

Reply

The Conference thanks the Leicester (Trinity) Circuit Meeting for its memorial which highlights the commitment of the Methodist Church to encouraging Local Churches to welcome same sex couples and families and to ensuring their participation in the life and worship of the Church.

The Conference was asked in 2012 (by memorial M29) to revisit its 2006 ruling that the blessing of same-sex relationships should not take place on Methodist premises, the hope of that memorial being that the blessing of civil partnerships would be allowed on Methodist premises. The 2014 Conference received a report from the Working Party on Marriage and Civil Partnerships which had been directed by the 2013 Conference to provide a further response to M29 (2012). Following a proposal from the working party the 2014 Conference adopted amended guidelines which provide for prayers of thanksgiving to be offered on Methodist premises and by Methodist ministers or lay persons on the basis that no person or body should be required to act in a way contrary to the demands of their conscience. These guidelines are printed in Book VII, Part 10 of the Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church. Whilst the resolution of the 2014 Conference does not permit the blessing of same-sex marriages, the amendments to the guidelines do enable local churches to provide a positive response to same-sex couples seeking prayers of thanksgiving following their marriage. The Conference therefore declines the memorial.

The Conference does however draw the Circuit's attention to the further decisions of the 2014 Conference, including its encouragement to the Methodist people to engage in a process of deep reflection and discernment regarding the issues raised in the report, including the question of whether to revisit the Methodist Church's definition of marriage. The Marriage and Relationships Task Group is currently coordinating this work, which includes developing materials to support local conversations, holding meetings for district representatives between June and October this year and running workshops at the 2015 Conference. Materials recommended by the group can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/views-of-the-church/human-sexuality/talking-of-marriage-and-relationships. Districts have been asked to report their conversations back to the group by February 2016, and the group will bring a further report to the 2016 Conference.

M27 Investment in fossil fuels

The Stratford and Evesham (5/15) Circuit Meeting (Present: 28; Voting: 21 for, 3 against) draws the Conference's attention to:

- The Statement of the 2011 Conference that: "The scientific analyses of climate change and the role of human greenhouse gas emissions are well-grounded. It is now morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in

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greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species” (*Hope in God’s Future*, 2011).

- The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimate of a ‘cumulative carbon budget’ up to 2100 for GHG emissions to stay within a 50% chance of limiting global warming to 2°C. Only a quarter of those GHG emissions now remain, yet proven fossil fuel reserves would release far greater volumes if burnt (*The New Economics of Climate Change*, Lord Stern and others, 2014).
- JACEI’s report to the 2014 Conference that at least two thirds of current proven reserves held by gas, oil and coal extraction companies must remain unburned if global warming is to be held below the internationally agreed level of 2°C, the point at which climate change is likely to become catastrophic. However, those same companies continue to plan to extract and sell all their reserves, in full knowledge of their incompatibility with the 2°C target, on the grounds that there is no legally binding target (eg *Energy and Carbon - Managing the Risk*, Exxon Mobil, March 2014; Shell’s strategic report for 2014, committing 85% of capital investments to further exploration and extraction).
- The fact that the Methodist Church in Britain holds approximately £58m, 6% of its investments, in fossil fuel companies (2012 figures) and can make a strong and positive statement by disinvesting from these sectors and supporting the increasingly urgent need for a legally-binding global cap on carbon emissions to be agreed in Paris in December 2015.
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s statement in April 2014 “We live in a world dominated by greed. We have allowed the interests of capital to outweigh the interests of human beings and our Earth. It is clear [the companies] are not simply going to give up; they stand to make too much money.” “People of conscience need to break their ties with corporations financing the injustice of climate change. It makes no sense to invest in companies that undermine our future”. An increasing number of church bodies concur, including the World Council of Churches and church bodies in Sweden, New Zealand, Australia and the US.

While recognising the efforts already made with Shell and BP, the Circuit Meeting nevertheless asks the Conference to request the Central Finance Board to work with JACEI to develop and implement criteria for swift disinvestment from fossil fuel stocks based on the following:

- (a) immediate disinvestment from companies involved in exploration for or extraction of coal, tar sands or other highly carbon-intensive fossil fuels;
- (b) total disinvestment in oil and gas companies by the end of 2018;

- (c) seek alternative investment in energy efficiency and low-carbon renewable energy generation wherever possible and appropriate.

Reply

The Conference notes the concerns raised by the Stratford and Evesham Circuit Meeting and thanks the Meeting for its memorial.

Since the direction given by the Conference in 2014, the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) has undertaken further work and provided advice to the Central Finance Board of the Methodist Church (CFB) in relation to investment in fossil fuels. A report on this work can be found in the Conference Agenda (p. 141).

A position paper and policy paper have been developed by JACEI and the CFB. The policy paper “Policy on Climate Change – Implications for Different Fuels” has been approved by the Board of the CFB. These papers are available on the CFB and Methodist Church websites. The CFB has also published a policy paper on the implications of the climate change policy for investments in the electricity generation industry.

The CFB will evaluate the suitability of companies for investment on the basis of these policies on a case by case basis using the guidance of the JACEI/CFB position paper, CFB policies and seeking the guidance of JACEI. This will take into account the investment plans of companies involved in the extraction of coal and tar sands. However, as this approach is not consistent with the demands of the memorial, the memorial is declined.

M28 The Lancashire District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 134; Voting: 71 for, 36 against)

This memorial was received with the same text as M27, with the exception of the paragraph beginning “While recognising...”, which was replaced by the paragraph below:

The Synod asks the Central Finance Board to review its policy of engaging with companies involved in exploration or extraction of fossil fuels and divest from fossils stocks based on the following timetable:

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M29 Investment in fossil fuels

The West Yorkshire District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 110; Voting: 83 for, 0 against) asks the Conference to request the Central Finance Board and JACEI to develop an urgent action plan based on:

- (a) immediate disinvestment from companies involved in exploration for or extraction of coal, tar sands or other highly carbon-intensive fossil fuels;
- (b) total disinvestment from companies involved in oil and gas exploration and extraction by the end of 2018;
- (c) seeking alternative investment in energy efficiency and low-carbon renewable energy generation wherever appropriate.

Reply

The Conference adopts the same reply as to M27.

M30 Tax justice

The Birmingham District Synod, Representative Session (Present: 111; Voting: 101 for, 8 against) welcomes the progress that has been made on communicating the issue of tax justice throughout the Methodist Church by the Methodist Tax Justice Network (MTJN), especially in association with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI) and the World Church Relations (WCR) team. In light of ongoing revelations about the degree of global tax-dodging it encourages the further development of this work by these and other elements of the Church by:

- (a) requesting the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network to incorporate into its educational materials the issue of tax justice, in the context of any work on Biblical teaching, the economy, poverty or inequality, noting that assistance from the MTJN is on offer if required;
- (b) encouraging the JPIT, as resources allow, to further develop a focus on tax justice in its work on economic, justice and equality issues, working with the MTJN, and including such areas as education, promotion, campaigning and discussion of a Global Wealth Tax as a key means towards slowing the growing inequality in the human community;
- (c) requesting the WCR team to continue to offer information and discussion on tax justice to our World Church partners, in the context of One Mission, with the aim of facilitating direct partnerships between MTJN and partner churches or other partners to engage around tax justice;
- (d) calling upon JACEI in conjunction with the Central Finance Board urgently to develop a position paper leading towards a policy statement on tax justice in order to address companies in which the Church invests on this issue, taking into consideration the policy areas set out in section (e), and to keep the Church informed on progress;
- (e) urging HM government, alone and through the EU and the OECD, both to bring to justice