

The Work of the Faith and Order Committee 2018-2019

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Resolutions	38/1. The Council receives the report. 38/2. The Council adopts section 5 of the report as the response to Council direction 49/4 (2015) and affirms the conclusions contained therein. 38/3. The Council affirms the conclusion in paragraph 6.6 relating to the relationship between the order of ministry and the religious order and directs the Faith and Order Committee to report this to the Conference as part of its report on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order.

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	The work of the Faith and Order Committee 2018-2019
Main Points	Ways of working Oversight of fresh expressions Questions relating to the religious order Update on <i>Mission and Ministry in Covenant</i> Scrutiny and consultation work Work being brought to the Conferences of 2019 and 2020
Background Context and Relevant Documents	The Faith and Order Committee reports to the Methodist Conference, and annually provides a briefer report to the Council.

1. The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by the Methodist Conference and reports annually to the Council and when its business requires to the Conference. On behalf of the Conference, it helps to ensure that what the Methodist Church 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. The remit of the Faith and Order Committee is contained within Standing Order 330. It is directed, for example, 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. The 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.

3. In this report, the Committee brings responses to Council directions relating to the oversight of fresh expressions and to questions about the religious order. It also outlines the main items which it intends to bring to the Conference in 2019 and 2020.

4. **Ways of Working**

4.1. The Committee has met twice since the 2018 Conference, each time for a 24-hour residential. As part of its most recent meeting, it met jointly with the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission. The Worship and Liturgy Sub-Committee meets according to need, and utilises electronic ways of working. The Committee continues to pay attention to its ways of working in order to provide a theologically rich, robust and also cost-effective way of fulfilling the remit of the Committee under Standing Order 330.

4.2. The Faith and Order Committee appoints the Faith and Order Executive to make some decisions on behalf of the Committee between meetings. It meets as needed and comprises the Chair, Secretary and two other members of the Committee. The Committee have agreed some Terms of Reference for the Faith and Order Executive and these can be found in Appendix 1.

4.3. 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; encourage a shared engagement in theological reflection; liaise with the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee; and make reports or raise issues with the Committee as required.

4.4. 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. It is particularly grateful for early conversations with working parties appointed by the Conference or the Council in order to identify whether the work is likely to involve any issues of faith and order.

5. **Oversight of Fresh Expressions**

5.1. Following some work on the recording of pioneering fresh expressions in 2015, the Methodist Council directed "the Law and Polity Committee and the Faith and Order Committee to ensure that work is undertaken with regards to the oversight and governance of Fresh Expressions."

5.2. Both committees have kept these issues under review, and note that:

a. The Methodist Church has already undertaken substantial theological work on fresh expressions, not least in its joint report with the Church of England, *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church* (2012);

b. This is an area of the Church's life which continues to evolve. The existing polity of the Methodist Church enables a variety of fresh expressions and recent reflection concluded that more time is needed to see how they develop. As described in the 2018 Ministry in the Methodist Church report (Part C section 2.8):

- i. “there is tension between the need for creative flexibility and legitimate accountability, and questions of where and how that is best held” (2.8.2);
 - ii. “there is significant diversity of context, experience and approach among those involved in the world of pioneering and fresh expressions” (2.8.2); and
 - iii. there is a tension between those who wish fresh expressions and other emerging expressions of church to be more clearly defined within the polity of the Methodist Church and those who would want there to be further space to see how fresh expressions and pioneering communities develop. “Many fresh expressions and new Christian communities are still relatively young and there has not yet been sufficient time to see how they mature and develop in relation to the Methodist Church. In many cases it is too early to tell what impact and role fresh expressions have in the life of the Church, including issues about whether such communities are sustainable and what kind of ministry they require on an ongoing basis” (2.8.3).
- 5.3. Questions about oversight and governance, raised in relation to fresh expressions, often involve questions about theology, polity, accountability, power, and relationships. The committees concluded that the current polity of the Methodist Church is flexible enough to enable fresh expressions to flourish and for there to be appropriate structures of support and accountability. Whether our current polity is always used in such a way is a different matter, and some of the concerns expressed may be more about issues of power and relationships than faith and order or law and polity. One of the ongoing challenges is that it is not easy to establish what the faith and order issues are, what the law and polity issues are, or whether the issues are primarily about relationships or power.
- 5.4. The committees therefore conclude that given the work that has already been done, the flexibility in our current polity, and the need for some continuing learning with regard to how fresh expressions are developing, it is not clear what kind of work is needed at this point. Following the 2018 Conference, the Ministries Committee is “to continue to give attention to pioneer ministry and to ensure that there is a gathering of learning and opportunities for collaborative reflection on questions of practice, policy and theology” (Resolution 32/6). This, and other continuing reflection on the development of fresh expressions in relation to the Methodist Church, may, in due course, help to clarify any particular questions that it would be appropriate for the Faith and Order or Law and Polity committees to examine. If the Council decides that further work is needed then a more specific direction as to what work is required or expected would be most helpful, not least because of the different expectations noted in paragraph 5.2iii.

