



Nature,

This is a five session course designed for small groups of young people or adults in local churches; those preparing for church membership, those who are new to the United Reformed Church or for those who, for whatever reason, want to deepen their understanding of our tradition and ways

The Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order is the one we say together on some of our big public occasions and it provides a vivid snapshot of what we are about. Those with well-tuned historical antennae will be able to pick up all sorts of references to our sometimes turbulent past and to issues that are still divisive among us. For those who say these words, some commentary may be helpful, along with an invitation to enter the debates. When the deeper implications of these phrases are appreciated they become not empty words to be parroted, or the 'boring bit' at an induction service, but spine-tingling testimony to the kind of church we are or hope to be.

The sessions are based on the responsive form of the Statement, since this is the version with which most people will be familiar.



A faithful church

not only about this personal and individual relationship. It is also about being part of God's community in the Church and none of us can live well apart from the community of faith. We are like a vine which thrives on connection and which

We believe
God loving
calls us
each one
into the
community
of the church

withers when cut. We all benefit from the corporate life of the Church, as we hear the Bible read and interpreted, as we receive God's gifts to us through the sacraments

(of Baptism and Communion) Amen
the Church to be what it needs to be

- How would you describe the core of the Christian faith in writing 'the Gospel in five words' (Compare your answers!)
- What do you say to those who find 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' too male?
- Imagine that you have been on a desert island. What are the essential things about Christian faith that you find a way to do as soon as possible?
- Think further about the vine. How does it help you understand belonging to a community? What other biblical metaphors open up the collective life of the Church and why?
- Which do you think is the most important part of the Sunday service?
- Which things about the Church's faith do you think need re-examination for today?

Notice too the simplicity of this section - the Church needs just a few things to 'be church'. This is an important witness of our tradition.



With the whole Christian Church
the United Reformed Church believe
one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

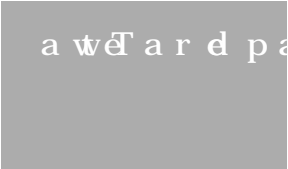
THE LIVING 'OD THE ONLY 'OD
EVER TO BE PRAISED

The life of faith to which we are
is the Spirit's gift,
continually received
through the Word, the Sacraments
and our Christian life together.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE GIFT
AND ANSWER THE CALL
GIVING THANKS FOR THE MEANS OF GRACE

Many people in contemporary Britain have no idea what the United Reformed Church is or what we stand for. Our title is often mis-spelt and misunderstood and, no doubt, there are many who assume we are some kind of 'sect' – the Unification Church? But it is possible to explain who we are! This is what the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order does

The Statement begins by saying loud and clear that we are part of the whole Christian Church, and we are glad to say that. We don't believe we are the only true Church or that we are the ones who have



got it right above all others
We are parts of the whole Church
– we are not the whole Church
ourselves. Saying that alone makes
us different from some other
Christian churches

We also say that we believe the
Christian faith is proclaimed
by the whole Church. Of course
there are differences of opinion
about some things between
different churches (and between
different Christians!), but it
remains true to say that whatever
our differences from some other
Christians on some secondary
matters, we believe and proclaim
in the United Reformed Church
the Christian faith, the faith

that the Apostles
proclaimed. We
might have to find
new ways of saying
it in our times, but
it is very important
to us that we stand
in faithful continuity with the whole Church.
This is what we mean when we say that we
believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
In what we call the doctrine of the Trinity,
we try to put into words what cannot be
adequately conveyed in language, the mystery
and wonder of God. You could describe the
Trinity as one way of talking about the Christian
faith as a kind of story. From the creation of all

things by God who is the source of all that is
made, to Jesus who was God's Son and who
taught us all that God is our loving Father, to
the hope and promise of the Holy Spirit who
is present and active in the world today and
in the days to come – in this story of our faith
we believe that we have encountered and still
encounter the reality of God who reaches out
to us in love. The Trinity is also a beautiful way
of expressing what Christians believe; that at
the very heart of the truth and reality of God
is a loving, personal relationship, – the three
persons of Father, Son and Spirit are a picture
of the perfect love of God which reaches out
towards us too and which invites us to join in.
We believe that the Trinity is the primary way
Christians have been given to talk about the
mystery of God's presence with us and purpose
for us. And this
we share with the
whole Church.

