

Paper F2

United Reformed Church
Ecumenical Future

Faith and Order Committee



Paper F2

Faith and Order Committee: United Reformed Church Ecumenical Future

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Welch, convener of the Faith and Order Committee minister@theroundchapel.org.uk
Action required	Discernment regarding the Church's ongoing engagement with and contribution to the constantly changing ecumenical scene, especially in light of current discussions about the future of the Church.
Draft resolution(s)	None
Alternative options to consider, if any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Out of our ongoing discussions about the future of the Church and the distinctive characteristics of the United Reformed Church we seek to understand our place within the wider Church and to seek the Spirit's leading.
Main points	The ecumenical scene has changed since the formation of the United Reformed Church. Some questions must be asked continually. Are we still committed to the ecumenical movement? How do we envision visibly unity? How should our commitment be expressed? What are the distinctive characteristics we bring to the wider scene?
Previous relevant documents	The 2007 statement regarding the nature of our ecumenical engagement is attached. Also attached is the October 2013 World Council of Churches' unity statement. The documents resulting from Mission Council's discussions on the future of the church are all relevant.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council and the Faith and Order Committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The nature and character of our engagement with ecumenical partners.

United Reformed Church ecumenical future

“What is the Spirit saying to the churches?”

1 Introduction

1.1 In 1972 the United Reformed Church celebrated the birth of a dream, of a new united church, between the Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England, that was to be a prelude to a wider uniting with other Churches in the UK. The dream was realised in union with two other Churches, the Churches of Christ and the Scottish Congregational Church. This dream is foundational to the Basis of Union and has been reaffirmed at previous Assemblies. The most recent significant discussion was in the 2007 General Assembly which resulted in the adoption of the Statement on the Nature of the United Reformed Church’s Ecumenical Engagement (see appendix 1). There was also a discussion in Mission Council as recently as November 2011 with the review of URC ecumenical relations.

1.2 However, 42 years later, the URC has not seen wider realisation of the early dream. While the URC has a well-regarded commitment to the ecumenical journey, other factors affecting the life of the Church in the UK have come to the fore. There has been a growth of secularisation, leading to a retrenchment of many historic denominations as they have sought their own survival. There has been a blossoming of new Churches, both home grown and those fuelled by immigration, with their own sense of identity and their desire for that identity to flourish. Some have perceived there to be a lack of confidence in the Gospel across the United Reformed Church, (described by some as “functional atheism”) which has resulted in diffidence about sharing the faith both within the Christian community and in the wider community.

1.3 The March edition of *Reform* has brought together four helpful and challenging reflections on ecumenism which outline some of the settings, both local and international, of the debate on the future of the ecumenical journey and its particular nature. The World Council of Churches general secretary refers to the unity statement adopted at the Assembly in Busan in 2013, which is offered to the Churches as a stimulus to further thought on the nature of unity that is God’s desire for God’s people (appendix 2). The Faith and Order Committee is considering this document alongside the WCC “Common Vision” statement to see how best to engage the United Reformed Church in responding.

1.4 The Faith and Order Committee has been looking at a range of issues with regard to the future of the Church and brought papers for discussion to both meetings of Mission Council in 2013. In May 2013, five scenarios were offered in order to stimulate discussion, imagining different futures for the Church. In November 2013, the Faith and Order Committee drew out two topics from the May discussion that had emerged as priorities for further prayer and reflection: conciliarity and the church meeting, and the issue of “living” or “dying” – whether Mission Council envisaged a future for the United Reformed Church and, if so, what shape that future would take. One of the issues that arose out of the November discussion was the ecumenical calling of the United Reformed Church. The Faith and Order Committee now wishes to bring this issue to Mission Council, with a view to both re-affirming the particular calling of the United Reformed Church to be at the ecumenical cutting edge of Christian life in the UK today, and also affirming the need for a renewal of the nature

and understanding of the URC's Reformed identity. The committee believes that the URC's particular contribution to the life of the Church in the UK at the present time will lie in its grasp of its Reformed identity and that this has the potential to lead to the renewal of the Church and its outreach into the world. Building on the discussion at Mission Council, the Faith and Order Committee will bring a further report to General Assembly for reflection.

