

MODEL CONSTITUTION FOR A METHODIST - UNITED REFORMED ECUMENICAL AREA

Introduction

1 The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Together, we rejoice in the inheritance of the apostolic faith as we have received it in our two traditions. The two churches share a commitment to an ecumenical journey and are members of the ecumenical instruments in Great Britain (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales)). Despite our remaining differences, particularly our respective understanding of the nature of the Church, we work together in many places and with other denominations. As part of that overall ecumenical commitment, in some places we have formed Ecumenical Areas which are both a Methodist Circuit and an entity to which the relevant URC Synod has delegated some of its functions.¹

The Status of the Ecumenical Area

2 This document is the constitution of the *xxx* Ecumenical Area which is a Methodist Circuit within the *aaa* Methodist District designated by the Conference as an ecumenical area² and an area of ecumenical cooperation to which the *bbb* Synod of the United Reformed Church (URC) has agreed to delegate the functions as listed in Schedule 3³. The Schedules, including (but not restricted to) the definitions in Schedule 2, form an integral part of this constitution.⁴

3 The Area shall consist of the Methodist Churches and United Reformed Churches specified in Schedule 1 (hereafter 'local churches') including those which are single congregation local ecumenical partnerships⁵. The Area Meeting shall have authority, subject to the respective denominational provisions and processes, to add churches to, and remove churches from, the list in Schedule 1.

4 The Area shall be an unincorporated charitable association, and as such a charity, governed by the Area Meeting whose Members shall function as its charity trustees.

5 The object of the Area shall be the advancement of religion in accordance with the faiths, principles, practices and usages of the Participating Denominations including the promotion of fellowship and cooperation between the local churches and furthering the aims and interests of the Area and those of the local churches so far as they are wholly and exclusively charitable.

6 In achieving its purpose, the Area will engage in a range of activities either on its own or with others, including (but not restricted to):

- a) support for the celebration of public worship;
- b) the teaching of the Christian faith;

¹ If there were an agreed overall Methodist/URC statement of our shared faith, it could be referenced here; but in the absence of such a document this is the best we can do.

² Currently under Standing Order 512

³ Currently under Section 2.(5) of the Structure of the URC

⁴ This draft draws on the Model Constitution for Single Congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships (SCLEPs) for many of its generic provisions. A detailed comparison with the current Charity Commission guidance on these matters has not been done; that guidance can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-write-your-charitys-governing-document>.

⁵ This draft assumes that all the local churches in the Area will be Methodist churches, URC churches or SCLEPs including at least one of those denominations. If an Area includes single denominational churches of other traditions more complex provisions might be needed in some areas. No specific provision seems to be needed for Methodist congregations which are classes of other churches.

- c) mission and evangelism;
- d) support for pastoral work, including visiting the sick and the bereaved;
- e) the provision of facilities with a Christian ethos for the local communities, including (but not restricted to) the elderly, the young and other groups with particular needs; and
- f) the support of other charities in the UK and overseas.

Area meetings

7 The functions of the Area Meeting shall be those specified in current Methodist Standing Orders as functions of the Circuit Meeting, those delegated to the Area by the URC Synod as specified in Schedule 3 and any other functions delegated to that body by any other competent body⁶. The Area Meeting shall comply with:

- a) relevant denominational provisions laid down by the competent bodies of the Participating Denominations; and
- b) current charity law (including but not restricted to the Charities Act and regulations made under it and including the requirement to make an annual return to the Charity Commission).

The Area Meeting shall also take appropriate notice of advice and guidance issued by or for the Participating Denominations including (but not limited to) that issued by the URC Synod and the Methodist Conference.

Co-Leaders

8 There shall be Co-Leaders of the Area. For The Methodist Church, this shall be the Superintendent. For the URC, this shall be a minister or lay person approved by the Synod. The Co-Leaders will be expected to work together and act with sensitivity to the ethos and needs of both denominations.

Officers

9 The officers of the Area shall be the following:

- a) the Co-Leaders;
- b) all ministers in the active work stationed to the Area by the Methodist Conference.
- c) all ministers of word and sacrament and church related community workers serving local churches in the area with concurrence of or appointed by the URC Synod;
- d) at least two Area Stewards appointed by the Area Meeting who shall *inter alia* undertake the responsibilities of Methodist Circuit Stewards (including Treasurer functions); and
- e) an Area Clerk appointed by the Area Meeting who shall give notice of meetings, keep and maintain the records and minutes of Area Meetings, maintain a register of Members of the Area Meeting and perform such other functions as required by the Area Meeting.

