

32. Faith and Order Committee Report

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Resolution	32/1. The Conference receives the Report.

Summary of content and impact

Subject and aims	To provide a report on the work of the Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The work of the Faith and Order Committee• Ways of working• Responses required by previous Conference• Scrutiny and consultancy work• God's 'worship' and our worship• Ministry in the Methodist Church• New work initiated by the Faith and Order Committee• Work being brought to the 2017 Conference
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	For background to the section on "God's 'worship' and our worship" see paragraphs 57-60 of the <i>General Secretary's Report</i> (2011).

The Work of the Faith and Order Committee 2015-2016

1. The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by, and directly accountable to, the Methodist Conference. It is directed to encourage reflection on the theological implications of all the work undertaken by the Connexional Team, to undertake specific tasks of theological scrutiny, and to stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church (SO 330). 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 understanding, engagement with the Methodist tradition, and shared critical reflection to help discern Methodist perspectives and responses in all aspects of the Church's life. In this report, the Committee outlines the main areas in which it has been working during the present connexional year.

2. Ways of working

2.1. The Faith and Order Committee seeks to fulfil its responsibilities by offering theological consultation for work being conducted throughout the Connexion and theological scrutiny for the work of the Conference and the Connexional Team. The Committee drafts, scrutinises and comments on reports from its own members or from other parts of the Methodist Church, makes recommendations to the Council and the Conference, offers advice on issues related to the faith and order of the Methodist Church, and reports to the Conference. Its roles in offering encouragement and in undertaking scrutiny sit alongside each other, and the Committee continues to give particular attention to how it might best help to stimulate, resource and encourage theological reflection throughout the Church.

2.2. The Committee continues to consider the best ways of working in order to provide a theologically rich, robust and also cost-effective way of fulfilling its remit. It is in the process of building up the Faith and Order Network, an approved panel of people with relevant skills and gifts who may be called upon to support the Committee in its work; and it is giving particular attention to how such skills may be nurtured and developed by the Church. The Secretary is always glad to be informed of the names of individuals, lay or ordained, who have proven theological skills and a good understanding of Methodist theology, doctrine and polity.

2.3. The Committee has met three times since the 2015 Conference: in September for a day meeting; in November for a 24-hour residential meeting in London; and in March for a 24-hour residential meeting in Leeds. It appoints a Faith and Order Executive to make some decisions on behalf of the Committee between meetings.

2.4. The Liturgy and Worship Sub-Committee assists the Committee in completion of its tasks (SO 330(2)). It meets according to need and utilises electronic ways of working. It is currently working to provide some further resources to support local arrangement services and the relevant section of the Methodist website shall be updated accordingly.

2.5. A Joint Subgroup, appointed by the faith and order bodies of the Methodist Church and the Church of England, continues to take forward the work on ministry and oversight. A joint meeting of the faith and order bodies will take place in September 2016 to discuss this work and the Committee expects to bring a report to the 2018 Conference.

2.6. All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary of the Committee. The Committee has agreed a protocol for Faith and Order representation and consultation. As a general principle no-one speaks on behalf of the Faith and Order Committee, except for the Secretary, unless they are specifically authorised to do so. Whilst those representing the Faith and Order Committee on other bodies cannot act on behalf of the

Committee they shall endeavour: to articulate faith and order perspectives and highlight questions and concerns as appropriate; to encourage a shared engagement in theological reflection; to liaise with the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee; and to make reports or raise issues with the Committee as required.

- 2.7. The Committee continues to explore how it might best work with others in order to seek to stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church (SO 330(3)). It welcomes opportunities for collaboration and would encourage the creation of more opportunities for Methodists to confer theologically together within our oversight structures.
- 2.8. The appointment of the Faith and Order Committee is the responsibility of the Methodist Conference. The Committee expresses its thanks to the Revd Dr Chris Blake, the Revd Dr Adrian Burdon, and Dr Josef Lössl who will be retiring as members of the Committee at the end of this connexional year.

