

# Paper F3

Faith and Order Committee  
Report of ongoing work

United Reformed Church  
Church 2017  
Church 2017  
Church 2017



# Paper F3

## Faith and Order Committee

### Report of ongoing work

#### Basic Information

|                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Contact name and email address</b> | The Revd Elizabeth Welch<br><a href="mailto:welchea@talk21.com">welchea@talk21.com</a> |
| <b>Action required</b>                | Reading and reflection   |
| <b>Draft resolution(s)</b>            | <b>No resolutions</b>  |

#### Summary of Content

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Subject and aim(s)</b>                   | This report is offered so that members of Mission Council can see a summary of the ongoing work of the Faith and Order Committee, and feed back any comments to the committee. |
| <b>Main points</b>                          | Update on work taken to the 2016 General Assembly, ongoing work on scripture, ecumenical matters and theology of marriage.   |
| <b>Previous relevant documents</b>          | Reports to General Assembly in 2014 and 2106 and to Mission council in the intervening periods.  |
| <b>Consultation has taken place with...</b> |  |

#### Summary of Impact

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Financial</b>                  | Nil |
| <b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b> |     |

# Report of ongoing work

## The Remit of the Faith and Order Committee:

- 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.

## Introduction

The ongoing work of the Faith and Order committee covers a range of theological and ecumenical areas. The committee seeks to reflect the broad spectrum of theological understanding across the URC, with an affirmation of the particular theological approaches that are formational and celebrated in the URC. What follows is a summary of ongoing work.

1. **Church Membership.** Two separate reports, on 'Isolated Members' (arising out of the 'Wider Fold' discussion) and the Future of Membership are being brought to Mission Council. Work is ongoing on drawing up a revised leaflet on membership for sharing with prospective new members.
2. **Follow up from reports taken to 2016 General Assembly:**
  - i. **Authorised elders.** This report which went to the 2016 General Assembly has been circulated to the synods and is being taken forward in a variety of ways. The Faith and Order Committee are happy to receive reports from the synods about the implementation of this report and are dealing with issues arising. One such is the question that has been raised as to whether every lay preacher be Authorised to preside at Holy Communion. The Committee thought that it was better to put this issue on hold until the present report on Authorised Elders has had a chance to be implemented and tested across the synods.
  - ii. **What is the Spirit saying to the churches?** A theological reflection on this question was offered to the 2016 General Assembly, based on the previous booklet circulated to the churches and synods and the responses received. Work is taking place on formatting a pamphlet from the proposals agreed at General Assembly and making this available across the church for churches to use as and when they feel so led. The Faith and Order Committee is aware that General Assembly instructed the Faith and Order committee and the Walking the Way Group to work together, and is looking forward to this happening.
3. **Ecumenical involvement.**
  - i. **Ecumenical Dialogues:** The church-wide ecumenical discussions that have been happening between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, and the Roman Catholic Church and the United Reformed Church are now moving in their next phase in a more contextual and practical direction, so there is less need for the involvement of the Faith and Order Committee in theological reflection in these areas.
  - ii. **Relation to new churches:** There has been a discussion about the United Reformed Church's relation to new churches, especially Pentecostal churches. The Faith and Order committee has had an initial consideration of doctrinal issues surrounding co-operation with new partners and has decided to wait for

- specific issues to be raised out of shared working with partner churches before considering this matter further.
- iii. **CPCE discussion** papers. A number of interesting reports have come to the URC from the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. Fleur Houston, who is involved with the CPCE will be invited to the July FAOC meeting and detailed consideration will be given to these reports.
  - iv. **New frameworks in mission** CTE report: In response to this CTE report, the committee had an initial discussion on the ongoing significance of unity as the United Reformed Church's contribution to ecumenical discussion
  - v. **Episcope**: a paper on oversight in the URC has been offered and is being worked on. There are ecumenical implications with regard to the nature of episcopate when the URC shares together with other churches, as well as a discussion within the URC about oversight ministry.
  - vi. **Use of title**: An interesting issue was raised as to whether a URC minister could continue to use the title 'reverend' if he or she resigns from the URC Roll of Ministers in order to become a Roman Catholic. It was advised that this would be inappropriate, while also being noted that people who had used the title of the minister previously might need some help in understanding the journey that the minister was taking and the implications of this.
4. **Sola scriptura**: The Faith and Order Committee has been looking at the role of scripture within the URC from a range of perspectives. It has noted for example that bible study groups are not necessarily thriving in local churches; that there's a diffidence about entering into reflecting on scripture; that there are issues about different views of the authority of scripture; that the discussions on marriage have not necessarily been addressing this topic from a scriptural perspective. A concern has been expressed about the development of 'silos' of interpretation across the church and how to connect between these 'silos'. Five papers have so far been written by various ministers across the church and have been considered. Alan Spence is working on a paper that might be circulated more widely to aid the wider church in reflection on the role scripture plays in the church's life.
  5. **Theology of marriage**: The Faith and Order Committee has been responding to concerns raised re the need for theological and biblical work in this area. At present the approach taken is to build on a resource list of articles published on the URC website and to offer links to other websites where this matter is discussed. A particular piece of work is being looked at, and that is the idea of covenant in relation to marriage. The committee would be glad to receive more articles, from a variety of directions.
  6. **Theology of buildings**: work on this area is ongoing, in relation to the Buildings Forum.
  7. **Theology of Worship**: There has been an ongoing discussion as to where the URC wide responsibility for worship lies, after the ending of the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee. Tribute has been paid to the excellent daily devotions now available by email and the annual prayer handbook. There is a desire to share the wealth of URC specific worship and liturgical resources more widely, and to reflect on the theological undergirding of the URC's understanding of the nature of worship.
  8. **Holding a position/making a statement on behalf of the URC**: an interesting issue has been raised about the possibility of holding a position or making a statement on behalf of the URC and who takes responsibility for this.
  9. **Thanks**: Warm thanks are due to the secretary of the committee, Revd David Tatem, at the time of his forthcoming retirement, for his hard work in relation to this

committee, especially in drawing up agendas, writing the minutes and following up on the work of the committee; his ecumenical vision, his wide knowledge of the church, the thoughtful contributions he has made to the committee's discussions and the helpful way he has kept on top of the varied work of the committee. The committee looks forward to welcoming his successor, Revd Philip Brooks, when he starts in July.

### **Membership of the Committee** (with dates when member's terms finish)

Elizabeth Welch (Convener) 2017. Alan Spence (Convener-elect 2016-17 and Convener until 2023), Malachie Munyaneza 2018, Tim Meadows -2018, Anna Briggs -2020, Catherine Ball -2020, Samuel Silungwe 2023 (name going to May 2017 Mission Council), Secretary for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations: David Tatem finishing in July 2017 and Philip Brooks starting in July 2017; General Secretary; Moderators of General Assembly. Consultant: Stephen Orchard, C of E Observer: Jeremy Worthen

One further new member is being currently sought.

