

# Book of **Reports**

Southport Convention Centre  
8 to 11 July 2016



*The*  
**United**  
**Reformed**  
**Church**

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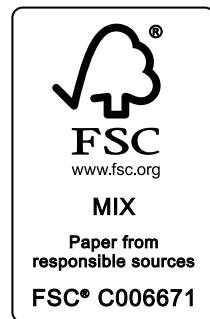
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Southport 2016



Dear friends,

Welcome to General Assembly 2016. Welcome to Southport, where members of Mersey Synod will host us. Welcome to a special opportunity to take responsibility as Church, for the life of the Church.

If you are coming to Assembly, you have a vital role. There we shall listen, reflect, speak and decide as trusted representatives of the URC's congregations, synods and people. If you are observing Assembly from afar, those of us who will be at Southport will value your interest and ask for your prayers.

Assembly is always important. There the Church gathers, does business, seeks insight from God and from one another, and scatters to our regular places of worship and service with fresh energy and commitment to faithfulness and discipleship.

Yet within that pattern of gathering and scattering, extending across the decades, each meeting of Assembly has a formative and creative role of its own. So this year's discussing, discerning and deciding has a distinctive agenda, responding to the issues of the moment, and taking church life forward to a new stage. At Southport we shall think about leadership and learning in our congregations, about our environmental responsibility, about Christians who suffer persecution in various parts of the world, about our Reformed story and values, and about the centenary of the First World War.

One current issue cannot be covered in the *Book of Reports*: at the time when we meet the EU referendum result will be fresh. For some it will be disappointing. It may come as a surprise to many. It may test our public life in quite deep ways. The URC has no agreed position on the main issue, of leave or remain. Yet our people will seek to vote with conscience and wide concern, and when the voting is done, we shall aim to be a calm and supportive presence among our neighbours.

Meanwhile, there is witness to offer for Jesus, in the regular work of our local churches. There is care to give, in a world of need. There is business to prepare for Assembly. And for those who will meet at Southport, there is preparation of ourselves, through prayer, reading and reflection. I look forward warmly to seeing many of you in July, and I rejoice to work with all of you, in the cause of the Gospel, in these days and years.

Yours sincerely,

John Proctor  
General Secretary



## Framework for Mission

# ten statements of our mission purpose

### **Statement 1: Spirituality and prayer**

We will grow in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Statement 2: Identity**

The URC will be a Church where every local congregation will be able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

### **Statement 3: Christian Ecumenical Partnerships**

We will be more confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the Church.

### **Statement 4: Community partnerships**

We will be a Church that is more active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

### **Statement 5: Hospitality and diversity**

We will be a Church committed to becoming even more welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

### **Statement 6: Evangelism**

We will be more confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

### **Statement 7: Church growth**

We will be a growing Church with an increasing membership.

### **Statement 8: Global partnerships**

We will be a Church that is an active partner in God's global mission with other Churches around the world.

### **Statement 9: Justice and peace**

We will be a Church committed to peacemaking and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

### **Statement 10: The integrity of creation**

We will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.



# Mission Council:

## General report 2014 to 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information; papers with resolutions follow as appendices
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None in the general report</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To report on the work of Mission Council in the last two years
<b>Main points</b>	There are many. Those that require Assembly decision are listed in the various appendices
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council papers from November 2014, May and November 2015 and March 2016, available on the URC website
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The committees and synods of the Church

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	These are various, and are most obvious in paras 10-12, re Church House
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The Methodist Church regularly sends a representative to Mission Council, who comments helpfully on our business; the Church of England has not recently taken up its seat on Mission Council.

# Report on the work of Mission Council, 2014 to 2016

## Introduction

1. The brief for Mission Council directs it to oversee, prepare and sift business between meetings of Assembly. This often involves dealing with detail and practicalities, so that a host of specific matters may progress without undue delay. It also requires attention to overview and vision, so that the presentation of business at Assembly may enable Assembly 'to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church'. Mission Council seeks to be alert to the needs, concerns, opportunities and hopes of the whole body of the URC, and this realism is helped by the fact that synod representatives make up most of its membership. It tries to keep a proper focus on the Church's main concerns, so that all our work will further the mission of the gospel.
2. Mission Council meets in the autumn and the spring, for 48 hours on each occasion, and thus has met four times since the last main meeting of General Assembly.

## Major projects that Assembly will consider

3. A number of major projects and tasks have been considered at Mission Council, often more than once as work evolved from one stage to another. Several of these pieces of work are included as items on the Assembly agenda, so need just a mention here rather than lengthy exposition. They all, however, claimed time and care in Mission Council, which was concerned to bring them to Assembly in the best possible shape.
4. Assembly 2014 launched a wide consultation on the marriage of same-sex couples. Mission Council reviewed the consultation's results, and prepared resolutions for an additional Assembly meeting at Birmingham in June 2015. This matter has since been considered by synods, and is now brought back to Assembly for possible decision.
5. A discussion that started in Mission Council in 2012, in response to an initiative from the Council for World Mission, has moved forward with energy and purpose in the last year, as proposals emerged for 'Walking the Way', with a focus on Missional Discipleship. An account of this work, its vision and its progress, is appended to this Mission Council report (pages 11-14).
6. The faith and order committee has used Mission Council as a sounding board for its work on authorised elders, on 'What is the Spirit saying to the Church?' and on church membership, now leading to proposals for 'The Wider Fold'. All of these matters emerged, in one way or another, from the work of the 2014 Assembly.
7. Mission committee brought two major items for Mission Council to discuss in a preliminary way and these now come forward to Assembly: an environmental policy, and a resolution on nuclear weapons. For both of these issues, the wide forum of an Assembly is the best place for the Church to develop its opinions and policies.
8. The work of the safeguarding advisory group has come into greater prominence in the last year or so, through the preparation and publication of an up-to-date 'Good Practice' resource for the Church, and through the planning and initiation of a Past Cases Review. A paper on this is appended to this Mission Council report (pages 15-17)
9. The task group reviewing the Church's engagement with people aged 20-40 was granted more time, in order to learn as much as possible from parallel work being done by other churches. It will now report to the 2018 General Assembly.

## United Reformed Church House, London

10. The URC Trust, which is the legal custodian of the Church's material and financial assets, has consulted Mission Council several times about our central office building in London. Initial thoughts of moving out of London or away from Tavistock Place have been set aside, and the Church is now committed to staying where it is. The idea of building and marketing two floors of flats on the roof did not find favour; it would have been risky and complicated, and might have compromised our freehold. However, the building ought to be made more accessible and more flexible; if it can be more compactly used, part of it may earn us money through rental; there is scope to make it more efficient environmentally; and we ought to develop our facility to host 'virtual meetings', thus enabling some of the Church's committee work to be quicker, less cumbersome and more open to people who cannot commit long hours to travel.

11. In March 2016 Mission Council authorised the Trust to take up a quote from a named contractor on a design-and-build contract, and noted that the finance committee was able to release £2.5 million from the URC's reserves to fund the work. Questions were rightly asked about how this proposal would be heard in local churches. Several answers could be given: that the work done by staff in Church House is primarily for local churches; that the refurbishment is the first work of its kind for decades, and is likely to last for decades; that the cost will be taken from accumulated reserves rather than from the Church's annual giving; and – a point made by the Treasurer – that the local is not being neglected. Our church buildings fund, held within the central finances of the Church, has money in hand for which congregations may apply.

12. The Trust and Mission Council believe this refurbishment work is necessary, timely and hopeful. Our Church does not live through the well-being of its central office; but the central office contributes actively and consistently to the well-being of the Church, and this building work will enable it to do so with fresh vigour and purpose. We are grateful to our central staff for the quality and commitment of their work for the Church, and for their readiness to bear a period of disruption and dislocation in the coming months while the building is renewed.

## Governing the United Reformed Church

13. A continuing concern for Mission Council, informed in recent years by the work of the medium term strategy group, is the cost of the Church's governance. Our 2012 General Assembly conducted a careful review of the Church's budget, and limited the Assembly line to £100k per annum; but we already find it difficult to keep to that limit, and synods tell us that neither they nor their representatives ought to be asked to pay the difference. Further, there is some desire to revert to an annual Assembly, so that Mission Council was asked to think with care about whether we could save money on the Church's network of committees with a view to funding this. Mission Council has gone on to talk about the future character of General Assembly, and some contours of this discussion are now emerging more clearly.

14. As a conciliar church, we welcome the chance to meet regularly; indeed the Spirit often uses these settings to speak through us and to us. In order to engage properly with local church concerns, we value wide involvement. We believe the Gospel deserves excellence, so we want our councils and meetings to be professional in style and tone. And so we find it hard to make choices that would trim any one of these ideals. If only Assembly could be frequent, large, careful, inspiring, well-staged and cheap! So Mission Council does not bring precise recommendations, yet. It has, however, discovered that savings on committee work could not be large and quick, unless the work committees do were to change radically; there is not at present an obvious vision for this. However, Mission Council has recently asked the Assembly arrangements committee to advise this year's Assembly whether or not a 72-hour Assembly could expect to run within budget in 2018. Any decisions we take in Southport about our meeting in 2018 ought to be realistic.

## People, places and posts

15. Mission Council has acted for General Assembly in the appointment and tenure of several Synod Moderators. Two pieces of tidying up clarified that Andrew Prasad's second term in Thames North would run to February 2021, and Jacky Embrey's initial tenure in Mersey to August 2021. Initial seven-year terms, from September 2015, were agreed for Steve Faber in West Midlands, where Roy Lowes had retired, and for Andrew Mills in the North West, after Richard Church moved to London; also for David Pickering in the National Synod of Scotland from July 2016, following the retirement of John Humphreys. Lis Mullen's term in Northern was extended to July 2016, when she will retire. It is hoped that this year's Assembly will be able to appoint her successor.

16. Mission Council acted for General Assembly in approving new regulations for conducting the tenure review of Synod Moderators (Paper J2, November 2014).

17. Recognising that people are working longer in many occupations and that UK legislation has changed in recent years to enable people to work without fear of age discrimination, Mission Council acted on behalf of the General Assembly to remove the age-related entry qualifications with regard to non-stipendiary ministry.

18. Mission Council acted for General Assembly in overseeing several appointments to Assembly-appointed posts in our central office. In August 2014 Gill Nichol was confirmed as our Head of Communications, after already acting in that role for some months. Steve Summers took on all the work of the CRCW Development post from January 2015, having previously job-shared with Suzanne Adofo. Richard Church took post as Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) in May 2015, this being a new job, in its present form. After Jane Rowell moved on from our World Church post, Michael Jagessar accepted a new remit as Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries from November 2015, and Grace Pengelly became our Secretary for Church and Society in January 2016, succeeding Andrew Bradstock.

19. One local church closure was overlooked at the 2014 General Assembly – at Chapel End in the West Midlands. Mission Council acted for General Assembly in noting this congregation's closure, with praise to God for its many years of worship and witness.

20. Mission Council acted for General Assembly in assigning the responsibility of General Assembly representative for the disciplinary process to the DGS (Discipleship) from May 2015; prior to that date this duty was carried by David Thompson.

21. Mission Council was pleased to hear from the nominations committee that they had identified a suitable candidate to be the Church's next Treasurer, and commends Mr Ian Hardie to Assembly. A short resolution paper on this is appended to this Mission Council report (pages 18-19).

## Rules and procedures

22. Mission Council noted an urgent need to amend the Standing Orders that apply to Mission Council and General Assembly, as changes that had been approved at Mission Council in 2013 were in the event not made at Assembly in 2014. The new Standing Orders have now been adopted, and are printed in the Assembly reports.

23. In particular a new Standing Order 12, about closed sessions of Assembly, was added in March 2016. At that time two additions were made to the Rules of Procedure of the Church, as outlined in Paper M2 of March 2016. These changes carried forward the work of the Peel Commission, which had reported to Mission Council in 2013, and the full Rules of Procedure are now up-to-date on the Church website:

[www.urc.org.uk/images/the\\_manual/C-Rules-of-Procedure-March-2016-A4.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/C-Rules-of-Procedure-March-2016-A4.pdf)

24. Mission Council resolved on behalf of General Assembly that the Church would hold the members of the law and polity advisory group (including the legal adviser, except when he personally endorses an opinion as his professional advice) indemnified against liability for any error or omission in the discharge of their functions relating to the law of any territory.

25. New rules and guidelines have been set out for the life and work of URC Youth, and Mission Council, in approving these, determined that all references to 'FURY' in the Structure of the Church, and in any other constitutional documents, should now be deemed to refer to 'URC Youth'.

26. Postal voting: Because meetings and councils occasionally seek guidance on this matter, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, affirmed the long standing practice of the United Reformed Church and its predecessor churches, that postal and/or proxy votes are not permitted in the councils of the church on business which is subject to discussion, unless otherwise provided for in Structure, the Rules of Procedure, the URC Act, or Local Church constitutions. This is because we believe such meetings are to seek the will of God, and everyone present is open to the possibility of changing their mind in openness to the Holy Spirit until a decision is made. The views of absent members may be made known to those present before any decision is made, but only those present should make a decision.

27. In March 2016, Mission Council considered a paper from the law and polity advisory group about appeals, reference and constitutional review between councils of the Church, and a resolution about this is appended to the Mission Council report (pages 20-23).

28. On the recommendation of the MIND advisory group, (which oversees the ministerial incapacity and discipline procedures) and acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approved in May 2015 changes to the disciplinary process, with immediate effect. These have already been incorporated into the online version of the process. For the full process, and the changes, see respectively: [www.urc.org.uk/images/the\\_manual/O-Disciplinary-Process-June-2015.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/O-Disciplinary-Process-June-2015.pdf)  
[www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/May-2015/T1\\_-\\_Shared\\_Synod\\_Panels.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/May-2015/T1_-_Shared_Synod_Panels.pdf)

29. On the recommendation of the MIND Advisory Group, and acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approved in March 2016 changes to the Incapacity Procedure, with immediate effect. These have already been incorporated into the online version. For the full Procedure, and the changes, see respectively: [www.urc.org.uk/images/the\\_manual/Incapacity\\_Procedure\\_from\\_March\\_2016.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/Incapacity_Procedure_from_March_2016.pdf)  
[www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2016/T1-MIND-Report-March-2016.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2016/T1-MIND-Report-March-2016.pdf)

## Resolutions referred to synods

30. An appendix to this report outlines four resolutions that were referred to synods in 2015 (pages 25-34). Much detail is given there.

## International partnership

31. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council endorsed in May 2015 a Memorandum of Understanding between the United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of Korea. This is intended to nurture contact and collaboration between the two Churches, in both of our lands, and Mission Council encouraged committees, synods and local churches to pursue in practical ways the new possibilities it sets before us. A text of the memorandum is appended to this report (pages 35-37).

## Finance and practicalities

32. Mission Council adopted, on behalf of General Assembly, the Church's budgets for 2015 and for 2016.

33. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council agreed a recommendation of the mission committee that the percentages for allocating income from Commitment for Life be changed to 75% for Christian Aid, 5% for Global Justice Now (formerly World Development Movement) and 20% for administration, grants, and programme expenses, with effect from 1 January 2015.

34. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agreed in November 2014 that a new Trust Deed and Rules for the United Reformed Church Ministers pension fund be signed on behalf of the Church by the Moderator and Clerk of Assembly. Mission Council also delegated certain actions in connection with the fund, and adopted arrangements for early leavers. Papers are at the following address: [www.urc.org.uk/about-mission-council/65-general/mission-council/1528-november-2014.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/about-mission-council/65-general/mission-council/1528-november-2014.html)

Paper G2 outlines the matter. More technical papers about the pension fund are listed at the foot of the page, just below the list of Mission Council papers for that month.

35. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approved in May 2015 revised Terms of Reference for the United Reformed Church investment committee, which are appended to this report (pages 38-39).

36. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council added in November 2015 an appendix relating to climate change to the 2010 statement of principles for the use of the United Reformed Church in making investment decisions. An up-to-date general summary of our Church's guidelines for investors, based on a number of policy statements that we have made in recent years, is appended to this report (page 40).

37. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council instructed the Assembly arrangements committee to book all accommodation for future Assemblies.

38. Mission Council has authorised the Mission Committee to apply for Mission Support Programme funding from CWM, to extend our Fresh Expressions post from half-time to full-time, and to launch the Walking the Way project.

39. Following an incomplete discussion at Cardiff about our Education and Learning budget, Mission Council in November 2014 agreed a new system for setting student grants and offered additional budget for three years, in order to support our ministerial students properly.

40. A new Lobbying Act came into effect before the 2015 General Election. Eventually, in consultation with JPIT partners, the URC decided not to register.

## Collaborations

41. Mission Council has been aware of two significant pieces of shared work in the Church, although has not sought formal report on either in these last two years.

42. The group of senior staff at Church House has been complete since May 2015, with three Deputy General Secretaries managing different sides of our central work, and reporting regularly to the General Secretary. This team has gelled well, and staff are now more closely overseen and supported than was possible before.

43. Our five Northerly Synods (Scotland, Northern, Yorkshire, North Western and Mersey) have continued bi-annual conversations, in order to learn from each other's experience and expertise in particular areas of work, and all have gained wisdom and encouragement from this contact.

# Mission Council: Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today

**A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples  
within the United Reformed Church**

## Basic Information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>1. General Assembly welcomes the work of the Walking the Way steering group and commends it to the wider Church.</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	A brief introduction to the development of this initiative within the URC and an update on its progress
<b>Main points</b>	Development of joint initiative of the education and learning and mission committees
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council November 2015 paper M1 and M2 Mission Council March 2016 paper M1
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	A wide range of groups and networks in the URC, synod moderators, the ministries committee, the faith and order committee, URC youth, ecumenical colleagues

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Financial resources will be required for the appointment of a project co-ordinator and the production of resources. Applications will be made to the CWM Mission programme support fund and to the URC legacy fund. Some costs can be met from existing mission and education and learning budgets, however some additional budget provision will be needed
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Increased co-operation with Methodist colleagues.

# Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today

## A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church.

1. A brief account of the process which has led to the emergence of this emphasis is given within the mission committee report. This report is accordingly intended to convey something of the consultation and planning which has flowed from that process, marking as it does partnership working across many Assembly committees.

2. Members of General Assembly may recall as children being given a thousand piece jigsaw and looking with bewilderment at all the scattered pieces, wondering what sense to make of it all. However, there comes the moment when two or more parts interlock and a part of the picture begins to emerge. It is a very encouraging moment, even though the overall picture is so wide reaching that there still seems so much we do not yet see.

3. Members of the missional discipleship task group established by the mission committee and the education and learning committee and authorised by Mission Council in November 2015 are aware of the scale of the task but greatly encouraged by the interlocking nature of many of the agendas of the United Reformed Church at the moment.

4. We are inspired by a vision of each member of the United Reformed Church recapturing a sense of being called by Jesus to be a follower of the Way and inspiring others to follow in his footsteps. One writer has defined discipleship as being ‘apprenticed to Jesus through community.’

5. That is the big picture to which the Church is called. What follows are the steps along the way and some of the ‘jigsaw pieces’ which we have found to fit together.

### The process

6. The mission committee had been exercised over the question of how a culture of confident faith sharing could be encouraged within the denomination. This culminated in a discipleship day in April 2015 attended by a wide range of people from across the denomination. The conclusion of the consultation was that developing discipleship with a view to building confidence in evangelism was something that the URC should pursue. However it was noted that this emphasis could not be achieved by developing another programme, but should work with local churches to encourage a change of culture and the formation of habits of faithfulness which could sustain existing congregants and newcomers on their journey of faithfulness.

7. The education and learning committee had also been drawn in their work to addressing the question of how their work could contribute towards an integrated system of whole life discipleship, open to all, anchored in the Christian revelation and building up the Church. Much of this thinking was prompted by a review of Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) which had originally been brought into the Church as a means by which individuals and communities throughout the church could learn and be refreshed.

8. It became clear that these two separate initiatives belonged together and a missional discipleship task group was formed comprising the Revd Dr Graham Adams, the Revd Peter Ball, the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, the Revd Tracey Lewis, the Revd

Kathryn Price, the Revd Fiona Thomas and the Revd Dr Phil Wall. The group was convened jointly by Ms Francis Brienen and the Revd Richard Church. This group, together with two additional members nominated by the two Assembly committees, has now been asked by the March 2016 Mission Council to carry the work forward as the Walking the Way steering group.

## The work so far

9. In its work the group has been at pains to understand what the current patterns of discipleship are within the Church. During the autumn of 2015 responses to a questionnaire which was circulated across a representative sample of the URC revealed that spiritual formation, worship, fellowship and community engagement are key components in discipleship growth. The responses indicated that faith formation rested mainly, if not exclusively, on Sunday mornings. The survey also revealed that in order to build people up in their discipleship small groups, mentoring and coaching, as well as providing a variety of accessible materials can play a crucial part.

10. In addition we have consulted with the Head of Children's and Youth Work Development, the children's and youth work committee, the Secretary for Ministries and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries. Conversations have been held with the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity, Shoreline Consultancy, the Fresh Expressions team through Mike Moynagh, and Andrew Roberts of the Birmingham Methodist Circuit concerning his book *Holy Habits*.

11. We have read papers on evangelism, cultural change, how adults learn and the contribution of Fresh Expressions, notably through its Mission Shaped Introduction and Mission Shaped Ministry courses. A wide range of literature has been read by members of the group.

12. In its thinking the group has been assisted by the image of an oak tree. The tree has roots, a trunk and branches. The roots represent the hidden aspects of our call to follow Christ. People start on the journey of faith for many reasons. They are often nurtured through prayer, biblical reflection and the example of wise and godly people. We have been impressed by the number of times the topic of mentoring has come up. In September 2016 the URC retreats group will be considering how to encourage a deepening life of prayer.

13. Turning to the trunk, we have decided to commend to the churches the use of *Holy Habits*. Derived from the Acts 2 account, ten habits of faithfulness have been identified: eating together, prayer, making more disciples, gladness and generosity, the breaking of bread, acts of service, fellowship, worship, biblical teaching and the sharing of resources. There is a book which has been published this year and materials produced for local church use on each of these aspects of being followers of the Way.

14. However in addition to this material we are aware of a plethora of resources including, for example, those from Shoreline Consultancy – which are more inductive in their methodology. We are currently preparing an annotated bibliography of all these resources.

15. The branches represent the spread of different forms of service which grow out of the trunk. Some of these are familiar to us and long established such as the service offered by lay preachers, Ministers of Word and Sacraments and church related community workers. Other forms of service are just beginning to emerge: community chaplains, local church leaders, emerging church pioneers, youth pastors and family workers.

16. With regard to TLS, there will be a transitional period of two years from summer 2016 during which people wishing to explore their faith further for purposes including Assembly accreditation and synod recognition will be encouraged to use a strengthened form of TLS LITE. This will be supplemented by the existing TLS one-year

## Mission Council

courses, and supervised practice under the guidance of relevant synod personnel such as training officers. Work is being started to assess ways in which other courses such as Mission Shaped Ministry can also be used to support those wishing to develop their discipleship in this way.

17. The education and learning committee will be responsible for drawing up the terms of reference for the design team to get to work on the new vehicle which will take the place of TLS and which is intended to start in September 2018.

### **Putting the pieces together**

18. This report has been prepared recognising that many of the reports to this Assembly find their proper perspective within the overall picture described in paragraph 4. The picture of being a community of disciples seeking always to help others to follow in the Way of Jesus is the key to many of the distinct initiatives upon which we have been working.

19. We see in the work that the faith and order committee has been doing on authorised elders the opportunity for this to be seen as a part of the collaborative patterns of leadership for which Assembly has called in recent reports and which belongs in an emphasis on our making and releasing disciples in the URC.

20. The ministries report refers to deployment figures which make clear that our present way of understanding and valuing this precious resource in the form of stipendiary Ministers and CRCWS needs to be re-evaluated. Walking the Way provides the perspective within which this re-evaluation can take place.

21. Groups within the Church are calling out for our vision not to be segmented into different groups defined by theology, age or ethnicity. The children's and youth work committee want to initiate intergenerational events for the whole Church. Intercultural ministries are reminding us that their multicultural days are not simply for those with a minority ethnic background but for the whole Church.

22. Accordingly in 2017 the theme of Feasts and Festivals has been adopted for the prayer handbook and has been embraced by a broad coalition within the Church as a means of celebrating our inherited and developing identity. The steering group encourages every local church to engage with the events of the year using resources which will be provided. A handbook of ideas will be circulated to churches in September and this will be supported by web-based materials.

23. During the spring and summer of 2017 members of the General Secretariat and Assembly staff will take to the road giving presentations on Walking the Way which will help ministers and elders understand this fresh emphasis and what they can do in response to it.

24. In the summer of 2017 another booklet will be produced for local churches with practical suggestions as to how Walking the Way might be useful in their context.

25. The steering group are encouraged that the incoming Assembly Moderators have taken as their focus 'People of the Way'.

26. This report is offered in the hope that it may enable us to come together as we learn afresh what it means to envision, with the help of some of our pioneer ministers, what it means to be transformed by the Gospel and making a difference for Christ's sake.

# Mission Council: Safeguarding Past Case Review

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Cassi Wright: <a href="mailto:cassi.wright@urc.org.uk">cassi.wright@urc.org.uk</a> Richard Church: <a href="mailto:richard.church@urc.org.uk">richard.church@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information only
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Update on progress of phase two of the Past Case Review
<b>Main points</b>	To provide an update on progress for of phase two since Mission Council March 2016
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Papers R1 and R2, Mission Council, March 2016 Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2015
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Richard Church Elizabeth Gray-King The safeguarding advisory group Graham Wilmer – The Lantern Project Jane Dowdell – Wessex Synod Mel Campbell – Northern Synod The synod moderators

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	£10,000 has been allocated in the first instance for phase two. Further funds are available, if required, to facilitate the process and response
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Liaison with the Methodist Church, the Church of England, the Lantern Project and The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS).

# Safeguarding Past Case Review

1. At Mission Council in March 2016, the resolution agreeing the principle of the design, as outlined in paper R1 and R2, and instructing the safeguarding advisory group to finalise plans for the process, was passed by consensus.

2. The papers referenced above can be located as follows:

Paper R1: <http://www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2016/R1-Safeguarding-past-cases-review-March-2016.pdf>

Paper R2: <http://www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2016/R2-Safeguarding-MC-March-2016.pdf>

3. Phase two is an open invitation for anyone to raise concerns about the behaviour or conduct of anyone affiliated with the URC since its formation in 1972. At the time of writing, it is hoped that this phase will commence in July 2016. Formal notification of the launch date will be made via synods, local churches, social media sites and the national press, to ensure that the message is widely received.

4. As outlined, this phase will consist of four categories: listening, allegation handling, pastoral care and learning. The flow chart opposite provides an overview of the process of phase two.

5. There will be three contact methods for people wishing to make a complaint; via an automated secure telephone system which will obtain basic personal contact details, via a secure email address or via the URC website. All complainants will be allocated a listener, who will receive the complaint through either a telephone call or a face to face meeting.

6. The Past Case Review team has successfully recruited volunteer listeners from within the URC (non-post-holding members) and also acquired support from our ecumenical partners and the Lantern Project. This to ensure that complainants have opportunity to share their concerns with appropriately trained listeners who will follow a specific recording process in order to record the complaint.

7. The listeners are not required to offer any pastoral or on-going support to the complainant.

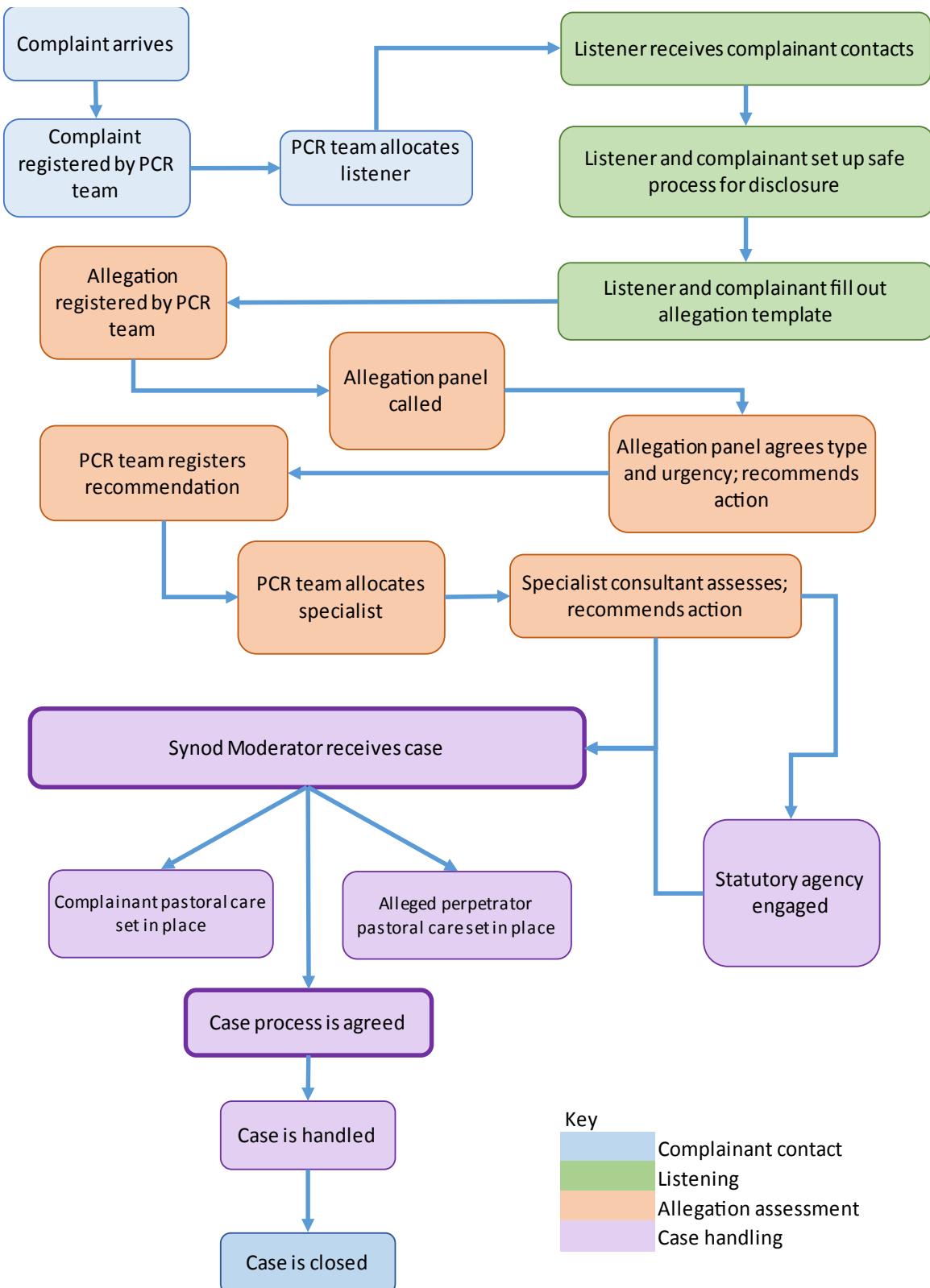
8. The complaint will be passed from the listener to the Past Case Review team, who will allocate an allegations panel of two people to review each case. Similar to the readers in phase one, the allegations panel will assess the nature and risk of each case, categorising and determining seriousness of the concern.

9. The complaint will then be scrutinized by an independent consultant with specialist experience in the relevant field. They will recommend appropriate action dependent upon the level of risk, severity and available information.

10. Whatever the recommendation of the independent consultant, and any consequential actions, feedback will go to the relevant Synod Moderator to ensure they are aware.

11. Churches and synods will be asked to provide pastoral support as per usual procedure. However, a range of alternative support services will be provided by the URC and other organisations for those seeking support outside of the church.

12. The final stage of the process is to learn from our findings and the information shared with us during phase two, in order to ensure a safe church environment for the future, to recognise errors of the past and to offer theological reflection. The learning group will be comprised of others outside the safeguarding advisory group to provide a balanced and impartial analysis of the findings of phase two.



# Mission Council: Nomination of Treasurer

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>2. General Assembly appoints Mr Ian Hardie as Treasurer of the Church from 1 July 2017 for six years.</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Appointment of Treasurer
<b>Main points</b>	A process of enquiry and interview has identified a suitable candidate
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Nothing recent
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod Moderators, Nominations Committee, Treasurer. See also Para 2 below

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Competent oversight of our finances is a legal and reputational requirement.

# Nomination of Treasurer

1. John Ellis's service as our treasurer will come to an end in June 2017, and a successor will be needed. An earlier search process in 2013 was undertaken with diligence and care, but proved unfruitful. The General Secretary therefore consulted the synod moderators in spring 2015, and two names emerged after that conversation. Of these, Ian Hardie indicated that he was able and willing to be considered for the post.

2. Ian Hardie CBE is a long-standing member and elder of Witham URC in Eastern Synod and is currently treasurer of that synod. He has retired after a career of more than thirty years in HM Revenue and Customs. The officers of the nominations committee agreed that he be interviewed by a panel of four – Jane Baird (Deputy General Secretary [Admin and Resources]), Dick Gray (convenor of URC Trust), Andrew Grimwade (Chief Finance Officer) and John Proctor (General Secretary). All four took the view, after reading Mr Hardie's CV and questioning him in interview, that he would be suitable for the role of Treasurer.

3. Since the Treasurer is an officer of the General Assembly, it is right that Assembly take its own decision about this appointment. Mission Council commends Ian Hardie to Assembly as a capable and fitting candidate, who has already carried major financial responsibility in our Church with competence and care. Assembly is invited to appoint him for the stated initial term of six years.

4. Our rules allow a treasurer to be nominated for a second term of four years, after the initial six. But that is not at all a decision for this year.

# Mission Council: Appeal, reference and constitutional review between councils of the Church

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	David Thompson: <a href="mailto:dmt3@cam.ac.uk">dmt3@cam.ac.uk</a> Augur Pearce: <a href="mailto:augur@dunelm.org.uk">augur@dunelm.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	3. <b>General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Structure of the URC;</b> 4. <b>General Assembly directs Mission Council to amend the Rules of Procedure, in order that the Structure changes may be appropriately implemented in practice.</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To amend and clarify the mechanism for appeals from more local councils of the Church to wider councils; to introduce a procedure for reviewing decisions of more local councils which are believed to lie outside their competence
<b>Main points</b>	The proposals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>clarify who can appeal;</li><li>confirm that a wider council can substitute its own decision on an appeal;</li><li>allow for mediation before the formal appeal procedure where this seems appropriate;</li><li>allow appeals out of time when fairness or the interests of the Church require this;</li><li>provide for hearing by a commission as the normal procedure for disposal of appeals; and</li><li>allow a wider council, following constitutional review, to quash a more local council's decision taken outside its competence or contravening a binding resolution of the Assembly.</li></ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The Structure of the URC The Rules of Procedure
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Council

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Appeal hearings already have a cost in terms of time and travel. The proposals may increase their frequency, but the regular use of commissions would reduce the number of people involved
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Decisions of an ecumenical area meeting are now clearly brought within the URC oversight mechanism if they have implications for the URC or any part of it.

# Appeal, reference and constitutional review between councils of the Church

1. The law and polity advisory group (LPAG) was asked by the former Clerk of Assembly (Margaret Carrick-Smith) and General Secretary (Roberta Rominger) to look at the Church's rules for appeals from its more local to its wider councils. The topic was introduced at the group's meeting in June 2014 and general principles discussed. Agreement having been reached on the main points, a detailed draft was presented for the group's November meeting. The current draft, reflecting one alteration asked for in November, was adopted by the group in June 2015 and commended to Mission Council. The latter found the proposals broadly acceptable, but asked for there to be provision for mediation as a first option, before moving to formal appeal. This has been done by adding a clause to the proposed first sentence of para 5.4. The substance of how mediation will be handled will need to be covered in the Rules of Procedure. At the time the *Book of Reports* goes to press LPAG has not had time to give detailed consideration to the full implications of this change for the Rules, but will do so in June, and bring detailed proposals to Mission Council in the autumn.

2. The proposed amendments seek:

- to remedy one clear omission from para 5 of the Structure as it stands (the lack of any appeal from an ecumenical area meeting, even if it has itself determined an appeal from a local church);
- to clarify who can appeal;
- to resolve any doubt whether a wider council can substitute its own decision on an appeal;
- to make provision for mediation before appeals where this seems appropriate;
- to allow appeals out of time when fairness or the interests of the Church require this;
- to provide for hearing by a commission as the normal procedure for disposal of appeals.

3. They also introduce a new procedure – 'constitutional review' – whereby a wider council can, on application or on its own initiative, review a more local council's action when that action is believed to lie outside the more local council's competence or to contravene a binding resolution of the General Assembly.

4. They do not cover decisions made by trust bodies, or by members of elders' meetings when acting as trustees, since these are not decisions of Councils of the Church.

## Proposed Structure para 5

5.1 The first three sub-paragraphs distinguish the three ways in which a council's decision may be brought before a wider council for review.

5.2 An **appeal** is appropriate when a council's decision aggrieves individuals (or some other council) who wish to challenge it, and have standing to do so. A **reference**, on the other hand, is made when a council wishes a difference arising in the local church, ecumenical area, province or nation under its oversight to be considered at a wider level – this can include questions that lie within the referring council's own competence, but which it feels have a wider import or would benefit from being considered elsewhere.

5.3 Appeal and reference are both concerned with policy decisions, and can be used when it is felt that the more local council's decision is simply wrong. Para 5.4 indicates that the wider council can substitute its own judgment for that of the more local council. **Constitutional review**, on the other hand, is not about the rights and wrongs of policy: it is about a more local council arrogating a wider council's power to itself without authority, or taking action contrary to the Basis of Union, Structure of the URC or a binding resolution of Assembly. Here there is no question of substituting a decision: the outcome of a successful review application is simply that the lower council's decision is declared a nullity.

## Resolution

6. The following new wording is therefore proposed for Paragraph 5 of the Structure of the URC:

## Structure of the URC

### 5. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review

5.1 Any decision of a Church Meeting within an area of ecumenical experiment may be taken by way of appeal to the area meeting. A decision of any other Church Meeting may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which the local church concerned is represented. Any decision of an ecumenical area meeting having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which local churches in the area are represented. Any decision of a synod may be taken by way of appeal to the General Assembly.

5.2 A Church Meeting may itself refer any dispute or difference arising within the local church for resolution by the synod. An ecumenical area meeting may refer any dispute or difference arising within the area for resolution by the synod. A synod may refer any dispute or difference arising within the province or nation under its oversight for resolution by the General Assembly.

5.3 The synod may declare any decision of a Church Meeting within the province or nation under its oversight, or any decision of an ecumenical area meeting within that province or nation having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof, which is (or has been reached by a procedure) incompatible with the Basis of Union, the Structure of the URC, the constitution of the ecumenical area (where applicable) or any rule or resolution of Assembly binding on the local church or the ecumenical area to be a nullity. The General Assembly may declare any decision of a Synod to be a nullity on analogous grounds. The review of any decision with a view to declaring it a nullity shall be known as constitutional review.

5.4. Appeals, references and constitutional review under this paragraph shall be subject to conditions and processes laid down by the Assembly in Rules of Procedure, which shall allow scope for the subject-matter of an appeal to be resolved by mediation where appropriate. A wider council determining an appeal or reference may either substitute its own decision for that of the more local council, or remit the issue to the more local council for reconsideration. No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review decisions reached under the ministerial disciplinary process or the incapacity procedure.

5.5. The decision of the General Assembly on any matter which has come before it on appeal, reference or constitutional review shall be final and binding.

# Resolutions referred to synods (preface)

1. In 2015 four resolutions were referred from Mission Council or General Assembly to the Synods of the Church. This paper reports that one of the resolutions has completed due process and received final approval. It also reports on the Synods' responses to the other three resolutions, and brings these three resolutions forward so that Assembly may consider giving final approval to the measures they propose.
2. In each case the process for decision is set out in Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure of the Church, which can be found on page 32 of the 2015 Assembly Reports <http://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Assembly-2015/GA-papers-JUNE-2015.pdf>. Three of the four measures involve changes to the Structure and so require this process, and the fourth (on the marriage of same-sex couples) was explicitly assigned to this process by Resolution 5 of the Birmingham Assembly meeting in 2015.
3. Thus for each of the three measures that is presented for Assembly decision in 2016, a two-thirds majority would be necessary to effect final approval.

# Mission Council: Resolutions referred to synods (A): membership of General Assembly and of synods

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	None: Mission Council has confirmed these changes to the Structure of the URC
<b>Resolution(s) which have completed their process of approval</b>	<p><b>Resolution 19B(2) from General Assembly 2014 resolved ‘to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church by deleting the words “a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly” from Paragraph 2(6)(d).’</b></p> <p>That sentence therefore changes to read: ‘Where the moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative’</p> <p><b>Resolution 19E from Cardiff resolved ‘to amend paragraph 2(4)(a) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church by adding the words “former Moderators of General Assembly and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that synod”.</b></p> <p>This sentence thus changes to read: ‘The synod being representative of the local churches in that province or nation united for the purpose of dealing with matters of wider concern shall consist of: (a) All ministers, registered pastors (in Scotland) and church related community workers engaged directly in the service of the United Reformed Church within that synod, former Moderators of General Assembly and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that synod.’</p>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The membership of General Assembly and of synods
<b>Main points</b>	As above
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly Resolution 19, 2014; Mission Council papers May 2015
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	All synods, and Mission Council

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Occasional small savings in Assembly cost, and regular small increase in synod costs
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Resolutions referred to synods

## (A): membership of General Assembly and of synods

4. Resolution 19 at the 2014 General Assembly in Cardiff concerned the membership of various councils of the Church. Some sections of the resolution were agreed at that Assembly and were implemented immediately. Two further sections that were agreed at Cardiff required reference to the synods and further consideration at a central council, if they were to become part of the Structure of the Church.

5. The first of these two sections reads as follows:

**Resolution 19B(2) from Cardiff resolved ‘to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church by deleting the words “a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly” from Paragraph 2(6)(d).’**

6. In practical terms this first means that where a Synod Moderator is a member of General Assembly in more than one capacity, the synod would now only appoint a substitute if that other capacity is as an officer of Assembly. The Assembly judged that this was the only conflict of interest that was really sufficient to merit a substitute.

7. The second of the sections reads:

**Resolution 19E from Cardiff resolved ‘to amend paragraph 2(4)(a) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church by adding the words “former Moderators of General Assembly and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that synod”.’**

8. This adds two categories of people to the roll of a Provincial or National Synod.

9. All thirteen synods had opportunity to consider these two matters. None asked that they ‘be not proceeded with’.

10. The matters therefore came to Mission Council in March 2016, where they received final approval. Mission Council thus acted on behalf of General Assembly, and made these changes in the Structure of the Church, with immediate effect.

11. There were two further parts of Resolution 19 – B(3) and B(4) – that the 2014 Assembly had wished to refer to the synods. In the event Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, decided not to refer these at the moment, because both of them are linked to resolutions that were not passed at Cardiff in 2014. Resolution 19 had been originally designed as a package, and not all of its fragments can helpfully be considered on their own.

12. Resolution 19B(4) was linked to Resolution 19A, which was deferred by the Cardiff Assembly. Both concern the representation at Assembly of the Synod of Scotland, which they would together have reduced. Following the report of the National Synods task group, Mission Council withdrew 19A and agreed not to refer 19B(4) to Synods.

13. Resolution 19B(3) was linked to 19B(1), which was withdrawn at Cardiff, and to 19B(5), which was deferred; all of these concern the question of whether members of General Assembly must also be members of the URC. Since the Cardiff Assembly had not come to decision on B(1) or B(5), Mission Council paused consideration of B(3) until further work is done on membership. It is now hoped that the faith and order committee’s work on ‘The Wider Fold’ will be helpful in this regard.

# Mission Council:

## (B): ministerial candidacy

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>5. General Assembly resolves to make the following changes to the Structure:</b></p> <p><b>Functions of synods:</b></p> <p><b>2(4)(A)(xvi) Present version:</b> to give oversight to candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to candidates for any form of full-time service in the Church at home and abroad, and, in the case of candidates for the above ministries, determine their eligibility for a call</p> <p><b>New version:</b> <b>to consider on the recommendation of local churches applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them, if approved, to the Assembly for decision, and, in partnership with the relevant Resource Centre for Learning, to give pastoral care to such candidates during their training.</b></p> <p><b>Functions of Ecumenical United Areas:</b></p> <p><b>2(5)(A)(vi) Present version:</b> to consider, on the recommendation of Local Churches, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them, if approved, to the synod for decision.</p> <p><b>New version:</b> <b>to consider, on the recommendation of Local Churches, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them to the synod.</b></p> <p><b>Functions of General Assembly:</b></p> <p><b>New function [numbering to be determined]:</b> <b>to consider, on the recommendation of synods, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work, to oversee their training, and to determine their eligibility for a call.</b></p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Assessment and oversight of ministerial candidates
<b>Main points</b>	Making formal changes to the Structure to match operational and policy changes that were approved by Assembly in 2007 and have worked well ever since
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly 2007, Resolution 40 – Record pp 51-54, Book of Reports pp 163-6

<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Council; synods. Mission committee (regarding the reference to service abroad)
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### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

## Resolutions referred to synods (B): ministerial candidacy

14. These resolutions were approved by Mission Council in May 2015. All thirteen synods have since had opportunity to consider them. None asked that they 'be not proceeded with'. The matters therefore come to General Assembly, which may, if it so decides, make these changes in the Structure of the Church, with immediate effect; for this a two-thirds majority would be necessary.

15. The ministries committee outlines the background to the matter as follows.

16. Assembly 2007 passed a lengthy resolution (Resolution 40) relating to the process for interviewing and assessing applicants for recognition as candidates for the ministry, and the oversight of candidates in training. The principles agreed then have operated successfully since, and robust procedures have developed for ensuring that synods and Assembly work in close partnership in these matters.

17. Unfortunately, nobody noticed in 2007 that the passing of Resolution 40 required amendments to the Structure of the United Reformed Church. Now that this has been spotted, the required changes have been drafted.

18. This will not result in any changes to procedures which have operated successfully since 2007. It is a 'tidying up' exercise, ensuring that the Structure of the URC provides an accurate account of the functions of the various councils of the church.

19. Clause 2(4)(A)(xvi) gives synods responsibility for assessing applicants for full-time service abroad. This clause has not altered since 1972, although the formation of CWM in 1977 in fact changed the situation. Any applicant for full-time service abroad through the URC would now be referred to the application process of CWM, in which synods play no formal role, so this wording would be removed as it is no longer necessary.

20. Note that the Structure uses one word and one phrase in a technical way, which varies from ordinary usage. No change is proposed to these usages, as to do so would require further extensive re-writing of the Structure.

- a) the word 'decision' refers to the FINAL decision on candidacy, not the intermediate decisions of church meeting whether to refer an applicant to synod, or of a synod whether or not to refer an applicant to Assessment Board.
- b) the phrase 'candidate for ministry' refers to those whose call has been affirmed by the Church as a whole, and at earlier stages applicants are called 'applicants for recognition as candidates'. This is consistent with ecumenical usage.

# Mission Council: (C): National Synods

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>6. General Assembly resolves to make the following changes to Paragraph 2(4)A(xxii) of the Structure.</b></p> <p><b>Present version:</b> to seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and in Scotland and Wales to undertake responsibility for national ecumenical relationships on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church, subject to the final authority of the General Assembly</p> <p><b>New version:</b></p> <p>a) <b>to seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and</b></p> <p>b) <b>in Scotland and Wales to speak and act on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church in public affairs or the conduct of ecumenical relationships specific to the nation concerned, in the General Assembly's name but without prejudice to the Assembly's right to speak and act in the same field on behalf of the church either in England or throughout Great Britain.</b></p>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The role of our National Synods in Scotland and Wales
<b>Main points</b>	Making formal changes to the Structure to reflect the 1998 Proposals for Union
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Proposals for Union 1998 (especially Part 5:1) National synods consultation notes (April 14-15, 2011)
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Members of the joint negotiating committee which drafted the 1998 Proposals for Union The law and polity advisory group Mission Council, and all thirteen synods

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	This will strengthen and extend the right and responsibility of the two national synods to speak and act for the United Reformed Church in their respective nations.

## Resolutions referred to synods (C): national synods

21. This resolution emerged from the work of the national synods task group, which reported to Mission Council in May 2015, where the resolution now before Assembly was approved. All thirteen synods have since had opportunity to consider it. None asked that it 'be not proceeded with'. The matter therefore comes to General Assembly, which may, if it so decides, make these changes in the Structure of the Church, with immediate effect; for this a two-thirds majority would be necessary.

22. The task group outlines the matter as follows.

23. Although the United Reformed Church was from 1972 'one church in two nations' (England and Wales), and then became 'one church in three nations' as a result of the union with Churches of Christ in 1981, awareness of this was sharpened by the union with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000. In the years since then we have grown to appreciate both the rich diversity this brings to our Church, as well as the new challenges brought by developing experience of the political devolution within the United Kingdom enacted in 1999 following referendums in 1997.

24. The Proposals for Union with the Congregational Union of Scotland – in their entirety – were approved by the Annual Assembly of the Congregational Union of Scotland and the URC General Assembly in 1998, although only limited changes to the Structure of the URC were proposed at that point (and approved in 2000). The proposals provided (in Part 5.1) for both national synods to speak and act 'in the name of the URC' in their nations' ecclesiastical and public affairs. The term 'ecclesiastical' as used in that context meant ecumenical.

25. Part 5.1 of the proposals talks of 'speaking for the URC', whereas part 4C(i) speaks of 'acting with the delegated authority of the General Assembly'. The current Structure para 2(4)A(xxii) speaks of responsibility for national ecumenical relationships undertaken 'on behalf of the whole URC' but 'subject to the final authority of the General Assembly'. Each of these expressions potentially means something a little different, which opens the door to confusion or dispute. The main difference now identified is that councils which speak or act 'subject to the final authority of the Assembly' (the normal situation for local councils and synods) may have their decisions appealed to the Assembly; whereas councils, commissions etc. which act with delegated authority may not. (Such as Mission Council acting for Assembly between sessions, and Assembly commissions in disciplinary cases.)

26. We felt that the national synods' responsibility in specifically national questions should not be simply overruled by an English majority in General Assembly. A right of appeal to Assembly, therefore, is not appropriate and the 'deemed delegation' approach expresses this best. The language in our draft resolution is taken from the language already used in Structure para 2(6) in relation to Mission Council.

27. However, we also felt that it could never have been intended that a national synod should, by speaking on some moral or religious issue in the national context, be able to prevent the General Assembly expressing the view of the wider church on that same issue. Nor should the other national synod be so prevented; nor should Assembly – which at present is the only forum in which the collective view of URC members in England can be expressed – be prevented from expressing an English perspective simply because a Celtic national synod with delegated authority had spoken first. The words in our amendment to the Structure beginning 'but without prejudice' are designed to express this.

28. Spelling this out, of course, raises the possibility that the opinion of church members in one of the three nations, expressed by a synod in the Celtic nations or by the Assembly in right of England, will diverge from the opinion of church members in another nation, and the URC will be seen by the outside world to be speaking with two or more voices. We do not believe this is always undesirable. It is certainly honest. But there should always be careful thought before the Church takes this course. The main means of 'taking thought' is consultation, between the synod and Assembly levels of the church, usually through their responsible committees. No new provision is required for this in the Structure – para 4 already calls for consultation – but the report spells out some implications, e.g. reminding Assembly committees to be alert to the possibility of a distinctive national perspective.

29. When it seems desirable for there to be a single public URC view on a question, the opening words of Structure 2(6) suggest this should be the Assembly view. We have not spelt out in so many words that the synods would then abide by the Assembly or Mission Council decision; but past experience suggests that national synods take seriously what Proposals 5.1 called 'their continued participation in and commitment to the conciliar structures of the URC'.

30. We envisage that, under the Structure as amended and subject to the provisions for consultation, each national synod would

- co-operate with churches indigenous to the nation concerned and (so far as those churches' polity allowed) with the Welsh or Scottish organs of Britain-wide or international churches;
- conduct negotiations for church union within the nation concerned, subject to Structure para 3(2) regulating final approval of any union;
- speak and act on behalf of the URC on matters relating to Scottish and Welsh public affairs;
- respond to consultations initiated by the devolved legislatures;
- play a full and active part in Scottish and Welsh ecumenical and public affairs in relation to organisations, institutions and activities indigenous to Scotland and Wales; and
- represent the URC to the devolved legislatures on matters of social, political and economic significance to the nation concerned.

# Mission Council: (D): the marriage of same-sex couples

## Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Proctor: <a href="mailto:john.proctor@urc.org.uk">john.proctor@urc.org.uk</a>
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p><b>7.a) In keeping with the 2007 commitment on Human Sexuality, General Assembly does not consider it appropriate to express a single view on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church on the matter of the marriage of same-sex couples.</b></p> <p><b>b) General Assembly declares that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same-sex couples, in accordance with the provisions of Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.</b></p> <p><b>c) In the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, where the constitution makes no provision for a Church or Congregational Meeting (including a Special or Extraordinary General Meeting) the relevant governing authority of the United Reformed Church under Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 is the council which represents the widest gathering of members of that Church or Partnership. In case of doubt the council to act in this matter shall be jointly determined, in light of the LEP constitution and any sharing agreement, by the Moderator and Clerk of the synod on which that Church is represented.</b></p> <p><b>d) Noting that Mission Council has already recognised, on behalf of General Assembly, 'that if a future Assembly were to allow for ministers and members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the URC to approach the Registrar General for Scotland', the General Assembly confirms that it now lies within the competence of the National Synod of Scotland to nominate under Section 9(1A) of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 as amended by the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 members of the United Reformed Church who have indicated their willingness in writing to the synod to be approved celebrants for the marriages of same-sex couples in Scotland.</b></p>

	<p>e) The General Assembly recalls that the trusts on which Local Church buildings are commonly held empower the Church Meeting to direct in what ways such a building is or is not to be used for public worship and ancillary purposes.</p> <p>f) The General Assembly authorises the General Secretary, the Clerk, or any Deputy General Secretary to sign and furnish a copy of this resolution (or a relevant extract) in the name of the Assembly, whenever such a copy may be required by law.</p>
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### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The marriage of same-sex couples. To affirm that the Church as a whole does not have a single view on this matter. In that light, to consider where appropriate decisions might be taken within the Church about the registration of local church buildings (in England and Wales) and the nomination of celebrants (in Scotland)
<b>Main points</b>	<p>Affirming that the Church as a whole does not express a single view</p> <p>Declaring that Church Meetings hold a 'governing authority' role in this matter in URC congregations in England and Wales</p> <p>Identifying where a 'governing authority' role would be held in LEPs and Union Churches in England and Wales</p> <p>Recognising the role of the National Synod to nominate celebrants in Scotland</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly, Cardiff 2014: <i>The Record</i> pages 7, 23 and 25, with Resolution 31. Special meeting of General Assembly, Birmingham 2015: <i>Book of Reports and Record</i> , particularly resolutions 4, 4A and 5.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Local congregations, synods, Mission Council, the human sexuality task group, the law and polity advisory group

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Other churches in the UK and internationally are also considering this issue, with a wide spectrum of opinions and responses.

## **Resolutions referred to synods (D): the marriage of same sex couples**

31. This resolution was agreed by a majority of 205 votes to 14 at the Birmingham meeting of General Assembly in 2015. That meeting of Assembly further resolved that this matter should be referred to the synods of the Church by the process in Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

32. All thirteen synods have since had opportunity to consider the resolution. None asked that it 'be not proceeded with'.

33. The matter therefore comes to General Assembly, which may, if it so decides, determine this matter with immediate effect; for this a two-thirds majority would be necessary.

34. The matter was brought by the human sexuality task group to the Birmingham Assembly meeting, and their report is on pages 9-17 of the 2015 Assembly Reports. Those pages give a substantial and reasoned background to the present resolution, which may still be of help to some members of Assembly in 2016:

<http://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Assembly-2015/GA-papers-JUNE-2015.pdf>

35. Should General Assembly reach a decision on this matter, it may wish to thank and discharge the human sexuality task group, who have understood their work in the context of recent legislation, and do not expect to be retained as a standing committee.

# Mission Council:

## Memorandum of Understanding between the United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of Korea

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Tracey Lewis: <a href="mailto:tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com">tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com</a> Michael Jagessar: <a href="mailto:michael.jagessar@urc.org.uk">michael.jagessar@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Take note
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Memorandum of understanding between the United Reformed Church (URC) and the Presbyterian Church of Korean (PCK)
<b>Main points</b>	The changing landscapes in which the URC and PCK find themselves have resulted in a growing and significant partnership. The momentum and the opportunities before both Churches suggest the need to continue to work intentionally to grow and deepen the relationship between our Churches, so that mission and ministry are undertaken in partnership between our Churches (in both South Korea and the UK) for the sake of God's mission in the world
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission committee Ministries General Secretary URC Korean Ministers, Ministers of Kingston, New Malden and Bristol Korean/Redland Park URC and Bournemouth International Church

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Potential sharing of mission partners will have financial implications
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The memorandum may lead to a new way of sharing resources for cutting edge ministry. As such it could provide a model that could have wider ecumenical implications.

# Memorandum of Understanding between the United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of Korea

1. As partner Churches, the United Reformed Church (URC) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) share in the life of the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC). Our partnership in God's mission has emerged from the historic missionary movement to current expressions of the sharing of mission personnel and resources, mutual accountability and common witness. The PCK treasures its long relationship with the URC and especially its antecedent denominations' contributions to Christianity in Korea. The URC values the presence of Koreans, their faith and their contributions to our life together.

2. We have sought over the years, through multilateral and bilateral relationships, to deepen our commitment to new forms and expressions of partnership in the world so that God's people and God's world may be blessed. Both the global and local contexts in which our Churches find themselves mean that our partnership has been growing in creative and inspiring ways. This momentum and the opportunities before both Churches suggest that we need to continue to work intentionally to grow and deepen the relationship between our Churches, so that mission and ministry is undertaken in partnership between our Churches (in both South Korea and the UK) for the sake of God's mission in the world.

The URC and the PCK commit to:

- a) hold the mission and ministry of each other in prayer: praying for a peaceful reunification of the two Koreas, peace and justice for life in the UK and in the Korean Peninsula and North East Asia, for nuclear free societies in the world, for persecuted minorities everywhere, including victims of extreme religious violence, for our damaged environment, and for discerning new and creative ways to respond to new mission and ministry challenges;
- b) work together to map, read, interpret and respond to the changing contextual realities in which we will together partner in mission and ministry;
- c) explore opportunities to share good practices and stories that would help to grow, renew and reignite the ecumenical vocation;
- d) therefore work together for a new global ecumenical movement that seeks unity of Christian witness in the midst of immense historical, cultural and geopolitical changes in order to enrich our life and to promote reconciliation and healing in Korea, in the UK and in the world;
- e) recognise mutually that ministers of both the PCK and URC approved, trained and ordained through their respective processes, and who have demonstrated effective and faithful qualities, character and witness are considered valid ministry partners.

The URC and the PCK envision the outworking of these commitments in the following practical ways:

- f) The URC and the PCK continuously exchange information about events and developments within their churches, to better enable congregations to understand and pray for each other. Representatives of the churches will exchange visits to enable them to become acquainted with all aspects of the life and work of the respective churches.

- g) Members of the URC and PCK who have moved or migrated to either the UK or Korea will be encouraged to develop active relationship with a congregation of the URC or the PCK. Congregations of both the PCK and URC are encouraged to extend hospitality to each other's membership.
- h) The URC and the PCK will work intentionally to connect with the growing Korean communities in the UK. The URC in partnership with the PCK will help support and resource these communities pastorally and otherwise as able. Through this work we seek to receive one another's gifts, including the gift of ministry, and become a transformed and transforming Christian presence in the new British reality.
- i) The PCK wishes to draw on the experience and expertise of the URC to respond to the mission and ministry opportunities provided by a growing English speaking population, an increasing multicultural landscape and a younger generation that communicates more readily in English in South Korea.
- j) The URC and the PCK will explore ways to respond to the growing number of North Korean migrants in the UK, especially in New Malden and Kingston. The PCK is especially keen to work with the URC on this potential mission opportunity to offer some form of ministry to a specific cultural group of Koreans.
- k) The URC and the PCK will consider the development of joint PCK/URC congregations in the UK, especially in locations with a high Korean population and not currently served by existing URC congregations and in locations of historical missionary significance to the PCK and the URC.
- l) Both the URC and the PCK will explore the possibility for supervised ministry internship/placement opportunities for cross-cultural learning for ministerial students and ministers in their early years of ministry.