3. Responses required by previous Conferences

The Faith and Order Committee has been working on responses to specific Conference resolutions, and draws the attention of the Conference to the following:

3.1. *God's 'worship' and our worship (resolution 2/5, Conference 2011)*

The 2011 Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in a section of the 2011 General Secretary's Report entitled *God's 'worship' and our worship*. The response to this resolution is contained in section 5 of the report.

3.2. *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21st Century (resolution 14/2, Conference 2012)*

The 2014 Conference commended for study and reflection the 2014 report, *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*, and the relevant sections of *Called to Love and Praise*, and invited responses to be submitted to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee by 30 September 2016. Any such submissions will be warmly welcomed and should be sent to faithandorder@methodistchurch.org.uk.

3.3. *Ministry in the Methodist Church (resolution 35/2, Conference 2014)*

An interim report on the work on the theology and nature of lay and ordained ministry in the Methodist Church in Britain is contained in section 6 of the report.

3.4. The following response is brought as a separate report:

The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate interim report (resolution 44/11, Conference 2013).

4. Scrutiny and consultancy work

- 4.1. The Committee has engaged with various questions, projects and Council papers, offering specific responses to reports and other documents, continuing involvement in the support of working groups, or commentary on the development of reports. Where appropriate, specific responses have been sent directly to the authors of reports or to those providing the lead in these areas of work.
- 4.2. Under SO 330(10) the Faith and Order Committee has a specific responsibility 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 to establish effective and constructive ways of working and to enable opportunities for shared reflection as the work develops.

4.3. The Committee continues to reflect on how it might best support members of the Connexional Team, and those undertaking work (individuals and working parties) on behalf of the Conference and Methodist Council, to think about how their work might be theologically resourced and what it means to reflect theologically in the context of the Methodist Church in Britain.

5. God's 'worship' and our worship: Response to Resolution 2/5, Conference 2011

The Conference of 2011 directed the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee to establish a working group to consider the issues raised in the section of the *General Secretary's Report* 2011 entitled "God's 'worship' and our worship".¹ The Committees agreed that the Liturgy and Worship Sub-Committee would undertake some initial consideration of these issues and, after further conversations and reflection by both Committees, the following response is brought to the Conference.

5.1. Within the *General Secretary's Report* to the Methodist Conference of 2011 disquiet is expressed about the nature of formal public worship as sometimes experienced within the Methodist Church in Britain. The reflections arise from "an almost unspoken assumption that worship is the highest calling of the Christian Church" and the understanding that all that we do is "located in the privilege of worshipping God." (§57) Our discipleship is expressed in worship and in mission. It must, though, be acknowledged that our worship and our mission are not ours but God's. The Church is part of God's mission in the world, and worship and mission are responses to the divine imperative and in partnership with the divine activity. Worship is the continual renewal of the relationship between God and God's people which leads to a renewed awareness of God's mission in the world (*missio dei*) and the obligation of our participation in that mission (*missio ecclesiae*). So, then, worship and mission have a vital relationship within the calling of God's people into discipleship.

5.2. As worship is central to the Church's life and identity, we are urged "to take special care about reflecting on our worship as 'God-bearing'." (§60) It is suggested that such worship will be "near and transcendent, vital and majestic, challenging and enthralling," but that, for some people, Methodist worship often feels far from this. (§ 60) The *General Secretary's Report* described some formal worship as seeming to lack the "exuberance, vitality and easy spontaneity of some acts of worship of other Christian groupings" or failing to convey "a deep sense of God's presence and peace". (§59) Since 1932, the Methodist Church in Britain has produced a variety of reports intending to address the perceived inadequacies of public worship. It seems that every generation and every cultural context has to ask, for itself, what it is that enables worship to be God-bearing and leave us all "lost in wonder, love and praise".²