The Area Stewards and the Clerk shall be members of one of the local churches.

Membership

10 The Area Meeting shall consist of the officers of the Area as specified in paragraph 9 above together with:

- a) the Moderator of the URC Synod;

⁶ This is intended *inter alia* to permit functions to be delegated by bodies of other denominations which may (as part of the wider ecumenical co-operation indicated in paragraph 1) play a part in the life of the Area (such as an Anglican Deanery).

- b) the Secretary of the Area Preachers Meeting;
- c) representatives of each of the local churches appointed in accordance with paragraph 16 below;
- d) Methodist ministers who are –
 - stationed in, or
 - residing for the purposes of the stations in, or
 - whose names appear under the number of the Area in accordance with Standing Orders⁷, and who have informed the Superintendent of their wish to be members of the Area Meeting;
- e) any Interim Moderator appointed by the URC to any church or churches within the Area;
- f) any retired minister of the URC who is appointed to an office within the area for the period of their office; and
- g) members co-opted by the Area Meeting under paragraph 17 below.

11 Any retired minister of the URC, who is neither an interim moderator nor an officer of the Area, may, with the consent of the URC Synod, become an associate member of the Area having the right to speak but not to vote at meetings of the Area. Lay employees of the Area shall normally be invited to attend Area Meetings but unless they are also members of the Area Meeting in some other capacity shall have no vote and if voting members shall normally be asked to leave the meeting for any discussion of their employment.

12 No person who is disqualified under charity law from acting as a charity trustee shall be appointed as a member of the Area Meeting and if already acting shall immediately cease to be or act as a member of the Area Meeting.⁸

13 The Area Meeting shall regulate its proceedings according to any relevant denominational provisions, to charity law and to the provisions of this constitution. It shall have authority to appoint committees and working parties providing that such bodies report regularly to the full Area Meeting. Such bodies may undertake denominational functions including the functions of a URC Pastoral Committee.⁹

14 There shall be a regular staff meeting consisting of all the ministers serving in the Area but it shall have no governance authority or responsibility. Lay employees and others may be invited to attend that meeting.

15 On the recommendation of the Area Preachers Meeting defined in paragraph 22 below, the Area Meeting shall appoint a Secretary of that meeting from amongst the persons eligible to be members of it. The person so appointed shall be a Member of the Area Meeting¹⁰.

Representatives of local churches

16 Local churches in the Area shall be entitled (in accordance with their own rules) to appoint a minimum of one and a maximum of *[ten]*¹¹ Members to the Area Meeting. All persons appointed to

⁷ Currently SOs 785(4) and 510

⁸ This paragraph might be transferred to Schedule 2

⁹ This paragraph might be transferred to Schedule 2

¹⁰ The Area Preachers Meeting Secretary is NOT an officer of the Area but is a full voting Member of the Area Meeting

¹¹ This figure reflects current rules in Methodist Standing Orders (which specify a Church Steward and the Treasurer plus up to eight other representatives) but the number might reasonably be reduced to eight or even six.

the Area Meeting shall be members of the relevant local church. The numbers to be appointed by each local church shall be determined from time to time by the Area Meeting providing that no local church shall have more representatives than another local church with a greater membership. At least one person appointed by each local church shall be an officer of that local church and, where a local church has three or more representatives, at least two shall be officers of that local church.

17 The Area Meeting shall have authority to co-opt up to [ten]¹² persons to ensure that all parts of the Area's life and mission are adequately represented and in particular that, wherever possible, young people are included in its membership. All persons so co-opted by the Area Meeting shall be members of one of the local churches in the Area.

Frequency of meetings

18 There shall be at least [three]¹³ Area Meetings in each year, one of which shall be an annual meeting at which appointments are made and accounts are received. The financial year of the Area shall end on 31 August. 14 days notice of meetings shall be given and that notice shall include the terms of any resolutions which are to be put to the meeting for decision. The quorum for an Area Meeting shall be [one third] of the membership. Urgent business may be considered by the meeting with the consent of the person in the Chair provided that two thirds of the Members present and voting agree.

Funding

19 The Area shall be funded by an assessment on the local churches in the Area as determined from time to time by the Area Meeting. The Area Meeting shall pay the assessment due to the Methodist District and shall normally make the Ministry and Mission contributions due to the URC Synod. The Area Meeting shall also pay out of the income and property of the Area all the proper costs and expenses of administering the Area. It shall also comply with the specific provisions set out in Schedule 2 to this Constitution. A written statement of agreements concerning the financial arrangements of the Area shall be made and kept regularly updated.

