

Paper J3

Providing a 3rd Version of the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 43 General Assembly agrees to adopt Version III of the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide a shorter, responsorial version of A Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC (SNFO) which is closer to the original text.
Main points	<p>The Committee was asked if the responsorial version II of the SNFO could be shortened as many of the responses do not appear in the original text (version I). The Committee felt there was merit in offering a third version using expansive language and which was also closer to the original text. Any of the three versions could be used by local churches at services of induction, commissioning, and ordination.</p> <p>If accepted, as this would be a change to the Basis, the resolution would need to be referred to the Synods.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Versions I and II of the SNFO
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

A question from a retired URC minister led to discussion about the responses in version II of A Statement concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC (SNFO). While the Committee agreed that the responses were appropriate, members acknowledged that they made additional statements, not found in the original text (version I).

The Committee noted that there are occasions, often ecumenical, when version II is considered to be too long to be fit for purpose, and an alternative, version III, might be provided for the church which stayed close to the original text, introduced responses and employed expansive language. The Committee offers the following for consideration by General Assembly to adopt this as a third version alongside the two existing versions.

The Committee felt it important, in a statement such as this, to keep to the traditional language describing the Trinity at the start, declaring that our faith is that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, but to balance this with a prayer using expansive language at the end and to remove gendered references to the First and Third Persons of the Trinity throughout.

In the second stanza the Committee felt it would be good to return to the original language, closer to the Basis of Union, “in the common life of God’s people” when referring to the life of faith to which we are called.

In the third stanza we have put back in the clause about the Bible noting that it is discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which, we felt, was stronger than the phrase “alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit” in Version II.

We followed Version II in combining three stanzas in the original about the ability to change and make new declarations of faith adding in the original’s phrase about the mind of Christ.

We reworked the clause about personal freedom to avoid the word “fellowship” which some feel is gendered. This then follows into the next stanza where we follow the previous versions in noting it is for the church to decide when such freedom causes injury to our common life. Again we’ve avoided the use of “fellowship.”

In the stanza about church and state we have more closely followed version I with the addition of the word “religious” before belief. Non-religious beliefs and ideologies would be included in the “conscience” article.

The final stanza in Version III uses “declare” rather than “affirm”, thinking in terms of confessing faith in the world. We have avoided “fellowship” (in Version I) and “fellow Christians” (in Version II).

The beautiful final phrase in Version II is reworked into a short prayer to finish the Statement grounding it firmly into the worshipping life of the church.

A comparison of all three versions follows. If General Assembly were to pass the resolution and the Synods confirm it, then any of the three versions could be used by local churches at services of induction, commissioning, and ordination.