

Report of the Faith and Order Committee

MC/22/54

Date of meeting	2-4 April 2022
Contact name and details	The Revd Dr Nicola Price-Tebbutt Price-tebbuttn@methodistchurch.org.uk
Action required	For information
Resolution	54/1. The Council receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject of aims	The work of the Faith and Order Committee 2021-2022
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review of ways of working• Work being brought to the Conference
Background context and relevant documents (with function)	The Faith and Order Committee reports its substantial work to the Conference, and annually provides a briefer report to the Council.

- 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 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.
- 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 the Council or the Conference, 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.

Review of Ways of Working

- 3 Each year the Committee reflects on and reports to the Council on its ways of working. More recently it has also given attention to its pattern of meeting and the ways in which new members are recruited to the Committee. In the past few months it has advertised and interviewed for new members of both the Faith and Order Committee and its Liturgy and Worship Sub-Committee, and it intends to adopt a similar practice in the future.
- 4 The Committee notes that recommendation 8 of the *Strategy for Justice, Dignity and Solidarity* (which was adopted by the 2021 Conference) stated that the Faith and Order Committee should be directed to review its ways of working in the light of this strategy and report back to the Council. The report did not identify particular concerns or matters that should be given attention, although the Committee has itself raised questions about the diversity of the Committee and continues to give this attention. The Committee is still continuing the review of its ways of working and it welcomes further conversation.
- 5 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.
- 6 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 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.
- 7 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 is an issue of concern.

- 8 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.
- 9 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 has been a challenge.
- 10 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, 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.

Work being brought to the Conference of 2022 and 2023

- 11 The Committee will report to the 2022 Conference on membership in the Methodist Church, the review of further work on marriage and relationships, the revision of the Guidance for Marriage, the theology of online life, and theological reflection on deliverance ministry. The work on the review of criteria for authorisations to preside at the Lord's Supper will take place during the next year and will be reported to the Conference of 2023.

*****RESOLUTION**

54/1. The Council receives the report.