Appointments

20 Area Meetings shall be chaired by both or either of the Co-Leaders. Should the Co-Leaders present so request, or in the absence of a Co-Leader, another person shall be elected to chair that meeting by two thirds¹⁴ of the Members present and voting. Where denominational provisions provide for special majorities the Area Meeting shall be bound by those provisions. The Area Meeting may also adopt requirements for special majorities in particular cases. Otherwise, except as otherwise provided in this Constitution, every question at an Area Meeting shall be determined by a simple majority of votes cast by the Members present and voting.

21 The Area Meeting shall make appointments to the wider councils and courts of the Participating Denominations as required and may make appropriate appointments to ecumenical bodies and to community groups operating in the Area.

Area Preachers Meeting

22 There shall be an Area Preachers' Meeting consisting of all persons in membership of the local churches who are (a) Methodist local preachers or presbyters, or (b) lay preachers accredited (nationally or locally) by the URC or URC ministers, or (c) URC Elders or (d) supernumerary Methodist presbyters or retired URC ministers habitually worshipping in the local churches. Persons accredited as worship leaders may also be invited by the Area Preachers Meeting. The Area Preachers' Meeting shall, in particular, make recommendations to the Area Meeting as to the admission or accreditation of preachers under the relevant denominational provisions. It may also

¹² This is an arbitrary number and might be increased or reduced.

¹³ A larger number up to six might be thought appropriate in some cases.

¹⁴ This is an arbitrary figure and might be increased or reduced (but not below 50%!).

make recommendations to the Area Meeting or to local churches on matters relating to worship provision in the Area. It shall be normally be chaired by one of the Co-Leaders and shall perform the functions of the Local Preachers' Meeting as specified in Methodist Standing Orders.

Powers

23 In order to further the purpose of the Area but not further or otherwise, the Area Meeting may subject to relevant denominational provisions¹⁵:

- a) raise funds, provided that in doing so the Trustees must not undertake any substantial permanent trading activity and must comply with any relevant statutory regulations;
- b) apply for and accept grants and provide security in respect of obligations under grant agreements;
- c) buy, take on lease or in exchange, hire or otherwise acquire any property and maintain and equip it for use;
- d) co-operate with other charities, voluntary bodies and statutory authorities and exchange information and advice with them;
- e) establish or support any charitable trusts, associations or institutions formed for any purpose connected with the purpose of the Area;
- f) set aside income as a reserve against future expenditure but only in accordance with a written policy about reserves;
- g) obtain and pay for such goods and services as are necessary for carrying out the work of the Area;
- h) open and operate such bank and other accounts as the Trustees consider necessary and invest funds and delegate the management of funds in the same manner and subject to the same conditions as the Trustees of a trust are permitted to do by the Trustee Act 2000 and any other relevant rules;
- i) employ staff taking account of employment legislation and relevant denominational provisions;
- j) appoint such committees and working parties as it deems fit and to delegate to such bodies any functions except the appointment of officers and adoption of accounts provided that they shall report regularly to the Area Meeting; and
- k) do all such other lawful things as are necessary for the achievement of the purpose of the Area.

Alterations to the Constitution

24 Any proposal to alter this constitution shall be subject to consultation with local churches and the appropriate denominational ecumenical officers. No alteration to this constitution shall take effect without the consent of the Methodist District and URC Synod in accordance with relevant denominational provisions. Alterations to this constitution shall receive the assent of a two thirds majority of the Members of the Area Meeting present and voting at an Area Meeting. A resolution for the alteration of the constitution shall be received by the Area Clerk at least 21 days before the meeting at which the resolution is to be brought forward. The Area Clerk shall give the Members of the Area Meeting at least 14 days' notice in writing of such a meeting and shall include notice of the alterations proposed.

¹⁵ This list is borrowed from the SCLEP Model Constitution with the addition of the authority to employ staff at i) which (perhaps oddly) is not explicitly in the SCLEP list and the deletion of powers relating to property, borrowing, partnership and joint ventures.