5.3. Dissatisfaction with worship is a recurrent theme in the development of our self-understanding as a church. That it is such is not to reject the reality of the issue, but is to recognise a persisting challenge. It seems that each Christian community has to discover for itself the manner and form in which it is to worship God. The Methodist Church recognises that its calling is to respond to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to live out its discipleship in worship and mission. It does this through regular worship, learning and caring, service and evangelism.³ In partnership with others wherever possible, the Methodist Church will concentrate its prayers, resources, imagination and commitments on the priority to proclaim and affirm its conviction of God's love in Christ, for us and for the world; and renew confidence in God's presence and action in the world and in the Church.⁴ The ecclesiology of the Methodist Church in Britain is a mission focused ecclesiology and, in our

¹ See paragraphs 57-60 of the *General Secretary's Report* (2011).

² Charles Wesley, *Love Divine All Loves Excelling, Singing the Faith* 503.

³ *Our Calling* (2000) www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=11

⁴ *The Priorities of the Methodist Church* (2004).

www.methodist.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=opentogod.content&cmid=559

polity, worship and mission are held in vital relationship.⁵

5.4. It is crucial that an adequate response is made to the disquiet about worship that is expressed in the *General Secretary's Report* to the 2011 Conference. What is clear, though, is that there is no one solution to this disquiet and any solution is only ever going to be local and temporary. Various questions arise, questions for consideration as much by Local Churches as by connexional committees, including, for example, the following:

- a. Who is responsible when Methodist worship “touches neither the ‘heights’ nor the ‘depths’” and fails to provide “adequate spiritual nourishment” (§59)?
- b. What difference might further training or opportunities for shared reflection on worship make?
- c. How might Methodists enable exuberance, vitality and spontaneity in worship and how might we enable contemplation, lamentation and reflection?
- d. Ecumenical convergence has brought many of our worshipping patterns to similar places, so how do the Methodist people rediscover and re-express our distinctive expression and contribution?
- e. How might local churches resource particular expressions of worship and also enable diverse communities to worship together? For example, what might churches learn from young people?
- f. What might be learnt from and what might be offered to further resource the worship of the different cultural and language groups within the Methodist Church?
- g. How do God's people demonstrate, express and respond to God's 'worship' in worship?

As churches continue to reflect on the nature of worship then these questions might form the basis of small group study.

5.5. The Faith and Order Committee and Ministries Committee agree that the issues identified within the 2011 *General Secretary's Report* are of importance for the whole of the Methodist Church in Britain. Such issues are not best addressed by a further report to the Conference, nor by the publication of new liturgical texts or resources for Methodist worship. Text and form are not the issue. Neither is the issue that of the content of worship in as much as, in today's church, preachers and leaders of worship have available to them a vast array of material from an immense variety of sources. Developments in technology make access to and use of this material in worship a relatively open and straightforward process.

5.6. How can congregations, preachers and leaders of worship be better prepared and resourced for sharing in acts of worship? There is some evidence to suggest that often there is a lack of expectation and preparedness on behalf of both congregations and leaders of worship. In gathering for worship does the average congregation do so with an expectation of it being God-bearing? In preparing for worship do those leading the congregation in worship expect to deliver them into that place of encounter with the living God? The development of the new training programme for worship leaders and local preachers provides an opportunity to encourage new preachers and worship leaders to engage with current best practice in preparing for and leading of worship, and all local preachers and worship leaders have a responsibility to engage in continuing development, which is seen as a core priority and not an optional extra.⁶ The Preface to the *Methodist Worship Book* also reminds us that: “Worship is the work of the whole people of God: a congregation is not an audience or a group of spectators. Those who lead worship are called to encourage, and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to enable the whole Body of Christ to participate fully.” There are opportunities for encouraging congregations to engage in conversation and reflection on the nature of worship in their context, and a variety of resources to support such discussions. Worship audits are available for congregations to engage in a process of self-assessment. There are short courses on

⁵ The Methodist Conference (1999) *Called to Love and Praise*, in Statement and Reports of the Methodist Church on Faith and Order, Volume Two (1984-2000), (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 1-59.