3. This Memorandum of Understanding will be reviewed 18 months from the date of signing by both Churches, and annually thereafter.

4. In obedience to Christ's prayer and intention for the unity of his Body, we acknowledge that this partnership is the result of the design, power and strength of the Holy Spirit. Trusting that what we seek to encourage in this exciting and developing relationship will be fulfilled through that same Holy Spirit, we pray that our witness to each other, the world and to the whole Church will be strengthened, to the glory of God and the praise of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

Drafted by representatives of the two Churches in February 2015, agreed by Mission Council in May 2015, and signed at the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea in September 2015, the URC signatory being the Revd David Gorsch-Miller, Moderator of General Assembly.

# URC Investment Committee (URCIC):

## URCIC Terms of Reference

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Sandi Hallam-Jones: <a href="mailto:s.hallam-jones@urc.org.uk">s.hallam-jones@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Take note. Mission Council has approved these revised terms of reference for the URC investment committee
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	URC investment committee terms of reference To approve the updated terms of reference
<b>Main points</b>	The URC investment committee has re-drafted its terms of reference to include responsibility for the lay staff pension fund and to allow for flexibility in the members of the committee in the event that a particular member could not attend
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Previous URCIC terms of reference
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	URC investment committee URC Trust URC Ministers' Pensions' Trust

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

## United Reformed Church Trust and the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust

# URC investment committee – terms of reference

1. The terms of reference of the United Reformed Church investment committee (URCIC) shall be as follows:
  - a) the committee shall provide guidance to the URC Trust and the URC Ministers' Pension Trust in relation to all matters relating to the investment of the assets held by those Trusts;
  - b) the committee shall also interpret the Church's views on investment strategy and ethical investment for input to The Pensions Trust in respect of the lay staff pension scheme;
  - c) the committee shall also act as monitor on the performance of The Pensions Trust investment managers in order to make any necessary representations to them;
  - d) the committee shall secure advice and support from investment specialists to enable clear recommendations to be made to the Boards of the Trusts in (a) above;
  - e) the committee shall take decisions on behalf of the Boards, subject to the authority of the Trust Boards and within guidelines for delegation agreed with the Boards;
  - f) the committee shall organise such training for its members as will enable it to carry out its duties in a professional manner;
  - g) the committee shall work with ethical investment guidelines agreed by the General Assembly and give advice on ethical investment matters to Mission Council.
2. The composition of the URCIC shall be as follows:
  - a) Ex-officio members:
    - i) the chair of the URC Trust or another director;
    - ii) the chair of the URC Ministers' Pension Trust Board or another director;
    - iii) the Treasurer of the United Reformed Church;
    - iv) the treasurer of Westminster College, or their nominated representative;
    - v) the convenor of the Pensions Executive, or their nominated representative.
  - b) Five members appointed by the General Assembly for four year terms, renewable once.
  - c) Any additional members co-opted by the committee.
  - d) Staff in attendance:
    - i) the Chief Finance Officer;
    - ii) the secretary to the URC Trust and the URC Ministers' Pension Trust, who shall act as secretary of URCIC<sup>1</sup>;
  - e) A convener for the URC investment committee, appointed by the General Assembly from amongst those in groups (a) and (b), with the agreement of both Trust Boards and who, if not already a member, will attend each Board as an advisor.
3. A quorum for committee decisions shall be a total of five members drawn from groups (a) and (b) above.

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1. In the event of the unavailability of the secretary s/he will make arrangements for a substitute to attend in liaison with the convener of the committee.

# Summary statement – recommended mandate for investors

1. General Assembly recommends that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the United Reformed Church should avoid any investment in:

- a) companies directly engaged in the manufacture or supply of weapons;
- b) companies a significant part of whose business is in the manufacture or supply of: alcoholic drinks, or tobacco products, or military equipment (other than weapons); or the provision of gambling facilities; or the publication or distribution of pornography; or in the extraction of thermal coal or the production of oil from oil sands;
- c) companies who benefit by offering credit at usurious rates of interest to those who do not have access to funds through normal lending channels.

General Assembly is of the view that in the definition of the activities outlined in b) above, 'significant' means that the share of turnover derived from the activity concerned is more than 10% of the company's total turnover; for c) above the equivalent threshold should be 25%.

2. In addition to the exclusions listed above, the URC's investment bodies should reserve the right to avoid investment in companies whose operations are deemed to:

- contribute directly to human rights violations or support the maintenance of oppressive regimes who are guilty of gross human rights violations;
- contribute to a systematic, harmful impact on the social or natural environment;
- harm the society in which they operate more than they benefit it;
- promote injustice.

3. Further, it is expected that governance standards of our advisers, our fund managers, their agents, and the companies in which we invest, both directly and indirectly, should meet internationally accepted norms. By focusing on these standards, investors will favour companies which will be seeking to develop their businesses sustainably in the long term interests of their shareholders and other stakeholders.

4. Nestlé clarification: for investment purposes all companies should be treated in accordance with this ethical investment policy. There is no further requirement to exclude holdings in this company.

5. General Assembly recognises that this policy cannot be binding upon those with responsibility for specific investment decisions but when these bodies seek advice on investment matters they should apply due diligence to ensure that the integrity and reputation of the United Reformed Church is, as far as is practical, protected.

# Synod moderators' report

**'I like espressos... small, but incredibly potent... tell your people to stop trying to be like cappuccinos and try to be more like espressos.'**

Nick Page *The Invisible Church*

## Looking for a good cup of coffee

1. What do you look for in a good cup of coffee? At Starbucks, Costa or Caffè Nero everybody knows what to expect. Nobody will receive a latte with no milk. Milk is part of what defines a latte. There are other coffee shops, including small outlets, not part of a big chain or franchise, which can also refresh and may surprise! What do you look for in a good United Reformed Church? Variety is the spice of life; but what makes us distinctively United Reformed? A big question for all mainline denominations in the United Kingdom today is that of identity. Who are the United Reformed? What is the Church's role in a rampantly secular, and sometimes militantly atheistic, society? How is it possible to engage with a culture that has substantially lost the Christian story and prefers to avoid engagement with faith of any hue? The seemingly trivial questions about why, for example, a nativity play requires a baby and a manger represent a profound challenge for today's Church.

## Seeking the United Reformed Church identity

2. The identity question is probably larger for the URC than it is for our sister denominations. Our pre-1972 leaders who carried out the brave decision to form this denomination did so in what they thought was the clear knowledge that it would not be around very long. They believed that the URC would be a stepping stone to greater Church unity. People often joke about the abundant use of the word 'normally' in URC procedures – but this is where it came from. A whole tranche of things had to be agreed, but, if some individuals did it a little bit differently, it did not really matter. It was all temporary. A 'normally' way of doing things was established but, by definition, that meant that some would do it differently, and that was fine. It is important to learn that God has a bigger picture and is not yet finished with the URC.

3. So what does the URC bring to the party (or coffee shop) that is the Church? So far as the record states, Jesus did not say anything about drinking coffee – but he was clear that eating together is a kingdom activity. 'Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.' (Luke 13:29) The URC is called to contribute to the feasting that offers hints of God's kingdom on God's earth.

4. One of the gifts that the URC brings is to be discovered in our smallness. United Reformed Christians immediately recognise that they are not, and cannot be, the whole of the story of the church. The contribution of others is valued and, as that happens, so often the URC becomes the catalyst for doing things together. So, for example, in St. Neots the URC has played a key role in the establishment of a Churches Together-sponsored appointment of a pioneer minister to the new housing area of Love's Farm. In a similar pioneer ministry position in Cranbrook, near Exeter, the URC has led partners in drawing up an ecumenical vision statement.

5. As well as being small, the URC knows that it is broken. The faultlines of our founding still run through us and help us to value the contributions of our differing Churches of Christ, Congregational and Presbyterian antecedents, recognising, in turn, that each of those strands has a varied, and not a single, history. The URC continues to live out the gifts that are provided by unity in diversity.

## Mission Council

6. That still leaves the question of identity. The name provides the two indicators that we are United and Reformed, but leaves us to explain what these mean. In doing that, perhaps there needs to be an acknowledgement of the tendency to be far more engaged with the 'United' than the 'Reformed'. As David Peel points out:

*I get the impression that URC folk are far more likely to show an interest in their denomination's history than in its theology. After all we are living in an age which yearns for the past, or at least selected parts of it, with the growth of the heritage industry being a prominent feature. But, by and large, theology is not held in esteem in our churches. It is widely held that it is best left alone, since it only complicates simple believing and undermines faith.<sup>1</sup>*

7. Yet surely our theology should be our driving force, and it must be in exploring our theology that our identity is discovered. So, in exploring what God is like, it becomes apparent how to live and be. It is important to consider carefully questions about what it means to be Reformed and united but, in addition, to offer more explicitly those elements of our Church life that are distinctive and important. As Synod Moderators we see both the challenges and the opportunities of doing this.

8. The URC has never been able to do everything, though sometimes it has seemed as though that is what was being attempted. So what are the distinctive United Reformed contributions to the wider Church? Without trying to do everything, there remains quite a long list of valuable contributions. Eldership, Pilots, the Joint Public Issues Team, and the church related community work programme are all relatively distinct elements of URC life which need to be resourced if this denomination is going to contribute well.

9. The gift of eldership has come to our tradition from a variety of roots, as have the opportunities for checks and balances provided by a conciliar system of governance. How can these be helpfully shared on the wider church scene? Though it has never reached the scope that was envisaged, how can the Church Related Community Work programme, so often highly valued by those of other denominations who encounter it, contribute to the life of the whole church? In particular, how can its insights shed light in places where it is not currently part of the specific ministry? Good examples help. Jenny Crane is CRCW at Castle Hill URC, Northampton, a church that exudes history as one of the Philip Doddridge churches, but set in a deprived ward of the city. Supported by Jenny's ministry some exciting things have been happening, connecting with the community using projects ranging from 'guerrilla gardening' through to a film club that is packed out. Amongst many other things, Jenny helped set up Street Church, an ecumenical Fresh Expressions congregation run by and for people who are homeless, now a key part of Northampton's church landscape.

10. How can the thinking and practice that is Pilots be more widely offered? How can the work of the Joint Public Issues Team be disseminated across a broader spectrum?

11. Alongside these, it is essential to contribute to those more widely-shared elements of church staying, as one example, with the three key themes of Vision4Life – the Bible, prayer and evangelism – as well as regularly checking against the ten priorities of Vision 2020. What is to be learned about the critical challenges of discipleship, now helpfully presented and resourced by a restructured General Secretariat and a remodelled department of Discipleship that urges us to do what it says on its particular tin.

12. Going around the synods, we, Synod Moderators, encounter those places where God's people are struggling and where a sense of direction is difficult to pinpoint. However, in other places, often quite remarkably, we see exciting things happening as our folk set off on a variety of adventures. For example, Messy Church at Toll Bar with Prescot URC is really connecting with local families and impacting their own faith as they seek to present it visually and physically to others. This led to dancing by one of the Messy Church girls at the induction of their new minister.

13. It is important to note that, though it can be, it is not always the relatively larger churches that are doing all the risky stuff. In some cases it is small churches with an ageing membership who set out on some unexpected journey to which God is calling them. The elderly Abraham, as he set off from Haran, remains a valuable model. So the small URC congregation at Upton Cheyney (near Bristol) was facing closure but, with a rallying call to the village and neighbouring URCs, and the inspiration of Meryl White, a non-stipendiary minister, they have engaged with the community in new ways. Last Christmas they held a successful 'Crafts and Carols in the Barn' event, as well as completing Phase 1 of their ambitious church building refurbishment.

## Being Reformed

**We limit not the truth of God,  
to our poor reach of mind,  
by notions of our day and sect,  
crude, partial and confined:  
no, let a new and better hope  
within our hearts be stirred:  
the Lord has yet more light and truth  
to break forth from his word.**

George Rawson – 'We limit not the truth of God' (based on parting words  
of Pastor John Robinson to the Pilgrim Fathers, 1620)

14. The URC needs to be fleet of foot in looking to the challenges of mission today. That is being reformed, and part of our unique gift. One of the clues as to what it means to be Reformed is found in that great summary of what the URC is and stands for, the statement of 'The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church' most commonly used in version II.<sup>2</sup> (It is encouraging to note how often colleagues from other denominations wistfully mention their wish for 'something like that statement'.) One of its important assertions is the expression of our readiness to embrace change. It talks about the willingness to 'make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ'. The specific reference is to credal statements, but our faith is also stated in our actions and they must be changed where that is needed.

15. Being reformed can be defined in many ways but, if it means anything, it surely means openness to change. Of course, there are times to resist change, but Synod Moderators see plenty of URC evidence of willingness to tackle the new challenges that God sets before us.

16. The innovative ministries of Mike Walsh in Manchester and Ruth Maxey in Milton Keynes are just two examples among many. St. Cuthbert's, Holy Island, has Rachel Poolman as Special Category Minister. Here is an example of the church responding contextually to the mission opportunities presented by tourism, retreat seekers, day trippers and anyone else who arrives at the centre. The stories of churches willing to radically alter their buildings, so that they can better serve the community, are many and varied.

## Being united

**If we walk together, the Lord will help us to live that  
communion that precedes all argument.**

Pope Francis, 'Address to the Waldensians', 22 June 2015

17. The ecumenical agenda remains fundamental to United Reformed thinking. Many of our congregations are part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership and, though it is now often suggested that the ecumenical agenda is changing and that Local Ecumenical Partnerships have passed their sell-by date, the URC experience tends to be that there

## Mission Council

is still much that is good about life in Local Ecumenical Partnerships with new ones developing all the time. However, despite supportive noises in what might be called 'high places', as with the Archbishop of Canterbury stating that ecumenism is not important, but indispensable,<sup>3</sup> URC leaders often struggle with those who do not want to collaborate in that way.

18. How can the URC remain a prophetic voice, calling the Church to greater unity, even though others have moved away from that place? Ecumenism is messy and needs to be contextual. The ecumenical landscape is changed and changing, but the ecumenical imperative remains part of the URC's DNA. How can this denomination be the sand in the oyster, hopefully producing a pearl? How can new ways of being Churches together be encouraged? How might Churches other than the traditional mainline denominations be welcomed to the ecumenical scene? There are indications that some of these Churches want to cooperate, but it will fail if we refuse to amend the traditional structures.

19. Like others, the URC values the new ecumenical initiatives, such as street pastors and foodbanks, as well as continuing to share in the likes of Christian Aid, but, too often, united congregations are not receiving the across-the-denominations support that they ought to be able to expect.

20. All this does not imply diversity is not valued by the URC. On the contrary, we embrace it. The range of theology that is represented by Free to Believe and the Group for Evangelism and Renewal is a highly valued aspect of our denominational life, even though the differences in perspective can make for an uneasy, and sometimes competitive, coexistence. When working well across the range of opinions, the URC does (and sometimes forgets) some really superb 'stuff'. So, for example, the 2007 commitment on human sexuality and some of what has emerged from that, not least the 2012 'living with difference' material, make such a contribution – but too often we are not holding things together and valuing each other as we should within the URC.

21. It is important to continue to make the space to speak courteously and listen carefully to each other. A number of synods have managed to do this at recent discussions of same-sex marriage legislation, and we must never tire of conversations which help us to understand one another in our diversity.

22. Most, if not all, of us recognise the value of, and need for, new ways of being the Church, often called 'fresh expressions'. There are many examples, such as Priesthill working with a community management group, Clacton hosting one of what is currently just a handful of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Messy Churches, and Augustine hosting a mental health chaplaincy for Edinburgh. The obvious 'fresh expressions' are the Messy Churches and cafe worship that happen in a range of ways in so many places. However, though the imaginative range of such is wider and expanding, many more are still needed.

## So where is that cup of coffee for the road?

23. As Synod Moderators, we see these issues being worked through, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, as we travel round our synods. The Synod Moderators recognise that many struggle with the challenges of being a 21st-century church in the United Kingdom, though many do so creatively, like the small elderly congregation in Avonbridge running a weekly luncheon club. One of the frequent problems is that, like Costa and the rest, we look to offer a full range of lattes, cappuccinos, americanos and all the rest. Within the URC, we need to learn to specialise. Robert Warren has suggested that one of the marks of a healthy church is that it 'does a few things and does them well'.<sup>4</sup> That is a lesson that still needs to be learned by many. When, as in a number of our churches, God is calling us to a ministry to the elderly, we find ourselves being side-tracked as many of our number fret about the absence of children.

24. Many rather take the opportunities for mission and community engagement offered by such a profile. Several work with dementia sufferers and their carers, like Basingstoke and their weekly "Memory Tree Club", Wymondham (near Norwich) and their weekly Pabulum Café with a range of activities including snooker, curling, films and singing, and Verwood with a monthly 'Music for the Mind' group. Cotteridge (Birmingham) operate an Older Adults Centre.

25. Others look for different ways of sharing their message, like Belford (North Northumberland) who engaged in a community-based local history project about the dissenting history of the church. A booklet and beautifully presented pictures around the walls of the hall are part of an initiative which attracts tourists and school children.

26. Of course, the examples are just that, and most are replicated in many other places. Messy churches and cafe churches abound, as do a whole range of community and social activities which form a crucial part of the mission of the URC. There is no synod without congregations involved in foodbanks. The ecological challenge is being taken up in each synod in different ways: small churches are being used as retreat centres, as at Monks Eleigh (Suffolk); community gardens are being developed as at Helensburgh and Winson Green (Birmingham); building developments are taking place, either with partners, as with a housing association in Granton and Leith, or to make older buildings fit for purpose, as at Plymstock, Thurso and Annan; and some are hosting important community facilities – Long Melford house the local library and Duxford the post office.

27. So what are our cups of coffee like? Do they remind us of too much church coffee – (dare it be said?) weak and insipid? Many of us remember being committed to the original CafeDirect, despite its awful taste, because of the principle it represented. Our commitment and patience have long since been rewarded with the range of great-tasting Fairtrade coffees that are available today. So is there an investment in decent coffee and a proper machine to make it? Is there a willingness to share the coffee? One of our other great gifts to each other is the covenant by which we contribute to the Mission and Ministry fund, not according to what is going to be received, but according to what can be afforded. In today's economic climate, that can be challenging. It is counter-cultural. In the world you pay for what you get; but in the URC's M&M world, somebody else might be drinking your coffee, and it doesn't matter. The espresso is the basis for every coffee, providing the essence. What is our espresso and what are we doing with it – or are we going to end up with a pile of babycinos that don't have any coffee?

28. 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Luther posting his 95 theses. What are the changes (or reforms) that are needed in church? What are the theses that today's URC ought to be posting? How can the coffee be shared appropriately? The Synod Moderators believe that we will discover some exciting and adventurous answers to those questions before General Assembly meets again.

## Personalia

29. Since our last report to General Assembly we have welcomed Jacky Embrey as Moderator of Mersey Synod. We have bidden farewell to Richard Church, who has moved to be Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) and welcomed Andrew Mills as Moderator of North Western Synod. Roy Lowes and John Humphreys have left us for retirement and Lis Mullen is about to do so. Roy has been succeeded by Steve Faber as Moderator of West Midlands Synod and John by David Pickering in the National Synod of Scotland. We look forward to welcoming Lis's successor in Northern Synod, that appointment being unknown at the time of writing. We miss Richard and Roy and will miss John and Lis, but we welcome the contributions that Andrew, Steve and David bring to all that we share.

## Questions for reflection and discussion

1. What is the essence of your local church? Look back over the last five years and the last generation. If it has lost its flavour, potency and purpose, what is missing and what help do you need to recapture what has been lost? If you now have a better blend and brew than before, what has changed and how can you share and celebrate the new flavour?
2. If we are to be fleet of foot in looking to the challenges of developing mission today, are there things holding you back? What can and must you do locally to shed that burden so that you can do fewer things but do them well? What difference would that make to the whole denomination?
3. If the URC is the small grain of sand in an ecumenical oyster, what should we do to help produce pearls? What do you see as the distinctives that we bring and that must be preserved in order to let those pearls develop?
4. Abram was led into a risky adventure and his faith was credited to him as righteousness. How can we show great faithfulness in the face of decline, and how can we reframe the story to get past decline?

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1 David Peel, *Reforming Theology*, The United Reformed Church, 2002, p.9

2 *Rejoice and Sing*, No. 761

3 Archbishop Justin Welby's comment to the Churches Together in England Forum on video, 29 May 2015

4 Robert Warren, *Healthy Churches' Handbook*, Church House Publishing, 2004, p.44. It is the seventh of the seven marks of a healthy church

# Church changes not previously reported to General Assembly

1.1 In an ideal world this list would only include church changes – that is a note of churches that have closed – or opened – between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2016 (these are the cut-off dates that we need to work to prepare the *Book of Reports* for General Assembly). Unfortunately some churches that closed between 1 April 2012 and 31 March 2014 (and, in one case, even earlier) were not included in the appropriate report to General Assembly, and we have wanted to include them here.

1.2 Below is a simple listing of the closed churches, synod by synod, listed in alphabetical order with the date of closure. The *Record of Assembly* will include a section on church ‘obituaries’ and all churches that have closed in the qualifying period have been invited to submit an obituary for inclusion in that. We are grateful to the Revd Mark Meatcher for his careful work in compiling this list.

## Resolution 8

**General Assembly notes the closures listed, with praise to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years.**

### Church closures

#### **Synod 1: Northern**

Chatton United Reformed Church, Chatton 3 May 2015  
 Felton United Reformed Church, Felton 28 February 2016  
 Lingdale United Reformed Church, Lingdale 5 April 2015  
 Winlaton United Reformed Church, Gateshead 26 July 2015

#### **Synod 2: North Western**

Barrow United Reformed Church 21 June 2015  
 Haslingden United Reformed Church, Rossendale 5 October 2014  
 Lytham United Reformed Church 21 September 2014  
 Metropolitan Church Mission Project, Manchester 12 March 2016  
*(Noting that the mission project has now amalgamated with their host church – Wilbraham St Ninian’s URC, Chorlton, Manchester.)*

#### **Synod 3: Mersey**

Beechwood West United Reformed Church, Runcorn 30 March 2014  
 Upton United Reformed Church, Wirral 26 July 2015

#### **Synod 4: Yorkshire**

Brotherton United Reformed Church, Brotherton 27 March 2016  
 Holderness Road United Reformed Church, Hull 28 September 2014  
 Wadsley United Reformed Church, Sheffield 19 July 2014

#### **Synod 5: East Midlands**

Chaddesden United Reformed Church, Derby 29 March 2015  
 Hill Top United Reformed Church, Dronfield 8 March 2015  
 Thurnby & Bushby United Reformed Church, Bushby 1 February 2015

#### **Synod 6: West Midlands**

No closures to report in the period

## Mission Council

### **Synod 7: Eastern**

Eastwood United Reformed Church, Southend-on-Sea 9 August 2015  
The Independent Chapel (1662), Congregational Church and United Reformed Church in Finchfield 20 September 2014  
Trent Road, Chelmsford 30 January 2014

### **Synod 8 South Western**

Avebury Chapel Centre, Avebury 21 July 2014  
Bishopsworth United Reformed Church, Bishopsworth 30 December 2012  
Tabernacle United Reformed Church, Chippenham 23 March 2016  
Lawrence Hill United Reformed Church, Bristol 23 June 2013  
Morcombelake United Reformed Church, Morcombelake 1 June 2014  
Penhill United Reformed Church, Swindon 30 March 2014

### **Synod 9: Wessex**

The United Free Church (St Peter's Shared Church LEP), Chertsey 9 March 2014  
Newbury United Reformed Church, Newbury 11 April 2015

### **Synod 10: Thames North**

St Mark's Church, Aylesbury 17 September 2011

### **Synod 11 Southern**

Ash, Kent 19 September 2015  
Ashburnham United Reformed Church, Ashburnham 31 December 2013  
(*Noting that the church has become an independent chapel.*)  
Robertson Street United Reformed Church, Hastings December 2012  
Pratts Bottom Free Church 6 April 2013  
Richmond Green 30 August 2015  
Robertsbridge United Reformed Church, Robertsbridge 5 September 2015  
Sittingbourne and Milton Regis 25 July 2015  
South Norwood URC 25 January 2015  
St Mary's Island Ecumenical Church, Chatham 30 November 2012  
(*Noting that the church ceased to be an LEP but continues as an Anglican church.*)

### **Synod 12: Synod of Wales**

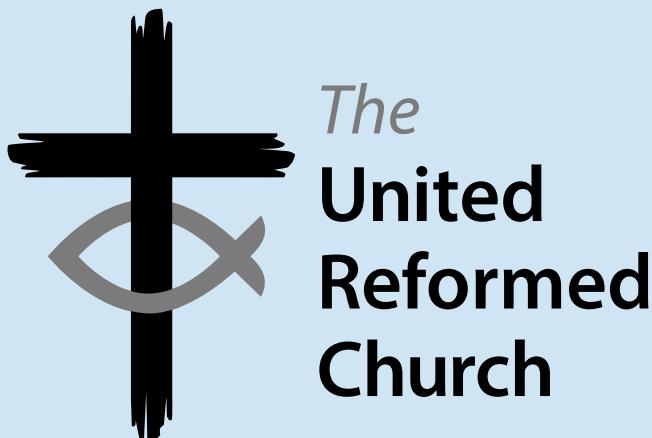
Carmel United Reformed Church, Nantmel 18 October 2014  
Christchurch United Reformed Church, Llandaff North Cardiff 31 January 2016

### **Synod 13: Synod of Scotland**

No church closures to report in this period.

## **Church openings**

No new United Reformed churches, or local ecumenical partnerships involving the URC, have opened in the period between 31 March 2014 and 1 April 2016.



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# Assembly arrangements committee:

## Report to General Assembly 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd James Breslin: <a href="mailto:member@newcastleurc.freeserve.co.uk">member@newcastleurc.freeserve.co.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>9.</b> In order that the <i>Book of Reports</i> should be as accessible as possible, General Assembly requests that every report on which a decision is invited should include a summary of its main points in not more than 250 words on a cover sheet. Assembly gives to the General Secretary, as editor, authority to vary this guideline in appropriately exceptional cases.</p> <p><b>10.</b> Assembly agrees that the General Assembly in 2018 will meet in the Albert Hall, Nottingham from 6 to 9 July 2018 or at such other place or on such other date as may be necessary.</p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	1. To appoint a venue for the 2018 Assembly 2. To consider and possibly reduce the amount of preparatory reading required of members.
<b>Main points</b>	As above
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Assembly arrangements committee

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Assembly arrangements committee

## Committee members

**Convenor:** The Revd James Breslin

**Secretary:** Ann Barton

**Members:** Moderators, Moderators-elect, General Secretary, Clerk to Assembly, Convenor of local arrangements committee for the relevant year.

## General Assembly 2018

1. The committee brings a resolution that the Assembly of 2018 be held in the Albert Hall, Nottingham from 6 to 9 July 2018.

## Special meeting of Assembly 2015

2. The normal pattern of the committee's work was disrupted by the decision to hold a special meeting in Birmingham in 2015. This led to a number of extra meetings with a slightly different committee membership. The committee would like to express its thanks to all those, not least the minister and elders of Carrs Lane Church, whose hard work enabled this one-day meeting to be run so efficiently, and on budget.

## Assembly costs

3. The work of the committee is such that spending decisions are being made and commitments entered into not merely for the forthcoming Assembly but for the following Assembly – and often the one after that. In 2012 the budget of the Assembly was reduced by one third, and while the committee has attempted to reduce its costs accordingly, this has only proved possible by transferring a number of major costs to other budgets. In 2014 the cost of accommodation and travel was only partly met from the Assembly budget, with several synods picking up the extra expense which otherwise fell upon the individual members. For 2016, the Assembly budget will pay the first £50 of each night's accommodation with synods agreeing to meet the additional cost of accommodation and all travel costs. The committee is most grateful to the synods for agreeing this but recognises that this can only be a temporary arrangement. The Assembly of 2018 will be the first to have been planned and costed entirely on the basis of the reduced budget.

## Short term future planning

4. Planning for a future Assembly begins several years in advance. Normally by the time the Assembly meets the committee has begun detailed negotiations with the proposed venue for the Assembly following the next. This has not proved possible this time. Although we intend that the 2020 Assembly be held in Scotland, uncertainty over our future budget, and a major review of the Assembly being carried out by the General Secretary at the request of Mission Council, has led the committee to delay making any decisions beyond 2018.

## Longer term future planning

5. Several options for the longer term are being explored. The work already carried out by the General Secretary covered several possibilities. Four ways of reducing the cost of the Assembly were proposed, make it simpler; make it smaller; make it shorter; hold it less frequently. Of those only the last has been rejected. Further work remains to be done on the feasibility and desirability of the other options. A shorter Assembly would involve difficult decisions about what could be removed from the Agenda

## Assembly arrangements

and a smaller Assembly would involve changes to the formula by which membership is calculated, and might require changes to the Structure – a lengthy process. The 2018 Assembly will be simpler and this might help the Church to see whether that is a pattern it wishes to adopt. A fifth option – not to change the Assembly but to increase the budget – is also being explored. Additionally, the committee was asked to investigate the possibility of adopting a permanent site for the Assembly to meet. Already two possible venues have been identified, one in London and one in the Midlands but this project having been suspended while awaiting the outcome of the General Secretary's work, much more work needs to be done before any proposals can be brought forward.

## Reporting to Assembly

6.1 In addition to its work on size, duration and venue the Assembly arrangements committee is also responsible for timetabling and for the structuring of debate. The nature of the General Assembly is such that its members have a number of complementary skills and interests.

6.2 While it is expected that members give serious consideration to all matters coming before it, it has to be recognised that different members will find some business of greater interest than others.

6.3 The problem of how to report to a body containing different levels of expertise is one which all of our councils meet – and have addressed in various ways.

6.4 The duty of disclosure imposed upon committees, combined with the fact that some of the work of the church either needs quite complex explanation or is the product of a joint exercise which may result in a lengthy document, means that committees occasionally produce lengthy reports which go into more detail than many members of the Assembly feel they need or are prepared to study.

6.5 To remove these detailed reports would constitute an unacceptable – and in some cases potentially illegal – restriction, but to expect all members to read and assimilate several thousand words on a matter in which they have no previous knowledge is unrealistic.

6.6 It is therefore proposed that committees be instructed to produce a shortened version of large reports in order that members might familiarise themselves with the general content and decide when they need to read the full document.

## Acknowledgements and thanks

7.1 The committee is hugely indebted to the many people whose detailed work and planning makes the Assembly possible. Although the committee has just nine members, attendance at meetings rarely drops below twice that number as those responsible for many of the different bits of the work of the Church contribute to its deliberations.

7.2 Not least among these are Gill Nichol, the Head of Communications and her staff who are responsible not only for producing the *Book of Reports*, the *Record of Assembly* and the various documents and communications that accompany these, but also for the production and management of the text of resolutions which appear on the screens while the Assembly is sitting as well as for the Facebook, Twitter and print reports that are distributed before and after the Assembly.

7.3 Karen Morrison, the Head of Children's and Youth Work Development, works closely with the committee in assisting the younger members of the Assembly both during the Assembly and the pre-Assembly 'What do You Think' event.

7.4 The Revd Michael Davies has, for several years, undertaken the detailed work in overseeing the budget and monitoring expenses as well as assisting in the office during the Assembly.

7.5 Without the volunteers who give of their time before and during the Assembly, it would not be possible and the committee always welcomes offers from possible new helpers.

7.6 Without the active engagement of the synod in which the Assembly meets it would not be possible to hold an Assembly in its current form. Every Assembly is staffed by a team of stewards drawn from local churches and the committee wishes to express its thanks to all those who undertake this task.

7.7 While it has only been possible to mention a few of those whose contribution makes the Assembly possible, the committee particularly wishes to thank Ann Barton, its secretary. Ann has served as secretary of the Assembly arrangements committee since 2004. This she has done in addition to her main role as Facilities Manager in Church House. Although she has indicated that she does not intend to do so, Ann will be eligible to retire just before the 2018 Assembly, which would make this her last Assembly as a full time staff member. We are grateful for her continuing commitment to the work of the Assembly and for her attention to detail which makes the work of this committee so much easier. In the Assembly arrangements committee report to the General Assembly of 2005 the then Convenor, in thanking her for her first year's work, noted that the 'role encompasses much more than the simple title implies.' Never was a truer word said!

# Children's and youth work committee:

## Report to General Assembly 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Karen Morrison; Tim Meachin <a href="mailto:children.youth@urc.org.uk">children.youth@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Take note
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Actions and developments since General Assembly 2014 Plans for the future
<b>Main points</b>	Restructuring of FURY, key decisions regarding future planning, report of work undertaken. Pilots and its place in the committee's programme
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Papers B1 and B2: Mission Council November 2015 URC Youth Handbook and associated documents – online
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Youth Assembly 2015 and 2016 and via online survey

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	N/A
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	N/A.

# Children's and youth work committee General Assembly

## 2016 report

### Committee members

**Convenor:** Tim Meachin

**Secretary:** Karen Morrison (Head of Children's and Youth Work Development)

**Members:** Sam Brown, Heather Cadoux, Lorraine Downer-Mattis, Richard Eastman (until February 2016), Nicola Grieves (CYDO 2016-18), Alan Kendal, Tim Lowe (until June 2015), Maria Mills (Equal opportunities), Dan Morrell (Youth Assembly moderator elect 2016–17), Catey Morrison, Sandy Nunn (Youth Assembly moderator 2015–16), Philip Ray (CYDO 2014–16), Phil Reeve (until June 2015), Ruth Roddison, Mick Smerdon, Alison Tansom, Fiona Thomas (Education and learning), Soo Webster (convenor of Pilots management committee), Andrew Weston (FURY moderator 2014–15), Adam Woodhouse.

## Pilots

*'Pilots believes that children and young people matter, therefore Pilots gives local churches the opportunity to share the love of God in the ongoing life of Jesus Christ by inviting children and young people on an exciting journey'.*

The Pilots mission statement.

1.1 Work has continued apace in Pilots with 2016 seeing a 24 hour summit meeting being held for the Pilots management committee, regional Pilots officers and Pilots publication board members. This was an intense and fruitful series of meetings looking at the future of the organisation in the 21st century.

1.2 From this a request was made to the children's and youth work committee to clarify the organisation's place in the committee's programmes. Pilots received confirmation from the committee that 'Pilots is the children's and youth work programme, for those aged 5 to 18, offered and supported by the United Reformed Church and will be promoted as such, where it is appropriate'.

1.3 Pilots continues to produce high quality annual resources, one of which, the annual worship resource, is shared with the whole church. In addition to these, two further resources were produced in 2015:

1.4 *Let Justice Flow: An Introduction to Social Justice*, produced by the URC, Pilots, Christian Aid and Commitment for Life, was presented at Youth Assembly. This resource aims to enable local churches to interact with topics such as climate change, poverty, equality and world trade.

1.5 *Theology of Pilots*, a further title in the theology series published by the children's and youth work committee. It is a resource for ministers, parents and Pilots, explaining why Pilots 'does what it does'.

1.6 A Pilots 'Big Day Out' entitled 'Pilots on Safari', took place in 2015 to which the whole church was invited. 1500 people gathered for a day of fun and fellowship. Materials were produced before the event to help groups engage with the theme and a sticker collecting game helped children learn more about endangered species on the day itself.

## Children's and youth work

1.7 Two videos about Pilots were commissioned. A short video to promote the organisation and a longer video giving more of the historical back story, produced specifically for churches which are considering setting up a Pilots company.

1.8 Work is nearing completion on an updated version of *The Compass*, the manual for leaders running Pilots companies. Much of the material is new and the committee is excited by the new programme offered.

1.9 The 80th anniversary of Pilots is in 2016 and a range of celebrations have been planned. A Pilots hymn, to the tune 'Theodoric', has been written by the Revd Janet Lees to mark the occasion. During the anniversary year, it is hoped memories and stories from past Pilots can be captured and recorded in *The Bridge*, the Pilots magazine.

1.10 Pilots is looking forward to celebrating *Feasts and Festivals* with the whole denomination in 2017 and plans for another Big Day Out are underway.

## United Reformed Church Youth

*'Our mission is to discover God, to help each other grow in the Christian Faith, and through our lives reflect God's love to all'.*

The URC Youth mission statement.

### 2.1 Restructuring

2.1.1 A review of The Fellowship of United Reformed Youth (FURY) has been completed. FURY has a long and precious history, playing an important role in many lives within the URC and the committee celebrates this history. The review found that the name FURY had run its course and no longer served its original purpose. The term 'United Reformed Church Youth' has been adopted and documents (URC Youth Handbook, Framework and Standing Orders) have been produced to support its work and that of the new Youth Executive as well as supporting the Youth Assembly business sessions. These were received at Youth Assembly 2016.

2.1.2 In its final form, the URC Youth restructuring has been very well received. Consequently, the Children's and Youth Work Committee brought a resolution, which was agreed by Mission Council in November 2015, to implement the new structures.

2.1.3 The URC Youth structure and procedures now parallel the rest of the denomination with synod youth representatives having a seat on the URC Youth Executive.

### 2.2 Youth Assembly 2015

2.2.1 The 'Time To Change' pledge was signed on behalf of Youth Assembly before it met, committing Youth Assembly to doing everything in its power to tackle mental health stigma, promote living conversations about mental wellbeing, and make the best provision possible for people facing mental health difficulties, across the organisation.

2.2.2 Youth Assembly 2015 reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the work already undertaken on mental wellbeing at previous Youth Assemblies, which had resulted in bringing a resolution to General Assembly 2014 in Cardiff, which was passed.

2.2.3 In addition, two documents have been produced, 'Get Talking', in response to a Youth Assembly resolution asking for help to make conversations about mental health and wellbeing easier to start, and, second, a signposting document which guides readers to appropriate sources of support, as well as providing snippets of appropriate information.

### 2.3 Youth Assembly 2016

2.3.1 Youth Assembly 2016 passed several resolutions in response to the restructuring, including the adoption of the standing orders and the appointment of a clerk to Youth Assembly. Resolutions encouraging synods to run more and longer summer camps and to make better provision for young people settling in new synods are now being considered further by the URC Youth Executive, which is also addressing issues arising from the end of the Christian Aid Internship programme.

2.3.2 Youth Assembly discussed the work of the Church and Society department on environmental issues, as well as contributing to the work of the 20s to 40s Task Group.

### 2.4 URC Youth executive

2.4.1 The URC Youth Executive has plans to develop cross departmental relationships, identifying areas where work overlaps across the denomination. It will focus attention on social justice and the environment, drawing upon the help of Christian Aid, the Joint Public Issues Team and the Church and Society department.

2.4.2 Preliminary planning has begun for Youth Assembly 2017.

### 2.5 What do you think?

2.5.1 WDYT? 2014, once again, gave Under 26 Representatives to General Assembly the chance to explore the structure and business of Assembly before the event. This was well received by the representatives who were evidently well prepared to contribute, and as a result many members of General Assembly noted how well informed and confident they were.

2.5.2 There was also a short WDYT? on the day of the recalled General Assembly in 2015. Planning for WDYT? 2016 is underway.

## Integrated theme

3.1 The committee hosted a theme planning meeting in August 2014 to suggest annual themes to focus URC's the Children's and Youth Work each year. This gathering also served to build relationships between those involved in Children's and Youth Work who might not otherwise gather.

3.2 The 2015 theme of *Treasures* was followed by *Roots and Foundations* in 2016. Both have proved very successful indeed.

3.3 Following the success of this initiative, particularly in relation to Youth Assembly and Pilots, we are encouraged that the concept of a theme for the year has been adopted more widely. Next year's theme, *Feasts and Festivals*, has been chosen in collaboration with the Discipleship department to celebrate the five hundred years since the Lutheran reformation and one hundred years since the ordination of Constance Coltman.

3.4 This theme will provide a focus for a whole range of areas of work in addition to children's and youth work. We look forward to this venture with great anticipation.

## Child Friendly church awards

4. The Child Friendly Church Award (CFCA) programme continues to provide an excellent framework for churches to reflect on their ability to cater for the needs of children and young people in their communities and contexts, making sure that any current or potential work with children and young people made by the church is truly relevant, accessible and engaging for all involved. Since General Assembly 2014, eight new Child Friendly Church Awards have been presented, along with 18 award renewals. The committee has also produced guidance to enhance consistency and accountability in the CFCA renewal process.

## Children's and youth work priorities

5. In order to give direction to the work of the Children's and youth work office, the committee has agreed a set of priorities which will enable staff to better manage their commitments and to be sure that their work focuses on the areas we have prioritised.

### Children's Assembly

6.1 Along with many members of General Assembly and Mission Council, we express deep disappointment at the lack of a Children's Assembly to run alongside General Assembly. In previous years, this event has enabled children to participate directly in the work of General Assembly and its business, truly treating them as 'equal partners, with adults, in the life of the Church' (URC's Charter for Children in the Church). The work of the Assembly has been enriched by the children's contributions.

6.2 Much thought has been put into the idea of running a Children's Assembly alongside this year's General Assembly but, owing to a range of reasons including cost, logistics and the current pressures on school systems across the UK, this has, sadly, not been possible.

6.3 We are delighted, however, that children's voices will be heard at General Assembly 2016 in the form of video contributions to worship sessions. This will allow them to help shape and influence the spiritual reflections of Assembly, impacting the gathering in a meaningful way.

### Children and youth development officer covenant

7.1 The children's and youth work committee considered the Mission Council resolution of May 2013 which noted that Mission Council 'strongly urges all Synods to covenant to Assembly level work up to 25% of the time of their CYDO(s), or other person(s) chosen and employed by the Synod with a brief for Children's and Youth work at Synod level;' [and] 'invites the Children and Youth Work Committee to explore ways of working together across all the Synods'.

7.2 As the conversation between the committee and synods progressed there was little appetite for a signed covenant but the committee was encouraged by the positive nature of synod responses and by the increased number of CYDOs which have been appointed.

### Website

8. Children's and youth work pages offer information, resources, encouragement, story sharing and reflection, which can be a challenge on a website designed to be text heavy. The committee is grateful to all those who contribute materials to these pages.

### Safeguarding

9. In order to assist the production of 'Good Practice 4' (GP4), the URC's latest guidance on safeguarding practice, members of the children's and youth work development officer (CYDO) team and children's and youth work office contributed to the materials. This took a great deal of time and energy for which the Children's and Youth Work Committee is grateful.

### Work with other organisations

10. Following an approach from the United Reformed Church Guide and Scout Fellowship, the committee considered how the children's and youth work office should deal with requests for us to enter relationships with such organisations. The committee has agreed guidelines for office staff to follow, which includes triaging requests in order

to find suitable ways forward, approaching the committee for any decisions which might be needed. We hope that this will enable useful relationships to be developed as the need or opportunity arises.

## Society, ecumenical and international work

### 11.1 Council for World Mission (CWM)

As one of the URC's main partners in mission, CWM continues to provide a range of opportunities for young people to deepen their understanding of faith and spirituality through different projects, events and initiatives, including the Mission House in Amsterdam and the Training in Mission (TIM) programme, taking place in three different countries each year. CWM has also been considering its work with children in Europe and also around the globe, hosting a European Consultation on Mission with Children in 2015, which representatives from the URC thoroughly enjoyed. The report of the consultation can be found on CWM Europe's website (<http://www.cwmeurope.org/images/What/MissionwithChildrenReportFinal.pdf>).

### 11.2 Opportunities and experiences

The committee encourages and supports young people to participate in the various opportunities that are on offer to them. Since the General Assembly last met, the URC has been represented by young people at the Starpoint Festival in Hungary, Mission Camp in Taiwan, CWM Exploration Programme in the Netherlands as well as many synod opportunities that the committee supports through its grant funding. Young people have participated in peer gatherings with the Methodist Church and the Quaker Society as well as accepting invitations to MP led events at Portcullis House, Westminster.

### 11.3 Children's Ministry Network (CMN)

Formerly known as the Consultative Group on Ministry amongst Children (CGMC), this network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) continues to provide networking opportunities for children's ministry practitioners across the UK, sharing information and resources, such as CORE Skills Training, recommended for anyone engaging in any type of children's or youth work within the URC.

### 11.4 European Conference on Christian Education (ECCE)

This ecumenical conference, held every four years, will take place in London in May 2016, giving organisations and denominations working with children the opportunity to gather, from across Europe, to explore the theme of *Lifelong Disciples: Accompanying children on their faith journey – Thinking as, living as being a lifelong disciple*. The children's and youth office have been playing a key role in organising this conference.

# Communications and editorial committee:

## Towards resourcing the Church

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Peter Knowles: <a href="mailto:peterwknowles@gmail.com">peterwknowles@gmail.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>11. General Assembly changes the name of the communication and editorial committee to the communications committee with immediate effect, and authorises any consequent changes.</b></p> <p><b>12. General Assembly commends iChurch, as its preferred website supplier, to local churches, affiliated groups and the synods.</b></p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To provide Assembly with an update on the work of the communications and editorial committee and an outline of their future plans and;  To change the committee name and; To commend the use of iChurch across the denomination
<b>Main points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To give an overview of the work done in the past two years – and that planned for the next two-to-five years</li> <li>2. To emphasize the committee's commitment to resourcing the local churches by creating and disseminating good quality and relevant information</li> <li>3. Recommendation that the denomination supports iChurch</li> </ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council papers: November 2014: C1 – The departmental mission statement; C3, The future of <i>Reform</i> November 2015: C1–The departmental review March 2016: C1 and C2 – Update on <i>Reform</i> 's finances
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Ongoing discussions with the communications and editorial committee, the staff of the department and the Deputy General Secretary (Administration & Resources)

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	As the plans outlined here are put into action, and local church resources updated, created and disseminated, it is hoped that the denomination will benefit and that the role and positive example of the URC will be more easily recognised by ecumenical partners.

# Towards resourcing the Church

## **Mission Statement:**

The communications department exists to promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the United Reformed Church by:

- Giving voice to good news
- Facilitating regional/national communications
- Supporting the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly
- Resourcing the local churches

## **Committee members:**

**Convenor:** John Humphreys (to 30 June 2015) Peter Knowles (from 1 July 2015)

**Secretary:** Gill Nichol

**Current members:** Andrea Varnavides; Andy Jeens; Ashley Evans; Heather Carr, Kate Gray, Kevin Snyman, Rebecca Gudgeon and Tim Llewellyn.

The committee thanks John Humphreys, Ian Fosten and Heather Whyte, all of whom completed their term in 2015.

## **Overview**

1.1 The last two years have been a time of excitement, change, exhaustion and hope. It has been busy! Yet, at the time of writing, there is a sense of quiet pride as we look back over the achievement of the past two years, pleasure in all we have accomplished, acknowledgement that there is still much to be done, and an overriding sense of optimism that we're on the right path.

1.2 In 2014 the committee considered the mission of the department and the above mission statement was agreed upon and ratified by Mission Council in November 2014.

1.3 In the last 24 months the department has been driven by its aim to provide the United Reformed Church with a communications department able to meet the growing needs and expectations of the denomination. The departmental review (see section two) gave focus and structure to this process, helping the committee and the department staff begin to define what the denomination needed – and how and what it could deliver given the resources available.

1.4 There will always be a tension between the communication needs and expectations of the denomination and the ability of the department, with its finite resources, to meet them. Prioritisation and the targeted, efficient use of those resources, are key.

1.5 Much of what we do – for example the editing and production of the business papers for Mission Council and General Assembly – is determined by the needs of the General Secretariat and others; but when we are able to make choices over where we put our time and energy we wish to prioritise work that resources the local churches. For example we are starting to review many of the denomination's existing information booklets such as the series: '*They've asked me to be*'.

1.6 Resourcing the local churches informs much of our work – including the books we chose to stock in the online store; the Bible studies and the new practical features in *Reform*, the development of News Update (our e-newsletter) as well as our synod-based communications training.

1.7 One way we have tackled the gap between need and resource, is by the recruitment of skilled volunteers to undertake specific editorial tasks, working alongside the staff team. We are very grateful for the writing and editing work done by Dr Jean Silvan Evans on the *Getting to grips with copyright* booklet; and the ongoing editing work

## Communications and editorial

done by Ms Cathy Melia on the revision of *The Manual*. The committee and the Head of Department extend their warm thanks to them both.

1.8 We are delighted that work has been done to modernise the URC logo, making it fit for purpose across all necessary media; it will be in use from Assembly 2016. The committee thanks the department's graphic designers – Sara Foyle and Chris Andrews, for their work on the logo.

## The departmental review

2.1 The departmental review, the subject of our report to General Assembly 2014, concluded in summer 2015.

2.2 The review of the communications department October 2013 – July 2015 was part of the business of Mission Council in November 2015 and is available to read online at <http://bit.ly/1S4vZHe>

## Staffing

3.1 After a period of stability in the staffing of the department the last 12 months have been a time of great change. For a variety of reasons five members of the team have left, three new staff members have been recruited and, at the time of writing, we are recruiting two new staff members. Despite this significant turnover of staff the human resources office is content that there are no underlying personnel issues at play.

3.2 The committee thanks all departmental staff, past and present, for their contribution to the communications work of the Church. Particular mention must be made of Tina King, who served the Church with unstinting cheerfulness and professionalism, for 17 years.

## Renaming the committee

4.1 This committee now wishes to be known as the communications committee. The existing name is cumbersome and we believe that this change brings the committee name – and that of the department – in line with our peer organisations. We believe that the editorial aspects of our diverse brief are covered by the single title 'communications'.

## Resourcing the church

5.1 Resourcing the local churches, a key aim and part of our Mission Statement (printed at the top of page 61) informs much of the work we do. It is our hope that our commitment to resourcing the church is clear across all sections of the report, but we have highlighted six areas of work that are not expressly picked up elsewhere.

5.2 Developed from the communications training led by Gill Nichol is a growing series of information booklets on several aspects of church communications including *Church print and publications* and *Dealing with the media*. Written as training resources, they are also available to buy via the online store. We are pleased with both the quality and range of these booklets.

5.3 In autumn 2015 the publications office became aware that *Rejoice & Sing* will soon be out of print. The publishers – Oxford University Press – do not intend to reprint when the current low stocks are sold. In the light of this, the committee has been asked to examine the viability of the denomination having its own printed hymnbook and it has recently started to look into this. The committee plans to bring its recommendations to Mission Council in October 2016.

5.4 The committee fully supports iChurch, the out-of-the-box United Reformed Church website solution developed by the Windermere Centre. iChurch is built on the Wordpress blogging software and provides an easy-to-use, cost-effective, supported and flexible web solution. We commend its use to local churches, affiliated church groups and the synods. For more information please see the report from the Windermere Centre on pages 75-77 and/or contact Rebecca Gudgeon at the Windermere Centre at [rebecca.wincen@gmail.com](mailto:rebecca.wincen@gmail.com).

5.5 The *Social Media Guidelines* were written in 2014, ratified by Mission Council in May 2015 and are due to be reviewed this year.

5.6 We developed a House Style Guide for use throughout Church House and beyond. It is available for use throughout the denomination and can be found via the Resources Library section of the URC website.

## External communications

6.1 Kenwyn Pierce, the full-time Press and Media Officer, handles the external communications of the Church – including media releases, web stories, Joint Public Issues Team work, and leads on URC-led media campaigns – such as the denomination's involvement in the Greenbelt festival and the Christian Aid Christmas appeal, for which the URC was a media partner for the past two years.

6.2 Kenwyn has developed our podcast output – aiming to produce one 15 minute conversational interview a month that offers fresh insights into the life and mission of the URC.

6.3 In the past year we have developed our social media reach significantly and are now seeing better engagement with our social media posts. In the period from 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2016 the reach of our Facebook page has risen by almost 200% and Twitter by 75%.

6.4 We have invested in a small audio-visual recording studio, currently located in one of the basement rooms at Church House. We used this to run our first in-house broadcast media training day in January 2016 and it is also regularly used for recording podcasts. We are considering other ways we can make this facility available, both to colleagues in Church House, to the wider denomination, and perhaps even those beyond the denomination.

6.5 Reputation management is a crucially important piece of work handled by the department. Like all public institutions, the URC is involved in this difficult area of work – advising on the media angles of situations which could negatively impact on the work and reputation of the United Reformed Church at all levels – local church, synod and national. It is vital work that we must get right. Much time-absorbing, careful, work takes place behind the scenes – and other work is often temporarily sidelined while this urgent work is given priority. Appropriate execution of this work, led by Gill Nichol, Head of Communications, with high levels of input and support from the Press and Media Officer, frequently put pressures on other parts of the work delivered by these two post holders.

## Internal communications

7.1 Internal communications, in a URC-context, refers to a wide range of activities, including *News Update* and web reflections – which are activities carried out by the Press and Media Officer – and copywriting booklets, web-copy and other publications – which is mostly handled by the Head of Communications, and, as noted in paragraph 1.7 above, by willing and committed volunteers.

## Communications and editorial

7.2 We are currently planning the communications work around forthcoming denominational initiatives: the Moderators' theme of People of the Way (2016 to 2018) Feasts and Festivals initiative (2017) and Walking the Way (2018 onwards)

### Reform

8.1 Boosted by the commendation *Reform* received at Mission Council in November 2014, the communications team has worked hard to market the magazine to new subscribers. These efforts have included special offers, advertisements, reviving the local church distributor network and mailing lapsed subscribers. Consequently, after years of steep decline, subscriptions to *Reform* have stabilised at around 4,000 over the last year, and, in March 2016, we saw the first increase in subscriptions for two years – we hope to see consistent growth in the future.

8.2 To make *Reform* more of a resource for churches, the *Reform* team have started to include articles on more practical subjects including: how churches can be more dementia-friendly or autism-friendly; tips for church websites; and how churches can be more creative. A guide to using *Reform* in church has been printed, and the *Reform* website now provides discussion questions for church study groups to accompany the 'Chapter & verse' page in the magazine each month.

8.3 The digital edition of *Reform* for tablets, smart phones and computers, was launched in April 2015. It has been well received, and the number of subscribers has increased every month, reaching 234 in March 2016.

8.4 *Reform*'s editorial board was revived in February 2015. It has six members from across the denomination and meets twice a year, offering valuable feedback on the content and direction of the magazine.

### Graphics and print

9.1 It has been another extremely busy period and we have been working at capacity. The steady stream of material to be designed and printed continues – certificates, booklets and business papers for Mission Council and General Assembly. Other projects are currently on hold mainly due to a lack of staff resources to deliver the volume of work needed in the time required.

9.2 Discussions about website material have led to a revision of the way web resources are presented; it is planned to roll out this new formatting style across all web resources as they are updated.

9.3 The graphics office continues to benefit from the skills of Chris Andrews, graphic designer for *Reform*, who now works with the graphics office for either two or three days a month (30 days a year). The most significant piece of work Chris has been involved in is the development of the reworked URC logo.

### Website

10.1 In 2015 the URC website has been moved to an updated stable platform and a cleaner, more streamlined layout is being implemented across the site, starting with the Admin and Resources section. Planned development in other areas is in progress but due to limited staff resource, has not been able to move forward at the pace hoped for.

10.2 We are currently considering appointing – on a part-time fixed term contract – a web specialist to help progress the updating of the website.

## Publications

11.1 Having been staffed by temporary (agency) staff for the past few years we are now recruiting for a permanent part-time (0.6) Publications Coordinator. This new role will include marketing activity.

11.2 The three annual publications – The *Yearbook*, *Prayer Handbook* and the *URC diary* remain steady sellers.

11.3 In 2015 the content of the *Yearbook* was examined and improvements made to both layout and content.

11.4 Recognising that the department does not have the resources to act as a publisher the committee decided to pull back from publishing new titles whilst the review was ongoing. During the review, the committee started work on a publications policy – this is still in draft form and is due to be further reviewed by the committee at its next meeting. When finalised it will go to Mission Council for ratification

11.5 Despite the virtual moratorium on publishing new titles, we are pleased to announce that we will be publishing two new titles this year – one from Bernard Thorogood and another from his son Neil Thorogood.

11.6 The publications board is in the process of being re-established. The committee is delighted that the Revd Heather Whyte has agreed chair the board. We hope that it will be in place and operational by summer 2016.

## Despatch

12. In the past two years the despatch office has been modernised and now uses Royal Mail's online processing programme for sorting parcel post. The office is open two days a week and works at full capacity on both days; packing and despatching copies of the *Yearbook* and the *Prayer Handbook*, as well as publications and items sold via the online store.

# Education and learning committee:

## Report to General Assembly 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Prof Neil Messer: <a href="mailto:Neil.Messer@winchester.ac.uk">Neil.Messer@winchester.ac.uk</a> The Revd Fiona Thomas: <a href="mailto:fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk">fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	To receive the report
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The purpose of the report is to describe the work carried out on behalf of the committee since the General Assembly of 2016
<b>Main points</b>	The last two years has seen significant work done on EM1 budgeting, encouragement of collaboration between educational providers, and preparation for the denomination's approach to missional discipleship
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Committee report to GA 2014
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Ongoing consultation across the denomination

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None outside agreed budget
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Education and learning committee update report

The education and learning committee maintains strategic oversight of adult learning in the United Reformed Church by liaison with relevant officers in synods and other Assembly committees; supporting four Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs); providing the Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) range of courses; and maintaining positive relationships with ecumenical partners. The committee supports the initial and ongoing professional development of Ministers of Word and Sacraments, church related community workers (CRCWs), Assembly-accredited lay preachers, and other lay ministries including eldership.

## Overall

1.1 The 'Learning Church. Next Chapter' process discussed in the committee's report to General Assembly in 2014 encouraged the committee to continue focusing on conversations between and within educational providers in pursuit of the goals of the 2006 training review. This has borne fruit through the 'Big Picture' meeting in May 2014 which brought together people from synods, RCLs and other key Assembly committees.

It concluded:

*'The education and learning committee has the task of creating and holding spaces in which people can meet to interact with each other, creatively and sometimes ferociously to ensure that this resource-rich church is taking seriously the challenge to integrate its efforts. Key words are flourishing, nurturing and deepen.'*

1.2 The Big Picture meeting gave rise to the 2014 review of TLS, and, at the recalled Big Picture meeting in May 2015 reiterated the Learning Church. Next Chapter focus on lay development, which fed into subsequent work on missional discipleship and Mission Council's adoption of 'Walking the Way: Living the Life of Jesus Today'. The 2015 meeting also led to the 'Roundtable to Enable Learning' bringing synods and Assembly committees together in April 2016 to look at ways of working in a church rich in people resources.

## The best of what we do

1.3 The education and learning committee budget is largely committed to the RCLs together with recurring programmes including TLS and Education for Ministry phases 1/2/3 (EM1, EM2 and EM3). The committee both responds to and feeds into Assembly policy in relation to adult education, carrying out careful and detailed work in pursuit of effective use of resources. Indicators of this in the past two years can be seen in:

- participating in the establishment of the discipleship department
- pioneering use of Appreciative Inquiry in the churches in partnership with synods and ecumenical colleagues
- reviewing TLS
- commissioning the fixed-term task group on blended learning
- joint working with the children and youth department on signposting mental health resources
- introducing a new EM1 student finance scheme in conjunction with the finance office and relevant RCLs
- reshaping EM1 administration with the ministries committee and RCLs, allowing reduced staffing in the education and learning office
- preparing for a network of researchers from the United Reformed Church
- implementing mandatory Safer Sacred Space training in conjunction with the synods

## Education and learning

- maintaining the EM2 programme
- compiling statistics on use of membership resources, eldership preparation, and EM3 uptake.

### Learning from change and challenges

1.4 In 2009 the education and learning committee adopted an approach to relationships with the RCLs based on the three principles of parity of esteem, comparability of financing, and equivalence of representation, which take into account the diversity of the RCLs. One size could not fit all, and the rich variety of voices in the rest of this education and learning committee report is testament to that. The learning from the past two years is that continuing conversations bear fruit in surprising ways, and that facing challenges openly can lead to new ways forward.

1.5 There is always transition in life, and the last two years has seen significant shifts in personnel. The sudden death of Penny Hannon, the Education and Learning Finance Officer, in December 2014 came at a crucial time for the introduction of the new student financing system. But the preparatory work which Penny had carried out with her characteristic quiet persistence, together with collaboration with the finance officers of the relevant RCLs enabled the system to be introduced on schedule for new students from summer 2015. Penny worked for the URC for ten years, became a treasured colleague and was held in deep affection by all those who worked with her. The committee recognises and is deeply grateful for her work and commitment to the denomination.

