

International relations

Unite Faith Workers Branch also works on an international level. As a union we have formed links with trade unions specialising in matters appertaining to ministers of religion across the globe, most notably in Canada and across Europe, but have also had links with unions in the USA and Australia. From these relationships we have come to a better understanding of the social dialogue and the roles of the union in representing its members from various countries, and have drawn on best practice from these, adjusting our modus operandi accordingly.

We have also built links with other nations, most notably in Africa, South America and with the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and are supporting trade unionists who face daily challenges in these nations.

For more information

Unite, as a trade union, not only builds on its history, but also on the experience of today's members. The more members we have, the more we can build on the diversity of the membership, as well as the unity that a trade union can bring.

We encourage all our members to build the union, to support one another and to make as wide a difference as possible. With our aim to work with the support of faith organisations, we can make a huge difference to the working environment of all our members and beyond.

Wider services

As a large organisation, Unite can offer other services which can be of benefit to members. This can include legal support on a range of matters, including a free will writing service, advice on all matters relating to your place of work, health and safety, learning and development as well as general employment matters, and through its engagement with a range of suppliers, can provide cheaper insurance schemes which can be of benefit to members and their families.

As a union we are involved in campaigns for a better society and a better world. Many of our members have actively involved themselves in the wider campaigning work of Unite to support other workers both at home and abroad and make representation to those in the political systems.



For more information
contact Unite:

Faith Workers Helpline **0845 108 2575**
or e-mail: **faithworkers@unitetheunion.com**

**Faith Workers Branch, Unite the Union,
35 King Street, London WC2E 8JG**

Join online at **www.unitetheunion.com**



UNITE FAITH WORKERS BRANCH

Introduction

As Unite Faith Workers Branch has continued to grow, it has also built professional and specialist services for its members. At a time where many faith bodies and organisations are reviewing their internal procedures, Unite wants to ensure that there is greater transparency and clearer processes to enable issues to be raised and addressed fairly. Unite is also advising and representing more of our members, individually and collectively, over a range of issues.

With so much change, the Faith Workers Branch has had an opportunity to reflect and review the support and services it brings to members. The Branch believes that it is important to clearly set out its objectives and commitments to its members and to the faith bodies and organisations it interacts with. In so doing, Unite recognises the loyalty and commitment that its members have to their faith bodies, and wants these, in return to demonstrate their commitment to its ministers and employees through raising the bar as to the way that they care and support those in ministry, as well as creating an environment of dignity and respect.



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Our values

- **Fairness and dignity at work.**
- **Equality of treatment and opportunity.**
- **Commitment to working for proper recognition and support for all faith workers.**

Supporting Members Individually

The vast majority of the work of the Faith Workers Branch involves providing advice, support and representation for our members. Unite has therefore created a package of specialist support that all of our members can draw on should they need to.

Unite has devised high quality training for all of our representatives dealing with issues relating to faith bodies and related organisations. Some have further specialised in issues appertaining to a particular area like health and safety or denominational issues. The majority of our representatives are ministers of religion, although a few are staff. All representatives are accredited by the union.

We advise our members to contact us as soon as issues start to emerge, since early intervention usually prevents escalation, and can bring about a far more satisfactory outcome for all concerned.

We ask our members to call the Faith Workers Helpline on 0845 108 2575 as their first port of call. The helpline is managed by one of our representatives, who is equipped to provide front line advice, however s/he will then quickly pass on the case to a representative who will then support the member throughout the case. The vast majority of cases are dealt with at this level. The support a member requires from a representative will vary according to the member concerned and their needs, as well as the situation. The support goes far beyond that of just a representative, but is also pastoral in nature, supporting the holistic needs of the member. A representative will stand by their member through the thick and thin, which at times, when someone can feel at their most vulnerable, is so essential.

Should matters escalate the union will involve one of its Regional Officers who work for the union, and on occasions the National Officer will also become involved in a case.

Sometimes the union will draw on the advice of its solicitors. For matters appertaining to ministers of religion, we engage a specialist legal service. Whilst we never want to take cases through the tribunal system, occasionally this has proved a necessary last resort, and it is always helpful to know that such support is available should this be required.