The second part
of the Statement
describes the
important things about our life together as
Christian people. We believe that we are called
to this life by the Holy Spirit and that it is a joy
and gift. 'Calling' is an important word in our
tradition, because we believe that God is not
an abstract idea or a distant force, but a living
presence with whom we can enter into a close
relationship. We believe that God lovingly
calls us, each one, into the community of the
church; that there's something personal and
very special about this. But being a Christian is

WE DO NOT ASSUME
THAT WE CAN READ
WITHOUT HAVING
TO WORK AN

WHAT ARE YOUR EARLIEST
OF READING THE "BIBLE",

YOU REALLY STRUGGLE WITH
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THE "BIBLE" HELP YOU

SO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS
FOR HOW

WHAT CAN BE SAID IN FAVOR
KEEPING THE "BIBLE" JUST AS
THE GORY BITS THE "SUBLIME"
POETRY



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THE HIGHEST AUTHORITY FOR WHAT IS GOD'S WORD IN THE BIBLE ALIVE FOR HIS PEOPLE TODAY THROUGH THE HELP OF THE (ONLY)

WE RESPOND TO THIS WORD WHOSE SERVANTS WE ARE WITH ALL GOD'S PEOPLE THROUGH THE YEARS

MANY HOMES AND CHURCHES FROM LOOKING BACK OVER AMAZINGLY QUICKLY "BIBLES ARE NOT ALWAYS BOOKS AND COMMENTARIES AND WEIGHT WE SEE WITH HIGHLY VALUED AMONGS REFORMED CHRISTIANS IN 16TH CENTURIES FROM WHICH HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THINGS COME ALTHOUGH THEY REMAINED THEIR WORDS WERE CONTROVERSIAL IN SOME COUNTRIES WE CAN READ WITHOUT HAVING TO WORK AND PRAY AS WE DO SO WITH THIS EMPHASIS ON "TRUST THAT IT AND SEEKING TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE FOR OUR OWN BELIEVING AND DOING THE WILL OF GOD THROUGH THE BIBLE WE LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD AS OUR SUPREME AUTHORITY IN A PUZZLING SITUATION FOR US AND WE WOULD TURN TO THE BIBLE FOR ANSWERS

4 THE BIBLE IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR EVERY KIND OF CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND FOR EVERY PARTICULAR CHURCH TRADITION. NOTICE THAT THIS WAS OUT OF A TIME WHEN THERE WAS GREAT INTEREST IN THE BIBLE THROUGHOUT EUROPE SINCE THE REFORMATION WHICH STRETCHED FROM THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY TO THE END OF THE SEVENTEENTH. SOME ARE READING AND AGAIN TO STUDY THE BIBLE TEXTS IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGES (GREEK AND HEBREW) AND TO MAKE NEW DISCOVERIES ABOUT THEM. SOME ALSO ARGUED AT A TIME WHEN LITERACY WAS EXPANDING THAT EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO READ THE BIBLE IN HIS OR HER OWN LANGUAGE AND SO TRANSLATIONS BEGAN TO BE MADE. SOME FEARED THAT IGNORANT PEOPLE READING THE BIBLE WOULD LEAD TO NO GOOD AND WANTED TO PROTECT THE BIBLE FROM BEING MISINTERPRETED. BUT OUR PARTICULAR FOREBARS WERE FIRMLY ON THE SIDE OF OPENING IT UP TO EVERYONE. AT THE SAME TIME THEY WANTED MINISTERS TO BE NECESSARILY STRAIGHTFORWARD THAT GOD SPEAKS TO THE THINGS OF GOD SO THAT THEY COULD HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE. EVEN AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRINTING PRESS PRINTED BIBLES IN LOCAL LANGUAGES BECAME AVAILABLE IN

