

32. Faith and Order Committee Report

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Resolution	32/1. The Conference receives the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aims	To provide a report on the work of the Faith and Order Committee
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The work of the Faith and Order Committee 2019/2020• The nature of the Local Preachers' meeting• Development of the work on guidelines for exorcism• Liturgical resources in the light of <i>God in Love Unites Us</i>

The Work of the Faith and Order Committee 2019/2020

1. The Faith and Order Committee is appointed by, and directly 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. 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. 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. All reports, questions and communication to the Committee should be sent in the first instance to the Secretary of the Committee.
3. The Coronavirus pandemic has inevitably impacted on the priorities and ways of working for many bodies in the Methodist Church during this time, including those of the Faith and Order Committee. In the light of this and also due to the changed arrangements for the 2020 Conference, some pieces of work originally intended for this year will now be brought to the 2021 Conference. Two significant pieces of work, *Ministry in the Methodist Church* and *Changing Patterns of Ministry*, are brought to the 2020 Conference in separate reports.

4. **Further work in the light of *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order (2019)***
- 4.1. In section 5 of the *Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order (2019)*, the Faith and Order Committee noted that a variety of questions required further exploration. Many of these are being addressed by the Ministries Committee and the Convocation of the Methodist Diaconal Order, but the Faith and Order Committee has considered the following:
 - 4.1.1. The Office of Vice-President

The 2011 Conference directed that the Methodist Council, the Convocation and the Faith and Order Committee review, report and make recommendations to a subsequent Conference about the question of whether the office of Vice-President should be open to deacons. The Faith and Order Committee reviewed previous exploration of this question and did not feel that any further theological reflection by the Committee would help to resolve the different views, nor that it is a theological priority at this time. It noted that the office of Vice-President has been open to deacons for a significant period of time, that it is nearly always occupied by a lay person, and that previous discussions by the Conference have not led to any change in this position. It therefore made a report to this effect to the Methodist Council, and the question is now being considered by the Council and the Convocation.
 - 4.1.2. The Nature of the Local Preachers' Meeting
 - 4.1.2.1. The 2019 Conference directed that from 1 September 2020 all deacons will be members of the Local Preachers' Meeting. The Faith and Order Committee has therefore considered the nature of the Local Preachers' Meeting and the question of the capacity in which deacons are members.
 - 4.1.2.2. The Committee agreed that the Local Preachers' Meeting has three purposes:
 - a. It is a place for reflection on the worshipping life of the Circuit. The Committee noted that this could often be focused too narrowly on the Preaching Plan, and that the ways in which proclamation and preaching are offered in other contexts are also part of the worshipping life of the Circuit;
 - b. It is a place of accountability for those involved in preaching, which includes its role in training local preachers and continuing development;
 - c. It is a community of practice, a place where the corporate identity of those who have a common call to preach is expressed, a place of formation for preaching and a place of support and fellowship.
 - 4.1.2.3. As the Committee considered the question of the capacity in which deacons belong to the Local Preachers' Meeting a variety of questions arose including:
 - a. the capacity in which presbyters belong to the Local Preachers' Meeting;
 - b. whether all student deacons should be voting members of the Local Preachers' Meeting, recognising that there is already provision for student deacons who are local preachers under SO 560(1)(ii). This, in turn, raised wider questions about where the membership of diaconal and presbyteral students is held, which Circuit Meeting it is appropriate for them to belong to, and whether oversight of training in preaching for diaconal students who are not local preachers most appropriately lies with the training Institution;

- c. the role and relationship of worship leaders to the Meeting. Currently worship leaders can be invited to attend Local Preachers' Meetings under SO 560(6):

“The meeting should invite others who contribute to worship in the Circuit (for example, church stewards, worship leaders, musicians, those who conduct reader services) to attend the meeting at appropriate times.”

Worship leaders play a valuable role in the worshipping life of many Local Churches and their participation in reflection on the worshipping life of the Circuit is to be welcomed, including any opportunities for further training, resourcing and other forms of support which might be offered by the Circuit. As worship leaders are not preachers it is not, however, appropriate for them to be involved in the parts of the meeting which focus on the other two core purposes of the Local Preachers' Meeting, ie the training, accountability and oversight of preachers, and the community of practice for those who proclaim the Word. Worship leaders should not be present while the Local Preachers' Meeting conducts these parts of its business. The pastoral tension of welcoming worship leaders to part of a meeting while asking them to leave for other parts needs to be addressed. In addition, although worship leaders are appointed by Local Churches and are accountable to and supported by the relevant Church Council, the Local Preachers' Meeting also plays a role in the oversight of worship leaders (particularly during training and with regards to discernment as to their suitability (SO 680)). The relationship of worship leaders to the Local Preachers' Meeting therefore warrants further clarification, not least in the light of pastoral concerns and to ensure greater consistency in practice throughout the Connexion.