1.6 The Revd John Smith completed his term as convenor of the committee in July 2015 after prior years of service as a member of the committee. His calm and insightful facilitation of meetings and conversations both formal and informal were an immeasurable contribution to the life of the committee and its office during a protracted period of turbulence. The Revd Dr Neil Messer brings a valuable perspective to the role of convenor as a theologian in the academy with experience of institutional change.

### The future?

1.7 The biggest single influence on the work of the committee for the foreseeable future is clearly 'Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today' as it seeks to shape and express the life of United Reformed Church through missional discipleship. It is likely to affect every part of the committee's responsibilities. This rich and-still-being woven tapestry is emerging from collaboration across the church, with particular threads in the hands of the education and learning committee. One of these is the range of intentional adult development opportunities offered during the transitional period. Work is underway to base these on strengthening Training for Learning and Serving. Local Introductory Training Experiences (TLS LITE), continued provision of TLS one year courses, and mentored reflective practice through synods. A second, longer lasting thread will be the design of the programme to replace TLS from 2018 onwards. This will rely on shared work between Assembly committees, Synods and RCLs to ensure that the new programme is as transformative and durable as TLS has proved to be, whilst benefiting from the integration of resources which was the intention of the 2006 training review.

1.8 The committee's work on appreciative inquiry and conversational approaches to organisational change is expected to move forward with the publication of the workbook currently being called *Appreciating Church*, which has drawn substantial financial support from the Methodist Church and is being co-designed with Appreciating People and ecumenical partners. The Church Leadership Programme has been revised and renewed and will once again be offered through the Windermere Centre.

## Training for Learning and Serving

2.1 Since last Assembly, two 'TLS greats' have passed on: Dr David R Goodbourn who was instrumental in devising TLS and in first delivering it among the Scottish churches; and the Revd David AL Jenkins whose energy and efforts rooted TLS in the United Reformed Church and developed it into the enormously valuable training resource it became. Marking the passing of the two Davids may seem a sad way to begin such a report as this, but as TLS evolves into something new, it is appropriate to reflect upon their mutual passion which drove the development of TLS, a passion which centred around the formation of Christian disciples and equipping them for mission and service inside and outside congregational life. TLS has sought to sustain their legacy and act upon it during the changes and challenges of the last two years.

2.2 One of those challenges has been the declining numbers enrolling on TLS courses – current numbers on all courses are 66 – and extensive soul searching has been exercised related to the question 'Why?' Is it because:

- TLS no longer 'scratches where people are itching'?
- TLS has become too identified with training for accredited ministries such as lay preaching?
- Folk in the congregations are unaware of the opportunities TLS presents?
- TLS is perceived as too demanding – especially because of its association with University validated courses?
- There are fewer church members who want to take advantage of formal discipleship training?
- It is simply time for something new?

2.3 Those who serve at the heart of TLS have not arrived at any definite answers to those questions and indeed would be sceptical of any claims to know the answers but the questions have been discussed thoroughly and, where possible, action has been taken to address the issues at the root of them.

### Taking the best of TLS into the future

2.4 One area of activity has been the creation of a more user friendly environment for engaging with the electronic aspects of TLS – having been something of a pioneer in the development of e-learning via URCLE (United Reformed Church Learning Environment). It has not always been an easy ride, not least because familiarity with computer technology is not as prevalent among URC members as is often presumed. We have worked hard to sustain the accessibility of TLS for those who are not so comfortable with computers, including helping them to develop their skills in this area and simplifying the systems we ask them to work with. If future programmes are to be open to all, continuing attention will need to be given to this reality.

2.5 Two groups (rather than individuals) have enrolled in the Foundation Course in the current academic year. The Church of Scotland enrolled six people from six of their congregations to form a TLS study group in Glasgow as a pilot for the future use of TLS as one of their main lay training vehicles – an initiative not without irony as the Church of Scotland was one of the partners who 'sold' TLS to the URC some 15 years ago, with the intention of replacing it with something new. It says much for the effectiveness of TLS that apparently a replacement that compares has never been found. The second group is 11 people from one church who, with the encouragement of the minister, enrolled on the Foundation Course and formed into two study groups with the aim of using TLS to generate and train lay-leadership in the church. As the facilitating tutor for both study groups, enormous demands are being placed upon the minister, who views the effort as worthwhile due to belief in what TLS may help to accomplish. This suggests a need to encourage individuals and groups to participate in opportunities for the development of their discipleship. Perhaps past efforts have focussed too much on recruiting individuals to training schemes and too little on what may be accomplished by bringing together groups of people from the same environment to learn and grow together.

## Education and learning

2.6 The two one-year courses running in the current academic year show – in different ways – the value of what may be termed ‘added extras’ in drawing people into learning. Gateways into Worship potentially leads to an accredited ministry and there is no doubt that, for some people, such possibilities are a significant motivation in them embarking upon a course of study. Developing Community Experiences is operated in partnership with the CRCW team who drive the recruitment of new course members. The healthy enrolment numbers on both of these courses suggest that a connection to ‘something else’ benefits discipleship development. Whether it be the potential for engaging in service that is formally recognised by the Church, or having courses that are linked to particular Church mission and service agencies or something entirely different, the added purpose brought about by the ‘something else’ can be an important stimulus to study.

2.7 The next two years will be an exciting time for the TLS LITE (Local Introductory Training Experiences) programme as it becomes a significant element in the transition from TLS to its successor. Work has already begun to make LITE deliverable electronically – and to upgrade some aspects of its assessment procedures so that it may be fit for purpose in its new role while continuing to offer the chance for people to use it simply for personal discipleship development. The new LITE facility will be available from September – watch this space.

2.8 The advance of time brings the inevitability of farewells. Heather Skidmore began as a course member on TLS and became its part-time administrator in 1999. The fact that the part time element has often been overlooked by students, and by Heather herself, says much for the contribution she has made to the smooth running of the whole enterprise. Assembly will say its own thanks but as she steps into retirement in the summer it would be remiss if we did not acknowledge here the profound debt of gratitude TLS and the whole church owe to Heather. TLS has long relied on her passion for the cause, her commitment to the task and her unstinting sacrificial service. The successor to TLS will be well served by finding people with such willingness to use their administrative skills for the building of the Kingdom.

## Northern College

3.1 Northern College continues to be a place, within the Luther King House teaching and worshipping environment, where learning, conversation and community thrive. Friends from around the world Church, as well as from other denominations in the United Kingdom, bring much to the experience of students and staff. We worship and learn together in this ecumenical setting, and feel fed by all we receive from one another.

3.2 Our students remain in their own homes and support networks, and travel for study to the college. Full-time students come to Manchester two days a week in term time (staying overnight as they need to); CRCW students have a mix of extended weekends, days, and midweek attendance; part time students attend six weekends a year.

3.3 Students work towards Diplomas, BAs or MAs in Contextual Theology, which, with their tailor-made pattern of placements over a four-year period, gives a strong grounding in today’s church and society. We have 23 EM1 students (five preparing for the ministry of CRCW, five for non stipendiary service as ministers of Word and Sacraments, and 13 for stipendiary service as ministers of Word and Sacraments) – two of whom are from the Moravian Church. Learning alongside each other, in different modules, tutorial groups and college time (the ‘formational programme’), students on each pathway overlap and diverge in their training, and come back together to complement one another’s skills and experience. Placements, in local churches of various denominations as well as the URC, in chaplaincies, and in community projects, form an important context for the academic work and a strong backdrop for the building of experience during EM1.

3.4 Having been blessed with continuity of staff resources over the last two years, Christine Jones (CRCW tutor) will be retiring this summer, and we are glad to have welcomed Noel Irwin, through succession planning, for this important role within the college and URC. As the only college offering training for CRCWs, we felt it was important not to have a hiatus of provision, but to hand over the expertise of running the programme and teaching the academic modules. Noel is an experienced Methodist minister, and has worked in the community in inner city Sheffield where he was also the Circuit Superintendent, and part time Director of the Urban Theology Unit. That latter role will continue part-time until the summer, from September Noel will be full time with Northern College.

3.5 Our development as a Resource Centre for Learning continues, with courses available to people from the wider Church. All academic programmes are available as 'short courses' that anyone can dip into for interest; there is a monthly lecture programme, a variety of Quiet Days, together with Saturday events aimed at lay people in the church, and an annual Lay Preachers' and Worship Leaders' Conference which is increasing in popularity. In addition, each member of staff contributes to training and learning events in a number of synods, local churches and for other denominations – from Ministers' Summer Schools, to synod lay preaching conferences; from local preaching to committee work. Kathy White is involved with TLS, and with the appreciative inquiry work; Graham Adams is part of the missional discipleship task group which is looking the resourcing of the church for Walking the Way, including TLS's successor.

### **The best of what we do**

3.6 We believe the beating heart of what we offer to the URC is our passion for contextual theology as we seek to respond to the changing needs of the church in the 21st century. The placements we have set up for students have taken them into a variety of chaplaincies: industrial, airport, prison, retail, hospice and navy settings as well as the more usual hospital situations. Students have the opportunity to learn first hand about working ecumenically in church placements – over the last few years in: the Church of England, and the Roman Catholic, Baptist and Methodist Churches. Students have also worked in food banks, with migrants and refugees, with projects where support is offered to people with mental health problems, and various other local-community issues. All this leads up to their two-year placement in a URC/project (or Moravian Church/Congregational Federation). Alongside this, each person has the opportunity for around ten weeks in a vacant pastorate during the summer, and an international placement.

3.7 Our ministry of CRCW modules are now popular with all students, who see the relevance of the 'edginess' of their remit in all ministry. The Baptist College are now using these modules to equip their pioneer ministers.

3.8 We have worked particularly hard over the last two years to build relationships with local synods. Staff and students preach regularly in local churches too. All this supports our insight into the realities of the URC today.

3.9 We feel that, through these local church/community-based experiences, and bringing those experiences into academic work and conversation, Northern College equips students for today's URC and into its future life and mission.

## Education and learning

### The future?

3.10 The previous paragraph says it all; the challenge is, can each Resource Centre for Learning respond to the changing needs of the URC, and to the calls upon them to share what we have to offer in the wider church?

3.11 We believe firmly that future ministers (of every kind) should be able, in their turn, to encourage and equip people with different giftings in their pastorates or projects, so we encourage students to set learning objectives in their placements with this in mind.

3.12 We are developing important partnerships with several local synods, in particular to offer more training (such as supporting lay preachers to lead funerals) that takes some of what we offer in EM1 and makes it more widely available. We are also looking beyond delivery in Manchester to the use of different venues for some of our events in the future.

### Scottish College

4.1 This year, in our Education for Ministry 1+ programme, we spent some time in the world of fairytales: discerning their significance in pastoral care, in organisational development, in storytelling, in the creative arts and in adult learning. Our learning as a college is not simply for the formation of individuals but the basis for organisational reflection and change.

4.2 Mirror, mirror, on the wall... Telling fairy stories is about creating a reflective space; about offering a means by which we can honestly explore thoughts and feelings about how things are; about the actions of others and our relationship with them; about our place in the scheme of things with our hopes and fears – and so on. And the fairy story genre does invite us to bring into that reflecting our feelings, our emotions, at least as much as our rational thoughts. Though we may live in rather activist times, there needs to be time and space for thinking and pondering as well as actions. We are not absorbed in navel gazing, but in study, in prayer, in silence and in conversation. As a college, we endeavour to create the spaces, for ordinands, for elders, for lay leadership and for ourselves to stand back and to look deeply.

4.3 Sometimes the mirror will speak to us words that we are reluctant to hear or show us truths that we are hesitant to acknowledge. The evil queen in *Snow White* is quite content when the mirror affirms her superior beauty but less happy when Snow White supplants her. The Old Testament prophets often performed such a function: When Nathan speaks to King David about the deeds of a wicked man, the king demands to know who this evil man is – ‘King David, you are the man’ (2 Samuel 12) is not the truth that David wants to hear. The mirror gazing, if it is to do us any good, has to be honest. In *Once upon a time: A short history of fairy tale*, Marina Warner observes that the fairy tale traditionally combines ‘honest harshness’ and ‘wishful hoping’. Our reflections and our hoping have to be connected to that real assessment of how things are and any wishful hoping has to be more than a nostalgic longing for a restoration of a golden age memory. There is much good in our college life and in the life of our churches and from reflecting on these things we shall learn what the lessons are for our journey and what will give us the energy to move forward in that journey.

4.4 The telling of a fairy tale will often take us back to our early years. In college this year, we have spent time recalling the heritage that is common to our own institution and to our traditions. Folk from the URC and the Congregational Federation shared in exploring the potential in remembering our past, not as an exercise in reminiscence but as a recovery of our deepest values. We discerned that in our roots lay things that need to be re-awakened: as we said in our annual report – ‘Might our heritage gifts of radical theology, passion for evangelism, love of learning, an affirmation of the ministry of each and all, a vitalised church meeting be the very things we need for discipleship today?’

Fairy tales often encapsulate the deepest truths for our human living, embody the deepest values and set out the deepest struggles to shape a world in which right and truth and humanness are affirmed. If we are to live faithfully – and are to draw others to that faith – we need to be more aware of, and inspired by, our histories; we have a heritage that lies not largely hidden in historical tomes, but that is a living and lively word for the present and the future.

4.5 And they all lived happily ever after... In thinking of the fairy tale both in pastoral care and in organisational development, we saw how often these stories had the potential for change, though they are sometimes represented as a foolish optimism in which all is resolved tidily. Working in a fairy tale model can allow us to envisage alternative endings to stories that we imagine are fixed in their conclusion. When we think, for good or ill, that we know the trajectory of our story, one of the most important questions can be 'What if ...' in which we imagine a different ending to the one that we so often expect to be settled or inevitable. Imagining our alternative 'endings' can be a means of opening up possibilities on what we thought were closed narratives.

4.6 Fairy tales are full of surprises. Animals speak and act, inanimate forces like the sea and the wind intervene to rescue. The unexpected, even the rationally unimaginable, come to pass. The Bible has its share of the ridiculous too. Abram and Sarah find themselves to be parents in advanced years. This is not to suggest that we immerse ourselves in some fantasy world, but we could be far more open to the unexpected. The fairy tale world, scarily, reminds us that the world is not one within our control, but equally it holds out possibilities of remarkable, unexpected, even incredible things happening. We who declare the presence of the Spirit working in our midst can be strangely wedded to a closed mindedness. Do we really expect God to be doing the new things in our midst?

4.7 As a college, we are on the threshold of significant change. The Synod of Scotland welcomes a new synod moderator. The leadership of the college itself must be in transition. We shall listen to the lessons of our heritage, we shall read the story of our present, and we shall open our hearts and minds to the new things with which God will surprise us.

## Westminster College

5.1 General Assembly 2014 heard of the successful completion of the development programme that saw every inch of the college building refreshed. It has been a subsequent delight to begin discovering how best to deploy the new resources at our disposal. After so much time spent preparing for this renewal we give thanks to God that we can now truly share the gifts with which we have been entrusted. The building is a tangible celebration of United Reformed Church generosity and commitment, with daily chapel worship, both in and out of term time, at its heart.

### The best of what we do

5.2 As a Resource Centre for Learning we are delighted to see a growing range of non-academic programmes developing as part of our offering to local churches. We now offer four lay preachers and worship leaders' residential short courses every year (in August and September) to cope with demand. We are building a pattern of regular retreats and quiet days. Within our own context of the Eastern Synod we are developing regular days of celebration and refreshment. We are welcoming individuals who come to enjoy some space and who are invited to make use of some or all of the teaching staff as conversation partners in exploring anything they wish. We welcome groups and committees from across the URC who meet here. Our domestic and administrative staff, led by our new bursar Magalie Cooper, offer truly superb hospitality.

## Education and learning

5.3 Much of the growth in this wider dimension of Westminster's work has been led by the Revd Samantha White, our first Director of Pastoral and Church Programmes, who joined the Westminster staff in 2014. Half of Sam's time is devoted to developing our work with and for local churches, drawing in other teaching staff as necessary. We have reduced and refined our pricing to make the use of Westminster affordable and viable. We continue to listen carefully to the Church so that we can respond to everyone's needs.

5.4 The other half of Sam's job is focussed upon our formation of candidates for the URC ministry of Word and Sacraments. This is the core work and responsibility for Westminster – and for our five teachers. This work unfolds each year within the stimulating and sometimes challenging context of the Cambridge Theological Federation; one of the broadest ecumenical communities of theology that exists, which includes interfaith study and teaching as well. We passionately believe in the importance of such a setting of diversity with its many voices, encounters and experiences as part of the context within which future ministers are nurtured. Meeting and understanding difference, and being able to celebrate our own unique gifts whilst discerning those in others, helps shape us more fully for Christ's service. Westminster is fast becoming a campus at the heart of this Federation with its central offices newly housed on our site and the Woolf Institute for the study of relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims well under way with their new building at Westminster. This will be opening in summer 2017.

5.5 Change is happening with our people too. Our teaching staff team, after years of stability, is being transformed. No sooner had we welcomed Sam than we set about recruiting a New Testament tutor to take John Proctor's place after his call to become General Secretary. After John's years of devotion to Westminster, and to a teaching ministry that has touched so many, it was important that the college wished him well with acclaim and thankfulness. To our joy we have been blessed with the arrival of Revd Dr Yak-hwee Tan in summer, 2015. Yak-hwee joins us from the Presbyterian Church in Singapore where she most recently worked with the Council for World Mission. Previously she has taught both in Taiwan and in the United States. To have Yak-hwee's fresh perspective and teaching talent is a wonderful gift. The summer of 2016 will see the retirement of the Revd Dr Janet Tollington as Westminster's Old Testament Tutor, after almost as many years of gifted and faithful service as John Proctor. We will want to give huge thanks for Janet's ministry and friendship as this new chapter begins for her. We have been delighted to appoint her successor already; Dr Alison Gray. Alison is currently on the staff at Westcott House, one of the Federation's Anglican houses, although she comes from a URC background. She brings great gifts as a teacher to the college and wider URC.

5.6 We have continued to learn to be flexible in all we do. Teaching awards with three universities (Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin and Durham) allows us to tailor programmes to individual student needs and backgrounds. Our growing provision for lay training builds constantly upon feedback and conversation across the denomination. But this all takes real energy, creativity, tenacity and wisdom. We sometimes wish we had more time to reflect and adjust – with less pressure from factors outside our control, such as decisions taken by other denominations that reshape our ecumenical reality.

## The future?

5.7 Ten years after General Assembly designated us a RCL we are excited by the future. The building and campus are wonderfully alive with a buzz of people and ideas. We have facilities suited to future decades yet retaining the beauty of their original craftwork. We have a superb team ready to serve everyone across all aspects of college life. We are currently focussed upon creating a brand new website and far greater use of online resources and courses. We hope to welcome an increasingly diverse range of students from the UK and abroad. We are exploring, with others from across the

denomination, something of the current realities and future possibilities for ordained ministry to better shape suitable teaching and support at Westminster. We are keenly aware of the Walking the Way discussions and want to play our part to the full as plans emerge. We recognise that our own teaching team may need to develop to maximise our potential to deliver lay and local church resources.

## The Windermere Centre

6.1 The Windermere Centre mission statement is being used to inform all areas of centre policy, from programme planning to individual team member personal development goals. It says:

*'Resourcing the United Reformed Church through hospitality and theological adventure'*

The Windermere Centre, as a residential RCL of the United Reformed Church seeks to:

- develop deeper, more faithful discipleship through immersion in the Christian Reformed tradition
- nurture a spirituality that equips people for life-in-mission
- equip churches for relevant faith-living in the contemporary context
- encourage risk-taking, mission-focused learning opportunities.

## Learning from challenges

6.2 August 2014 saw the centre move to a policy of Pay What You Can (PWYC). The catalyst was the anticipated 2014 £40K+ budget deficit arising from the accumulated effects of the 2012 URC budget cuts. It proved an opportunity to (a) resource the whole Church more effectively (rather than only those sections that could afford to pay) and (b) model a gospel-shaped business policy that exemplified generosity and abundance, rather than scarcity and competition.

6.3 PWYC was one strand of the policy shift: the other was a move to the It's Your Space (IYS) programme planning. Rather than try and anticipate what courses might 'sell', we moved to bespoke planning with individuals and groups who wanted to pursue a course or event, working with them to plan the programme, gather a cohort and send out invitations. It enabled us to 'scratch where the Church was itching'.

6.4 The results have been transformational:

- Churches and groups who have not previously found it affordable have started using the centre
- Donations have almost quadrupled
- Ecumenical use of the centre is growing
- Income from courses increased 44% so eliminated reliance on holiday accommodation via Booking.com
- The budget deficit reduced 74% during 2015; income increased 19% overall
- The new business plan – tracking an overall reduction in central subsidy for the centre over the period 2015-18 – was endorsed by both the finance committee and Mission Council

6.5 Comparative figures:

	2015	2014
Total visitors	1,896	1,747
Total bednights:	4,250	3,874
Church contacts:	350	358
Newsletter subscribers:	458	383

6.6 Assuming an average church size of 20 per church contact, approximately 9,500 URC members were directly resourced by the centre during 2015; the URC support of £123K thus represents a per capita investment of approximately £13.

## Education and learning

### The best of what we do

6.7 The centre resources the URC through its programme, its monthly newsletter containing resources for local churches, and the wider work of the Director.

6.8 Our programme:

- responding to and resourcing URC initiatives
- creating alliances to devise and deliver sustained programmes for the life of the Church
- delivering and/or hosting core URC courses
- promoting and resourcing an active web presence for local churches
- church weekends, with a focus on growing in faith and discipleship
- resourcing specific groups within the Church
- hosting church networks and committees
- resourcing wider church networks, committees and groups
- resourcing the social/recreational life of the Church through, amongst others, walking and various arts and crafts courses.

6.9 The centre's resources and programmes have been organised around the theme, 'What's the Point of Church?' This has been intended as a contribution to the on-going exploration, 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?' Its focus is threefold:

6.9.1 Missiological: the Church is most effective and faithful when it is engaged in God's mission of transforming this world into the Kingdom of God.

6.9.2 Prophetic: the Church is most authentic when it is making a Jesus-shaped difference in the lives of people and communities in which it is situated. Its priorities are therefore on the Kingdom, rather than its own survival and flourishing as an institution.

6.9.3 Relevant: the Church needs to engage in culturally relevant ways – especially online through websites and social media.

This has fed into the URC's Greenbelt theme of 'Scrap the Church?' The Director will be a panellist at the festival's 'Scrap the Church?' debate.

6.10 iChurch is the out-of-the-box URC church website solution built on Wordpress blogging software. It ships with a template populated with dummy content, instructions and annual hosting. Designed to be maintained by people with no specialist knowledge of Wordpress or coding, different packages are available, from instructions-only, through training to full maintenance by the centre. We are looking at securing funding to appoint a full time administrator.

6.11 The annual Windermere Online Festival began in 2013, takes place during the last week in January, enables people to access the Windermere Centre as an online resource, and has grown in popularity. Content is commissioned from across the URC in a variety of formats. The archive can be viewed online <http://windermere.urc.org.uk/windermere-online/>

### The future?

6.12 We have three major priorities:

6.12.1 Develop and extend 'What's the Point of Church?':

- a) 'When Church and Kingdom collide' – explorations and conversations as part of the URC's wider discussion on the future of the Church;
- b) 'It just works' – working with the mission committee on sharing and disseminating good practice as a way of encouraging the URC to expect to grow, rather than simply to decline;

## Education and learning

- c) Growing new disciples – promoting evangelism and outreach that engages people with no previous Christian background;
- d) Renewal of faith and deepening discipleship;
- e) Seeing an ageing Church as a resource-rich, effective Church rather than a failure.

6.12.2 Develop and extend the URC's online presence. We are exploring joint working with the communications and editorial committee to roll out iChurch for synods and churches, together with an integrated social media strategy. The centre will continue to develop online learning opportunities.

6.12.3 'Walking the Way' will be the integrative focus for the centre's work.

Please pray that the centre will continue to be a faithful servant and effective resource for the Church.

# Education and learning committee:

## Twenty first century expectations for ministry

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Prof Neil Messer: <a href="mailto:neil.Messer@winchester.ac.uk">neil.Messer@winchester.ac.uk</a> The Revd Fiona Thomas: <a href="mailto:fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk">fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Discussion and commendation to Mission Council for action
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>13. In the light of discussion of the papers on expectations of ministers, General Assembly:</b></p> <p>a) <b>directs Mission Council to agree a statement on the expectations of ministers of Word and Sacraments;</b></p> <p>b) <b>instructs the ministries and education and learning committees to carry out the necessary consultation and drafting work to enable Mission Council to fulfil this task.</b></p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The intention of the resolution is to engage General Assembly in preliminary discussion of contemporary expectations of ministers, whether exercising the ministry of Word and Sacraments or church related community work
<b>Main points</b>	The focus of Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today is on enabling the whole church in missional discipleship. People called to public ministry have significant roles to play in this. The United Reformed Church faces the challenge of continually refreshing its understanding and expectations of such roles
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The training committee approved a set of benchmarks for assessing the readiness for ministry of students, for use in initial ministerial education in 1993
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The ministries committee during 2010-2012. Assessment conferences and RCLs have used the benchmarks as working documents

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Not applicable
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Not directly applicable although how the URC sees ministry is likely to be influenced by how close ecumenical partners view ministry.

# Expectations of ministry

1. Work for *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today* has again highlighted the ways in which the expectations which the United Reformed Church has of its ministers has a major influence on congregational life. This is expressed in the often heard, and difficult to answer question: 'What are ministers for?'
2. The scope of this resolution covers the ministry of Word and Sacraments, whilst drawing directly on experience and insights of CRCW ministry.
3. The training committee agreed what it expected of someone preparing for the ministry of Word and Sacraments in 1993. The education and learning committee and ministries committee updated these expectations in 2012. There have been parallel benchmarks agreed for the ministry of church related community work. This is the first time that these two documents have been explicitly discussed by General Assembly.
  - 4.1 The two documents attached to this resolution have different, but inter-related, origins.
    - 4.1.1 The document on the ministry of Word and Sacraments resulted from discussions of the 1993 benchmarks 2010 to 2012 within and between the education & learning and ministries committees.
    - 4.1.2 The document on CRCW ministry originated in work done by the CRCW programme subcommittee and Northern College. The purpose of that was to ensure that the competency profile of people commissioned to CRCW ministry meets the needs of both the Church and recognised quality assurance standards for community work. The community work (CRCW) document is intentionally laid out in a comparable way to that of the ministry of Word and Sacraments (MWS) paper.
  5. Thus there is a difference in the status of the two papers. The CRCW paper is the current authoritative expression of the United Reformed Church's expectation of people exercising CRCW ministry. The MWS paper is a working draft which has been used in varying degrees of formality since 2012.
  6. These two papers are being brought to General Assembly for the purpose of working towards a definitive version of the MWS paper to be adopted by Mission Council in due course, with work being done jointly by the ministries and the education and learning committees to prepare for this.
  7. Consultation pursued with synods and the Resource Centres for Learning would include synod ministries and pastoral committees and relevant networks such as training and development officers, mission enablers, children and youth development officers, and Together Ethnic and Minority URC (TEAMurc).

## A minister of Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church is a person:

who is:	who lives:	who knows about and understands:	who has skills in:
<b>A faithful disciple</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>committed to Christ</li> <li>a life of prayer, worship and witness within the community of the church</li> <li>with integrity, discipline, joy and commitment in good, flourishing and wholesome relationship with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>his/her own experience of life and faith</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>giving their own account of the Gospel</li> </ul>
<b>A theologian</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a life shaped and being transformed by the Bible inhabiting a particular tradition, but also within the ecumenical, world and intercultural community of the Church</li> <li>in a healthy tension between received tradition and present experience and expression</li> <li>with mind and heart ready to question and to trust</li> <li>as one who has strong habits of worship and prayer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Bible</li> <li>the Tradition (including its expression within the United Reformed Church)</li> <li>the significance of context and culture in the shaping of faith</li> <li>the importance of being a theologian for particular times and places</li> <li>patterns of worship and where they come from</li> <li>the demands of shaping worship in contemporary cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpretation, listening and critique</li> <li>analysis and discernment</li> <li>interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith from within particular contexts</li> <li>leading worship of deep quality deepening faith and worship for others</li> </ul>
<b>A worshipper and worship leader</b>			
<b>A pastor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with a depth of self-awareness</li> <li>with openness to, and a desire to live for, others</li> <li>attentive to the safety of all</li> <li>with sensitivity and responsiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ministry as accompaniment</li> <li>patterns of human relationship</li> <li>patterns of human community and society</li> <li>the human psyche</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening and counselling</li> <li>understanding and interpreting people and situations</li> </ul>
<b>An educator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as one committed to being a learner throughout life</li> <li>with awareness of own learning style and needs</li> <li>taking regular opportunities to learn, develop and grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how people learn and grow</li> <li>the place of learning in faith</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teaching all ages and all kinds of people</li> </ul>
<b>A missionary and evangelist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as one on fire with the Gospel</li> <li>with a message to proclaim</li> <li>with a love for God's world</li> <li>with a commitment to community and to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to analyse and to understand the contemporary world and particular contexts</li> <li>the demands of evangelism today</li> <li>how societies are made</li> <li>how truth is established and challenged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effective communication</li> <li>social and political action</li> <li>inspiring and enabling others in mission and evangelism</li> </ul>
<b>A collaborator and community builder</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>always seeking the good of the whole</li> <li>as one committed to the church s/he serves</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the particular gifts s/he can bring</li> <li>group dynamics</li> <li>how community is made and how communities work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>animating the gifts of others</li> <li>community and team building</li> <li>models of decision making</li> <li>leadership and management</li> <li>administration</li> <li>working with others</li> </ul>
<b>A public figure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with a commitment to contributing to the world</li> <li>in the service of wider society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social and political worlds</li> <li>how to support and how to critique society</li> <li>how power works</li> <li>human life at the centre and at the margins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engaging with public bodies</li> <li>taking part in the life of the wider world</li> </ul>
<b>A communicator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a life open to others and interested in them</li> <li>with a passion for deep encounter with others</li> <li>with creativity and imagination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpersonal communication</li> <li>oral and written communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>preaching and speaking</li> <li>presentation of text, image and sound</li> <li>information technology</li> </ul>

## A church related community work minister (CRCW) in the United Reformed Church is a person:

who identifiably lives:

		who knows about and understands:	who has skills in:
<b>A faithful disciple</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>committed to Christ</li> <li>a life of prayer, worship and community engagement</li> <li>with integrity, discipline, joy and commitment</li> <li>in good, flourishing and wholesome relationships with others</li> <li>practicing inclusivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>his/her own experience of life and faith</li> <li>their own, and the Church's, reasons for community engagement</li> <li>biblically, and from a community development perspective, the importance of enabling inclusion in church and community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relating the Gospel to contemporary society relating to those not engaged in faith communities</li> <li>reflecting theologically on their local and broader context</li> <li>making the tradition (biblical and theological) relevant for the communities in which they work</li> <li>using the Gospel to build community and challenge injustices</li> <li>interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith from within particular contexts</li> </ul>
<b>A contextual theologian</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a life shaped and being transformed by the Gospel</li> <li>inhabiting a particular tradition, but also within the ecumenical, world and inter-cultural community of the Church</li> <li>in a healthy tension between received tradition and present experience and expression</li> <li>with mind and heart ready to question and to trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the Bible</li> <li>the Tradition (including its expression within the United Reformed Church)</li> <li>the importance of being a theologian for particular times and places</li> <li>the importance of relating text and context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>listening and being able to advise on organisational structures using community development perspectives</li> <li>plan and gain resources and funding</li> <li>use a community development approach for monitoring and evaluation</li> <li>understanding and interpreting people and situations</li> </ul>
<b>An encourager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with an evident depth of self-awareness</li> <li>with openness to, and a desire to live for others</li> <li>attentive to the safety of all</li> <li>with sensitivity and responsiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to accompany and strengthen groups to use community development approaches</li> <li>patterns of human relationship particularly to lead and assist in setting up new projects and partnerships</li> <li>patterns of human community and society</li> <li>the human psyche</li> <li>how to support, develop and manage local support groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teaching all ages and all kinds of people</li> <li>facilitating community learning for social and political development</li> </ul>
<b>An educator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as one committed to being a learner throughout life</li> <li>with awareness of own learning style and needs</li> <li>taking regular opportunities to learn, develop and grow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how people learn and grow</li> <li>how to develop community learning opportunities using community development practices</li> <li>the ethos and practices of community education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to analyse and to understand the contemporary world and particular contexts</li> <li>the demands of evangelism today</li> <li>how to assess, develop links with and engage with a community</li> <li>how to analyse and to understand the use of power, politics, the contemporary world and particular contexts</li> </ul>
<b>A missionary and evangelist</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>as one who understands and engages with the local community</li> <li>as one on fire with the Gospel</li> <li>with a message to proclaim</li> <li>with a love for God's world</li> <li>with a primary commitment to community and to others</li> <li>as one who can share the Good News in a creative way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>effective communication</li> <li>social and political action</li> <li>facilitating community research</li> <li>analysing and dissemination their community research with others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

who is:	who identifiably lives:	who knows about and understands:	who has skills in:
<b>A collaborator and community builder</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>demonstrating the ability to integrate theological understanding with the values and processes of community development</li> <li>with integrity and demonstrating competence as a community development practitioner</li> <li>as one committed to the church s/he is involved with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the particular gifts s/he can bring</li> <li>group dynamics and the tensions inherent in community development practice</li> <li>how community is made and how communities work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>animating the gifts of others</li> <li>community and team building</li> <li>relating to different communities</li> <li>leadership and management</li> <li>maintaining community development practice within their own project</li> <li>working with others</li> </ul>
<b>A public figure who can use a community development approach to instigate collective action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>with a commitment to contributing to the world and, in line with transformational educationalists and community developers, believe individuals and the world can be changed</li> <li>challenging injustice and working to alleviate poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>social and political worlds</li> <li>how to support and how to critique society</li> <li>how power works</li> <li>human life at the centre and at the margins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engaging with public bodies</li> <li>supporting inclusive and collective working through community development practice</li> <li>organising community events and activities</li> <li>responding to community conflict</li> <li>supporting communities to campaign for change</li> </ul>
<b>An effective communicator with specific gifts in promoting collaborative working in the community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a life open to others and interested in them in both Church and community</li> <li>with a passion for deep encounter with others</li> <li>with creativity and imagination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interpersonal communication</li> <li>oral and written communication</li> <li>how to use a community development approach to support collaborative partnership work</li> <li>how to use a community development approach to coordinate networks and partnerships</li> <li>how to supervise community development practitioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>presentation of text, image and sound</li> <li>information technology</li> <li>promoting and supporting effective relationships between communities and public bodies</li> <li>managing internal organisational development and external relationships to support effective community development practice</li> </ul>
<b>A competent community development worker</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understanding themselves and their impact on others</li> <li>understanding and keeping professional boundaries</li> <li>behaving in an appropriate professional manner</li> <li>treating others (including colleagues) with respect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>how to plan and organise how to take action in church and community</li> <li>how to reflect on and evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken</li> <li>how to work with churches and communities</li> <li>to bring about church and community transformation</li> <li>effective management and development of personnel, projects and organisations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>working with communities to identify needs, opportunities and rights.</li> <li>building and sustaining relationships within Church and community</li> <li>developing strategic community networks</li> </ul>

# Equalities committee:

## Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Helen M Mee: <a href="mailto:hmmedin@aol.com">hmmedin@aol.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	None
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The aim is to provide General Assembly with an overview of the work of the committee, which is to monitor equality throughout the United Reformed Church
<b>Main points</b>	Overview of work
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Previous relevant documents are all available on the website at <a href="http://www.urc.org.uk/equal-opportunities.html">http://www.urc.org.uk/equal-opportunities.html</a>
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	General Assembly committees through linked observers; nominations committee

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity

## **Remit:**

The equalities committee is responsible for reminding the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work; and challenging the practice of the United Reformed Church where appropriate.

This includes:

- Taking action to assist in the development of equal opportunities throughout the United Reformed Church within the context of a diverse society
- Monitoring of the equal opportunities policy and updating it when appropriate
- Promoting training programmes in equality and diversity
- Promoting, supporting and encouraging the United Reformed Church's contribution to equality in the wider life of our society
- Reporting to General Assembly

## **Committee members:**

Convener: Helen M Mee

Secretary: Adrian Bulley

Members: Jane Baird (Deputy General Secretary [administration and resources]), Tunde Biyi (until July 2015), Ruth Clarke, Clive Curtis, Susan Flynn, Michael Jagessar (Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries), Iain McDonald, Maria Mills, Patricia Poinen (from July 2015), Adella Pritchard, Margaret Telfer.

1. The equalities committee has met on six occasions since General Assembly convened in Cardiff in 2014 although most of its work is carried out by the individual committee members as it works to hold the aspects of its far-reaching remit in creative tension. The remit of the committee is 'to remind the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work and to challenge the practice of the URC where appropriate.' Recognising the validity of equality and cherishing diversity is, simply put, an issue of justice. Much of our work as a committee is in the promotion and encouragement of equality and diversity. We pursue this through our established links with the other Assembly committees as well as by being alert to the work undertaken on Assembly's behalf by bodies such as the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) and many members of programme staff, but particularly the work around racial justice and multicultural ministry.

2. We are also charged with monitoring how the URC's commitment to equality of opportunity for all people across all of the diversity strands is being put into practice in order to build a truly inclusive community, and to this end we have continued to monitor the membership of committees, sub committees, advisory and task groups. It is neither possible nor appropriate to attempt to monitor the various diversity strands through observation alone. We have monitored membership on the basis of three factors; gender, being ordained or lay and being from a black and minority ethnic community.

2.1 This has highlighted a number of issues such as the effect on the makeup and balance of committees which have ex officio members when new post holders are appointed.

2.2 The analysis of figures available at the end of 2014 showed that overall the denomination is achieving a 60% to 40% balance between men and women and a 50% to 50% balance between lay and ordained. This is, of course, positive however we do have some larger committees where there are still significant imbalances: the URC Trust, the ministerial incapacity procedure and disciplinary process (MIND) advisory

group, Mission Council advisory group (MCAG) and the incapacity procedure panel all having a membership which is over 80% male. Looking at the balance between lay and ordained membership the figures showed MCAG, education for ministry phases two and three and the accreditation subcommittee all having a membership which is over 80% ordained. Most concerning is that the overall representation offering a BME perspective stands at 4%.

2.3 These are complex issues which do not respond to simple mathematical solutions. However, as a denomination committed to equality and diversity, it is paramount that we are intentional in our actions to ensure that every committee reflects the diversity within the church. The equalities committee will continue to seek ways to monitor and address these issues.

3. The committee was gratified that its resolution to the 2014 General Assembly on expansive language was passed. Continuing this emphasis, we are minded to work with the Faith and Order Committee to bring to a future General Assembly proposals that enable a permissive paragraph to be inserted ahead of the various schedules to the Basis of Union to enable local variations of the male-centric Trinitarian formula (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) to be sanctioned.

4. The committee warmly welcomed newly introduced equal opportunities monitoring forms designed to be used in the recruitment process within Church House as well as the introduction of expected standards to all job descriptions, one element of which is equality and diversity.

5. There are many examples across the denomination of new technologies being trialled in order to increase opportunities for participation in decision making. There may also be a saving in resource on personal, denominational and global levels. The equalities committee is exploring how it may contribute to this conversation within the church. In 2014, in response to industrial action being called in London transport systems, we held one meeting where some members attended virtually. This was a hastily set up experiment which had limited success. Its value has been in the learning that we can take into any future trial. The committee's main focus in this is the equalities issues involved:

- will the opportunity to participate virtually enable greater representation with potential participation from those less able to travel because of distance or commitments such as work, carer responsibilities, etc.?
- will the removal of a requirement to travel enable more people with disabilities to be represented within our processes?
- are there people whose disability means that they would be disadvantaged by any move to virtual meetings?
- can we ensure that participants are readily able to borrow any equipment needed and to access training in its use?

There are many questions to be answered and options to be explored. The findings may not support all of the expectations of any trial but it is appropriate to research and address the equalities issues raised.

# Faith and order committee: Report of ongoing work

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Elizabeth Welch: <a href="mailto:welchea@talk21.com">welchea@talk21.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	None
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The spectrum and overview of the detail of the work of the committee. The aim is to appraise the Assembly of the range and nature of work
<b>Main points</b>	The committee has an agenda that is created from Assembly resolutions, work referred to it by external and internal points and from its own initiatives
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Report to the 2014 Assembly (page 175 of the <i>Book of Reports</i> )
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The faith and order committee

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Report of ongoing work

The faith and order committee exists:

- to address issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC;
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and interfaith 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.

Committee members:

Convenor: Elizabeth Welch

Secretary: David Tatem

Catherine Ball, Anna Briggs, Sarah Hall, Tim Meadows, Malachie Munyaneza, Stephen Orchard (co-opted), Alan Spence, Jeremy Worthen (Church of England),

## 1. Introduction

1.1 Since the time of the 2014 General Assembly, the faith and order committee has been engaged in a number of significant pieces of work, some of which were generated by that Assembly and others of which have come, as is often the case, from outside the denomination or as a result of issues raised and questions asked within it.

## 2. Programme of work

2.1 The most significant piece of work has been the 'Future of the Church' discussion which had begun prior to the last Assembly, and the committee was asked there to take the discussion to the churches. This led to the production of the booklet *What is the Spirit Saying to the Churches*, which was circulated for discussion with responses requested by summer 2015. Only 10% of the churches engaged in this discussion, perhaps because they had only just gone through a process of discussion on same sex marriage. The report of this process is the subject of a separate paper.

2.2 Two other significant pieces of work have been in connection with church membership and what was originally brought to the 2014 assembly under the heading of 'Ordained Local Ministry' now re-titled 'Authorised Elders'. We have been grateful to Stephen Orchard and David Thompson respectively for heading up the two task groups that have worked on the papers which have been produced and discussed both at the faith and order committee and Mission Council and which are also both the subject of separate reports.

2.3 Another significant but less high profile piece of work has been the production of the church's response to the World Council of Churches' document 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision'. Under other circumstances that document might have been circulated to the churches for discussion, but with the other significant discussions the church was engaged in this was not deemed possible. Instead, following discussions in the committee, we have been grateful to Catherine Ball for drafting a response which has now passed through numerous iterations and which Assembly is asked to receive. The deadline for the submission of responses has been extended to the end of 2016, so members of the church at large are now being asked, if they wish, to comment on the document and our response by the end of October in order that the final submission can be made in December.

2.4 Responding to the requests of the World Council of Churches connects with the fact that we have for some while been engaged in two bilateral dialogues; one with the Church of England and another more longstanding one with the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. A third dialogue has just begun in which

## Faith and order

we have a significant stake. This is between the Anglican Communion and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. This dialogue met for the first time in September under the co-convenorship of Elizabeth Welch.

2.5 The report of the discussions with the Church of England is brought separately to General Assembly. The discussions with the Roman Catholic Church will come to the end of their second five-year period in November, and a report is in the process of being produced which will be presented to Mission Council along with proposals for continued discussions.

2.6 The committee has also had the opportunity to comment on the report of the discussions between the Church of England and the Church of Scotland that have resulted in a report containing the Columba Declaration.

2.7 On the international scene, the committee has also continued to be the main conduit through which requests come from the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe for involvement in the work in which they are engaged. Neil Messer is a member of their expert group on ethics and is editing a guide to the ethical challenges posed by reproductive medicine. There have also been requests for participation in meetings focusing on education, which have been responded to by education and learning.

2.8 Other varied items that have been on the agenda of the committee have included considering the question of the nature and even the possibility of an agreed statement of faith of the Free Churches Group. In a similar vein we were also asked to contribute to the drafting of a new statement of faith for the Eglise protestante unie de France.

2.9 The committee works closely with other committees and departments of the church and was asked to make some comments relevant to the discussions on same sex marriage and offered advice to the law and polity advisory group; it was represented at the 'Big Picture' meeting organised by education and learning and has held a discussion with the communications department including, in part, questions around how discussion and feedback on the various faith and order issues can best be enabled throughout the denomination. This is an important area of concern when it is all too easy for issues to be handled in the hot-house environment of a small committee.

2.10 Issues around local ecumenism can cross the boundaries between several areas, especially that of the mission committee within which ecumenical relations officially sits. The paper on 'New Frameworks in Local Ecumenism' from Churches Together in England is more properly dealt with there, but the faith and order committee have also discussed it and contributed to the thinking from their perspective, with comments being fed in through the secretary for ecumenical and interfaith relations who is also the secretary of the faith and order committee.

### 3. Future work

3.1 Pieces of work that have come or are just coming onto our agenda have included work on 'Sola Scriptura'. This has arisen from the various discussions, notably around sexuality, that have taken place in recent years. The question of how we understand and apply our understanding of the authority of scripture has played an important part in those discussions and it is believed that it is time to examine it afresh and in some depth. Another revisiting arises from the three dialogues that we are part of as well as the ongoing wider discussions about ecumenical relations. It is clear that progress with the Anglican Communion, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox can only make progress when Christians in the Reformed tradition are willing to consider the question of personal episcopacy. We have been here before. In 1980 at the time of the English covenant, Assembly voted to accept the creation of URC Bishops, but the covenant failed. The committee intends to explore the thinking of that time along with new thinking. A contribution was made on this to a discussion of the Theology and

Unity Group of Churches Together in England. Alongside this work will come work to explore dialogue with some of the newer partners. Our traditional ecumenical partners are already engaged in dialogue with Pentecostalists as well as others and it is time that we did the same.

3.2 Another new development growing out of ecumenical cooperation with the Methodist Church has been the Buildings Forum. Part of its agenda is to explore theological thinking around the use of church buildings including answering such questions as 'what are the limits on the use of our buildings by members of other faiths?' This work will develop over the next couple of years and will assist the forum in developing its work.

3.3 A significant event arising in 2017 will be the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. The committee has had this on its agenda for some while and although most of the focus of the church's engagement is through other departments, Alan Spence has drafted a paper explaining the significance of the Lutheran Reformation for other expressions of the Reformation, including our own. This is being presented as a booklet which is being launched at General Assembly and which has been produced in the style of the 'Worshipping God' booklet which was launched at the 2014 assembly containing both worship and discussion resources. That booklet continues to be much appreciated and used not only within the denomination but ecumenically and internationally.

# Faith and order committee: Authorised elders

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Elizabeth Welch: <a href="mailto:minister@theroundchapel.org.uk">minister@theroundchapel.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>14. General Assembly agrees that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (<i>The Manual</i>, Section F) be amended to read:</b></p> <p><b>The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows –</b></p> <p class="list-item-l1"><b>a) the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);</b></p> <p class="list-item-l1"><b>b) if such a minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the <i>Basis of Union</i>: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;</b></p> <p class="list-item-l1"><b>c) authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal. Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs.</b></p> <p><b>15. General Assembly agrees that synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared.</b></p> <p><b>16. General Assembly agrees that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before embarking on their ministry.</b></p> <p><b>17. General Assembly agrees that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose authority to serve has been withdrawn be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again.</b></p>

	<p><b>18. General Assembly agrees that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.</b></p> <p><b>19. General Assembly agrees that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry.</b></p>
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### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To respond to resolution 13 of Assembly 2014 asking for work to be done on the possibility of authorising ‘celebrant elders’ to preside at the sacraments
<b>Main points</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Revision of the Guidance on Presidency (<i>The Manual</i>, Section F)</li> <li>2. Extension of the normal period of authorisation</li> <li>3. Synods to organise regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder, and to hold regular meetings for all authorised elders</li> <li>4. Ministries committee to prepare a code of conduct for authorised elders, which they would sign before embarking on their ministry</li> <li>5. General Secretariat to maintain a list of authorised elders whose service has proved unsatisfactory</li> <li>6. Education and learning committee to be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders, drawing on synod resources</li> <li>7. Ministries and education and learning committees to be invited to give further attention to the possibility of restoring the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry</li> </ol>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly 2012, Resolution 35, <i>The Record</i> p41 General Assembly 2014, Resolution 13, <i>The Record</i> p6
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Synod moderators September 2015 Secretaries for Ministries and Education and Learning Ministries committee group on non-stipendiary ministry

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	No significant financial implication
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	No change in position regarding sister churches.

# Authorised elders

1.1 The General Assembly of 2014 asked the faith and order committee to set up a task group to explore the possibility of authorising ‘celebrant elders’ to preside at the sacraments, because Ministers of Word and Sacraments are increasingly expected to serve several congregations. The report of this group has been adopted by the committee for presentation to Assembly 2016.

1.2 The committee recommends that the term ‘celebrant elders’ should not be used, since earlier attempts to create categories within the eldership have been perceived as divisive. Further we believe that theologically the congregation celebrates the sacraments: those presiding lead the biblical words of institution, the thanksgiving and related prayers, and perform the sacramental actions of baptising in water, breaking the bread and pouring the wine. Since there already exists a procedure for authorising elders and lay preachers to preside, its proposals now simply refer to ‘authorised elders’ – a term already familiar in several of our synods. The principal recommendations (embodied in Resolutions 14-18) are:

- to revise the current guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (*The Manual*, Section F) by extending the term of service;
- to recommend that synods provide regular support and guidance for congregations without authorised elders and offer opportunities for those who are authorised to meet together regularly;
- to ask the ministries committee to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers which they would be required to sign before beginning their ministry;
- to maintain a list of any such elders and lay preachers whose term has been discontinued because their service had been unsatisfactory;
- and to invite the education and learning committee to develop an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.

The committee has also accepted the task group’s recommendation that the ministries and education and learning committees should re-examine the approved patterns of non-stipendiary ministry so as to restore the original understanding of what would now be called ‘team non-stipendiary ministry’. This would ease some of the potential ecumenical difficulties surrounding an increase in the number of authorised elders and lay preachers (Resolution 19).

1.3 The committee believes that these proposals will meet the needs of our congregations; that they will strengthen the role of elders in the church; that they can be readily implemented and overseen by synods; and that they are realistic. By extending the term of service for which authorised elders and lay preachers are appointed, it hopes that the proposals will increase trust and involve less monitoring by synods.

1.4 In 1972 the United Reformed Church boldly committed itself to ‘take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments are readily available to every local church’ (*Basis of Union*, §25: see §2.4 – references to the history and theological justification for these proposals are in the Appendix). But because the two Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational) had different views of the appropriate pattern of presidency at the sacraments, paragraph 25 was a compromise. On the one hand, there was the Presbyterian view, which emphasised that those presiding at the sacraments represented the whole Church, not just a single congregation, and therefore sought to restrict exceptions to presidency by Ministers of Word and Sacraments as far as possible. On the other hand, the Congregational view regarded presidency at the sacraments as a decision for the local church, and was ready to authorise lay preachers, where Ministers of Word and Sacraments were not available.

The compromise was that presidency would normally fall to a minister of Word and Sacraments, but in cases of pastoral necessity deaconesses<sup>1</sup>, elders and accredited<sup>2</sup> lay preachers might be authorised by District Councils to preside, thereby securing recognition by the wider church. Although the provisions of the Basis of Union apply to baptism as well as Holy Communion, in practice most of the discussion has taken place about Communion. Also, different views have been taken about what constitutes ‘pastoral necessity’ in various parts of the country. This was true from the beginning, but with the abolition of District Councils as a regular part of the Church’s life, it has been necessary to create a common policy within each synod.

1.5 Those differences of view about sacramental order have been overtaken by a significant change in the pastoral situation facing our congregations. The number of ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments has declined (notwithstanding the introduction of non-stipendiary ministry from 1979) and this is likely to continue. But the number of congregations has declined more slowly. The Church therefore confronts a new mission situation, if the sacraments are to continue to be readily available to our congregations.

1.6 How can the underlying differences of conviction on this matter that paragraph 25 sought to resolve be handled today? The committee’s report to Assembly in 2014 noted that in several synods it had been suggested that there was already an ordained local ministry – the eldership; and it therefore suggested that a solution might be found by developing a new category of elder: ‘celebrant elders’. The task group, however, argued:

- a) that ordination does not of itself give authority to preside; what determines the ministry authorised is the office to which a person is ordained (§§2.10-2.11);
- b) if elders, or a specified group of elders, were to be given authority to preside by ordination, this would require amendments to the Basis of Union (§2.13), which would change the nature of the eldership and involve lengthy consultation.

1.7 The committee recognises that urgent action is necessary. It is already four years since the Wessex Synod resolution was proposed in 2012. This is a mission imperative for many local churches, given the increasing number of multi-church pastorates, the clustering of churches with ministry teams including ministers, elders and lay preachers, and the inexorable problems of deploying a declining number of ministers over wider areas.

1.8 The synod moderators in responding to a request from the committee about the present position indicated that the current practice was to invite nominations from church meetings annually of elders or lay preachers for nomination (four synods limited the number to two or three per church), which were submitted to the pastoral committee for approval, and recorded in committee and/or synod minutes. In all twelve synods responding, a majority (sometimes overwhelming) were elders; any lay preachers tended to be either church members or those who preached in the local area. All new nominees underwent a synod training course before presiding. Although at present all synods except one only made authorisations for one year at a time (three still authorised for one occasion at a time), a majority of moderators would be content with a period of authorisation for three to five years.

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- 1 The Presbyterian Church of England ordained deaconesses, who might have pastoral charge of a congregation but were not authorised to preside at the sacraments. At the formation of The United Reformed Church there were eight deaconesses, and one about to enter training. It was decided not to continue to recruit to this ministry in future, but to honour the ministry of those already in post. Of the six listed in the 1979 *Year Book*, three were ordained to the ministry in 1979 and two retired. The remaining one retired in 1990. The paragraph in the *Basis of Union* on Deaconesses was removed in 2000.
- 2 In 1972 the only form of URC accreditation was that through the Assembly lay preachers committee. Since then synods have begun to accredit lay preachers. Apart from lay preachers from other churches, they are the only category covered by paragraph 25 of the *Basis of Union*.

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1.9 The committee therefore proposes that synods should be encouraged to authorise elders, or lay preachers with a pastoral relationship to the congregation, for periods of between three and five years at a time (according to synod judgement), rather than for particular occasions or for a year at a time. (The current guidance in Section F of *The Manual* limits authorisation to periods of one year.) Such a proposal is supported by a majority of Synod Moderators; and it would satisfy those voices strongly urging a steer from Assembly, so that we should be seen to be acting as one church rather than thirteen synods. It would enable those authorised to feel that the preparation for the task is worth undertaking, as well as giving stability to local congregational situations. Moreover such persons should be used regularly, not just left as names on a list; otherwise the time spent in preparation is wasted (§2.27). All synods take seriously the responsibility of preparing elders to preside; this diversity of resources is an asset, which enables us to learn from one another's experience. The committee does not propose a maximum or minimum number per church, since it believes the Basis of Union intended the matter to be determined on the basis of need not numbers.

1.10 Various pastoral questions have been raised, although in general the detailed application of Assembly policy will always lie with the synods. Some have wondered about appropriate provision in various Fresh Expressions of church or Local Mission Projects; this must depend on the synod's judgement about the local situation in question. Presumably there will be a local church or a synod-appointed group to guide the development concerned; thus the recommendations would fall to them. Other questions have been raised about communion for the housebound, or for those in care homes and similar situations. There is an obvious difference between conducting a service for one or two church members in a home accompanied by another elder, and providing a service to which all the residents are invited. We commend the practice of the Synod of Scotland in giving special preparation for those presiding at communion with vulnerable adults. Another synod has suggested that a named elder might be given the task of preparing candidates for baptism and conducting the service. The committee regards this as an imaginative use of §25.

1.11 The new atmosphere of suspicion in parliamentary legislation about internal church discipline, exemplified by the Goddard Inquiry, has influenced the drafting of other details: the committee proposes a probationary period of one year for new appointments before commissioning; a code of conduct by which authorised elders and lay preachers would agree to be bound before beginning their probationary period; regular support and guidance from synods for both churches without an authorised elder or lay preacher, similar support for those authorised so they can share their experience; and a list of any whose authorization has been withdrawn, for reference if someone moves from one synod to another (resolutions 14(c), 15, 16, and 17; see also §2.14, 2.23, 2.33, 2.36, 2.37). Authorised elders, like ministers and lay preachers at present, would be well advised (and might be required, according to synod policy) to have a DBS check.

1.12 The development of a programme of missional discipleship, with a variety of learning resources, means that the preparation for such a ministry by those not ordained to the ministry of word and sacraments can be seen as part of a total commitment by the United Reformed Church to a new outward-facing approach in their local situation. In addressing the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20:18ff) Paul alludes to Ezekiel 33-34, which enables him to characterise the elders as sentinels and shepherds. An elder looks outward at the wider community, recognising and understanding the pressures, concerns and context amid which the congregation serves. Elders also look inward, with a caring and supportive ministry towards the people who have elected them. Both aspects of the role matter. Elders can only help members in their faith and witness if they understand well the local context within which that faith is set and that witness expressed. A single Assembly syllabus for a programme of preparation for authorised elders and lay preachers could build on the existing resources of each synod, and ensure that the delivery of such a programme would be adapted to the local situations of those preparing for this ministry (including flexibility over timing

to suit the candidates). The committee proposes that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare such a syllabus, which could be linked to the work on Missional Discipleship (see Resolution 18).

1.13 The committee therefore proposes the following resolutions:

**14. General Assembly agrees that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (*The Manual*, Section F) be amended to read:**

**The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows –**

- a) the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);**
- b) if such a minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the *Basis of Union*: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;**
- c) authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal. Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs.**

**15. General Assembly agrees that synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared.**

**16. General Assembly agrees that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before embarking on their ministry.**

**17. General Assembly agrees that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose authority to serve has been withdrawn be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again.**

**18. General Assembly agrees that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.**

(The reason why lay preachers are referred to in the resolution and text above, even though this Report is about authorised elders, is that lay preachers are included in the *Basis of Union* among those eligible to be authorised to preside)

1.14 Finally the committee reminds Assembly that the original model of non-stipendiary ministry, introduced in 1979, (based on the practice of former Churches of Christ congregations) was rooted in local congregations. The committee proposes that there should be further exploration of the pattern of ‘team non-stipendiary ministry’, by the ministries committee (which has a working group on non-stipendiary ministry) and the education and learning committee. This would ensure that presidency at the sacraments (both baptism and Holy Communion) is rooted in the local congregations concerned. The committee therefore proposes the following resolution:

**19. General Assembly agrees that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry.**

1.15 The committee offers some concluding thoughts:

**a) Teamwork**

Regardless of whether the committee's suggestion for further work on team non-stipendiary ministers is pursued, it believes that there should be a fresh look at the opportunities for teamwork, and the possibility of mixed teams of ministers of word and sacraments, elders and lay preachers; this suggestion, which has been mentioned more than once in previous Reports, should be referred to the ministries and education and learning committees, and to Synod Moderators and pastoral committees, in consultation with the local churches concerned.

**b) Information**

We are concerned at the apparent lack of information about who preaches and leads worship generally in our congregations week-by-week. Obviously local churches know what is happening, and we suggest that synods should gather more information than is routinely available today. Questions concerning presidency need to be set in the wider context of the current patterns of worship, which include, for example, services taken by authorised representatives of partner churches, and joint or united services. If Assembly and synods are to decide on these matters, we believe that they require more information than is currently available.

**c) 'Clericalisation?'**

At the General Assembly in 1995, and to a lesser extent in 2005, some members expressed concern that the addition of further responsibilities to even two or three elders might distract them from their Christian witness in the wider world – what other traditions might call 'the clericalisation of the laity'. An elder's office in the United Reformed Church is one of governance and pastoral care; it carries authority and responsibility, dependent on the grace of God. There is no reason why another responsibility for some should impede the task of every Christian 'to give an account of the faith that is in us' in encountering an increasingly secularised world. To accept the popular distinction between clerical and lay is to deny the biblical view that the laos is the whole people of God, not only the unordained. It does not accord with the Reformed tradition. Nor is the difference one between 'amateurs' and 'professionals': this seriously undervalues the work of our elders in leading worship and preaching. One member of the task group remarked that it was when preparing devotions, praying with members who were sick, or presiding at the Lord's Supper that she was most strongly reminded of our concern for witness and service to the community and evangelism at home and abroad. The committee is therefore confident that nothing in these proposals will reduce the missionary potential of our elders.