WITNESS TO THE
FAITH GIVEN BY
THE APOSTLES
IN THE CREEDS



HOW CAN YOU IMAGINE OR
STATE THE FAITH
OR SAYING A CREED

HOW DOES YOUR LOCAL
CHURCH EXPRESS ITS FAITH



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IF IT WERE YOUR DECISION AND YOU WOULD YOU USE YOUR FREEDOM TO CHANGE THE LOCAL CHURCH TO THAT RESTRAINTS ARE THERE SHOULD THERE BE ON YOUR INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

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IS THERE ANYTHING THAT YOU CHURCH OR THE WHO DECIDE TO DECLARE OR DO THAT MEAN YOU WOULD PERSONALLY COMPELLED TO LEAVE

THINK FURTHER ABOUT THE OF FREEDOM OF AN ESTABLISHED FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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WE CONDUCT OUR LIFE TOGETHER ACCORDING TO THE "BASIS OF UNION IN WHICH WE GIVE EXPRESSION TO OUR FAITH IN FORMS WHICH WE BELIEVE CONTAIN THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE CHURCH'S LIFE BOTH CATHOLIC AND REFORMED "BUT WE AFFIRM OUR RIGHT AND READINESS IF THE NEED ARISES TO CHANGE THE "BASIS OF UNION AND TO MAKE NEW STATEMENTS OF FAITH IN EVER NEW OBEDIENCE TO THE LIVING CHRIST

OUR CRUCIFIED AND RISEN LORD WHO LEADS US IN OUR FAITH IN EVER NEW OBEDIENCE TO THE LIVING CHRIST

(GATHERED TOGETHER IN THE "BODY OF CHRIST THROUGH THE FREEDOM OF THE SPIRIT WE REJOICE IN THE DIVERSITY OF THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS AND UPHOLD THE RIGHTS OF PERSONAL CONVICTION & FOR THE SAKE OF UNITY AND FELLOWSHIP IT SHALL BE FOR THE CHURCH TO DECIDE WHO HURT OUR UNITY AND PEACE

WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE AND GROW TOGETHER IN THE PEACE OF CHRIST

WE BELIEVE THAT CHRIST GIVES HIS CHURCH A GOVERNMENT DISTINCT FROM THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE IN THE THINGS THAT AFFECT OBEDIENCE TO GOD THE CHURCH IS NOT SUBORDINATE TO THE STATE BUT MUST SERVE THE LORD JESUS CHRIST ITS ONLY RULER AND HEAD CIVIL AUTHORITIES ARE CALLED TO SERVE GOD'S WILL OF JUSTICE AND PEACE AND TO RESPECT THE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE AND BELIEF