2 The scenarios

2.1 The Faith and Order Committee brought five scenarios to Mission Council, to which a sixth scenario was subsequently added. These scenarios are available on the URC website (under URC Resources; Mission Council May 2013 paper A1). The scenarios and the resulting discussion at Mission Council are summarised below:

1. "Steady as she goes, being realistic about ongoing decline" – i.e. more or less staying the same. This scenario gained the least support from Mission Council.

2. The Uniting Churches of/in Great Britain – Anglicans, Methodist and United Reformed Church uniting across the three nations, leading to a major sell-off of buildings and the development of new vibrant congregations. There were strongly divided views on this scenario. Some folk were very much in favour. Others were against, feeling it to be unrealistic and leading to a loss of United Reformed identity.

3. Encouraging local unions in each place. It was felt by some that this would lead to a loss of United Reformed identity. There were varying views expressed at Mission Council.

4. The development of "pastorate churches", grouped into five new synods, with pastorates organised into 10 to 15 congregations. Each pastorate would have one central church building hosting a monthly united service. For the rest of the month the congregations would function as cell groups. Funds from the sale of church buildings would be released to support staff and a lively programme at the central church. In parallel with this, there would be the development of "a Reformed order within the wider Church". Views on this one were mixed, with a strong resistance to a major structural re-organisation.

5. Local incarnations: the development of new forms of Christian communities such as Fresh Expressions and "de-branded" churches, leading to a great range of different churches, with only a handful left with a recognisable United Reformed identity.

6. "Cyber-church" – dependent on development of social networking and new technology, creating the possibility of on-line communities. (This was explored in the subsequent Faith and Order meeting.)

2.2 There was a lively discussion on the scenarios, with a range of responses. In discussions in Mission Council it has become clear that structural re-organisation, whether within the United Reformed church or with ecumenical partners, is not felt to be the primary way forward in terms of renewing the life of the Church. Rather there is a desire to re-focus on spirituality, embracing the renewal of prayer and worship; theological reflection, giving time to consider the particular gifts of the URC's Reformed heritage and the way they shape and invigorate our shared life today; and practical local initiatives, reaching out together to people and places of need in each community.

2.3 What follows is a summary of the issues raised with regard to the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitment, some practical suggestions that have been made to move the Church forward, and some questions for Mission Council to reflect on.

3 Issues:

3.1 Context and realism

The United Reformed Church is seeking its particular identity in a time of ecumenical struggle in which it is perceived that there is a limited desire from other Christian traditions to engage meaningfully with the United Reformed Church. In this context, we want to hold the significance of the ecumenical drive. Through our clarity about what we offer from our own identity to the ecumenical scene, we will be realistic. We will not be discouraged when our gifts are not received by others, nor will we complain about them. Rather, living with our own integrity, we will see where the Spirit is speaking to the Church and leading across the Churches. As one Mission Council respondent put it in the November 2013 meeting: “What does faithfulness to our calling mean? Not beating others up, but quietly raising the ecumenical dimension, seeking partners where they may be found, but not being deterred from doing pieces of work if we’re on our own.”

3.2 Distinguishing the marks of the United Reformed Church

Mission Council worked on identifying a range of these characteristics, as follows:

- Semper Reformanda – reserving the right to change in the light of experience of the Holy Spirit and openly and intentionally stating our readiness to change;
- the particular interpretation that the United Reformed church gives to the priesthood of all believers;
- elders who are ordained and set apart to share leadership with each other and the minister of Word and sacrament;
- the church meeting, in which people together discern the leading of the Holy Spirit, and through which power is shared;
- the ability, in response to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to develop policies that embraces diversity e.g. in recognising both infant and believers baptism;
- upholding the rights of personal conviction;
- the strong sense of social justice & action, freedom in worship, centring on Scripture;
- valuing the local church.