- 4.1.2.4. The Law and Polity Committee is bringing the necessary changes to Standing Order 560 and associated Standing Orders to the 2020 Conference that will enable all deacons to be members of the Local Preachers' Meeting from 1 September 2020. The Faith and Order Committee will consider the questions in 4.1.2.3 and bring further revisions to the relevant Standing Orders to the 2021 Conference. The further revisions will reflect the clarification of the nature and purpose of the Local Preachers' Meeting as outlined in 4.1.2.2.

4.1.3. Questions of oversight

- 4.1.3.1. The *Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the MDO* (2019) established that the order of ministry and the religious order are coterminous but not the same. Deacons belong to both. This decision followed a period of discernment because the relationship has not always been clear and patterns of oversight have sometimes been confused. This has been evident in some of the past work on the role of the Warden, for example.
- 4.1.3.2. The Faith and Order Committee had an initial discussion about how the discipline of the religious order relates to the discipline of being in Full Connexion with the Conference, and feels that it is important to distinguish what appropriately belongs to the order of ministry and what appropriately belongs to the religious order. It will therefore carry out some further work on this, beginning with a review of the relevant Standing Orders, and report to the 2021 Conference.

5. ***Mission and Ministry in Covenant***

- 5.1. In its report to the 2019 Conference, the Faith and Order Committee noted that the Methodist Conference and the Church of England's General Synod had both debated the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* report and asked for additional work in some specific areas. A report detailing this additional work was made public for discussion and discernment shortly before the 2019 Conference.

- 5.2. In July 2019 the General Synod of the Church of England debated this report, welcoming the work of the faith and order bodies and affirming the priority of doing mission together. It also noted some continuing concerns about the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals and areas where there continue to be questions and a lack of consensus. It requested that the Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England undertake some further work in these areas with the Methodist Church's Faith and Order Committee.
- 5.3. The Faith and Order Committee identified five potential areas of further work in relation *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* but noted that the Conference had not yet had the opportunity to discuss the most recent report nor to express a view on the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals themselves. It therefore sought the direction of the Methodist Council in October 2019.
- 5.4. The Methodist Council welcomed the work done by the faith and order bodies and affirmed the priority of doing mission together but it directed the Faith and Order Committee not to undertake any of the work that had been identified, feeling that time and resources should not be committed to further work on these specific proposals until there was a clearer indication of approval for them in both churches. It therefore directed the Faith and Order Committee to bring the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* proposals to a future Conference and once the General Synod has begun the legislative process. The General Synod, however, had already asked for the further work in order to help it make the decisions about beginning the legislative process. Therefore, although neither the Methodist Conference nor the General Synod have intentionally decided to halt the *Mission and Ministry in Covenant* process, it is now uncertain how it could continue. The Faith and Order Committee is aware of continuing conversations in both churches and awaits further direction in this matter.
6. **Revision of Guidelines on Exorcism** [section deleted]
7. **Theology of online life**
 - 7.1. The Faith and Order Committee is committed to taking forward work "in order to support continued reflection on the particular questions relating to 'holy communion mediated through social media' and to enable theological exploration of the broader questions about the nature of online life and Christian experience..."¹ In December 2019 it hosted a day of reflection on 'Presence, Communication and Digital Media Technologies'. As well as some conversation about 'online communion', a range of other areas for further reflection were noted, including how we evangelise to people who now live so closely with their communication devices, how the Methodist Church contributes to the creation of healthy online communities, how we use technology for worship, fellowship and discipleship, issues of inclusion and unconscious bias that arise in online engagement, how technology impacts on how we think about our faith, and further exploration of different kinds of presence.
 - 7.2. The experience of being in Government-imposed lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic offers further cause for reflection as interaction with technology and online communication has changed and developed. It is too early to discern how it might have changed the Methodist Church more permanently, but many have experienced new ways of being in community, of worshipping and of being disciples of Jesus. These recent experiences of online life and communication are varied, sometimes affirming and creative and sometimes challenging. Careful listening to these recent experiences, and reflection on learning, will be important.

¹ Faith and Order Committee report, 2018

7.3. While the Faith and Order Committee has the remit to explore the theological questions arising from online engagement, it is hoped that there can be other ways of enabling and supporting continued reflection on the Methodist Church's engagement in online life.

