

Inter Faith Relations

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Status of Paper	Final
Action Required	To note the work undertaken.
Draft Resolution	58/1. The Council receives the report.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	n/a

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	Inter Faith Relations; the aim of this paper is to update the Methodist Council on the work that has been under taken since the last Inter Faith Council paper (April 2014).
Main Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The Methodist URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group B. Strengthening the network of advocates and practitioners C. Finance D. Ways Ahead
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	<p>Council Paper MC/14/44 (April 2014)</p> <p>Council Paper MC/13/80 (October 2013)</p> <p>Council Paper MC/13/10 (January 2013)</p>
Consultations	Co-Chairs of the Methodist URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group, Gareth Jones and Clare Downing.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Future budget setting.
External (eg ecumenical)	Attendance at the CTE and CTBI conference in 2015.

Inter Faith Relations

Introduction

1. This report updates the Council on the progress of work concerning Inter Faith Relations undertaken by the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church (URC) Inter Faith Relations Reference Group.
2. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group (IFRRG) recognises that, following the cessation of the post of Methodist Church Inter Faith Relations Officer, it is operating in a new context. So the group have been working on their purpose. As a result, the reference group chose to strengthen the group by appointing new people who have a specialism in inter faith relations (please see the appendix).

A. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group

Purpose

3. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group was constituted in 2008 as a joint venture between the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church (URC) to support staff members and serve as a source of expertise within and beyond the two Churches. The following, from the URC website, indicates the remit envisaged for it:
 - Advise both Churches on matters of inter faith relations.
 - Enable both Churches to think through and engage in issues of inter faith dialogue and cooperation at different levels of Church and community life.
 - Reflect on inter faith relations issues on behalf of the two Churches, and where appropriate raise particular issues of concern with the structures of each Church.
 - Initiate particular pieces of work to educate, inform and resource our Churches.
 - Undertake work that is remitted to it by the governance structures of either Church.
 - Help resource the work of Connexional Team (Methodist) and Assembly Staff (URC).
 - Resource District and Synod Inter Faith Advisers.
 - Work in close partnerships with ecumenical inter faith instruments.
 - Engage with inter faith relations experience and insights from other parts of the world.
4. This is still the broad remit of the group, but it needs to re-evaluate what is possible without the capacity offered by a Methodist Church Inter Faith Relations Officer.

Strengthening the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group

5. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group has sought to strengthen its own membership through the addition of members of both denominations with specialist expertise and experience. Over the last year, the group has been augmented by, among others, specialists in Christian Muslim relations, Christian Sikh relations (an area of expertise that the Methodist Inter Faith Relations Officer had previously contributed) and the inter faith dimension of vocational training. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group has been further strengthened by the addition of inter faith relations to the brief of the URC Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, who sits on the group.

Representing the Methodist Church on inter faith related bodies

6. The Methodist co-chair and other members of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group have represented the Methodist Church at the AGM and EGM of the Inter Faith Network for the UK; on the Churches' Forum for Inter Religious Relations and the Churches' Inter Religious Network; and on the steering group of the Hindu Christian Forum. Nine Methodists in all attended the Churches Together in England (CTE) ecumenical meeting for Inter Faith Advisers and Advocates in February 2015. Several members of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group from both denominations attended, including the Methodist co-chair as one of the facilitators. Some members of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group also belong to a number of other inter faith related bodies, including the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG), in an individual capacity rather than as representatives of the Methodist Church or the URC.

Consultation

7. Since the discontinuing of the post of Inter Faith Relations Officer in the Connexional Team, the reference group has taken on some of the responsibility for consultation on inter faith matters. The Methodist co-chair and other members have responded to queries from Methodists around the country and have been invited to speak to local groups.

Free Churches Inter Faith Desk

8. The Free Churches Group in its meeting last September had a positive discussion regarding the need for professional support in the area of inter faith relations. It was proposed that a working group be set up to look at how this could best be done. There has been no further news or developments on this.

B. Strengthening the network of advocates and practitioners

Events

9. **Churches Together in England (CTE) meeting of Inter Faith Advisers/Advocates**
The Churches Together in England meeting of Inter Faith Advisers/Advocates conference was held on 2-3 February 2015 at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick. This event was promoted both through the Methodist and URC networks – this includes the Inter Faith events page of the Methodist website and by emailing Methodist and URC Inter Faith Advisers/Advocates.