One group at Mission Council described United Reformed Church identity as being about a distinctive combination of characteristics, like a recipe or a culture. It is not that the United Reformed Church has characteristics which are not individually shared with other Churches; it is that the particular combination of these characteristics in the United Reformed Church offers this Church’s distinctive identity.

3.3 Conciliarity

This is being addressed in a separate paper on conciliarity and church meetings.

3.4 Structure and institutions verses movement

More work needs to be done on the kind of structures that are helpful to the flourishing of denominations in the future. What sort of need is there for the Church in the changing age in which we find ourselves, where institutions and structures are often bypassed by looser networks created by, for example, social media?

3.5 Receiving other Churches’ gifts

What can we learn from other parts of the Christian tradition that would benefit our life? More work needs to be done on exploring the gifts of other traditions and our openness to receiving these.

3.6 Local ecumenical partnerships

There is a need to celebrate the gifts of these partnerships, as well as exploring where the

future of such partnership lies. There will be a fringe meeting at General Assembly on local ecumenical partnerships; there is a Churches Together in England working group, which includes the United Reformed Church's secretary for ecumenical relations, David Tatem, looking at issues with regard to LEP's, how they work and their future.

3.7 Balance of ecumenical engagement between local and regional and national

In a Church in three nations, committed to the importance of the local congregation in each place, there is a need to look at the capacity for developing ecumenical relationships that will differ depending on the locality, the region and the nation.

3.8 Developing new partnerships

There is a range of new partners springing up from outwith the historic churches who bring with them new and different possibilities for shared life and work.

3.9 Building up spiritual life

There is a need to discern the spiritual gifts of the Reformed tradition, the ways in which these can renew the lives of individuals and congregations, together with the gifts of other traditions.

3.10 Discerning the Holy Spirit

At the heart of the Church's life is the prayerful discernment of the Holy Spirit, both within and between congregations and churches. Resourcing this discernment will help the life of the Church to flourish.

4 Practical approaches

4.1 Put together a collection of stories where the URC is contributing ecumenically, contributing good things.

4.2 Identify the issues and attitudes that block ecumenical growth and development and devise ways of addressing these.

4.3 Look for signs of resurrection – identifying where God is present in and between our Churches and celebrating this presence.

4.4 Look at the Cumbria covenant and the model it offers for producing an ecumenical county.

4.5 Look at a “denominational” URC membership scheme for those who are in LEP's or who live at a distance from their nearest URC and are therefore going to a church of another tradition, but who want to retain their URC link.

4.6 Ask synods to target ecumenical possibilities and put their resources into these.

5 Questions for Mission Council:

5.1 In view of the current ecumenical climate, does the URC want to continue to affirm our ecumenical identity as a key part of our life?

5.2 If so, what are the particular Reformed emphases which we treasure and which give us life, will we want to offer in ecumenical conversations and life? What are the gifts we look to receive?

5.3 How far and in what ways do we wish to affirm God's life-giving call to all God's people to be one?

5.4 Would it be helpful to open up a conversation, in co-operation with the range of ecumenical partners with whom we are surrounded, about the nature of visible unity and what it might look like, so that we can be renewed in the vision that God holds in front of us?

APPENDIX 1

Statement of the Nature of the United Reformed Church's Ecumenical Engagement (General Assembly 2007)

The challenge

Where should we focus our limited resources for ecumenical initiatives?

To answer that question, the Ecumenical committee has tried to get a clearer picture of how our current ecumenical engagement needs to look.

Where are we?

