

METHODIST CHURCH REPORTS

Special Report

Holy Communion - a Methodist perspective

1. The Faith and Order Committee is aware that there is no existing overall Methodist statement on the important issue of eucharistic theology and practice, and has therefore begun to prepare a report for eventual presentation to the Conference. It is envisaged that this process will take a further two (or possibly three) years, and will include wide consultation and the gathering of evidence.
2. At the same time, the Committee is aware that eucharistic theology and practice features in the ecumenical conversations already under way in each part of Britain, and it will maintain close contact with those involved in the various conversations, so as to ensure a consistency of approach.
3. There have been numerous Conference reports on some aspects of this issue. These have mostly dealt with particular questions, notably 'who may preside?' and the participation of children. However, many other questions have not received the same attention. The Committee is also aware that there is a wide variety of practice in our churches. Practice and theology influence each other. Over the past three or four decades, many new influences (notably through the ecumenical movement) have come to bear upon our attitude to the Lord's Supper. Many of these are reflected in The Methodist Worship Book.
4. Many Methodists, themselves holding the Lord's Supper in high esteem, find it difficult to understand the differing emphases and practices of other, equally sincere Methodists. The very choice of name, 'Lord's Supper', 'Holy Communion' or 'Eucharist' itself reflects a variety of understandings and emphases. Sometimes our beliefs are not fully articulated until a change in practice is proposed, for example the introduction of a 'common cup', or a change in the arrangements for the distribution of the elements.
5. The Committee's aim is to produce a report which will be genuinely 'owned' by the Church as a whole, and also offer fruitful material both for reflection within our Church and for those others who seek to discover what Methodist belief and practice is.
6. The Committee will, of course, draw upon the vast body of material to be found in existing Conference reports and statements, in our hymnody and in authorized liturgies. It will also consider the substantial contributions that Methodist theologians have made to the literature on the subject. The Methodist Church has published, through various channels, a wide variety of educational, devotional and theological material relating to Holy Communion, and this will also be examined.
7. The Committee will welcome input from all parts of the Connexion. Some material will be gathered by a survey. Members of the Conference are invited to assist with this, and questionnaires will be distributed to them during the Conference. Anyone else who would like to take part in this survey is invited to contact the convenor of the working party, Rev Jonathan Kerry.

8 Contributions are also particularly invited on the following topics:

- Descriptions of the actual practice of particular churches, and reflections upon the reasons for them, and the significance of them. Which liturgies and hymns, and what kind of vessels, bread and wine are used? What happens to the remaining bread and wine after communion? What are the practical arrangements (seating/ standing/kneeling, movement, arrangement of furnishings, role of stewards, assistance with the distribution, etc.)?
- The frequency of celebration of the Lord's Supper now and in the past.
- Views upon the significance of the Lord's Supper - how important is it as a part of our common life, and what do we believe we are doing or is happening?
- Have people's views changed over the years and if so, how?
- What are our views on 'the open table', and our participation in communion services of other Christian traditions? How do we recognize with sensitivity the good conscience of those who do not feel able to participate?
- What is the ministry of communion stewards, and how might this be developed?
- How can those who preside, and all who participate be better prepared for celebrating the Lord's Supper?
- What changes have you seen in recent years, and how do you react to them?
- What future developments would you like to see in our practice?

RESOLUTIONS

- **7/10.** The Conference receives the report and invites responses to be sent to the Secretary of the Faith and Order Committee, Dr Clive Marsh, by 30 June 2001.
- **7/11.** The Conference directs the Faith and Order Committee to present a further report to the Conference of 2002 or 2003.