7.4. The Faith and Order Committee will continue this work and make a fuller report to the 2021 Conference.

8. **Response to *God in Love Unites Us***

In its second report to the 2019 Conference, the Faith and Order Committee acknowledged that it has an obligation under Standing Order 330(10) to scrutinise all matters directly concerning the faith or order of the Church presented to the Conference, but it had not had an opportunity to discuss the *God in Love Unites Us* report before the Conference met. It has now considered *God in Love Unites Us* and the provisional resolutions, paying particular attention to questions about what constitutes doctrine. It has also reviewed the provision of relevant liturgical resources as directed by the 2019 Conference. Given that *God in Love Unites Us* will not now be discussed at this year's Conference, the Faith and Order Committee will bring its report to the 2021 Conference. This is primarily to ensure that all District Synods have access to the same information when they discuss and vote on the provisional resolutions. As some Synods were able to meet and vote before the lockdown then it would be inappropriate for the Faith and Order Committee to make its reflections public at this point. The report will be in the Agenda for the 2021 Conference.

9. ***Theology of Safeguarding***

9.1. The *Theology of Safeguarding* report will be available by the time that the 2020 Conference meets. The Faith and Order Committee will make it available for use and consultation during the 2020/2021 connexional year, and feedback will be welcomed. Having considered the feedback and made any revisions to the report, it will be brought to the 2021 Conference for adoption. The Committee will also explore producing a resource focused on 'forgiveness' as this has been identified as something that will be helpful.

10. **Liturgical Resources**

10.1. The Worship and Liturgy Sub-Committee has developed an order for a Love Feast and a resource for spiritual communion. These have been approved by the Faith and Order Committee and are available on the *Additional Methodist Liturgies* page of the Methodist website. In addition, some guidelines for online use of the Love Feast, together with particular adaptations for Maundy Thursday and Easter Day were produced. Further resources were also produced for Holy Week and Easter and included a service of light and darkness and a Way of the Cross resource.

10.2. A book of prayers and services for use at different stages of relationships

10.2.1. The 2019 Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to explore producing liturgical resources and relevant guidance for use at the ending of a marriage. The Committee notes the complexity and variety of pastoral situations that arise at the breakdown of a relationship, and that people may need different kinds of liturgical resources at different times. It therefore feels it appropriate for there to be a variety of liturgical resources for such times and will work towards this. It further feels that some further theological reflection on the ending of relationships is timely.

10.2.2. The 2019 Conference also directed the Faith and Order Committee to review the provision of liturgical resources in the light of *God in Love Unites Us*. An update on this will be brought to the 2021 Conference but, as part of the response, resources for celebrating civil partnerships will be produced. The parameters for such work will be dependent on the

decisions relating to *God in Love Unites Us*.

- 10.2.3. The Committee draws the attention of the Conference to the publication *Vows and Partings* which is a book of prayers and services by the Methodist Church for people at every stage of marriage and other relationships – as a relationship starts, during joyful and difficult times, and when a relationship ends. The resource is currently out of print, although still available to buy second hand. The Faith and Order Committee feels that the most appropriate way of responding to the directions of the Conference referred to in 10.2.1 and 10.2.2 is to produce a similar resource containing the work outlined above. The Committee will take this work forward. It will develop the resources described in 10.2.1 during the next connexional year, and will develop further resources including those for celebrating civil partnerships once the Conference has made decisions about the *God in Love Unites Us* resolutions. It is the intention that the new resource will be available by the 2022 Conference.

11. **Consultation and scrutiny**

The Committee has engaged with various issues, projects, Council papers and pieces of work by the Connexional Team, 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.

12. **Appreciations**

12.1. **Appreciation for Professor Judith Lieu, Chair of the Faith and Order Committee**

- 12.1.1. The Chair of the Faith and Order Committee, Professor Judith Lieu, comes to the end of her term of office on 31 August 2020. The Faith and Order Committee wishes to thank Judith for her wisdom and leadership during the past eight and a half years.

- 12.1.2. Judith has an outstanding academic pedigree and theological credibility within and outside the Methodist Church. She has brought to the Committee theological expertise, spiritual insight and forensic analytical skills. She has an immense grasp of the broad range of work that comes onto the agenda of the Faith and Order Committee, is clear about the Committee's particular functions, and takes a keen interest in achieving the highest possible standard of output from the Committee.

- 12.1.3. Judith has been a very effective and highly respected Chair of the Committee, managing the complex agenda deftly and efficiently with a light touch that has enhanced the quality of the Committee's conversations by creating a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in meetings. She is always thoroughly prepared. She has encouraged members to contribute to debate and listened patiently to all points of view. She has a knack of identifying key issues and is astute in summarising complex material and Committee conversations. Her leadership of the Committee has been both strong and sensitive.