⁶ For Local Preachers see SO 563(3)(ii) and for Worship Leaders see SO 681(3)(i).

the nature of worship which could be engaged with by house groups, or in Lent and Advent study courses. Other resources are available to enable our congregations, preachers and leaders of worship to address the issues and so work together for the transformation of Methodist worship.

5.7. The Faith and Order and Ministries Committees therefore propose that through the Liturgy and Worship Sub-Committee, and in consultation with the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network, resources could be identified and made available through the Methodist website to help congregations to respond to the challenge to reflect on the nature of worship in their particular context. They also commend this section of the report to Local Churches for discussion and reflection.

6. Ministry in the Methodist Church

6.1. The 2014 Conference directed that the Faith and Order Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee undertake work on the theology and nature of lay and ordained ministry in the Methodist Church and bring an interim report to the 2016 Conference and a final report no later than the 2018 Conference (*Resolution 35/2*). The Faith and Order Committee further decided that its response to a number of other Conference resolutions shall also be included within this piece of work.⁷ The interim report is offered through this section of the Faith and Order Committee report and the Conference workshops.

6.2. The Faith and Order Committee appointed a small working party to facilitate this work and specifically directed the working party to work in a collaborative and consultative manner, to listen to different perspectives and experiences, and to draw upon the relevant skills, expertise and experiences of others when considering particular issues. The work remains the responsibility of the Faith and Order Committee and any final recommendations shall be made by the whole Committee.

6.3. The task given to the Committee is a significant one, potentially encompassing a wide range of issues, practices and concerns. There is a range of diverse, and sometimes competing, expectations associated with this work and the Committee inevitably needs to limit its scope and focus its content. Whilst it will not be possible for the Committee to address every issue relating to ministry that has arisen in the course of consultations, it is hoped that the final report will provide a theological framework for thinking about ministry in the Methodist Church and will offer some theological reflection on those issues that it identifies as a priority or that are of particular significance for our understanding of ministry in the Methodist Church today: for example, some reconsideration of itinerancy in the light of current practice is likely to be timely.

6.4. There is a significant body of material about ministry in the Methodist Church that has already been considered and adopted by the Conference, and much reflection has taken place across the years. Yet, the contexts of ministry continue to change and current practice and experiences provide new insights. The Faith and Order Committee therefore sees its task as having three functions:

6.4.1. **Remembering:** helping the Methodist Church to remember what it has already said and agreed with regards to ministry by paying attention to previous work and reports to the Conference;

⁷ Those resolutions are: *resolution 2/5 (2011)*, examining the issues relating to ministry named in the General Secretary's Report to the Conference; *resolution 35/5(a) (2012)*, exploring hospitality between orders of ministry (although it was noted that the issues that led to this resolution have been addressed in practice); reply to *Memorial 8 (2014)*, considering the role of church stewards and other lay leaders; and the ongoing work relating to *resolution 44/11 (2013)*, the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate, building on the work of the interim report presented to the 2016 Conference.

6.4.2. **Rearticulating:** restating or discerning the Methodist understanding of ministry in relation to changing contexts and patterns of ministry, and in relation to some specific questions and challenges that are identified; and

6.4.3. **Reconsidering:** identifying where there is a need for further reflection on the practice and theological understanding of ministry.

6.5. Having carefully considered previous work, issues arising from current conversations and practice, and how it might best approach the task, the Faith and Order Committee has agreed that it is important to ensure that any exploration of ministry in the Methodist Church is rooted in our understanding of the nature of God and in the theology and ecclesiology of the ministry of the whole people of God. It has thus agreed a preliminary agenda for the work, namely:

- a. The nature of God (and the nature of the Church, ie who we are called to be in response to God);
- b. The world around us and changing contexts for ministry;
- c. The nature of discipleship;
- d. Christian vocation (the people of God, ministry and Christian character, call);
- e. The ministry of the whole people of God (including spiritual gifts, the nature of leadership, ministry and ministries, how and why the Church orders its life, lay ministry and authorised lay ministries);
- f. Ordained and authorised ministries (including understandings of different kinds of authorisation, issues of oversight and accountability, competencies for lay and ordained ministries at different stages, changing patterns of ministry, representative ministry, itinerancy and deployment, power and authority);
- g. Resourcing and releasing ministry (training, continuing development in ministry, itinerancy and deployment, the theological literacy of the Church).