**d) Differences of opinion**

We are struck by the fact that attempts to resolve some of these issues have divided opinion in the Church for more than 20 years (see §§1.4-1.6 above). The faith and order committee was not unanimous in bringing their recommendation to Assembly in 2014, and Assembly approved the resolution by agreement (rather than consensus). Therefore, although the task group has found unanimity in its thinking, the committee recognises that further decisions on this matter will not be easy, and will require an appropriate combination of prayer and realism, alongside theological discernment. The committee reminds members of Assembly that the United Reformed Church is committed to living with differences of opinion, unless its unity and peace are threatened – which is a matter for the Assembly to judge.

## Appendix

### History and theological justification

#### The 2014 resolution

2.1 The Wessex resolution to General Assembly 2012 suggesting exploration of ordained local ministry was the latest initiative in a twenty-year long process to address the issues of continuity of ministerial service within local congregations, as multi-church pastorates and clusters have become more common and more use is made of the provision in the Basis of Union to authorise elders or lay preachers to preside at Holy Communion. A version of this was adopted by a majority of the faith and order committee and brought to General Assembly in 2014, which approved it by agreement (for the text see §2.2). A small task group was then set up to address the issues (§2.3, 2.6-2.7). The committee's conclusions are set out in §1.2 above.

#### 2.2 Resolution 13 of 2014: ordained local ministry

1. General Assembly, affirming the existing gift of elders and the diversity of gifts within each elders meeting as part of the United Reformed Church's distinctive contribution to the Church universal, wishes to reinvigorate the role of elders and welcomes current work to that end.
2. General Assembly directs the faith and order committee to set up a task group incorporating expertise from other committees of the United Reformed Church to explore the possibility of authorising 'celebrant elders' to preside at the sacraments.

To that end General Assembly asks for work to be done in the following areas:

- a) the nature of ordination within the United Reformed Church, both of Ministers of Word and Sacrament (*sic*) and of elders;
- b) how within the understandings of the various traditions which make up our Church the sacrament of Holy Communion is linked to ordination;
- c) the suggested future relationships of 'celebrant elders' to local church leaders, lay preachers, Ministers of Word and Sacrament (*sic*), synods and General Assembly;
- d) the nature and financing of the requisite training to support such elders in their calling;
- e) the accountability of such elders and the question of who would be responsible for discerning, authorising and supporting their vocation;
- f) the place of such elders in local ecumenical partnerships.

General Assembly instructs that the progress of such work be reported to General Assembly in 2016.

#### The task group

2.3 The task group consisted of the Revd Professor David Thompson, Eastern Synod (convenor), the Revd Dr Sarah Hall, Wessex Synod, (secretary), Mrs Susan Bush, Northern Synod and Mrs Lesley Richmond, Synod of Scotland.

#### Background since 1972

##### 2.4 Paragraph 25 states (in part):

The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen, the United Reformed Church shall (a) take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained ministers of the Word and Sacraments are readily available to every local church...

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It has never proved possible to deliver that commitment in the way that was hoped. Furthermore, had there been any widespread adoption of the former Churches of Christ custom of weekly communion after 1981, its impossibility would have become apparent long since. Even without any change in communion practice, ready availability of Ministers of Word and Sacraments for every local church would have been difficult for the majority of former Congregationalist local churches making up the new Church to achieve. The section provided also for the training and accreditation of lay preachers (an office not otherwise defined in the Basis), and for the recognition of certain members of the United Reformed Church ‘normally deaconesses, elders or accredited lay preachers’ to preside at the sacraments ‘where pastoral necessity so requires’. The paragraph has been the subject of successive interpretations by Assembly. The most recent one in 1998, states that the provisions of the paragraph ‘are intended to establish the principle that worship should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as by the local church’.

## Previous reports to Assembly

2.5 Two reports to Assembly in the past 20 years have aroused intense debate. The first was *Patterns of Ministry*, the recommendations of which, despite a two-year period of consultation in synods and District Councils, were mainly rejected by Assembly in 1995. The second, *Equipping the Saints* (2002-4), which was less overtly radical, received more support. Nevertheless, resolution 30 of 2005 on deployment accepted ‘that not every congregation has or will have a Minister directly providing their day-to-day leadership’. An amendment that would have weakened the force of that statement was defeated. The Assembly discussions revealed that the differences of conviction underlying §25 in the late 1960s were the fundamental reason why both the *Patterns of Ministry* report of 1993 and the *Equipping the Saints* report of 2004 faced such disagreement in the General Assembly.

## Process and conclusions

2.6 The task group has met seven times. A large part of one meeting was given over to discussion with the Revds Fiona Thomas (Secretary for Education and Learning) and Craig Bowman (Secretary for Ministries). In an attempt to set the question of presidency at the sacraments in the broader context of worship in the local church, Synod Moderators were also invited to consult their lay preaching commissioners to secure some sense of who actually preaches and conducts worship in our churches week by week, taking note of those served by Ministers of Word and Sacraments, accredited lay preachers (Assembly or synod), those occupying similar positions in other Churches, and others. Three synods (Wessex, Eastern and East Midlands) submitted detailed reports, and some other Moderators responded personally. After the November 2015 Mission Council Synod Moderators provided further information on the way in which authorisation of elders to preside at the sacraments is handled in their synods. The committee is grateful to all those who have assisted its work.

2.7 The initial conclusion was unsurprising. There is a shortage of ordained leadership not only in the United Reformed Church, but also in many of the traditional Churches. Proposed solutions have varied. The Church of England intends to increase numbers of ordinands by 50% in the next ten years; the Methodists’ *Fruitful Field* initiative three years ago places ordinands in Circuits for a year before they spend any time in one of two remaining colleges; the Church of Scotland is merging local parishes, as is the Roman Catholic Church (though not without significant local opposition). In Africa, Asia and Latin America the traditional European size of parish has rarely become the norm; nonetheless some of these areas are those where the Church is growing most rapidly – not because of the number of ministers, but because of active and recognised groups of non-ordained members.

2.8 The original Wessex resolution to General Assembly asked for the exploration of ‘some form of locally ordained ministry’, which inevitably involves local church leadership in a broader sense than presidency at Communion. With current levels of

ministry there need to be those alongside Ministers of Word and Sacraments to whom local congregations can look for leadership in mission and worship. This point was also made in *Equipping the Saints* in 2005. Such people need to be accountable so that if there are problems, for whatever reason, their service may be terminated with the minimum disruption to the peace and unity of the congregation.

## The response to the six areas of work (see §2.2)

### 2.9 *The nature of ordination*

For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls *some of his servants* to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church...Those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills: the United Reformed Church having solemnly acknowledged their vocation and accepted their commitment shall appoint them to *their particular ministry and give them authority* to exercise it within the Church, *setting them apart with prayer that that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces for its fulfillment*, which solemn setting apart shall in the case of ministers and elders be termed ordination (*Basis of Union* §20) [italics added].

Some are called to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. ... *They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments...* Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary... (*Basis of Union* §21) [italics added].

2.10 The general understanding of ‘ordination’ in biblical and Christian theology is the setting apart of someone by prayer, fasting and the laying-on of hands. Fasting has been overlooked in our traditions in the last century or more. The key question is, ‘What office is a person ordained to?’ since that determines the nature and meaning of ordination in a particular case. In other words, the primary significance that any ordination has relates to the definition of the office to which someone is ordained. This view is shared by Catholics and Protestants alike. Thus in the catholic tradition of a threefold ministry a person may be ordained to the office of deacon, priest or bishop: bishops and priests can preside at the Lord’s Table; deacons cannot. This difference in function does not make the service for the ordination of a deacon any less of an ordination. There is nothing contradictory, in other words, in ordaining to some offices that carry the privilege of presidency at the sacraments and others that do not.

2.11 The *Basis of Union* also states that: ‘elders share with the minister in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders’ meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care’ (§22). Neither the Basis, nor the service in *Worship from the United Reformed Church* (2004), which provides a longer statement of duties, makes any reference to presiding at the sacraments. (The only reference to the possibility of presidency by elders comes later in §25 of the Basis ‘where pastoral necessity so requires’, and requires specific authorisation.) The fact that elders are ordained is therefore irrelevant to the general question of presidency at the sacraments.

### 2.12 *How communion is linked to ordination*

The United Reformed Church celebrates the gospel sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. When in obedience to the Lord’s command his people show forth his sacrifice on the cross by the bread broken and the wine outpoured for them to eat and drink, he himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives himself to them for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, his people gathered at his table present their sacrifice of thanksgiving and renew the offering of themselves, and rejoice in the promise of his coming in glory (*Basis of Union* §15).

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The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen, the United Reformed Church shall (a) take steps to ensure that *so far as possible* ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments are *readily* available to every local church; (b) provide for the training of suitable men and women, members of the United Reformed Church, to be accredited by synods as lay preachers; (c) make provision through synods, in full consultation with the local churches concerned, for the *recognition of certain members of the United Reformed Church, normally deaconesses, elders or accredited lay preachers, who may be invited by local churches to preside at baptismal and communion services, where pastoral necessity so requires.* ... Apart from ordained ministers of the United Reformed Church and of other churches, only such recognized persons may be invited (*Basis of Union* §25) [italics added].

2.13 These provisions suggest that, if any decision were made to enable elders to preside at Communion as *one of their duties as elders*, an alteration of the Basis of Union would be required. An illustration of the kind of change that we have discussed would be either to specify an additional duty for elders to preside within the local congregation, or to remove the phrase ‘where pastoral necessity so requires’, or both. Such an alteration would be justified on the basis that (as resolution 30b of 2005 concerning deployment in the light of the report *Equipping the Saints* implied) it is no longer in practice the case in the United Reformed Church that ‘ordained Ministers of the Word and Sacraments are readily available to every local church’. However, the inclusion of such a duty might also put off others who would be quite prepared to become elders on the current basis. Thus the amendment might have to be more complicated, e.g. by inserting a phrase after ‘the local churches’ in §22 such as: ‘presiding (if they are willing) at the sacraments when required’. Such a detailed reflection was necessary in order to see whether there was a simple amendment that would achieve this. There is not one.

2.14 The interpretation of the phrase ‘pastoral necessity’ as the current criterion for authorisation of elders to preside at communion exemplifies the tension between different understandings of ‘normal’ practice within our churches. That tension has never been resolved, and experience suggests that ‘pastoral necessity’ sometimes lasts for much longer than was originally envisaged in the 1960s. To recognise this we propose extending the normal period for such authorisations from one year to three to five years, according to the judgement of the synod concerned. (The committee considers it unreasonable to expect someone to spend a year or more preparing for an authorisation that might only last for a year.) We also suggest that such authorisation be given for a probationary year on first appointment, before a service of commissioning takes place. This would make it possible for the candidate to conduct more than one service, and thereby enable both congregations and candidate to decide whether the candidate should continue.

2.15 The committee notes that the demographic profile of our Church has led to an increasing need for provision of Communion for the housebound and those in care homes. We affirm the importance of meeting this need; and we also affirm that in the Reformed tradition such services are understood as distinct services of the local church concerned. This is why it is customary for the person’s elder, and possibly another member, to be present with the minister at such a service. It is not part of the Reformed theology of communion for bread and wine already set apart at an earlier church service to be used for this purpose.

2.16 Lay preachers also may be authorised in case of pastoral necessity to preside at Communion (see *Basis of Union* §25), but they are listed after elders in the *Basis* and the 1995 guidance, because elders have a more obvious pastoral relationship with their church. The Moderators tell us that the majority of those currently authorised to preside are elders, and in some synods overwhelmingly so. Since lay preachers are often also elders, they have frequently taken this role, and perform other functions

of local church leadership.<sup>3</sup> The Committee urges lay preachers not to cite their lay preaching commitments as a reason for not agreeing to nomination as elders. While the proportion of congregations to ministers has increased considerably since the inauguration of the URC, the proportion of congregations to lay preachers has stayed remarkably constant, suggesting that the supply is being replenished. On the other hand we have no evidence to suggest that lay preachers are taking a higher proportion of services.

2.17 In the *Patterns of Ministry Report*, there is a Statement on Presidency at the Sacraments in §5.1 that was accepted (with one amendment) by Assembly 1995 as an expression of the mind of the church ‘at this present time’ (*Reports to Assembly 1995*, pp 124-25; Resolution 45, *Record 1995*, p 45). An alternative to an amendment of the Basis of Union would be to update that Statement (which was published in Section F of *The Manual*, and is on the URC website). This would have the added advantage of involving Scotland in the decision, since the original statement was agreed before the union of 2000. It would also take account of the disappearance of District Councils in their original form. In order that some speedy action on this report is taken, the committee recommends **that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (*The Manual*, Section F) be amended to read:**

**The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows:**

- a) **the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);**
- b) **if such a Minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the Synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the Basis of Union: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;**
- c) **authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal. Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs (Resolution 14).**

The committee believes that such a process will remain true to the spirit of the Basis of Union. It will enable us to be ourselves, and it will be sensitive to our ecumenical context.

2.18 *The understanding of the constituent traditions about the relationship of ordination to communion*

The different interpretations of the relationship of ordination to communion among us arise from various strands within the historical antecedents of our Church. The *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* annexed to the *Westminster Confession* (1646/7) is silent about the ordination of any other ministers than ministers of word and sacrament, although it recognises the offices of elder and deacon as ministries in the Church (as well as teachers or doctors, who are ordained to the ministry of word and sacraments

3 Research by the lay preaching committee 20 years ago suggested that one-third of Sunday services were taken by lay preachers. Evidence presented to the task group indicated that 44% of the congregations making a return in Wessex were served by ‘local arrangements’ for their weekly worship. 64% of those authorised to preside at Communion in Eastern Synod were neither Assembly – or synod-accredited lay preachers.

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like pastors). The *Form of Presbyterial Church Government* also declares all ordinations to be an act of a presbytery, rather than a particular local congregation. The Church of Scotland found it difficult to agree on whether elders should be ordained in the late sixteenth century (see the difference between the First and the Second *Book of Discipline*).

2.19 On the other hand, *The Institution of Churches and the Order Appointed in them by Jesus Christ*, annexed to the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658, accepted the same fourfold ministry but placed the emphasis on the calling of persons to each office – that is ‘that he be chosen thereunto by the common suffrage of the church itself, and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of that church’ (§11). Furthermore ‘those who are so chosen, though not set apart by imposition of hands, are rightly constituted ministers of Jesus Christ’ (§12). The work of preaching the Word was not confined to pastors and teachers, but could be undertaken by others, approved and called by the congregation (§13), i.e. lay preachers; and for good measure, the *Declaration* added that ‘ordination alone without the election or precedent consent of the church’ did not make any person a church-officer (§15). Thus for Congregationalists election by the local congregation was fundamental.

2.20 The Churches of Christ developed a different understanding of church order again, by routinely expecting elders to preside at the Lord’s Table. The mandate at the ordination of elders read (in part) as follows:

‘You are appointed to minister in sacred things, and to *take your place at the Table of your blessed Lord*. It will be your privilege and your duty to break the Bread of Life to this congregation, and for the due and adequate discharge of this Office you will answer to the great Head of the Church. It will fall to your lot, with your brother Elders, to rule over the House of God as the steward of God, to maintain the services of the Church, and to *celebrate the sacraments with faithfulness, dignity and grace* (*Report of the Commission on Ordination*, adopted by Annual Conference, *Year Book* 1942, p 148 [italics added]).

This was why they were recognized as auxiliary ministers in 1981.

2.21 Churches of Christ Elders did not operate individually as sole church leaders but as a team supported and resourced by their ministers, especially since single-congregation pastorates were very rare. The development of the auxiliary ministry into today’s non-stipendiary ministry, differing from their stipendiary colleagues only in the lack of stipend rather than the nature and length of training, is understandable as a wish to express parity between the two ministries, yet a certain flexibility and accessibility of leadership has been lost to the local church (except perhaps in parts of Scotland) in this development from the original Churches of Christ understanding of eldership.

### 2.22 *The position of authorised elders within the church*

There are different kinds of ‘pastoral necessity’, which require different kinds of solution. A fundamental difference between the situation of larger (usually urban) and smaller (usually rural) churches runs through most of our approach to Church life beyond the local congregation. Typically the voices of the smaller churches are rarely heard or listened to. At least three different scenarios currently exist, which require rather different solutions:

- a) emergencies, when the appointed minister either fails to arrive or gives very late notice (i.e. less than 24 hours) of inability to come. Here, unless there is another eligible member of the congregation who can be approached and is willing, the procedure envisaged in the final paragraph of §25 of the *Basis* allows for the congregation assembled for a baptismal or communion service themselves to appoint, ‘as a church meeting, a suitable person to preside at the sacrament in a case of emergency’. In practice, this is more likely to apply to a baptismal service, since a communion service could always be postponed to another Sunday.

- b) churches (e.g. in a multi-church pastorate) with no minister regularly assigned or obtainable, where some kind of continuity from week to week or month to month is desirable. This would justify the authorisation of a designated elder or lay preacher along the lines envisaged in §25 of the *Basis*.
- c) churches like those in (b), but where it would be more effective in terms of sharing the burden of preparation to have a team of designated elders or lay preachers authorised.

It should also be remembered that some multi-church pastorates may be quite large in area, or have geographical obstacles to speedy communication, such as mountains or rivers with few bridges.

2.23 Relationships of authorised elders with every council of the church – elderships, church meetings, synods and General Assembly – must be characterised by both support and accountability. The former Churches of Christ model of team leadership can be helpful here, allowing as it does for a differentiation within worship between presiding and preaching, and for a close working relationship between Ministers of Word and Sacrament and authorised elders.

2.24 The committee suggests that, to be true to the Church's understanding of call, the call of authorised elders should be recognised by a service of commissioning after approval of their names by the synod. There is a particular need to support those congregations that have no authorised elder in their membership. It also believes that authorised elders need support and encouragement from a larger group than their own local church. This would be more important if the length of service is extended. For this reason **synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared (Resolution 15)**.

2.25 Where there are local church leaders in a congregation, the relationship between them and authorised elders should be clarified at the outset, because of any overlaps in function (see the *Guidelines*, approved and amended by Assembly, *Reports to Assembly* 1998, pp 66-67). Both are accountable to the elders' meeting, as well as the synod. Any greater detail should be set out by the synod that appoints them.

2.26 There are apparently some churches which currently propose names on a 'just in case' basis, and some synods approve them. The committee strongly urges on all concerned that this practice is in no-one's best interest; indeed it has been told that some persons already authorised have had so little experience that they would be nervous at being called upon. This is not what ministry is about. If people are nominated and approved, then they should be used – for their own sake as well as that of the churches. The proposed probationary year would obviously require this in order that there should be experience to be tested. There are also various ways in which such people can be involved in sharing the presidency with an ordained minister. From time-to-time at General Assembly others have been involved with the principal presider in saying parts of the Prayer of Thanksgiving; and simply to involve such a person at the front of the church alongside the minister can boost confidence. To preside at the Lord's Table is no light matter: it requires careful personal preparation and prayer; and it is a ministry to and for other Christians. The value of such a ministry in 'an emergency' is directly proportionate to that person's previous preparation and experience.

#### 2.27 *Training for authorised elders*

The word 'training' has been experienced by some potential candidates in the past as a pejorative judgment on their current ability rather than as a supportive resource for improvement. The task group notes that 'formation' is now generally used in relation to education for pastoral ministry, rather than 'training'. Those who have years of experience in conducting worship may not see any need for further training. On the

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other hand, lay preaching courses are oversubscribed (more so than when they were described as training courses), and the idea of lifelong learning is increasingly accepted within society generally. We need both to motivate those currently serving to see the benefits available, and to persuade others that adopting such a position of leadership would be good for them and their congregation. The committee therefore suggests that the ministries and education and learning committees consider using the words ‘further preparation’ be used for authorised elders, rather than ‘training’.

2.28 The *Basis of Union* (§21 and §25) emphasises that those who preside must also be recognised more widely than by the congregation alone. In every synod preparation is currently a prerequisite for those elders or lay preachers applying for permission to preside at the sacraments, though its content and style varies. The committee suggests that the synod should also be involved from the candidating process onwards, possibly through its Development/Training Officer. If a candidate has unsuccessfully offered for ministry of Word and Sacrament, this information should be available as part of the decision process, though it should not in itself be a reason for rejection.

2.29 Preparation for authorisation to preside needs to be tailored to individual needs and gifts, but also be of a sufficiently high (and common) standard. Currently the Church offers no form of preparation between TLS accreditation and full NSM ministerial education. The concept of ‘graduate attributes’ used in higher education to produce a well-rounded tertiary education could be considered.<sup>4</sup> The model of apprenticeship, whether in the last year of initial ministerial education or as an integral part of the whole course, is already recognised in formation for ministry of Word and Sacraments and sometimes in placements before initial ministerial education begins. In TLS local tutor groups and placements (in *Gateways into Worship*) achieved this, although with the ending of TLS something new will be required. A clear understanding of what needs to be achieved to qualify for authorisation will be necessary. There should be a clear sense of the aims and objectives, including the use of appropriate prayers and enabling candidates to feel at ease with the procedures involved.

2.30 Apprenticeship used also to be the training method for lay preachers as the ‘student’ followed the ‘expert’ preacher around the churches. Candidates for authorised eldership might similarly be linked to Ministers of Word and Sacrament and learn ‘on the job’ by sharing in presidency in appropriate ways (see §2.27 above). The members of the task group, who are all well-acquainted with what professional qualifications in themselves tell anyone about adequate preparation, believe that there is scope for greater flexibility in the criteria used for authorisation for presidency at the sacraments, in particular the recognition of the significance of previous experience and the recommendations (as well as the requests) of local congregations. This is why they recommended that the normal period of authorisation for presidency be extended to three to five years, rather than one year at present (see §2.18 above).

2.31 While the practice of presidency at Communion in itself is already covered (see §2.17 above on what currently happens in the synods), preparation for authorised elders might helpfully be offered through an expanded module on the conduct of worship (including baptism) in the new material for missional education. Could there be levels of certification to encourage those who start off in a smaller way, so that, for example, there would be a series of short courses, the completion of each one would be marked with a certificate? (In the secular world such methods are used for one-day first aid or safeguarding courses.) Alternatively, material already used by the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) in preparation packages for elders and lay preachers could relatively easily be assembled into a course, preferably developed by all four RCLs

<sup>4</sup> The concept of ‘graduate attributes’ as a way of defining the outcomes of higher education has been developed in this country, particularly (but not exclusively) in the Scottish universities, and includes such qualities as enquiry and lifelong learning, personal development, ability in public speaking and communicating ideas, working within a team, critical thinking and research skills, and leadership.

in collaboration and then delivered from all four centres. Could the RCLs and the discipleship department work together on this? In our view a system that allows further preparation after a provisional authorisation is preferable to one in which authorisation follows the completion of all course requirements.

2.32 These two modes of learning, the more academic and the more practical, could helpfully be integrated. Mentoring for a year before final recognition would also be good, as would fixed terms of service with built-in assessment. When the synod adjudges preparation to be complete, the committee suggests a service of commissioning to mark the transition. Congregations should also be prepared for this new situation, both to support authorised elders and also to avoid misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations of them in their new role.

2.33 Since the 2014 General Assembly the discipleship and mission departments have begun work on a new programme of Missional Discipleship for the Church, which was introduced at Mission Council in November 2015. This report was already in draft at that Mission Council, but the point was made that any church-wide programme should include the kind of preparation for authorised elders presiding at the sacraments. In view of the phasing out of TLS a new programme will be necessary anyway. Since there are already resources in the various synods, the committee believes that it is only necessary for the Assembly to authorise a list of the elements in such programmes that are regarded as essential. The committee therefore recommends **that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources. (Resolution 18)**.

2.34 How much would this cost? The task group has not attempted to answer this question, because it does not know in detail about how what is currently offered is accounted for at present. In large part it depends on the number of candidates per year. But much of the initial work in dealing with preparatory material is a one-off exercise, which may be something that is part of the programme of a synod or the RCLs anyway. It is aware that some worry about the implications of any change for ministry and mission payments; but it regards that as a separate question, not directly related to its remit. There is no obvious way of reflecting on it until a decision has been taken on the main principle.

### 2.35 *The accountability of authorised elders*

Discipline can and should be exercised by the eldership of the church in which this ministry is to be exercised. However, the current promises made by elders on ordination and induction (*Basis*, Schedule B) do not include anything about presidency at the sacraments, because that is not a specified duty for elders. Authorised elders might be considered more likely to need DBS checks, and may be affected by other parliamentary legislation. For these reasons the committee believes that a separate code of conduct for authorised elders is necessary. The URC elders' code of conduct and the disciplinary and incapacity codes for ministers could be resources. The committee recommends **that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before beginning their probationary year (Resolution 16)**. Where, for pastoral reasons, discipline becomes problematic – for example, in the case of conflict between an authorised elder and a local church leader or lay preacher – the synod pastoral committee should be called upon for help. However, the committee advises that the Synod Moderator should not engage directly with any disciplinary process, so as to be available for pastoral support to any parties as necessary.

2.36 There are also potential problems if authorised elders move from one synod to another where they are not known – though in principle they are no different from those faced in relation to those for any elder who moves to a different church and synod. Authorisation is not 'transferable' from one Synod to another, without positive action from the receiving synod. It is right that a letter of commendation should be

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received from the ‘sending synod’, just as letters of transfer are expected is a member moves from one local church to another. Similarly a ‘receiving synod’ needs to know whether authorisation has been withdrawn at any point and why. This might be because the elder’s service was no longer needed, but it might be because there had been dissatisfaction with that service, and attempts to remedy that had failed. In any such situation, the person concerned would be informed, as would local churches for which the authorisation had been granted. It is impossible to produce a complete list of what might be regarded as reasons for withdrawing authorisation, but three different illustrations might assist: unwillingness to use a form of worship that was recognisable as a common service within the pattern expected by the United Reformed Church; actions and behaviors which exceed the authority granted by the synod and local church; refusal to co-operate with the preparation and/or support offered by the synod. The committee therefore recommends **that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose service has proved unsatisfactory be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again (Resolution 17).**

### 2.37 The place of authorised elders in local ecumenical partnerships

The ecumenical implications of these recommendations are significant, both for local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs) and our wider ecumenical relations. The Church of England cannot at present recognise authorised elders for LEPs in which they and we are involved. The Methodist Church does not have an objection in principle to authorising non-presbyters to preside, but its criteria are based on a strict arithmetical calculation of need (see *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, Volume 2, Book VI, section 3) and authorisation is only for three years. The current total is nearly 150 for the UK, including those ministers serving their probationary year before ordination. The Presbyterian Church in Wales, our major ecumenical partner in Wales, permits elders to administer the sacraments in specified situations, but only licenses them (for renewable periods of three years) after three years’ training. In Scotland, our only LEPs involving the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church of Scotland are large churches that do not require authorised elders. There are no problems with Baptist/URC congregations and probably would not be for community churches either. Thus in various ways other traditions, particular the URC’s major partners, work with less flexibility over who can preside at the Sacraments. In view of the United Reformed Church’s commitment to seek wider unity in the Church, the committee therefore ventures to suggest another possibility of answering the same need: reviving a model of team non-stipendiary ministry, arising from the former Churches of Christ understanding of eldership. This is not a substitute for the earlier recommendations, but one that might be more ecumenically fruitful among our partners, who would probably find the use of non-stipendiary ministers more acceptable than that of authorised elders.

### 2.38 There would be several other advantages in using once more the pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry that the Church recognised as early as 1979 (see *Reports to Assembly* 1979, pp 46-49, section II of which still reads as freshly today as when it was written):

#### a) Creativity

Increasingly our pastorates for stipendiary ministers include several congregations; or several pastorates are combined in clusters. This means that those ministers are more stretched so that they have enough to do simply maintaining what exists, rather than stepping back and reflecting on what new initiatives might be taken. Much more of the life of the church is unhelpfully compressed into Sunday mornings than in earlier years, though larger churches offer midweek opportunities. The more activities that are initiated, however, the more a team is required to lead them. Although EM1 now uses a teamwork approach, many ministers are still not experienced at working in teams. Teamwork is harder than doing everything oneself, because it means telling

others what one is planning or doing in good time, as well as learning to trust and sharing ministerial control. This may be a sign that busy people are trying to do more than they can manage, at the expense of consultation. Some members of congregations may also be unwilling to let go of reliance on ‘their’ Minister of Word and Sacraments as the one to solve all problems.

b) Flexibility

Such a pattern of team leadership allows for flexibility, with the gifts of various people being used in leadership as the local situation requires, instead of expecting one person to be good at everything. The responsibilities of team non-stipendiary ministers could (depending upon their gifts) involve some administration, the conduct of worship (including the sacraments), and the time to reflect upon and assist in the leadership of new methods of evangelism, working as a team with the stipendiary ministers for the parishes. Rather than falling into the trap of ‘steady as she goes’ and spreading ministry too thinly between different congregations – as may also be the case for those lay preachers, who rarely offer or receive ministry within their own congregations – a local gift-oriented leadership team has the potential for growth.

c) Discipline

A key element of this discussion (particularly in the minds of Synod Moderators) is the question of the discipline under which elders serve. At present, as discussion of safeguarding has demonstrated, elders count as ‘volunteers’; and as such there is no obvious disciplinary process for them, unless the Church devises one. A code of conduct was approved by Assembly 2010, but it has received little publicity, and does not deal with the questions of accountability, term of office or circumstances in which a period of office can be terminated early. Non-stipendiary ministers, on the other hand, are subject to the ministerial disciplinary and incapacity process, because of their office.

2.39 This solution would require no amendments to the *Basis of Union* (other than the updating of the guidance on Presidency referred to in Resolution 14(a), which is not an amendment to the *Basis*).

2.40 The United Reformed Church rightly values its eldership. It has been suggested that instead of meeting the need for presidency at the sacraments in our churches by using the ministry of elders, the creation of more ministers might appear to devalue the elders we have. This is illogical; the need for elders’ ministry remains. We usually rejoice if an elder feels the call to stipendiary ministry: why should this be different? The task of ‘giving an account of the faith that is in us’ is one for all Christians – church members and elders – not simply ministers. Where that is done most effectively, churches grow.

2.41 Taking all this into account, the committee recommends **that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry (Resolution 19)**. The ministries committee already has a working party on non-stipendiary ministry, and the education and learning committee has spent much time in the last few years in adjusting to new requirements in the common awards for stipendiary ministry candidates.

# Faith and order committee: A Response to the World Council of Churches convergence document, ‘The Church: Towards a common Vision’

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Dr Catherine Ball: <a href="mailto:catherine.ball@ntlworld.com">catherine.ball@ntlworld.com</a> The Revd Elizabeth Welch: <a href="mailto:minister@theroundchapel.org.uk">minister@theroundchapel.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	To take note of the response formulated by the faith and order committee and invite further responses from within the church.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>20. General Assembly commends the document ‘The Church: Towards a Common Vision’ for ongoing reflection in the church; takes note of the faith and order committee response and invites comments on that response by the end of October for consideration for inclusion in the submission to the World Council.</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Responses from the perspective of the United Reformed Church to the contents of the World Council of Churches document. Aims: To formulate and communicate an articulate and accurate response. To share that within the denomination for further reflection
<b>Main points</b>	There are many individual points in relation to specific questions but the main point is to affirm the Church’s commitment both to the ecumenical movement’s search for organic unity and to affirm the distinctive contribution of the tradition in which we stand to such a process, striving for unity with diversity
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The faith and order committee

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Contributes to the collective thinking of the world ecumenical movement.

# A Response to the World Council of Churches convergence document, ‘The Church: Towards a Common Vision’

The report of the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* is elegantly and graciously written – obviously with much thought and care and respect for all the different churches. Rather than confronting head-on great differences between different Christian denominations, it steps back and looks at the process of how we discuss and reason with each other – with the intention of listening to and understanding each other.

The responses below relate to the indicated sections of the document itself.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 To what extent does the text reflect the ecclesiastical understanding of the URC?

1.1.1 In many ways the report reflects the values and principles of the United Reformed Church. We are one in Christ, yet the Church in the world is imperfect and we have different histories, traditions and styles of worship that mean there is diversity of expressions of the Christian faith. The URC would agree with Chapter I the understanding that the church is to further God’s work of healing and reconciliation accomplished through Christ Jesus by worship, initiating new members by baptism, by discipleship and celebrating Holy Communion, proclaiming the Word of God and acknowledging that Christ is crucified and risen. As a church in the Reformed tradition, the URC understands the church as the body of Christ where the Word is preached, the sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism are practiced, and church discipline maintained. There is recognition that the church is fallible, full of ‘sinners saved by grace’ and therefore needs to be continually reformed. There is a strong emphasis in the URC on unity and a real desire to work ecumenically wherever possible and to work towards organic unity with other churches.

1.1.2 In addition to providing worship and pastoral care, the URC has a history and focus upon social action: our faith should be lived out in our lives, not only as individuals, but corporately, and that we should stand alongside the poor, sick and oppressed of our world, and work for justice and peace. We should be good stewards of our environment – for God is reconciling the whole world through Christ. This is seen in our work with the Council for World Mission, Christian Aid and the Fairtrade movement.

### 1.2 To what extent does the text offer a basis for growth in unity among the churches?

1.2.1 The URC acknowledges the gracious, patient and sensitive work that was involved in forming the WCC report and agrees that it offers a basis of understanding from which to develop greater unity among churches.

1.2.2 The URC affirms, along with the other churches in the World Council of Churches, the catholic faith witnessed in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, included in the *Basis of Union* Para 18 and the Nature, Faith and Order of the Church, Para 4 and also in the URC hymnbook, *Rejoice and Sing*.

1.2.3 The URC also affirms its right to make new declarations of faith according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This can cause division and needs to be handled carefully and patiently, using proper procedures. The URC recognises that churches hold different views on how to live as Christians – for example: a) in the URC women may

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hold any position in the church; b) in the URC, as well as holding up marriage to one partner for life as an ideal, because it is a human institution as well as God's design, we recognise that some marriages may fail and individuals in this situation may seek God's forgiveness and new beginnings in a new relationship. The URC upholds the rights of personal and denominational conviction and so allows some differences of opinion, such as the case of same sex marriage, which it seeks to hold within its wider unity.

1.2.4 The identification of common core beliefs of Christians in the text of the report is a helpful means of sustaining our commonality. Identifying how we then live out our faith may change in different historical and cultural situations. This would be one possible criterion for acknowledging overriding unity with diversity of lifestyle – and allowing some diversity without division.

### **1.3 What adaptations or renewal does this statement challenge the URC to work for?**

1.3.1 One of the areas that the URC is challenged to adapt in order to share commonalities with other denominations is in the area of worship. The URC is more open and understanding toward more sacramental forms of worship than our Protestant forebears. The URC acknowledges that God is mystery and so there is a place for mystery in worship, yet we could continue to learn from more contemplative and Anglo-Catholic styles of worship. An example of convergence already can be seen in URC styles of worship. Although the URC was formed by some who were dissenters reluctant to use a set liturgy as in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England, today worship leaders tend to follow the URC Service Book or Worship Books. Churches in the United Reformed Church follow their own service book, and it is also quite common for churches in the URC to use the *Revised Common Lectionary* that we share across different traditions for weekly Scripture readings during worship.

### **1.4 How far is the URC able to form closer relationships in life and mission with those churches that can acknowledge in a positive way the account of the Church described in the Towards a Common Vision Statement?**

1.4.1 This is a difficult question in the UK today as many Christian denominations are solidifying their patterns of ministry and worship with the decline of membership numbers. The primary way in which many local churches are able to form closer relationships with other churches at present is on the ground rather than structurally at a denominational level. There are many Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP), in which the URC and one or more other denominations form one worshipping congregation. And the URC is open to forming new LEP relationships. These do not represent the organic unity of different denominations at a local level but the partnership of distinct traditions. In practice, however, they can be experienced as organic unions which represent a challenge to the parent denominations as to how this can be both acknowledged and a source of fruitful dialogue.

1.4.2 The URC holds a strong positive view of the unity of the Church and seeks to work toward organic unity of the church in conversations and forming agreements where possible. This is recorded in its Basis of Union, 'The URC sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people.' The URC celebrates our fellowship with the other Covenanted Churches in Wales, through which we recognise the ministry of one another. Such ecumenical understanding has come through prayer, compromise and hard work, and the URC is keen to work for other examples of visible unity within Wales, the UK and beyond.

1.4.3 The URC seeks to work ecumenically wherever it can in mission projects with other local churches through Churches Together and in social action such as with the Fairtrade movement, Christian Aid and ecology groups. Another example is the Joint Public Issues Team where the URC works with Methodists, Baptists and the Church of Scotland on common concerns.

1.4.4 Local congregations of the URC often work together with churches from other denominations on mission projects and joint events through Churches Together

in England, CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales) or ACTS (Action for Churches Together in Scotland). At the institutional level, however, there is a struggle to reconcile our differences. Some of our differences come from the Reformation and a past of conscientious dissent, which our forebears gave their lives to achieve. Perhaps identifying, acknowledging and jointly declaring our shared Christian principles of justice, love, tolerance, freedom of belief etc. would help us to listen and work alongside each other more cooperatively.

1.4.5 The URC recognises a need in its local churches for more house groups and Bible studies to enable people to grow and deepen their level of devotion and discipleship. An affirmation that all Christians are pilgrims growing in faith and knowledge of God throughout their lives might encourage life-long discipleship. The URC could learn from other denominations that have good resources for study discussion and worship. A positive example is the annual Lenten Course produced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

**1.5 What aspects of the life of the Church could call for further discussion and what advice could the URC offer for the ongoing work by the WCC faith and order group in the area of ecclesiology?**

1.5.1 The URC has a statement of its ecclesiology in the Basis of Union. It affirms one Church called into being through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It considers the Church holy because God has redeemed and consecrated it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and because Christ dwells with his people. It views the Church as apostolic because Christ continues to entrust it with the Gospel and the commission to proclaim that Gospel to all peoples. Yet the URC acknowledges that failure and weakness mar the life of the Church, requiring it to ever be renewed and reformed by Christ's mercy and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The ecclesiology of the URC includes an acknowledgement that the church has a call to repent of what has been amiss including divisions in the church in the past and to be reconciled. The URC believes that the church should take wherever possible and with all speed further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

1.5.2 Yet there are some hard won values and principles of the URC that the church would be reluctant to let go of. One of its main distinguishing features is its more participative church structure. It is encouraged by the increased use of conciliar methods of church government in other denominations as a result of ecumenical dialogue.

1.5.3 One value of the URC is the equality of opportunity for all its members, regardless of gender or marital status, to be in positions of leadership within the church. There are some questions that the URC might consider as it seeks to form closer relationships with other churches. How should the URC respond with strength and solidarity supporting freedom and equality of women and those with different beliefs, yet also with graciousness, humility and respect for others' views? How can Christians of different denominations show respect for those of different cultures and sexual orientations? It would be helpful to form agreements with other Christians on URC concerns about our consumerist, western ways – e.g. the overt use of violence and sexuality in TV and advertising. Yet it would be good to acknowledge where we differ – in the URC we believe that women should be able to have education and leadership roles. The WCC could speak to and guide the different churches so that we could offer Christian perspectives on current issues in the world.

## **2. Chapter I**

### **Fundamental issues of the way to unity**

2.1 Ever since the Toronto Declaration of 1950, the WCC has challenged the churches to 'recognise that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own church body.' Moreover, mutual regard between churches and their members has been profoundly encouraged and advanced by ecumenical encounter. Nevertheless, differences on some basic questions remain and need to be faced together: How can we identify the Church which the creed calls one,

holy, catholic and apostolic? What is God's will for the unity of this church? What do we need to do to put God's will into practice? This text has been written in order to assist the churches as they reflect upon such questions, seeking common answers.

2.2 Fundamental issues of justice and peace and respect of all people are important aspects of unity within the worldwide Church of Christ. The main way that people in society can identify the Church as universal and apostolic is for the people of the church to follow Christ's way of 'taking up our crosses' rather than 'taking up our swords' in church life and ministry. As followers of Christ we are called to imitate his ways, display his humility and further his ministry of healing, welcoming the outcast, feeding the hungry, challenging evil and showing self sacrificial giving in our service toward each other and people in the world.

### **3. Chapter II**

#### **The Church of the triune God**

##### **3.1 How continuity and change in the Church relate to God's will**

3.1.1 Through their patient encounter, in a spirit of mutual respect and attention, many churches have come to a deeper understanding of these differing sensitivities and convictions regarding continuity and change in the church. In that deeper understanding, it becomes clear that the same intent – to obey God's will for the ordering of the Church – may, in some, inspire commitment to continuity and, in others, commitment to change. We invite churches to recognise and honour each other's commitment to seeking the will of God in the ordering of the Church. We further invite them to reflect about the criteria which are employed in different churches for considering issues about continuity and change. How far are such criteria open to development in the light of the urgent call of Christ to reconciliation? (Matt. 5.23-24) Could this be the time for a new approach?

3.1.2 The United Reformed Church affirms the faith of the apostles and also recognises that 'the Holy Spirit may lead us to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the living Christ' as indicated in our Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church:

3.1.3 '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'.

3.1.4 This means that the URC affirms the Protestant Christian understanding that people are saved by faith and not by practice (although the faith that saves is never alone, but followed by good works). The Christian faith is always experienced in person. It is not a set of propositional truths, but a relationship with the living God which is lived in a particular culture and society and generation. As society changes it is appropriate for Christians to change their expectations of themselves to be appropriately good and decent in the society in which they live. It may mean a woman wearing a head covering in some societies and it may mean not so in others. The Church will evolve as it seeks to live out the will of God in bringing peace and justice and wholeness to all. This has been shown in the church's response against slavery, which took many years to realise, the recognition of women's ministry in some denominations and an ongoing searching and discovery of what is healthy and wholesome sexual identity and behaviour. One of the important principles is the recognition that some churches in different societies will have different understandings and expectations and therefore we should allow difference and respect for each other as pilgrim people. One of the United Reformed Church's ways of living this out is to revise the Basis of Union for the essential elements of the Church's life through General Assembly, and for local churches to work out in the local Church Meeting more specifically local issues that are important to them.

### 3.2 The expression, ‘the Church as sacrament’

3.2.1 Those who use the expression ‘the Church as sacrament’ do not deny the unique ‘sacramentality’ of the sacraments nor do they deny the frailty of human ministers. Those who reject this expression, on the other hand, do not deny that the Church has an effective sign of God’s presence and action. Might this, therefore, be seen as a question where legitimate differences of formulation are compatible and mutually acceptable?

3.2.2 This would not normally be an expression used in the URC. The URC would agree that the church is a ‘sign’ or ‘foretaste’ of the Kingdom. It is a place of God’s presence and action in the world, but is imperfect and not the Kingdom of God but supposed to point to it. The URC acknowledges the work of the Holy Spirit beyond the church to draw people to God. One of the first of the Five Marks of Mission, adopted by Anglican, Methodist and URC churches is to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom. One URC church quotes this statement and says, ‘This is central to our worship in which we honour Christ whose Kingdom is coming and which we are called to anticipate’ (taken from the mission statement of Emmanuel URC, Trumpington Street, Cambridge)

### 3.3 Legitimate and divisive diversity

3.3.1 Ecumenical dialogue in search of the unity for which Christ prayed has, in large part, been an effort by representatives from various Christian churches to discern, with the help of the Holy Spirit, what is necessary for unity, according to the will of God, and what is properly understood as legitimate diversity. Though all churches have their own procedures for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate diversity, it is clear that two things are lacking: (a) common criteria, or means of discernment, and (b) such mutually recognised structures as are needed to use these effectively. All churches seek to follow the will of the Lord yet they continue to disagree on some aspects of faith and order and, moreover, on whether such disagreements are Church-divisive or, instead, part of legitimate diversity. We invite the churches to consider, what positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?

3.3.2 It would seem legitimate for Christian churches to agree on the main historical orthodox statements of faith while having some differences of opinion on local cultural ways in which they express their faith. If churches follow the teaching of the Book of Acts and the Letter of Paul to the Romans, which refused to place unnecessary burdens of the Law on Gentiles to prevent them from coming to God, then churches should recognise that there are differences of personal conviction relating to lifestyle and not judge each other. This would mean that it would be helpful to identify the principles and practices that should characterise all Christian churches, such as valuing and respecting all people, because God created us in his image, and to work toward justice and peace and to respect the environment, a responsibility given to human beings by God in Genesis. Churches may differ on minor matters, acknowledging that no church is perfect, but seeking to follow Christ faithfully in their location and generation. One of the worst witnesses to the gospel in the history of the church was the violence and force used by some Christians against others through the Spanish Inquisition and the European Reformation. So it would be important to discourage churches from calling others heretical which is a divisive diversity, but to allow churches to work out their own faith and church life through discussion and discernment under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

### 3.4 The relationship between local and universal church

3.4.1 Many churches can embrace a shared understanding of the fundamental relationship and communion of local churches within the universal Church. They share the understanding that the presence of Christ, by the will of the Father and the power of the Spirit, is truly manifested in the local church (it is ‘wholly Church’), and that this very presence of Christ impels the local church to be in communion with the universal Church (it is not ‘the whole Church’). Where this fundamental agreement is found, the expression ‘local church’ may nonetheless be used in varying ways. In our common quest for closer unity, we invite the churches to seek more precise mutual understanding and agreement in this area: what is the appropriate relation between the various levels of life of a fully united Church and what specific ministries of leadership are needed to serve and foster those relations?

## Faith and order

3.4.2 The URC is linked in various ways to other bodies of Christians: at the world level it is a member of the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council and the Council for World Mission. At the regional level, it is a member of the Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. In the British Isles it is a member of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland as well as the ecumenical instruments of England, Scotland and Wales. These relationships are manifested in various ways in the life of the URC. They provide a basis for recognising members and ministers of other member Churches; they also provide a network of contacts between people and places resulting in exchange visits and partner congregations, which bring the universal Church to life in a very local way.

3.4.3 Ministers of Word and Sacraments are trained for three to four years with a year placement, often in ecumenical settings sharing teaching with other denominations, and therefore would have similar academic standards to other churches in Britain. This would mean that we will recognise the ministry in other denominations, and if individuals wish to transfer to our denomination we acknowledge and recognise their ministry; however we would require them to take some training about the United Reformed Church.

3.4.4 URC ministers often serve in local ecumenical partnerships. These are partnerships of local churches usually worshipping as one congregation, bound together by covenant whereby the ministry of a pastorate may be provided by different denominations at different times or as part of a team. With the exception of Roman Catholic involvement, this allows the ministers of different traditions to fully cooperate and share in ministry on an equal basis including in the celebration of the Eucharist. This shared training and experience would be helpful in seeking to deepen the understanding of ecumenical cooperation across different traditions and to develop the skills needed to minister across the range of traditions and cultural differences that are often so challenging.

## 4. Chapter III Growing In Communion

4.1.1 In the light of the convergences of Baptism and Eucharist and of further reflection upon the historical roots and potential compatibility of the expressions 'sacrament' and 'ordinance,' the churches are challenged to explore whether they are able to arrive at deeper agreement about that dimension of the life of the Church that involves these rites. Such convergence could lead them to consider several additional questions. Most churches celebrate other rites or sacraments, such as chrismations/confirmations, weddings and ordinations within their liturgies and many also have rites for the forgiveness of sin and the blessing of the sick: may not the number and ecclesial status of these sacraments or ordinances be addressed in ecumenical dialogues? We also invite churches to consider whether they can now achieve closer convergence about who may receive baptism and who may preside at the Church's liturgical celebrations? Further, are there ways in which fuller mutual understanding can be established between the churches which celebrate these rites and those Christian communities convinced that the sharing of life in Christ does not require the celebration of sacraments or other rites?

4.1.2 The United Reformed Church recognises only two sacraments: Holy Communion and Baptism. The URC holds a Reformed understanding of Holy Communion as a sacred symbolic meal. There is recognition of the mystery of the presence of Christ in the meal through the Holy Spirit. However this is an area of diversity within our denomination. In the URC Worship Book II baptism is described as publicly marking the beginning of a person's life as a Christian and as belonging to the body of Christ the Church. This means that baptism in itself does not make a person a Christian, that is done by God's grace and calling. Also, in the URC there is an understanding that God's love and grace are wider and broader than the Church and so those who are not baptised may, through Christ be accepted and welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

4.1.3 The church is willing to offer infant baptism as well as ‘believer’s’ baptism, as the URC recognises baptism to be an outward expression of a response to God’s prior love for all people. Infant baptism is based on the parents making a confession of faith and promising to bring their children up in the life of the church and a congregation promising to provide Christian teaching and example, with the hope that they will grow up to make their own commitment of faith. However while the URC will perform both infant and believers’ baptism there is an acknowledgement of different hermeneutical views on this and the URC upholds the importance of personal conviction through enabling ministers to act according to their own discernment and conviction. If a minister does not wish to perform infant baptisms then they are expected to enable someone else to conduct this sacrament.

4.1.4 When someone who has been baptised as an infant wishes to make a confession of faith they are considered already properly baptised at birth and so the United Reformed church would not re-baptise them, but would invite them to confirm their faith and be welcomed into church membership, with the rights and responsibilities of making decisions at church meeting and supporting others in fellowship and financially. An acknowledgement that members of the same tradition can differ over their understanding of something so significant is both a challenge for the denomination and, we believe, a working example of how diversity and unity can both be lived out within the institutional church.

4.1.5 Other rites would be considered services of blessing or welcome into membership, or of healing etc. They could be offered by a minister or an elder and may be designed appropriate to a situation. URC worship leaders may use liturgical resources from different denominations for such occasions.

## 4.2 Ordained ministry

4.2.1 Ecumenical dialogue has repeatedly shown that issues relating to ordained ministry constitute challenging obstacles on the path to unity. If differences such as those relating to the priesthood of the ordained prohibit full unity, it must continue to be an urgent priority for the churches to discover how they can be overcome.

4.2.2 A difference which may be a barrier to unity with other churches is the URC understanding of ministry. There is an understanding in the URC that both men and women may serve as Ministers of Word and Sacraments. The URC will also accept for ministry people of any marital status or sexual orientation. In the URC we would recognise that some people may be called to celibacy – but probably a very few people. Not all in ministry are able to fulfil this calling and nor should it be required of them. In 2017 the URC marks the centenary of the ordination of women to the mainline church in Britain, and offers their experience to the wider church.

## 4.3 Threefold ministry

4.3.1 Given the signs of growing agreement about the place of ordained ministry in the Church, we are led to ask if the churches can achieve a consensus as to whether or not the threefold ministry is part of God’s will for the Church in its realisation of the unity which God wills?

4.3.2 In the URC we do not normally use the language of a threefold ministry. Synod moderators, while in office, would have a somewhat similar role to bishops, having oversight of ministers, but hold no special status among ministers once their period of service as a moderator is over. There is a difference between an Anglican understanding of priest and a church minister in the United Reformed Church. Although we would have similar training to Anglican priests, URC ministers have different practical experience and different expectations to meet. The URC has a different understanding of ordination. Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments are not held as a separate order but are simply recognised and set apart to serve as ministers. The use of the word ‘minister’ reflects the role as servant of the church, following Christ’s example of servant leadership. Ministers serve alongside elders and are led by decisions of the local Church Meeting rather than having authority and power over a local pastorate.

## Faith and order

4.3.3 The URC commissions church related community workers who have the role of supporting local churches with its community. They have gone through the assessment process, been accepted as a candidate, and then completed prescribed training like a Minister of Word and Sacraments, but with a focus on community and social issues. They are then appointed to a post approved by the URC.

4.3.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments work alongside a team of elders. The role to which an elder is ordained is not equivalent to an Anglican deacon or a Methodist deacon. In the URC, elders share with the minister in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local church. They work in teams with each other to provide pastoral care. In the elders' meeting they take counsel together for the whole congregation. They are responsible for: making provision for Christian worship and education, for maintaining proper standards of membership, and for promoting witness and service to the community, mission at home and abroad, and the peace, unity and welfare of the Church. So in a sense the URC has a four-fold ministry

4.3.5 As Elders have become trustees under state legislation, 'it is their duty to arrange for the proper maintenance of church buildings, and to ensure the oversight of church finances. Some represent the local church in the wider councils of the Church, and by virtue of their membership of these councils also represent the whole Church to the local church.' (From the URC Worship book)

### 4.4 Authority in the Church and its exercise

4.4.1 Significant steps towards convergence on authority and its exercise have been recorded in various bilateral dialogues. Differences continue to exist between churches, however, as to the relative weight to be accorded to the different sources of authority, as to how far and in what ways the Church has the means to arrive at a normative expression of its faith, and as to the role of ordained ministers in providing an authoritative interpretation of revelation. Yet all churches share the urgent concern that the Gospel be preached, interpreted and lived out in the world humbly, but with compelling authority. May not the seeking of ecumenical convergence on the way in which authority is recognised and exercised play a creative role in this missionary endeavour of the churches?

4.4.2 The URC has a participatory form of government in which authority is shared among the different councils of the church under the leading of the Holy Spirit. One of the main features of the United Reformed Church is its conciliar style of church government in which decisions are made in councils from the local Church Meeting, to synod and through General Assembly. The URC has four levels of church councils: 1) the Church Meeting of a local church, in which decisions affecting the local church are made; 2) the locally elected elders meeting makes decisions as Church trustees and gives leadership to the Church Meeting; 3) synod level of region or nation dealing with matters of wider concern, taking actions from General Assembly and bringing forward concerns to General Assembly; and 4) General Assembly, held biennially, which is the central organ and final authority on matters of doctrine and order of the URC. Each council makes decisions and reports, proposals and suggested actions travel from wider to local church level or from the local level to the wider church. This encourages a shared use of power to reduce the likelihood of abuse and increase the regular accountability of leaders. This conciliar model of church government is valued highly by the URC and we would want to hold it up as a positive model of church government.

4.4.3 The URC understanding of authority in ministry is that it should be exercised by those who are authorised but always accountable to the councils of the church. The role of minister or synod moderator is one of servant leadership rather than an authoritarian position over others. It is based on a calling by God, confirmed by the community of faith. In the URC there is recognition that a woman may equally be called by God to a form of ministry and may hold any position in the church. This is seen as recognition of God's call. The church seeks to discourage discrimination on any basis of race, culture, age or gender, sexual orientation or marital status within the URC and to promote full inclusion.

#### 4.5 Authority of ecumenical councils

4.5.1 While most churches accept the doctrinal definitions of the early Ecumenical Councils as expressive of the teaching of the New Testament, some maintain that all post-biblical doctrinal definitions to be normative and therefore irreformable expressions of the faith. Has ecumenical dialogue made possible a common assessment of the normativity of the teaching of the early Ecumenical Councils?

4.5.2 The URC recognised the early ecumenical councils being normative for the Christian Church, but it would be open to holding further Ecumenical Councils. According to the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC, 'we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the living Christ'. There is recognition in the URC that each culture, social class, gender and generation of churches may interpret the Scriptures in different ways as the Christian faith is an incarnational faith that is expressed slightly differently in different places and times. Definitions of orthodoxy need to be discerned by each generation and place, acknowledging that there is a breadth of understanding.

#### 4.6 Universal ministry of unity

4.6.1 If, according to the will of Christ, current divisions are overcome, how might a ministry that fosters and promotes the unity of the Church at the universal level be understood and exercised?

4.6.2 The Church universal should show unity as reflecting the prayer Jesus made in John 17. Yet the reality is that it is divided by different denominations, church governments, styles of worship and polity and practice of the Christian faith. The URC understands the apostolic succession of the Christian faith is found in the councils of the church under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

4.6.3 In order to regain or form greater unity, one of the fears of the URC as a small denomination is that some of its good distinctive features and emphases might be lost in the union. It would require significant representation by smaller churches in negotiations toward unity with larger, more powerful churches so that the positive features of different smaller churches might be valued and maintained. Smaller churches may be more adaptable to cultural and societal changes.

### 5. Chapter IV The Church: In and for the World

#### 5.1 Ecumenical response to religious pluralism

5.1.1 There remain serious disagreements within and between some churches concerning these issues. The New Testament teaches that God wills the salvation of all people (1 Tim. 2.4) and, at the same time, that Jesus is the one and only saviour of the world (1 Tim. 2.5 and Acts 4.12). What conclusions may be drawn from these biblical teachings regarding the possibility of salvation for those who do not believe in Christ? Some hold that, in ways known to God, salvation in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is possible for those who do not explicitly share Christian faith. Others do not see how such a view sufficiently corresponds to biblical passages about the necessity of faith and baptism for salvation. Differences on this question will have an impact upon how one understands and puts into practice the mission of the Church. Within today's context of increased awareness of the vitality of various religions throughout the world, how may the churches arrive at greater convergence about these issues and cooperate more effectively in witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed?

5.1.2 Within the URC there are some who emphasise a more exclusive approach, focusing upon individual salvation through faith and baptism. There are others that would invite a more universalist understanding of salvation regarding God's coming kingdom and the vision of all things being brought into the New Jerusalem at the Parousia. The URC is a church that respects a range of beliefs of salvation among its members.

## 5.2 Moral questions and the unity of the Church

5.2.1 Ecumenical dialogue at the multilateral and bilateral levels has begun to sketch out some of the parameters of the significance of moral doctrine and practice for Christian unity. If present and future ecumenical dialogue is to serve both the mission and the unity of the Church, it is important that this dialogue explicitly address the challenges to convergence represented by contemporary moral issues. We invite the churches to explore these issues in a spirit of mutual attentiveness and support. How might the churches, guided by the Spirit, discern together what it means today to understand and live in fidelity to the teaching and attitude of Jesus? How can the churches, as they engage together in this task of discernment, offer appropriate models of discourse and wise counsel to the societies in which they are called to serve?

5.2.2 This is a very difficult area to address. Perhaps further sharing of biblical scholarship and study would help churches to acknowledge cultural adaptations to contemporary moral issues. The Western church has had a tendency to focus on sexual behaviour, which Jesus spoke about very little. He had much more to say about the love of wealth and the oppression of others and self-righteousness. He disobeyed some temple rules of purity saying that the rules are for the people, not the people for the rules. Jesus summarised the commandments as to love God and love our fellow human beings. The URC affirms the Ten Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew (and on the plain in Luke's gospel). Jesus' demands are almost impossible to follow and show that all are sinful in need of God's grace.

5.2.3 A recognition that there are differences in how Jewish and Gentile Christians would be expected to live their Christian lives, even within the same generation, in first century Palestine, and an acknowledgement of changes down the centuries since then might help churches recognise that different churches in different places and times may express their faith differently and still be faithful to the overriding commandment by Christ to love God and to love one another. This would mean that there need not be unanimity on this in order to have unity.

## 5.3 The role of the Church in mission

5.3.1 This seems to be an area in 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision' paper that has not been sufficiently addressed. Jesus' final words in the gospel of Matthew 28.18,19 are his commissioning of the disciples to make disciples of all nations. There are many models in the Scriptures that speak of the church as being a witness to the world. The URC acknowledges in its Basis of Union that Christ continues to entrust the commission first given to the apostles to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. There are different metaphors used in the gospels referring to being a witness to the world: salt and light in Matthew 5, salt to preserve the world and light to be a visible presence in which Christian good works may be seen and give glory to God. Jesus sent out the first disciples to proclaim the good news and to bring healing and wholeness to people. The main model of mission is the Kingdom or realm of God. Luke's gospel ends with the risen Lord saying repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. John's gospel was written so that people may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah. John's letters challenge Christian disciples to love one another and in this way they are to reveal God's love to the world. The URC affirms the importance of mission and the role of congregations as a witness in their local communities and so mission is to be appropriate for their local context.

