

THE CIRCUIT OFFICERS

The circuit would not function without its circuit officers. First among these are the circuit stewards, formerly two in number, whose task it is to invite ministers to serve, to ensure their manses are in good order, originally to furnish them and maintain them, and to pay their stipends from circuit funds. To collect these funds it is their responsibility to allocate to each church its share of the required circuit income, by an assessment of the financial state of the church, the number of members, and taking into account any special circumstances which may apply. This may involve negotiations with church stewards who think that their assessment is too high, and conversely persuading other stewards that they need to contribute more.

Circuit stewards were in the early years often chosen from those men (no women stewards until the 80's) who had business experience and occupied prominent places in the local society. With the spread of educational opportunity however, stewards began to be chosen (by the current stewards in conjunction with the superintendent) from a greater range of people, often on the recommendation of a minister. Stewards formerly served for four years, but the increasing size of the circuit led first to a circuit treasurer being appointed to assist them; then in the 80's three stewards became the norm, serving three years with one retiring annually. The burden of stipend payment (with tax calculations etc.) was lifted in the 80's when the Ministerial Benefits section of the Central Finance Board began to pay all ministers, leaving only some allowances to be paid locally. The provision of furniture for manses, often relying on gifts from members which did not always ensure a happy solution to furnishing problems, was also changed. Ministers became responsible for their own furniture, except for carpets and curtains, much to the relief of minister's wives. The changeover was effected by allowing ministers to purchase any existing items in their manses for a very nominal sum. The pastoral care of ministers and their families, while shared with others, has always been an important part of the circuit stewards job.

Other circuit officers include the circuit meeting secretary. There have been less than ten over the century, and their record of proceedings has been the basis of this history. It is interesting to note that minutes were hand written in bound minute books until the 1960's, although an exceptional typed record did appear in 1924. The elaborate minutes of the first half of the century have given way to more factual and brief records which do not always convey the atmosphere

Resolved:

That a Banking Account for the Sutton Park Methodist Circuit be continued with the Midland Bank Limited at their Sutton Goldfield Branch and that the Bank be and is hereby empowered to honour Cheques, Orders for Payment, Bills of Exchange and Promissory Notes drawn, signed, accepted or made on behalf of the said Sutton Park Methodist Circuit by the Circuit Stewards for the time being and to act on any instructions given by the persons so authorised with regard to any accounts whether in credit or overdrawn or any transactions of the said Sutton Park Methodist Circuit.

From the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting
1950

or feeling of the meeting, a regrettable state of affairs for future historians.

There are also the secretaries of the circuit committees, each of which may have a minister as chairman. These have varied from time to time; there is no longer a Temperance committee, or a Sustentation Fund treasurer. Missions, Education and Youth, Local Preachers, Property and others continue to be subject to supervision on a circuit basis through their circuit committees, the success of which as usual depends on the leadership of their officers.

The circuit meeting consists of representatives of all committees and members of local churches appointed by their church council. A nucleus forms a general purposes committee which may also act as an invitation committee to prepare submissions to the circuit meeting.