1. A lot has happened in the last ten years. In the 1990s the Called to Be One process replaced Councils of Churches with Churches Together groups and drew Roman Catholics into full involvement. It said nothing about inter-faith or environmental/ecological issues, though, whereas today both are centre stage.
2. The Anglican – Methodist Covenant has been a real cause for rejoicing, laying to rest the damaging myths held in each tradition about the other's history. However, it has shown how difficult it will be to bring about further visible, structural unity. More immediately attainable goals are needed, though not as substitutes for the ultimate prize.
3. The recent Methodist – United Reformed Church document Peacemaking: a Christian vocation has been hailed as an excellent example of modern ecumenical collaboration – a short, intense study on a focussed area, co-opting experts to do a particular piece of work. Many younger ecumenists see their most natural outlet as the single-issue pressure group on concerns such as trade justice, refugees and asylum issues, or the environment.
4. The United Reformed Church is still firmly committed to ecumenical activity. We give thanks for courageous witness and painstaking hard work in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, intermediate forums and national ecumenical instruments. We rejoice at ever-growing membership of ecumenical bodies. The bad news is that we have to recognise, honestly, the many problems of relating in several directions at the same time, the frustration caused by lack of progress, and the sometimes bewildering complexity of relationships.
5. Today the ecumenical movement can be very varied. It is also building bridges to those in non traditional churches, outside the Churches Together structures – notably Pentecostals, New Churches and Fresh Expressions of Church.
6. One focus for the ecumenical debate is about responding to diversity in unity. This arises because:
 - a) Many ecumenical partners find themselves threatened by potentially church-dividing issues, especially around human sexuality. They are confronted with the question: "How do

we hold together those within our own number who in all integrity disagree?”

- b) Some see God calling us to new, emerging ways of being church or fresh expressions, and ask how to hold together more traditional and more experimental forms, while encouraging a thousand different flowers to bloom.
- c) Those pondering the shape of global Christianity wonder how to hold together the forms it takes in the North and West with those emerging from Southern cultures.
- d) Some traditions worldwide stress their particular roots. Others are forming united or uniting churches across historic divides. Both these witnesses need to be heard.

The other focus for debate is about how we live with our differences. As well as the reasons already given, this arises because:

- a) There are concerns over how to relate to Islam, and whether the debate about multiculturalism is shifting from how to get people a place at the table, to how to manage the debate they then have.
- b) It has been said that the theme of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament is universal in scope, while its content is particular to individual lives and specific situations. If so, the ecumenical task is to affirm this universal scope against a fast-expanding background of different settings, ways of talking and sets of ideas. Can we recognise it when we share a common goal, or search for the same truth, but use different language to describe it?
- c) To do our theology in a wide range of different contexts is a big challenge. We have to be even-handed in dealing with others. We also have to struggle with whether God is calling us to work with what we find or stand over against it for the sake of the Gospel.
- d) Contemporary thinking about evangelism affirms the value of each person’s search and story, rather than stressing the need for common ground. Emerging church thinkers plead for the treatment of everyone as individuals, so we can all learn and even teach.

8. Some people respond to the current state of affairs by doubting whether we can hold together; they predict new schisms – and alliances. It is easier to identify possible schisms than to foresee the shape of any new alliance. Those who agree about the public issues which should concern the church also disagree just as strongly on the nature of the church, so if the church split it could fracture into small pieces rather than being able to form new groupings.

9. There is an emerging debate about ecumenical core values. At an ecumenical officers’ conference in 2006, it was suggested that full visible unity was a last gasp of late Enlightenment utopian thinking which has no place in the 21st century.

10. In a recent poll Christian Aid emerged as the most hated charity and the Salvation Army the third most hated, because they were “religious” rather than “spiritual”. Although there are some questions about how the poll was done, it does seem that people now associate something “religious” with being old, boring and disconnected – whilst something “spiritual” is compelling, different, creative and fresh.

Four Ways Forward

11. The United Reformed Church still upholds the definition of organic unity offered by the Second World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh in 1937: A Church so united that the ultimate loyalty of every member would be given to the whole body and not to any part of it. We would see certain elements of such a Church as non-negotiable, such as the ordination of women to all forms of ministry, but we believe organic unity remains important for good reasons:

- a) because it is based on the prayer of Jesus that his followers should be One;
- b) because we believe that in the last century those who went before us heard God’s renewed call to be One and we must witness to their insight;

- c) because of its symbolic value for work in healing and reconciliation;
- d) because if God is One in Trinity, and there is one earth for which we all share responsibility, then for us to be divided in our response to one another, to our environment and to God is a denial of that oneness;
- e) because when the Church is called to new ways it matters how we put things to rest. Drawing a line under our shared history of persecution and martyrdom may be a powerful response to sectarianism and encourage good community relations;
- f) because we live in the transition between the modern world of the 18th to 20th centuries and the post modern 21st century world. It is too easy to say that everything which went before is irrelevant now;
- g) because even if it was starry eyed to dream about a future with one church, we may be called to hold on to that vision while others lose it, even if we have to redefine and revalidate our arguments in terms of the world we live in now.

