

Paper F1

Update on current work

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

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| Action required | For information. |
| Draft resolution(s) | N/A |

Summary of content

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| Subject and aim(s) | Update on the work of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee. |
| Main points | This paper outlines the areas of work the Committee has undertaken as well as its future work. |
| Previous relevant documents | None. |
| Consultation has taken place with... | |

Summary of impact

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| Financial | None. |
| External (eg ecumenical) | The work of the Committee has an impact on ecumenical relationships, as this is the body which is called on by ecumenical partners to discuss how to improve areas of co-operation and mutual understanding. |

The remit of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee is:

- to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
- to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order
- to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship
- to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

An eventful year has passed since our previous report to Assembly Executive as the then Faith and Order (F&O) Committee. Since that time, we have met twice (3 March 2023 online and 9-10 June 2023 in residential) as the F&O Committee and once (20 October 2023 online) as the new Worship, Faith and Order Committee.

At our F&O meetings, we:

1. Discussed an 'environmental policy' and stressed that the reduction of in-person meetings to one per year had addressed part of the issue, though we would need to return to the subject and agree a policy once the URC's new Committee Structure was clearer.
2. Completed work on a Fresh Expressions paper which helped inform debates elsewhere in the church about when a FX becomes a 'church'.
3. Continued a discussion about membership and 'isolated membership', having heard the response that this was not quite meeting the need that had been identified. Part of our discussion has revolved around how someone might belong to the URC in ways other than belonging to a local church. This remains work in progress as we have yet to reach a point of resolution.
4. Prepared and discussed a paper on the theological implications of the Vocation and Call paper which emanated from the Education and Learning, Ministries, and Children's and Youth Work committees. A version of the paper (discussed though not endorsed by the F&O Committee) can be found on the URC Learning Hub.
5. Drew to an end the work of the Worship Reference Group as a body separate from but reporting to F&O thanking those involved, especially the Revd Samuel Silungwe for chairing the group. It was agreed that the work of the group should be included on the Committee's agenda and a resolution to effect this was adopted at General Assembly in 2023.
6. Looked at and responded to the material presented by yoURChurch in order to be recognised as a church in the URC. F&O Committee raised some issues but was of a mind to seek the will of General Assembly with a view to maintaining links with yoURChurch, in part through continuing members of F&O who attend yoURChurch, as its polity and its activity develops. Over time, as membership of the Committee changes, any ongoing discussion might need a more formal relationship with yoURChurch.
7. Began a discussion about how the schedule of promises might be made available in non-gendered language, following a question raised during the parallel sessions at General Assembly 2022. A small group has been established, convened by the Revd Dr Susan Durber with the Revd Andy Braunston as secretary, with a remit to draw on ecumenical experience in considering what might work liturgically.
8. Have maintained contact with the work of the Ministries Committee through the regular attendance of the Secretary of Ministries, the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith. She has submitted occasional papers for our consideration, including one discussing a 'Theology of Safeguarding'.

9. Have looked again at the 'priesthood of all believers', considering an initial paper which led F&O to resolve to do further work and think about how our deliberations might be more widely disseminated.
10. In light of discussion informed by one of our members, Ms Diana Paulding, we supported the arrangements made for a 20s-40s event which proved to be a success. It has particularly helped our discussion about membership.
11. Reflected, in discussion with the Childrens and Youth Work Committee's resolution, adopted by General Assembly in 2023, to work out how Children's and Youth Work Ministry might be formally recognised in the URC, highlighting what might be the F&O issues involved.

At our last F&O Committee meeting we thanked the Revd Samuel Silungwe for his time of service on, and contribution to the work of, the Committee and bade him a fond farewell.

Following resolution 56, passed at General Assembly in 2023, the F&O Committee became the Worship, Faith and Order Committee with the remit which appears on the cover sheet. We have met once (online) and next meet on 23-24 February 2024, after the meeting of the Assembly Executive.

Deliberations at our first meeting as the new WFO in October 2023 brought to light that appointees to the Committee were asked to serve for six years. This was felt to be out of step with other Committees and also to be a length that could put off some people from serving on the Committee. As a result, the Committee will ask Assembly Executive, via a separate report, to agree that the initial term of service for appointees should be four years. Such an appointment can be renewed for a further four-year term.

In our February meeting, we will be continuing our work as follows:

1. We expect the group working on a version of the schedule of promises in non-gendered language to report on progress.
2. We will discuss our historical and current understanding of 'membership' with the intention of discussing with the General Secretary, at a future meeting, how contemporary lifestyle might impact on that understanding.
3. A further discussion will take place on 'priesthood of all believers', making reference to a number of resources, and whether or not there is any mileage in the Committee seeking to disseminate its findings.
4. We will discuss whether work with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee might fruitfully occur in further discussion of the document *God's Love Unites Us*.
5. The matter of 'discernment' has come to our attention as one we might fruitfully consider and on which some further work might be desirable.
6. We will consider more fully our plans regarding a Net Zero target for the Committee and its activities.

7. We will keep yoURChurch on our agenda to see if any further work needs to be done by the Committee.
8. We will receive a report from the Spirituality Group in line with our new remit. We currently plan an annual reporting mechanism with a representative of the Spirituality Group in attendance at one of our meetings annually (probably an online meeting).
9. We will consider an approach from the Theology of Worship Group and how best to relate their work to that of the Committee.

As per our remit, members of the Committee would be pleased to receive comments and feedback from members of Assembly Executive. We would be pleased also to receive questions regarding the URC's worship, faith and order for deliberation during, or between, our meetings.