Working with Faith Bodies/Organisations

Unite wants to see faith bodies excel in all they do, respecting their culture and *raison d'être*. As the UK and Ireland's largest trade union, stretching across the economy as well as a specialist union for all Faith Workers, Unite recognises that there are many areas of employment policy and practice that need to be updated and improved within faith organisations. It is our ambition that faith organisations bring about change and become recognised for excellence in the way they care for and regard their staff and ministers.

Unite aims to work with, not against, faith bodies in as close a partnership as is possible, whilst maintaining our independence. Where we are able to work this way with other employers, often in the not for profit sector, we know that there is a win – win for all. However partnership and social dialogue can only be built where both faith body and union are willing to engage in this way. Unite is pleased that this way of working is developing in some denominations and hopes that this will deepen in time as trust is built and understandings grow.

Trade unions have a lot of experience that they can bring to faith bodies about the way that they “employ” their ministers and staff and manage them thereafter.

To ensure that Unite is as representative as it can be of those working for different faith bodies, we have restructured our membership into denominational strands so that each

denomination is represented by those working for that denomination. We have also built mechanisms by which we can now consult with our members as to their aspirations for their denomination. Further we have provided training for our representatives in collective representation, and will do so on an on-going basis.

Through direct communication with our members, through our newsletter and through reflecting on cases, Unite representatives identify issues concerning their members, and then raise these with their correlating faith body. It is our hope that we are not there for just information, but consultation and social dialogue, as our insights can really benefit all. Likewise, Unite asks that denominations seek out the union's views on developments that they are considering. It is always best to be involved in these from an early stage.

Through on-going consultations and dialogue, we aspire for advances to be made in all areas of concern. The strength of the union in these discussions is that we are independent, and people are often free to raise issues in this environment. We can also draw on other experiences from across thousands of organisations and elsewhere in the economy, highlighting the costs and benefits of particular options. In addition, Unite can also bring objectivity into the dynamics, due to its independence, in a way that no internal organisation can, yet with members working from those organisations and fully committed to them.

Campaigning for a Better Future

Unite is a campaigning union, a union that wants tomorrow to be better than today for all our member's experience of work. This need not be a negative agenda, but a very positive one.

Unite aspires for all our members to have a good experience of work on a daily basis, however with the twists and turns of life, and those of others, things can sometimes go wrong, and on occasions, very wrong indeed. It is for this reason that the union wants to ensure that faith bodies take responsibility for each of their ministers and members of staff in a way that can deal with issues expediently and effectively.

Many ministers are tired from working too many hours, stressed from having unrealistic expectations placed on them and are close to burn out. Others have experienced bullying, or have had to live or work in unsafe environments. Unite wants faith bodies to provide better policies for their ministers with regards to health and safety, which clearly identify the appropriate body having a duty of care, thus taking responsibility for its ministers.

In other nations, it is common that secular labour law is applied to ministers of religion in this area. We believe that this would also be appropriate in the UK and Ireland since this legislation has been devised over many years to protect individuals. We frequently hear from members who are close to burn out, bullied, or stressed. Good health and safety policies, with people empowered to act when issues occur will show the faith body really taking care of its ministers. Unite believes that the faith body has a moral duty to do this, if not a legal duty, and will work to ensure that all organisations act appropriately in these areas.

Often our members report that they believe that their case has been prejudiced. Due to this, we believe that there needs to be an independent stage of restitution. On occasions, members make unwise choices, often resulting from other mitigating circumstances, which leads them into a disciplinary situation, others are subject to the unwise choices of other making them vulnerable and having to pursue the route of a grievance. Unite, again, believes that secular law, whilst still in development, does provide best practice in achieving independent restitution in cases. However we also recognise that for any case to have to draw on this as an end stage does demonstrate a sorrowful failing.



Unite has always been a keen advocate of alternative dispute resolutions. The use of mediation and conciliation can lead to far more satisfactory resolutions, and can enable all parties to take their responsibility in a particular situation, and also to provide the solution to the situation. The outcome may require sanction or training, however can still restore relationships in a business that is relationally focussed.

Unite's aim is for churches, synagogues, mosques and temples to provide the best environment for their ministers to flourish. Providing such a culture will enable each faith body to achieve so much more, as well as support those we believe it should care for.