12. The United Reformed Church is committed to recognising ecumenical partners as people of worth, made in the image of Christ and part of his body the Church. In the past, we have tended to recognise what we share with other Christians, and suggest renewed unity with them on that basis. Now, we may be starting to see that there are still differences between us, and we had assumed more similarity than was there. If part of our new focus needs to affirm the diversity in our unity, then holding together with others despite our differences is a pressing challenge. We shall need to affirm as a core value our recognition of others and the presence of God in them, their gifts and their creativity. This will help us to witness to the truth we share as Christians in the face of our culture, which increasingly challenges the Church by alternative ways of understanding and portraying the reality around us.

13. The United Reformed Church bears witness to living with differences. We acknowledge a common starting point, but accept that this works out locally in different ways. For us, the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for our faith and conduct. In each local church the gathered fellowship of believers seeks God's help to carry out their witness in the place where they are. In making decisions on such historic issues as administering baptism, on whether or not to remarry divorced people, or on our attitudes to warfare and weaponry, we have lived out our differences. We will need to continue reflecting on the ways we use the Bible and hear its message, and on what theology and spirituality teach us about the richness of God, if we are to prevent our standard core from becoming a lowest common denominator.

14. The United Reformed Church will explore ecumenically the theme of space. This is important because:

- a) God's gift of space and time permits hospitality, encounter and exploration. The practice of ecumenism demands a radical hospitality towards other people, an openness to what emerges and the gift of space – not least for those with no background in the Christian faith or others wanting to re-engage.
- b) Exploring how to inhabit and use space opens up questions of how to live together peacefully in a divided global family.
- c) As Catch the Vision moves on to spirituality, we will consider the ecumenical dimension in inviting God to inhabit the silence and stillness we seek within us, which used to be full of our own concerns.
- d) As we build bridges to fresh expressions of Church, we will need to find common ground with growing virtual and online communities, especially of younger believers, in their search for God.

e) To hold ourselves together, across our diversity, we will need to set aside reverent space for God in word, text and pixel, as well as in hospitality, community, church council meeting and shared discernment.

f) Space allows room to unfold and is therefore crucial to the concept of growth, which would seem to be one of God's central concerns. The first things God places on this earth after creation are those that grow and bear fruit.

15. We see this statement deepening the theoretical basis of the Three Ecumenical Principles agreed at General Assembly 2001:

a) To expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community.

b) To proclaim more clearly, in word and deed, that in Christ we are one World Church family living in a world which God loves, and to celebrate the rich diversity of cultures, languages and church traditions, and to seek, as appropriate, to work with members of other faith communities for the promotion of biblical values of love, peace and justice.

c) To persevere in the search for the visible and organic unity of the Church through church-to-church conversations on matters of faith and church order so that sinful, and sometimes death-dealing, divisions may be healed and the Christian message of reconciliation be proclaimed with integrity.

APPENDIX 2

Unity Statement of the World Council Assembly – Busan 2013

God's Gift and Call to Unity - and our Commitment

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)." Creation is a gift from the living God. We celebrate creation's life in its diversity and give thanks for its goodness. It is the will of God that the whole creation, reconciled in the love of Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, should live together in unity and peace (Eph.1).

