

Paper W2

Terms of Reference for the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group

Methodist/URC Strategic Oversight Group





Paper W2

Methodist/URC Strategic Oversight Group: Terms of Reference for the Methodist- United Reformed Church Liaison Group

Basic Information

Contact Name and Details	David Tatem david.tatem@urc.org.uk
Action Required	Decision
Draft Resolutions	Mission Council approves the Terms of Reference for the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group contained in paper W2.
Alternative Options to Consider, if Any	

Summary of Content

Subject and Aims	To agree revised Terms of Reference for this Group.
Main Points	Give the Group a greater clarity of purpose. Establish a procedure for the renewal of its membership. Revise the Group's working method and reduce the normal number of its meetings from three to two per year. Clarify the Group's lines of responsibility and accountability.
Background Context and Relevant Documents (with function)	The adoption of Resolution 16 of the 2008 Assembly. The subsequent establishment of the Strategic Oversight Group (SOG) meant that the long-standing Liaison Group needed to review its terms of reference, in particular to establish the nature of its relationship with the SOG.
Consultations	Strategic Oversight Group

Summary of Impact

Financial	Probable reduction of costs due to fewer meetings
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group

Revised Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The first official Methodist/Congregational partnership scheme was inaugurated at Bridgnorth in Shropshire in 1962.¹ Over the last 50 years, there has been a significant growth in the number of partnerships between churches in our two traditions. These partnerships vary in size and balance and many also involve churches of other traditions. As well as partnerships between local churches there are also ecumenical or united areas which originally brought together the functions of Methodist circuits and URC districts.
- 1.2. The Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group began its life as ‘a small informal group’ in 1975 or 1976,² became the United Reformed/Methodist Committee in 1977,³ and subsequently took on its current name.
- 1.3. In the on-going relationship of our two Churches and particularly following the establishment of the Strategic Oversight Group, the time has come to renew the terms of reference of the Liaison Group.
- 1.4. It is notable that the Liaison Group’s agendas have had a cyclical pattern. In part, this may be due to a lack of corporate memory, inadequate communication, or inaccessibility of resources. It is also due to the developments both our Churches have made in certain key areas as they seek to respond to the changing context for the life and mission of the Church. It is hoped that these renewed terms of reference will help to respond to these challenges.

1 *Patterns of sharing and commitment between Methodist and United Reformed churches (Formerly Local co-operation between United Reformed and Methodist churches)*, 6th edition (1990), p.7. This ‘Letter of Advice’ had previously been published in 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, and 1986.

2 See the report of the Methodist Church’s Ecumenical Committee to the Conference in 1976 (Agenda, p.273): ‘Relations with the United Reformed Church have developed rapidly at local levels and it has been found necessary to have a small informal group, representing on the Methodist side the interests of the Ecumenical, Building Schemes, and Faith and Order Committees, in order to deal with particular issues. These have included the deployment of the ministry, payment of stipends and the increasing number of what are virtually Methodist/URC circuits rather than single shared churches. A joint meeting of Methodist Chairmen of Districts and URC Provincial Moderators immediately after the Conference is one of the results of this group’s work.’

3 See the report of the Methodist Church’s Ecumenical Committee to the Conference in 1978 (Agenda, p.191): ‘As requested by last year’s Conference, the Ecumenical Committee has set up a United Reformed/Methodist Committee; it has so far met three times and, among other things, has produced a printed version of the letter of advice to URC/Methodist schemes, discussed the development of URC/Methodist Circuits, considered the recognition of lay preachers within the two churches, and provided a form for ministers serving in joint churches.’

2. Task

- 2.1. The task of the Liaison Group is to focus on the local and intermediate dimensions of the relationship between the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church and, in relation to those contexts, to:
- explore the two Churches' understandings of their life and mission;
 - share perspectives and insights from each tradition;
 - address the issues affecting their practical co-operation, including theological and non-theological factors and those arising from policy and strategic decisions made by both Churches;
 - provide advice and information; and
 - develop appropriate web-based resources that can be printed on request.
- 2.2. The Liaison Group shall pay particular attention to the following:
- matters relating to local ecumenical partnerships involving both Churches;
 - matters relating to ecumenical/united areas;
 - the current accuracy of the information, advice, and other resources relevant to the responsibilities of the Liaison Group available on both Churches' websites;⁴ and
 - links to other websites providing information about both traditions, including the national ecumenical instruments (Action of Churches Together in Scotland, Churches Together in England, and Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales), Uniting and United Churches, and international dialogues.

3. Membership

- 3.1. The membership of the Liaison Group shall comprise:
- an equal number of persons from each Church who, together, have a broad range of relevant expertise and experience:
 - two co-chairs, one from each Church;
 - two co-secretaries, namely the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations of the URC and the Connexional Ecumenical Officer of the Methodist Church;
 - up to three other members from each Church;
 - and one representative of each of the following:
 - the Baptist Union of Great Britain;
 - the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England; and
 - Churches Together in England.

⁴ This includes information about the faith, worship, life, ministry, and mission of our two churches, training opportunities, the expectations, orientation, and welcome/induction of ministers, and the sharing and use of manses and other church buildings.

- 3.2. The United Reformed Church members shall be appointed by the General Assembly or Mission Council on the recommendation of the URC's Nominations Committee.
- 3.3. The Methodist Church members shall be appointed by the Methodist Council.
- 3.4. Both Churches shall review the membership every five years.
- 3.5. The Liaison Group may draw upon outside expertise as and when needed to comment on papers, contribute to discussions at meetings, and to offer guidance and advice.

4. **Method of working and relationship with other bodies**

- 4.1. The Liaison Group shall support the Methodist Church's Connexional Ecumenical Officer and the URC's Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and National Ecumenical Officers for Scotland and Wales, and through them their respective networks of district, synod, and denominational ecumenical officers.
- 4.2. The Liaison Group shall normally meet for two day-meetings each year and, between meetings, continue to fulfil its task through active networking and consultation.
- 4.3. The Liaison Group's agenda shall relate to its Task and items may be contributed by:
 - its co-chairs, co-secretaries, and other members;
 - the Strategic Oversight Group;
 - the Joint Property Strategy Group;
 - Methodist district, and URC synod and denominational ecumenical officers;
 - the Methodist Church's Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum; and
 - the URC's Synod Moderators' Meeting, Mission Committee, and Mission Council.
- 4.4. Agendas for and Minutes of each meeting shall be produced by the co-secretaries and, after approval by the co-chairs, distributed to the members and be available to the Strategic Oversight Group.
- 4.5. The Liaison Group shall relate with the Methodist-URC Liaison Committee in Wales.
- 4.6. The Liaison Group shall maintain an appropriate working relationship with the faith and order and law and polity bodies of the two Churches.
- 4.7. The Liaison Group shall identify those items that need to be reported or referred to the Strategic Oversight Group and the co-secretaries shall ensure good communication between the two groups.
- 4.8. The Liaison Group shall identify those items that need to be reported or referred to the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission⁵ and/or the Methodist Church's Ecumenical Stakeholders' Forum and the Methodist co-secretary shall ensure good communication with these bodies.
- 4.9. The Liaison Group shall identify those items that need to be reported or referred to the URC's Synod Moderators' Meeting, Mission Committee, and Mission Council, and the United Reformed co-secretary shall ensure good communication with these bodies.

⁵ The URC's Secretary for Ecumenical Relations is a member of MAPUM.

Resolution

Mission Council approves the Terms of Reference for the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group contained in paper W2.