

Faith and Order Committee

MC/24/59

Date of meeting	13-15 April 2024
Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Mark Rowland, Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee faithandorder@methodistchurch.org.uk
Resolution	59/1. The Council receives the report.

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.

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 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.

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.

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).

Each year the Committee reflects on its ways of working and seeks to work as effectively as possible. 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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Specific items of work

The Committee has several items of work currently in progress, many of which are due to report to the 2024 Conference. Among these are:

Online Church: With the Law and Polity Committee, the committee is studying what work would be required to be done to provide for predominantly online churches in our discipline. An initial report was taken to the Conference of 2023 and connexional and district committees and other bodies were asked by the Conference to consider how such provision might affect them and to send comments to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee. Formal discussions have taken place with the Ministries and Mission Committees and a very helpful paper was prepared by the Safeguarding Committee and individual responses have also been received. A report has been produced for consideration by the Faith and Order Committee which will report to the Conference.

The Role of a District Chair: As part of the Oversight and Trusteeship Work, the Faith and Order Committee was directed to examine this and it takes on a particular complexity in the light of the emerging variety of sizes of district and patterns of district leadership. This piece of work relates to the Senior Leadership work that the Ministries Committee is overseeing and it may be helpful to have some conversation about their interrelation.

Healing Ministry and Neurodiversity: The 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 things is wide and varied. As part of this work, the task group noted that our existing Conference statement on healing ministry dates from the 70s and draws attention to the need for updated resources.

Singleness: Following the 2021 decisions on Marriage and Relationships, the Faith and Order Committee offered a number of areas to the Conference on which further work could be done. The Conference asked for more reflection on singleness and a report will be brought to the Conference this year. The Committee is also due to report in 2025 on other continuing questions following *God in Love Unites Us* with recommendations as to any action to be taken.

Membership: The Conference received the major report *Methodist Membership in the 21st Century* in 2022. Some further matters required more work and these are due to be reported to the Conference this year.

Deliverance Ministry: The committee notes the direction of the Conference to 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 committee therefore proposed to the Ministries Committee that it proposes 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.

Criteria for the Transfer of Ministers: When Ministers of Other Churches and Conferences seek status with the Methodist Church in Britain (eg to transfer into full connexion, be recognised and regarded and so on), checks have to be made to ensure that their ordination is recognised by the Methodist Church. These are governed by the criteria for the Transfer of Ministers which date to the 90s and need updating. A paper was submitted to the Ministries Committee regarding this and we will propose to the Conference that the criteria be revised.

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). The committee is 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. The committee will continue to seek opportunities to work together on this and will report developments when possible.

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. 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 with a view to bringing proposals next year.

In addition to the above items, the committee or its representatives are consulted about a wide range of issues in the life of the church. The committee was pleased to be able to contribute to conversation about the God for All strategy, a possible Forum for Worship Leaders and Preachers, and other matters.

*****RESOLUTION**

59/1. The Council receives the report.