

21. Faith and Order Committee

Contact Name and Details	The Revd Mark Rowland Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee rowlandm@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action Required	Approval
Resolutions	21/1. The Conference receives the Report. 21/2. The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out in paragraphs 5.15 and 5.16 above. 21/3. The Conference adopts section 5 of this report as its further reply to Memorial M22 (2022). 21/4. The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring the work required by resolution 45/2 of the Conference of 2022 to the Conference of 2024.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	A general update on the work of the Faith and Order Committee. A further response to Memorial M22 (2022).
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Ways of Working • Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee • A fundamental revision of the Methodist Worship Book? • Use of alcohol in Holy Communion • Other items of work
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<i>Methodist Worship Book</i> Memorial M22 (2022) Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership (Conference 2022)

1 Introduction

- 1.1 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

21. Faith and Order Committee

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.

- 1.2 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.

2 Ways of Working

- 2.1 Each year the Committee reflects on its ways of working. In the current year, the appointment of a new Secretary of the Committee is inevitably leading to some adjustments and changes, which are still in their early days. The Committee has also given attention to its pattern of meeting and the ways in which new members are recruited. Last year, recruitment to both the Committee itself and to the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee were by open advertisement and interview and a similar process is underway for this year's recruitment. Due to the success of last year's recruitment process for the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee we have only recruited to the main committee this year. Reflecting on the process from last year, we note that alongside the openness of an advert and application process, we need to work harder at offering encouragement and help to enable those who are underrepresented on the Committee to apply.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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

21. Faith and Order Committee

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.

- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 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,

21. Faith and Order Committee

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.

3 The Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee

- 3.1 The Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee now consists of 11 people, convened by the Revd Neil Stubbens and continuing to be chaired by the Revd Leo Osborn. It engages in a wide range of liturgical work on behalf of the Committee and the Committee is extremely grateful for its attention and dedication to its task. In addition to the specific items of work directed to it, it provides representation for the Methodist Church to the Joint Liturgical Group, the Funerals Group and the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England.
- 3.2 The Conference of 2021 directed the production of guidance for marking the ending of appointments in services of worship (resolution 26/3). This guidance has now been produced and is available on the Faith and Order pages of the Methodist Church website. In addition, guidance on Welcome Services and a paper on the Theology and Practice of the Peace have also been produced and are available in the same place.
- 3.3 The Standing Orders adopted by the Conference of 2022 regarding Local Lay-Pastors require that a service of commissioning normally be held at the start of an appointment (SO 56A1(7)) and a liturgy for such a service has now been produced and approved by the Faith and Order Committee and is available on the additional liturgies' page.⁷
- 3.4 The new set of additional orders for services of Holy Communion mentioned in our report to the Conference of 2022 have now been completed and are now available on the Methodist Church website. These are intended to complement the current provision in the *Methodist Worship Book* and include explanatory notes that may be helpful for study, perhaps as part of preparation for membership or in house groups.

4 A fundamental revision of the Methodist Worship Book?

- 4.1 The Secretary of the Conference asked the Faith and Order Committee to consider whether it is time for a fundamental revision of the *Methodist Worship*

7 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/leading-worship/additional-methodist-liturgies/>

21. Faith and Order Committee

Book (MWB). Under the terms of Standing Order 330(9), the Committee has the authority to make proposals for revising forms of service authorised by the Conference. Authorisation by the Conference is our highest level of liturgical approval.

4.2 MWB was published in 1999 so is now a little over 20 years old, although the work on producing it began in 1990. There has never been any requirement for Methodists to use authorised texts, but they provide ‘norms for guidance.’ It is a much more substantial book than its predecessor (the *Methodist Service Book* 1975) which was a deliberate decision in response to feedback at the time. With the developments of technology since then, it is easier for additional resources to be made available online via the Methodist Church website. These usually carry ‘approved’ or ‘recommended’ status and may be for particular needs or occasions. While in many ways, MWB continues to wear well and to be a widely used resource in our worship, there is also a number of factors that point towards the need for change:

- The corrections to the text made since the original publication;
- Subsequent decisions of the Conference which have changed the text of the MWB eg those following the report on the Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate which amended the ordination service;
- The liturgies authorised by the Conference subsequent to the MWB eg the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Promises, and whether these should now be included;
- The new marriage services which will come to the 2023 Conference;
- Concerns about the Good Friday reproaches and liturgical resources for Holy Week and therefore whether these should be revised or whether the current guidance⁸ becomes part of the text;
- Questions about inclusive and expansive language.

