

The way forward in worship: results of a survey

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The Methodist Conference at Cardiff in 1990 directed the Faith & Order Committee to begin work on the revision of the *Methodist Service Book*. The new *Methodist Worship Book* has at last been produced in draft form and has, in part, been shaped by the responses made to the Faith & Order Committee by those who have used the new orders of service that have been made available while the book has been in preparation. Much discussion has centred around the size, cost and contents of the book but it seems likely that, when it is finally produced, it will be warmly welcomed by Circuit Ministers.

In 1997 as part of a larger project on Methodism in Britain, a survey was made of all Methodist Circuit Ministers in Britain by sending them a comprehensive 24 page questionnaire. The questionnaire was prepared by Revd John M Haley, himself a Methodist Circuit Minister, under the guidance of Revd Professor Leslie J Francis and Dr William K Kay at Trinity College, Carmarthen, both of whom have carried out similar work among Anglicans, Roman Catholics and in the Free Churches. Ministers were invited to reply in confidence and this gave rise to a response rate of over 73%. Such a high response rate allows the findings reported here to be treated with confidence.

Ministers were asked to indicate if they agreed with, disagreed with or were uncertain about the statements given below.

Statement	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Methodist worship is often dull	65%	15%	20%
Methodist worship depends too much on the organ	68%	14%	18%
Methodist worship would be improved by new liturgy	55%	24%	21%
Methodist worship would be improved by more 'worship songs'	52%	26%	22%

According to the first statement, two thirds of Circuit Ministers, who have a large responsibility for worship, admit that Methodist Worship is often dull. This is an admission which needs to be taken seriously. After all if Ministers find worship dull, is the congregation likely to disagree? One reason for the dullness may be given by the second statement since almost the same percentage of Ministers believe that Methodist worship depends too much on the organ. So how is worship to be improved? The answer comes in the next two statements. Over half think new liturgy would make improvements. Over half would support the introduction of more new worship songs.

It may take some time in local churches before other instruments are readily introduced without the organist feeling that his/her position is being improperly usurped. But whatever changes are made should surely reflect participation, life and vitality. Only in this way is the dullness that many Ministers feel likely to be removed. As for worship songs, no doubt the same debate about the quality and content of these will continue alongside the debate about the quality and content of the new *Methodist Worship Book*. But what this survey shows is that renewal in Methodist worship, in word and song, is very much desired. Yet, the survey

also shows that about a fifth of Ministers are happy with the *status quo*. They do not want a new liturgy. This implies that the changes that are brought in should respect the position of the minority. Although there may be new liturgy and more 'worship songs', and a variety of instruments alongside the traditional forms and organ, there needs also to be a sense of continuity with the past.