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The Faith and Order Reference Group

Proposal that this group becomes a committee of the Assembly:

Draft Remit

- To address issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC.
- To participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues.
- To advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of faith and order.
- To listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate.
- To publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to questions of faith and order.

Both in the UK and in the wider Church there have been a number of developments which have had the effect of bringing Faith and Order questions into greater prominence. Anglican/Reformed dialogue sponsored by WCRC and the 1662 anniversary being but two examples. Other issues looked at recently include a Theology of Land (requested by a Methodist/URC group), Worship (a document referred from the World Communion of Reformed Churches), doctrinal standards for ministers (referred by a Synod Moderator), Lay Presidency, (referred by the General Secretary) ethical decision-making, and two papers referred by the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe).

At present the remit and accountability of the Faith and Order Reference Group has not been put down in writing. In view of the wide range of referrals which the Group is receiving, the Group feels that the time has come when it would be helpful to have clarification about these areas. Accordingly it is proposed that the Reference Group be converted into an Assembly Standing Committee. This would enable a wide range of individuals, groups, committees and councils to be free to refer Faith and Order matters to the FORG. It has also been realised that there is not a group looking at worship. It is proposed that the FORG take this area on. (as has already been seen in consideration of a CWRC document on worship which was referred to the group).

Method of Working:

Currently issues can be raised by individuals and councils of the URC, the FORG itself, and national and international ecumenical partners. The FORG responds to referrals in order to offer a URC perspective to the relevant person/council/partner.

The FORG also has a role to discern how such matters should be disseminated more widely across the URC, including, as necessary, formal referrals to the URC General Assembly, as the body which is tasked in the Basis of Union to make declarations of Faith and Order on behalf of the URC. It is proposed that this pattern will continue but with the addition of a formal report to each Assembly.

Accountability:

In view of the broad remit, receiving referrals from a cross section of individuals, groups and councils, with regard to matters that affect the URC as a whole, accountability should be to General Assembly but generally through Mission Council.

Proposed Membership:

A Convenor, appointed by General Assembly, the Deputy General Secretary, the Ecumenical officer, and 6 people, representing a cross section of theological views, with a depth of theological experience, with one or two participants from other Christian traditions. Nominations committee will appoint the members with the length of appointment being the standard for URC committees.

Resolution:

- 1. Mission Council resolves to create an Assembly Standing Committee to be called, The Faith and Order Committee, with as its current membership those individuals serving on the Mission Council Faith and Order Reference Group.**
- 2. Mission Council agrees that the remit of the Faith and Order Committee shall be:**
 - **To address issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC, either referred to it or by its own initiative.**
 - **To participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues.**
 - **To advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of faith and order.**
 - **To listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate.**
 - **To publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to questions of faith and order.**
- 3. Mission Council thanks and discharges its Faith and Order Reference Group.**