

LPWL-ENews August 2017 regarding Local Arrangement Services

Circuit Plans increasingly include services known as “Local Arrangements” which are not led by a Presbyter or Local Preacher. Occasional local arrangement services are seen as a healthy thing for most churches but for them to be effective, thought should be given to offering training and reflection to those leading them. The Connexional Faith and Order Committee have produced some guidance for these services, and various resources are suggested. While the guidance is directed primarily to Superintendents, Local Preachers’ Meetings are encouraged to discuss them and to consider how they could offer support and training. The guidelines are below.

Guidance to Superintendents Regarding Local Arrangement Services

1. The 2011 Conference asked the Worship and Liturgy Resource Group of the Faith and Order Committee to look at providing guidelines to clarify what is meant by “preaching element” in SO 569(1) and how best to support local arrangements, with a view to clarifying the Standing Orders as required. As the Resource Groups have ceased to exist, the matter has been considered by the Faith and Order Committee.
2. The Faith and Order Committee does not recommend any changes to the Standing Orders, and offers the guidance below.

Guidance Regarding Services not led by a Presbyter or Local Preacher

The Preaching Element

3. Historically, Methodism has always drawn a distinction between preaching, testimony and exhortation. It is appreciated that the boundaries may sometimes be unclear or indistinct, but the difference is captured in the traditional phrase ‘taking a text’. All are welcome, and encouraged, to share their personal experience of God’s grace (testimony) and to make this a basis for urging others to respond to the Gospel (exhortation). Preaching often includes these features, but it goes further, by reflecting on and expounding Scripture, in the light of the faith of the Church and the needs of the world. All Christians are called to bear witness to the hope that is in them; not all are called to preach.

Local Arrangement Services

4. Occasional Local Arrangement services are a healthy thing for most churches, as they offer a chance for the wider membership or groups within the life of the church to lead worship. In this, new vocations for worship leading, local preaching, and ordained ministry may be developed and discerned.
5. In more subtle ways, occasional Local Arrangement services may also help to foster a culture of worship owned and actively engaged in by the congregation. Strategically used and supported, they make real the statement “Worship is the work of the whole people of God: a congregation is not an audience or a group of spectators.” (*Methodist Worship Book (MWB), Preface, p. vii*)
6. However for this to happen, attention must be given to offering training and reflection for those leading Local Arrangement services. Leaders of worship (authorised or not) are called to “...encourage and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to enable the whole Body of Christ to participate fully”. (*MWB, Preface, p. vii*)
7. Opportunities for reflection on the implications of this for planning and leading worship should ideally be offered as part of the regular pattern of discipleship and learning within Local Churches, Circuits and Districts.
8. It is suggested that Superintendents keep a record of those who take responsibility for Local Arrangements and, where appropriate, encourage the Local Preachers’ Meeting to offer support and training. Where people are frequently taking responsibility for Local Arrangements then the following guidance is offered:

- a) They should be approved by the Church Council;
- b) Their name should be passed on to the Superintendent;
- c) They should go through the Safeguarding processes applicable for local preachers;
- d) They should receive direction on what is meant by the “preaching element”;
- e) They should be required to take the Worship Leaders’ Training Course (or an adapted version of it);
- f) They should be encouraged to consider whether they have a call to worship leading or to local preaching;
- g) The Church Stewards should be asked to present a report to the Church Council from time to time on those who regularly take responsibility for Local Arrangement services and any feedback on their services.

Resources and Support for those Leading Local Arrangement services

9. The *Methodist Worship Book* is a key resource for the planning and leading of Local Arrangement services. The full First or Second service may be used with minimal preparation. Even if the congregation does not have copies of the *Methodist Worship Book* available, a leader may use the book and adapt the services, using familiar or simpler congregational responses. The leader may also use the order of either service, but use prayers or elements of worship from other sources.
10. In addition to the full services, the *Introduction before the First Service* (MWB, p. 26) and the *Guidance for Ordering a Morning, Afternoon, or Evening Service* (MWB p. 51) provide a framework where leaders of a Local Arrangement service do not wish to use the material in the Worship Book, but do need support for the order and elements.
11. When SO 569(2) applies then careful consideration should be given to the choice of the elements of worship. For example, a Local Church may choose to use the order described in the Guidance notes on p. 51 of the *Methodist Worship Book*, but work with members of a junior church, class or house group, independent site user or tenant congregation (licensed under Model Trusts paragraph 14(2A)) to write prayers appropriate to lead the congregation, or make creative or visual or other artistic leads into prayer or action in response to the reading of scripture.
12. Other resources are widely available in a variety of media: the published and authorised liturgies of ecumenical partners, including the Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland; Common Worship and other printed and online resources from the Church of England; Worship from the United Reformed Church; and myriad specialist or themed collections of prayers and liturgies.
13. The Faith and Order Committee makes available a number of ‘Readers’ Services’ available for use or adaptation. These can be downloaded from www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/local-preachers/readers-services and will be regularly updated.
14. Where Local Arrangement services are prevalent in a Circuit, churches may be encouraged to work together with members of the Local Preachers’ meeting to plan a series of fully worked out services which can be shared across a number of weeks in a Circuit. For example, a Circuit that struggles to fill the months of July and August might choose to have a six week local arrangement, where full services (hymns, prayers, music and media, action and weekly Bible study/preparation) are prepared well in advance and made available to the stewards in any congregation wishing to use them. A number of Circuits have adopted approaches like this or others, and in some cases examples of these are available on Circuit or District websites. This is in accord with the guidance of SO 539.
15. While church stewards retain responsibility for resourcing Local Arrangement services, there may be others within Circuits and Learning Regions who can further support Local Churches with both resources and reflection. The goal is always to allow Local Churches greater confidence in adapting traditional structures and orders so as to enliven their experience of God in worship, in line with SO 569.

