

Paper F1

Faith and Order Committee report

Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope rpp20@cam.ac.uk Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	This paper outlines the current areas of work for the Committee.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Communications, URC Youth, Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, Walking the Way Steering Group and ecumenical partners.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ongoing discussions with ecumenical partners about the role of eldership in LEP's.

Since submitting our last report to Mission Council, the Faith and Order Committee has met twice: once on 8 October 2020 and then on 2 to 3 February 2021. On both occasions we met via Zoom, though the latter meeting at least approximated the pattern of our pre-Covid meetings. At our meeting in February we were delighted to welcome the Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson as a new Committee member nominated by the United Reformed Church, and also to welcome back the Revd Catherine Ball as a co-opted member, with a specific brief for our work on Fresh Expressions.

The Committee is pleased to report to Mission Council that the series of ten booklets on aspects of Christian teaching, written under the common heading 'What do we believe about ...?', have now been designed and published on the URC Website. Initially suggested by a member of the Church, the Committee enthusiastically took up the challenge and, through a corporate effort involving all its members, finally completed the task last year. The ten documents outline historic Christian doctrines, emphasise a Reformed perspective and honour the various commitments the URC has made regarding its discourse and the way in which we seek to love and respect each other. They are not intended to be comprehensive but instead to be a way of opening conversation and to seek further avenues for exploration. We humbly offer them as a resource to the Church and it is hoped they may be useful both to Church members and to enquirers. The booklets are available on-line at <https://urc.org.uk/believe>. We offer our sincere thanks to Communications for bringing the text we supplied to life.

On-going discussions are leading the Committee towards at least two significant pieces of work.

- What originated as a discussion about the ordination of elders has, following feedback from various sources including ecumenical colleagues, become a wider project to explain the role and theological significance of elders in United Reformed Church polity alongside the theological and historical reasons for their emergence in the Reformed churches and for our current practice of ordination. Robert Pope will lead on taking this forward.
- A number of conversations – including dialogue with URC Youth about ‘isolated membership’, with the FX Enabling Group regarding what makes church *church*, with various people reflecting on experiences during lockdowns arising from the pandemic – have converged and lead us to consider our ecclesiology. A sub-group has been established in order to think particularly about the theological significance of our polity, about what it means to gather and about what it means to be a ‘member’, thinking again about belonging, commitment and mutual care and accountability alongside other matters. The hope is that we can find ways of supporting new and exciting expressions of Christian community life which might meet particular needs and might be appropriate for the Church’s mission and ministry in a post-pandemic world. Philip Brooks, Diana Paulding and Catherine Ball will take the work forward initially. This is part of a wider piece of work alongside other Assembly Committees and co-ordinated by the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group.

The Committee expects to meet again in April or May in order to review progress and to widen discussion on these items.

Questions regarding EM1 students presiding at the sacraments and the nomenclature of the minister of ‘Word and Sacrament[s]’, mentioned in our last report to Mission Council, have now received a response which at this stage does not require any action from Mission Council.

At our February meeting, we discussed ‘*Koinonía: God’s Gift and Calling: The Hiroshima Report of the International Reformed-Anglican Dialogue (IRAD), 2020*’. Members of the Committee found the report an encouragement and an inspiration. The world lacks *koinonía* and it is the Church’s task not only to identify that fact but to live more into the *koinonía* that is God’s gift to us. The Committee warmly commends the report to the Church for prayerful study.

The commitment to *koinonía* was supported by the receipt of a report of the Conference of European Churches held in December 2020 which took as its theme ‘The Hope of Communion from 1920 to 2020’. The conference focused on responding to two documents published one hundred years ago which emphasized *koinonía*, namely *The Patriarchal Encyclical Letter to the Churches of Christ Everywhere*, composed by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in January 1920, and *The Appeal to all Christian People* issued by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops in October 1920. The Committee is grateful to the Revd Fleur Houston for writing and submitting the report.

It seems clear to members of the Committee that the call to live the ‘communion’ that is God’s gift to the Church, as well as deliberately seeking its manifestation in our life, our discipleship, mission, witness, stewardship of the earth and in our advocacy of God’s justice and peace, is something the Spirit is saying to the Churches. We will be looking at what work the Committee might do to advocate commitment to, and encourage expressions of, *koinonía* and invite members of Mission Council to suggest ways in which we might take this work forward.