



# Panel Solicitors

Information on the five firms that have been appointed to the first panel of solicitors for the Methodist Church.

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## Introduction

Local Churches, Circuits and Districts find themselves needing legal advice from time to time on a wide range of issues, from the sale of manses to car parking queries to redevelopments, and that is just on property related matters. Managing Trustees may also need advice on employment issues with lay employees, the governance of trading subsidiaries and how this affects the Church as a charity as well as legal disputes with a neighbour or contractor.

TMCP and the Connexional Team have carefully selected five firms of solicitors to be on the first panel for the Methodist Church who can provide advice across the Methodist Connexion in England & Wales.

At this time, we are looking to secure firms suitable for the panel who can advise in Scotland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. The situation is under review and Managing Trustees in those jurisdictions will be contacted if and when the position changes. In the meantime please continue to use your regular legal advisers.

## Expertise

All the firms appointed to the panel have the proven skill, expertise and technical knowledge to provide excellent legal advice to Managing Trustee bodies. The firms have extensive experience in working with charities and other Christian denominations so their solicitors understand the challenges that Managing Trustees are faced with on a day to day basis. While the firms are nationally recognised for the work they undertake they retain a friendly and approachable ethos, compatible with the values of the Methodist Church.

The panel members have all received training from TMCP and the Connexional Team on Methodist law and policy as well the practical requirements and expectations of the Methodist Church. Ongoing monitoring of the panel firms will be undertaken regularly so TMCP and the Connexional Team can be satisfied that Managing Trustees are receiving consistent and competent legal advice which is cost effective and will lead to transaction times being reduced. The panel will work very closely with TMCP Legal in all transactions meaning Managing Trustees can rest easy in the knowledge that their instructed legal adviser and TMCP will together make sure that the Methodist Church is protected and matters will be dealt with in a professional and timely manner.

To find out more of the background to the panel and the rigorous tender process that was undertaken as well as general information on the 5 firms, please read the [Panel Promotional Booklet](#).

Please also ensure that a copy of the Panel Promotional Booklet is shared within Local Churches, Circuits and Districts.

## Added Value

After identifying some potential deficiencies and consistency in the quality of legal advice given to Managing Trustees across the Methodist Connexion, the delays and large legal bills which have sometimes resulted, TMCP and the Connexional Team believe that the panel should bring huge benefits to the Methodist Church. Some of the key benefits will be:

- Improved communication and regular reporting on cases between the panel and TMCP so there are no last minute issues which could cause delay and where appropriate, fixed/reduced legal fees will be charged for more complex transactions.
- Managing Trustees will be offered 30 minutes of free legal advice on new matters or when ad hoc queries arise and targeted training events will be offered by the panel firms on issues such as trustee responsibilities.

Further, regular legal updates will be provided directly from the panel firms and through the TMCP website. TMCP will ensure through monitoring that there is regular sharing of information on best practice, where lessons have been learnt, and how transactions or communication could be improved so that the service to Managing Trustees continues to improve through regular review meetings with TMCP on targets and performance.

- Managing Trustees will be speaking to someone who understands the requirements of TMCP and the Methodist Church's legislation and policies. The panel will understand that Managing Trustees do not regularly deal in legal matters and will therefore ensure that clear, comprehensive and understandable advice is given as well as providing continuous support throughout the transaction.

## Key areas of Law

During the tender exercise TMCP and the Connexional Team identified minimum key areas of law that the panel firms would advise upon that affect Managing Trustees regularly. These areas are:

- All aspects of property transactions from Manse sales and purchases to large scale development of church sites.
- All commercial aspects of the charities work, including general commercial contracts, as well as service delivery contracts and issues around non-primary purpose trading.
- All aspects of charity law, including matters pertaining to the duties of charity trustees;
- All aspects of compliance including fundraising, serious incidents with reputational risk, health and safety and **data protection, however specialist advice will be provided for the most part by the TMCP as Controller and the Connexional Team;**
- VAT and direct tax advice;
- Advice in relation to employment law, including the Equality Act, TUPE and volunteers. (The advice would relate to individuals employed by the charities and not Methodist ministers who are not employees);
- Where required, specialist advice in relation to legacies, including contentious estates. **Guidance will be provided for the most part in-house by TMCP Legal;**
- Civil litigation and safeguarding matters;
- Advice, where required, on sensitive issues with possible reputational implications for the charities, including all matters relating to defamation and libel and social media;
- Advice on Ecumenical work including Sharing Agreements and Local Ecumenical Partnerships. **Specialist guidance is also provided in these areas in-house by the Conference Office and TMCP;**
- Advice in relation to schools, in particular conversion to academies;
- Any other miscellaneous legal matters which could arise, including litigation

For more in depth information about each of the firms on the panel and the services they offer, Managing Trustees can click on the logos below which will take you to a page dedicated to each firm. Please note that the firms are listed below in alphabetical order and not in any order of preference. By clicking on the logos below you will also find the contact details for the lead person overseeing Methodist transactions at each firm as well as the locations of their offices. You can also obtain a PDF copy of our Panel Solicitors contact sheet [here](#).





MILLS & REEVE

Sintons  
Law

*If you have any queries in relation to the guidance in this document please contact [TMCP Legal](#) for further assistance.*

## Index

[Anthony Collins](#)

[Blake Morgan](#)

[Capsticks](#)

[Mills & Reeve](#)

[Sintons](#)