# Faith and order committee: What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?

## Basic Information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p>21. General Assembly affirms 'What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?' and invites local churches, synods and General Assembly, and their committees, to continue prayerfully to ask this question, looking at the points of celebration in their life and the possibilities and challenges in front of the Church.</p> <p>22. General Assembly encourages local churches to be proactive in sharing their good news stories via the communications department, the creative use of social media, synod gatherings and whatever other opportunities present themselves or can be created.</p> <p>23. General Assembly invites the faith and order committee in consultation with other relevant bodies to undertake work arising out of this report and on 'A Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church', to produce further resources for study and worship, to help churches in their reflection on 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?'</p>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The results of the discussion process initiated by the 2014 General Assembly on the future of the Church  The aim is to share the conclusions drawn from that process and encourage and challenge the Church
<b>Main points</b>	<p>'What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?' is a paper that was first offered to Assembly in 2014 to aid the prayerful reflection of the United Reformed Church on this particular Church's future. After responses received from churches, synods and individuals, and discussion at Mission Council, a further paper is brought with affirmations about the God in whom we put our trust to lead and guide us, with celebrations of our life, and with possibilities and challenges that lie in front of us</p> <p>Four separate resolutions, in support of some of the work referred to in this report, are also before General Assembly:</p>

	<p>1) ‘The Wider Fold’ in relation to church membership;</p> <p>2) ‘Authorised Elders’ with regard to the role of elders presiding at Holy Communion;</p> <p>3) The report of the conversations between the URC and the Church of England;</p> <p>4) The URC’s response to the WCC paper ‘The Church: Towards a common vision’.</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	<p>The report ‘What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?’ Affirming the United Reformed Church’s future’ submitted to the 2014 General Assembly as ‘Future of the Church’, paper 1 (page 102 ff of the <i>Book of Reports</i>)</p> <p>The discussion document ‘What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?’ circulated to the churches in winter 2014</p>
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	<p>Local congregations and synods</p> <p>Mission Council</p> <p>The faith and order committee</p>

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Hoped-for enhancement of relationships inside and outside the Church.

# What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?

*The United Reformed Church is not here to die, but to be reborn.*

## A. The Spirit-led pilgrimage of the United Reformed Church

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has been travelling on a journey guided by the Spirit of God.
- 1.2 We believe that the Spirit inspired our forebears to recognise that the state has no authority to legislate for the worship and practice of the Church. In England and Wales some 2,000 ministers chose in 1662 to be excluded from the established Church and from public office rather than conform to state legislation in matters of religious practice. Throughout these lands meeting houses and chapels were built, where Dissenting congregations worshipped with the freedom which they believed was their God-given duty and privilege.
- 1.3 We believe that the Spirit led us to recognise the role of women in the ministry of Word and Sacrament. We are about to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Constance Coltman's ordination in the Congregational Union of England and Wales.
- 1.4 We believe that the Spirit called Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Churches of Christ to come together in the URC. As a united Church we have heard God's calling to continue to work for the unity of the wider Church even at the cost of our own traditions and institutions.

## B. What is the Spirit saying to our Church today?

- 2.1 The Spirit is leading us to a renewal of faith in God, in which we can let go of the guilt and burdens that weigh us down, and be open to God's grace to guide us. The Spirit is leading us to trust that God holds the future, even when the future appears uncertain.
- 2.2 We believe that the Spirit is calling us to reaffirm our ecumenical commitment; to understand more clearly, and so regain greater confidence in, the central features of our own Reformed tradition; and to commit ourselves to a life of radical discipleship, directed towards God's mission in the world.
- 2.3 We offer six affirmations, which point us to our faith in God and the renewal of the life of the URC, believing that as we put our trust more deeply in God this Church will be reborn. These affirmations build on URC's *Basis of Union* and the resources offered in Vision 2020. They are expanded in the appendix, to include particular aspects of our life that we celebrate and some of the possibilities and challenges before us.

### God is the generous gift-giver

- 3.1 God's gifts are poured out in creation, in Jesus and in the Spirit.
- 3.2 The Church's first response to God is the offering of worship. The URC celebrates the centrality and joy of worship as a living encounter with God, in which God is known and lives are transformed, and out of which people share in God's transforming action in the world.

## **God is our source, our guide, our goal**

4.1 We celebrate the gifts and treasures of the Reformed tradition, acknowledging the rootedness in a theological heritage that goes back to the early Church, and open to the leading of the Spirit in new ways today, as the Spirit led our Reformed ancestors in their particular cultures and contexts.

## **God leads people into truth**

5.1 In the power of the Holy Spirit, truth is received in many different ways, through Scripture and the tradition of the Church, through the testing of personal experience, through the discernment of the gathered people of God and through wrestling deeply with the issues of the day.

## **God in Trinity draws people into a relationship of love**

6.1 We affirm the value of the local church as the place in which God's love is known and lived out. The URC celebrates the whole people of God, each one, young and old, with his or her own gifting from the Spirit, each one given voice by the Holy Spirit.

## **God reshapes the Church to meet the challenge of different contexts and cultures**

7.1 We celebrate the 'risk-taking' nature of our obedience to the Spirit across our history and in our present social and political stances.

## **God draws people to be one, offering reconciliation in a broken world**

8.1 We celebrate the bold steps taken to bring this Church into being through uniting different traditions of the Church and we affirm that our calling is to continue to witness to unity.

## **C. Summary**

9.1 We know that God has spoken to our forebears, but now we long to hear the voice of the Spirit for ourselves. The faith and order committee brings this aspect of its work to the Assembly, convinced that as a Church we do need to hear the Spirit speak. We believe that discussions around the theme 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?' have encouraged our people to hear the Spirit's voice and will continue to do so.

## **A prayer for the United Reformed Church**

Speak Holy Spirit, speak.  
Speak like a gentle breeze comforting us in our fearfulness;  
Speak like a mighty gale to shake us out of false security;  
Speak like a dove to bring peace in our hearts, amongst our people, in this world.

## Appendix

### A. Background

1.1 The booklet ‘What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?’ was drawn up by the faith and order committee after three years of reflection and consideration, presented to the 2014 General Assembly and circulated for discussion to the synods and churches. 138 responses were received from individuals, churches, groups of churches, and synods.

1.2 The responses indicated that many of the congregations within the URC, of different sizes and across a broad geographical and theological range, both value our traditions and are open to the voice of the Spirit in their midst. These responses were discussed by the faith and order committee, who brought the first draft of its report to Mission Council in November 2015. This draft received its final shaping at the faith and order meeting in March 2016.

### B. Story of the booklet and the response

2.1 The booklet looked realistically at the numerical decline of the URC in recent years, noting that if there were easy answers to be had, these would have already been discovered. Detailed work was offered on URC identity, including the significance of being united and being Reformed. The Church’s gift of conciliarity was looked at, in particular regard to the Church Meeting. Five scenarios were offered as a device to stimulate conversation, outlining possible ecumenical ways forward.

2.2 Many detailed and helpful responses were offered to the booklet. People indicated happiness that the question ‘What is the Spirit saying to the churches?’ was being put before the Church. In some places there was a greater focus on the call to discern and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In other places, there was a greater focus on the scenarios. It was clear that no one scenario was favoured to the exclusion of all others.

2.3 The breadth of response was of value: it demonstrated the multifaceted way in which the Spirit speaks through the churches and the wide range of thinking with regard to the future of the URC. It also pointed to the need to regain confidence in this particular tradition of the Church, in God’s purpose for this Church, and in what this Church has to offer the world.

### C. The affirmations: celebrations, possibilities and challenges

3.1 We offer no easy answers. But we do offer a wealth of areas of URC life that can be celebrated, and possibilities and challenges for the future. We affirm both the characteristics of being united and Reformed that shape the URC’s life as a whole and the huge diversity in which these characteristics are lived out in each place. We invite our local churches to ask themselves ‘What is the Spirit saying to the churches?’ and to see what can be celebrated, and where the possibilities and challenges lie for each congregation. We hope that the particular examples we outline will act as a trigger for thinking about many other areas.

## Faith and order

### *God is the generous gift giver*

#### **3.2 We celebrate**

3.2.1 The offering of worship. Worship centres on the opening of the Word and the breaking of the bread, offered in a range of ways, as the congregation feels led, building on the wide range of approaches to worship today. Worship draws people in to the mystery of the holy, receiving generously from the wellspring of God's love. Worship is the starting point for mission, as people participate in God's mission to the world, new people are welcomed, baptism is offered and different ways of worship are explored.

3.2.2 These different ways of worshipping are given life through a valuable range of initiatives, including Fresh Expressions, Messy Church and cafe-style church; the 'Worshipping God' booklet; TLS training, soon to be updated as a result of the Missional Discipleship work; and such synod initiatives as the Advent, Lent and Easter devotions produced by Northern and North Western Synods.

#### **3.3 New possibilities and challenges**

3.3.1 Sharing innovative and creative patterns of worshipping across the churches.

3.3.2 Living out our ecumenical commitment by receiving further the gifts of spirituality and worship offered by our brothers and sisters in Christ from different traditions.

3.3.3 Developing the reflection on the nature of worship in a changing and increasingly secular world e.g. in the Theology of Worship group developed by the West Midlands Synod Training Officer.

### *God is our source, our guide, our goal*

#### **4.1 We celebrate**

4.1.1 The conciliar nature of the URC, in which it is affirmed that the Holy Spirit speaks through each person, gathered in the councils of the local church, the regional and national synods and the General Assembly, is a gift of our tradition.

4.1.2 The 500th Anniversary celebration of the Reformation in 2017 offers an opportunity for study and reflection for United Reformed churches.

#### **4.2 New possibilities and challenges**

4.2.1 Deepening our knowledge of this Reformed tradition equips the Church to be more faithful in contemporary opportunities for mission. There is a need for the councils to work more closely together and the local churches to feel more affirmed and supported by the wider councils.

4.2.2 In 2017 the commemoration of the Reformation will provide an important occasion to focus particularly on those aspects of our identity that belong to our Reformed heritage. A study guide produced by the Faith and Order Committee, along with a number of other initiatives offered ecumenically, will aid our reflection.

### *God leads people into truth*

#### **5.1 We celebrate**

5.1.1 The particular drawing together of Scripture, tradition and experience that are God's gift to this Church (as seen in the URC's founding document 'A Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church' – see URC website).

5.1.2 The variety of ways of studying and interpreting Scripture. Growing in knowledge and understanding of Scripture helps to articulate the faith in relation to tradition and experience and to give confidence to God's people to speak of the faith in a changing world.

5.1.3 The times we have stood for truth against the prevailing culture, as in our Dissenting history, and the new understandings and initiatives to which we have been led.

## 5.2 New possibilities and challenges

5.2.1 Renewed study of 'A Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church', (building on the study guide 'What is the United Reformed Church?' – to be found on the URC website) so that congregations and members are aware of the foundations of this particular tradition of the Church and what these traditions still offer this Church and the world in which this Church is set.

5.2.2 Our discussions about the marriage of same-sex couples have highlighted the multiplicity of interpretations of Scripture. The faith and order committee is initiating a study of the different ways in which we value the Bible in this Church and how these different approaches can be developed further.

5.2.3 Engaging in dialogue with science, responding to the 'new atheism' and our increasingly secular culture.

5.2.4 The way in which the URC is led into prophetic truth in terms of our social and political witness.

## *God in Trinity draws people into a relationship of love*

### 6.1 We celebrate

6.1.1 There are many good news stories across local churches, particularly as seen in the recent 'It Just Works' consultation in Windermere, the valuable work of Pilots, the Youth Assembly, our ministry among and with children and young people, and the huge range of work that takes place with older people.

6.1.2 Elders are a particular gift to the United Reformed church, set aside in each congregation for spiritual leadership and pastoral care.

6.1.3 Ministers of word and sacrament, entrusted with oversight and inspiration of each congregation, have a particular role in leadership.

### 6.2 New possibilities and challenges

6.2.1 The proposed focus on Missional Discipleship is being developed to help people to grow in the knowledge of God and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in order to reach out to people in a spiritually hungry world.

6.2.2 Discovering new ways of sharing good news stories and examples of good practice more widely for mutual encouragement, developing the sharing of stories from the recent Windermere consultation (<http://thingsthatwork.urc.org.uk/>), in the URC's *Reform* magazine and on social media.

6.2.3 In order to support the local church, further work is being undertaken by the faith and order committee on the nature of membership, with a paper on 'The Wider Fold' being brought to the 2016 General Assembly, and follow up work being planned for the autumn of 2016 on the concept of membership and what it means today. The report 'What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?' offered study material on the role of the Church Meeting.

6.2.4 The 'Authorised Elders' paper coming to the 2016 General Assembly looks at affirming and consolidating the role of elders, particularly with regard to a new proposal about authorising elders to preside at Holy Communion and bringing forward a suggestion for the development of team non-stipendiary ministry.

## Faith and order

6.2.5 Westminster College hosted a consultation in April 2016 with regard to the ministry of Word and Sacrament in these changing times. (Outcomes not available at the time of writing this report.)

6.2.6 The URC's Ministries Committee is working on a variety of issues with regard to ministry and the pressures faced by both ministers and congregations in view of the way in which ministers are spread more thinly.

*God re-shapes the Church to meet the challenge of different contexts and cultures.*

### **7.1 We celebrate**

7.1.1 The Church's work with people on the margins evident in the amazing variety of work undertaken by local churches, with foodbanks, homeless people, refugees and a host of other initiatives.

7.1.2 This is matched by the wider URC's engagement through the CRCW programme, Racial Justice and Intercultural Ministry, the work of Church and Society and the Joint Public Issues Team and the development of interfaith work.

### **7.2 New possibilities and challenges**

7.2.1 Working to welcome and give homes to refugees; exploring how our buildings can become places of hospitality for people of other faiths and others who seek to build community.

7.2.2 Increasing our solidarity with those who are forced into increasing poverty through changes in economic policy; becoming active in creating alternatives to a consumerist culture that rewards the wealthy at the expense of the poor.

*God draws people to be one, offering reconciliation in a broken world*

### **8.1 We celebrate**

8.1.1 The 400 Local Ecumenical Partnerships in which the URC is involved; the many Churches Together groups, Fresh Expressions of Church and pioneer initiatives in which Christians of many traditions work together.

8.1.2 The URC's participation in the national and international ecumenical bodies, from Churches Together in Britain and Ireland to the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe to the World Council of Churches. Our engagement in dialogues with the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales and our role in the conversations just beginning between the Anglican Communion and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

8.1.3 The synod and URC-wide links with Churches across the world; from our longstanding covenant with the Church of the Palatinate in Germany, our links with the Waldensian Church in Italy to the memorandum of understanding recently signed between ourselves and the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

### **8.2 New possibilities and challenges**

8.2.1 Taking further the challenges in the World Council of Churches' report *The Church: Towards a common vision*, with regard to ministry and authority, to see where God might be yet leading us to call Churches to visible organic unity. The URC's response to this report will be presented to the 2016 General Assembly.

8.2.2 Looking at the rich opportunities offered by 'Receptive Ecumenism', a theme initiated by theology staff at Durham University (see their website for further details) to look at what Churches can positively receive from each other.

8.2.3 Maintaining a balance between our commitment to unity, especially in local ecumenical partnerships, and our particular characteristics as a Reformed Church.

8.2.4 Renewing the URC's bold commitment to call the Churches to unity, in each place, and across the nations, despite the difficulties along the way.

8.2.5 Work on 'The New Frameworks for Local Ecumenism', currently being undertaken in England, offers an opportunity to look at new ways at local ecumenical engagement with new as well as traditional partners.

# Faith and order committee: The Wider Fold

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Stephen Orchard: <a href="mailto:scorchard@btinternet.com">scorchard@btinternet.com</a> Elizabeth Welch: <a href="mailto:minister@theroundchapel.org.uk">minister@theroundchapel.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>24. General Assembly:</b></p> <p><b>a) welcomes the principles embodied in the Wider Fold proposals;</b></p> <p><b>b) instructs the faith and order committee to prepare a plan to implement these principles, in consultation with the law and polity advisory group;</b></p> <p><b>c) instructs the faith and order committee to bring proposals for such a plan to the meeting of Mission Council in May 2017.</b></p>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Church membership for those not within reach of a local church or otherwise in transit
<b>Main points</b>	Creation of a holding system for previous church membership
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The ‘What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?’ report to the 2014 Assembly led to discussions at Mission Council out of which emerged the work of the task group on membership and the Wider Fold concept.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Law and polity advisory group

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Minimal in the first instance
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Signs that it would be helpful in some ecumenical situations.

# The Wider Fold

## 1. The principles

1.1 Membership in the United Reformed Church is an important concept. It represents a degree of commitment in exchange for the right to share in decisions for the denomination. However there are people who have been received as members of a local church and who retain a commitment to the URC but now live too far distant from a local church to worship there regularly. There are also people with a transitory lifestyle, students or members of the armed forces for instance, who wish to identify with the URC but do not fit into the traditional forms of membership. The Wider Fold is intended to provide membership for those who find a meaningful link to a local church impractical, even though it cannot offer the benefits of membership of a Church Meeting.

1.2 The Wider Fold offers a non-geographical substitute for the local church, with all the limitations of a substitute. People would be admitted to it by transfer from a local church, and admitted to a local church by transfer from the Wider Fold. Only actual local churches, however (so not the Wider Fold) would be able to admit candidates on profession of faith. This is because, in our long-standing practice, admission to membership involves not only a willingness to commit and a declaration during public worship, but also (for good reason) the decision of a council of the church, often made on the recommendation of another council, the elders' meeting, which is satisfied of the candidate's preparation and sincerity. The Wider Fold would not have the resources to satisfy itself in this way, but could rely on the judgment of a local church commending candidates for transfer.

1.3 The Wider Fold would not be open to everyone. It would exist to serve several 'constituencies' of people who have joined the URC in the regular way through the decision of a Church Meeting, who wish to continue to 'belong' and to maintain their commitment; but who are unable, for reasons of distance or mobility, to put down regular roots in an existing local church. The constituencies would be:

- students and young people resident away from home for part of the year
- members of the armed forces and their households, many of whom receive the ministry of URC chaplains;
- members of the URC, including retired ministers and non-serving elders, who have moved away from any locality where regular attendance at a local United Reformed church is practical;
- URC members worshipping in a church of another denomination which had earlier been a local ecumenical partnership in which the URC was involved but from which it has withdrawn.

1.4 Ministers, whether retired or in secular employment, may currently be in the anomalous situation of being on the Roll of Ministers but not on any membership roll. The Wider Fold membership roll would be a way to end that anomaly; but the corollary of this is that a certain minimum contact (the same as required for a lay person to stay on the Wider Fold roll) might become a condition of remaining on the Roll of Ministers.

1.5 Thought has been given to the suggestion that those who come to Christianity through Fresh Expressions of Church might also be potential members of the Wider Fold. It is up to each synod to decide whether a Fresh Expressions group is sufficiently settled to be recognised as a local church and to elect elders. If it is not, then we do not feel its attenders can yet be considered members of the URC and they would not, therefore, be eligible to join the Wider Fold.

## Faith and order

1.6 The faith and order committee have given attention to the detail of how the Wider Fold might be administered and are ready to consult with the law and polity advisory group and the Clerk of Assembly to see what changes, if any, need to be made to the Basis of Union and the guidance given to synods and local churches. If General Assembly is content that the principles of the Wider Fold are acceptable then detailed work will proceed but it was felt unwise to commit resources to planning something which proved unacceptable in principle. Addressing the questions raised at the last General Assembly about specific issues of membership has led the committee and Mission Council to realise that there are broader issues of membership which need to be addressed and work is already underway on a review of our current practices, which antedate the current ecumenical situation.

1.7 At the moment individuals normally join the URC by one of three routes:

Baptism in infancy – preparation – Church Meeting approval – affirmations – admission to full privileges and responsibilities of membership;

OR

Preparation – Church Meeting approval – affirmations and baptism – admission to full privileges and responsibilities of membership;

OR

By transfer from another denomination – Church Meeting approval – affirmations (appropriately modified) – admission to full privileges and responsibilities of membership.

1.8 Our proposal is that having joined the URC, an individual in one of the constituencies listed at 1.3 above may ask his/her local church to transfer him/her to the Wider Fold. The Church Meeting (or by delegation the elders' meeting) of that church, if it considers the member to be in good standing, passes the name and contact details to the Wider Fold. The individual remains a nominal member of the local church until advised otherwise by the Wider Fold. Synods would not take such nominal members into account in processes of scoping or assessment.

1.9 Within the Wider Fold there would be a sharing of information and opportunity to attend special events, as well as to be of service to synods and the whole URC. It would be possible for members to contribute financially. The Wider Fold would also hold reviews of membership on a regular basis and advise those local churches where nominal membership was held of any withdrawals.

## 2. Transitional arrangements

2.1 The principle of joining a local church first, and then transferring to the Wider Fold, may be workable in future, but would be more difficult to impose on the potential 'founder members' en bloc. It will therefore be necessary to liaise with local churches at strategic points round the country and to ask them to act as 'admitting churches' simply to get the Wider Fold off the ground. This would ensure that no one becomes a member of the Wider Fold without personal contact with other church members and an affirmation of faith within the context of the URC.

# Faith and order committee:

## Unity, Identity and Mission:

### A report on conversations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church 2013-16

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Nicola Furley-Smith: <a href="mailto:moderator@urcsouthern.org.uk">moderator@urcsouthern.org.uk</a> Elizabeth Welch: <a href="mailto:minister@theroundchapel.org.uk">minister@theroundchapel.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Reception and agreement of resolution to accept recommendations
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>25. Assembly welcomes the report of the Church of England/United Reformed Church conversations, agrees the recommendations and instructs the nominations committee, having consulted with the faith and order committee and any other relevant parties, to nominate members for the proposed steering group.</b>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The content and conclusions of the discussions between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church  Aims: To contribute to deepening understanding and co-operation between the two denominations and contributing to wider ecumenical relations The recommendations are listed below under main points.
<b>Main points</b>	Recommendations emerging from the conversations are: 1. Urgent attention should be given by our churches in consultation with Churches Together in England to the question of identifying and enabling structures that can sustain shared commitment to mission, including sharing of physical resources, ministry resources, financial resources and strategic planning, at local, regional and national levels 2. In the light of what occurs between the Church of England and the Methodist Church with regard to interchangeability of ordained ministries within the covenant relationship, a review should be undertaken regarding understanding of the nature of ordained ministry and potential for progress towards reconciliation and interchangeability of ministries between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, if appropriate involving other churches also. 3. A process should be set up for exploration of the relationship between elders and church related community workers in the United Reformed Church on the one hand, and deacons in the Church of England and elsewhere on the other. 4. Attention should be given to studying the scope for receptive ecumenism between our two churches in the area of worship, looking both at theology and practice, and the opportunities and challenges of worshipping together 5. A steering group be set up for Church of England – United Reformed Church Relations that can monitor the implementation of the report's first four recommendations, coordinate different areas of activity and promote further growth in unity in mission

<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	‘Healing the Past – Building the Future’ the report of the first round of conversations leading to the service of reconciliation at Westminster Abbey on 7 February 2012. See also appendix 3 of the report for other historical references
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The faith and order committee

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None at present
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Encouragement of other similar dialogues and to the world wide conversations between the Anglican Communion and the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

## Unity, Identity and Mission: locating the full report

This very long report would fill more than 50 pages of the *Book of Reports*, with 101 paragraphs of careful exposition, along with a wealth of historical material and resources for study and discussion. It deserves to be bound distinctively, so that it can be used widely.

Below are the final seven paragraphs, which summarise the recommendations of the report.

Assembly members may access the full report in one of two ways, either as an online copy via the Assembly section of the URC website, or by writing in for a hard copy.

Members who write for a hard copy, should do so by 8 June to:  
Mr Greg Baldock, United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London. WC1H 9RT  
or by email to: [print@urc.org.uk](mailto:print@urc.org.uk), with the words ‘Unity, Identity and Mission full report’ in the subject field.

Please include **your full postal address** with your request; there will be no charge.

After Assembly it will be possible to purchase copies, which local churches or local Churches Together groups may wish to use for reflection and discussion.

# Unity, Identity and Mission:

## Report on conversations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church 2013 to 2016

### Summary of recommendations

95. Four main recommendations have emerged from the preceding chapters: one about structures for ecumenical partnership, two about ministry and oversight, and one about worship. From these, a fifth and final recommendation is made regarding how these might best be addressed.

96. With regard to structures for ecumenical partnership, we recommended that **(1) urgent attention should be given by our churches in consultation with Churches Together in England to the question of identifying and enabling structures that can sustain shared commitment to mission, including sharing of physical resources, ministry resources, financial resources and strategic planning, at local, regional and national levels.** There are significant opportunities here in the Simplification work stream of the Church of England's Programme for Reform and Renewal, as well as in the review being undertaken by Churches Together in England of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). While there is undoubtedly significant scope for development with LEPs, some form of LEP will not always be the right model for churches wanting to share together in common mission, so thinking also needs to extend beyond this.

97. Moreover, the Cumbria model described in chapter 2 shows how a real commitment to unity at regional level can release opportunities and energy for sharing in mission at local level. The conversation about local unity, therefore, has to attend to regional and national dimensions, particularly where the churches involved – like the Church of England and the United Reformed Church – also have regional and national structures. The right shared structures at regional and national levels should have the effect of lifting from local churches the burden of needing constantly to reinvent the ecumenical wheel. It may be that expertise in organisational development needs to be brought into fresh dialogue here with the accumulated experience of those deeply involved in ecumenism for many years.

98. With regard to ministry and oversight, we recommended, first, that **(2) in the light of what occurs between the Church of England and the Methodist Church with regard to interchangeability of ordained ministries within the Covenant relationship, a review should be undertaken regarding understanding of the nature of ordained ministry and potential for progress towards reconciliation and interchangeability of ministries between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, if appropriate involving other churches also.** There is no naïve assumption here that proposals developed for the specific relationship between the Methodist Church and the Church of England can simply be adapted to include the United Reformed Church. The point is rather that such proposals are likely to hinge on (a) a 'reimagining' and 're-receiving' of the historic episcopate to fit the history and culture of a church shaped – in part – by the nonconformist traditions of English Christianity, and (b) a commitment by the Church of England to authorising licensed ministry – for a limited period of time – from those previously ordained outside the historic episcopate. Both of these would constitute very significant developments that could allow long-standing and divisive issues, associated with events in 1660-62 that scarred relationships profoundly, to be approached in fresh perspective.

99. The second recommendation around ministry and oversight was that **(3) a process should be set up for exploration of the relationship between elders and church related community workers in the United Reformed Church on the one hand, and deacons in the Church of England and elsewhere on the other.** Study of this relationship could have real benefits for both churches in clarifying their self-understanding and evaluating current developments in their own lives, as well as opening up new areas for receptive ecumenism. Eldership and the diaconate are both areas where the polities of the two churches appear to have no obvious ‘match’: could they have parallels that have not yet been explored, and, if so, might there provide a way for imagining how the office of elder in the reformed tradition more generally might be received in LEPs and even, ultimately, in the context of a future relationship of visible unity in the Church of England?

100. In the final chapter, with regard to worship, we recommended that **(4) attention should be given to studying the scope for receptive ecumenism between our two churches in the area of worship, looking both at theology and practice, and the opportunities and challenges of worshipping together.** By ‘worshipping together’ we mean to include the experience of ministers from one church leading worship in the other, as well as joint congregations in the context of LEPs and churches who might share worship together from time to time. For any church, ways of worshipping are a crucial part of identity – Christian, ecclesial and denominational – so that growing in our ability to be one in worship is a critical dimension of growing in our ability to be one so that the world may believe. Worship of one God, in the name of one Lord, confessing one faith and one hope in the power of the one Spirit, is where the ecumenical journey begins and ends.

101. Finally, we believe that serious thought needs to be given to establishing a suitable body that can monitor the implementation of these recommendations, coordinate different initiatives and have responsibility for continuing to seek growth in relations between our two churches, identifying both challenges and opportunities. It would coordinate work done by others rather than aiming to fulfil major tasks by itself. It would not need to meet frequently or have a large membership, and would report to the appropriate church body, i.e. at the time of writing for the Church of England the Council for Christian Unity and for the United Reformed Church the faith and order committee. We therefore recommend that **(5) a steering group be set up for Church of England – United Reformed Church Relations that can monitor the implementation of the report’s first four recommendations, coordinate different areas of activity and promote further growth in unity in mission.**

# Finance committee:

## General Report 2014 to 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Ellis, Treasurer: <a href="mailto:john.ellis@urc.org.uk">john.ellis@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To report on the central budgets and other major areas of work over the last two years
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There were modest surpluses on the central budget in 2014 and 2015</li> <li>Ministry and Mission Fund giving is relatively stable</li> <li>The latest valuation of the Ministers' Pension Fund did not require any significant increase in the Church's contribution</li> </ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Resolution 28 of the 2014 Assembly
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	N/A

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Nothing new in the report itself
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Contributions to government consultations (para 11).

# General Report 2014 to 2016

## Budget results

1. The Church's central budget relies on giving to the Ministry and Mission (M&M) Fund for over 90% of its income. Three-quarters of its expenditure is to pay the stipends and related costs of ministers working in local settings; the rest pays for the programmes and central staff that the Assembly has requested.

2. In 2014 and 2015 we sought broadly balanced budgets. In 2014 actual expenditure of £20.5m consumed 98% of our income and in 2015 actual expenditure of £20.8m represented 99% of our income. Overall therefore a small surplus was achieved in each year. More detailed figures are provided to Mission Council and are available on the URC website.

3. The 2016 budget is based on income and expenditure both being around £20.5m. Projections for 2017 and 2018 do not suggest any major challenges to continuing existing expenditure patterns.

## M&M giving

4. Noting the steady decline in total M&M giving, the 2014 Assembly challenged all local churches to increase their giving to the Ministry and Mission Fund by at least an additional 1% per annum (Resolution 28 of 2014). The impact of this resolution is hard to disentangle from other influences on M&M giving, especially in synods which were already in the process of reorganising their M&M policies. However it is clear that at least £50,000 in additional M&M giving came as a direct result of this challenge, for which we can be grateful.

5. Partly because of this, total M&M giving in 2015 was above budget but still below giving in 2014. Indications from synods are that there will be a further slight decline in 2016.

6. The overall picture remains that average M&M giving per member is rising each year but the fall in the number of members still results in less money in total. What money Assembly can spend ultimately rests on what M&M giving local churches provide.

## Pensions stability

7. The 2015 valuation of the Ministers' pension fund showed that the actuarial deficit had declined since the previous valuation in 2012 and no significant increase in the Church's annual contribution to the fund was necessary.

8. During the difficult years 2010-15, every synod responded to the request to provide additional money for the fund over and above the money taken from M&M. The need for this is now past, but the total of over £4m found by the synods should be recognised as a sign of the priority the Church gives to the proper care of its ministers.

## Living legacies

9. When some people move beyond the pensions stage their influence on the Church's mission continues through a legacy. Bequests to the United Reformed Church that are not specifically earmarked for other purposes are placed in the Legacy Fund, which is currently able to give away £200,000 a year in grants to support innovative mission projects.

10. During the past two years, projects supported have included the transformation of URC premises in North Wales, agricultural scholarships in Malawi, a Christian-Muslim Forum in Britain and the work of roving Evangelism and Renewal advocates. Details of how to apply for grants are on the URC website.

## **Educating government**

11. In an age when legislators and civil servants do not always understand Churches, a growing strand of work has been to ensure government is aware of how policies do or could impact on church life. The finance committee has responded to a formal consultation on the Gift Aid scheme and, in conjunction with ministries committee, has responded to a request from HM Revenue and Customs to clarify the importance for churches and the communities they serve of the current tax arrangements for manses.

## **Grateful farewells**

12. At this Assembly the Revd Dick Gray ends his term as Deputy Treasurer, having provided valued and flexible cover for the three years when the Treasurer was also a Moderator of the General Assembly. Mr Andrew Grimwade retires this Summer after more than a decade of exceptional service as the Chief Finance Officer in Church House. The Church is indebted to them both.

# Finance committee:

## Churches’ Mutual Credit Union

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Ellis, Treasurer: <a href="mailto:john.ellis@urc.org.uk">john.ellis@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>26. General Assembly welcomes the participation of the United Reformed Church in the Churches’ Mutual Credit Union.</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To introduce the Churches’ Mutual Credit Union (CMCU) and encourage URC participation in it
<b>Main points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Background to CMCU and its aims</li> <li>• Extending the CMCU to include the URC</li> <li>• URC financial commitment</li> <li>• Need for advocacy</li> </ul>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	CMCU; URC Trust

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	An investment of £30,000 in CMCU shares and a £10,000 grant is proposed
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The URC would become part of a growing ecumenical initiative which provides practical help to individuals and a principled challenge to unjust financial structures.

# Churches’ Mutual Credit Union

1. The United Reformed Church has a new opportunity to point to the values of the Kingdom of God amidst current financial structures.

## Background to the CMCU

2. Following the banking collapses of 2008-9, internal and regulatory pressures on the banks made them much more restrictive in extending credit to relatively poor risks. This led to widespread difficulties for lower income households in securing credit even for emergency purchases, except by resorting to high interest lenders. One URC response to this was to add the usury clause to our ethical investment policy in 2013.

3. Meanwhile Justin Welby, as Bishop of Durham and then Archbishop of Canterbury, used his role on the House of Lords review committee on the banking system to challenge the ethics of the high interest lenders, such as Wonga. He announced he would like to compete them out of existence.

4. One dimension of this was to revive the idea of a credit union, set up and run by the Churches. This could help fill the gap left by the banks’ tighter policies without resorting to the ethics or economics of the high interest lenders. Much detailed work on finding a structure that the regulatory authorities would accept began.

5. Eventually the Churches’ Mutual Credit Union was launched in February 2015, embracing the Anglican Churches in Britain, the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church. For various reasons it was not possible for the URC to be a founding partner but a Moderator of the General Assembly was invited to attend the launch and the URC’s interest was explicitly recognised.

## Aims and activities of the CMCU

6. The President of CMCU is the Archdeacon of Dorset, the Venerable Antony MacRow-Wood, who is also a past President of the British Association of Credit Unions. He is very familiar with the field and is committed to ensuring the CMCU is in every possible way a model. He has been invited to attend General Assembly for this business.

7. Initially the CMCU only seeks to offer the most basic savings and loan products but hopes in due course to expand its operations, including by providing loans to churches for mission projects. Its facilities can be studied on its website [www.cmcu.org.uk](http://www.cmcu.org.uk).

8. As with any credit union, fundamental to its structure is the ‘common bond’ which links all its members, whether borrowers or savers. Initially this is limited to those with a formal link with one of the founding Churches as ministers, elders, employees or trustees. The longer term ambition is to extend the common bond to all members of participating denominations. It is intended to complement and not replace the many local credit unions that churches and individual Christians have set up and support around the country.

## URC participation

9. The progress of the CMCU has been watched by both the finance committee and the URC Trust. The CMCU’s first AGM in January 2016 passed unanimously a resolution to extend the participating Churches to include the United Reformed Church as soon as possible. It is hoped that the wording of a revised common bond to embrace the URC will have been agreed with the regulators by the time Assembly meets. The URC participants should be able to include all ministers and elders, whether serving or not.

10. If Assembly endorses URC participation, we would be expected to join the other denominations in purchasing CMCU shares, which provide a secure capital base and pay a dividend, and in providing a grant to assist with the extra costs of the start-up period. The finance committee would find £30,000 for shares from the part of the URC Trust’s investments which is reserved for socially desirable investments which will not necessarily maximise purely financial returns. The committee would add a £10,000 grant from the Legacy Fund.

11. The finance committee and the URC Trust encourage the Assembly to show enthusiastic support for this venture and help it grow beyond its embryonic form. In its first year, the CMCU had achieved over 600 members and assets of over £1.3m. It had been able to extend its first 100 affordable loans, mostly of between £4,000 and £8,000. There were no loan defaults.

## **Looking ahead**

12. How much impact the CMCU can make largely depends on establishing a track record that persuades the regulators to allow it to widen the scope of its activities. This in turn depends on growing as rapidly as is prudently possible its membership, both depositors and borrowers.

13. If Assembly supports URC participation, every member of Assembly is urged to become an advocate for CMCU and ensure their own church community knows of this opportunity to do something practical in the interests of economic justice.

# Finance committee:

## Annual accounts

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	John Ellis, Treasurer: <a href="mailto:john.ellis@urc.org.uk">john.ellis@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>27. General Assembly notes the trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2015.</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To notify General Assembly of the audited accounts for 2015
<b>Main points</b>	The accounts for the United Reformed Church's central activities are legally in the name of the URC Trust. Copies of the audited accounts for 2015 are now available on the URC website and hard copies will be made available at Assembly
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Accounts for 2014 are available on the website
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The URC Trust

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	N/A
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	The report provides a publicly available summary of the Church's activities.

# Ministries committee: Report to General Assembly 2016

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Craig Bowman: <a href="mailto:ministries@urc.org.uk">ministries@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Main areas of focus since General Assembly 2014 and subcommittee reports
<b>Main points</b>	Non-stipendiary ministry, minister numbers
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Ministries report to General Assembly 2014
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Ongoing consultation across the denomination

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None outside regular budget
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Ministries committee

The committee is responsible for the ministry of Word and Sacraments, church related community work, lay preaching and eldership. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, church related community workers and lay preachers, including supervision, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the work of the assessment board and is assisted by four subcommittees.

**Convenor:** Gethin Rhys (until March 2016)

**Secretary:** Craig Bowman

**Members:** Martin Camroux (from 2015), James Coleman, Stuart Dew, Heather Pencavel (until 2015), Jane Woods-Scawen, Peter Meek (synod moderator), David Bedford (convenor of the retired ministers' housing subcommittee), Ewen Harley (convenor of the assessment board) Pamela Ward (convenor of the maintenance of the ministry subcommittee), Frances Ruthven (convenor of the accreditation subcommittee), Jacky Embrey (convenor of the CRCW programme subcommittee), Andy Buxton (leadership in worship advocate from 2015) and Judith Johnson (leadership in worship advocate until 2015).

## Discipleship

1. The committee continues to do its work as part of the discipleship department at Church House which fits well with our understanding that we are seeking to support those who provide leadership in local churches and other mission settings. We believe that this leadership, which includes ordained and commissioned ministry as well as lay preachers and elders, is key in fostering a culture of discipleship across the Church and we look forward to working closely with the other committees in the department as well as with colleagues from the mission department in developing discipleship in the coming years.

## Non-stipendiary ministry

2.1 Following a residential consultation with non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs) in the United Reformed Church held in 2013, ministries established a working party to consider some of the concerns that had been raised. NSMs held a further self-funded residential consultation in 2015, and one of the attendees, the Revd Sue Cossey, is a member of the working party, together with the Revds Heather Pencavel (convenor), Nicola Furley-Smith and Gethin Rhys (until March 2016) and Mrs Irene Wren.

2.2 The terms of reference of the working party are:

- i. To canvas the synods in order to understand current practice with regard to the appointment and review of ministers in non-stipendiary service.
- ii. To canvas the synods with regard to any retirement practice and planning that is currently in place, and to seek contributions from retired ministers who served in a non-stipendiary capacity indicating what was, or what might have been, helpful.
- iii. To reflect on the established three models of non-stipendiary service and advise on their usefulness or otherwise, and to consider whether alternative models might better serve the Church and the ministry.
- iv. To identify best practice with regard to the appointment, review and retirement of ministers in non-stipendiary service, in order that the ministries committee can encourage the support and use of this ministry.
- v. To consider whether there should be an age limit for candidating or ordination and if so what that age or ages should be.
- vi. To consider any other matters that affect the support and utilisation of ministers in non-stipendiary service and make recommendations to the ministries committee for any improvements.

## Ministries

2.3 Item (v) has been completed, following the acceptance by Mission Council in November 2015 of a resolution presented by the West Midlands Synod to Assembly 2014 removing the upper age limit for candidating for non-stipendiary ministry. This decision has been implemented immediately.

2.4 The working party has consulted with the CRCW programme subcommittee, the education and learning and faith and order committees, one of the resource centres for learning and the synods. The working party will undertake work following the 2016 Assembly's response to the recommendations by faith and order regarding 'Model 1' non-stipendiary ministry (ordination to local teams).

2.5 It is hoped to produce a report with recommendations for consideration by Mission Council during 2017, with any proposals for change to come to Assembly 2018. The working party will welcome any submissions that members of Assembly might wish to make.

## Minister numbers

3.1 The belief that the URC doesn't have enough ministers is regularly voiced and yet the number of members per stipendiary minister is lower than ever. The fact that in most cases those members are spread across several congregations makes it feel very uncomfortable when the prevailing expectation is of a style of ministry that was common several decades ago. This, combined with the effect of the Assembly resolution in 2012, to match the cost of stipendiary ministry to the membership of the Church, really does force us to consider how we use ministers and what other leadership is available to the Church.

3.2 It may be that the removal of the upper age limit for candidacy for non-stipendiary ministry, along with any proposals that arise from the NSM working party, see an increase in the recognition of vocations to this model of ministerial service.

## Managing ministry pressure better

4.1 In 2015 the ministries committee commissioned a survey of all URC ministers to seek a better understanding of the pressure and stress experienced by serving ministers.

4.2 An invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all ministers who had an identifiable role, whether they were in stipendiary or non-stipendiary service, and whether or not their ministry was exercised under the direct oversight of the URC or for another body, e.g. chaplaincy. Approximately 625 invitations were sent out and 62% responded.

4.3 The survey and analysis was conducted by Dr Robert Wilcox and colleagues at InterHealth and was undertaken during the month of February. The data was collected and examined in a manner which maintained the anonymity of the participants and a presentation of the statistically significant results was made to synod moderators and a number of General Assembly appointed staff in May 2015.

4.4 Some of the highlights were:

- The demands of the work (volume and speed, including the correspondence) produce the most pressure;
- Relationships and support are particularly good;
- Church finance, as opposed to personal finance, is a source of pressure;
- The most pressured are the 40-49-year-olds;
- Those in rural ministry are relatively less pressured;
- The full-timers are more pressured than the part-timers;
- Overall, the pressure levels compare favourably to secular employment.

4.5 More detail can be found on the URC website:

[www.urc.org.uk/discipleship/ministries-committee-home/managing-ministry-pressure-better.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/discipleship/ministries-committee-home/managing-ministry-pressure-better.html)

# Accreditation subcommittee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this subcommittee accredits those applying for inclusion after training and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries.

**Convenor:** Fran Ruthven

**Secretary:** Craig Bowman

**Members:** Bridget Banks, Ewen Harley (convenor of the assessment board), Richard Church, Helga Cornell (until 2015), Russell Furley-Smith (from 2015), Naison Hove, Liz Mullen (from 2015) and Gethin Rhys (convenor of the ministries committee until 2016).

## Special category ministry posts

1.1 The number of special category ministry (SCM) posts currently stands at 24.5 with only one post as yet unfilled. This is considerably less than the number allowed by General Assembly and there is concern over the number and quality of applications received over the past two years. Since February 2014 we have had six applications. Four have been accepted and two rejected. The following posts have ended: Liverpool City, London Metropolitan Universities, Aston University, Nottingham University, Bracknell, Brecon Rural and Morningside. We recognise that synods are under pressure regarding deployment, which may have resulted in some applications not meeting the SCM criteria and thus being rejected.

1.2 Since the last General Assembly, the subcommittee has revised its applications process and instituted a system of reviews of the posts that will help identify any difficulties early in the postholder's tenure. We are now having an informal review with the postholder at six months, a formal review at one year and then a review at 3.5 years as the post comes up for renewal.

1.3 We continue to be challenged by posts that involve ecumenical partners, but have become more robust in our insistence of firm commitments from partners that will be sustained for the duration of the post.

1.4 The subcommittee is in the early stages of developing a process by which we could determine which posts have made the most impact and what we can learn from the data/information gathered.

## Certificates of eligibility

2.1 The ministries committee is responsible to General Assembly for oversight of the projected number of ministers for future years and for deciding each year, on the basis of these projections, whether certificates of eligibility for stipendiary service may be issued to ministers of other denominations. Such a certificate grants eligibility to receive a call to serve in a pastorate or post.

2.2 No certificates of eligibility for stipendiary service have been granted since 2011.

## Certificates of limited service

3.1 Certificates of limited service provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities. A certificate of limited service allows a minister or community worker of another denomination to serve in, and be paid by the URC in one specified post only and for a limited period of time. One was issued in 2014 and three in 2015.

3.2 The issuing of certificates of eligibility and certificates of limited service may appear to be a bureaucratic annoyance, yet we see it, not only as one of our functions to administer the roll of ministers, but also of significant pastoral import in supporting congregations and individuals and ensuring suitable accountability.

## The roll of ministers

### Admissions to the roll of ministers (from 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2016)

#### 4.1 By ordination and induction:

Samantha Aspinall, Janine Atkinson, Martin Belgrove, Bruno Boldrini, Elaine Colechin, Chris Dowd, Trevor Hahn, Elaine Hutchinson, Bachelard Kaze Yemtsa, Angela Jane Lawson, Catherine Lewis-Smith, Catherine McFie, Joshua Norris, Zaidie Orr, Matthew Prevett, Branwen Rees, Bryn Rickards, Nadene Snyman, Richard Stein, Jake Tatton, Phil Wall, Henriette Wentink, Jim Williams and Ruth Wilson.

#### 4.2 By transfer from other churches:

Pamela Anne Noonan and Daniel Yoo.

#### 4.3 By changes within the roll of ministers: none

#### 4.4 Deletions from the roll of ministers by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process

Philip Baiden (Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales), Angela Cotton (resigned), Neil Eldridge, Lance Stone (Church of Scotland) and Ian Wiseman (Church of Scotland).

## Church related community workers

### Admission to the roll of church related community workers (from 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2016)

#### 5. By commissioning:

Kirsty Mabbott.

## Assembly-accredited lay preachers

#### 6.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2016 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination.

Northern:	Ann Sinclair
Mersey:	Marje Robinson
East Midlands:	John McLean, Magnus Ramage and Valerie Smith
West Midlands:	Barbara McDowell, Dave Treweek and Christopher Wall
Eastern:	Moira Baptie, Denise Beckley, Robert Dart and Heather Smethurst
South Western:	Thérèse Bourcier-Mayo and Pat Clarke
Wessex:	Helen Everard and Louise Shrubsole
Thames North:	Geneva Adjei, Margaret Colville, Elisa Hoeschl de Gusmão, Reuben John, Laura Marlow, Rachel St Clair and Anne Walton
Southern:	Hamish Cook, Lynne Le Masonry and Heather Ward
Wales:	Verena Walder
Scotland:	John Collings

#### 6.2 Twenty-three of these lay preachers had successfully studied through Training for Learning and Serving.

## Merging accreditation and CRCW subcommittees

#### 7. In response to the Mission Council paper 'Hearing God More Clearly', the accreditation and CRCW subcommittees met in January 2016 to begin a conversation about how we might work together with the possibility of eventually merging into one smaller subcommittee. The meeting was fruitful and the conversation continues.

# Assessment board

**Convenor:** Ewen Harley

**Secretary:** Craig Bowman

**Members:** Ruth Allen, Alex Bediako, Maureen Campbell (until 2015), Lesley Charlton, Sohail Ejaz, Judith Garthwaite (until 2015), Bill Gould, Peter Henderson, Franziska Herring, Shahbaz Javed, Sue Kirkbride, Rod Morrison (until 2015), Mercy Nimako (until 2015), Kim Plumpton, Adella Pritchard (until 2015), Stuart Radcliffe, Peter Rand, Jill Shelton and Mary Thomas.

## Commitment

1. The commitment of those who serve on the board is much appreciated and grateful thanks are expressed to all who are willing to give significant time, energy and focus to this work, particularly to those who have retired from the board in the last two years. Some members of the assessment board are called infrequently to attend conferences as a result of the need to have a balance between male and female, ordained and lay members at each conference and taking into account the synods from which candidates have come. However the willingness of board members to make themselves available even when they are not always used is recognized and appreciated.

## The work

2.1 The board meets annually in September and reviews continually the processes involved in the selection of candidates for training for the ministry of Word and Sacraments and church related community work. Each year the board reflects on the manner in which the decision, whether positive or negative, is conveyed to the candidate by the board, recognising the need for a balance between speed (perhaps involving insensitivity) and delay (perhaps causing unnecessary anxiety to the candidate). Whilst the current practice of giving the decision in person to the candidate, usually in their synod with synod people present, is not the preferred choice for some, the board still believes it is the best way of meeting the balance mentioned above.

2.2 In recent years it has been our practice to invite a member of staff representing the resource centres for learning (RCLs) to attend the annual meeting of the assessment board in September to help the members of the board have a realistic understanding of the demands of ministerial training and for the RCLs to raise particular matters of concern.

2.3 We have continued to plan for two assessment conferences each year. However the conference planned for November 2015 was cancelled due to very low candidate numbers. Although this may have been disappointing for the candidates, the strange nature of a conference with such low numbers and the fact that by attending the April 2016 conference the potential start date for ministerial training would not be affected, the decision to cancel was reluctantly taken.

## Number of candidates

3. Twenty-eight candidates attended the three assessment conferences between January 2014 and January 2016.

- Nineteen candidates for stipendiary service (18 accepted for training)
- Four candidates for non-stipendiary service (three accepted for training)
- Three candidates for CRCW in stipendiary service (three accepted for training)
- One candidate for CRCW in non-stipendiary service (not accepted for training)
- One for transfer from non-stipendiary to stipendiary service (not accepted)

## Windermere consultation

4. The annual consultation at Windermere in November continues to provide training both for assessment board members and for those in synods involved with interviews of candidates. It also provides a valuable point of contact between the board and synods. For several years this event was led by Sian Collins and Jamie Kissack but in 2015 it was handed over to Peter Henderson and Mary Thomas. We are grateful to all four of them for their work.

# Church related community work programme subcommittee

It is responsible for supporting the church related community work (CRCW) ministry and programme under the terms agreed in the CRCW covenant. This includes the accreditation of churches-in-community.

**Convenor:** Jacky Embrey

**Secretaries:** Suzanne Adofo (until 2014), Steve Summers

**Members:** Rosie Buxton, John Campbell (until 2015), Derek Estill (from 2015), Graham Ghaleb (until 2015), Simon Loveitt (convenor-elect from 2015) Keith Morrison, Caro Smyth, Helen Stephenson (from 2015), Simon Walkling and David Williams (from 2015).

## The ministry

1. Churches participate in CRCW ministry because they believe that the process of community development is an empowering and enabling way to express their beliefs in action. They do so with the knowledge that engaging in this ministry will change not only the community but also the congregation. They also understand that this journey is not one that can be neatly pre-planned but that it will certainly be Spirit-filled and exciting.

## Numbers

2.1 General Assembly has set a target of at least 26 CRCW projects across the denomination. We currently have 14 accredited projects with commissioned ministry in place and four vacant, with a further seven at various stages of the application process. Since ministry is provided for five years in the first instance, with a possible second five years available as a maximum, we are constantly looking for new projects.

2.2 We are also always on the lookout for new people who are interested in exploring this exciting ministry. We are pleased that we currently have five candidates in training, nevertheless we are continually working on raising awareness of the opportunities that this ministry offers to individuals and to local churches and groups of churches. Please see <http://www.urc.org.uk/discipleship/church-related-community-work> for more information.

## Training

3. We are delighted by the number of people who have been engaging with the 'Developing Community Experiences' year of the Training for Learning and Serving programme over the last three or four years. These have included folk who are already working in their local communities, alongside their congregations, and those interested in doing so. Others are candidates discerning whether or not they are called to the full-time ministry of CRCW. This enriching course will continue to be available, whilst the next generation of discipleship tools are being developed. In addition, modules at Northern College can be audited (attended but not examined) by anyone who wishes to do so. Of particular interest is the 'toolkit' for community work, which covers areas such as community audits and fundraising.

## **Moving Forward**

4. The subcommittee is working with the accreditation subcommittee to see how CRCW ministry and special category ministry can learn from one another. Joint roadshows or visits to churches may help individuals and congregations to discern how best to move forwards in their particular situation and we can each learn from the different emphases in our processes. The subcommittee is also looking at new ways of sharing the valuable resources of the CRCW ministry more widely, including encouraging elements of synod-wide operations within posts and working towards setting up non-stipendiary posts.

# Maintenance of the ministry subcommittee

Advises on the level of stipend and ministers' conditions of service through the 'Plan for Partnership'. It is also concerned for pensions through its associated pensions executive.

**Convenor:** Pamela Ward

**Secretary:** Craig Bowman

**Members:** Keith Berry, David Black, Chris Evans (convenor of the pensions executive), Sue Kirkbride, Gethin Rhys (convenor of ministries committee to March 2016), Peter Rippon, Richard Turnbull and Eilidh Young.

1. The maintenance of the ministry (MOM) subcommittee meets twice a year, but conducts much of its business by email, as and when a decision is called for concerning stipends or allowances for individual ministers.

## Stipend increase

2. Our proposal for the stipend increase each year is based on a formula using the consumer price index (CPI). When the formula was applied in 2015, the CPI increase was 0%, producing a stipend increase of 1%. This is regrettably low, lower than it has been for some time. It is, however, in line with public sector increases.

## Changes to the Plan for Partnership

- 3.1 Maternity leave: It was brought to our notice that the wording of the Plan could lead to an unfair situation, in that a minister who took half her leave before the birth could have six months leave on full stipend, whereas a minister who worked until immediately before the birth, while entitled to the same amount of leave, only received full stipend for three months of it. This clearly needed to be changed; so now total maternity leave on full pay is up to six months, whether or not some of it is taken before the birth (providing it starts no more than 11 weeks before the due date).

- 3.2 Shared parental pay and leave: This new government policy replaces additional paternity pay and leave. While it does not strictly apply to ministers, as officeholders, the United Reformed Church chooses to treat ministers as if they were employees in this instance. Full details are available from the MOM office.

## Ministers from overseas

4. The government has introduced an immigration health surcharge: anyone entering the country on a visa, or renewing a visa, must now pay an extra £200 a year per person. Ministers coming from overseas to serve in the URC pay for their own visas, but we felt that this extra charge, particularly for a minister arriving with a family, was too much of a burden. It will therefore be reimbursed from MOM funds.

## Longterm sickness absence

5. We continue to monitor and improve our care for ministers who, having been on sick leave for six months, come to the end of their entitlement to full stipend. We sometimes have painful decisions to make and we strive to bring wisdom and compassion to the judgments that are entrusted to us. We are very grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MOM office, who pays the stipends, tells us when we need to make a decision, organises medical and moderator reports, and deals with all the correspondence.

# Retired ministers' housing society subcommittee

This subcommittee continues to be responsible for policy in matters of the provision of retirement housing for ministers, their spouses, widows and widowers. It uses the United Reformed Church Retired Ministers' Housing Society Limited as its agent for the implementation of policy and the practical steps associated with the provision of housing.

**Convenor:** David Bedford

**Secretary:** Andy Bottomley

**Members:** Anne Bedford (convenor-elect), Nicola Furley-Smith, Malcolm Lindo and Peter West.

## The immediate challenge

1.1 The past two years have once again seen change, challenge and progress.

1.2 Changes include the recruitment of an administration assistant – which has enabled the society to overcome the backlog of compliance checks that had accumulated and has also enabled the society to be more proactive in its approach to maintenance, which was an objective detailed in the society's previous report to General Assembly.

1.3 The committee charged the staff to take a more pastoral role in the oversight of its tenants through increased visits. This is ongoing and continues to develop as the society seeks to recruit the first of two regional managers whose role it will be to develop a programme of pastoral and property check visits.

1.4 As reported previously, there is for every retired minister a story of life, and, as part of that life and that living, there are inevitably stories of those who we have got to know who have passed away. This is the work that the society is involved in: it is not just about bricks and mortar, it is about people; it's about providing the best worry-free accommodation the denomination can with the resources it has.

1.5 The society is therefore continuing to look to new ways of being proactive in its awareness of the situations and it will continue to develop and inform synod moderators of pastoral issues that arise. The appointment of the regional managers will develop this further but in the meantime the society, acknowledges the input and support of the moderators in this positive development.

## Grateful for generosity

2.1 The society has continued to receive donations and legacies and was grateful to receive the proceeds from the sale of two properties that were bequeathed to it during 2015. Many churches, synods and individuals have responded to our ongoing appeal which in recognition of its 10th anniversary will be re-launched again at this General Assembly.

2.2 In 2007, General Assembly approved a resolution recommending that 10% of funds raised from the sale of redundant churches be contributed to the society. Encouragingly, many synods have agreed to this course of action; others have offered to help in different ways.

### Our ongoing work

3. The society continues to be a part of the finance department and is grateful to Andrew Grimwade and his team for the support, financial information and advice they provide. The society continues to contribute to the ministries pre-retirement courses run at the Windermere Centre. These sessions are constantly being reviewed so as to be of benefit to all, regardless of whether or not assistance with housing will be needed.

### The future

4. The future of the society is exciting, and it is a privilege to be serving those who for all their lives have served others. It is a unique ministry with both challenges and rewards, which operates, hopefully, with a light touch but far reaching consequences through the network and support of local churches, moderators and the wider fellowship of the URC.

# Ministries committee: Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment

## Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Craig Bowman: <a href="mailto:ministries@urc.org.uk">ministries@urc.org.uk</a>
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p><b>28.</b> General Assembly notes the projections for numbers of stipendiary ministers likely to be available and stipendiary posts likely to be fundable through the Ministry and Mission Fund until 2025, and urges synods to use the principles outlined in 'Challenge to the Church' in deploying the stipendiary posts allocated to them, alongside non-stipendiary ministers, elders, local church leaders and other lay ministries.</p> <p><b>29.</b> General Assembly instructs the ministries committee to apply the following formula for the allocation of stipendiary ministry posts to synods from January 2017:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a)</b> Assembly reaffirms its aim of funding at least 26 stipendiary CRCWs across the URC with a minimum of two CRCWs per synod. While the total number of CRCW stipends paid remains below 26, synods may have three stipendiary CRCWs in their synod for a limited period without it affecting their overall deployment numbers or number of stipends allocated for the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Each CRCW post shall require approval by the church related community work programme subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.</li><li><b>b)</b> Up to 8% of the available stipendiary posts for ministers of Word and Sacraments shall be allocated as special category ministry posts, each post to be approved by the accreditation subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.</li><li><b>c)</b> All remaining stipendiary posts for both ministries shall be allocated to synods on the basis of a formula with a weighting of 60% for the number of members in each synod and 40% for the number of congregations in each synod. This formula shall be reapplied annually on the basis of the latest information available.</li><li><b>d)</b> Each synod shall remain responsible for making its own allocation of stipendiary posts across the synod.</li></ul>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To draw wide attention to the number of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments available to the Church and to continue to encourage those responsible for their deployment to seek ways of using these ministers in supporting the mission of the Church. To adjust the current formula used for deployment to remove the tether to now inaccurate data
<b>Main points</b>	<p>Detail of the affect of a previous Assembly decision on the number of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments the church can afford</p> <p>Projection regarding the number of stipendiary ministers likely to be available to the church over the next ten years</p> <p>Encouragement to synods to continue to explore the best way of deploying stipendiary ministers</p> <p>Removing the population figure from the equation used to calculate synod deployment targets</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	‘Challenge to the Church’ 2008, ‘Equipping the Saints’ 2005, Resolution 19 of General Assembly 2012
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The United Reformed Church Treasurer, Chief Finance Officer and synod moderators

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	There is no additional financial implication
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Reinforces the encouragement to consider ecumenical opportunities for sharing ministry and leadership.

# Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment

## Stipendiary minister numbers

1. The first resolution relates to stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments. It does not include CRCWs or self-supporting ministers and recognises that synod moderators and other centrally-appointed ministers are not part of deployment as normally understood.
2. The following paragraphs summarise the best estimates we can produce about trends in the two key numbers mentioned in this resolution. First there is the number of ministers likely to be available, based on such matters as the age profile of our ministers. The second set of estimates are the total number of ministers we are likely to be able to fund if we adhere to the existing Assembly guideline linking minister numbers to membership.

## Future numbers of available ministers

- 3.1 The prediction of the number of ministers likely to be available for deployment in future assumes:
  - i) there is no significant change in the pattern of deaths in service and other similarly unpredictable changes;
  - ii) the number of ordinations is correlated with existing student numbers on initial training until 2018 and thereafter averages eight per annum;
  - iii) the number of special category ministries remains at the lower of the current 25 full-time equivalents (fte) and the ceiling of 8% of deployable ministers;
  - iv) from the total number of stipendiary ministers, there continue to be 13 synod moderators and an average of 10 other Assembly postholders (including college staff) not available for deployment; and
  - v) the practice of not granting certificates of eligibility to ministers from outside the URC were to continue.
- 3.2 The estimates these assumptions produce are set out in Table 1 below.

