

8. Faith and Order Committee

Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	Approval
Resolutions	8/1. The Conference receives the Report. 8/2. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation as appropriate, to revise the Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers and to report to the Conference of 2026. 8/3. The Conference resolves that the 1977 Statement on <i>The Church and The Ministry of Healing</i> shall no longer have the status of a Conference Statement.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	A general update on the work of the Faith and Order Committee. Proposals for the revision of the Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduction• Ways of Working• Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee• Revision of the Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers• Other items of work

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by, and accountable to, the Methodist Conference. On behalf of the Conference it helps to ensure that what the Methodist Church in Britain 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.
- 1.2 Under SO 330(10) the Faith and Order Committee has a specific role in scrutinising all matters directly concerning the faith and order of the Church presented to

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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, particularly with working parties appointed by other bodies, to establish effective and constructive ways of working and reflecting as the work develops. Conversations as the group is set up and the process for developing the work is established are particularly appreciated. All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary of the Committee.

2 Ways of Working

- 2.1 Each year the Committee reflects on its ways of working. The Committee is always deeply grateful to the many people who volunteer their time to enable its work. In this connexional year, we have been particularly saddened by the death of the Revd Leo Osborn who was a member of the Faith and Order Committee, Faith and Order Executive and the Chair of the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee. Leo's contribution was significant in many ways and we miss him very much.
- 2.2 The Committee has appointed Craig Price to the Faith and Order Executive. Recruitment to the Committee for this connexional year is in process at the time of writing and will include the appointment of a new Chair of the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee (as Standing Orders require this person also to be a member of the F&O Committee itself).
- 2.3 The Committee is aware that there are various expectations of what the Committee does, what it is responsible for, and the kind of decisions it can make. The role and remit of the Faith and Order Committee is set out in Standing Order 330.
- 2.3 A common misassumption is about the role that the Committee plays in the theological life of the Church. Although it does have a responsibility to "stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church" (SO 330(3)), it is important to note that the Faith and Order Committee is just one part of the process of theological reflection. It does have a particular role to play in helping the Conference make decisions which have implications for the faith and order of the Church. This often involves both a broad theological understanding and particular (and often detailed) knowledge of Methodist theology, polity and the relevant theological subject areas, which is more than just academic expertise. In addition, much of the work of the Committee requires the ability to read and process significant paperwork, too often at short notice, and with a careful

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attention to detail. Whilst not every member of the Committee needs to be proficient in every area, these are the gifts and knowledge needed to be able to carry out the Committee's work.

- 2.4 Given that the Committee is not, and should not be, the only place where theological thinking happens, then it does have a concern for the theological life of the Church and how theological thinking is facilitated in Local Churches, Circuits, Districts, the Connexional Team, and connexional working parties, committees and other bodies. Its own desire to play a part in stimulating theological thinking has often been thwarted by a heavy workload and immediate demands. This is likely to be mirrored in many other contexts, and continues to be an issue of concern.
- 2.5 When the Conference directs the Committee to undertake a piece of work on a specific topic then the Committee would usually work with other people; either through establishing a working group that draws on a variety of people with different experience and perspectives relevant to the subject, or through reflection days, conversations or different forms of consultation. For many of the reports it brings to the Conference, therefore, it has worked with people outside of the Committee and from many parts of the Church's life.
- 2.6 In order for the Committee to be able to fulfil its responsibilities it requires not only the skills and knowledge indicated above, but also a commitment of time and attention. As in many areas of the Methodist Church's life, Committee members are volunteers. In a context when many people are already overloaded, finding people who have the time and availability is a challenge.
- 2.7 The Committee also notes that, like many others, it undertakes much of its work under pressure in order to meet Conference, Council and other deadlines. This affects the extent and nature of any consultation (which, if done well, always takes time, attention and resourcing), the opportunity to engage in more proactive and creative thinking, and the time and ability to develop skills for faith and order work. The Committee has given thought to how it might help to develop the particular skills and expertise needed for its work and has explored and is exploring various possibilities including mentoring, creating further opportunities for involvement in its work, training or study days or sessions in particular areas and paying attention to different ways of identifying people for particular pieces of work. It has been encouraged at the response to the recent advertisements, and is keen to identify people with potential for faith and order work even if they do not have all the skills needed at present.

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3 The Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee

- 3.1 The Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee now consists of 10 people, convened by the Revd Neil Stubbens. It is hoped that the name of the new Chair will be brought to this Conference. It engages in a wide range of liturgical work on behalf of the Committee and the Committee is extremely grateful for its attention and dedication to its task. In addition to the specific items of work directed to it, it provides representation for the Methodist Church to the Joint Liturgical Group, the Funerals Group and the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.

