

The Methodist Church in Wales – Wales Synod

Policy Document: Local Preachers - Extension to period of time on trial

Introduction

Local Preachers play a highly significant role in the life of Methodist circuits and local churches. The Methodist Church recognises this in its opening statement on the duties and rights of Local Preachers: *Preachers are called of God, to be worthy in character, to lead God's people in worship and to preach the gospel.* [S.O. 563(1)].

Consequently, when candidates have been approved by the Local Preachers' Meeting and have received *from the Superintendent a written note authorising them to assist a preacher in the conduct of services within the Circuit* [S.O. 564A (1)], they begin to follow a training programme approved by the Methodist Council (currently, "Worship: Leading and Preaching") and are *required to make a firm commitment to training and study.* [S.O. 564A (3)]. This programme is followed throughout their time on note and continues during their time on trial, when they are approved to take responsibility themselves for the conduct of worship and preaching for the rest of their period of training.

However, the Methodist Church requires that this period of training on trial is time limited. *Before persons on trial are finally admitted as Local Preachers, they shall have not less than one nor... more than five years on trial.* [S.O. 564B (1)]. Although Local Preachers on trial may have entered the process with the appropriate level of commitment to training and study, it sometimes happens that personal circumstances mean that it is impossible to complete the training within the allotted time.

Extension to training – initial considerations

It is the policy of the Wales Synod to encourage local circuits to approach the possibility of an extension to the training period for a Local Preacher on trial with sensitivity and understanding. It is important that the Local Preacher on trial discusses the situation with their tutor and their Superintendent as early as possible in the process. As part of the discussion, these questions should be addressed:

- How many appointments per quarter is the Local Preacher on trial being given?
- What other responsibilities in the life of the circuit and local church does the person have?
- Is the circuit or local church being unfair in asking the person to fulfil these responsibilities as well as training to become a Local Preacher?
- Have personal circumstances changed?
- How much of the "Worship: Leading and Preaching" course has been completed?
- What evidence is there that the person is making a serious attempt to complete the course within the required timescale?
- What additional support can the local circuit offer to enable the Local Preacher on trial to complete the course?

If, in the light of these discussions, it is felt appropriate to seek an extension, then this must be done via the Circuit Local Preachers' Meeting. If the meeting decides after due consideration not to grant such an extension, then the situation will need to be handled locally with sensitivity and care, with due consideration given to the person's pastoral needs. If the meeting decides that an extension is

warranted, then the Local Preachers' Secretary will make application to the Assistant Synod Secretary under the provisions of Standing Order 564B (3):

Applications to extend the period on trial beyond five years must be to the district Policy Committee. Such applications should be granted only in very exceptional circumstances. The Superintendent and the person on trial have the right to be present and to speak to the case.

Extension to training – Synod process

The Assistant Secretary of Synod will present the application, which should contain assurances that the above questions have been addressed, together with an indication of the length of extension sought and a plan for completing the course, to the next meeting of SPC for consideration. If SPC is satisfied with the assurances it has received and the plan that has been put in place to ensure completion of the course, then an extension will be granted.

If, however, SPC is not satisfied that the application contains the necessary information to enable it to arrive at a decision, SPC will appoint one person to choose, convene and chair a panel of three people from the Synod, but not from the circuit concerned, to meet with the Local Preacher on trial and their Superintendent in their locality.

The panel will come to a mind on the issue and explain their decision to those involved, once again seeking to act with due care and sensitivity to the person's pastoral needs. They will produce a written report, which will include its recommendation, to be forwarded to the Assistant Secretary of Synod for presentation to the next meeting of SPC, at which a final decision will be made. This decision will be communicated as soon as possible after the meeting to the Superintendent of the circuit concerned.