

Paper J1

Worship, Faith & Order Report

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	None
Draft resolution(s)	n/a

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report the work of the Worship, Faith and Order (WFO) Committee
Main points	This paper outlines the areas of work the Committee has undertaken since it last reported to General Assembly and identifies ongoing and future work
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

Summary of impact

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.

The Worship, Faith and Order Committee has met on six occasions, including two residential meetings, since last reporting to General Assembly in 2024.

1. Children and Youth ministry

The Committee was fully involved in the discussion about a Children and Youth ministry. The decision at Assembly Executive, and subsequently at the Children and Youth Work Committee, paused this conversation. However, WFO feel it is important to acknowledge the clarity achieved on questions of polity. This will be useful should conversations about new ministries resume in the future.

2. Church membership and belonging

Noting that the language and practice of membership feels alien to many, the Committee has discussed this matter on several occasions. We are now consulting with other denominations to see if there are common issues and possible solutions. In the meantime, the Committee is looking at historical precedents to ensure that what was theologically meaningful is not lost as a result of cultural change. The work is ongoing.

3. Assisted Dying

Aware that legal changes were on the horizon, the Committee revisited the General Assembly resolution of 2007. Initially there was some concern about how to respond pastorally and theologically in a situation where assisted dying might be a legal possibility when the URC has adopted a resolution clearly opposing it. Perhaps unexpectedly, and despite the momentum for change that appeared to be gathering pace, the Scottish Parliament voted against a change to the law while, at the Westminster Parliament, the debate ran out of time.

Alongside this, the Committee had a helpful session at its residential meeting in February 2025 in which two stakeholders guided our thinking around developments in theology seeking to hear marginalized voices. These include disabled voices, voice of the ethnically minoritized and the global majority. These were not prominent in 2007, while it has also been pointed out that the 2007 documents had no distinctive women's voice.

All these would now offer important insights to us. While the Committee believes that the material produced in 2007 was, for its time, balanced, these subsequent developments need to be made more readily available to the churches. As a result, the Committee will bring a resolution to the Assembly to reissue the paper on Reformed theological approaches to the question and note that further work will be commissioned bringing to the fore a greater breadth of voices on the issue.

4. Christian Nationalism

The Committee has been made aware of the rise in popularity of Christian imagery and language associated with extreme political views. While this has been a clear phenomenon for some time in the USA, it has begun to play a part in European countries and recently in the UK. The Committee in discussion with ecumenical pastors, JPIT and others will provide material to help inform our churches in due course. The work is ongoing.

5. Co-opting members

It has become clear that URC representatives to certain ecumenical bodies (such as the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches) have no natural place in our revised structures in which to report to the denomination. WFO believes they should be co-opted to serve on the Committee in order that there be a place where the work of those

ecumenical bodies can be received and, when necessary, a response offered. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

6. A Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church

Following a query to the Committee regarding the responses found in Version II of the Statement, and hearing of experiences, especially in ecumenical services, where Version II has been considered to be too long to be fit for purpose, the Committee agreed to produce a third alternative version of the Statement which is shorter than Version II, stays close to the content of Version I, but includes congregational responses. This is intended to be a further option alongside, rather than a replacement for, Version I and Version II. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

7. Creationtide

Global ecumenical partners have been encouraged to adopt a Feast of Creation and to consider a Creationtide Season during which churches will focus on the mystery of creation. The Feast of Creation will be included in the Revised Common Lectionary from 2026. Given that the URC does not follow a particular calendar, but that many Ministers and Lay Preachers use the Revised Common Lectionary, the Committee will ask General Assembly to encourage churches to observe the Feast and Season and to provide resources to help churches to celebrate it. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

8. URC Spirituality

This group reports on activity to WFO, both formally and informally through conversations between its officers and committee officers. Discussion have included the provision of a page for URC Spirituality on the denomination's website. A question has been raised about the appropriate committee to oversee URC Spirituality and this is awaiting clarification.

9. Minister for Digital Worship

As member *ex officio* and as joint secretary to the Committee, the Minister for Digital Worship has attended the Committee meetings and makes a full contribution to the Committee's work. He reports, as necessary, on his work. Recently he has worked on slight amendments to the Marriage Rites and these have been included in the on-line Worship Book.

10. Expansive language

A sub-group looking at expansive language in worship surveyed the orders of service for baptism, initiation, ordination and commissioning. With due recognition of ecumenical discussion and commitment, especially regarding baptism, the language of each service had been revised as far as is possible.

11. On speaking about the Faith, Life and Practice of Jewish People

For various reasons, the Committee's attention has been drawn to the need for guidelines about how difficult biblical passages should be discussed. Specialist research and great sensitivity is required. The work is ongoing, though the aim is to bring a URC statement on relationships with the Jewish people, on which full consultation has taken place, to General Assembly as soon as possible.

12. Non Stipendiary Ministry (NSM) (Local)

Though a matter for Ministries, this matter was brought to the Committee by the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) so that the Faith and Order aspects could be discussed. The Committee noted that, in terms of order, NSM (Local) ministers are ordained ministers of the Word and Sacraments, and we only have one order of this ministry. This means that their ministry is to be recognised throughout the Church. Their role is more narrowly focused, but the paper and resolutions approved by Mission Council in 2018 noted that Synods are free to determine the nature and scope of an NSM (Local) ministry. The Committee observed that Synods can use their oversight and discretion in redeployment if an NSM (Local) needs to be redeployed.

13. Miscellaneous

On occasion WFO is approached by convenors and secretaries of other committees to offer advice on particular pieces of work. Over the last two years this has included comment on AI, Diaconal Ministry, Marks of Mission, how we discern the guidance of the Spirit in our meetings.

As per our remit, and as can be seen from the report, members of the Committee are pleased to receive comments and feedback from members of Assembly.