

# Paper F1

## Update on current work

### Worship, Faith and Order Committee

#### Basic information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Robert Pope <b>rpp20@cam.ac.uk</b> Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	Note.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>N/A.</b>

#### Summary of content

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

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	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.

General Assembly 2023 brought the Worship, Faith and Order Committee into existence. Since then, the Committee has:

1. Discussed the Environmental Policy, and stressed that the reduction of in-person meetings to one per year had partly addressed the issue, while careful consideration will be given to where the residential meeting will be held to keep travel to a minimum.
2. 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.
3. 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 WFO Committee) can be found on the URC Learning Hub.
4. Drew to an end the work of the Worship Reference Group as a body separate from but reporting to the Committee. Thanks go to those involved, especially the Revd Samuel Silungwe for chairing the group.
5. Began a discussion about how the schedule of promises might be made available within a liturgy that used expansive language, following a question raised during the parallel sessions at General Assembly 2022. A small group was 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. The group's work has been completed, with the words approved by the Committee.
6. 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'.
7. Looked again at the 'priesthood of all believers', considering an initial paper which led WFO to resolve to do further work and think about how our deliberations might be more widely disseminated.
8. 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.
9. Reflected, in initial discussion with the Children's and Youth Work Committee, about how Children's and Youth Work Ministry might be formally recognised in the URC, highlighting what might be the WFO issues involved.
10. 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 asked Assembly Executive to agree that the initial term of service for

appointees should be four years. Such an appointment can be renewed for one further four-year term.

11. Discussed and commended the Methodist Church's document *God in Love Unites Us* as a resource for the United Reformed Church, and WFO will continue to reference it when relevant to our deliberations.
12. Had initial discussions about the matter of 'discernment', and some further work will be undertaken in discussion with the Business Committee.
13. Received 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).
14. Discussed the Methodist Church's Justice Seeking Church Report. WFO intends to return to this Report in the future, with a view to seeing how some of its principles and recommendations, alongside its theological approach, may be appropriated for the United Reformed Church.
15. Begun a discussion about the five Marks of Mission, and what a rewrite appropriate to the age and to the URC might look like.

Some of this work is ongoing. We have been asked to consider diaconal ministry, and a theological response to AI.

The Minister for Digital Worship reports as follows:

In 2021, General Assembly resolved to create the new post of Minister for Digital Worship to create and curate a range of worship resources to help local churches, elders, lay preachers and ministers, as digital technology gives the Church opportunities not seen since the invention of the printing press in the 16th Century. Andy Braunston took up this role in February 2022 and reports to General Assembly through the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee which he serves as joint Secretary.

Andy oversees the production of services for local churches to use via PowerPoint, with videos of a minister giving an introduction, sermon, and blessing and, at least monthly, presiding at Holy Communion. Readings, prayers and hymns are provided in audio format, too. Local churches can adapt these and lead readings and prayers locally from the script provided or use all the material on PowerPoint. Churches find this useful when they have no minister or lay preacher to lead worship, and some are making these services a regular part of their repertoire, using them monthly. The PowerPoint material is sent out a month in advance, alongside audio recordings and full scripts, which some churches distribute to those unable to attend who do not have access to the internet. On average, 139 congregations each week use some or all of this material.

Those who lead these services also provide Worship Notes which contain all the prayers, an all-age activity, a selection of hymn suggestions and notes to build into a sermon. This material can be used as is, adapted, or used to stimulate ideas. On average, 634 people a week download this material – and our reach extends from the URC, with people from a range of other denominations using the material, too. As the material is produced several months ahead of time, Andy has overseen a small team of people producing Weekly Intercessions designed to be more topical yet still related to

the Lectionary readings for a given Sunday; these are produced in the week before they are designed to be used, and more than 100 people a week download these.

Biblical reading and reflection are hallmarks of Reformed spirituality, and the Daily Devotions continue to be a key part of the URC's spiritual life. Themes range from working through a Biblical book, using art to access Biblical truths, asking guest writers to tackle a series and, increasingly, using voices from around the world to stimulate our thinking. This year, we have heard a range of voices from the wider Church ponder the Revd Dr Graham Adam's reworking of the Anglican Five Marks of Mission, and voices from Myanmar reflect on the plight of that troubled nation.

We have read through St Mark's Gospel, looked at a range of representations of Jesus in art, pondered evangelism with Eddie Boon, and are looking forward to reading through Hebrews with John Proctor. About 4,000 people are sent the Daily Devotions each day; some listen to them as podcasts, and 250 local church contacts receive them in booklet format to print and give to members of their churches without internet access. Some Daily Devotion series are turned into small group studies for local church use.

Andy has also served as Secretary to a small working group who edited the various initiation, ordination and commissioning services in Worship From to update them in light of Assembly Resolutions on Expansive Language. The changes also reflect various changes in URC polity since Worship From was published (for example the removal, for all intents and purposes, of District Councils), and corrected some typographical mistakes.

Andy is grateful for the many Daily Devotion writers, crafters of worship and intercessions, and the team of people who record the material; they all help enrich the Church's worship. Particular thanks are due to the Revd Walt Johnson who provides quite technical support, in particular, for the Podcasts. Thanks are due, too, to Neil Hunter, the Digital Content Manager, who carefully attends to the production of the service podcasts, booklets and PowerPoint files week after week.

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