4.3 Following initial consideration by the Liturgy and Worship Subcommittee, the Committee considered this at its November meeting and took the view that it is time for a fundamental revision of the MWB. The Committee recognised many factors that tend to support this view and felt that, while some things could be retained, the extent of revision required probably suggests a fairly full and comprehensive piece of work. It noted questions around format and use and the significance of authorised resources, while also recognising their value and importance beyond their use (or otherwise) in public worship.

8 <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/life-and-faith/faith-and-order/guidance-for-methodist-people-concerning-anti-semitism-and-the-service-for-good-friday/>

21. Faith and Order Committee

- 4.4 As the conversation continues, no doubt further factors will be identified. There is also a practical motive in that the stock of MWB available for purchase has now been exhausted. As an interim measure, Englesea Brook is collecting, refurbishing and making available copies of MWB which are no longer required (eg from churches which have closed).
- 4.5 Following conversations within the Connexional Team and consideration at the Methodist Council, it is agreed that the first step in any revision would be to conduct a consultation process among both leaders of worship and worshippers to assist in discerning what form a successor to MWB might take. This could include such matters as what use is currently made of MWB, what resources would be desirable in a new collection, what format(s) it should be available in (noting that our current practice is 'digital first') and so on. The Council has agreed that the Faith and Order Committee will take forward this consultation process, with a view to developing proposals to bring to the 2024 Conference.

5 Use of alcohol in Holy Communion

- 5.1 Memorial M22 from the Cumbria District Synod to the Conference of 2022 requested consideration of our discipline regarding the use of alcohol in Holy Communion by Methodist presbyters when presiding in the context of another denomination for whom that is customary. The Synod was concerned that our current position is inconsistent in expecting those who take services in Methodist contexts to conform to our discipline, while expecting Methodists presiding in other denominational contexts to conform to our rules not those of the context – 'having our cake and eating it' in effect. The key request of the memorial was:

The Synod asked the Conference to direct the Faith and Order Committee, in consultation with the Connexional Ecumenical Officer, to consider whether the understanding around a Methodist presbyter accepting an invitation to preside at Holy Communion in another denomination's context might be developed, specifically to permit a Methodist presbyter to respect the practices of another denomination concerning the use of alcoholic wine when on their premises.

- 5.2 The Conference in its response directed the Faith and Order Committee as requested. Following consideration of matters raised, it is proposed that amendments to the Standing Order be made to provide for exceptions in appropriate contexts.

21. Faith and Order Committee

Current position

- 5.3 As the memorial points out, we currently hold the position that the denominational identity of a given service is determined by the presiding minister. Any service of Holy Communion at which a Methodist presides is therefore subject to Methodist discipline, no matter what form the service takes, where it takes place or of whom the congregation is made up.
- 5.4 The current discipline of the Methodist Church on this matter so far as Methodist services on Methodist premises is concerned is set out in Standing Order 922, in particular 922(2):

In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the wine used shall be non-alcoholic.

Standing Order 922(4) provides an exception for the celebration of the Lord's Supper by a non-Methodist congregation worshipping on Methodist premises, subject to certain conditions.

- 5.5 There are however no exceptions provided for situations where a Methodist presides, wherever the service takes place. In general, Methodists should not do in another church what they are not allowed to do in their own. Moreover, Standing Order 014(3) says that the stipulations in Standing Order 922 concerning the use of alcohol on Methodist premises should also apply in other places where there is a publicly advertised event using the name of the Methodist Church, except in certain stated situations. Those exceptions no longer seem sufficient to deal with the ecumenical situations in which Methodists are engaged.

Situations where the issue arises

- 5.6 There are several situations across the Connexion where, were the discipline strictly enforced, Methodists presiding would be in breach. These all relate to ecumenical partnership and cooperation. The memorial gives the example where a Methodist presbyter is invited to preside in a church of another denomination. As noted above, the discipline that applies to a particular celebration of the Lord's Supper is determined by the denomination of the presiding minister. So even though in all other respects a service may follow the custom and practice of another denomination, if a Methodist presides it is regarded as subject to Methodist discipline. Following our current discipline, a Methodist so invited should insist on the use of non-alcoholic wine. As the memorial notes, this may not be a constructive or helpful position to take for ecumenical relations.