Our experience

2. Today, the whole creation, the world and its people, live in the tension between the profoundest hope and the deepest despair. We give thanks for the diversity of human cultures, for the wonder of knowledge and learning, for the enthusiasm and vibrancy of many young people, for communities being rebuilt and enemies reconciled, for people being healed, and populations fed. We rejoice when people of different faiths work together for justice and peace. These are signs of hope and new beginnings. But we grieve that there are also places where God's children cry out. Social and economic injustice, poverty and famine, greed and war ravage our world. There is violence and terrorism and the threat of war, particularly nuclear war. Many have to live with HIV and AIDS and suffer from other epidemics; peoples are displaced and their lands dispossessed. Many women and children are victims of violence, inequality and trafficking as are some men. There are those who are marginalised and excluded. We are all in danger of being alienated from our cultures and disconnected from earth. Creation has been misused and we face threats to the balance of life, a growing ecological crisis and the effects of climate change. These are signs of our disordered relations with God, with one another and with creation, and we confess that they dishonour God's gift of life.

3. Within churches we experience a similar tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with rich diversity. There is a deepening sense among some churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. In places where churches experience anguish and constant fear of persecution, solidarity between Christians from different traditions in the service of justice and peace is a sign of God's grace. The ecumenical movement has encouraged new friendships forming a seed bed in which unity can grow. There are places where Christians work and witness together in their local communities and new regional agreements of covenanting, closer fellowship and church unions. Increasingly, we recognize that we are called to share with, and learn from, those of other faiths, to work with them in common efforts for justice and peace and for the preservation of the integrity of God's beautiful but hurting creation. These deepening relationships bring new challenges and enlarge our understanding.

4. We grieve that there are also painful experiences of situations where diversity has turned into division and we do not always recognise the face of Christ in each other. We cannot all gather together around the table in Eucharistic communion. Divisive issues remain. New issues bring sharp challenges which create new divisions within and between churches. These must be addressed in the fellowship of churches by the way of consensus discernment. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions and communities refusing to be challenged and enriched by the gifts others hold out to us. Sometimes we seem to embrace the creative new life of faith and yet do not embrace a passion for unity or a longing for fellowship with others. This makes us more ready to tolerate injustice and even conflicts between and within the churches. We are held back as some grow weary and disappointed on the ecumenical path.

5. We do not always honour the God who is the source of our life. Whenever we abuse life through our practices of exclusion and marginalization, our refusal to pursue justice, our unwillingness to live in peace, our failure to seek unity, and our exploitation of creation, we reject the gifts God holds out to us. Our shared scriptural vision.

6. As we read the Scriptures together, under the guidance of the Spirit, our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people within creation. Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God and given the responsibility to care for life (Gen. 1:27-28). The covenant with Israel marks a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The prophets call God's covenanted people to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized, and to be a light to the nations (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6).

7. God sent Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God (John 1). Through his ministry and through his death on the cross Jesus destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, established a new covenant, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own Body (Eph. 1:9-10 and 2:14-16). He announced the coming Kingdom of God, had compassion on the crowds, healed the sick and preached good news to the poor (Matt. 9:35-36; Luke 4:14-24). He reached out to the despised, the sinners, the alien, offering acceptance, and redemption. By his life, death and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus revealed the communion of the life of God the Holy Trinity, and opened to all a new way of living in communion with one another in the love of God (1 John 1:1-3). Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples for the sake of the world (John 17:20-24). He entrusted his message and his ministry of unity and reconciliation to his disciples and

through them to the Church, which is called to continue his mission (2 Cor. 5:18-20). From the beginning the community of believers lived together, were devoted to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and praying together, caring for the poor, proclaiming the good news and yet struggling with factions and divisions (Acts 2:42; Acts 15).

8. The Church, as the Body of Christ, embodies Jesus' uniting, reconciling and self-sacrificial love to the world on the cross. At the heart of God's own life of communion is forever a cross and forever resurrection – a reality which is revealed to us and through us. We pray and wait with eager longing for God to renew the whole creation (Rom. 8:19-21). God is always there ahead of us in our pilgrimage, always surprising us, calling us to repentance, forgiving our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

God's call to unity today

9. On our ecumenical journey we have come to understand more about God's call to the Church to serve the unity of all creation. The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and servant spreading the good news of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love.