6. **The MDO as a religious order**

- 6.1. The 2016 Conference received an interim report on The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate, which advocated “the need for further clarity to be brought as to the nature of the MDO as a religious order in the British Methodist Church” (para. 6.5). In response the Conference agreed the following resolutions:
- 33/2. The Conference directed the Methodist Council, with the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Faith and Order Committee, to consider whether the religious order should be opened to receive into membership Methodists who are lay or ordained to presbyteral ministry and report to the 2018 Conference.
- 33/3. The Conference directed the Methodist Council, with the Methodist Diaconal Order and the Faith and Order Committee, to consider whether those whom it ordains to the

diaconal order of ministry continue to be required also to become members of the religious order and report to the 2018 Conference.

- 6.2. In order to address these significant and complex questions, the Council appointed a small group to consider these Resolutions and take forward this work (see paper MC/16/92), and its conclusions were reported to the Council in January 2019 (MC/19/24).
- 6.3. As the conclusions raise some questions of ecclesiology and polity (some of which are long-standing) and relate to the work of the Faith and Order Committee on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate, it was proposed that it would be sensible and helpful to bring together the different pieces of work on the diaconate and the MDO into one report. At its January meeting the Council agreed that the response to resolutions 33/2 and 33/3 from the 2016 Conference would be contained within the Faith and Order Committee's report to the 2019 Conference on the Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate (Resolution 24/2) and that the Faith and Order Committee would report the contents of this report to the Methodist Council in April 2019.
- 6.4. A provisional draft report can therefore be found in Appendix 2. This report remains confidential. The Faith and Order Committee met at the beginning of March and agreed the contents of its report, but it has not yet agreed a final text. In the light of this, the version in Appendix 2 contains some amendments to a previous draft (made by the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee), but these have not yet been seen by the full Committee and there are paragraphs which still need further work. As part of this revision process, attention is also being paid to responses from consultation with the MDO Area Groups and the Ministries Committee. Some of the questions which the report seeks to address have persisted over a number of years and the Faith and Order Committee notes that there are diverse perspectives. It would therefore be unhelpful for there to be different versions of the report in the public domain, particularly before a final version has been agreed by the Faith and Order Committee itself, but the Committee has endeavoured to provide the Council with as full a report as possible to enable it to discuss its work and the further reflections of the Faith and Order Committee.
- 6.5. Members of the Council are invited to particularly consider the following sections of Appendix 2:
 - section 1.5 (copied in paragraph 6.6 below) which describes the conclusions of the Methodist Council working party; and
 - sections 3 and 4 which, in part, build on the work of the Methodist Council working party.
- 6.6. The Council is asked to affirm the conclusions of the working party about the relationship between the diaconal order of ministry and the religious order, which, for ease of reference are repeated here:
 - 6.6.1. Whilst British Methodism makes a contribution to the wider Church as its deacons focus and represent the servant ministry of Christ "as much through being members of a religious order as being part of an order of ministry in Full Connexion with the Conference," it has struggled to more fully articulate this contribution. The 2016 Conference therefore asked that the relationship between the diaconal order of ministry and the religious order was re-examined.
 - 6.6.2. Therefore, the Methodist Council with the Faith and Order Committee, and through various consultations with the MDO, have explored the nature of the relationship between the diaconate as an order of ministry and the Methodist Diaconal Order (MDO) as a religious order and have come to the following conclusions:

- a. The Methodist Church continues to affirm that the MDO “is a gift of God to the Church to help enable the Church to fulfil its calling.”¹ The distinctive position of deacons is part of this gift. Within British Methodism the MDO and the role of ordained deacons have “evolved over time as the Church has sought to discern the will of God and remain faithful to its calling.”² The distinctive relationship between the religious order and the order of ministry is part of our response to God’s call, shaping how we share in God’s mission in and for the world. As will be seen in sections 2 and 3 below, there is much convergence in the theology underpinning the diaconal order of ministry and the MDO and there is therefore a coherence in their close relationship.
- b. Members of the MDO make a life-long commitment, all are subject to the same discipline (of both the MDO and the Conference) and therefore live within the same patterns of oversight and with the same tensions. Members of the MDO expect to serve in different places, to undertake different roles and to participate in different forms of service. These considerations therefore led to the conclusion that the MDO is for ordained deacons in Full Connexion with the Conference and that it is therefore inappropriate for it to be open to lay members or presbyters.
- c. It was also found that it should continue to be a requirement that that members of the MDO be ordained to the order of deacons. The identity and nature of the MDO is bound up with the office of deacon in the Methodist Church in Britain. There is a firm link between the focus of the MDO and the calling of the order of ministry. It is therefore felt appropriate that the two are closely related. Although the separation of the religious order and the order of ministry can be ecclesiological and theologically envisaged, and the two have not always co-existed within the Methodist Church in Britain, there is a coherence in their current relationship.
- d. Deacons in the Methodist Church should therefore continue to belong to both an order of ministry and a religious order. The present holding together of the religious order and the order of ministry is important for many deacons and their ministry as a member of one is shaped by their belonging to the other. This is also reflected in many areas of the Church’s polity and practice. There is no clear and pastorally justifiable reason for separating the order of ministry and the religious order, and it was found that there is generally either resistance or a lack of will and energy for such a course of action.
- e. Furthermore, there was not found to be a strong interest or clear reason to open up the MDO to presbyters and lay people. More recent and renewed interest in religious orders, or in belonging to some form of religious community, has not led to much particular interest in admission to the MDO itself, which is always dependent on discernment of a call to the religious order.
- f. It is therefore recommended that the Conference is asked to reaffirm that the MDO is a religious order open only to those who are ordained deacons in Full Connexion with the Methodist Conference; and that all ordained deacons in the Methodist Church are also required to be members of the MDO.
- g. Methodism, like other denominations, has seen a genuine, though limited, renewal of interest in developing religious orders. Further consideration of this is beyond the scope of this report, but, the expression of diaconal ministry in the MDO offers a vibrant and creative expression of a religious order which will have a particular

¹ *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate – Interim Report*, 2016, 1.2

² *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate – Interim Report*, 2016, 1.2

contribution to make to any further conversations.

7. Update on *Mission and Ministry in Covenant*

The 2018 Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England asked for further work on questions arising from the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* report. The faith and order bodies appointed a joint working group to explore these questions. A report on this further work is in the process of being finalised and will be made available before the Conference. The Faith and Order Committee report to the 2019 Conference will include a short update on the work and it is currently anticipated that the 2020 Conference will be asked to make decisions about the *Mission and Ministry* proposals.

8. Scrutiny and Consultancy Work

- 8.1. The Committee has engaged with various issues, projects and Council papers, providing specific responses to paperwork, 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 relevant areas of work.
- 8.2. Under SO330(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 to establish effective and constructive ways of working and reflecting as the work develops.
- 8.3. 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 Methodist Council and the Conference, 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.
- 8.4. The Committee continues to consider how it might best work with others in order to fulfil its remit under SO 330(3) to “seek to stimulate theological reflection and study throughout the Church”.

9. Work being brought to Conferences 2019 and 2020

The Faith and Order Committee reports to the Conferences of 2019 and 2020 will include the following pieces of work:

Conference 2019:

The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order. This will include work on the liturgical role of deacons and the response of the Methodist Council to Resolutions 32/2 and 33/3 of the 2016 Conference.

Revised guidelines for joint confirmation.

Conference 2020:

Theology of Safeguarding
Revision of guidelines in relation to exorcism
Report on work relating to the theology of online life
Report on the theological and ecclesiological aspects of the nature of leadership in the Methodist Church

*****RESOLUTIONS**

- 38/1. The Council receives the report.**
- 38/2. The Council adopts section 5 of the report as the response to Council direction 49/4 (2015) and affirms the conclusions contained therein.**
- 38/3. The Council affirms the conclusion in paragraph 6.6 relating to the relationship between the order of ministry and the religious order and directs the Faith and Order Committee to report this to the Conference as part of its report on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order.**

Appendix 1

Faith and Order Executive Terms of Reference

1. The Faith and Order Executive comprises the Chair, Secretary, and two other members of the Faith and Order Committee.
2. The Faith and Order Committee may delegate to the Executive responsibility for signing off reports and other documents.
3. The Faith and Order Committee may delegate to the Executive the authority to make particular decisions as defined by the Committee between meetings.
4. The Faith and Order Executive offers support to the Secretary and is available for consultation as issues arise.
5. The Executive is responsible for appointing people to Faith and Order working groups, for appointing Faith and Order Consultants, for bringing nominations for membership of the Worship and Liturgy Subcommittee for appointment by the Committee and for bringing nominations for membership of the Committee.
6. The Executive helps the Chair and Secretary to prioritise the Committee's work and to plan for Committee meetings.

March 2019