Dissolution of the Area

25 The Area shall be dissolved if it ceases to be designated by the Conference as an ecumenical area or ceases to be an area of ecumenical cooperation to which the URC Synod delegates functions. The Area may be dissolved at any time by a resolution of the Area Meeting and with the consent of the Methodist District and the URC Synod in accordance with relevant denominational provisions. Such a resolution requires a majority¹⁶ of those Members of the Area Meeting present and voting at a special meeting of which at least 21 clear days' notice shall have been given to all the Members. Notice of the meeting shall include a copy of the resolution. The apportionment of the assets and liabilities of the Area shall be a matter of agreement between the Methodist District and the URC Synod subject always to the provisions and processes of the churches.

¹⁶ In the light of comments we considered whether a special majority should be required here but concluded that the most usual route to dissolution would be to use the first sentence of this paragraph and that a special majority was not needed here.

SCHEDULE 1

List of Local Churches in the Area.

This list should indicate which are Methodist Churches, which are URC Churches, which are Methodist-URC SCLEPs and which involve other ecumenical partners.

SCHEDULE 2

OTHER PROVISIONS¹⁷

Definitions

1 In this Constitution and the Schedules:

- a) 'Participating Denominations' means the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church;
- b) 'Minister' means for the URC a minister of word and sacrament or a church related community worker and for the Methodist Church a Deacon, a Presbyter, a Probationer Deacon, a Probationer Presbyter or a person authorised to serve the Church as a presbyter or deacon;
- c) 'Moderator' means the Moderator for the time being of the *bbb* URC Synod and 'URC Synod' means that Synod;
- d) 'District Chair' means the Chair for the time being of the *aaa* Methodist District and 'District' means that District.
- e) 'Methodist Standing Orders' means the provisions described as such in the current edition of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church commonly known as CPD.
- f) 'Denominational provisions' and similar expressions shall include, but not be restricted to
(1) for the Methodist Church, the Methodist Church Act, the Deed of Union, the Model Trusts and Standing Orders; and
(2) for the United Reformed Church, the United Reformed Church Acts, the Basis of Union, the Structure of the United Reformed Church, the statement on The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church and the Manual.

Members of the Area Meeting

2 A Member shall cease to hold office if he or she:

- a) is disqualified from acting as a Trustee by virtue of the Charities Act or any other relevant statutory provision;
- b) ceases to be a Member of one of the local churches in the Area or a retired minister habitually worshipping in the Area;
- c) dies or becomes incapable by reason of mental disorder, illness or injury of managing and administering his or her own affairs;
- d) resigns as Member by notice to the Area Clerk (but only if at least two Members will remain in office when the notice of resignation takes effect); or
- e) is absent without the permission of the Area Meeting from all their meetings held within a period of six consecutive months and the Members resolve that his or her office be vacated.

Proceedings of the Trustees

3 The Area Clerk must convene a meeting of the Members if requested in writing to do so by one fifth of the current Members.

4 Questions arising at a meeting must be decided by a majority of votes. In the case of an equality of votes, the person who chairs the meeting shall have a second or casting vote.

¹⁷ Except for the definitions, this is all borrowed from SCLEP Model Constitution with appropriate adaptations.

5 No decision may be made by the Area Meeting unless a quorum of Members is present at the time the decision is purported to be made.

6 A Member shall not be counted in the quorum present when any decision is made about a matter upon which that Member is not entitled to vote. [If the number of Members is less than the number fixed as the quorum, the continuing Members or Member may act for the purpose of filling vacancies but for no other purpose.]¹⁸

Trustee benefits

7 No Member or any person connected with a Member may receive from the Area any payment of money or other material benefit (whether direct or indirect) except by way of:

- a) reasonable remuneration or stipend paid to any Member who is a minister serving in the Area;
- b) reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses (including hotel and travel costs) actually incurred in the administration of the Area;
- c) interest at a reasonable rate on money lent to the Area;
- d) a reasonable rent or hiring fee for property let or hired to the Area;
- e) an indemnity in respect of any liabilities properly incurred in or about the administration of the Area (including the costs of a successful defence to criminal proceedings); and
- f) payment for employment or services authorised under paragraph 8 of this Schedule.

8 The Area Meeting may employ, or engage under a contract for services, such of their number or any person connected to a Member as they may determine provided that:

- a) the procedure set out in paragraph 9 below is followed;
- b) the Area Meeting is satisfied that it is in the interests of the Area to employ or engage under a contract for services (as the case may be) the Member or connected person concerned;
- c) the Area Meeting is satisfied that the terms of employment or engagement are reasonable and will be subject to regular and objective review; and
- d) at no time may a majority of Members benefit directly or indirectly from payments made under this clause.

