

Interfaith – The Future

Basic Information

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| Status of Paper | Final |
| Action Required | Note |
| Draft Resolution | 80/1. The Council receives the report. |

Summary of Content

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| Subject and Aims | To update the Council on Interfaith work since the April Council meeting and in light of a direction of the Conference. |
| Main Points | A review of previous Conference actions connected to Interfaith the main areas that are now being taken forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interfaith Policy • Interfaith Strategy • Building a Network |
| Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function) | Notices of Motion 201 and 210 (2012) |
| Consultations | Free Churches General Secretary, Methodist Co-Chair of the URC/Methodist Interfaith Forum, The Strategy and Resources Committee September 2013. |

Summary of Impact

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| Financial | Both Notice of Motions will add unbudgeted spend to the budget for this year – these will be minimised where possible |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | This work has a huge impact on Christian and other faith partners and will take much careful handling |
| Risk | Reputational risk already generated from the Conference in particular in relation to NoM 201 |

Interfaith – The Future

1. Background

Following the decision of the Connexional Grants Committee (CGC) not to award another grant to the Touchstone project in Bradford the 2013 Conference adopted the following motion.

2. Notice of Motion 210: Interfaith policy

2.1 In view of the multi-faith context in which we are called to be disciples, and the growth of racist politics targeted at various faith groups, the Conference affirms the work of Touchstone, Bradford, as a centre of excellence in faith to faith relations.

2.2 Following the non renewal of Connexional grant funding to Touchstone and the limited progress made on Interfaith Policy through the Review Group and the Methodist Council, the Conference:

(a) directs the Council urgently to develop an Interfaith policy and strategy for the Methodist Church using the expertise of its centres at Touchstone, at The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham and in relation to the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network;

(b) allocates £70,000 interim funding to allow the work of Touchstone to continue for a limited period of one year, in order that vital work is not lost as alternative ways of working are developed, and so that the resource continues to be available to the Connexion as it develops an Interfaith policy.

This report is to bring the Council up to date with work undertaken since the Conference and to share the planned work for the year ahead.

3. Interfaith Strategy

3.1 Initial research work has gathered together the various reports dealt with by the Conference which all relate to Interfaith issues –

1983 – Relations with People of Other Faiths within the Faith and Order report

1985 – Multi-faith worship within the Faith and Order report

1994 – Building Good relationships with people of different faith within the Decade of Evangelism report where the Conference endorsed the Inter Faith Networks' Code of Conduct and adopted within the report 8 Principles for Dialogue and Evangelism. These were commended to circuits and churches for discussion and action.

1999 – 'Called to Love and Praise' contained a clear call to dialogue with people of other faiths

2004 – The Conference approved and commended the 'Faith meeting Faith' resource and reaffirmed the 8 Principles for Dialogue and Evangelism. Since 2010 this resource has been available on the website as a download.

3.2 Apart from these statements there continues to be a Methodist/URC Inter Faith Forum which meets throughout the year to discuss matters of import to Interfaith work. Methodism is also well represented on the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group and work with Churches Together in England and other partners on Interfaith initiatives (we were part of the group sending Eid greetings to the Muslim community and attending an event at the East London Mosque at the start of August).

All of this indicates an ongoing desire for the Church to engage with Interfaith issues.

4. Building a Network

- 4.1 Following the discussion at the SRC in March 2013 further work has been undertaken in line with SRC/13/02 which approved a development of a Network within Methodism which would utilise existing skills.
- 4.2 Following the awarding of a CGC grant of £15k for a one-off networking permission was sought of the CGC for this money to be used over a longer period of time and for more than one event.
- 4.3 It is now hoped to hold at least two smaller events to bring people together before considering what larger networking events need to happen. There is a committed to having larger events with other partners and so continue conversations with them. It will be proposed to the Methodist/URC Interfaith Forum that they play a key part in this network building when they meet in September. We will also ensure that any networking is clearly communicated to the Districts and also to those who took part in the consultation earlier this year.

5. Free Churches Group

Conversations continue with the Free Churches Group about the possibility of a shared Interfaith desk within that staff and further paperwork will come before the Methodist/URC Interfaith Forum for discussion if possible.

6. New directions

To date much of the Interfaith policy and strategy are focussed on presence, advocacy and listening. Whilst this is clearly critical there have been calls from within the World Council of Churches¹ and the recent Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies for a stronger focus on evangelism within Interfaith work. These calls need to be taken seriously as we move forward in gathering together a report for the Conference in 2014.

7. Notice of Motion 201

It is worth sharing with the Council the massive increase in workload for both JPIT and the Connexional Secretary arising from the Conference adopting Notice of Motion 201 relating to the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions movement. The Conference is of course entitled to direct work but when the work is so sensitive and potentially damaging to the reputation of the Church it is not a straightforward piece of work and takes the time of many senior people. In order to ensure this work is carried out properly our commitment to other areas will need to be reduced.

8. Conclusion

Work will be ongoing throughout the year in building networks, working with partners, encouraging the wider Connexional Team to think about our multi-faith context and ensuring that the Conference can be assured of ongoing commitment and attention to this significant area of work in new ways.

*****RESOLUTION:**

80/1. The Council receives the report

¹ Together Towards Life : Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes
Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World

Both documents are from the World Church of Councils | www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions