

36. Faith and Order Committee Report

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Resolution	36/1. The Conference receives the Report.

Summary of content and impact

Subject and aims	To provide a report on the work of the Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work of the Faith and Order Committee • Ways of working • Responses required by previous Conference • Scrutiny and consultancy work • Further work initiated by the Faith and Order Committee • Work being brought to the 2018 Conference

The Work of the Faith and Order Committee 2016-2017

1. The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by, and directly accountable to, the Methodist Conference. On behalf of the Conference, it helps to ensure that what the Methodist Church says and does is true to its self-understanding, mission and purpose. It therefore seeks to encourage a deepening of theological understanding, engagement with the Methodist tradition, and shared critical reflection in order to help discern Methodist perspectives and responses in all aspects of the Church's life.
2. The remit of the Faith and Order Committee is contained within Standing Order 330. It is directed, for example, to encourage reflection on the theological implications of all the work undertaken by the Connexional Team, to undertake specific tasks of theological scrutiny, and to stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church. The Committee seeks to fulfil its responsibilities by offering theological consultation for work being conducted throughout the Connexion and theological scrutiny for the work of the Conference and the Connexional Team. The Committee drafts, scrutinises and comments on reports from its own members or from other parts of the Methodist Church, makes recommendations to the Council and the Conference, offers advice on issues related to the faith and order of the Methodist Church, and reports to the Conference. Its roles in offering encouragement and in undertaking scrutiny sit alongside each other, and the Committee continues to give particular attention to how it might best help to stimulate, resource and encourage theological reflection throughout the Church.
3. Although its responsibilities have not altered substantially across the years, the nature of the day to day work of the Faith and Order Committee has gradually changed. The Committee notes that the time spent on work directed by the Conference and on more general tasks of scrutiny and theological consultation now leaves less capacity for enabling and stimulating theological reflection. This is a matter of concern which the Committee will keep under review, particularly as it considers its ways of working with the Faith and Order Network.
4. In the rest of this report, the Committee outlines the main areas in which it has been working during the present connexional year.

5. **Ways of working**

- 5.1. The Committee continues to consider the best ways of working in order to provide a theologically rich, robust and also cost-effective way of fulfilling its remit. It has begun a conversation about improving ways of conferring within the Committee, with members of the Faith and Order Network and more widely, acknowledging that pressures of time and workload are often constraints for all involved.
- 5.2. The work of establishing the Faith and Order Network continues. This is an approved panel of people with relevant skills and gifts who are willing to be called upon to support the Committee in its work. The Secretary is always glad to be informed of the names of individuals, lay or ordained, who have proven theological skills, an ability to analyse complex documents, and a good understanding of Methodist theology, doctrine and polity.
- 5.3. The Committee has met three times since the 2016 Conference: in September for a day meeting; in November for a 24-hour residential meeting; and in March for a 24-hour residential meeting. It appoints an Executive to make some decisions on behalf of the Committee between meetings. The Liturgy and Worship Sub-Committee assists the Committee in completion of its tasks (SO 330(2)). It meets according to need and utilises electronic ways of working.
- 5.4. A Joint Subgroup, appointed by the faith and order bodies of the Methodist Church and the Church of England, continues to take forward the work on ministry and oversight; and the Committee expects to bring a report to the 2018 Conference.
- 5.5. All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary of the Committee. The Committee has agreed a protocol for Faith and Order representation and consultation. As a general principle no one speaks on behalf of the Faith and Order Committee, except for the Secretary, unless they are specifically authorised to do so. Whilst those representing the Faith and Order Committee on other bodies cannot act on behalf of the Committee they shall endeavour: to articulate faith and order perspectives and highlight questions and concerns as appropriate; to encourage a shared engagement in theological reflection; to liaise with the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee; and to make reports or raise issues with the Committee as required.
- 5.6. The Committee continues to explore how it might best work with others in order to seek to stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church (SO 330(3)). It welcomes opportunities for collaboration and would encourage the creation of more opportunities for Methodists to confer theologically together within our oversight structures. It is particularly grateful for early conversations with working parties appointed by the Conference or the Council in order to identify whether the work is likely to involve any issues of faith and order.
- 5.7. The appointment of the Faith and Order Committee is the responsibility of the Methodist Conference. The Committee expresses its thanks to Catherine Frieze who will be retiring as a member of the Committee at the end of this connexional year.