9 Whenever a Member or a person connected to a Member has a personal interest in a matter to be discussed at an Area Meeting or any committee, the Member or connected person concerned must:

- a) declare an interest before discussion on the matter begins;
- b) withdraw from the meeting for that item unless expressly invited by the chair to remain solely in order to provide information;
- c) not be counted in the quorum during that part of the meeting; and
- d) withdraw during the vote and have no vote on the matter.

10 For the purpose of paragraphs 7 to 9 above a person is connected with a Member if that person is, *inter alia*:

- a) a child, parent, grandchild, grandparent, brother or sister of the Member; or
- b) a spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of the Member or of any person falling within (a) above.

Investment

¹⁸ This may not be needed given the size of the Area Meeting

- 11 Funds which are not required for immediate use must be placed on deposit or invested.
- 12 [Investments and other property of the Area may be held:
- a) in the names of the Trustees;
 - b) in the name of a nominee (being a corporate body registered or having an established place of business in England and Wales) under the control of the Trustees or of a financial expert acting on their instructions;
 - c) in the name of a trust corporation as a holding trustee for the Area which must be appointed (and may be removed) by deed executed by the Trustees; or
 - d) in the case of land, by the Official Custodian for Charities under an order of the Area Commission or the Court.]¹⁹

¹⁹ Is this needed given the existence of TMCP and the relevant URC Synod Trust?

SCHEDULE 3

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DELEGATED FUNCTIONS

The list below shows all the matters which can under the Structure of the URC be delegated to an Area Meeting. The schedule to be included in any given constitution should list those items actually delegated by the relevant Synod

The *bbb* Synod of the United Reformed Church has delegated to the Area Meeting the following functions:

- (i) to exercise oversight of all ministers and church related community workers falling within any of the categories 2.(4)(a), (b), (f) and (g) set out in Structure of the United Reformed Church except Moderators of synods who although members of the area meeting are responsible to the General Assembly;
- (ii) to give (or, where deep pastoral concern for the church requires it, to withhold) concurrence in calls to ministers and church related community workers and, with the moderator of the synod or the moderator's deputy presiding, to conduct, in fellowship with the local church(es), any ordinations and/or inductions of ministers or commissionings and/or inductions of church related community workers within the area of ecumenical cooperation;
- (iii) to appoint, or to concur in the appointment of , non-stipendiary ministers (and church related community workers) to their particular service and to review this service at stated intervals;
- (iv) to appoint, in consultation with the local church(es) and the moderator of the synod, an interim moderator during a pastoral vacancy, such interim moderator normally being a serving minister or a retired minister. In exceptional circumstances an elder may be appointed;
- (v) to care for all the churches of the area meeting and to visit them by deputies at regular intervals for consultation concerning their life and work;
- (vi) to consider on the recommendation of local churches applications for recognition as candidates for the ministries of word and sacrament and church related community work and to transmit them, if approved, to the synod for decision;
- (vii) to accredit lay preachers;
- (viii) to consider resignations of ministers or church related community workers not currently the subject of any case within the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in consultation with the moderator of the synod to decide upon appropriate action (see also Paragraphs 2.(4)(A)(xxi) and 2.(6)(A)(xviii) of the Manual);
- (ix) from time to time to recommend to synod such number of representatives to the General Assembly as the URC synod shall determine;
- (x) to engage in study concerning the Church's mission in the region and to encourage in the local churches concern for youth work and social service and a sense of responsibility for the wider work of the Church at home and abroad;
- (xi) to promote church extension within the area and to submit proposals to the URC synod for the establishing of new causes and the recognition of mission projects;
- (xii) to make recommendations to the URC synod in consultation with the churches concerned and to act on behalf of the synod in consultation with the moderator on all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of local churches;
- (xiii) to make recommendations to the URC synod in consultation with the churches concerned and to act on behalf of the synod on all matters regarding erection, major reconstruction or disposal of buildings;
- (xiv) to provide a forum for concerns brought forward by local churches and to advise thereon;

(xv) to hear and make decisions upon appeals brought forward by local churches and church members;

(xvi) to take appropriate action on matters referred to the council by the synod or General Assembly, and to initiate or transmit proposals for consideration by those bodies; (xvii) to maintain contact with ecumenical and missionary work in the area;

(xviii) to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information.

Insofar as they relate solely to the work of the United Reformed Church these functions may be discharged by the United Reformed Church committee of the Area Meeting if appointed.