## Target numbers of ministers

- 4.1 Resolution 19 of Assembly 2012 said **General Assembly directs that for 2013 and until further notice, the target number of stipendiary ministers should be set so that the direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget moves in line with the trend in overall membership numbers across the Church.** The main factor behind the maximum number of ministers we can pay for is therefore our membership trends. If overall membership were to grow, so would the money available to fund stipendiary ministry.

- 4.2 In applying the 2012 policy, “the direct costs of supporting the ministry” means not just stipends but the linked costs of pension provision and national insurance contributions. This does not include the substantial but indirect costs of ministerial training. More detail on the calculation is given in the appendix to this report.

- 4.3 Taking 2012 as the starting point, this Assembly policy gives a target spend in 2015 of £14.50m, which would represent 397 ministers available for deployment. Actual minister numbers at the end of 2015 were 393, so current numbers are very close to the Assembly guideline.

4.4 The 2012 policy assumes that, on average, individual ministry and mission (M&M) giving by United Reformed Church members will rise in line with inflation. This remains a reasonable assumption in the light of recent experience, although if anything it could be slightly pessimistic.

4.5 The financial predictions used to calculate the deployment targets assume:

- i) URC membership continues to fall at the average of 3.2% pa seen over the past five years;
- ii) the rate of inflation as measured by the consumer prices index (CPI) will on average match the Bank of England target of 2%;
- iii) there is no substantial change in pensions legislation; and
- iv) the URC retains the existing Ministers' Pension Fund.

4.6 Given that the Assembly policy defines the amount of money that is available to spend on direct ministry costs, the target number of ministers at any time depends on the average cost of supporting a minister. This is peculiarly difficult to predict in current circumstances but some plausible estimates have been made and more detail is in the appendix to this report.

## The overall picture

5.1 Applying these calculations gives the results shown in Table 1. Inevitably the numbers for the most imminent years are the ones offered with greater confidence.

Table 1: Predictions for number of deployable ministers 2015-25

End of year	Available from M&M (£m)	Target number	Predicted number
2015	14.50	397	393
2016	14.32	383	372
2017	14.14	369	351
2018	13.96	354	340
2019	13.78	340	330
2020	13.61	326	313
2021	13.44	314	301
2022	13.27	302	280
2023	13.10	290	262
2024	12.94	278	251
2025	12.77	266	235

5.2 All the numbers in Table 1 refer to the number of full-time equivalent stipendiary ministers who are available for deployment, thus excluding CRCWs, special category ministers, synod moderators, college staff and other Assembly postholders.

5.3 By 2020, relative to 2015, the Assembly policy would expect to see a reduction in the target number of deployable ministers of around 70, or just under 20%. The final column of the table indicates that on best present estimates and unchanged policies, the reduction in actual minister numbers by 2020 will be around 80.

5.4 The difference between the target number of deployable ministers and the actual number of ministers could be partly addressed through the issuing of a limited number of certificates of eligibility to ministers outside of the URC, over a number of years. Continued cooperation between the finance and ministries committees regarding certificates would ensure that the impact of such action falls within the requirements of Resolution 19 from 2012. It would be unwise to assume, however, that a widening gap between the target number of ministers and the actual number produced by the URC can always be satisfactorily bridged by ministers with certificates of eligibility.

## Ministries

5.5 More tentatively, Table 1 suggests that by 2025 the target for deployable ministers might be about a third lower than it is today. The best prediction of actual numbers on present policies hints at possibly a sharper reduction of around 40%. But any numbers ten years ahead must be treated with caution.

5.6 Although these numbers are presented to Assembly for the first time, the general trend is widely known and recognised across the Church. Ministries has for at least 20 years been urging synods to consider the deployment of a reducing number of stipendiary ministers alongside the other people resources available to the Church.

## Previous resolutions

6.1 In 2005, Assembly received the report 'Equipping the Saints', and in response passed Resolution 29:

**General Assembly urges local churches and groups of churches to develop collaborative leadership patterns, and wherever possible to do so ecumenically.**

Resolution 30 acknowledged that the pattern of providing a proportion of the time of an ordained minister to each local church was no longer sustainable:

**General Assembly, recognising that the number of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments continues to fall much more rapidly than the number of congregations, requests synods, district and area councils to deploy ministers in ways which show imagination and flexibility, and in particular:**

- a) to focus on present and future opportunities not historical patterns;
- b) to look at leadership needs and resources in each congregation, accepting that not every congregation has or will have a minister directly providing their day-to-day leadership;
- c) to take account of the deployment plans of sister denominations;
- d) to take account of the service offered by self-supporting ministers;
- e) to take account of the Church's policy on local church leaders as agreed at the 1998 meeting of the Assembly;
- f) to remember the possibilities provided by the special category ministry scheme.

6.2 In 2008, Assembly agreed a 'Challenge to the Church', by consensus as Resolution 23. This Challenge developed the 2005 resolutions, and ministries believes that it is as relevant as ever. We therefore invite Assembly to reaffirm it in 2016.

**General Assembly:**

- i) believes that each congregation and mission group has a need of its own local leader to work in partnership with the elders' meeting to challenge, enable and equip the saints and be a focus of Christian presence in the local community; and
- ii) affirms the value of team pastorates in providing pastoral support, encouragement and training for those in local leadership;
- iii) recognises that congregations and communities may sometimes be best served by ecumenical teams;
- iv) therefore requests synods
  - a) to identify and quantify the leadership needs of each local situation,
  - b) make arrangements for the recruitment, training, calling and support of local leaders,
  - c) to encourage the development of team pastorates to provide pastoral support, encouragement and training, and
  - d) to explore ecumenical opportunities for sharing ministry and developing, where possible, cross-denominational team pastorates.

## Deployment

7. In 1979, Assembly agreed that the number of stipendiary ministers available to the Church as a whole should be allocated to each of the synods according to a formula which was weighted in the ratios 3:2:1 for number of members: number of churches: population. At the time, there were almost 850 stipendiary ministers available for deployment, and the formula has in general served the Church well over the intervening years.

8. However, the one-sixth population element has not been regularly updated and still uses 1991 census data. It would be possible to recalibrate using 2011 census data. As population shifts generally follow economic prosperity, the main effect of such a recalculation would be to shift resources from the poorer synods towards the synods that are already the wealthier ones.

9. In addition, as this population element represents only one-sixth of the weighting in the formula, and as the number of stipends available continues to fall, the difference made to the number of ministers available to any given synod as a result of inclusion of this element is less and less. Ministries is therefore recommending that the allocation formula is now simplified and the population element be removed from the calculation.

10. As a result of Assembly decisions since 1979, stipendiary ministers are available to synods outside the formula through the special category ministry programme and the church related community work programme. Both programmes have enabled synods and pastorates – many in deprived areas – to engage in Christian ministry and mission in new and exciting ways. These posts are applied for by synods on the basis of the mission needs of the area concerned, and approval is not dependent on the membership or number of churches within a synod. No change is proposed in either of these arrangements.

11. As the numbers of Ministers of Word and Sacraments fall, the numbers of CRCW ministers is holding steady, with 14 currently active CRCW ministers and a further five in training. Interest in this ministry is growing amongst the synods, and we recommend that Assembly retains the target of seeking 26 CRCW ministers, aiming for two in each synod.

12. The projected numbers of deployable Ministers of Word and Sacraments for the end of 2016 using the current and the proposed formulae are as follows:

SYNOD	1 Nth	2 NW	3 Mer	4 Yor	5 EM	6 WM	7 East	8 SW	9 Wess	10 TN	11 Sth	12 Wal	13 Sco	Totals
MEMBERS – 2015	2693	5545	3288	3269	3636	4825	4580	3389	5849	5221	7038	2109	2856	<b>54298</b>
CHURCHES – 2015	71	131	82	99	132	121	135	115	134	133	149	98	47	<b>1447</b>
1991 POPULATION (in thousands)	3051	3931	2733	4494	4702	5632	3266	3204	4271	5904	5818	2808	5000	<b>54814</b>
<b>Actual end of year figures 2015</b>	21	41	20	25	31	34	41	28	39	32	49	15	20	<b>393</b>
FTE target, end of year New formula Weighting M=60, C=40, P=0	19	37	23	24	29	33	34	27	39	36	46	19	17	<b>383</b>
FTE target, end of year Old formula Weighting M=50, C=33, P=17	19	36	22	26	30	34	32	26	37	37	45	19	20	<b>383</b>

13. Ministries recognises that synod four (Yorkshire) and synod 13 (Scotland) will be disproportionately affected by this change in the formula, and transitional arrangements will be made to assist these synods to adjust.

## Appendix

### Additional information regarding the calculations of minister numbers

#### 1. Calculating the direct costs of ministry (see paragraphs 4.1-4.2 above)

1.1 The current Assembly deployment policy, established in 2012, requires a calculation of 'the direct cost of supporting the ministry'. For the purposes of considering the deployment of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments, this is calculated as follows.

1.2 In the URC Trust's annual *Trustees' Report and Financial Statements*, made available to Assembly members, there is a note giving an analysis of expenditure and this includes a line called 'Local and special ministries and CRCWs'. This is the basis for the calculation and reflects a similar line in the central budget agreed by Mission Council.

1.3 Behind this line in the Note to the URC Trust accounts are more detailed management accounts and from these the aggregate stipend figures for local ministers of Word and Sacraments are taken from Section A1 'Maintenance of Ministry'. The latter four account lines in this section, covering national insurance, pension contributions and 'other costs' include both ministerial and CRCW costs, so these have been apportioned in the same proportion as the split of the stipend lines between ministers and CRCWs for the same period. The stipend line for local ministers has then been added to the ministerial portion of the other lines to give the direct costs of ministry figure.

#### 2. Calculating the target number of ministers (see paragraph 4.6 above)

2.1 As explained in paragraph 4.6 above, the current Assembly policy requires a calculation of the costs of a stipendiary minister to central funds in future years, so that the total available amount of money can be converted into a target number of ministers on the payroll. The following paragraphs describe how this has been done in producing the numbers in Table 1.

2.2 There are two main elements to be considered in predicting the total cost of supporting a stipendiary minister.

2.3 The first element is the rate of increase in stipends. In a typical year, the URC starting point is to average the rate of inflation and the rate of wages growth in the wider economy. The rate of inflation is assumed, as noted in the main paper, to be 2% for these calculations. For most of the period 1945-2008, wages in Britain grew on average at around 1.5% above inflation. Since the economic crash of 2008-9, this relationship has entirely broken down. There have been extended periods when wages have grown much less than inflation while currently they are rising by much more than inflation. Therefore predicting whether stipends will grow faster or slower than inflation is problematic.

2.4 The second element is the cost of supporting the Ministers' Pension Fund. With two-thirds of the fund's members receiving pensions and only one-third still working and contributing into the fund, it is a perennial challenge to avoid the amount the Church needs to put into the fund from rising markedly. In other words, it is a challenge to stop the pension element of the per capita cost of supporting ministers from rising faster than inflation. However the 2015 actuarial valuation did manage to avoid increasing the Church's contribution, so it is not inevitable that it will rise.

2.5 Taking both these elements of uncertainty into account, the numbers fundable have been calculated on two alternative bases. The higher cost trajectory assumes that the average stipend rise is 1% above inflation each year and that at each triennial valuation of the Ministers' pension fund there is a further 2% rise in the cost of

supporting the average minister. The lower cost trajectory assumes stipend and other direct ministry support costs rise each year in line with inflation but never faster than that. The majority of plausible outcomes lie somewhere between the higher cost and lower cost trajectories.

2.6 For providing Assembly with figures to consider, it was agreed that it was not helpful to provide alternative sets of numbers. Therefore after the higher cost trajectory and lower cost trajectory estimates have been made, the average of the two for any given year has then been calculated as a central forecast.

2.7 Furthermore, for planning purposes the trend in deployable numbers over a period of years is what is needed and so the annual numbers generated by the process described above have been adjusted so that the changes from one year to the next are as near to constant as possible. To achieve this, the central forecast numbers have been smoothed over each half decade; by definition the numbers for 2015, 2020 and 2025 are unchanged by this process. These smoothed annual numbers are the ones shown in Table 1 as 'Target Number'.

# Ministries committee: Assessment procedure

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Craig Bowman: <a href="mailto:ministries@urc.org.uk">ministries@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>30. General Assembly confirms the procedure shown on pages 164-166 of the <i>Book of Reports to General Assembly 2016</i> for applications for candidacy for the ministry of Word and Sacraments and the ministry of church related community work within the United Reformed Church, and delegates to the ministries and education and learning committees' authority to make such minor amendments to the administration of this procedure as may from time to time be required, while reserving the right to make major changes of substance.</b>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To confirm the current assessment procedure and enable future minor amendments to be made by Assembly committees
<b>Main points</b>	Confirm the current procedure, delegate authority to Assembly committees, indicate appeal rationale and clarify preassessment criteria following the decision of Mission Council in November 2015 to remove the upper age restriction for candidates for non-stipendiary ministry
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly 2007 Resolution 40; Mission Council Paper H1
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Secretary for Education and Learning, representatives of the RCLs and synod candidating secretaries

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	No changed financial impact
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	No external impact.

# Procedure for applications for candidacy for ministry

1. In 2007, Assembly agreed a detailed procedure for the councils of the Church to consider applications for candidacy for ministry. This procedure has worked well in the intervening nine years, but some minor changes have been made to the detail of the procedure in the light of experience. The complete current procedure is shown in the Appendix overleaf.
2. In 2008, ministries reported to Assembly that a revised appeals procedure had been introduced for use by applicants whom the assessment board decides not to send for training. However, it is now the view of the ministries committee that it is not possible to appeal the prayerful discernment that is carried out at an assessment conference, as that is quite different in nature from decisions taken in the more usual style of meeting, and cannot be replicated by an appeals panel. However, it is recognised that there may be rare occasions when an applicant believes that the procedure followed at the assessment conference was not correct, and wishes to appeal on that point.
3. In such an instance, an appeals panel will be convened by the convenor of the ministries committee (who has no role in the process prior to that stage) or a deputy together with two other members of the ministries committee. They will hear an appeal regarding procedural matters only, and their decision shall be final. Because of the different nature of the decisions referred to in the previous paragraph, this is a special appeal which is granted only in the very circumstances described, and is not subject to the normal appeals process.
4. Prior to beginning the formal application process, the prospective candidate needs to fulfil the United Reformed Church's preassessment criteria, these and other requirements of the procedure are outlined at the start of the appendix. The remainder of the procedure is shown in the form of a flowchart.
5. Assembly is invited to reaffirm this procedure, and to delegate to ministries and education and learning committees the authority to make such minor amendments (to matters such as timing, etc.) as may from time to time be necessary.

## Appendix

### Preassessment criteria

#### Preassessment criteria

1. The prospective candidate needs to:
  - Have been in membership of the United Reformed Church for at least two years prior to candidating;
  - Conform to the age criteria. The lower age criteria relate to commencing training: 18 for the ministry of Word and Sacraments, 21 for church related community work. Candidates for stipendiary service should complete their training in order to be ordained by their 58th birthday, therefore a candidate should submit an application before their 53rd birthday. Where a candidate has appropriate prior theological education a shorter period than the usual four years of preparation for ordination or commissioning may be possible. If it is thought this may be a possibility the Secretary for Education and Learning should be consulted as soon as possible to explore the matter. However a definitive judgement regarding length of training can only be made at the assessment conference. There is now no upper age criterion for non-stipendiary service.
2. In addition prospective candidates must show they are able to undertake the academic aspects of ministerial training. In order to be accepted as a candidate for training for stipendiary or non-stipendiary service, the candidate will need to have reached the following educational standard:
  - a) GCSE (Grade A-C) in English Language or an equivalent.
  - b) Plus one of the following:
    - i) 2 'A-levels'
    - ii) 2 Scottish 'Highers'
    - iii) A degree from a UK university, or equivalent
    - iv) 120 first degree credits from the Open University or other UK university working on a modular system
    - v) An advanced GNVQ, involving a substantial quantity of discursive work
    - vi) A successful completion of the two foundation years of the Training for Learning and Serving course including the successful completion of the essay option. The agreed standard for successful completion is an average mark of 50% for six assignments (in essay format) of the Foundation Course, marked on the access scale, with all essays having achieved the pass mark of 40%.
    - vii) Such professional qualifications or experience of life and work as, in the opinion of the education and learning studies panel, is of equivalent standard and provides a suitable foundation for training.

#### During the assessment process

3. The candidate needs to:
  - In the case of candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacraments, have had a report written, on at least one service conducted and one sermon preached, by assessors appointed by synod;
  - In the case of candidates for church related community work, have experience of some form of community work. At the assessment conference these candidates will be asked to make a 10-minute presentation on their understanding of CRCW answering the question 'In what ways can our faith produce the actions that make a positive difference to people and their communities?'

- Understand, accept and be committed to the *Basis of Union* of the United Reformed Church in particular the ordination and commissioning promises and the 'Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church' and;
- Have attended Church Meeting and Synod;
- Supply a reflective account of Church Meeting and Synod Meeting attended;
- Be aware of the required medical and psychological examinations indicating fitness for training and ordained/commissioned ministry;
- Complete the form relating to disclosure of criminal convictions and court orders.

# The candidating process

## Candidate meets with Synod Moderator

All pre-assessment criteria met, candidate can proceed synod candidating secretary informed and candidate given application form

Synod candidating secretary receives the candidate's application form and personal references and contacts ministries office to provisionally book a space at an assessment conference.

Arrangements made for candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacraments to conduct an assessed service; a candidate for church related community work to shadow two CRCWs and visit two CRCW projects; all candidates to write reflective accounts on a Church Meeting, and a synod meeting, (Note that some synods also require candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacraments to shadow a minister or undertake a short placement.)

## Church Meeting interview and decision

Decision to recommend – church secretary sends report to synod candidating secretary

*Decision not to recommend – minister and elders need to debrief and help candidate explore vocation in a different way.*

### Local interview on behalf of synod (where held)

The process allows for an additional interview with the candidate to collect local knowledge and opinion of the candidate, which is set in a wider context than that of the local church alone.

## Synod interview and decision

Decision to recommend – synod candidating secretary notifies ministries office and candidates papers sent to ministries office.

*Decision not to recommend – candidate needs to be debriefed and helped to explore vocation in a different way. Ministries office informed that the candidature has come to an end.*

## Assessment conference

This takes place over a weekend (Friday lunchtime until Sunday morning) and includes interviews with assessors and a panel representing education and learning.

Prior to the conference candidates will have been required to complete an online assessment, the outcome of which will be discussed with a personal development officer.

A CRCW candidate will be required to give a short presentation to the assessors.

After the conference, members of the assessment board will meet the candidate at the relevant synod office on a date previously agreed with synod and candidate within eight to 12 days of the conference.

Decision yes, candidate is offered a training place subject to completion of the required medical and psychological screenings and a satisfactory criminal record check.

*Decision not to send for training – the synod and local church should help the candidate explore vocation and other opportunities for service. A candidate may appeal against the process or reapply after two years*

# Mission committee:

## Report to General Assembly

### 2016

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Tracey Lewis: <a href="mailto:tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com">tracey.a.lewis@btinternet.com</a> Francis Brienen: <a href="mailto:francis.brienen@urc.org.uk">francis.brienen@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information and discussion
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	This report provides an overview of the work of the mission committee and mission team in the period from July 2014 till March 2016. It describes completed and ongoing work
<b>Main points</b>	A progress report is given on the work of: Church and Society, Commitment for Life, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Mission and Evangelism, Rural Mission
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission committee report to General Assembly 2014
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	N/A

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	N/A.

# Mission committee report to General Assembly

The central task of the mission committee is to focus on mission, working with the whole of the church to formulate and give expression to our mission and faith in ways which bring alive our vision of 'being Christ's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference to the world' (General Assembly, 2007). The committee seeks to encourage growth in discipleship, evangelism and witness by:

- reflecting on the church's mission practice and theology;
- formulating policy, strategies and programme (action) priorities;
- reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically;
- working with partners; and
- continuously evaluating the place of mission and evangelism within the work of General Assembly.

**Convenor:** Tracey Lewis

**Staff:** Francis Brienen, Deputy General Secretary (Mission); Elizabeth Clark, National Rural Officer; Michael Jagessar, Global and Intercultural Ministries; Linda Mead, Commitment for Life; Grace Pengelly, Secretary for Church and Society; David Tatem, Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations.

**Members:** Ron Forster, Stuart Nixon, John Cornell, Lesley Moseley, John Davey, David Sebley, Stephen Newell, Sheila Thatcher, Vivien Andrew, Martin Hayward, John Collings, Marie Trubic (co-opted), Bernie Collins (convenor-elect).

## Introduction

1.1 The United Reformed Church, we are constantly reminding ourselves, is a small Church with limited resources. However, as you will recognise in the report that follows, we are adventurous, ambitious, diverse and creative in our use of those resources and vibrant, courageous and hopeful in character.

1.2 Mission is always about looking to see what God is up to in the world and joining in! As a Church, we have recognised through the vision2020 framework for mission that God is engaged in the life of the world in rich, broad and diverse ways. And so the agenda that we embrace together as a Church is multi-faceted and calls upon us to treasure the different directions in which the mission of the Kingdom of God is pursued among us and through us.

1.3 We are now in the sixth year of exploring the vision2020 framework for mission. It is proving to be a stimulus for mission in many ways and at different levels across the URC. The mission team and committee have been delighted to see increasingly creative local mission initiatives, which the vision2020 grants have been able to support. Local churches, it seems, have found here a resource which encourages them to try something new.

1.4 'Trying something new' is also reflected in the growing network of our Pioneer Ministers who are exploring beyond the edges of inherited Church. They, as one of the ways in which we look to the future God is calling us to, will have much to teach us as we travel together.

1.5 The report that follows offers a taste of the many ways in which we are a Church exploring new and evolving opportunities for mission in the diverse and changing context of our present culture. The challenges are huge. While we are small our greatest resources are found in the faithful people who serve in and through this Church. It is with thanks to the mission team and the mission committee and the many people in the synods, networks and churches engaging in mission, that we present the report.

## Church and Society

2.1 The United Reformed Church's church and society programme continues to help the Church speak prophetically about justice and peace issues in the public square and support churches on the ground by providing resources and campaigns that help individuals make the links between faith, politics and action. This work is done through membership of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), which is a partnership between the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland. We were delighted to welcome Grace Pengelly as the new Secretary for Church and Society in January 2016.

### Political engagement

2.2 The famous 'we don't do God' dictum would not last long in the Joint Public Issues Team, which always seeks to make apparent the relationship between politics and the Gospel. This team analyses issues, trends and policies in order to develop a collective response that reflects our shared desire to live out the Gospel of Christ in church and society.

#### *Political engagement in the UK*

2.2.1 In February 2015 JPIT hosted its third conference, the theme of which was 'Think, Pray Vote', encouraging people to reflect on the relationship between their faith and political involvement ahead of the UK General Election. Those who came had the opportunity to attend topical issue-based workshops and practical sessions on lobbying and media messaging.

2.2.2 JPIT's briefing document 'Faith in Politics' helped churches prepare for the 2015 General Election by identifying key themes and providing questions for reflection and discussion. It produced a similar document for the recent EU referendum.

2.2.3 In light of the government's proposed British Bill of Rights, which would replace the Human Rights Act (1998), JPIT produced a resource at the end of 2015 designed to help churches reflect on the topic of human rights. It explores what human rights mean to those who have a Christian faith and to the society we live in.

2.2.4 As in previous years, our General Assembly Moderators have attended political party conferences as part of the church leaders delegation. The URC's representatives attend fringe events and meet with MPs and government ministers. Our presence is notable and often elicits productive conversations on policy areas of interest to the Church. For the first time last year representatives attended the Scottish National Party's autumn conference.

2.2.5 JPIT has enabled our churches collectively to respond to government consultations on: freedom of information protocols, Sunday trading and local authority pension fund investment.

2.2.6 We live on an island of three nations, and our knowledge and ability to work on issues particularly relevant to Scotland has been strengthened through the recent addition of the Church of Scotland to the Joint Public Issues Team.

#### *International political engagement*

2.2.7 One of the most pressing international issues to arise in the past two years is the civil war in Syria between the Syrian government and a number of opposition groups, including ISIL (Daesh). The war has raised deeply challenging questions for governments, who have had to decide the most appropriate way to respond to the violence. JPIT's affiliated Churches have made two significant interventions in relation to the war, the first of which expressed abhorrence at the actions of ISIS in Syria, and ahead of a parliamentary vote on bombing, asserted that Daesh can only be defeated through a comprehensive economic, diplomatic and security strategy.

## Mission

A latter intervention pressured governments to increase their financial contribution to humanitarian efforts in the region. We continue to call on church members to pray for all those who suffer as a consequence of more than four years of conflict.

2.2.8 The URC has also responded to the crisis by supporting the efforts of partner Churches in the region. At the time of writing we have collectively given £4,141 in response to the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon's (NESSL) appeal for donations to aid their humanitarian efforts. NESSL identified children's education as essential to the future of young Syrian refugees and have used money raised to open a number of schools in the region. Funds raised also helped cover the costs of basic needs, and has paid for rent, fuel and medical support for people affected.

## Campaigns

2.3 Much of the work of JPIT is done through campaigns that equip congregations with the tools they need to raise awareness about a particular cause or concern. This might be through lobbying MPs, attending an event or drawing attention to an issue through social media.

### *Rethink Sanctions*

2.3.1 In 2014 one million benefits sanctions were imposed on people – this means their payments were stopped for a period of between one month and three years, usually because they had not complied with the conditions set out by the job centre. With the support of the JPIT denominations, this campaign called for a full and independent review of the scheme, which disproportionately affects the young, the homeless and the disadvantaged. The campaign received brilliant engagement, with a number of church groups drawing attention to the issue in creative ways – one such example was the Red Fridays campaign, a silent solidarity protest against the unjust sanctions, led by a group of Christians in South Tyneside, that asked participants to skip a meal at Friday lunchtime in solidarity with all those who struggle to eat because they have had their benefits sanctioned.

### *The 'Enough' Campaign*

2.3.2 Children without enough to meet their basic needs are denied a decent start in life; these children can expect fewer qualifications, lower-paid jobs, more illness and shorter lives than richer classmates. The Enough campaign drew attention to the need to keep the link between a family's needs and the support that is offered by the benefits system. It was launched just before the Welfare Reform and Work Bill was debated in Parliament, and was critical of the effects the proposed benefit cap and life chance assessment would have on the lives of children who already live without enough.

2.3.3 Last Christmas JPIT invited individuals to write 'One more card' to the then Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith. Hundreds did so, wishing the minister a Happy Christmas but reminding him of the need to make sure that every child had enough at Christmas.

### *Pray and Fast for the Climate*

2.3.4 Much of JPIT's work looks at issues of international significance. Pray and Fast for the Climate was a campaign designed to keep attention focused on the Paris 2015 Coalition of the Parties summit in December 2015 (COP21). The campaign called on Christians to pray and fast on the first day of every month until December 2015.

## **URC specific work**

2.4 While the majority of the URC's church and society programme manifests itself through the work of JPIT, there are other pieces of work that do not fall under this remit. The Secretary for Church and Society is also responsible for liaising with the mission committee and Mission Council in the writing of policy and resolutions.

This year church and society led on two of these, the proposed Environmental Policy (see pages 185-190) and a resolution regarding a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty (see pages 191-195).

2.5 In May 2015 a resolution was passed at Mission Council which highlighted the plight of Christians around the world being persecuted for their faith. This has resulted in JPIT dedicating staff time to the issue. At the time of writing, a resource designed to help churches understand and respond to the persecution of religious minorities is being written. It is hoped that this resource will be available online before General Assembly.

2.6 Our church and society staff also contributed to the URC's centenary of World War One commemorations by producing resources for reflection and contemplation. This piece of work will continue until 2018 and resources are available online.

## Hope for the future

2.7 It is encouraging to see the growth of regional JPIT groups. There is an active network in the West Midlands and an emerging group taking shape in Yorkshire. These groups tend to engage with UK-wide issues in ways that correspond to their specific setting.

2.8 The big challenge facing any programme that spends a considerable amount of time working on policy is ensuring that local congregations feel involved and empowered to engage in these issues more knowledgeably. It is hoped that a renewed focus on communication at a local and denominational level will address this challenge, and ultimately strengthen our collective engagement with the issues of the day.

## Commitment for Life

3.1 Commitment for Life is very much part of the identity of the United Reformed Church, being passionate about justice and living out faith through action as well as words. As a programme of General Assembly, Commitment for Life sits within the mission team but also serves a reference group. John Griffith from Mersey Synod is the present convenor but ends his four-year term at General Assembly. We welcome the Revd Alan McGougan, from the Scotland Synod, as the new convenor. The reference group meets twice a year and is the regulating and supportive body for the programme coordinator.

3.2 The year 2014 saw a decline in contributions from churches, so in May 2015, on the recommendation of the reference group, the mission committee submitted a resolution to Mission Council asking for the allocation percentages to be changed to cover basic costs of salaries, resources and administration. The resolution was adopted. Christian Aid's percentage remains at 75% of the money raised by the programme, while Global Justice Now (formally the World Development Movement) receives 5% with the remaining 20% allocated to resources and the running of the programme. In May 2015 the administrator moved on and it was decided that the programme coordinator would trial combining both jobs. This is working well but is being kept under review.

3.3 The total of contributions received in 2015 was similar to 2014, but with the changes in percentages and the saving of a part-time salary, Commitment for Life is in a better position. Grateful thanks are expressed to all contributing churches as this has enabled us to keep our commitment to the work of Christian Aid and of Global Justice Now.

3.4 Our partner countries – Bangladesh; Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua); Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory; and Zimbabwe – all continue to struggle with systems and with significant changes in climate that affect those living with poverty. Bangladesh has seen a rise in interfaith violence. Gang violence and violence against women is still of great concern in Central America. Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory continue to be in the headlines, with increased

## Mission

tension and a rise in house demolitions. Southern Zimbabwe is currently in drought and needs food aid. We ask for prayers for all these partners. Local churches continue to find our monthly e-newsletters useful as an update on their partner country situations. 'Stories for Change' contains stories and statistics on issues in Central America, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, while 'Moving Stories' explores the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

3.5 The usual yearly cycle of mailings, thank-you letters, database updating and the provision of useful educational and worship resources continues. We are encouraging churches to order enough of our mini magazines for each church attendee. This is our key way of sharing information on how the money raised is used. Feedback tells us the yearly service outline, for use on Commitment for Life Sundays remains a well-used resource. The 2016 service is entitled 'Love Your Neighbour' and can be found on the website: [www.cforl.org.uk](http://www.cforl.org.uk). We are always looking for ways to keep information fresh and inviting.

3.6 The website offers information and inspiration for churches. Campaigns and events are publicised, together with our printed resources, which are available to download and print.

3.7 Commitment for Life is part of the Climate Coalition. We publicised the 'Show the Love' campaign, encouraging people to think about what would be lost with rising sea levels and changing climates. Christian Aid's 'Hunger for Justice' weekend in October 2014 saw churches invite local MPs to an event or service to speak about their party's commitments on international development and climate change ... and how far they have fulfilled their promises.

3.8 On 1 November 2014 individual Christians and churches were encouraged to join in a day of prayer and fasting for a just and meaningful climate agreement. The action was then repeated on the first of every month until the December 2015 UN climate talks. Both the United Reformed Church and Commitment for Life supported this event. The year 2015 saw a climate change march in March, the Big Lobby in June in the lead up to the United Nations meeting in Paris in December. The Paris talks were overtaken by tragic events but pilgrims, campaigners and non-governmental organisations were pleased with the shift in the talks and the way the faith voice was recognised. We will continue to be part of events and campaign actions on this subject, especially where it relates to our partner countries.

3.9 The 'Fairtrade is 20' celebration at the QE2 Conference Hall in 2015 brought together campaigners, local supporters and business representatives. A speaker, representing the views of the churches and long-term supporters, asked for a return to core values and an enthusiasm for justice. The Fairtrade Foundation is keen to get back to their social action roots. Following a review, during which we were consulted, there will be a relaunch of the Fairtrade Church scheme in 2016.

3.10 'Hope in a changing climate' was the theme for the conference held at Central Hall, Coventry. The Commitment for Life programme coordinator was part of the planning group for the Ecumenical World Development Conference and delegates from the United Reformed Church attended.

3.11 Other ecumenical work has included being part of the planning group for the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, as part of the World Council of Churches. The joint Belonging to the World Church/Commitment for Life trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory that took place in February 2013 encouraged one participant to apply and be accepted onto the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). A yearly grant is now given by the mission committee, replacing the contribution made by Commitment for Life in previous years. A grant was also given to the Haifa project that allows ecumenical accompaniers to dialogue with Jewish families while in the region.

3.12 With a focus on helping young people understand about the injustice in this world our Christian Aid Collective and Commitment for Life interns are building a legacy for the future. The 2014/15 intern was Thomas Hackett. Tom is now working for Christian Aid in the collective team. The 2015/16 Intern is Amelia Sutcliffe. There will be no internship next year as Christian Aid is redesigning the scheme. Both Tom and previous intern Ian Rowe were part of the writing team for the new Pilots' resource 'Let Justice Flow'.

3.13 We will continue to resource churches to show how their contributions are used and the difference these make to people's lives. Our key aim is to show how the work, supported by Commitment for Life, is part of the mission of every local church and an integral part of our faith.

## **Ecumenical relations and interfaith work**

4.1 The ecumenical and interfaith relations agenda is largely influenced by circumstances beyond one's control. There may be events or incidents that demand a response but most of the work requires keeping in step with the gradually shifting patterns of both the ecumenical and interfaith landscape. From time to time the opportunity for taking initiatives or being part of new initiatives arises.

### **Ecumenical relations**

4.2 On the ecumenical scene one of the potentially most significant developments was the work of a small group within Churches Together in England (CTE) that began looking at the life and future of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). That has evolved into a piece of work entitled 'New Frameworks for Local Ecumenism', which responds to the changing ecumenical landscape in England in particular, where new ecumenical partners are increasingly involved, notably the Orthodox, Pentecostals and a number of other charismatic Churches. Churches are now being asked to reflect on the document, on the implications for our different traditions, and in some cases for the rules by which we order ourselves. The timing of the production of this document has not allowed it to come to General Assembly, but the process will not be quick and it will be considered by various URC bodies including Mission Council. It is likely that developed ideas will come to the Assembly in 2018.

4.3 We continue to be engaged in bilateral relations, some of which lie within the orbit of more than one department or committee. The two bilateral dialogues with which we are engaged are faith and order dialogues, so the primary responsibility for our dialogues with the Church of England (CofE) and the Roman Catholic Church is handled primarily by the faith and order committee. The report of the conversations with the CofE comes to this Assembly but the outworking of the results will engage the mission department as well as others, as many of the implications are for the life of the church at the local level. When the report of the discussions with the Roman Catholic Church is produced later in 2016, that too will lead to a focus on enabling relations at the local level.

4.4 One initiative which is about to bear fruit is the production of a resource for local churches or groups enabling them to explore the dynamics of receptive ecumenism, an approach to relations predicated on the idea that there are gifts that we may wish to receive from as well as offer to other traditions.

4.5 One of the results of the review of the post of the secretary for ecumenical and interfaith relations has been the creation of a small ecumenical reference group. The role of the group is to support the work of the staff secretary and the two national ecumenical officers for Scotland and Wales. It will also serve as a sorting house for some of the issues that are presented to the Church, helping to judge the best form in which matters can be handled. It will also assist in establishing continuity in dealing with ecumenical issues when the current staff secretary retires in July 2017.

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4.6 One of the most active bilateral bodies continues to be the Methodist/United Reformed Liaison Group. This now meets twice yearly and is developing a task group approach to its operation, working virtually between meetings. One outworking of this is a gradual accumulation of resources which are already online for the work of the group and will become widely available through the websites of the two Churches. The chief task of this group is currently focused on the united ecumenical areas in which the two Churches attempt to operate a shared structure, something which is challenged by the different approaches to, for example, the call or stationing of ministers.

### Interfaith work

4.7 As a result of the review of the staff secretary post, the job title has now been changed to include a reference to interfaith relations. This is to reflect the growing significance of interfaith issues within wider society.

4.8 It is notable that for many in other faith communities the differences between the Christian traditions are confusing and they prefer to think of and deal with Christians as a block. On our part, understanding one particular faith, Sikhism for example, does not mean that one also understands Islam or Zoroastrianism. The interfaith reference group, which operates jointly with our Methodist partners, therefore attempts to include people with a range of experience of different faiths so that to some degree it can operate as an expert group, able to give advice about a good range of faith traditions and communities. Ecumenically, however, we are inevitably small players with an incomplete group of synod interfaith advocates alongside the small number of interfaith experts.

4.9 Working ecumenically on interfaith issues offers us the best possibility of engagement given the wider pool of wisdom and resources that is available, so looking at how local churches and individual Christians can be encouraged to engage and build up good interfaith relations is something that occupies much energy.

4.10 The London Interfaith Centre of which Maggie Hindley is co-director is one place where this work is being done through, as one example, the development of Scriptural Reasoning where people from Jewish, Christian and Muslim backgrounds share sacred texts as a way of exploring meaningful themes.

4.11 Members of the reference group are now preparing material for the 2017 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Lent study course which will focus on interfaith perspectives on Lenten themes.

4.12 One of the most difficult areas for our interfaith work is the tension between developing Christian–Jewish relations, especially amid a rise in anti-Semitism, and continuing to be engaged in justice issues relating to Israel–Palestine. There are no simple solutions and both things demand our time and attention as well as much prayer and careful thought.

### The Buildings Forum

4.13 The secretary for ecumenical and interfaith relations also served on the Joint (Methodist and URC) Property Strategy Group (JPSG), on behalf of the mission committee. During 2015 the JPSG organised and ran a number of roadshows around the country designed to encourage churches to think creatively about the uses and potential of their buildings. Having run these successfully, the JPSG then came to the end of its period of service in October 2015 with the recommendation that the two denominations find ways of continuing the work. Within the URC this has been taken up by the creation of a Buildings Forum, which is placed within the remit of the mission committee because its primary emphasis is missional. The forum includes representatives from the synods, from the mission committee and mission enablers network, a CRCW, and other co-opted members with appropriate skills.

4.14 The forum is still in its early days: it held its first meeting in February 2016 and will meet again later in July. At the moment it is developing internet-based presentations and online resources, and in conjunction with the faith and order committee and the mission committee is exploring of the theology of buildings.

## Global and intercultural ministries

### Changing work landscape

5.1 A significant change in the mission department has been the merging of the work of world church relations and racial justice and intercultural ministry. Reviews of both staff secretary posts underscored the connections and recommended the new directions. With the movement of the Revd Jane Rowell (then Secretary for World Church Relations) into a new post, Mission Council in November 2015 agreed that the work be reconfigured as global and intercultural ministries. The Secretary for Racial Justice and Intercultural Ministry, the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar was reappointed as Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries and a new post of Programme Officer for Global and Intercultural Ministries was set up. From a good field of applicants Eve Parker was appointed in this new role. This report is written in the context of this change and under the new focus of global and intercultural ministries.

### Strategic Developments

5.2 The reconfiguring means a greater focus on strategic work and clearer, more relevant policies as the two areas of work integrate, while maintaining some distinctiveness of each. Current and ongoing work includes:

5.2.1 An agreed memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Presbyterian of Korea and the United Reformed Church. With the growing number of newer migrant Christian communities into the UK (for instance Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking Chinese, a raft of churches from the Reformed family from Africa, South America and Europe), this MOU will serve as a model to follow.

5.2.2 Developing a new shape to the ministry among Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students and more long-term based families in the UK. Current direction of travel suggests a mission project that will be based at Lumen URC (London).

5.2.3 Redrafted global Belonging to the World Church (BWC) policies including BWC grants, vision2020 grants, and policies related to travel, risk management and expenses, synod global partnership principles, congregation to congregation partnerships, and good practices on briefing and debriefing in relation to visits and exchanges. With regard to the latter, a whole new approach to visits is being developed that is aimed at enabling wider, intentional and diverse access to these visits from across the synods.

5.2.4 Other intercultural strategic work including working towards consolidating intercultural gatherings (working across various networks), more intentional contributions to intercultural awareness at the various levels/councils of the URC through its policies (already working closely with nominations and the equalities committees).

5.2.5 A significant achievement has been the development of a joint webpage, facebook page and twitter account. This development can be viewed here: [www.urc.org.uk/mission/global-and-intercultural-ministries.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/mission/global-and-intercultural-ministries.html)

### Resourcing

5.3 Working collaboratively with the urban URC network, the equalities committee and a number of gifted URC writers and educators, we have developed new resources for churches. These resources, available online, are intended to resource diversity awareness and nurture intercultural competencies.

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5.4 Better Hosting: a significant feature of church life in the UK is the number of places where a church shares its premises with another worshipping congregation. With new migrant communities this pattern is growing exponentially. Research by racial justice and intercultural ministry (RJiM) and the urban URC network reveals that, in spite of the challenges related to shared worship spaces, there are potentially exciting opportunities for partnership in mission and ministry. To this end, RJiM and the urban URC network have developed a handbook (*Better Church Hosting*, 2014) to help local congregations to develop this missional potential.

5.5 'Sacred conversations on migration' resource: during 2015, a task group worked on developing resources for sacred conversations on migration aimed at local churches and/or church related groups to facilitate the exploring of issues around moving/migrating. Working with the theme 'at home in a strange place', it is hoped that the resources will generate a series of conversation points to help people reflect together on their experiences, stories and encounters and create opportunities for churches to connect faith, worship, advocacy, solidarity and practical engagement. It will include a thematic introduction, suggestions on conversation methods, short stories, Bible reflections, a board game, a written and filmed short play, video magazine clips, worship materials, links to online ecumenical resources etc. Materials are accessible online at [www.urc.org.uk/at-home-mission.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/at-home-mission.html).

5.6 Facilitating global presence and voices: an underused resource is that of our partner Churches. The 2015 Earth Year Conference organised by the Southern Synod brought to the table and the conference Maina Talia, Secretary of the Tuvalu climate action network and the Revd Maleta Tenten, Secretary for Mission of the United Church of Kiribati. This not only added voices of those directly affected by climate change, it also brought two colleagues from our partner Churches to share in the conversations. Global and intercultural ministries will encourage this model and practical way of drawing on our world church resources.

## Global Engagement

5.7 Visits, international exposure and representation: our work includes both visiting and receiving visits from partner churches. These visits can deepen relationships, demonstrate solidarity and enable mutual sharing and learning. While we directly arranged some of the visits, we also offered both financial and logistical support for others. This included:

5.7.1 Youth visits: two young people attended a Festival in Hungary (July 2015); a synod youth visit to Taiwan (2015) took place and a group of young people from Wessex is due to visit Zambia (July 2016). Group and synod link visits were to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (October 2014), China and Korea (October 2014), Zambia, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (2015). Individual visits were made to the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (2014 and 2015). The staff secretary visited the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands and the Guyana Congregational Union in February 2016, while moderatorial visits and representation took our Assembly Moderators to partner Churches in Southern Africa, Papua New Guinea and a Disciples' Conference in the USA. As well as facilitating a URC presence at a number of international assemblies, we were able to send representatives to the Synod or Assembly of a number of partner churches, such as the Church of the Palatinate in Germany, the Waldensian Church in Italy, the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.

5.7.2 Visits are also reciprocal: we welcomed two staff members from the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (February 2016) to discuss the future shape of our mission partnership related specifically to the Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking Chaplaincy. The national Synod of Scotland received two partners from the Presbyterian Church in Cuba who visited Nairn URC for the World Day of Prayer in March 2016 and participated in a whole week of activities. We will also receive and host two visits from the Presbyterian Church in Korea in May and June 2016 with two groups of people visiting the UK, including Kingston and New Malden URCs, where there is a vibrant Korean community.

5.7.3 We are currently planning a reciprocal visit with representatives from the URC visiting Seoul in December 2016. And a small group is currently working on a visit to the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan during April 2017.

5.8 Belonging to the World Church grants: the provision of grants and practical assistance to ministers, CRCWs, young people and Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) students is part of our work. Through this scheme ministers and CRCWs were able to visit New Zealand, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Pakistan, Tanzania, USA and Israel. Organised group visits were made to China, South Korea, India and Israel. EM1 students had international placement exposures in India, Taiwan and Israel. Reports received from these trips underscored both the importance of the encounters and the impact they make on participants.

5.9 The international exchange reference group (IERG) continues to do sterling work in supporting our mission partners, keeping contact with retired missionaries and their families, advising on BWC grant applications and on the ongoing conversations around the new direction of the ministry among Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students and their families in the UK. We record our appreciation of Chris Wright, who completes his term as convenor of the IERG, for his unwavering support of and commitment to the work of global ministries.

5.9.1 In terms of mission partners, we record our thanks to the Revd Dr Gwen Collins and the Revd Bernie Collins who have completed their service in Papua New Guinea and the Revd Philip Woods who has completed his term of service with CWM. Alison Gibbs continues to serve as head teacher of the Mwenzo Girls' School in Northern Zambia, while the Revd Shou-Hui Chung from the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan provides chaplaincy support to Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students in Manchester and London. Her term will come to an end in July 2018. The ministry among the Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students and families will be taking a different shape with a greater focus on the growing and more fixed communities around London.

5.9.2 The IERG also assists with the planning and delivery of an annual synod global partners event. The 2015 gathering was held at Westminster College in Cambridge in May. The 2016 event will be held from 17 to 18 September at the same venue. These gatherings are opportunities to share experiences and good practice, identify challenges, and consider helpful directions for these partnerships. The 2016 gathering will give particular consideration to the complex challenge of ending partnerships and starting new ones, and to some of the key new strategic directions of the global and intercultural ministries work.

5.10 Responding to international crises/disasters: In our 'global village' the reality of disasters and crisis situations is a constant, with partner churches either affected or involved in responding to these incidents. In such times, we have called upon all to remember our partner churches and their communities in our prayers and through tangible contributions to respond to immediate needs. Through appeals, drawing from small funds and the generosity of congregations and synods we have been able to respond to such situations in Myanmar, India, Taiwan, Syria/Lebanon and Cuba. We wish to express our profound gratitude to all for their compassion and generosity.

## Intercultural Encounters

5.11 Shift and convergence: the URC's adoption of the 'Intercultural Charter' affirmed the evolving nature of the work of racial justice and multicultural ministry into racial justice and intercultural ministry (RJiM). This shift has seen a wider cross-section of the URC identify, own and support RJiM and has encouraged a broader conversation on inclusion and diversity. It has also led to a natural convergence into global and intercultural ministries.

## Mission

5.12 Living out multicultural church-Intercultural habits: networks are at the heart of RJiM work. RJiM synod coordinators and advocates met regularly for strategic work, support and sharing good practice. Other networks (TeamURC, Cascades of Grace [BAME Women] and BAME Ministers) continue to contribute actively to shaping intercultural habits across the life of the URC. These networks have shared in conversations on Better Church Hosting, new advocacy strategies, multiple religious belonging, the changing language of racism, home and belonging, and young people and migration, among others.

5.13 Multicultural Celebration 2015: this regular biennial event brought together over 400 people from across the URC in September 2015 to celebrate our intercultural life together. Focusing on the theme, 'Journeys: Drinking from Many Wells', the programme included a variety of activities with a larger percentage of younger people participating. The event also included an art award and a multicultural congregational story award. Though a highly anticipated and well attended biennial event, the decision was taken to end this method of meeting and invest in sponsoring four smaller gatherings in various locations in 2017. Churches in Southend, Bristol, Pontypridd and New Malden have been asked to pilot this different approach to celebrating our life together. More on the intercultural celebrations can be found at [www.urc.org.uk/intercultural-celebration.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/intercultural-celebration.html).

5.14 Monitoring: RJiM work includes monitoring the inclusion agenda of the URC alongside enabling racism and diversity awareness training. This involves collaborative work with the equalities and nominations committees. Monitoring work has been carried out in the area of children's and youth work, education and learning and Church House. Monitoring is a very important tool to help us measure the practice of our inclusion intentions and what needs to be done. We have mapped the delivery of awareness training across the Church and the evidence indicates much work still to be done. A new online resource on diversity awareness training has been written.

5.15 A different approach to Racial Justice Sunday: the decision to move Education Sunday to the second Sunday in September which is also Racial Justice Sunday provided us with an opportunity to rethink and explore more constructive ways of integrating racial justice awareness across key designated Sundays in the ecumenical liturgical year. The RJiM network sees this as an opportunity to relaunch and raise the profile of racial justice. It is an opportunity to encourage the whole of the URC to do more to connect with other designated Sundays while drawing on the varying strengths and interests of our churches. The connecting points can be, for instance, Holocaust Memorial and Martin Luther King Days, Poverty Action Sunday, Refugee Week, Freedom Sunday, Disability Sunday, One World Week, Black History Month and Interfaith week. Connecting the complexities of marginalisation and drawing out the intersections may better serve the whole Church in its journey to becoming transformed and transforming communities.

## Mission and evangelism

6.1 Supporting synods and local churches in their engagement with mission, evangelism and church growth remains a key part of the work of the mission committee and department. This has happened in a variety of ways and supported by mission team staff, committee members and mission enablers.

## Engagement with vision2020

6.2 Support for churches' engagement with the vision2020 framework continued with the organising of a workshop together with the Windermere Centre in November 2015. Under the title 'It Just Works' the workshop brought together 36 people from local churches to share stories of engagement in mission with their communities. They spoke of ideas that had made a real impact on the life of the Church and the community. What the projects had in common was that they were manageable, creative and they worked. The purpose of the workshop was not only to share these activities with each other but also to create a website to publicise

these stories widely, so that other churches too can be inspired for their own work. The website is organised according to the vision2020 statements and is now live. The address is [www.thingsthatwork.urc.org.uk](http://www.thingsthatwork.urc.org.uk).

6.3 A small group of mission team and CRCW staff started planning the 2015 vision2020 conference on community partnerships, following successful conferences in 2011 and 2013. Rather than holding a central conference, we decided to offer a series of regional one-day road shows, to enable more people to participate. Unfortunately, due to low interest it was ultimately necessary to cancel the events.

6.4 The vision2020 grants continue to be administered by the mission team and are increasingly used to support one-off and longer-term developmental mission projects. Grants have been awarded for a variety of community outreach projects, art exhibitions, multicultural feasts, breakfast and lunch clubs, church without walls, children and youth work, asylum justice, disability facilities, and translation facilities for churches with a growing number of non-English speakers, to name some examples. Application forms can be found at: [www.urc.org.uk/mission](http://www.urc.org.uk/mission)

## CreateTalk

6.5 Launched at General Assembly 2014 as a development from ArtTalk, CreateTalk encourages churches to connect with their communities through creative activities, anticipating that conversations, inspired by the tool of creativity, will help people discover creativity in their churches and communities, and proactively engage in faith conversation. Resources to help foster imagination are the CreateTalk area of the URC website, a CreateTalk Twitter feed, and CreateTalk mentoring to local churches. The ArtTalk Resource Pack helps foster church conversations. ArtTalk Awards and vision2020 grants are available to projects which show a) plans to create a community connection, b) sharing of faith stories, c) commitment from the whole church, and d) plan for continued engagement.

6.5.1 Bridport churches, inspired to begin arts-based activities, held a Lent Stations of the Cross around the town. Using an empty shop as a community gallery, Hug, Collumpton, now has a community prayer group. Poole's Bridging Communities worked with the Borough Council and faith groups, culminating in a community art piece linking residents and faith groups. The project leader said, 'Create talk helped me see ways to open the door for conversations about faith.' Radford Road URC's Bible Society tapestry exhibition attracted a diversity of visitors. New Way Church held an exhibition of work from homeless people who were supported to create it. Chorlton residents were invited to see beauty in their locality, link that with our Creator, and share it on Facebook. 'Curiously, the "Beautiful Chorlton" Facebook page keeps gaining "likes".' Crowstone St George's holds a creative 'Sunday Cinema' allowing the opening up of difficult issues for discussion. Trinity Wimbledon's Christmas Tree festival established significant links between the congregation, building users and community groups. Work under the CreateTalk banner includes a Congregational Federation initiative using Graves Art Gallery, Sheffield, as a location for spirituality conversations. Projects are in planning in Sunderland, Sutton Coldfield, Saltaire, SPACE (Yorkshire group), Chorley and Glasgow.

6.5.2 Extraordinarily simple activities can create enormous impact, yet to establish the simple is a complex thing. Visits to local churches and groups have revealed much, particularly how local churches do or do not engage in obvious creativity and faith conversations.

6.5.2.1 Obvious Creativity – Existing visual in churches: creativity often means visual art, yet, 'seeing' the visual already in churches can be difficult. It is hard to imagine an art exhibition or theatre performance in a building which has not been 'seen' in truth, full of redundant objects and furniture. Members, used to not noticing what fills their building, need support to realise that, to the visitor, the new creative activity is just as new as what is already in a building. Before the new arrives, the old must be seen, and perhaps repurposed.

6.5.2.2 Enabling faith conversations: in every project, the hardest part is faith conversation. Churches have been venues for years, with little connection between the performers, audience and church members. CreateTalk activities need intentional loiterers, comfortable to have ad hoc conversation. Hug, Collumpton, staffed their Gallery with members from churches who hovered. Connection needs to be planned, intentional, obvious and full of graceful reticence.

6.5.3 CreateTalk keeps proving that a mission model, where the good news starts in relationships built around creativity, leads to deep conversations. However, new mission models embed slowly, with enthusiasts at workshops and presentations returning to the reality of local church life. Feedback from activities shows that deep conversations are being had and that connection is being made. But to cascade the experience is time consuming and it is our hope that this will continue to happen beyond December 2016 when the CreateTalk project is due to end.

## Fresh Expressions

6.6 In 2014 the URC joined the third phase of Fresh Expressions, which will end in March 2019. Canon Phil Potter took post as the new team leader and the board was reconstituted under the chairing of the Revd Dr Martyn Atkins, former General Secretary of the Methodist Church. Currently Fresh Expressions has five Church partners and 14 network partners, with conversations being held with many more. The board has affirmed the mission of Fresh Expressions as championing and resourcing new types of churches by promoting best practice, providing effective support and creating genuine partnership. The five areas of strategic focus for the next years include inspiring vision, networking strategically, connecting geographically, supporting pioneers and resourcing learning.

6.7 The work of the URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions, who is part of the Fresh Expressions team, developed significantly and was extended to a full time post in May 2015, partly funded by CWM's Mission Support Programme.

6.7.1 Much has changed since the Mission Shaped Church report (2004) first coined the phrase 'fresh expressions of church'. That original report highlighted a widening disconnect between church and culture, and began to consider how new forms of church might bridge the gap. In the 12 years since, there have been further dramatic changes in culture – not least, the advance of social media and mobile communications – and the phrase 'fresh expressions of church' has become part of the language for many denominations including the URC. We are embracing the reality that new types of church have an essential role in mission.

6.7.2 As the URC encourages habitual individual discipleship, fresh expressions of church are catalysts for more missional activity. Many fresh expressions emerge by encouraging a *mixed economy* of traditional and new types of church. We are seeing some excellent examples of mixed economy within the URC. These are churches that appreciate the possibilities of inviting people into church, whilst also encouraging mission outside of the building. Groby URC in Leicestershire offers a free weekly breakfast, bouncy castle and crafts; this provides a safe, familiar environment for people to enquire about Jesus, and in turn encourages new discipleship. Likewise, the Free Church in St Ives and Cornerstone in Hythe each offer a wide range of missional outreach activities, some inside the building, others out in the community. Each church offers a variety of discipleship pathways as people begin to enquire about Jesus. The URC in Rhos-on-Sea, North Wales works ecumenically offering a range of youth and children's clubs, all with worship opportunities.

6.7.3 There are also trained pioneer leaders who work towards models of church that are edgy and different to anything else that is on offer. These are only relevant to their own specific community and emerge after the pioneers have spent time immersed in local culture. The URC currently has seven such pioneers, with others coming on board.

They work around the country, including St Neots, Milton Keynes, Ipswich, Collumpton and Chorlton-cum-Hardy, and range from setting up church in new housing developments, among café-culture, and creating new communities in a small town.

6.7.4 We are intentionally developing networks of pioneering leaders. The first of these in the URC is taking shape in Eastern Synod, where around 25 ministers and leaders meet to discuss specific issues that affect them as they develop new forms of church. Fresh Expressions is developing a network of coaches and mentors to support and assist the fledgling new forms of church, and we continue to offer training in the form of local vision events, mission shaped intro and mission shaped ministry courses.

## Engaging with partners

6.8 The URC continued to be part of Back to Church Sunday in 2014, but saw a significant reduction in the number of participating churches. In 2015 Back to Church Sunday took a different approach with Season of Invitation, which focused on training local churches to invite people on five Sundays, from September to Christmas. Within the URC six synods took advantage of the training offered, with 45 churches taking part in West Midlands, Yorkshire and North Western Synods alone. This year will be the final year of promoting Season of Invitation with a training perspective and the organisers are currently reflecting on what will be offered in 2017.

6.9 The HOPE initiative was evaluated after its second phase in the early part of 2015. Anecdotal evidence from mission committee members and mission enablers suggests there was good engagement with HOPE in local churches, particularly in Northern Synod (around the centenary of the start of WW1), Wessex and Scotland. A major gathering of denominational leaders in March 2015 considered the evaluation and reflected on what should happen next. The findings suggested that HOPE14 had been good at community engagement but not at evangelism. This resulted in a proposal to continue with HOPE until 2020 with an interdenominational emphasis on evangelism. The mission committee agreed that the URC should remain a partner in HOPE in this new phase.

6.9.1 To define the task ahead, HOPE, the Church of England and the Evangelical Alliance commissioned the Barna research group to survey people's perceptions of Jesus. The survey results are available at [www.talkingjesus.org](http://www.talkingjesus.org) and have been widely circulated and discussed by HOPE's partners. Other aspects of HOPE's work in 2016 will be resourcing churches to reach out to their community on the occasion of the Queen's 90th birthday, through the book *The Servant Queen and the King She Serves* and at Christmas, with the publication of a leaflet to hand out to visitors telling the Christmas story and marking the bicentenary of the carol *Silent Night*. In 2017 HOPE will focus on training for sharing the good news and in 2018 there will be a major drive to mobilise the church for mission in word and deed, as well as an emphasis on the centenary of the end of World War One.

6.10 The mission committee, together with the communications and editorial committee, supported the URC becoming an associate sponsor of the Greenbelt festival for a period of two years. The festival has been held since 1974 and continues to equip and re-energise Christians to be imaginative and effective disciples in their local communities. Engaged with culture and politics, inspired by the arts and sustained by faith, Greenbelt offers a rich programme of music, visual and performing arts, spirituality, comedy, talks and discussion. The partnership is a natural fit, building on the URC's rich Nonconformist history of exploration of radical Christian faith and working for justice, and the dynamic and creative energy of the Greenbelt festival. A planning group, including mission team members, is preparing for the URC's participation in 2016 and 2017 under the leadership of Steve Summers who manages the project. The 2016 festival will be held from 26 to 29 August at Boughton House near Kettering, Northamptonshire.

## **Missional discipleship/Walking the Way**

6.11 Work continued on developing a proposal on pre-evangelism and discipleship for the CWM Mission Support Programme (MSP). A Day on Discipleship was held at High Leigh in April 2015, which affirmed that developing discipleship with a view to building confidence in evangelism is something the URC must urgently pursue. Mission committee agreed to approach education & learning to explore synergy between the aspirations of the TLS review and the MSP process, as both were inspired by an encompassing vision of missional discipleship of all God's people. A task group convened by the Deputy General Secretaries Mission and Discipleship started work over the summer of 2015 and brought initial ideas and proposals to Mission Council in November 2015 and March 2016. A full report of this work, now renamed Walking the Way, is presented on pages 11-14.

## **Other work**

6.12 The mission enablers network continues to meet regularly for information sharing and mutual support, and for providing feedback on the work of the mission committee and department. The mission enablers took part in the second joint networking conference with training and development officers, children and youth development officers and the resource centres for learning in March 2015. This provided an opportunity to reflect together on the theme of discipleship and explore joint areas of work.

6.13 Mission team staff are also part of a small group preparing to mark the centenary of the ordination of the Revd Constance Coltman, on 17 September 1917 in the Congregational Union of England and Wales. Part of the preparations for the centenary celebrations included the production of a short film, Constance, by the Revd Kevin Snyman, which was launched at Church House on 17 September 2015 and which is available on YouTube. Planning for a major event and memorial service in September 2017 is in progress.