6.6. The Committee is grateful to those individuals and groups who have already contributed to this work and for the consultations and discussions that have already taken place. Such consultation and shared reflection is ongoing, both to resource the reflection on ministry and to stimulate discussion about these issues. To facilitate wider discussion in local contexts, the Faith and Order Committee intends to produce some materials for small group discussion in time for Lenten studies in 2017 and is exploring other ways of resourcing ongoing reflection throughout the Connexion.

6.7. It is intended that the final report, due to be received by the 2018 Conference, will be presented for adoption and consideration as a Conference Statement under SO 129; and this report will also contain resources to encourage further discussion and reflection on ministry in the Methodist Church.

7. New work initiated by the Faith and Order Committee

The Faith and Order Committee offers advice and responds to a variety of questions and concerns that arise in the life of the Methodist Church in Britain. From time to time some more significant work and further exploration is warranted. The Faith and Order Committee has, this year, therefore decided to undertake two new pieces of work and will report to the Conference in due course.

7.1. Theology of Online Life

7.1.1. Within the discussions about the 2015 report *Holy Communion Mediated through Social Media* a variety of questions were raised about the use of social media and the nature of online life. Many of these questions are relevant to, but beyond the scope of, that particular piece of ongoing work. The Faith and Order Committee therefore concluded that it would be helpful to undertake some wider work, including theological reflection about the nature of Christian engagement online.

7.1.2. There are a number of factors that make this piece of work both essential and complex. These can broadly be placed under two headings: practical and theological. The practical relates to what is happening and what is being practised by Methodists on behalf of local Methodist churches and communities online. The theological relates to the interplay between theology and a number of disciplines (such as philosophy, anthropology and psychology) that is now generating a body of literature. Study of the internet and online engagement is taken seriously by academia across the world. Whilst Christians and theologians have been involved in this discourse from the outset (and many Methodists contribute significant expertise to such thinking), the Church has undertaken very little corporate reflection in this area.

7.1.3. The Faith and Order Committee therefore hopes to stimulate some theological reflection within the Methodist Church on these issues. It will continue to consider creative ways of facilitating and resourcing this, and it is envisaged that there will be a two part programme:

Part A would engage with those involved in church, theology and worship online to enable a sharing of reflection and experience. In many ways this would be a celebration of the variety of ways in which Methodists contribute online and would help the Methodist Church to hear of first hand experiences that would inform the second part.

Part B would focus on particular issues and questions (for example, the nature of online Christian community), and seek to enable those who are engaged online to contribute to wider theological debate.

7.1.4. This work would be additional to the ongoing work on Holy Communion mediated through social media, but it should help to make for a more informed and productive conversation. It is hoped that this method of engaging with the wider Connexion and resourcing further theological reflection will provide an adequate response to the complexity of online engagement and enable the Methodist Church to develop a more coherent method for thinking theologically about the nature of the internet and digital media.

7.2. Guidelines for Exorcism

It has come to the attention of the Faith and Order Committee that the Methodist Church guidelines for exorcism were last revised in 1976. An initial survey of the guidelines indicates that there are further areas that need to be addressed given the nature and context of the Methodist Church in Britain in 2016. The Faith and Order Committee shall therefore undertake this further work and bring some revised guidelines to a future Conference.

8. Work being brought to the 2017 Conference

The Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2017 Conference is expected to include the following major pieces of work:

- Issues of Connexionalism in the 21st Century (*resolution 14/2, Conference 2013*);
- Review of the theological foundation of all matters of ministerial remuneration (*resolution 46/4, Conference 2015*).

***RESOLUTION

32/1. The Conference received the Report.