21. Faith and Order Committee

- 5.7 In addition to the situation raised by the memorial, there are other contexts where Methodists cooperate ecumenically and similar issues arise. For example, in chaplaincies, ministerial training contexts and Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) it is common practice that in the celebration of the Lord's Supper both alcoholic and non-alcoholic wine are available and members of the congregation are able to choose, according to their own needs and conscience, which to receive. Strictly, a Methodist presiding at such a service is in breach of our current discipline.
- 5.8 A further scenario can be imagined if the kind of ecumenical service envisaged in the previous paragraph took place on Methodist premises. The exception of Standing Order 922(4) does not straight-forwardly apply to such a service and so questions arise both because of who is presiding and because of where the service is taking place.
- 5.9 While M22 (2022) is limited to the first example, it would be remiss to consider it without also giving attention to these other similar situations that occur in the life of the connexion.

Proposal

- 5.10 The Methodist Church has never disputed that the Lord's Supper can be celebrated with alcoholic wine and recognises this practice in a number of ecumenical partners (and indeed other Methodists in some parts of the world). Our own discipline on this point has been part of our witness to the dangers of the misuse of alcohol and our commitment to creating safe spaces for those affected by addiction. While affirming as a general principle our current discipline that the wine used in the Lord's Supper should be non-alcoholic, it is recognised that in the interests of relating well ecumenically, it would be appropriate to allow exceptions for some of the situations highlighted here. Methodists should be able to offer assistance to churches of other denominations where appropriate and to share in ecumenical services where multiple churches' traditions are honoured.
- 5.11 What is proposed therefore is to amend the Standing Order to create a new exception to provide for the situations identified above. This would allow Methodists presiding to use alcoholic wine when presiding for another denomination for whom that is customary or as part of an ecumenical service (eg in a chaplaincy), including on Methodist premises when that is part of long-term and regular ecumenical relationship. It should be noted that there is already provision for non-Methodist congregations using Methodist premises to use alcoholic wine in Holy Communion subject to certain conditions.

21. Faith and Order Committee

- 5.12 Those authorised to preside by the Conference under Standing Order 011 are included in this proposed exception. There may well be ecumenical contexts where it would not be appropriate for them, considering all the circumstances, to preside. However, if there were otherwise no objection, there seems no merit in creating an obstacle by this exception not being available in the same way as it would be to presbyters.
- 5.13 In all cases, the consent of the Methodist who is presiding is required for the use of alcoholic wine to be permissible and where the congregation includes Methodists or if the Methodist presiding wishes it then non-alcoholic wine should also be made available. Thus Methodist principles are upheld alongside appropriate ecumenical cooperation.

Standing Order Amendments

- 5.14 As the proposals outlined above relate to the celebration of the Lord's Supper by Methodists in general, it has been agreed with the Law and Polity Committee that Part 9 of Standing Orders (which concerns Methodist premises) is no longer the appropriate place for the relevant Standing Order. It is therefore proposed to create a new Standing Order 010B and to make consequential amendments to Standing Order 922 as a result.
- 5.15 The new Standing Order 010B would read as follows:

010B Wine at the Lord's Supper

(1) In accordance with Standing Order 922(1) and subject to clauses (2) and (3) below, on Methodist premises and in services held elsewhere in the name of the Methodist Church in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the wine used shall be non-alcoholic.

(2) Standing Order 922(1) and clause (1) above shall not preclude the use of alcoholic wine at the Lord's Supper by a non-Methodist congregation worshipping according to its own traditions on Methodist premises or in regular acts of ecumenical worship on those premises, provided that:

- (i) such use is not contrary to any sharing agreement that may apply;***
- (ii) such use is authorised by the trustees and permitted by the rules that apply to that congregation; and***
- (iii) when a Methodist presbyter or other person authorised by the Conference under Standing Order 011 presides that presbyter or other authorised person consents.***

21. Faith and Order Committee

(3) Clause (1) above shall not preclude the use of alcoholic wine at the Lord's Supper when a Methodist presbyter or other person authorised by the Conference under Standing Order 011 presides, and where:

- (i) such use is for a congregation of another denomination or in an ecumenical act of worship;**
- (ii) such use does not take place on Methodist premises; and**
- (iii) the presbyter or other authorised person consents.**

(4) In all cases where a Methodist congregation regularly shares in the Lord's Supper in an ecumenical act of worship or a Methodist presbyter or other person authorised by the Conference under Standing Order 011 is regularly invited to preside at such a service, non-alcoholic wine shall also be available.