6. **Responses required by previous Conferences**

The Faith and Order Committee has been working on responses to specific Conference resolutions, and draws the attention of the Conference to the following:

6.1. **Theological principles underpinning issues of ministerial remuneration**

The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to “undertake a major review of the theological foundation of all matters of ministerial remuneration and to report to the Conference of 2017” (*resolution 46/4, Conference 2015*). The response to this resolution is brought as part of

the report of the Connexional Allowances Committee to the 2017 Conference. During its review of the current understanding and practice in respect of matters of ministerial remuneration, the Faith and Order Committee acknowledged the pragmatic, pastoral and wider policy considerations that will continue to shape decisions in these areas. It is not necessarily the case that theological principles can be adduced to underpin current practice or to require any particular alternative, nor that theological reflection on these issues leads to a clear direction of travel. In addition, any consideration of matters of ministerial remuneration cannot be divorced from broader theological questions about the use of money and resources. The focus of the Faith and Order Committee's work therefore has been to articulate theological values and principles to assist with questions about how the Church financially resources and supports ministers.

6.2 The following response is brought as a separate report:

The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century (*resolution 14/2, Conference 2015*).

7. Scrutiny and consultancy work

- 7.1. The Committee has engaged with various questions, projects, and Council papers, offering specific responses to reports and other documents, continuing involvement in the support of working groups, or commentary on the development of reports and resources produced by the Connexional Team. Where appropriate, specific responses have been sent directly to the authors of reports or to those providing the lead in these areas of work.
- 7.2. Under SO 330(10) the Faith and Order Committee has a specific responsibility in scrutinising all matters directly concerning the faith and order of the Church presented to the Conference by other bodies. Such scrutiny requires consultation with the full Committee, and often some collaborative working, and the Committee is therefore grateful for early conversations to establish effective and constructive ways of working and to enable opportunities for shared reflection as the work develops.
- 7.3. The Committee continues to reflect on how it might best support members of the Connexional Team, and those undertaking work (individuals and working parties) on behalf of the Conference and Methodist Council, to think about how their work might be theologically resourced and what it means to reflect theologically in the context of the Methodist Church in Britain.

8. Further work initiated by the Faith and Order Committee

The Faith and Order Committee offers advice and responds to a variety of questions and concerns that arise in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain. From time to time some more significant work and further exploration is warranted. The Faith and Order Committee has, this year, undertaken three new pieces of work and will report to the Conference in due course.

8.1. Response to *A Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory*

A Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory is the tenth report of the International Commission for dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council. The Faith and Order Committee will bring a proposed response to the Conference of 2018 and intends to hold a study day in the autumn to explore and discuss the report and the British Methodist Church's response to it. The Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee will be pleased to hear from anyone who is interested in engaging with this process. A copy of the report is available at <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>.

8.2. Theology of safeguarding

It has become clear that some further theological reflection on issues of safeguarding would be

helpful for the Church's work in this area. The Committee is aware of similar work already undertaken by ecumenical partners and other bodies, and will draw on these resources as it explores understandings of safeguarding in a Methodist context.

8.3. Response to the CPCE *Church Communion* document

The Council of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), of which the Methodist Church in Britain is a member, has produced a substantial document on *Church Communion* for consideration and comment, and the Council of the CPCE has asked member churches to respond to a series of specific questions. The Faith and Order Committee has considered the document and the associated questions and will send a response to the Council of the CPCE by the deadline of August 2017.

9. Work being brought to the 2018 Conference

The Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2018 Conference is expected to include the following major pieces of work:

- Ministry in the Methodist Church (*resolution 35/2, Conference 2014*);
- Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate (*resolution 44/11, Conference 2013*) which will include the response regarding the liturgical role of deacons (*resolution 35/4, Conference 2012*);
- Holy Communion Mediated Through Social Media (*resolution 37/1, Conference 2015*);
- Response to *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness* (*resolution 21/3, Conference 2014*);
- Response to *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory*.

*****RESOLUTION**

36/1. The Conference received the Report.