## **Rural mission**

7.1 The mission committee welcomed the Revd Elizabeth Clark as the new National Rural Officer in September 2014. The National Rural Officer serves both the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and is based at the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) in Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth.

7.2 It is estimated that 25% of United Reformed churches are rural, and rural churches are important. However, they can often lack confidence and feel overshadowed by larger churches. Part of the Rural Officer's role and that of the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) is to try and change the narrative from one of failure to one that shows the value of small churches. For example, in a world where isolation and loneliness are increasingly widespread the small church can be a place of welcome where people get to know one another by name. Isolation and loneliness would seem to be an issue that the rural church could really do something about. Please look at the resource on the ARC website, the Rural Isolation Support Project for ideas and information: [www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk](http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk).

7.3 We know from independent research that rural Christians can and do make a significant contribution to their communities both in terms of leading and participating in groups and activities and in the small acts of neighbourliness that really help to build community. Part of the Rural Officer's role is to remind churches of this more positive view of the small church and encourage them to rise to the challenge of being at the centre of their communities. A key resource in this is the sharing of stories, telling churches what others in similar situations are up to. There are many stories of good practice on the ARC website, and the magazine *Country Way* also gives ideas and shares stories. Both these resources would benefit from some more URC stories.

7.4 The Rural Officer has made visits to various parts of the country including Cumbria, Cornwall, Shetland and the South East. The purpose of such visits is to listen and to share, listening to experiences, seeing new projects, and sharing stories from elsewhere. This can be quite formal, through leading worship or workshops or the informal conversations that happen on the way. During a visit to Cumbria last year the Rural Officer met some dairy farmers who had been badly affected by a disease called mycoplasma. This conversation led to some follow up work at the ARC in order to get the situation highlighted nationally.

7.5 At the ARC the Rural Officer teaches on the twice yearly Rural Ministry Course which is aimed at those new to rural ministry and is always ecumenical. She is also working on a project called Germinate Groups, which are learning communities for those in multi-church groups, providing an opportunity to think, pray and plan around their mission. She also helps to organise the rural officers' annual meeting, which sees rural officers from all around the country and from at least four denominations get together for support and learning.

7.6 A new initiative which the Rural Officer has worked on with the ARC is Rural Mission Sunday. This was celebrated for the first time last year on the 15 July and this year it will be on the 17 July, although it can be celebrated on any Sunday that fits with the local church. Rural Mission Sunday is an opportunity to celebrate the rural church, giving thanks for what is achieved both by individual members of the congregation and collectively. Worship material is produced around a theme; this year the theme is Sow and Grow and contains two URC contributions. Last year churches found different ways of using the material, for example inviting the village to afternoon tea and sharing worship. The feedback from last year suggested that those churches who did get involved found it really helpful.

7.7 One way of trying to raise the profile of the rural church within the wider church has been to work with those training for ministry. In the Methodist Church this has meant sending all those training full-time on a weekend rural placement around the country. This initiative is to be repeated this year. The Rural Officer has also arranged rural placements for those Methodists about to leave college and take up a rural appointment. She has also met the students at Northern College to speak about the rural context.

7.8 In 2004 the Methodist Church produced a resource for rural churches called Presence. This was a study guide which coined the phrase 'an effective Christian presence in villages' to describe the future shape of the church and provided tools to look at the life and mission of the church to help it become that presence. While the theology and vision underpinning this resource is still very valid, the context has changed and it needs to be updated. The Rural Officer has convened a group to look at rewriting this study guide from a Methodist and URC perspective. Another result of the rethink of Presence is a research conference to be held in July 2016. Papers will be presented from both a Methodist and URC perspective and it is hoped that this will lead to a publication aimed at rural practitioners.

## Conclusion

8.1 The opportunities for developing and offering new initiatives for mission are always there and always inviting! And we wrestle with recognising the capacity both of our staff and our church. 'No new initiatives' is a cry we often hear! On the other hand, we are always concerned to be exploring and offering good, stimulating, innovative and challenging resources to support and equip local congregations for mission in their context. We live with the tension of the 'harvest' being 'plentiful' while the workers need gentle encouragement, careful support in the exploration of their call to mission and permission to try, whether a few things, or just one thing, and do it well.

## Mission

8.2 Our rich and diverse picture of mission therefore gives us permission to see that as a whole church we are broadly, energetically and courageously involved in a huge range of initiatives and projects while encouraging each local church to find its place within that big picture. Mission is God's calling to all of his people and we all have a part to play. And so with thanks to the staff team for mission at Church House and those who have served on the mission committee in these past two years, we are grateful for the good work that is well established and ongoing while continuing to look forward in faith to the God who calls us to join him in revealing and living the Kingdom of God.

# Mission committee:

## Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Grace Pengelly: <a href="mailto:grace.pengelly@urc.org.uk">grace.pengelly@urc.org.uk</a> Francis Brienen: <a href="mailto:francis.brienen@urc.org.uk">francis.brienen@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>31. General Assembly adopts the Environmental Policy, and encourages all committees, synods and local churches to do their best to implement it.</b></p> <p><b>32. General Assembly resolves to appoint a task group until 31 July 2022 in the first instance, of four persons, to be appointed by the nominations committee and funded from the mission committee budget, to monitor the United Reformed Church's progress toward meeting its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, reporting to the mission committee.</b></p> <p><b>The task group's specific remit shall be to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) compile, produce or commission resources for worship and teaching related to themes contained in the Environmental Policy;</b></li> <li><b>b) consider the budgetary implications of implementing the Environmental Policy;</b></li> <li><b>c) commission a suitable individual or body to calculate the Church's carbon footprint, enabling a benchmark to be set against which future reductions in this footprint may be made; and</b></li> <li><b>d) liaise with the United Reformed Church investment committee, and to assist the relevant bodies within the United Reformed Church regarding decisions relating to the investment of Church funds in fossil fuels.</b></li> </ul>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	An agreed statement of intent by the United Reformed Church with respect to the environment and the Church's responsibility to reduce the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by its activities (its carbon footprint)
<b>Main points</b>	The policy contains a theological affirmation; an explanation of how it relates to vision2020 and builds on the Hope in God's Future report; and action which churches, synods and Assembly will seek to implement with respect to caring for Creation and reducing the Church's carbon footprint
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	URC Environmental Policy adopted by General Assembly 2004. Other relevant Assembly resolutions were passed in 1982, 1991, 1992, 1998 and 2007

<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Council; Synods; Joint Public Issues Team; Mr Andy Bottomley (Secretary, URC Retired Ministers' Housing Society); Mrs Ann Barton (Facilities Manager, Church House); Mr Richard Nunn (Chairman, URC Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd); Climate Stewards; A Rocha; the Revd Dr Rosalind Selby (Chair, Hope in God's Future working group); the Revd Dr David Pickering (Environmental Issues Network); the Revd Mike Shrubsole (Environmental Issues Network); the Revd Trevor Jamison (Eco-Congregation Scotland); Mr Charles Jolly (European Churches Environmental Network); Mr Derek Estill (URC member, Blackburn Diocese Environmental Group)
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## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	There will be some cost in tasks such as calculating the Church's carbon footprint, redrafting travel claim forms, etc. The cost of servicing a task group can be absorbed in the mission committee budget. Local churches (and perhaps synods) will incur expense if they try to make their buildings 'greener', but that will be their decision, in response to the policy, rather than a direct cost of the policy
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	It will deepen relationships with other churches on this issue and strengthen the strategic direction of the Joint Public Issues Team.

# Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church

## Purpose

- 1.1 This policy is an agreed, documented statement of the United Reformed Church's stance towards the environment in which it operates.
- 1.2 It is the cornerstone of our intent, as a body of people committed to caring for God's creation, to reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all of our operations.
- 1.3 It does not prescribe action for the Church or individual members, churches and synods, but as a statement of intent it provides a basis upon which appropriate action may be undertaken.

## Introduction<sup>5</sup>

- 2.1 As a Church we affirm that care for Creation, a just sharing of the world's resources, and a concern for the environment are fundamental Gospel commitments.
- 2.2 We believe that God created and continues to create the whole universe, sustains and nurtures Creation, and wills to redeem the whole of Creation from its bondage to decay (Romans 8.21). We believe that the reconciliation of all things to God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus cannot be separated from God's act of creation: that all things have been created through Christ and for Christ –the Word of God incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth – and that, through Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through the blood of his cross (Col 1.16-20). We believe that creative and redemptive work also belongs to the work of the Spirit, who swept over the face of the waters in the beginning and who inspires a groaning Creation as it awaits redemption. We acknowledge God the Trinity to be the transcendent and immanent source, sustenance and salvation of all creation.
- 2.3 We believe that God entrusts Creation to our care, calling us to be stewards of it; calls us to be partners in God's ongoing creative, renewing and redeeming activity; commands us to act justly and in righteousness not only towards our fellow human beings but to all Creation; and requires us to care for Creation so that future generations, whom God also loves, can enjoy it and benefit from it.
- 2.4 We affirm that Christian mission includes caring for God's earth and all Creation. It includes acknowledging humankind's responsibility, sharing in putting right the relationships within God's Creation that have gone wrong, and working within the church and with partners outside the church to grow towards justice and good stewardship as envisaged in the biblical vision of the world as it is meant to be.
- 2.5 We know that human activity has contributed to the degradation of the earth and that this is not the will of God. We believe that this degradation limits the attainment of the fullness of life that God wills for all Creation, and is a sin for which we should seek forgiveness. It also imposes most heavily upon the peoples of the developing countries of the world and is part of the intrinsic injustice to which we bear witness. As the Lambeth Declaration 2015 on Climate Change, to which the

<sup>5</sup> This section draws upon the Baptist Union of Great Britain statement 'A Vision for the Environment' [www.christian-ecology.org.uk/bap-env.htm](http://www.christian-ecology.org.uk/bap-env.htm); and the Methodist, Baptist and URC report *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2009) p.7.

## Mission

United Reformed Church is a signatory, affirms, ‘The demands of justice as well as of creation require the nations of the world urgently to limit the global rise in average temperatures to a maximum of 2°C... We have a responsibility to act now, for ourselves, our neighbours and for future generations.’<sup>6</sup>

## Vision2020

3.1 The previous Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church, adopted by General Assembly in 2004, was founded upon *The Five Marks of Mission*, the fifth of which committed the Church ‘to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation; to sustain and renew the life of the earth’. This policy is informed by the vision2020 strategic framework for mission adopted by General Assembly in 2010,<sup>7</sup> which declares that the United Reformed Church ‘will be a church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth’ (statement 10: The Integrity of Creation). Vision2020 also states that ‘our churches, reflecting faith in God the creator and sustainer of life in all its fullness, must discover the radical voice of care for the earth that is supported by the way we live.’

3.2 This policy echoes vision2020’s affirmation that ‘The changing climate and its consequences for all life on planet earth cannot be over emphasised as the most significant underlying issue of our time’ – and that it is vital that the Church ‘recognises the reality and fear present in environmental debates and lives hopefully in the present climate.’

## Hope in God’s future

4.1 We affirm the view expressed in the 2009 report ‘Hope in God’s Future’ that ‘it is now intellectually and morally irresponsible to fail to acknowledge and address the urgent need for radical cuts in greenhouse gas emissions in order to prevent intolerable damage to human populations and mass extinctions of many plant and animal species.’<sup>8</sup>

4.2 We pledge to respond to the report’s call for repentance in the face of our complicity in the sinful structures that are causing wanton damage to the earth, to its creatures and to many poor communities. We also commit to intercede for those threatened by climate change, and to adopt practices and lifestyles consistent with levels of carbon emissions the earth can sustain.<sup>9</sup> Specifically, and in line with the report’s recommendations, we shall strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the minimum 80% reduction by 2050 relative to 1990 levels, the target set by the Westminster government. We shall also strive to reach an interim goal of reducing our carbon emissions by 42% in 2020 relative to 1990, the target set by the Scottish Parliament.

## Shrinking our carbon footprint

5.1 Reflecting the commitments contained in the vision2020 statement, in the ‘Hope in God’s Future’ report, and in a resolution on climate change passed by General Assembly in 2007, the United Reformed Church reaffirms its pledge to shrink its carbon footprint (the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Church’s activities) and to strive to protect and restore the environment.

5.2 The Church recognises that this pledge calls for both *conversion* on the part of its individual members and *transformation* of its internal structures. The remainder of this policy, which incorporates the ‘suggested indicators’ contained in statement

6 <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/06/archbishop-of-canterbury-join-faith-leaders-in-call-for-urgent-action-to-tackle-climate-change.aspx>

7 [www.urc.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/mission/documents/vision2020genassembly\\_report.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/mission/documents/vision2020genassembly_report.pdf)

8 *Hope in God’s Future*, p.4.

9 the A Rocha website contains a comprehensive list of suggested practices <http://arocha.org.uk/our-activities/living-lightly-take-action>.

10 of vision2020, follows through on this ‘conversion’ and ‘transformation’. We will endeavour to work ecumenically whenever possible and appropriate as we act upon this policy.

5.3 Accordingly, our churches will be encouraged to:

- a) carry out a systematic environmental audit of their buildings and follow the strategies outlined below for reducing their carbon footprint; in this the resource ‘Greening Church Buildings’ produced by Eco Congregation Scotland will be helpful;<sup>10</sup>
- b) raise awareness, through prayer, preaching, Bible study, teaching and discussion, of the need for confession and repentance in relation to the causes of climate change, and of our calling, as God’s redeemed people, to live joyfully, simply and responsibly with respect to God’s Creation – caring for and treasuring that Creation, and celebrating all that is achieved in fulfilling that calling;
- c) seek to achieve ‘Eco-Church’ status [www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk) in the case of churches in England and Wales, or ‘Eco-Congregation’ status in the case of churches in Scotland [www.ecocongregationscotland.org](http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org);
- d) celebrate ‘Time for Creation’ as encouraged by the World Council of Churches.<sup>11</sup> Creation Time runs from 1 September until 4 October each year;
- e) ensure that energy is used efficiently and that their buildings are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- f) help members of their congregation to make adjustments in the carbon emissions associated with their lifestyles by supporting them in a personal audit and in finding appropriate strategies;
- g) involve their children and young people in activities focusing on care for the environment;
- h) engage their local political representatives, urging them to support policies that take effective steps towards realising the commitment to a minimum 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 and minimum 42% by 2020;
- i) support campaigns and popular action around climate change issues as appropriate;
- j) ensure that church-owned land is used in ways that encourage an enjoyment of nature and both enhance and protect the environment;
- k) produce a piece of community artwork celebrating the Creator God.

5.4 Our synods will seek to:

- a) encourage their churches to gain ‘Eco-Church’ status (in the case of churches in England and Wales) or ‘Eco-Congregation’ status (in the case of churches in Scotland); in so doing they will encourage churches to see the positive benefits in terms of the financial savings that environmentally-friendly practices can bring;
- b) develop and implement plans to become ‘Eco-synods’;
- c) ensure that their buildings, including manses, are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- d) encourage their churches to work in collaboration with, or initiate, local transition or sustainability groups;
- e) encourage their churches to receive training and support on issues of climate justice and environmental care;
- f) appoint one or more ‘Green Apostles’ to monitor progress on carbon reduction in their synod (if preferred this role could be differently named, for example ‘Sustainability Ambassador’);
- g) draw up an environmental charter along the lines of that adopted by the North Western Synod in 2015.

10 <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-Church-Buildings.pdf>.

11 <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation>.

## Mission

5.5 Assembly encourages the Church:

- a) to lower incrementally its carbon footprint by a significant amount each year by carbon budgeting, that is by setting specific year-on-year reduction targets in the percentage of emissions over a defined period;
- b) to campaign at local and national level for policies that strengthen, and take steps towards realising, the Westminster government's commitment to a minimum 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 and the interim goal of reducing carbon emissions by 42% as set by the Scottish Parliament;
- c) to ensure that its buildings are environment friendly through the use of energy-saving technologies and by identifying and using renewable sources of energy as appropriate;
- d) to reduce, where practicable, car and air travel for meetings through the use of video conferencing. With due regard for distances and costs involved, individual members are encouraged to use transport with minimum impact – to cycle, use buses and trains, and car-share and use energy-efficient vehicles where possible. Members are also encouraged to adopt the practice of carbon off-setting with respect to essential travel by making payments supporting sustainable projects (e.g. through Climate Stewards);<sup>12</sup>
- e) to promote an environmental theology.

5.6 Assembly also encourages URC Youth to develop a strategy responding to the challenge of climate change.

## Resources

6.1 We recognise and commend:

- Eco-Church, which provides an environmental toolkit and support network for local churches in England and Wales: [www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk](http://www.ecochurch.arocha.org.uk). In Scotland, this scheme is referred to as Eco-Congregation: <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org>.
- Operation Noah: <http://operationnoah.org>;
- Green Christian (formerly Christian Ecology Link): <http://www.greencchristian.org.uk>;
- A Rocha: <http://arocha.org.uk>;
- Climate Stewards: [www.climatestewards.org](http://www.climatestewards.org);
- 'Time for Creation' (World Council of Churches): <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change/time-for-creation>.
- *Greening Church Buildings* (Eco-Congregation Scotland): <http://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Greening-Church-Buildings.pdf>;
- *Hope in God's Future: Christian Discipleship in the Context of Climate Change* – report of a joint working group on climate change and theology convened by the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing, 2009);
- *Laudato si'*, the encyclical of Pope Francis (2015);
- Nick Spencer & Robert White, *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living* (London: SPCK, 2007);
- the promotion of links with transition towns, etc: [www.greencchristian.org.uk/churches-in-transition](http://www.greencchristian.org.uk/churches-in-transition).

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12 <http://www.climatestewards.org>.

# Mission committee: Support for a new international Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty

## Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Grace Pengelly: <a href="mailto:grace.pengelly@urc.org.uk">grace.pengelly@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision whether or not to support the call for a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>33. General Assembly, recalling the resolution on Trident adopted by Mission Council in 2006:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>a) Welcomes the current international focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons;</b></li> <li><b>b) Remains opposed to the costly replacement of Trident and calls for the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty to bring about the elimination of all nuclear weapons;</b></li> <li><b>c) Mandates the mission committee to make this call widely known, working where possible with partner churches and organisations to achieve it;</b></li> <li><b>d) Urges church members to engage with their Member of Parliament on this issue.</b></li> </ul>

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Support for a new international Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. Churches in the UK are being asked to support the call for a new international Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty. The aim of the campaign is to see introduced, as quickly as possible, a new international treaty to ban the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law
<b>Main points</b>	The paper sets out the context and background to the call for a new treaty, together with the reasons why the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) takes a different view and the risks and opportunities that may result for the churches as a consequence of their backing the call

<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	In 2006 a joint working group of the United Reformed Church and Methodist Church produced a report 'Peacemaking: A Christian Vocation'. This was adopted by Assembly in 2006 and commended 'for study by Synods and local congregations, and as a helpful guide for church leaders who may be called upon for comment on the ethical considerations relating to war and peace.' Other relevant Assembly resolutions were passed in 1983, 1990, 1994, 1995 and 2003. Relevant Mission Council resolutions were passed in October 2006 and May 2015
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Council Steve Hucklesby, Policy Officer, The Methodist Church

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Our churches' support would not require additional staff time beyond that already envisaged in this area of the work plan. Media and communications costs associated with this campaign are costs that we would incur anyway in our communication on nuclear weapons
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	There are time costs (principally those of the JPIT coordinator) in drawing up a FAQ or similar resource. JPIT coordination of this work (additional to other work on nuclear weapons) would require in total no more than three to four days staff time over the course of the next year.

# Support for a new international Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty

1. For many years the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has led a global civil society call for a new international treaty to ban nuclear weapons. In the past two years the call for a nuclear weapons ban treaty has suddenly gathered pace and is attracting growing support among governments. This has been largely inspired by the recent international focus on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons. The consequences could be beyond the capacity of any humanitarian response to address adequately. This provides further justification for the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons to be considered illegitimate under international humanitarian law.
2. The campaign seeks to introduce as quickly as possible a new international treaty to ban the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law (accepting that this will be introduced without the support of the majority of nuclear weapons states).
3. Its broader aims are to:
  - Ultimately strengthen global disarmament efforts by locating them around a principled position in international law.
  - Further stigmatise nuclear weapons, increasing the political cost of continuing to invest in their development and maintenance.
  - Strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in both its disarmament and non-proliferation pillars.
  - Make private sector investment in nuclear weapons more difficult to sustain.
4. Introducing a ban treaty now is controversial as it is unlikely to achieve the consent of nuclear weapons states. Supporters propose that this principled step be taken now, as a ban treaty would be compatible with a wider negotiation of other measures running in parallel (such as the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and a nuclear weapons convention).
5. This resolution comes within the context of a continuing commitment on the part of the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, and the Baptist Union of Great Britain to offer a strong public witness to the alternatives to investment in nuclear weapons. The JPIT Churches are committed to working for a world free of nuclear weapons and have made strong statements in this respect. It could be argued that in principle the URC already supports a ban, as once you have achieved near zero nuclear weapons, a ban treaty becomes the next obvious step. The call for a nuclear weapons ban treaty has so far been made explicit by statements from the Methodists and the Church of Scotland. Our four churches have been prominent in support for other treaties to ban indiscriminate weapons including, most recently, the Land Mine Convention and Convention on Cluster Munitions.
6. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's objections to a ban treaty are: (a) that it would distract attention from the NPT, which it believes should be the cornerstone of disarmament efforts; and (b) that such a treaty is not verifiable at this point in time. However, both of these two arguments can be countered and we must look more deeply to understand the antipathy to this proposal.
7. There are at least three distinct potential paths to achieving complete disarmament<sup>13</sup>. The FCO advocate the 'step-by-step approach' in which efforts are focused on creating the necessary conditions that might make disarmament achievable (there is no consensus on what would constitute achievability). This approach by its

<sup>13</sup> See for example, the New Agenda Coalition report to the NPT PrepComm 2014

## Mission

nature refuses to identify any step other than the next step, and strongly resists any and all multilateral discussions over milestones or timescales. This has led to the Marshall Islands arguing in the International Court of Justice that the nuclear weapons powers show little sign of negotiating in good faith on nuclear disarmament.

8. The step-by-step approach in the form advocated by the UK government would appear to sit at odds with the UK's obligations under the NPT. The UK has chosen not to attend the Open-Ended Working Group on Multilateral Disarmament mandated by the 2015 UN General Assembly. However, this unwillingness to talk about multilateral disarmament effectively makes the UK's reliance on nuclear deterrence a security posture, and tends to prevent the influence of the NPT from widening. Paradoxically this weakens the very treaty that the UK wants to be the cornerstone of inter-governmental non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

9. That 'realist' perspective on international relations and disarmament limits the role that might be played by civil society in bringing about change. It expects developments in international law to be driven by practice, and in particular by the practice of those states that have significant influence, including the five permanent members of the Security Council. Consequently calls from the UN General Assembly for changes in international law or negotiations on initiatives that oblige the UK, US, Russia, China and France on disarmament are considered by the five recognised nuclear weapons states as unhelpful and unlikely to be productive.

10. The competing perspective is that international law should have wide ownership. The Conference on the Humanitarian Impacts of Nuclear Weapons has demonstrated that even a limited nuclear exchange would probably have global impacts. It has been argued that the framework for international law on nuclear weapons should be constructed not by those that possess nuclear weapons but by those most likely to be impacted by their use (whether by accident or design). Even without the backing of nuclear weapons states, such a treaty could become a part of the body of international law quite quickly. A majority of states would sign very early and, following ratifications by state parties, the treaty would enter into force. There is a compelling legal case for proceeding in this direction as the lack of such a treaty is an anomaly in international law, given the precedents in international humanitarian law and the conventions that exist on chemical and biological weapons.

11. Christopher Weeramantry, former Vice President of the International Court of Justice, has said:

*Law after all is based on the moral sense of the community and the moral sense of the community draws deeply from the reservoirs of morality that are present in religion. All legal systems at their formative stages of development draw heavily upon religious principles, not in the sense of the dogma, or shall we say the ritual, or the high theology of religion, but upon the basic principles of morality which were contained in that body of religious teaching.*

Religions are united in their view on the morality of the use of weapons of mass destruction. Possibly the most valuable contribution that the Church can offer into this contentious global debate is a clear moral stance. Our voice in this regard would be respected.

12. There are risks associated with the introduction of a nuclear weapons ban treaty, not least that it would raise the temperature at NPT review conferences. It is possible that a nuclear weapons ban treaty could further increase frustrations with the lack of progress on the part of nuclear weapons states. If some NPT member states chose to withdraw from a NPT review conference it would weaken confidence in the NPT process and could in turn increase the risk of nuclear proliferation.

13. But there are also mitigating factors to consider. Firstly, the friction over a nuclear weapons ban treaty is not the most likely cause for states to withdraw from a review conference. For example, it was disagreement over the process for talks

around a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone that caused the 2015 NPT Review Conference to fail to achieve consensus. Secondly, a nuclear weapons ban treaty could be a complement and reinforcement to the NPT and the review process; it need not be seen as an alternative forum. Thirdly, if confidence were lost in the NPT it is possible that a nuclear weapons ban treaty, once it entered into force, could act as a modest restraining influence on states considering proliferation in nuclear technology or weapons, even if they were not signatories.

14. There are also specific risks for our churches, who may attract criticism and will need to be ready to defend their stance. A key concern around calls to halt the production of nuclear weapons relates to employment consequences for those in the UK who work in the nuclear weapons industry. There is understandable uncertainty and insecurity around calls to halt production in places such as Barrow-in-Furness, Derby and Aldermaston near Reading. In these places the research, development, production, maintenance and decommissioning of nuclear weapons provide many jobs. However, there are a number of ways in which the skills and expertise currently utilised by nuclear weapons production facilities could be safeguarded and diversified, most notably through a carefully managed transition to alternative employment within warhead decommissioning, submarine dismantling, renewable energy and other sectors. This would not necessarily be a straightforward process. It would require significant planning and the support of government. But it would not be impossible.

15. One way to make the churches' case public would be the production of a briefing or set of FAQs on the nuclear weapons ban treaty. This need only be a brief summary as further reference can be made to excellent resources elsewhere such as this from Article 36: [www.article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Banning-without.pdf](http://www.article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Banning-without.pdf).

16. JPIT will continue in dialogue with all partners and will take every opportunity for collaboration on other aspects of nuclear weapons non-proliferation and disarmament.

17. There are also opportunities arising from the campaign, including:

- we enable the Church in the UK to act early in adding an ethical perspective on an issue that will gain an increasingly high profile in the coming years;
- support for the World Council of Churches: the WCC have a resolution in support of the call for a nuclear weapons ban treaty but few member churches have independently endorsed this call;
- partner churches: we can encourage partner churches in other parts of the world to join in this call;
- building ecumenical relationships. There is interest from a range of ecumenical partners on work in this area. For example, the Church in Wales, who are not JPIT partners, would be interested in working with us on this issue;
- encouragement of our members. This campaign provides a further means for members to engage with MPs, AMs, MSPs and other elected representatives. There are some MPs who may engage on this topic whereas, due to party positions, they might not on Trident;
- this is an area in which solidarity across faith groups can be demonstrated, thereby visibly building interfaith cooperation.

18. This resolution supports our Churches' ethical investment stance on nuclear weapons, which is for zero tolerance (this is the C of E position and thereby at least by default the URC position for investments made via Church, Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA)). However, a zero tolerance policy is more difficult to achieve than might be imagined.

19. Impact would be measured by public recognition of the UK Churches' role (beyond our four JPIT partners) in bringing about a political demand in the UK for a nuclear weapons ban treaty. This presupposes that we have achieved some public media attention through our support for this call.

# Mission committee: Resolution on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula

## Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar: <a href="mailto:michael.jagessar@urc.org.uk">michael.jagessar@urc.org.uk</a>
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p><b>34.a) The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church welcomes the statement produced by the Ecumenical Forum on Peace in North East Asia meeting in Seoul on 12 September 2015.</b></p> <p><b>b) The General Assembly faithfully joins its ecumenical partners, especially the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK),</b></p> <p><b>i) in affirming the 'Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula' that was adopted by the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches;</b></p> <p><b>ii) in supporting the communiqué that was issued by the WCC International Consultation on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula at the Ecumenical Institute in 2014.</b></p> <p><b>c) The General Assembly dedicates itself to accompany its Korean partners, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) as they seek the reconciliation and restoration of families and communities long divided by conflict and hostility, so that social, spiritual and psychological healing can occur between the people of Korea.</b></p> <p><b>d) The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church continues to support ecumenical engagements towards peace and reconciliation of the Korean Peninsula. These actions include promoting the campaign to finally replace the Armistice Agreement of 1953 with a Peace Treaty, joining with Christians around the globe in recognising and providing worship resources and actively raising these initiatives with ecumenical partners in the UK.</b></p>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Resolution on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula
<b>Main points</b>	The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) jointly held the 100th General Assemblies of their churches in September 2015. These Churches, and their ecumenical and international guests, proclaimed this time to be a kairos moment, to renew the call for reunification of the Korean peninsula as a vital step towards a lasting peace with justice in North East Asia. They call upon their ecumenical and international partners to support them with prayer, fellowship and advocacy for their cause. This resolution is brought by the mission committee in response to this call
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Revd David Grosch-Miller

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Strengthening of relations with partner Churches in Korea.

# Resolution on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula

1. The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) and the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) jointly held the 100th general assemblies of their churches in Seoul, in September 2015. This historic occasion incorporated a gathering of partners from the Indo-Korean Council Foundation and the International Symposium for Peace in North East Asia.
2. As a partner Church of both the PCK and PROK, the United Reformed Church was represented by one of the Moderators of General Assembly, the Revd David Grosch-Miller. It was at this General Assembly of the PCK that our memorandum of understanding with the PCK was signed (the text of which is in Mission Council's report to Assembly) and our Moderator was asked to address the general assembly of the PCK.
3. Meeting in September 2015, these Churches, and their ecumenical and international guests, proclaimed this time, the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of East Asian countries following the end of the second World War, to be a 'kairos' moment, a moment of God's reconciling opportunity.
4. Immediately following liberation 70 years ago, the post-war global 'cold war' divided the Korean Peninsula, leading to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. Despite the end of cold war global hostilities, a final peace agreement has never been reached to bring closure to the Korean War. The division of the Korean Peninsula remains: thousands of families remain separated, hostility and enmity are still a present reality and aggressive military skirmishes often overtake the broader tensions and destabilise peace in the region.
5. People in North East Asia long for peace with justice. Korean reunification between North and South is an essential step in this process. (Peaceful reunification is recognised as a vital contributor to the stability of the region and the world.) This longing for peaceful reunification is supported by the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea and the Presbyterian Church in Korea who recognise this as both a Gospel and an ecumenical imperative.
6. Inspired by Jesus, who confronted and challenged oppressive powers, this ecumenical gathering of Christians called for commitment and support so that through efforts for reunification and peace, the mission of Jesus that 'all might have life and have it abundantly' might be realised among the Korean people.
7. They also call upon their ecumenical and international partner Churches to support them prayerfully and with fellowship and advocacy for their cause, in the outworking of their commitments and their hope.
8. Receiving the call for prayerful support and accompaniment from the Moderator who had represented the United Reformed Church at this gathering, the Mission Committee, meeting in February 2016, proposed the resolution that is now before Assembly.

# Nominations committee:

## Report to General Assembly

### 2016

#### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Carol Rogers: <a href="mailto:carannrog@aol.com">carannrog@aol.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<p><b>35. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 202-214 of the <i>Book of Reports</i>, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.</b></p> <p><b>36.a) General Assembly appoints Mr Ian Hardie as Deputy Treasurer of the Church with immediate effect until 30 June 2017.</b></p> <p><b>b) General Assembly appoints the Revd John Piper as Deputy Treasurer of the Church from 1 July 2017 for four years.</b></p>

#### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To appoint members of various committees
<b>Main points</b>	As above
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	N/a
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Wide consultation with synods, local churches, and the committees and groups where appointments are needed

#### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Nominations committee report

This committee nominates to Assembly the names of people to serve as convenors and secretaries of all Assembly committees, and as members of those committees. It also suggests names of United Reformed Church representatives on other bodies. It recommends the people to make up appointment groups for moderators of synods and Assembly appointed staff.

**Convenor:** Irene Wren

**Secretary:** Carol Rogers

**Synod representatives:**

1 Melanie Campbell	6 Margaret Marshall	11 Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor
2 Martin Smith	7 Paul Whittle	12 Shelagh Pollard
3 Robert Shallcross	8 George Faris	13 Moira Donaldson
4 Chris Reed	9 Sue Brown	
5 Helen Lidgett	10 Simon Fairnington	

The General Secretary and a representative from the Assembly Moderators' group are also members of the nominations committee.

## Current work

1.1 The main activity of the committee is routine, but in its own way demanding. The committee depends on the gifts and the goodwill of members of the Church to maintain the work of all Assembly committees and working groups; but the nomination committee have the responsibility of ensuring that invitations are issued that may result in balanced committees where every member contributes to the work of the whole.

1.2 Synod representative members encourage the churches and committees of their own synods to respond to the annual letter (sent out in early summer) which lists forthcoming vacancies, and asks for suggested nominees. Other committees are welcome to make suggestions where appropriate, recognising that often they have the clearest understanding of their own needs. To keep a healthy balance between continuity and 'new blood', and between established expertise and untested enthusiasm, is not always easy; and there is also the more obvious balance to be achieved between lay and ordained, and male and female, but this can be lost through the refusal of first choice nominees. However, the committee remains deeply grateful for the number of names that are received, and for the extent to which members of local churches still feel able to accept invitations and contribute in this way to the life of the Church.

1.3 As well as nominating committee members there is also the responsibility for the membership of General Assembly panels, and for ensuring that United Reformed Church representation on outside bodies is maintained. The last section of this report indicates the scope of the task: and even where the responsibility for some of these appointments lies with others, the committee is keen to maintain an up-to-date database of all who serve in this way, in order that the load may be seen to be fairly shared.

## Monitoring

2.1. To help in maintaining balance in all the Church's committees and working groups the responses of all those who receive invitations continue to be monitored and this information is shared with the equalities committee. Important as this monitoring process is, there is a warning to be heeded against reading too much into trends detected in so small a sample.

2.2 In fact most of these observations closely follow those made in the 2014 report: no new trends are apparent.

Across those committees whose members are appointed through the involvement of nominations committee, at September 2015 membership was 56% male ordained and 44% female ordained and 47% lay male and 53% lay female.

2.3 We have again been grateful to the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries for helping to identify a number of BME (black and minority ethnic) members, four of whom have accepted invitations.

2.4 From those who accepted invitations and indicated their age bracket it is clear that there is a need for concern about the age profile of those who are invited. It appears that there are many more who are over 55 years, reflecting the our lack of success in even identifying younger people who might be approached.

2.5 All this information is dependent on invitees completing a monitoring form. In order that the figures given are as accurate as possible the secretary is grateful that the majority do, but a invariably a number fail to – often it seems because a thoughtful letter of refusal appears kinder than an impersonal form and does not include the relevant information.

## Committee membership

3. Each synod is represented on the committee, some by synod clerks and others by individuals with a good knowledge of their own people. The committee benefits from a gradual change in membership.

## Deputy Treasurer

4. The committee brought to Mission Council last November the name of Mr Ian Hardie, to serve as the next Treasurer of the Church from 1 July 2017. Should Assembly accept Mission Council's commendation of Mr Hardie for this role, the nominations committee will move Resolution 36, which will allow Ian Hardie to work closely with John Ellis in the next year, and will then provide him with able cover and support in his own work as Treasurer.

## Thanks to all who serve

5. The Church continues to receive richly from its many willing members who are part of its committee structure, or who serve on panels and working groups, or represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows will surely include a real sense of gratitude for all who serve in this way.

## 6. Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. The moderators, the moderators elect, the immediate past moderators and the general secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee.
2. Symbols have been used as follows:
  - \*\* denotes those whom General Assembly is invited to appoint for the first time;
  - † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service;
3. The number in round brackets following the name indicates the member's synod: (1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.
4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category this is indicated in round brackets following the name.

## Nominations

5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes exceptionally be renewable. Committee convenors serve an additional preliminary year as convenor elect. In sections 1-4 of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. The date in square brackets following the name indicates the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000 some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. In years when General Assembly meets, new committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of Assembly. In years when General Assembly does not meet, they normally begin on 1 July.

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### 1. Mission Council

Mission Council acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the Synod Moderators and three representatives from each synod, one of whom is usually, but not necessarily, the Synod Clerk, together with the convenors of Assembly committees, the Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three members for URC Youth, including the URC Youth Moderator, together with staff secretaries, Moderators' chaplains and others as appropriate

#### 1.1 Mission Council advisory group

Convenor: The Moderators of General Assembly

Secretary: The General Secretary

Elected by Mission Council: The Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor [2019],  
The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2020], Mrs Helen Lidgett [2020], and one vacancy

Moderators-elect and immediate past Moderators of General Assembly

[*ex officio*: The Treasurer]

#### 1.2 Human Resources advisory group

Convenor: Mr Keith Webster [2017]

Secretary: The Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources)

Mr Mike Gould [2017]

Mr Peter Pay [2017]

Mr Alistair Forsyth [2017]

The Revd Wendy White [2017]

Mrs Bridget Fosten [2019]

General Secretary

#### 1.3 Law and Polity advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Prof David Thompson [2018]

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2020]

Ms Morag McLintock [2020]

Ms Denise Fitzpatrick [2017]

Mr George Faris [2020] (Synod Clerk) Mrs Kath Fowler (PLATO)

[*ex officio*: Clerk to General Assembly, General Secretary, legal adviser]

#### 1.4 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: Mr Peter West [2019]

Secretary: The Revd James Mather

The Revd Ray Angelsea (1)

Mr Michael Williams (2)

Ms Alison Lee (3)

The Revd David Figures (4)

Mrs Judith Booth (5)

Mrs Rachel Wakeman (6)

Mr Peter West (7)

Mr Roger James (8)

Mr Gerry Prosser (9)

Mr Christopher Buckwell (10)

Mr Guy Morfett (11)

Mrs Sue Cole (12)



## Nominations

### Retiring 2019

Mrs Sue Brown (9)  
 The Revd Paul Bedford (9)  
 The Revd Raymond Singh (11)

The Revd Nick Adlem (9)  
 The Revd Sohail Ejaz (7)  
 The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)

### Retiring 2020

Mrs Sheana Dudley (4)  
 Mrs Gwen Jennings (8)  
 The Revd Samuel Silungwe (5)

Mr Clive Curtis (12)  
 The Revd Dick Gray (8)  
 The Revd Bill Young (6)

### Retiring 2021

The Revd David Sebley (7)  
 Mrs Kate Yates (10)

Mrs Val Morrison (4)

### 2.3 MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline) advisory group

Convenor: The Revd John Durrell [2020]

Secretary: Dr Jim Merrilees [2018]

Convenor of the Assembly commission: Miss Judith Haughton

Secretary of the Assembly commission: Mrs Gwen Jennings

Convenor of the review commission of the incapacity procedure: Mr Donald Swift

Secretary of the review commission of the incapacity procedure: The Revd Ray Adams

Consultant for ministers and CRCWs: The Revd Ken Chippindale

Consultant for mandated groups: The Revd Alison Davis

Training Coordinator: Mr Keith Webster Co-opted: Mr Hartley Oldham

General Secretary, Clerk to Assembly, Secretary for Ministries, legal adviser

### 2.4 Disciplinary Process – commission panel

*(Members serve for five years as regular training is required. They may be invited to continue serving beyond this as experience is especially valuable on this panel)*

Convenor: Ms Judith Haughton BEM

Deputy convenor: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington

Secretary: Mrs Gwen Jennings [2017]

Members:

#### Retiring 2017

The Revd Colin Offor (1)  
 The Revd Carolyn Smyth (13)  
 Mr Douglas Hay (13)  
 The Revd Craig Muir (6)  
 Mr David Rice (13)

The Revd Jane Campbell (5)  
 Mr Keith Webster (10)  
 The Revd Ian Kirby (8)  
 Mr Alastair Forsyth (4)  
 The Revd John Bremner (13)

#### Retiring 2018

The Revd Pauline Calderwood (4)  
 Mr Peter Campbell-Smith (11)  
 Mrs Wendy Dunnett (9)

The Revd Bill Bowman (11)  
 Mr Roger Tucker (1)

#### Retiring 2019

The Revd Debbie Brown (3)  
 Mrs Mary Cummings (6)  
 The Revd Peter Flint (11)  
 Mrs Barbara Goom (8)  
 The Revd Deborah McVey (7)  
 The Revd Sarah Moore (2)  
 The Revd Wendy Swan (9)

Mrs Sue Bush (1)  
 Mr Peter Etwell (1)  
 Mr Andrew Harvey (8)  
 The Revd Graham Maskery (2)  
 The Revd Sue McCoan (6)  
 Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

#### Retiring 2020

The Revd Martha McInnes (6)  
 The Revd Hilary Collinson (1)  
 Mr Patrick Smyth (13)

The Revd Rachel Poolman (1)  
 The Revd Peter Stevenson (10)  
 Mr Andy Braunston (2)

#### Retiring 2021

The Revd Kirsty Thorpe (2)  
 Mrs Diane Moverley (12)  
 Mr David Jones (5)

The Revd David M Miller (6)  
 Mrs Janet Virr (4)  
 Mr Ian Corless (9)

## 2.5 Standing panel for the incapacity procedure

*(This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience)*

Secretary: The Revd Ray Adams [2017]

The Revd Ruth Whitehead (Synod Moderator) [2018]

The Revd John Marsh (Past Moderator of General Assembly) [2017]

Mr David Nash (legal experience) [2018]

Dr Ewen Harley (GP) [2018]

Commission officer for the incapacity procedure: Dr David Westwood [2018]

## 2.6 Pastoral reference and welfare committee

Convenor: Mrs Wilma Frew [2018]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

The Revd Clare Downing (Synod Moderator) [2018]

Mr Douglas Hay (13) [2017] Mrs Pam Sharp (9) [2019]

The Revd Camilla Veitch (6) [2020]

[*ex officio*: The Treasurer; General Secretary]

## 3. Mission department

### 3.1 Mission committee

Convenor: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2016]

Convenor-elect: The Revd Bernie Collins [2020]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

The Revd Ron Forster (1) [2018]

The Revd Stuart Nixon (2) [2018]

vacant (3)

Mr John Cornell (4) [2019]

The Revd Leslie Moseley (5) [2019]

Mr John Davey (6) [2018]

The Revd David Sebley (7) [2019]\*\*

The Revd Stephen Newell (8) [2018]

Mrs Sheila Thatcher (9) [2018]

Ms Vivian Andrews (10) [2019]

Mr Martin Hayward (11) [2019]

vacant (12)\*\*

Mr John Collins (13) [2019]

#### 3.1.1 International exchange reference group

Convenor: Mrs Judith North (5) [2020]

Members: The Revd Paul Whittle (Synod Moderator)

Ms Angela Bogg [2019]

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

#### 3.1.2 Commitment for Life reference group

Convenor: The Revd Alan McGougan [2020]

At least two Commitment for Life Advocates

Representative from Mission Team

Representative from Mission Committee

Representative from Christian Aid

Representative of Global Justice Now

Mrs Linda Mead (Programme Coordinator, Commitment for Life)

#### 3.1.3 Methodist/URC Interfaith reference group

*(Members normally serve for six years in parallel with Methodist terms)*

Co-Convenor: The Revd Clare Downing [2019]

Mr John Mellor (4) [2020]

The Revd Ann Jack (10) [2021]

The Revd Bob Day (2) [2021]

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

#### 3.1.4 Joint Public Issues Team strategy and policy group

Ms Marie Trubic (spokesperson on Public Issues for the United Reformed Church)

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

(Other members are appointed by the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland)

#### 3.1.5 Rural Strategy group (United Reformed Church/Methodist)

Co-Chair: The Revd Ruth Whitehead; the Revd Ron Forster

## Nominations

### 4. Discipleship department

#### 4.1 Ministries committee

Convenor: vacant

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

The Revd Dr James Coleman (4) [2017]

Mrs Jane Woods-Scawen (6) [2017]

The Revd Dr Martin Camroux (7) [2017]

Mr Stuart Dew (9) [2018]

The Revd Sally Thomas (12) [2018]

The Revd Allison Claxton (3) [2020]

Mr Andrew Buxton (Leadership in Worship Advocate) [2019]

The Revd Peter Meek (Synod Moderator) [2018]

Convenor, assessment board

##### 4.1.1 Ministries – accreditation subcommittee

Convenor: The Revd Fran Ruthven [2017]

Convenor-elect: The Revd Russell Furley-Smith [2016-2017] as convenor [2017-2021]

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

The Revd Naison Hove (10) [2017]

The Revd Mark Robinson (4) [2018]

Mr Keith Reading (3) [2020]\*\*

The Revd Andrew Prasad (Synod Moderator) [2020]

1 vacancy

##### 4.1.2 Ministries – CRCW programme subcommittee

Convenor: Mr Simon Loveitt [2020]

Secretary: CRCW Development Worker

Mr John Grundy (3) [2017]

Mrs Rosie Buxton (12) [2018]

Mr Derek Estill (2) [2019]

Mr David Williams (10) [2019]

The Revd Ruth Maxey (5) [2020]\*\*

1 vacancy

The Revd Simon Walkling (Synod Moderator) [2018]

##### 4.1.3 Ministries – maintenance of ministry subcommittee

Convenor: The Revd Pamela Ward [2017]

The Revd Sue Kirkbride (13) [2018] Mr David Black (6) [2018]

Mr Keith Berry (7) [2019] 1 vacancy

##### 4.1.4 Ministries – retired ministers' housing subcommittee

*(Members will normally serve for four years, but appointments may be extended for a further two years)*

Convenor: The Revd Anne Bedford [2020]

Secretary: Secretary of Retired Ministers' Housing Society

Mr Peter West (7) [2019]

Malcolm Lindo (10) [2018]

The Revd Ken Summers (3) [2020]\*\*

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Synod Moderator) [2018]

[*ex-officio*: Treasurer]

*(Properties are managed by a company viz: Retired Ministers' Housing Society Ltd,*

*Details of the members of the board etc may be obtained from the secretary, Mr Andy Bottomley at Church House.)*

##### 4.1.5 Assessment board

(Members usually serve for five years as training is required)

Convenor: Dr Ewan Harley [2019]

##### Retiring 2017

Ms Alex Bediako (10)

Mr Bill Gould (3)

The Revd Peter Henderson (8)

The Revd Shahbaz Javed (10)

##### Retiring 2018

The Revd Kim Plumpton (11)

The Revd Mary Thomas (9)

The Revd Ruth Allen (5)

##### Retiring 2019

The Revd Stuart Radcliffe (2)

The Revd Sohail Ejaz (7)

The Revd Peter Rand (1)

Ms Pat Oliver (9)

**Retiring 2020**

The Revd Lesley Charlton (11)

Mrs Jill Shelton (12)

**Retiring 2021**

Ms Karen Campbell (10)

The Revd Sue McCoan (6)

2 vacancies

**4.2 Education and learning committee**

Convenor: The Revd Prof Neil Messer [2020]

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Mrs Sheila Telfer (4) [2018]

The Revd Ros Lyle (10) [2018]

Mr Robert Pettigrew (3) [2020]

2 vacancies

The Revd Dr Jack Dyce (Resource Centre for learning)

The Revd David Salsbury (Synod Development Officer)

**4.2.1 Windermere management committee**

Convenor: The Revd Mitchell Bunting [2017]

Minute Secretary: The Revd Tony Haws [2020]

Miss Margery Pitcher (2) [2018]

Mr Andrew Guthrie (2) [2018]

Mr Clifford Patten (7) [2019]

Mr Kevin Mantle (5) [2018]

Ms Sandra Wellington (Training and Development Officer)

Mrs Ruth Clarke (representative of Carver Memorial United Reformed Church)

**4.2.2 Education for Ministry Phase 2 and 3 (EM2/3) subcommittee**

Convenor: The Revd Dr Robert Pope

Programme Officer: The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King

The Revd Phil Wall (EM2 Minister)

Ms Marie Trubic (CRCW)

The Revd David Downing (EM3 Minister)

The Revd Anne Sardeson (Training and Development Officer)

The Revd Dr James Coleman (Training and Development Officer)

Secretary for Education and Learning

**4.2.3 Education and learning finance subcommittee**

Chair: Professor Tim Rowland

Minute Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Members:

[*Ex-officio*: The Treasurer]*Staff in attendance*: Chief Finance Officer, Education and Learning Finance Officer**4.3 Children's and youth work committee**

Convenor: The Revd Tim Meachin [2017]

Convenor-elect: The Revd Jenny Mills [2017-2018 and, as convenor, 2018-2022]

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

Mrs Lorraine Downer-Mattis (10) [2017] Mrs Ruth Roddison (4) [2018]

The Revd Heather Cadoux (9) [2018] Mrs Alison Tansom (12) [2018]

Mr Alan Kendall (4) [2018]

Mr Adam Woodhouse (4) [2019]

Mr Sam Brown (11) [2019]

The Revd Jake Tatton (13) [2020] \*\*

1 vacancy

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

**4.3.1 Pilots management subcommittee**

Convenor: Mrs Soo Webster [2016]

Members:

*(Other members of the subcommittee are appointed by the children's and youth work committee.)*

## Nominations

### 5. Administration and Resources department

#### 5.1 . Assembly arrangements committee

Convenor: The Revd James Breslin [2020]

Secretary: Facilities Manager

Assembly Moderators

Moderators-elect

General Secretary

Clerk to General Assembly

Convenor, local arrangements committee

#### 5.2 Communications and editorial committee

Convenor: Mr Peter Knowles [2019]

Secretary: Head of Communications

Mrs Andrea Varnavides (4) [2016]

The Revd Peter Cooper (10) [2017]

The Revd Kevin Snyman (12) [2017]

Mr Andy Jeens (3) [2017]

The Revd Kate Gray (2) [2018]

The Revd Ashley Evans (10) [2018]

Ms Rebecca Gudgeon (2) [2019]

Mrs Heather Carr (1) [2019]

Mr Tim Llewelyn (9) [2019]

#### 5.3 Equalities committee

Convenor: The Revd Helen Mee [2018]

Secretary: The Revd Adrian Bulley [2017]

The Revd Susan Flynn (3) [2017]

Ms Maria Mills (8) [2017]

Mr Clive Curtis (12) [2018]

Mrs Ruth Clarke (2) [2018]

Ms Rosie Martin (9) [2020]

Ms Alex Bediako (10) [2020]

#### 5.4 Finance committee

Convenor: The Treasurer

Mr Ian Simpson (9) [2017]

Secretary: Chief Finance Officer

The Revd David Walton (6) [2018]

The Revd Kate Gartside (3) [2017]

Mr Brian Hosier (10) [2019]

Mr Richard Turnbull (5) [2017]

The Revd Iain McLaren (11) [2019]

Mr Gordon Wanless (1) [2020]

##### 5.4.1 Stewardship subcommittee

Convenor: Mr Keith Berry [2017]

Mr David Greatorex (5) [2020]

Mr Bob Christie (13) [2020]

2 vacancies

#### 5.5 United Reformed Church Trust

*(Members normally serve for six years. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number and appoint a secretary and deputy secretary.)*

Chair: The Revd Richard Gray [2018]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr Andy Bottomley

Members:

*Group 1 (Synods 1, 2, 3, 13)*

Mr Neil Mackenzie (3) [2016]

*Group 2 (Synods 6, 8, 9, 12)*

Mr Peter Pay (9) [2018]

Dr Ian Harrison (8) [2017]

The Revd Richard Gray (8) [2018]

*Group 3 (Synods 4, 5, 7, 10, 11)*

Mr Alastair Forsyth (4) [2018]

The Revd Michael Davies (11) [2018]

Mr Andrew Summers (10) [2018]

Mrs Margaret Thompson (7) [2018]

FURY Appointee: vacant  
 Mission Council nominated members: (to be appointed if necessary)  
 Mr Emmanuel Osae  
 Mrs Val Morrison [2018]  
 [ex officio: Moderators of General Assembly,  
 General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources),  
 Treasurer, Clerk to General Assembly  
 In attendance: Convenor, investment committee]

### 5.5.1 Church House management group

Convenor: Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources)  
 Mr Mike Gould Mr Derek Jones  
 Mr Doug Maxwell Mr Robert Buss  
 [ex officio: General Secretary; Chief Finance Officer]

### 5.5.2 Remuneration subcommittee

Convenor: Mr William McVey  
 Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources)  
 Ms Carmila Legarda (Methodist HR) Mr William McVey (elder)  
 Church House staff representative  
 Treasurer Chief Finance Officer

## 5.6 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

(*Members normally serve for six years. Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members appoint the company secretary, and elect the chair from among their own number.*)

Chair: Mr Richard Nunn  
 Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones  
 Members of URC:  
 Miss Margaret Atkinson [2020] Mr Andrew Perkins [2021]  
 Mrs Bridget Micklem [2022]  
 Members of Fund:  
 The Revd James Breslin [2021] The Revd Janet Tollington [2021]  
 The Revd Paul Bedford [2022] The Revd Derek Wales [2023]  
 [ex officio: Treasurer, convenor, pensions executive  
 convenor, maintenance of ministry subcommittee]  
 In attendance: convenor, investment committee

### 5.7 Pensions executive

Convenor: Dr Chris Evans [2017]  
 Secretary: Pension Fund Manager  
 Members:  
 Mrs Madeleine Brand (9) [2020]\*\* The Revd Steven Manders (13) [2020]  
 [ex officio: Convenor, maintenance of ministry subcommittee; convenor, investment committee; Treasurer]  
 (*The pensions executive reports to the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pensions Trust Board, the maintenance of ministry subcommittee and to the finance Committee.*)

### 5.8 Investment committee

Convenor: Mr David Martin [2018]  
 Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones  
 Members: Mr Andrew Perkins [2017] Mr Brian Hosier [2019]  
 The Revd Dick Gray [2018] The Revd Julian Macro [2020]  
 [ex officio: Treasurer, convenor, Pensions Executive  
 chair of United Reformed Church Trust or another director  
 chair of United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust or another director  
 treasurer, Westminster College]  
 In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

## Nominations

### 6. Representatives to meetings of sister Churches

<b>6.1</b>	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	The Revd Graham Maskery [2016]
<b>6.2</b>	General Synod of Church of England	Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
<b>6.3</b>	Methodist Conference	Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
<b>6.4</b>	Congregational Federation	Moderator, Chaplain, and synod representative
<b>6.5</b>	General Assembly of Church of Scotland [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.6</b>	United Free Church of Scotland [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.7</b>	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.8</b>	Scottish Episcopal Church [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.9</b>	Methodist Church in Scotland [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.10</b>	Baptist Union of Scotland [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.11</b>	Presbyterian Church of Wales [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.12</b>	Union of Welsh Independents [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.13</b>	Covenanted Baptists	synod nomination
<b>6.14</b>	Church in Wales Governing Board [note 7]	synod nomination
<b>6.15</b>	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	The Revd Edward Sanniez

### 7. Representatives on ecumenical church bodies

The following have been nominated as URC representatives at the major gatherings of the Ecumenical Bodies listed.

#### 7.1 Council for World Mission (CWM)

The Revd Peter Ball	The Revd Zaidie Orr
Mr Stephen Ball	Mr John Ellis

##### 7.1.1 CWM European Region Meeting

The Revd Peter Ball	
Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries	

#### 7.2 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Ms Camilla Quartey	The Revd Dr Phil Wall
Programme Officer Global and Intercultural Ministries	

#### 7.3 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations	and one other
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#### 7.4 The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

The Revd Rowena Francis	The Revd Prof David Thompson
Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries	

#### 7.5 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church Leaders' Meeting

General Secretary	
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##### 7.5.1 CTBI Senior Representatives' Forum

General Secretary	Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
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##### 7.5.2 CTBI Environmental Issues Network

The Revd Dr David Pickering	The Revd Mike Shrubsole
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##### 7.5.3 CTBI Stewardship Network

Mrs Faith Paulding	
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##### 7.5.4 CTBI Consultative Group on Ministry amongst Children (CGMC)

Head of Children's and Youth Work	and one other
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## Nominations

**7.18 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association**

Mrs Valerie Jenkins

**8. Representatives on formal bi-lateral and multi-lateral committees****8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Group**

Co-Convenor: The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Synod Moderator) [2020]

The Revd Kay Alberg The Revd Roy Fowler

The Revd Sally Thomas Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

**8.1.1 Methodist/ United Reformed Church Strategic Oversight Group**

General Secretary An Assembly Moderator

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations The Treasurer

**8.2 Church of England/United Reformed Church/ Church of England Bilateral Dialogue**

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith The Revd Elizabeth Welch

The Revd Tim Meadows The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

**8.3 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland) [see note 7]**

Appointed by synod

**8.4 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion** The Revd Dr Julian Templeton**9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc****9.1 Northern College**

The Revd Dr Robert Pope The Revd David Jenkins

Mrs Sheila Davies Mr Steve Wood

The Revd Brian Jolly

In attendance: The Secretary for Education and Learning

**9.1.1 Luther King House Educational Trust**

Secretary for Education and Learning

**9.2 Westminster College: Board of Governors**

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Uden

Clerk: Mr Chris Wright

Honorary College Treasurer:

Members:

Dr Jean Stevenson The Revd Craig Muir

The Revd Nigel Appleton Canon Brian Long MBE

The Revd Dr Rick Mearkle

The Revd Dr Jane Leach (representing Cambridge Theological Federation)

The Revd Prof David Thompson (representing the University of Cambridge)

Dr Andrew Salmon (representing Anglia Ruskin University)

In attendance: The Secretary for Education and Learning (*together with other governors appointed by other bodies*)

**9.2.1 Cheshunt Foundation**

Mr Guy Morfett The Revd Craig Muir

**9.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation Governing Council**

Convenor, Westminster College governors

## 10. Governors of colleges and schools with which the united reformed church is associated

<b>10.1 Caterham School</b>	The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith
<b>10.2 Eltham College</b>	The Revd Martin Foster
<b>10.3 Walthamstow Hall</b>	Mrs Isabel Heald
<b>10.4 Milton Mount Foundation</b>	
The Revd Val Towler	The Revd Derek Lindfield
The Revd Richard Wells	The Revd Kevin Swaine
Mr Ray Dunnett	
<b>10.5 Silcoates School</b>	
Dr Moira Gallagher	The Revd Dr Janet Lees
The Revd Steven Knapton	Mrs Sue Lee
Mrs Tessa Henry-Robinson	
<b>10.6 Taunton School</b>	The Revd Ruth Whitehead
<b>10.7 Bishops Stortford College</b>	Mr Anthony Trigg

## 11 Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

<b>11.1 Arthur Rank Centre</b>	The Revd Elizabeth Caswell
<b>11.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service</b>	Mrs Sheila Duncan General Secretary
<b>11.3 Congregational Fund Board</b>	Mr Anthony Bayley The Revd Eric Allen The Revd Kate Hackett The Revd Geoffrey Roper Mrs Jackie Haws
<b>11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust</b>	The Revd Derek Wales Mr Graham Stacy Dr Brian Woodhall Mrs Margaret Thompson Dr John Thompson Mr John Ellis
<b>11.6 English Heritage's Places of Worship Forum</b>	Mr Peter West (Convenor of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group)
<b>11.7 Lord Wharton's Charity</b>	The Revd Derek Lindfield
<b>11.8 Methodist faith and order committee</b>	Dr Augur Pearce
<b>11.9 Retired Ministers' and Widows' Fund</b>	Mr Ken Meekison Mr Anthony Bayley The Revd Julian Macro
<b>11.10 Samuel Robinson's Charities</b>	Mr Tony Alderman

## Nominations

### **11.11 Scout Association – URC Faith Adviser**

The Revd David Marshall-Jones

### **11.12 United Reformed Church History Society Council**

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe  
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar

The Revd Prof David Thompson  
Mr David Robinson

# Pastoral reference and welfare committee:

## Report to General Assembly 2016

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Richard Church: <a href="mailto:richard.church@urc.org.uk">richard.church@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information only
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To report on the work of the committee since the autumn of 2014
<b>Main points</b>	As above
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	N/A

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None.