WHILE WE OURSELVES ARE SERVANTS IN THE WORLD AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S ETERNAL KINGDOM

9 YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED THE PART TO CHANGE THE WAY WE SECTION WHERE WE TALK OF THE #CATHOLIC AND REFORMED WAYS OF LIVING BEING @ BOTH #CATHOLIC AND REFORMED FROM THE RIGHTS OF WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN IN EUROPE AND THE RIGHT THAT THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES OF THE STATE "OTHER WHOLE CATHOLIC CHURCH "THE CATHOLIC OF THE STATE "OTHER CHURCH IS ALL THOSE IN HEAVEN AND NONE EXCEPT FROM WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED BY THE (CITY OF SPIRIT) BE CHRIST'S FRIENDS AND FOLLOWERS SO THE CHURCH HAS CONGREGATIONS TO WHICH WE ALL BELONG THE WHOLE CHURCH IN MICROCHURCHES WE ARE RECEIVED INTO MEMBERSHIP WITH CONGREGATION WE ARE RECEIVED AS MEMBERS WE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH IN ONE OF THESE DOCTRINES THROUGH SOME EXPRESSIONS THE REFORMED ARE NOT TO BE DECEIVED TITLE REFERS TO OUR PARTICULAR BELIEFS UP TO PERIOD CALLED THE REFORMATION AND THE IMPORTANCE OUR LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITIES WE BELONG TO JOHN CALVIN'S CHURCH IN THE REFORMATION YEARS OF THE TO CALL THEMSELVES REFORMED REMEMBERING THAT WE COME FROM COMPELLING EVERYONE WHO NEVER WANTED TO SET UP A REFORMED REFORMED CHURCH BUT WHO WAS IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REFORM THE WHOLE CATHOLIC CONSCIENCE HAS MIGHT SAY THAT THE REFORMED DON'T ONLY THERE ARE THOSE WHO WANT TO BE ANYTHING BUT GOD BUT HOW WE MAKE MUCH NOISE CHRISTIANS / OF COURSE WE ALWAYS BELIEVE THAT IT PROVES REFORMATION IS A CONTINUAL PROCESS AND IT STANDS UP AND WE DO NOT REACH A POINT OF BEING REFORMED PERHAPS THOSE WHO CALL US TO BE CAREFUL NOT TO REFORM THE CHURCH MAKE A GOOD STORY THROUGH RESPECT THEIR MISTAKE 'GOD'S SPIRIT IS CONTINUALLY WORKING WHAT IT MEANS REACHING OUT TO CHANGE US) AND REMAINING LIZABETH MORE LIKE CHRIST NUMBER AMONG OUR PREDECESSORS FOR BELIEVING THAT IT WAS NOT BECAUSE OF OUR PARTICULAR MARCH OR PARLIAMENT TO THROUGH OUR HISTORY THE PRIVATE WORSHIP OR THE CHURCH HAS THINGS TO SAY ABOUT THE CHURCH OF % WE SAY BOLDLY THAT WE ARE READY TO TAKE OUR PART SO UP THE FREEDOM TO STATE TO BE NEARLY WIPED OUT

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4 THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A VERY DIVERSE COMMUNITY AND THERE HAVE BEEN DEBATES ARGUMENTS AND DIVISIONS SINCE THE BEGINNING YOU ONLY HAVE TO READ THE OLD TESTAMENT TO SEE THAT THERE NEVER WAS A GOLDEN AGE WHEN PERFECT PEACE REIGNED BETWEEN CHRISTIANS (HOWEVER SOME MAJOR DIVISIONS IN THE CHURCH CAUSED GREAT PAIN AND DAMAGE NOT ONLY TO THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH BUT TO ITS VERY LIFE. EARLY IN THE END OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM THE CHURCH SEPARATED INTO EAST AND WEST NOT QUITE BUT ALMOST EQUIVALENT TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH. THE REFORMATION PERIOD LED TO

OD ALWAYS TO BRING THE WHOLE CREATION INTO A HARMONIOUS AND COURTEOUS PEACE. THIS IS WHY THE UNITED PART OF OUR CHURCH IS ALSO IMPORTANT AND SIGNIFICANT WE CAN CELEBRATE COMMITTED TO BUILDING UN AND THEN IN AND THOSE SEPARATED HAVE COME INTO UNION THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HAS AS PART OF ITS VERY REASON FOR BEING A GIVING OF ITSELF IN PRAYER AND WORK FOR THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH WE RECOGNISE THAT THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH MAY NOT COME ABOUT IN THE WAY WE FIRST ENVISAGED THROUGH NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL UNION BUT WE REMAIN COMMITTED TO SEEKING WAYS TO OPEN AND EXPRESS THE UNITY WHICH

THE S) IT MAY BE THAT V VOCATION IN THIS THOUGH TO WORK OUT HOW TO LIVE REFORMED CHURCH PRAYER CHURCH IS VERY MUCH AT T MEANS FOR US TO BE THE C WHICH IS MAKING IT HARD T WITH SO MUCH DIFFERENC COMMITTED TO BUILDING UN SEPARATED HAVE COME INTO UNION THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH HAS AS PART OF ITS VERY REASON FOR BEING A GIVING OF ITSELF IN PRAYER AND WORK FOR THE VISIBLE UNITY OF THE CHURCH WE RECOGNISE THAT THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH MAY NOT COME ABOUT IN THE WAY WE FIRST ENVISAGED THROUGH NATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL UNION BUT WE REMAIN COMMITTED TO SEEKING WAYS TO OPEN AND EXPRESS THE UNITY WHICH