- 12.1.4. Judith has been a caring and collaborative colleague, whose support and encouragement has been much appreciated. She is gracious and courteous and has exercised a significant ministry of hospitality to our ecumenical colleagues and partner bodies. She has been a significant leader in the Methodist Church, reminding us of and demonstrating the importance of lay ministry. She has represented not only the Committee but also the Methodist Church well. Our ecumenical colleagues have great respect for Judith and she has shown not only a breadth of knowledge of the Methodist tradition but also of other traditions.

12.1.5. Judith is passionate about encouraging the whole Church to engage theologically and has supported all those in leadership in this enterprise. Altogether, Judith has served the Methodist Church with distinction through her significant contribution of time and expertise. She has been an outstanding Chair, a really good collaborative colleague and a wise counsellor.

12.2. **Appreciation for the Revd Prebendary C Norman R Wallwork**

12.2.1. After many years of faithful service the Revd Prebendary Norman Wallwork retires from the Faith and Order Committee's Worship and Liturgy Sub-Committee this summer. The Faith and Order Committee expresses its thanks and appreciation for his significant contribution, not only to the work of the Committee across the years but also to the liturgical life of the Methodist Church.

12.2.2. Norman's carefully crafted words can be found in many liturgies and prayers used by members of the Methodist Church and far beyond. He was one of the key architects of the Methodist Worship Book and he has provided sustained leadership to the Methodist Prayer Handbook Committee. As a main contributor to the life of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, he has authored several of its publications including *Blackbirds and Budgerigars*, a mini guide to clerical dress. Norman's desire that liturgy be done well led him to hope that those who chose to 'dress up' should know what to wear when, and why.

12.2.3. Firmly rooted in the Wesleyan Methodist tradition, Norman is unfailingly interested in those who hold different theological and ecclesiological views, and he is a great ecumenist. He has served with distinction as the Methodist representative on the ecumenical Joint Liturgical Group and was the first Methodist to serve as the Liturgical Secretary of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

12.2.4. A liturgical scholar, Norman has taught in various contexts including at Wesley College, Bristol, and he has also contributed to the formation of many ministers through supervising placements and acting as their mentor. His pragmatic approach to worship in the local context, his dry sense of humour and his pastoral care and support have been valued by many.

13. **Work being brought to the 2021 Conference**

- ◆ *The Theology of Safeguarding*
- ◆ Report on the work on the theology of online life
- ◆ Report on the revision of guidelines in relation to exorcism
- ◆ Response to *God in love unites us*, including relevant liturgical provision
- ◆ *The Methodist Understanding of Membership in the 21st Century*
- ◆ Further work on *The Theology and Ecclesiology Underpinning the Diaconate and the Methodist Diaconal Order*

***RESOLUTION

32/1. The Conference received the Report.

32/2. *[deleted]*

[Footnote]

1. <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/reflecting-on-faith/faith-and-order/theology-of-online-life/>

Notice of Motion 2020/110: Additional Resolutions for Report 32

(Daily Record 5/4)

1. The Conference thanks the Faith and Order Committee for the work undertaken on the theology of online life as outlined in Agenda Item 32 Section 7. It recognises the stated need for reflection on the church's current and expanding experience of worshipping as an online community and looks forward to the fuller report on the theology of online life at the 2021 Conference.
2. Nevertheless the Conference believes that the exceptional current circumstances which have left the Methodist people deprived of partaking in Holy Communion for three months demands an immediate and contextual response. Whilst a return to physical space may mean that some congregation members are able to share in Holy Communion in a matter of weeks, for many more vulnerable people it may not be safe to do so for an indeterminate time. This is concerning not least in how it will sit alongside our commitment towards the vision of "The Inclusive Methodist Church" (Agenda Item 22, section K).
3. The Methodist people share a common endeavour in seeking to discern faithfully how to live as a eucharistic community under the current restrictions. The Conference recognises the impossibility of theologically reflecting or conferring upon questions raised by these experiences in ways which would sufficiently justify any alteration to the Methodist Church's stated understanding of Holy Communion by this Conference. However the Conference also recognises the desirability of ministers and congregations being able to respond pastorally, faithfully and appropriately to local need. In the light of this tension, the following additional resolutions were proposed:

***RESOLUTIONS

- 32/3. The Conference encouraged Local Churches to reflect on their response to deprivation in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic. To assist Local Churches in this, it directed the Faith and Order Committee, as a matter of urgency, to produce guidance on acts of Holy Communion in our current context, including reflection on ways in which appropriate online participation in services of Holy Communion might be encouraged.**
- 32/4. The Conference directed the Faith and Order Committee to undertake further reflection on Holy Communion, and to bring a report and recommendations regarding 'online communion' to the 2021 Conference.**

Daily Record 5/4