# Pastoral reference and welfare committee

The committee considers the cases of ministers and church related community workers (crcws) which are referred to it by officers or councils of the Church when there is perceived pastoral need. Such response might be needed:

- a) when Synod Moderators or synod pastoral committees seek assistance in their pastoral care of ministers, CRCWs and congregations
- b) when there is a breakdown in relationship between the minister and congregation or the wider Church which, for whatever reason, does not fall within the pastoral care of the Synod Moderator or the synod pastoral committee
- c) when the continuance of a minister's or crcw's service within the United Reformed Church is in question
- d) when financial assistance is sought from welfare funds.

**Convenor:** Sheila Maxey (to 2015); Wilma Frew (from 2015)

**Members:** Richard Church (Deputy General Secretary [ Discipleship] – secretary from May 2015); Irene Wren (2015); Gabrielle Pagan (2016); Clare Downing (from July 2013); Douglas Hay (from July 2013); Pam Sharp (from 2015); Camilla Veitch (from 2016) [ex-officio: Treasurer, General Secretary]

## Pastoral reference work

1.1 We continue to value the work of the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service from which ministers – whether in active service, in training or in retirement – and their families can receive completely confidential support. The Counselling Service grants totalled £12,361 in 2014 and £8,024 in 2015.

1.2 We have responded to various situations of concern that have been referred to us in the past two years in a number of ways depending on the nature of the cases and the issues involved. We have valued the wisdom available to us from the members of the committee who have responded conscientiously and usefully both in committee and by email consultation between meetings.

1.3 An issue has risen over the course of the committee's work of URC ministers who are working for ecumenical or missionary bodies coming to the conclusion of their fixed- term appointment. Sometimes the process of seeking a new ministry within the URC has taken longer than their existing employment allows. In these cases, their synod moderator has applied for stipend support to cover the interim period before they are able to resume ministry within the URC. These applications have been turned down as the committee is not authorised to offer stipend support to anyone not already on the Plan for Partnership. The committee is not altogether comfortable about this circumstance as it could lead to a situation where ministers are less likely to respond to God's call to exercise ministry within the wider Christian family. However, there seems little we can do about it currently.

1.4 In July 2015 we benefited from a half-day training course on the incapacity process, for which we thank the organisers, Keith Webster and Hartley Oldham.

1.5 The committee meets three times a year and present thinking is that to meet less frequently would be unhelpful.

## Welfare grants

2.1 Each year a letter is sent to all ministers and CRCWs with their payslips, explaining the nature of these funds. New ministers and CRCWs receive that letter with their first payslip. There are dedicated educational and welfare funds and we make disbursements totalling in the region of £70,000 p.a. This exceeds the income from the dedicated welfare funds and the top up subventions from the M&M funds were £10,000 in 2014 and £15,000 in 2015.

2.2 As Andrew Grimwade the Chief Finance Officer is retiring this year, we would like to express our thanks for his assistance to the committee over the years.

# Eastern, Thames North and Wessex Synods: The Palestinian situation

## Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Eastern, the Revd Paul Whittle: <a href="mailto:moderator@urceastern.org.uk">moderator@urceastern.org.uk</a> Thames North, the Revd Jane Weedon: <a href="mailto:jane@urcwgc.org.uk">jane@urcwgc.org.uk</a> Wessex, the Revd Nigel Appleton: <a href="mailto:appletonn@aol.com">appletonn@aol.com</a>
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p><b>Eastern Synod</b></p> <p><b>37A. General Assembly resolves to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>a) commend the Church of Scotland Report 'The Inheritance of Abraham' (revised version) for study by United Reformed churches;</b></li><li><b>b) endorse the conclusion of 'The Inheritance of Abraham' and reject claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory;</b></li><li><b>c) commend 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed churches and encourage the formation of Kairos communities, either within individual congregations or ecumenically;</b></li><li><b>d) urge the UK government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories;</b></li><li><b>e) urge the UK Government and the European Union to exert, through sanctions or other effective means that address the inequality of power between the parties, international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the blockade of Gaza and allow a just peace to be achieved.</b></li></ul> <p><b>Thames North Synod</b></p> <p><b>37B. This is identical to paragraphs c), d) and e) of the Eastern Synod resolution.</b></p>

## Wessex Synod

### 37C. General Assembly resolves to:

- a) commend the Church of Scotland Report 'The Inheritance of Abraham' (revised version) and 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed churches and synods.
- b) urge the UK government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld by all parties in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- c) develop and deepen our existing work around these issues so as to enable the United Reformed Church to adopt a programme of dialogue and action with partner churches, interfaith partners and public authorities.

## Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Concern for justice and reconciliation in Israel and the Palestinian territories. A call for study and for action
<b>Main points</b>	As resolutions
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	None
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None in relation to the central budget of the Church
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Any resolution on this matter may influence our partnership and conversation with, in particular, Christians in the Holy Land and both Palestinian and Jewish people in the UK.

# The Palestinian situation

1. Three of our synods discussed resolutions on Israel-Palestine at meetings in March 2016, and all three decided to bring resolutions to Assembly. The resolutions overlap, but no two of them coincide precisely.
2. The Clerk will advise Assembly to consider these under Standing Order 4.10. The three alternative motions would be moved in turn and if Assembly so wished any of the three could be amended as it is considered. In due course Assembly would be asked to prefer one of the three, which would then become the resolution to be debated, as Assembly moved towards a decision.
3. Eastern Synod accepted all five parts of the resolution put to it, printed above as Resolution 37A. Thames North accepted three parts of the five, and their version is designated Resolution 37B. In Wessex a facilitation group worked on the resolution, so that the synod eventually developed and accepted Resolution 37C above.
4. The briefing that follows in paragraphs 5-9 was presented to Eastern Synod in March, and is now offered to Assembly as an introduction to the topic, rather than as an exact expression of the concerns of Thames North or Wessex.
5. This resolution is based on Kairos Palestine's appeal made in faith, hope and love by Palestinian Christian leaders in 2009 to religious people in Palestine and worldwide. (The word *kairos* means 'Moment of Truth' and the full text can be found at <http://kairos-palestine.ps/sites/default/files/English.pdf>.) The appeal points to the continuing occupation of Palestinian territories and the faltering peace process, the daily humiliation of the Palestinian population, confiscation of land and deprivation of basic freedoms.
6. Tragically, since 2009 the situation has deteriorated further. International attempts at peacemaking have been abandoned and hope is at lower ebb than ever. The bombardment of Gaza has been followed by Israel's refusal to allow it to rebuild. Illegal settlements continue to expand in the Occupied Territories with the backing of the Israeli government. The resolution is more relevant than ever today.
7. At Pentecost 2012 an ecumenical group of Christians known as Kairos Britain met on Iona and produced the Iona Call 'to seize the kairos moment with conviction and hope' (text at: <https://iona.org.uk/2012/06/07/kairos-palestine/>) In May 2013 the Church of Scotland adopted the resolution 'The Inheritance of Abraham', also drawing on Kairos Palestine, and pointing out that 'the political and humanitarian situation in the Holy Land continues to be a source of pain and concern for us all.' This may be read at: [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/14050/the\\_Inheritance\\_of\\_Abraham.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/14050/the_Inheritance_of_Abraham.pdf)
8. The motion before Assembly commends the key conclusions of the 'Inheritance of Abraham' report and the need to address the inequality in power between Israelis and Palestinians if negotiations are to lead to a just peace for all the people of the Holy Land. It is, in short, a call for justice, reconciliation and peace among all peoples in the Holy Land. It affirms that Christians should not be supporting any claims by any people to an exclusive right to possess particular territory. It calls on the UK government and the European Union to do all within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This includes the Jewish people living there, for where there is no justice there will be no peace. It encourages support for the actions called for in the Kairos Palestine document to achieve these ends, and it calls for churches and communities to undertake study and action towards a lasting peace.

## Notes on Kairos communities

9.1 Originating from a gathering of Christians on Iona in Pentecost week 2012, the document ‘Time for Action’ was published by Kairos Britain as a British Christian response to ‘A Moment of Truth’ and Kairos Britain was inaugurated as a network of individuals and faith communities supporting the actions called for in the Kairos Palestine document.

9.2 Kairos Britain calls for establishing of Kairos communities. These can be either ‘Kairos Committed Communities’ or ‘Kairos Active Communities’ (see below). Kairos Communities can be established within individual congregations or ecumenically, or a whole congregation can become a Kairos Church.

9.3 Kairos Committed Communities are committed to a just and lasting peace for everyone in Palestine and Israel; they pray for those in Israel and Palestine; they read and endorse the Kairos Palestine and Kairos Britain documents, and encourage others to do so too; and they communicate key themes and messages from these documents wherever possible.

9.4 Kairos Active Communities take their commitment a stage further. They educate and inspire their own members and the wider community and undertake activities (at least three in the first year) that promote a just and lasting peace in Palestine and Israel, including: praying regularly for a just peace; promoting boycott, disinvestment and sanctions of anything associated with Israel’s occupation; engaging with political representatives; organising visits to Israel/Palestine; and supporting the Palestinian economy by selling Palestinian products.

# Southern Synod:

## The budget of the Church

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	The Revd Dr Alan Spence: <a href="mailto:alanandsheila@googlemail.com">alanandsheila@googlemail.com</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>38. General Assembly resolves that at its future meetings it will, as part of its regular business, receive the budget of the Church for the next financial year for approval. In years when General Assembly does not meet, Mission Council, acting on behalf of Assembly, will receive the annual budget for approval.</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The role of the General Assembly in approving the budget of the Church
<b>Main points</b>	For the sake of good financial practice, for the greater ownership by the denomination of the Church's decisions regarding finance and in accordance with its commitment to conciliarity, Southern Synod believes it is appropriate to legislate that one of the functions of the General Assembly is to receive the Church's budget for approval in the years that it meets
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	The URC Manual B.2.(6) (ii) (General Assembly functions)
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Treasurer

### Summary of Impact

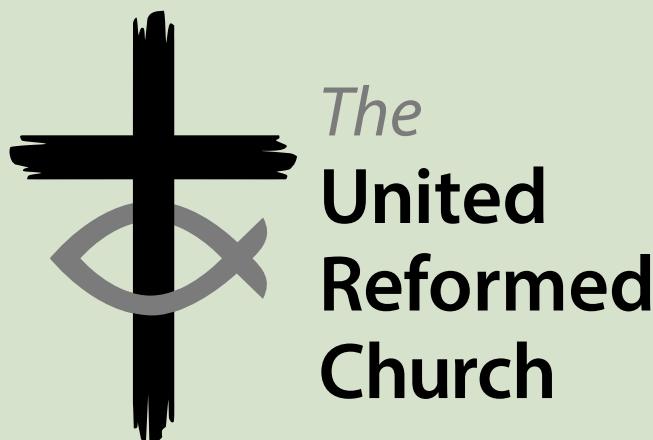
<b>Financial</b>	No cost
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Not applicable.

# The budget of the Church

This resolution was agreed by Southern Synod in March 2016. It will be proposed at Assembly by the Revd Dr Alan Spence and seconded by the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith.

1. Democracy is part of the DNA of the United Reformed Church. The conciliar traditions of our forebears led them to challenge autocratic government, not only in the church but also in the state, even if it meant going to war with the king. In so doing they played a significant role in shaping democratic government first in Britain and then across the world. It is a remarkable heritage of which we can be justly proud. But democratic institutions are not always popular. Those concerned with efficiency and good order often find conciliar decision-making to be cumbersome, time-consuming and messy. And so democratic institutions have to be vigorously defended or they will inevitably be undermined by the bureaucratic requirement for greater efficiency along with the ever present centripetal forces of power.
2. At the 2014 General Assembly the budget of the Church was not approved or even considered in plenary session but was relegated to an informal discussion in one of the parallel sessions. The question arises: 'Is this good practice in a conciliar church and, if not, should we formally legislate that the General Assembly receives the budget of the Church for approval whenever it meets?'
3. For most church members this is not a strange idea. In their local churches many will have witnessed their elders as trustees of the church bringing the budget to the Annual Church Meeting for approval by the congregation. Generally, on such occasions, the budget is not to be reformulated or tinkered with, but is put forward so that questions may be asked of it before approval is given. It can be a rich demonstration of conciliarity and transparency. Should this not be the practice of the General Assembly?
4. The widespread sense of disconnect between those in the pew and the wider councils of the church surely has a number of causes. But if all those who attended an Assembly came back to their congregations with a sense of ownership of a transparent, easy to understand budget, that they had approved, would that not be a small step in helping us all feel that we belong? Would not a pie-chart of the church's budget in every delegate's hand help to undermine some of the conspiracy theories being circulated about how 'the Church is spending our money'?
5. It might be argued that the General Assembly has more important things to do than spend time asking questions about the church's budget. There is much truth in that. But a lack of transparency in financial matters can be very destructive of an organisation. The early church suffered when some members thought that charitable gifts were being unfairly distributed. The American colonies fought for their independence under the slogan 'no taxation without representation'. (They came from the same Puritan stock as we do and their conciliar instincts were not to be quashed.)
6. Finally, the Scheme of Union of the URC stipulates that the General Assembly is responsible for making decisions on reports and recommendations from its own committees B.2.(6) (ii). This is the default position of our church and Assembly receiving the budget for approval is surely in full accordance with such a ruling.





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# URC History Society

Registered Charity No: 279213

1. Since last reporting to General Assembly, the Society has organised study occasions in two very different locations. The Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Hounslow provided generous hospitality, enabling those present to appreciate something of the Sikh tradition worldwide, and within its particular local setting. This visit in 2014 was organised by the Revd Dr John Parry, minister in Chalfont St Giles, whose ministerial service began in Bangladesh with the Council for World Mission. Dr Parry used the Annual Lecture to comment on and illustrate the relationships that have emerged between the United Reformed Church and other faith traditions, paying attention to the theological and the pragmatic.

2. More recently a residential study conference (30 June to 1 July 2015) was held at Westminster College Cambridge, an appropriate venue as the Society's collections have been held there since 1998, and following a major redevelopment of the premises, archive space to a high specification has been made available. One of the sessions was devoted to a tour of the holdings to illustrate how records from the denominations, which have come together in the United Reformed Church, are housed. Each of the three strands was represented in the papers on AD Harcus (Presbyterian), Arnold Legg (Congregationalist), both of whom were trained in Cambridge, and on the Chilembwe rising of 1915, which affected the Churches of Christ mission station in Nyasaland. Frank Buchman, founder of the Oxford Group also featured in another communication, as a former resident at Westminster.

3. The annual lecture, 'Prophets of the Kingdom or apologists for Empire? Churches and theologians on the way to 1914', was given by the Revd Dr Keith Clements, formerly General Secretary to the Conference of European Churches. Against a background of imperial expansion and rivalry, he drew attention to groups which sought to foster understanding, Free Churchmen among them, yet war came. Nevertheless, the 'promise' of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 sowed seeds that encouraged a radical rethinking of relationships later in the century, and moved some church people to call worldly kingdoms to account.

4. Meeting mid-week as an experiment was seen as advantageous for a conference occasion, since this might assist more ministers to attend. The jubilee of the ordination of the Chairman of the Council, the Revd Geoffrey Roper, was a matter for congratulation. Dr Jean Silvan Evans was also thanked for her commitment to Society activities, and as a trustee for nine years. Later in the year, news was received of the death of Dr Elaine Kaye, distinguished in her teaching career, as an historian and author, as tutor at Mansfield College, and also appreciated as a council member (1993-97) and Society President (1997-2001). The death of the Revd Professor Alan Sell in February 2016 has removed a prolific and challenging contributor to the *Journal*.

5. Numbers 4 to 7 of Volume 9 of the *Journal* have been published. Congregations anchored in their locality, Professor Sell's tribute to List B ministers, and an exploration of the histories of three Nonconformist families who combined industry, philanthropy and Christian citizenship, have featured. These might be themes to be expected, but alongside them have been articles which covered pastoral visiting of prisoners in the Ruhr and a radical Welsh Puritan, William Erbury (whose tolerant attitude to Jews and Turks was unusual in the seventeenth century). Articles for consideration can be sent at any time to the editor, the Revd Dr Robert Pope.

6. Archival deposits have continued. The major task was to transfer papers collected by the Revd Dr George Hood over his long career, together with material connected with Foreign Missions within the Churches of Christ to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. (See <http://blogs.soas.ac.uk/archives/2015/07/>).

In addition, all local congregational records from the Churches of Christ have been sent or taken to the appropriate County Record Office or Heritage Centre. Gifts from members have enhanced the library collection, which continues to complement the other specialist archives of the College. Mrs Helen Weller has been able to use volunteers as assistants in the work of reorganising the collections. She is in a position to offer advice and assistance to visitors, and may be contacted every morning except Fridays by phone (01223 330 620) or by email ([hw374@cam.ac.uk](mailto:hw374@cam.ac.uk)).

7. The appointment of a Records Manager, Ms Shahera Begum, at 86 Tavistock Place, has been welcomed by the Society Council, as being very helpful in making a commitment to the care and preservation of material generated by the United Reformed Church, and in a context where paper will not necessarily remain the norm.

8. The Marquis Fund, to further the study and publication of Nonconformist history, is administered by the Society and representatives of Westminster College, Cambridge. Grants may be made to scholars of any denominational affiliation or none, if the criteria are satisfied. Application should be made to the treasurer, using the college address. One application was received in 2015.

9. The standard subscription rate for membership is £20. For all enquiries about Society membership, including a 25% reduction for students and newly-retired ministers, Mrs Margaret Thompson may be consulted, either by email ([mt212@cam.ac.uk](mailto:mt212@cam.ac.uk)) or via Westminster College. Gift Aid declarations continue to make a valuable contribution to general finances.

# URC Music

1. During 2015, the executive committee of URC Music has been discussing ways of achieving some of the aims of our organisation, revised by our new constitution in 2014.
2. One of our aims is to help influence the training of our worship leaders. The Revd Fiona Thomas attended one of our committee meetings and helped us to gather information about how music is included during training for ministry. A new committee member, the Revd Matthew Prevett, gave music training sessions for worship leaders and lay preachers courses at Westminster College during the summer vacation. We hope there will be other ways in which URC Music can bring about a higher profile for music included in worship in our churches.
3. We are gradually building an advisory panel of people on whom we can call for help, advice and inspiration for all kinds of music in all kinds of situations. Please do get in touch with URC Music if you are willing to be a music adviser in your area.
4. Our annual Music Day is held in a different synod area each year so that our far-flung members, and hopefully other people, can attend at least occasionally. In 2015, we were given a warm welcome at Harrogate. Music days are such a good way of bringing people together to sing, to play an instrument, to write new worship songs and generally to enjoy fellowship and shared worship. If you think that your church could organise or host something like this, please do offer. If a church in every synod held a music day once a year, with help from our synod training officers, we would be getting somewhere!
5. Our magazine, *Making a Joyful Noise*, continues to be produced twice a year. Our editor always welcomes articles about music happening in our churches and good photos are worth a thousand words! Music is definitely still alive in our URC worship traditions but where do we hear about it? We can do better than we are at the moment to sing our praises and make them known to everyone. If you are reading this and thinking 'I could write about our fantastic worship band', do not delay but contact [carannrog@aol.com](mailto:carannrog@aol.com)
6. URC Music does not currently have a coordinator of our Organ Advisory Service. So we are looking for a person with a good working knowledge of pipe organs and also with some knowledge of electronic instruments who can help put churches in touch with our regional organ advisors. Our regional advisors have a wide range of skills and knowledge, so a church's nearest advisor geographically may not necessarily be the one who can give the best help. The role of the Organ Advisory Service is to help churches enhance their worship through the appropriate use of an organ and to get value from their instrument.
7. Do have a look at our website [www.urcmusic.org.uk](http://www.urcmusic.org.uk). All comments are welcome so just send them to our webmaster by clicking on the 'comments or questions' sentence at the foot of every page. Articles about recent or forthcoming musical events in the URC are particularly welcome, especially if they are accompanied by photos. [webmaster@urcmusic.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@urcmusic.org.uk)
8. URC Music has a fund allowing small grants to be made available to support individuals or churches with their music. Why not contact us to find out more?
9. Finally, even if you think that nothing much is happening, musically, in your area, you can be certain there is! Surely there cannot be a single church in the URC that does not sing hymns on Sunday mornings? We can all 'sing up and sing out' to the glory of God with all the joy and enthusiasm we can muster.
10. If you would like to become a supporting member of URC Music, do please get in touch.

# Schools relating to the URC

1. Twelve schools in England have significant connections with our Church through their history, trusteeship or governance. Four are local primary schools with relatively small catchment areas, and their church links (e.g. the nomination of governors) are nurtured locally rather than by Assembly. The other eight are independent schools with broader catchment, and Assembly has traditionally been involved in appointing governors and receiving reports. The schools are Bournemouth Collegiate, Bishop's Stortford College, Caterham, Eltham College, Mill Hill, Silcoates, Taunton and Walthamstow Hall, and three of them have forwarded reports on their work to this year's Assembly.

## Bishop's Stortford College

2.1 Academically, Bishop's Stortford College had a record-breaking year in 2015, with GCSE pupils surpassing all previous results at the college, achieving 70% A\*-A. 57% of A Level students also achieved A\*-A grades, and 82% A\*-B. Ten of our students went on to Oxbridge, and 38 GCSE pupils have joined the College's 'Ten Club', celebrating 10 or more A\*-A grades with a distinctive Ten Club tie, recognisable throughout the college.

2.2 Bishop's Stortford College pupils also continue to enjoy sporting success. In 2014, the College Under 12 Girls' Hockey team were crowned South IAPS Champions. In April 2015 the U14 Boys' Hockey team placed fourth at the National Hockey finals, played at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. It was a great honour and very thrilling for our pupils to play at this prestigious venue. We also had fantastic netball and rugby seasons: three of our rugby squads went on tour to Italy, and four netball teams were awarded winners' trophies at the District Netball Tournament.

2.3 In September 2015, the College worked with the charity TourAid to host a group of children and coaches from Botswana, as part of the Festival of Rugby 2015. The Prep School U13 rugby team played with the boys from Botswana in a tournament at Henley RFC, and the college was able to present a remarkable £9,000 to TourAid from their fundraising.

2.4 With each House in the Senior School supporting their House charity, and events such as Whole College Charity Day, which last year saw the entire college supporting Inspire Malawi, our pupils are actively involved in fundraising and many charitable activities. The Prep School raised over £12,000 for the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association last year, and were thrilled that their efforts were rewarded – they were asked to name the guide dog, Truffle.

2.5 Creative arts are also an important part of life at the college, and the recent Senior School production of *Macbeth* received fantastic reviews. In March 2015, the college's artist in residence built a kiln in front of the Art Centre so that pupils working with ceramics could experiment with raku firing. This has since been repeated as it was so successful. Musically, our pupils continue to delight audiences with regular performances, such as large-scale choral concerts and lunchtime recitals in the local community.

2.6 The Pre-Prep introduced 'Forest School' into their curriculum in September 2014. It is set in a magical woodland setting that offers all of our Pre-Prep pupils the opportunity to develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on outdoor learning.

2.7 In October 2015 we re-launched the college website; [www.bishopsstortfordcollege.org](http://www.bishopsstortfordcollege.org). The improved layout and navigation showcases some of what Bishop's Stortford College can offer as well as sharing all of our recent news. It is also a valuable resource for parents and pupils alike with links to VLEs, library resources, SchoolPost and pupil and staff email accounts.

2.8 Daily assemblies and regular concerts continue to be held in the Memorial Hall, one of the campus' most recognisable features. The college continues to be developed, and with planning permission now granted we embark on building two new boarding houses (one boys and one girls) and a new boys' day house. We will also be refurbishing the original school house to create new senior school classrooms and improve facilities for teaching staff. Following the devastating fire of September 2015 in Robert Pearce House, all of the boys and House staff are now temporarily accommodated whilst we await the plans for the building restoration. These development plans will lead us to our 150th anniversary in 2018.

## Silcoates School

3.1 In October 2014, 20 of our students went to Tanzania to help with building work and garden projects at a rural school in Babati. In October 2016, 50 students will be flying out to help with similar projects at two other schools. Upper Sixth Form student Bethany said, 'When I went to Babati, I was really impressed with the generosity and kindness of the people there. On one occasion we visited a pig farming project where we shared a meal and learned a local dance, which is an experience I will never forget.'

3.2 Another student, Erin, talked about a charity project closer to home, saying, 'We took part in a Christmas concert at the Yorkshire Cancer Centre in Leeds and I was one of the students who sang a solo. Afterwards, we received an email from someone thanking us and saying that they had received some bad news about their diagnosis just before the concert. They were sitting in another room listening and they heard me sing *O Holy Night*, which they said had really helped them. I think that's what charity is really about – not just the money we raise but how we can use the gifts we have to touch other people's lives in ways we could never imagine.'

3.3 We have developed our peer mentoring scheme at school, training older students to help offer advice and guidance to young ones. We have also played a leading role with the anti-bullying work of the Diana Award, with one of our Year 11 students, Alex, appointed as a director on the National Youth Board. He said, 'I am delighted to be part of the National Anti-Bullying Youth Board and I am looking forward to representing young peoples' views about bullying and sharing best practice to help overcome it.'

3.4 We have continued to remember the 100th anniversary of the First World War, rediscovering the stories of the Old Silcoatiens who gave their lives in service of their country. Laura is one of our Heads of School and she reflected, 'I was honoured to read the Roll of Honour during our Remembrance Day commemorations in November 2015. I think it is important that we continue to remember the sacrifices they made and to ensure their memory is not lost.' On 1 July 2016, we are holding a special day of activities to remember the first day of the Battle of the Somme.

3.5 For further information about the school, please go to our website – [www.silcoates.org.uk](http://www.silcoates.org.uk) – where you can read much more about the many and diverse activities that make up life at Silcoates.

## Walthamstow Hall

4.1 Greetings to the URC from Walthamstow Hall in Sevenoaks! Since I last wrote about life here at *Wally Hall* much has happened.

4.2 The school has continued to grow to a new record high of over 620 pupils, junior and senior. To accommodate increasing numbers, in 2014 we built a dedicated dining hall at our Junior School site, and in autumn 2015 opened a new sports hall and centre at our senior school site. The opening ceremony guests of honour were six of the school's current pupils who either compete for England or Great Britain in their various sports, or hold national record times, or indeed both!

4.3 The next project in the pipeline is a new sixth form centre and additional science laboratories and design technology facilities due to start in summer of this year. We are proud of the numbers of girls who leave here to study STEM subjects at university, and the longstanding tradition of studying medicine certainly continues.

4.4 Results remain strong – 92% A\*-B at GCSE, and 84% A-B at A Level – and keep us in the top 25 in the league tables.

4.5 Alumnae continue to support and take an interest in today's school and we are also extremely blessed to have fantastically committed governors. After over 20 years, our Chair of Governors, Mr Ian Philip retired last January, handing the baton to Mrs Jayne Adams. Our URC representative, Mrs Isabel Heald, continues to play a very full part in the life of the school and we are grateful for her service and that of all those who contribute so much to school life. Long may it continue!

# Women's World Day of Prayer, England, Wales and Northern Ireland

1.1 The United Reformed Church is involved in one of the biggest grass-roots ecumenical events of the year through Women's World Day of Prayer. There are more than 5,000 services on the first Friday in March, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Led by groups of women from local churches we celebrate with women around the world in the same words of worship, written by the chosen country. Scotland has its own national organisation. The focus is the annual service but the prayer and preparation go on throughout the year.

1.2 The national committee of 15, representing denominations in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, meets bi-monthly. The administrative office in Tunbridge Wells deals with the running of the organisation. The committee begins working on a service 18 months ahead, when they receive the script from the International Committee in New York. The words of the women of the writing country cannot be changed, but the creative ideas for children's activities, Bible background, notes on the country, music for the service, CD-ROM pictures with script, Together in Prayer Magazine, all need to be chosen, written and published. In the autumn before the service, the committee facilitates preparation days all over the countries where local groups gather, learn about the writing country and the concerns of those women, and plan for the forthcoming service.

1.3 Following the service the committee allocates approximately £250,000 annually in grants to projects large and small around the world. The successful projects will be in sympathy with the theme of the service, supporting women and their concerns.

1.4 We have a website, Facebook page and Twitter account and can respond quickly with prayer to world events and also can provide funds following disasters such as the earthquake in Nepal.

2015 'Do you know what I have done to you?'

Prepared by the Christian Women of the Bahamas.

Based on John 13:1-17 when Jesus washes his disciples' feet.

The service explored the radical love that Jesus showed in breaking conventions and how we, as his disciples, are challenged to follow him. For the women of the Bahamas that meant caring for the needs of vulnerable people in their community: the poor who live 'over-the-hill', victims of domestic violence and abuse, refugees and migrants, single mothers, those living with HIV/AIDS, and women with breast cancer.

2016 'Receive children, receive me', written by the Christian women of Cuba.

Based on Mark 10:13-16 when Jesus received the children.

The service celebrated the high level of health-care and education for children in Cuba. Women are valued in society and have positions of responsibility as well as caring for the family. Older women had kept the faith and passed it on to the young. In recognising the children, Jesus teaches an open-hearted acceptance of our neighbours and a vision of the kingdom that values each individual.

2017 'Am I being unfair to you?', to be prepared by the Christian women of the Philippines.

# World Day of Prayer, Scotland

1.1 The first World Day of Prayer was held in Scotland in 1930, with the theme 'May Jesus is Lifted Up'. Since then a World Day of Prayer has been held every year in Scotland. In the last three years the committee has made great efforts to increase the number of denominations on the committee and we now have more than 18 members, with more than ten denominations represented. All are volunteers, including the office bearers. The service is always planned and prepared by women because in many countries of the world women are in a submissive role to men. However in Scotland the title of Women's World Day of Prayer has been changed to World Day of Prayer.

1.2 The committee try to remain faithful to the country planning the service. The committee receive a detailed report about the planning country, particularly the social and health problems they are facing, and this helps us embrace the ethos behind the service. The committee start the preparation by taking two days in retreat.

1.3 Many people attending the services comment on the novelty of a responsive service with unusual hymns, bright colours and different themes. This year the service is written by Christian Women from the Philippines. The collections along with monies from the sale of calendars, notelets, badges and pendants are donated to the following charities: Feed the Minds, The Scottish Bible Society and a charity of the planning country.

1.4 Donations are also sent to European and International organisations to enable delegates from poorer countries to attend the conferences.

1.5 We try to send at least two representatives to these conferences .As well as attending meetings and participating in decision making delegates are expected to give a presentation, visit projects, and link up with partners from other countries. This year our prayer partners are from Croatia and Hungary and we have also linked up with the committees in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Eire. This has been particularly useful for sharing ideas and we are looking forward to meeting up.

1.6 Ruth Laing's five year term as the URC representative finishes this year so the search is on for her replacement.

1.7 For more information please look on The Scottish World Day of Prayer website at [www.wdpscotland.org.uk](http://www.wdpscotland.org.uk)





*The*  
**United  
Reformed  
Church**

# **Resolutions**

# RESOLUTIONS

## Resolution 1

### **Mission Council: Walking the Way – living the life of Jesus today (p.11)**

General Assembly welcomes the work of the Walking the Way steering group and commends it to the wider Church.

## Resolution 2

### **Mission Council: Nomination of Treasurer (p.18)**

General Assembly appoints Mr Ian Hardie as Treasurer of the Church from 1 July 2017 for six years.

## Resolution 3

### **Mission Council: Appeal, reference and constitutional review between councils of the Church (p.20)**

General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Structure of the URC;

#### **5. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review**

5.1. Any decision of a Church Meeting within an area of ecumenical experiment may be taken by way of appeal to the area meeting. A decision of any other Church Meeting may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which the local church concerned is represented. Any decision of an ecumenical area meeting having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which local churches in the area are represented. Any decision of a synod may be taken by way of appeal to the General Assembly.

5.2. A Church Meeting may itself refer any dispute or difference arising within the local church for resolution by the synod. An ecumenical area meeting may refer any dispute or difference arising within the area for resolution by the synod. A synod may refer any dispute or difference arising within the province or nation under its oversight for resolution by the General Assembly.

5.3. The synod may declare any decision of a Church Meeting within the province or nation under its oversight, or any decision of an ecumenical area meeting within that province or nation having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof, which is (or has been reached by a procedure) incompatible with the Basis of Union, the Structure of the URC, the constitution of the ecumenical area (where applicable) or any rule or resolution of Assembly binding on the local church or the ecumenical area to be a nullity. The General Assembly may declare any decision of a Synod to be a nullity on analogous grounds. The review of any decision with a view to declaring it a nullity shall be known as constitutional review.

5.4. Appeals, references and constitutional review under this paragraph shall be subject to conditions and processes laid down by the Assembly in Rules of Procedure, which shall allow scope for the subject-matter of an appeal to

be resolved by mediation where appropriate. A wider council determining an appeal or reference may either substitute its own decision for that of the more local council, or remit the issue to the more local council for reconsideration. No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review decisions reached under the ministerial disciplinary process or the incapacity procedure.

5.5. The decision of the General Assembly on any matter which has come before it on appeal, reference or constitutional review shall be final and binding.

## Resolution 4

### **Mission Council: Appeal, reference and constitutional review between councils of the Church (p.20)**

General Assembly directs Mission Council to amend the Rules of Procedure, in order that the Structure changes may be appropriately implemented in practice.

## Resolution 5

### **Mission Council: Resolutions referred to synods (B): ministerial candidacy (p.27)**

**General Assembly resolves to make the following changes to the Structure:**

#### **Functions of synods:**

##### **2(4)(A)(xvi) Present version:**

to give oversight to candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to candidates for any form of full-time service in the Church at home and abroad, and, in the case of candidates for the above ministries, determine their eligibility for a call

##### **New version:**

**to consider on the recommendation of local churches applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them, if approved, to the Assembly for decision, and, in partnership with the relevant Resource Centre for Learning, to give pastoral care to such candidates during their training.**

#### **Functions of Ecumenical United Areas:**

##### **2(5)(A)(vi) Present version:**

to consider, on the recommendation of Local Churches, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them, if approved, to the synod for decision.

##### **New version:**

**to consider, on the recommendation of Local Churches, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work and to transmit them to the synod.**

#### **Functions of General Assembly:**

##### **New function [numbering to be determined]:**

**to consider, on the recommendation of synods, applications for recognition as candidates for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and church related community work, to oversee their training, and to determine their eligibility for a call.**

## Resolution 6

**Mission Council: Resolutions referred to synods (C): National Synods (p.29)**

**General Assembly resolves to make the following changes to Paragraph 2(4) A(xxii) of the Structure.**

**Present version:**

to seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and in Scotland and Wales to undertake responsibility for national ecumenical relationships on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church, subject to the final authority of the General Assembly

**New version:**

a) **to seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and**  
b) **in Scotland and Wales to speak and act on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church in public affairs or the conduct of ecumenical relationships specific to the nation concerned, in the General Assembly's name but without prejudice to the Assembly's right to speak and act in the same field on behalf of the church either in England or throughout Great Britain.**

## Resolution 7

**Mission Council: Resolutions referred to synods (D): the marriage of same-sex couples (p.32)**

- a) In keeping with the 2007 commitment on Human Sexuality, General Assembly does not consider it appropriate to express a single view on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church on the matter of the marriage of same-sex couples.
- b) General Assembly declares that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same-sex couples, in accordance with the provisions of Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.
- c) In the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, where the constitution makes no provision for a Church or Congregational Meeting (including a Special or Extraordinary General Meeting) the relevant governing authority of the United Reformed Church under Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 is the council which represents the widest gathering of members of that Church or Partnership. In case of doubt the council to act in this matter shall be jointly determined, in light of the LEP constitution and any sharing agreement, by the Moderator and Clerk of the synod on which that Church is represented.
- d) Noting that Mission Council has already recognised, on behalf of General Assembly, 'that if a future Assembly were to allow for ministers and members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the URC to approach the Registrar General for Scotland', the General Assembly confirms that it now lies within the competence of the National Synod of Scotland to nominate under Section 9(1A) of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 as amended by the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 members of the United Reformed Church who have indicated their willingness in writing to the synod to be approved celebrants for the marriages of same-sex couples in Scotland.)

- e) The General Assembly recalls that the trusts on which Local Church buildings are commonly held empower the Church Meeting to direct in what ways such a building is or is not to be used for public worship and ancillary purposes.
- f) The General Assembly authorises the General Secretary, the Clerk, or any Deputy General Secretary to sign and furnish a copy of this resolution (or a relevant extract) in the name of the Assembly, whenever such a copy may be required by law.

## Resolution 8

### **Church changes: Report** (p.47)

General Assembly notes the closures listed, with praise to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years.

## Resolution 9

### **Assembly arrangements committee: Report** (p.50)

In order that the *Book of Reports* should be as accessible as possible, General Assembly requests that every report on which a decision is invited should include a summary of its main points in not more than 250 words on a cover sheet. Assembly gives to the General Secretary, as editor, authority to vary this guideline in appropriately exceptional cases.

## Resolution 10

### **Assembly arrangements committee: Report** (p.50)

Assembly agrees that the General Assembly in 2018 will meet in the Albert Hall, Nottingham from 6 to 9 July 2018 or at such other place or on such other date as may be necessary.

## Resolution 11

### **Communications and editorial committee: Towards resourcing the Church** (p.60)

General Assembly changes the name of the communication and editorial committee to the communications committee with immediate effect, and authorises any consequent changes.

## Resolution 12

### **Communications and editorial committee: Towards resourcing the Church** (p.60)

General Assembly commends iChurch, as its preferred website supplier, to local churches, affiliated groups and the synods.

## Resolution 13

**Education and learning committee: Twenty first century expectations for ministry** (p.78)

In the light of the discussion of the papers on expectations of ministers, General Assembly:

- a) directs Mission Council to agree a statement on the expectations of ministers of Word and Sacraments;
- b) instructs the ministries and education and learning committees to carry out the necessary consultation and drafting work to enable Mission Council to fulfil this task.

## Resolution 14

**Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (*The Manual*, Section F) be amended to read:

The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows –

- a) the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);
- b) if such a minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the Basis of Union: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;
- c) authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal. Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs.

## Resolution 15

**Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared.

## Resolution 16

**Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before embarking on their ministry.

## Resolution 17

### **Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose authority to serve has been withdrawn be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again.

## Resolution 18

### **Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.

## Resolution 19

### **Faith and order committee: Authorised elders** (p.90)

General Assembly agrees that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry.

## Resolution 20

### **Faith and order committee: A Response to the World Council of Churches convergence document, 'The Church: Towards a common Vision'** (p.108)

General Assembly commends the document 'The Church: Towards a Common Vision' for ongoing reflection in the church; takes note of the faith and order committee response and invites comments on that response by the end of October for consideration for inclusion in the submission to the World Council.

## Resolution 21

### **Faith and order committee: What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?** (p.119)

General Assembly affirms 'What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?' and invites local churches, synods and General Assembly, and their committees, to continue prayerfully to ask this question, looking at the points of celebration in their life and the possibilities and challenges in front of the Church.

## Resolution 22

### **Faith and order committee: What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches?** (p.119)

General Assembly encourages local churches to be proactive in sharing their good news stories via the communications department, the creative use of social media, synod gatherings and whatever other opportunities present themselves or can be created.

## Resolution 23

### **Faith and order committee: What Is the Spirit Saying to the Churches? (p.119)**

General Assembly invites the faith and order committee in consultation with other relevant bodies to undertake work arising out of this report and on 'A Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church', to produce further resources for study and worship, to help churches in their reflection on 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?'

## Resolution 24

### **Faith and order committee: The Wider Fold (p.128)**

General Assembly:

- a) welcomes the principles embodied in the Wider Fold proposals;
- b) instructs the faith and order committee to prepare a plan to implement these principles, in consultation with the law and polity advisory group;
- c) instructs the faith and order committee to bring proposals for such a plan to the meeting of Mission Council in May 2017.

## Resolution 25

### **Faith and order committee: Unity, Identity and Mission (p.131)**

Assembly welcomes the report of the Church of England/ United Reformed Church conversations, agrees the recommendations and instructs the nominations committee, having consulted with the faith and order committee and any other relevant parties, to nominate members for the proposed steering group.

## Resolution 26

### **Finance committee: Churches' Mutual Credit Union (p.138)**

General Assembly welcomes the participation of the United Reformed Church in the Churches' Mutual Credit Union.

## Resolution 27

### **Finance committee: Annual accounts (p.141)**

General Assembly notes the trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2015.

## Resolution 28

### Ministries committee: Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment (p.154)

General Assembly notes the projections for numbers of stipendiary ministers likely to be available and stipendiary posts likely to be fundable through the Ministry and Mission Fund until 2025, and urges synods to use the principles outlined in 'Challenge to the Church' in deploying the stipendiary posts allocated to them, alongside non-stipendiary ministers, elders, local church leaders and other lay ministries.

## Resolution 29

### Ministries committee: Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment (p.154)

General Assembly instructs the ministries committee to apply the following formula for the allocation of stipendiary ministry posts to synods from January 2017:

- a) Assembly reaffirms its aim of funding at least 26 stipendiary CRCWs across the URC with a minimum of two CRCWs per synod. While the total number of CRCW stipends paid remains below 26, synods may have three stipendiary CRCWs in their synod for a limited period without it affecting their overall deployment numbers or number of stipends allocated for the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Each CRCW post shall require approval by the church related community work programme subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.
- b) Up to 8% of the available stipendiary posts for ministers of Word and Sacraments shall be allocated as special category ministry posts, each post to be approved by the accreditation subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.
- c) All remaining stipendiary posts for both ministries shall be allocated to synods on the basis of a formula with a weighting of 60% for the number of members in each synod and 40% for the number of congregations in each synod. This formula shall be reapplied annually on the basis of the latest information available.
- d) Each synod shall remain responsible for making its own allocation of stipendiary posts across the synod.

## Resolution 30

### Ministries committee: Assessment procedure (p.162)

General Assembly confirms the procedure shown on pages 164-166 of the *Book of Reports* to General Assembly 2016 for applications for candidacy for the ministry of Word and Sacraments and the ministry of church related community work within the United Reformed Church, and delegates to the ministries and education and learning committees' authority to make such minor amendments to the administration of this procedure as may from time to time be required, while reserving the right to make major changes of substance.

## Resolution 31

### Mission committee: Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church (p.185)

General Assembly adopts the Environmental Policy, and encourages all committees, synods and local churches to do their best to implement it.

## Resolution 32

**Mission committee: Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church**  
(p.185)

General Assembly resolves to appoint a task group until 31 July 2022 in the first instance, of four persons, to be appointed by the nominations committee and funded from the mission committee budget, to monitor the United Reformed Church's progress toward meeting its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, reporting to the mission committee.

The task group's specific remit shall be to:

- a) compile, produce or commission resources for worship and teaching related to themes contained in the Environmental Policy;
- b) consider the budgetary implications of implementing the Environmental Policy;
- c) commission a suitable individual or body to calculate the Church's carbon footprint, enabling a benchmark to be set against which future reductions in this footprint may be made; and
- d) liaise with the United Reformed Church investment committee, and to assist the relevant bodies within the United Reformed Church regarding decisions relating to the investment of Church funds in fossil fuels.

## Resolution 33

**Mission committee: Support for a new international Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty**  
(p.191)

General Assembly, recalling the resolution on Trident adopted by Mission Council in 2006:

- a) Welcomes the current international focus on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons;
- b) Remains opposed to the costly replacement of Trident and calls for the negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty to bring about the elimination of all nuclear weapons;
- c) Mandates the mission committee to make this call widely known, working where possible with partner churches and organisations to achieve it;
- d) Urges church members to engage with their Member of Parliament on this issue.

## Resolution 34

**Mission committee: Resolution on peace and reunification of the Korean Peninsula** (p.196)

- a) The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church welcomes the statement produced by the Ecumenical Forum on Peace in North East Asia meeting in Seoul on 12 September 2015.
- b) The General Assembly faithfully joins its ecumenical partners, especially the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK),
  - i) in affirming the 'Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula' that was adopted by the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches;
  - ii) in supporting the communiqué that was issued by the WCC International Consultation on Peace, Justice and Reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula at the Ecumenical Institute in 2014.
- c) The General Assembly dedicates itself to accompany its Korean partners, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) as they seek the reconciliation and restoration of families and communities long divided by conflict and hostility, so that social, spiritual and psychological healing can occur between the people of Korea.
- d) The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church continues to support ecumenical engagements towards peace and reconciliation of the Korean Peninsula. These actions include promoting the campaign to finally replace the Armistice Agreement of 1953 with a Peace Treaty, joining with Christians around the globe in recognising and providing worship resources and actively raising these initiatives with ecumenical partners in the UK.

## Resolution 35

**Nominations committee: Report to General Assembly** (p.199)

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 202-214 of the *Book of Reports*, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.

## Resolution 36

**Nominations committee: Report to General Assembly** (p.199)

- a) General Assembly appoints Mr Ian Hardie as Deputy Treasurer of the Church with immediate effect until 30 June 2017.
- b) General Assembly appoints the Revd John Piper as Deputy Treasurer of the Church from 1 July 2017 for four years.

## Resolution 37A

### **Eastern Synod: The Palestinian situation (p.218)**

General Assembly resolves to:

- a) commend the Church of Scotland Report 'The Inheritance of Abraham' (revised version) for study by United Reformed churches;
- b) endorse the conclusion of 'The Inheritance of Abraham' and reject claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory;
- c) commend 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed churches and encourage the formation of Kairos communities, either within individual congregations or ecumenically;
- d) urge the UK government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories;
- e) urge the UK Government and the European Union to exert, through sanctions or other effective means that address the inequality of power between the parties, international pressure on Israel to end the occupation of Palestinian territory and the blockade of Gaza and allow a just peace to be achieved.

## Resolution 37B

### **Thames North Synod: The Palestinian situation (p.218)**

This is identical to paragraphs c), d) and e) of the Eastern Synod resolution.

## Resolution 37C

### **Wessex Synod: The Palestinian situation (p.218)**

General Assembly resolves to:

- a) commend the Church of Scotland Report 'The Inheritance of Abraham' (revised version) and 'A Moment of Truth, a word of faith, hope, and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering, Kairos Palestine 2009' for study by United Reformed churches and synods.
- b) urge the UK government and the European Union to do all that is within their power to ensure that human rights are respected and international law is upheld by all parties in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
- c) develop and deepen our existing work around these issues so as to enable the United Reformed Church to adopt a programme of dialogue and action with partner churches, interfaith partners and public authorities.

## Resolution 38

### **Southern Synod: The budget of the Church (p.222)**

General Assembly resolves that at its future meetings it will, as part of its regular business, receive the budget of the Church for the next financial year for approval. In years when General Assembly does not meet, Mission Council, acting on behalf of Assembly, will receive the annual budget for approval.

# The Standing Orders of General Assembly

## 1. The agenda of the Assembly

1.1 At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees which include the Mission Council or by synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

1.2 For the good ordering of General Assembly's time, the Moderators for that Assembly, in consultation with the General Secretary and the Clerk, shall group the draft motions into three groups which shall determine the manner in which the Assembly shall consider them: A – en bloc, B – majority voting, and C – consensus. All matters covered by paragraphs 3(1) & (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church shall be placed in Group B. In the case of any other matter the Moderator may rule at any time that a motion be taken from Group B and placed in Group C. At the same time the grouping of draft motions is published any matters already known to be urgent under Standing Order 2.3 shall also be published, with reasons given.

1.3 The motions in group A shall be taken en bloc. Notice in writing to the effect that one or more of the motions included in group A should be considered separately may be given to the General Secretary by the close of business on the first day of the meeting of the Assembly. If such notice, which must be signed by at least six members of the Assembly, is duly received, then the motion(s) in question shall be removed from group A. It shall be for the Moderators, in consultation with the General Secretary and the Clerk, to determine in which of groups B and C any such separated motions should be placed. When the single motion to approve group A is before the Assembly, the vote shall be taken immediately, the motion being determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards.

1.4 The motions in group B shall be determined by majority vote, and Standing Order 2 shall not apply.

1.5 The motions in group C shall be considered by means of the consensus decision making process set out in Standing Order 2.

1.6 The Assembly arrangements committee shall prepare before each meeting of the Assembly a draft order of business, and submit it to the Assembly as early as convenient in the programme.

1.7 Motions arising from a report which have been duly seconded and submitted by individual members of Assembly under Standing Order 4.2 shall be taken at a point in the business determined by the Moderator on the advice of the convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee.

1.8 If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Clerk.

1.9 The Convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee may, during the meeting of the Assembly, propose that the order of business be changed.

## 2. Consensus decision making

2.1 Those motions in group C shall be determined by a process of decision making by consensus. For these purposes the following Standing Order 2 will apply and the Standing Orders 4, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5 will not apply.

2.2 The process of consensus:

- 2.2.1 Consensus means a decision of the council reached unanimously, or where a small minority of members of the council is willing to accept a proposal that is not their first preference.
- 2.2.2 Passed, recognising disagreement, means a decision of the council where, after careful consideration of the options, a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so that the matter may be resolved.
- 2.2.3 At each stage of the process the Moderator will clarify the nature of the session, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.

2.3 The information session:

This session aims to inform the Assembly on the issue to be considered. At the start of this session, if the Moderator judges that the matter before the Assembly is urgent, requiring decision during the current meeting of the Assembly, s/he shall inform the Assembly that this is the case and advise that if following the Consensus procedures there is continuing disagreement it may be necessary to move to a majority decision under Standing Order 2.5.9.7. A range of options may be presented by different people who shall speak in favour of their option. Those presenting issues, reports or proposals may speak for no more than five minutes unless the Assembly agrees to an extension of time. Members of Assembly are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek for clarification or further information.

2.4 The discussion session:

This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. Speakers may speak for no more than three minutes.

- 2.4.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole council, time for thinking during a break etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage. (See paragraph 2.8 for more information on the use of coloured cards.)
- 2.4.2 The Moderator shall ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- 2.4.3 The Assembly may meet around tables so that small group discussion can happen quickly and easily.
- 2.4.4 As the discussion session proceeds possible ways forward for the Church are developed until a specific proposal is reached.

2.5 The decision session:

Only those Assembly members present may contribute to this session, they may speak for no more than three minutes.

- 2.5.1 Discussion continues with speakers outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. At all times, speakers are encouraged to suggest a way forward for the Assembly, rather than merely speaking with passion for a pre-determined view.
- 2.5.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- 2.5.3 The proposal shall be displayed throughout the discussion in such a way that all can see the text and any progressively agreed changes to it.
- 2.5.4 If a major new insight is expressed, the Moderator may determine that it is appropriate to move back into a discussion session.
- 2.5.5 After summing up where the Assembly seems to be heading, the Moderator checks whether the Assembly is nearing consensus using one or more questions such as the following:

2.5.5.1 What is your response to this proposal? (inviting a show of indicator cards)

2.5.5.2 Do you believe we have consensus in support of this proposal?

2.5.5.3 Do you believe we have consensus not to support this proposal?

2.5.6 If there is strong but not unanimous support:

2.5.6.1 Who supports the proposal?

2.5.6.2 Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by consensus?

2.5.6.3 Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?

2.5.7 Where some members of Assembly indicate an unwillingness to accept a proposal there shall be further discussion and then the Moderator shall seek to ascertain that they accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome.

2.5.8 The Moderator shall ask:

2.5.8.1 Are you prepared to have the issue declared passed, recognising disagreement?

If so they may choose to record their dissent.

2.5.8.2 Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?

2.5.9 Continuing disagreement:

Assembly may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including:

2.5.9.1 adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration;

2.5.9.2 asking the Moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly;

2.5.9.3 referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;

2.5.9.4 deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;

2.5.9.5 declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;

2.5.9.6 if the issue has previously been notified as urgent, moving to majority decision;

2.5.9.7 in the event of urgency not previously notified, moving to majority decision; in that event, the Moderator shall give her/his reasons, and test the mind of Assembly in forming her/his judgement.

2.6 The Moderator

2.6.1 The role of the Moderator is very important.

The Moderator:

2.6.1.1 assists the Assembly to discern the will of God as far as possible

2.6.1.2 is alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as members contribute

2.6.1.3 pauses for prayer or buzz group reflection as appropriate

2.6.1.4 encourages trust and integrity in contributions

2.6.1.5 ensures care and support for those whose honesty or minority voice makes them vulnerable

2.6.1.6 invites members to respond to speeches showing indicator cards, and reflects the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent

2.6.1.7 suggests or encourages creative modifications of a proposal, picking up insights expressed

2.6.1.8 summarises discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the discussion.

2.7 The Assembly and Moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group. This will be appointed at the beginning of each Assembly by the Assembly. It will:

2.7.1 enable group work, collate responses from groups and report back to the council

2.7.2 help and support the Moderator

2.7.3 be responsible for providing the wording of the text under discussion.

## Standing Orders

### 2.8 Coloured cards

2.8.1 Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they are helpful.

#### 2.8.2 Each member receives two cards:

2.8.2.1 Orange – held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal.

2.8.2.2 Blue – held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.

#### 2.8.3 Cards held crossed indicate to the Moderator it is time to move on to the next subject.

2.8.4 Cards should be shown only at the invitation of the Moderator and held so that the Moderator can see them. They indicate response to what has just been said. They help the Moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, and to invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

### 2.9 Changes of order

Changes of order may be raised by any member of Assembly at any time during the meeting and must refer to the proceedings of the council. The Moderator asks the member to state their change of order. The Moderator rules on it immediately, or asks for a decision by the Assembly via a simple majority vote.

Changes of order include:

2.9.1 Out of order – the speaker is digressing from the matter being discussed.

2.9.2 Closed session – that the matter in hand is sensitive and should be conducted in private. This is voted on immediately without discussion. It can be raised more than once during a discussion. If it is agreed, all those who are not members of the council must leave. Members must treat the subsequent discussion in the strictest confidence and must not divulge its content or process to non-members.

2.9.3 Adjournment of the discussion – this is voted on immediately without further discussion. It can be proposed more than once in a discussion. It cannot be brought by a person who has already spoken. When the discussion is resumed the person whose speech was interrupted has the right to speak first.

2.9.4 Personal explanation – a member feeling that some material part of their former speech has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may ask to make a personal explanation.

2.9.5 Objection – a member may raise an objection if the remarks of a speaker are deemed offensive or derogatory. On such an objection being raised the Moderator shall immediately rule as to whether the remarks are offensive or derogatory and if the ruling is in favour of the objection may require the speaker to withdraw the remark. Should the speaker refuse to do so the Moderator may require the speaker to terminate their speech immediately.

## 3. Presentation of business

3.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be printed and circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.

3.2 A synod may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 12 weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.

3.3 A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its synod for consideration and, if the synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the synod to comply with Standing Order 3.2 above.

3.4 A member of the Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the General Secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a synod through which the matter could properly have been raised, the General Secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Assembly arrangements committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.

3.5 Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Mission Council or a committee of the General Assembly or a synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.

3.6 It shall not be in order, whether in en bloc business, majority voting, or consensus decision-making, to move a motion or amendment which:

- 3.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or
- 3.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or
- 3.6.3 pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or
- 3.6.4 amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or
- 3.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under 3.6.5.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, and 3.6.5) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 3.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

## 4. Motions and amendments

4.1 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or synod, under Standing Order 1.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 3.4 of a motion to refer back to that committee or synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.

4.2 During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. The Moderator shall decide whether such motion or amendment requires to be circulated in writing to members before it is discussed by the Assembly. During the course of the debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.

4.3 No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder, the exception to this being motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given.

4.4 A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserves the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.

## Standing Orders

4.5 An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion under Standing Order 4.10.

4.6 If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.

4.7 An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.

4.8 The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.

4.9 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.

4.10 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. After any amendments duly moved under Standing Orders 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting. Once a sole motion remains, votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way and in accordance with Standing Order 7.

## 5. Timing of speeches and of other business

5.1 Save by prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.

5.2 Save by the prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Mission Council, or from any synod shall not in aggregate exceed 45 minutes, nor shall speeches in support of any particular committee or synod motion exceed 12 minutes, (e.g. a committee with three motions may not exceed 36 minutes). The proposers of any other motion of which due notice has been given shall be allowed an aggregate of ten minutes, unless a longer period be recommended by the officers of the Assembly or determined by the Moderator. Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than three minutes.

5.3 When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.

5.4 Secretaries of committees and full-time executive secretaries who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have

responsibility at the request of the convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator.

5.5 In each debate, whether on a motion or on an amendment, no one shall address the Assembly more than once, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.

5.6 The foregoing Standing Order (5.5) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.

## 6. Closure of debate

6.1 A member of Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion that the General Assembly, for the better consideration of a specified resolution and its related documents, goes into a committee of the whole Assembly. Provided that the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that this rule may appropriately be applied in the case of the said resolution, the motion shall be presented immediately following the opening speeches in support of the primary motion. For such a motion to be carried, two thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Committee procedure enables members to speak more than once and exploratory votes to be taken on particular points or suggested changes. The number and length of speeches shall be at the discretion of the Moderator. After discussion in committee and decision on any proposed changes the Clerk shall draw the attention of the Assembly to any changes to the original text which have been agreed. The Moderator shall then declare the committee stage to be ended, and the Assembly shall proceed to hear a closing speech from the mover of the motion under discussion and proceed to a vote on the motion, subject to any further motion under Standing Order 6. The decision of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

6.2 In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration be not put. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

6.3 In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question be now put. This is sometimes described as 'the closure motion'. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

6.4 During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be deferred to the next Assembly. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded

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and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the General Secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The General Secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be represented at the next meeting of the General Assembly.

6.5 The motions described in Standing Orders 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 above are exceptions to Standing Order 4.3, in that they may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote. Precedence as between motions under 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.

## 7. Voting

7.1 Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

7.2 Other motions before the Assembly, not subject to the consensus process, shall be determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards, except:

- 7.2.1 if the Assembly decides before the vote that a paper ballot be the method of voting or
- 7.2.2 if the show of cards indicates a very close vote, and the Moderator decides, or a member of Assembly proposes and the Assembly agrees, that a paper ballot shall be the method of voting.

7.3 To provide for voting in the case of a paper ballot, and to assist in taking a count of votes when the Moderator decides this is necessary, the nominations committee shall appoint tellers for each Assembly.

7.4 Any electronic voting system approved by the Assembly arrangements committee shall be deemed to meet the requirements of these Standing Orders.

## 8. Questions

8.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the convenor of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.

8.2 A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.

8.3 Questions asked under Standing Orders 8.1 and 8.2 shall be put and answered without discussion.

## 9. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

9.1 A member shall have the right to rise and call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall

cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.

9.2 A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may rise and request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.

9.3 The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.

9.4 The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

## 10. Admission of public and press

10.1 Members of the public and representatives of the press shall be admitted to the Assembly unless the Assembly otherwise decides, and they shall occupy such places as are assigned to them.

## 11. Circulation of documents

11.1 Only documents authorised by the General Secretary in consultation with the convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee may be distributed within the building in which the Assembly is meeting.

## 12. Closed session

12.1 A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Assembly, the legal adviser, and any technical or venue staff required to enable Assembly to meet safely may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and the legal adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held *in retentis* by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.

12.2 A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Assembly, requiring a simple majority. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded, and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately pause while non-members leave the room.

12.3 If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Assembly officers, consulting the legal adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.

12.4 Where possible a closed session will begin after a break, in which event everyone must leave the hall. Once the hall is empty, only those entitled to be present shall be

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admitted. Members of Assembly may leave the hall during a closed session, but if they do so they may not be re-admitted.

### 13. Use of Electronic devices and communications during the course of debate

13.1 Although many meetings take place in wi-fi enabled rooms, and many attending will have access to systems of electronic communication and to social media sites during business sessions, their primary responsibility is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications and editorial committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business. All electronic devices must be silent when a meeting is in session.

13.2 Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

### 14. Record of the Assembly

14.1 A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Assembly arrangements committee may determine.

14.2 The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the Clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.

14.3 A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the General Secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.

14.4 As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a *Record of Assembly* and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each Synod and Local Church.

### 15. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

15.1 In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.

15.2 Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Mission Council). The Clerk of the Assembly may, from time-to-time, suggest amendments.

*Updated 21 March 2016  
Michael Hopkins, the Clerk of the General Assembly*

### Flow Chart to guide the use of Standing Order 2 – Consensus Decision Making

NB – this flowchart is only for exploration, and is not definitive. The words always take precedence