5.16 It is then proposed that Standing Order 922 be amended as follows:

922 Intoxicants. (1) Subject to clauses (3), **(3A)**, **(3B)** and **(3C)** ~~(4)~~ below and to Standing Orders 926 **and 010B**, the supply, sale or use of intoxicants on Methodist premises is not permitted in any circumstances, nor may Methodist premises be used in such a way as to advertise or promote, whether directly or by means of sponsored events, the sale or use of intoxicants.

~~(2) In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper the wine used shall be non-alcoholic.~~

(3) Clause (1) shall not preclude the use of alcoholic drinks on domestic occasions in private homes, nor the lawful supply, sale or use of such drinks in other residential premises with the consent of the trustees and subject to such conditions as they may prescribe.

(3A) Clause (1) above shall not preclude the lawful supply, sale or use of alcoholic drinks on Methodist premises (other than any part of the relevant premises in which worship has been identified by the trustees as the primary use) if:

- (i) a significant part of the mission and activity of the Methodist Church carried out on the relevant premises involves use of the premises as a conference centre;
- (ii) such supply, sale or use is solely in connection with an event taking place on those premises as part of such use; and
- (iii) such supply, sale or use is with the consent of the trustees given for the specific event and subject to such conditions as they may prescribe.

(3B) Where the relevant premises are local, circuit or district property, the trustees may treat the condition specified in clause **(3A)**(i) above as satisfied

21. Faith and Order Committee

only if the appropriate district authority so determines. In all other cases, the trustees may treat that condition as satisfied only if the appropriate connexional authority so determines.

(3C) The trustees may delegate their power to grant consent under clause (3A)(iii) above to such person or body as they think fit upon terms that any exercise of the delegated power shall be in accordance with a policy agreed by the trustees.

~~(4) Clauses (1) and (2) above shall not preclude the use of alcoholic wine at communion by a non-Methodist congregation worshipping on Methodist premises, provided that such use is not contrary to any sharing agreement that may apply, is authorised by the trustees and permitted by the rules that apply to that congregation.~~

- 5.17 The Faith and Order Committee also proposes that this section of its report be adopted as a further reply to Memorial M22 (2022).

6 Other specific items of work

- 6.1 The Committee reported to the Conference last year regarding the *Changing Scenes* resource. Further work on this resource has indicated that it will not be possible to complete it in the manner originally envisaged. Instead, it is intended that the prayers and liturgies it would have contained be made available online and in a form that can continue to be developed.
- 6.2 The Committee is also bringing to this Conference as separate reports work on Online Church (in collaboration with the Law and Polity Committee), Authorisations to Preside at the Lord's Supper and on the authorisation of liturgies for the marriage of any two persons and the blessing of a marriage of any two persons previously solemnized.
- 6.3 The Faith and Order Committee has continued to be involved in the ongoing work regarding Oversight and Trusteeship and continues to hold before the Methodist Church the emphases of 'relatedness', 'participation' and 'conferring' as we continue to explore the meaning and practice of 'oversight', 'trusteeship' and 'leadership'. It reminds the Conference of the reflection on these matters in its report *Oversight, Trusteeship and Leadership* to the 2022 Conference. In the light of the decisions of that Conference not to receive the proposals regarding reconfiguration of districts, the Committee asks the Conference for permission to bring the work it directed on the role of a District Chair (resolution 45/2) to the Conference of 2024 and to refocus of it in the light of the new situation.

21. Faith and Order Committee

- 6.4 The Committee is planning to report to the Conference of 2024 on the following matters:

The role of a District Chair
Healing Ministry and Neurodiversity
Singleness
Holy Communion and Online Worship (conclusion of the period of discernment)
Membership
Proposals for a revision of the *Methodist Worship Book*

- 6.5 The Committee is planning to report to the Conference of 2025 on the following matters:

Marriage and Relationships (further work)

***RESOLUTIONS

- 21/1. **The Conference receives the Report.**
- 21/2. **The Conference amends Standing Orders as set out in paragraphs 5.15 and 5.16 above.**
- 21/3. **The Conference adopts section 5 of this report as its further reply to Memorial M22 (2022).**
- 21/4. **The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to bring the work required by resolution 45/2 of the Conference of 2022 to the Conference of 2024.**