

National Forest East Circuit Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Training

An Introduction God's love is for all.

Over the past few years, the Methodist Church has prioritised ensuring that our church policies, practices and words uphold this statement. Sometimes, we don't do this well and this hurts people, sometimes we are the ones who have been hurt. We are taking this time to check ourselves and to alter our actions and attitudes to ensure that in every sense, the message that we are giving is that "God's Love is for All". The training will challenge our self awareness - the aim is not to root us in the shame of failure, but to give tools to do better as we continue to grow and serve. However we find ourselves today, we are loved by God in the same measure as the person on our right or on our left. This is true for every person we encounter.

The Faith and Order Committee for the Methodist Church analyses and agrees our doctrine on behalf of the Methodist Conference. They identified Galatians 3:28-29 as being key to our understanding of oneness regarding Equality, Inclusion and Diversity. Oneness is found in our common salvation in Jesus. This will inevitably mean working with people with whom we disagree or have a different set of experiences or understanding of faith. Salvation is a 'work in progress' as we are constantly refined by God through prayer, fellowship and the study of the Bible.

Galatians 3:28-29 NIV

[28] There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This means that we are committed to developing as caring people who mirror God's love in the world

1. Because the church's mission has a commitment to social justice
2. Because Jesus told us to love one another as he has loved us
3. Because every person is made in God's image and is of great worth which we acknowledge and honour.
4. Because our actions, words and attitudes must match our faith's priorities (see the scriptures)

We are all responsible for ensuring that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is real in our churches and to acknowledge our part.

Our Social Context

Our roots may be in the past, in the excellent examples of John Wesley and the early Methodist preachers and leaders, but our mission and worship takes place today and must be appropriate to our present situation.

This involves us understanding the impact and influence of current legislation.

Equality legislation for Protected Characteristics

Age: Age discrimination can relate to someone being a specific age or within an age range.

Disability: This includes physical and mental impairments either present or in a person's personal history.

Gender Reassignment: This refers to any person who is at any stage of transitioning from one gender to another. It does not necessarily mean that medical procedures have begun. Gender fluidity and gender identity are implicitly protected under this characteristic.

Marriage and Civil Partnership: A person cannot be discriminated against on the grounds of being married (including a same sex marriage) or in a civil partnership. In a religious setting, office holders may be expected to follow a code of discipline.

Pregnancy & Maternity: A person can not be discriminated against due to being pregnant. Maternity lasts up to 26 weeks after giving birth in a non-employment situation. This includes treating someone unfavourably because they are breastfeeding.

Race: This protects people against discrimination against inequality based on their skin colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins.

The Methodist Church affirms that we are all one human race. Methodist Church in Britain uses the term 'ethnicity' to refer to our differences in skin colour and national origins.

Religious Belief: As well as religious beliefs, non-religious, philosophical beliefs such as atheism are protected. This includes veganism. Denominations (such as Methodism) are considered a religion for the purposes of equality law.

Sex: Equality law protects the rights of men and women based on their sex.

Sexual Orientation: People are protected no matter whether they are attracted to people the same sex, a different sex from themselves or both.

Different types of **discrimination** are unlawful and therefore must not be part of Methodist behaviour. They are described below:

Direct Discrimination: Where people are treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic.

Indirect Discrimination: A policy made applies to everyone but has a disproportionate impact on people with any of the protected characteristics.

Discrimination based on association: Treating people unfavourably because they have association with someone with a protected characteristic/ground.

Discrimination based on perception: Someone being discriminated against because someone believes them to have a protected characteristic/ground, even if they do not actually have that protected characteristic/ground.

Harassment: This is conduct relating to a particular characteristic/ground which has the purpose of violating a persons, dignity or creating an intimidating, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Sexual harassment is unlawful under this provision.

Victimisation: This is where a person is treated badly because they have, or are suspected of having, raised a complaint under the Equality Act.

Dual Discrimination: This is where there is discrimination based on two combined characteristics/grounds. For example, it is unlawful to discriminate against black women, even if other women and black men are not discriminated against.

Positive Action: Positive action refers to actions that are designed to remove barriers that might prevent people with certain characteristics/grounds from being employed or progressing through an organisation. For example, positive action could be undertaken to avoid under representation of people with protected characteristics in senior roles. These actions are lawful, however, someone from an under represented group can only be favoured if they are at least equally well qualified for a role as another candidate. It is unlawful to favour them if there is another more qualified candidate.

Alleged discriminator's characteristics: The characteristics/grounds of an alleged discriminator are irrelevant. So, for example, when considering whether or not discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has taken place, the sexual orientation of the person alleged to have discriminated is not relevant.

Single characteristic groups and organisations: It is permissible to have groups and services that are only available to people with a protected characteristic, provided there is a legitimate reason and a suitable alternative. For example, single sex schools are permitted provided there are sufficient school places for all pupils in other schools.

Going beyond equality legislation

We are called to be the the body of Christ. Where all can find belonging and experience the love of God, and here find their identity as a child of God, made in God's image. We need to meet more than just the minimum standards of equality legislation.

For example, there are a range of people who are not explicitly protected from discrimination and equality, and yet we would not want any person to experience injustice within the Methodist Church. These include those who have experienced abuse; those who have experienced childlessness; those who are disadvantaged by social class or economic injustice; those with less formal education; those people seeking asylum; those with carers status. All people should be treated as children of God within the church. We stand with people who are marginalised, we celebrate and cherish diversity as being intrinsic to God's creation.

What next?

Unconscious bias training module

The full training takes about four hours.

It can be accessed online by individuals or groups at

<https://mcb.theologyx.com/>

Or via the Methodist Church website.

In person training (two sessions) can be provided by the circuit at a central church location.

EDI training is mandatory for All ministers (including Superintendents and District Chairs)

1. Local Preachers
2. Connexional Committee members
3. Connexional Team members
4. Circuit and District Safeguarding Officers
5. Circuit stewards and church stewards
6. Lay Workers:
 - a) Lay Pastoral Workers
 - b) Children, Youth and Family Workers
 - c) Pioneers
7. Worship Leaders

Annual audit and refresh.