10. As foretaste, God gives to the Church gracious gifts: the Word, testified to in Holy Scripture to which we are invited to respond in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit; baptism in which we are made a new creation in Christ; the Eucharist, the fullest expression of communion with God and with one another, which builds up the fellowship and from which we are sent out in mission; an apostolic ministry to draw out and nurture the gifts of all the faithful and to lead the mission of the Church. Conciliar gatherings too are gifts enabling the fellowship, under the Spirit's guidance, to discern the will of God, to teach together and to live sacrificially, serving one another's needs and the world's needs. The unity of the Church is not uniformity; diversity is also a gift, creative and life-giving. But diversity cannot be so great that those in Christ become strangers and enemies to one another, thus damaging the uniting reality of life in Christ.

11. As prophetic sign, the Church's vocation is to show forth the life that God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions, which spring from fundamental disagreements in faith, remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, caste, and other forms of discrimination also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, humility, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, and a willingness to stay together, not saying "I have no need of you" (1 Cor. 12:21). We are called to be a community upholding justice in its own life, living together in peace, never settling for the easy peace that silences protest and pain, but struggling for the true peace that comes with justice. Only as Christians are being reconciled and renewed by God's Spirit will the Church bear authentic witness to the possibility of reconciled life for all people, for all creation. It is often in its weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is truly sign and mystery of God's grace.

12. As servant, the Church is called to make present God's holy, loving and life affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. By its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to witness to the gift of communion that God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the Kingdom of God. In its work of holistic mission – evangelism and diakonia done in Christ's way – the Church participates in offering God's life to the world. In the power of the Spirit, the Church is to proclaim the good news in ways that awaken a response in different contexts, languages and cultures, to pursue God's justice, and to work

for God's peace. Christians are called to make common cause with people of other faiths or none wherever possible, for the well-being of all peoples and creation.

13. The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected. Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God's world. The plan of God made known to us in Christ is, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10)".

Our commitment

14. We affirm the place of the Church in God's design and repent of the divisions among and within our churches, confessing with sorrow that our disunity undermines our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and makes less credible our witness to that unity God desires for all. We confess our failures to do justice, to work for peace, and to sustain creation. Despite our failings, God is faithful and forgiving and continues to call us to unity. Having faith in God's creating and re-creating power, we long for the Church to be foretaste, credible sign and effective servant of the new life that God is offering to the world. It is in God, who beckons us to life in all its fullness that joy, hope, and a passion for unity are renewed. Therefore, we urge one another to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches:

"to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe."

We affirm the uniqueness of our fellowship and our conviction to pursue the visible unity of the Church together, thankful for our diversity and conscious of our need to grow in communion.

15. In faithfulness to this our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church when we shall express our unity around the one table of the Lord. In pursuing the unity of the Church we will open ourselves to receive the gifts of each other's traditions, and offer our gifts to one another. We will learn to commemorate together the martyrs who witnessed to our common faith. We will continue theological conversations, giving attention to new voices and different methods of approach. We will seek to live out the consequences of our theological agreements. We will intensify our work for justice, peace and the healing of creation, and address together the complex challenges of contemporary social, economic and moral issues. We will work for more just, participatory and inclusive ways of living together. We will make common cause for the well-being of humanity and creation with those of other faith communities. We will hold each other accountable for fulfilling these commitments. Above all, we will pray without ceasing for the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17): A unity of faith, love and compassion that Jesus Christ brought through his ministry; a unity like the unity Christ shares with the Father; a unity enfolded in the communion of the life and love of the Triune God. Here, we receive the mandate for the Church's vocation for unity in mission and service.

16. We turn to God, the source of all life, and we pray:

O God of life,
lead us to justice and peace,
that suffering people may discover hope;
the scarred world find healing;
and divided churches become visibly one,
through the one who prayed for us,
and in whom we are one Body,
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit,
is worthy to be praised, one God,
now and forever. Amen.