4 Revision of the 'Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers'

- 4.1 When ministers of other churches and conferences seek to serve within the Methodist Church in Britain (whether on a permanent or temporary basis), checks are made as to whether their ordination can be recognised by the Methodist Church. Recognition of the ordination is not of itself sufficient to approve the application, but it is an essential part of the process.
- 4.2 Where there is doubt as to whether the ordination can be recognised, the advice of the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee is sought. The normal practice is that the applicant is asked for a copy of their ordination certificate and of the liturgy used for the ordination service. However, these are not always available and in many cases applicants are not able to provide the liturgy of the ordination service (for example, a copy may no longer be retained, or it may never have been a written liturgy).
- 4.3 The criteria against which recognition is judged were approved by the Conference in 1993 and are available at https://www.methodist.org.uk/documents/7996/fo-statement-criteria-for-the-transfer-of-ministers-1993_iSFu9e0.pdf. There is a number of challenges in applying these criteria, in particular that they do not provide criteria for the recognition of diaconal ordination and nor do they give any guidance as to the level of satisfaction that should be achieved on each point (and how in which direction therefore doubtful cases should be resolved).
- 4.4 The addition of diaconal recognition to the criteria will require careful consideration. There are many different patterns of ministry in our partner churches that come under the heading of deacons and diaconal, not all of them ordained. In addition, the MDO is of course a religious order as well as an order of ministry and considerations relating to this also affect the transfer processes.

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- 4.5 The processes for the transfer of ministers have been on hold for a period and have recently reopened. Consequently, a high number of applications is beginning to be considered. This consideration has highlighted the questions raised above and there has been initial conversation with the Ministerial Coordinator for the Oversight of Ordained Ministries who is in agreement that it would be helpful for these questions to be examined.
- 4.6 The Faith and Order Committee had an initial conversation about this in its meeting in November. It agreed that the criteria needed updating and potentially tightening and it would be useful to link them to the selection criteria. It consulted with the Ministries Committee (which has oversight of the transfer processes); that committee is in agreement that the criteria be reviewed. Alongside this, the Methodist Council has directed the Ministries Committee to appoint a task group to review Section 73 (which governs the overall process of ministerial transfer); the committees will ensure that there is appropriate coordination between these pieces of work.

5 Other specific items of work

- 5.1 Deliverance Ministry: The 2022 Conference directed the Ministries and Faith and Order Committee to bring revised guidance for deliverance ministry to the 2024 Conference. The Connexional Panel on Deliverance Ministry does not consider that any revision is required at this stage and the Faith and Order Committee therefore proposed to the Ministries Committee that they propose to the Conference that the existing guidance continue to be used. The two Committees will continue to keep the guidance under review and bring amendments when they are required.
- 5.2 Anglican-Methodist Covenant: The Methodist Council directed the Faith and Order Committee to work with the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England to explore the most suitable next steps in considering Mission and Ministry in Covenant (including, if necessary, drafting relevant legal/liturgical texts). We have been seeking a joint meeting of the Faith and Order bodies in order to take this forward, however this has not yet been possible due to the focus on work on marriage and relationships (LLF) in the Church of England and staff changes. We will continue to seek opportunities to work together on this and will report developments when possible.
- 5.3 Methodist Worship Book: The Methodist Council agreed that the Faith and Order Committee should take forward a consultation process regarding revision of the Methodist Worship Book with a view to bringing proposals to the Conference.

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Pressure of other work has meant that it has not been possible to complete that in time for this year's Conference but work will continue and proposals will be brought next year.

- 5.4 Healing Ministry and Neurodiversity: This work is in response to a Notice of Motion brought to the 2022 Conference and seeks to offer some reflection on healing ministry in the context of neurodiversity, recognising that experience of both is wide and varied. Following feedback from the JDS Committee, the Faith and Order Committee resolved not to bring this report to the Conference this year and to seek to do further collaborative work with the JDS Committee. As part of this work, the Faith and Order Committee has noted that the existing Conference statement on healing ministry dates from the 1970s. Understandings of healing have developed significantly since it was produced and the Committee is of the view that it is no longer appropriate for the document to have the status of a Statement of the Conference. It is therefore proposed that that status be removed.
- 5.4 The Committee is planning to report to the Conference of 2025 on the following matters:
- Marriage and Relationships (further work)
 - Proposals for a revision of the *Methodist Worship Book*
 - Healing Ministry and Neurodiversity
- 5.5 The Committee is planning to report to the Conference of 2026 on the following matters:
- Online Church
 - Revision of the Criteria for the transfer of ministers

***RESOLUTIONS

- 8/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**
- 8/2. **The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation as appropriate, to revise the Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers and to report to the Conference of 2026.**
- 8/3. **The Conference resolves that the 1977 Statement on *The Church and The Ministry of Healing* shall no longer have the status of a Conference Statement.**