10. **Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Inter Faith Theological Advisory Group (IFTAG) Conference, Cacophony or Conversation? The Bible and Inter Faith Dialogue**
The Churches Together in Britain and Ireland event is to be held on Tuesday 23 June – Thursday 25 June 2015, at High Leigh Conference Centre in Hertfordshire. This gathering has been promoted both through the Methodist and URC networks – this includes the Inter Faith events page of the Methodist website and by emailing Methodist and URC Inter Faith Advisers/Advocates.

Inter Faith event at Cliff College

11. An amount of £10,000 has been assigned to the event:

£2,000 for Touchstone assuming they will be involved in the event
£2,000 to produce publications for the event
£6,000 for the event

12. Cliff College has been asked to organise an inter faith relations event, which is due to take place in June this year. Three members of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group were among those invited to take part in the planning. Rather than seeking to attract those who may have attended the CTE meeting for Inter Faith Advisers and Advocates, the conference will be for people (one per District) who have interest, awareness and some experience of inter faith engagement. It is hoped that it will inspire them to better understand Methodist resources and experience in this area, and to become more fully involved. Some spaces will be made available for attendees from the United Reformed Church.

Website

13. **Maintenance**

Updates continue to be made to the existing Inter Faith web pages of the Methodist website, the URC have a link on their website which takes you to the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group web page on the Methodist website.

Information and resources concerning inter faith issues can be found on the Methodist Inter Faith pages of the Methodist website.

Website: www.methodist.org.uk/mission/inter-faith-relations

14. **A new website**

The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group have been looking into the prospect of having a joint Methodist Church URC website that sits independently of the Methodist or URC websites, similar to the Joint Public Issues website. They are currently researching the cost implications of devising their own joint website.

Emails

15. Methodist and URC Inter Faith Advisers/Advocates have been contacted on a few occasions regarding any events, newsletters or other information that it is deemed that they would find helpful.
16. The reference group plan to continue this practice and possibly to create their own e-news bulletin linked to the new website that is envisioned.

C. Finance

17. There are two amounts of £15,000 involved in the Inter Faith conversation:

	Budget	Grant
Amount	£15,000	£15,000
What are these funds for?	These funds are budgeted for Inter Faith Relations.	These funds were awarded by the Connexional Grants Committee in 2014 (connexional year 2013-14).
What is the purpose?	The purpose of this budget is to support the work of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group (IFRRG).	The purpose of this grant is to fund Networking Events run by the Methodist Church for Methodist people (possibly in partnership with the URC).
In 2014-15 for what have these funds been used, to date?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £244 IFRRG travel expenses to attend the IFRRG meetings. • £500 to attend the CTE Conference in February 2015. • £5,000 budgeted for the 'Eating Curry for Jesus' publication (plus some grant funding) – this is all pending. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £10,000 for an event at Cliff College. • £2,000 for Touchstone assuming they will be involved in the event. • £2,000 to produce publications for the event. • Leaving £6,000 for the event.

As explored earlier, the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group are in a new position so they plan to establish:

- how to use the regular inter faith budget by setting a clear strategy
- how to make sure that the grant is used for what it has been clearly assigned.

D. Ways Ahead

18. The Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group plan to:

- build on the breadth of expertise within the reference group and more widely, in order to resource the Methodist Church as effectively as possible with regard to inter faith relations;
- continue to strengthen the network of advocates and practitioners;
- continue to develop the website, and possibly a new joint website with the URC;
- set a strategy for the use of the annual inter faith budget (£15,000);
- set a work plan for 2015/16.

***RESOLUTION

58/1. The Council receives the report.

Appendix

Members of the Methodist Church URC Inter Faith Relations Reference Group

CTBI

Peter Colwell

Methodist

Mr Julian Bond

The Revd Pamela M Cram

The Revd Raymond G Gaston

The Revd Dr Barbara C Glasson

The Revd Gareth P Jones (co-chair)

The Revd David Musgrave

Connexional Team Staff support: Sanya Strachan

URC

The Revd Bill Burgess

The Revd Tim Clarke

The Revd Clare Downing (co-chair)

Helen Garton

Maggie Hindley

John Mellor

John Parry

The Revd David Tatem

Sally Thomas