

# Walking the Way Steering Group

## Where Next?: The future of Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today

### Basic Information

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<b>Action required</b>	Extend funding for Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 27</b> <b>General Assembly, in affirming the work of the Walking the Way steering group, encourages those who plan the Church's budget to seek ways of funding its continuing work at the level indicated in Appendix E of this paper, according to the priorities set out in the paper.</b>

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	This paper provides a summary of the journey which <i>Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today</i> has taken so far, an update on where things are now, how the focus has been received, where it might head in future and how this might be funded.
<b>Main points</b>	The steering group's open attitude to learning from the existing work of the Spirit on missional discipleship across the URC, and to share that wisdom more widely, has been well received. This vital focus is worth continuing but will require funding when its main external financial source comes to an end.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 3/16 paper M1 General Assembly reports 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Mission Education and learning Communications Children's and youth work Finance Bible Reading Fellowship London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) People involved in founding/coordinating various online churches

## Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	General Assembly is being asked to approve expenditure which is currently covered by external funds. In the short term, Finance Committee projections suggest that this can be achieved through existing budgets into 2021, and possibly right through 2021, allowing more time to think about the long term.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Specific events and opportunities to engage further with ecumenical and interfaith partners on discipleship and faith development are coming up. Consultation with various online churches and external partners (listed above) continues.

## 1. The journey to this point

- 1.1 The Council for World Mission (CWM), a partnership to which the URC belongs, has a Mission Support Programme (MSP), offering funding to member churches to develop their mission priorities. In November 2015, following a process of discernment about which particular priority the URC should focus on in the third and fourth stages of this funding, a task group was established as a joint venture of the Mission Committee and Education and Learning Committee to pursue whole-of-life discipleship as said priority. Over time, this focus brought forth *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, which was welcomed by General Assembly in 2016, and went through a period of preparation and development before being formally launched in November 2017 and, subsequently, the task group has become a steering group.
- 1.2 *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* is the URC's focus on whole-of-life discipleship, helping everyone across the URC to recognise and engage with God's presence in all aspects of our everyday reality, at home, in the workplace, at school, in the supermarket, on the factory floor. It has a steering group and full-time project manager to help keep things running in a good direction, but it is not a programme or initiative that is designed only to last for a short time. It is intended as a long-term emphasis on whole-of-life discipleship, to celebrate and build upon the existing experience and wisdom of what God is up to already in people's lives across the URC.

## 2. Update on work

With excitement continuing to grow across the denomination for whole-of-life discipleship, including the different ways in which every synod is, in its own way, incorporating whole-of-life discipleship into its life, work and strategy, the steering group has sought to recognise, celebrate and build on the existing work of the Spirit in these approaches. To this end, the work of the group has naturally fallen under several headings. Here is a summary of where things are:

### 2.1 Resources and communications

- 2.1.1 Feedback from local churches and synods suggests that, whilst it is important to avoid needless replication or to reinvent the wheel, it is useful for the steering group to produce some materials. As such, simple resources have been

distributed to individuals and local churches, including leaflets, bookmarks, pens, notepads and prayer cords with accompanying suggestion cards. The prayer cords have been the main item of note, with more than 20,000 being distributed since they were launched in 2018.

- 2.1.2 [Seasonal resources](#) have also been produced, with a production plan in place for the remainder of 2020 to ensure effective resource production throughout the year, including resources for Pentecost, Summer, Harvest, Remembrance and Advent, as well as exploring other resource ideas (e.g. worship/spirituality resources, educational events/opportunities, visual/photographic resources, social justice and stewardship). All of these will be kept simple, accessible and aware of the needs of different audiences.
- 2.1.3 The steering group has also continued to promote [Holy Habits](#) as a worthwhile resource. This has been helped greatly by the work of the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) in developing [further resources](#) and [web materials](#) on Holy Habits, which we have been able to signpost.
- 2.1.4 With the plethora of existing materials and approaches to whole-of-life discipleship growing constantly, the importance of signposting resources and helping people to navigate them has become a major priority for the steering group. The online [resource map](#) has helped with this, but has experienced technical issues since launch which have impacted its reception and use. The resource map will be relaunched in a more accessible form. In the meantime, a [separate webpage](#) for sharing synod identified/produced resources has proved much easier to use and, along with social media posts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)), has enabled signposting to continue, albeit in a different way to that originally expected.
- 2.1.5 The most important element of resourcing and communication has proved to be the sharing of real-life stories of individuals and communities living out discipleship in everyday life. The steering group is very grateful to all individuals, local churches, mission projects and others who have given permission for their stories to be shared. This has enabled us to release at least three stories a month through the [news page](#) and social media. This has also enabled us to identify enough material to publish a minimum of three posts a week on social media, plus additional items as and when these have been identified. We continue to seek stories and examples of everyday discipleship to share more widely and hope this vital sharing of wisdom and experience will continue long into the future.

## 2.2 Accompaniment

- 2.2.1 Having negotiated, in 2018, the terms of a pilot accompaniment programme to be delivered in conjunction with the [London Institute for Contemporary Christianity](#) (LICC) in two synods, and having identified Southern Synod as one of the participating synods, work on the pilot began in earnest in September 2019.
- 2.2.2 Mersey Synod has been confirmed as the second participating synod, and will commence a recruitment process soon.

2.2.3 Data are constantly being gathered about how the impact of the pilot accompaniment programme might help to shape something that might be offered across the URC as accompaniment in whole-of-life discipleship in the future.

## 2.3 Online Church

2.3.1 Following the final report of the URC's task group on work with 20-40 year olds, and resolutions from the URC Youth Assembly asking the Church to take more seriously the fact that people live more and more of their lives online, the steering group felt it appropriate to consider the prospect of online church and its capacity for supporting people in discipleship development.

2.3.2 Following consultation with a range of existing online churches, and different groups across the denomination, the steering group will set up a small task group, mainly of people with existing experience in online church development, to establish some detailed proposals of how things might proceed, especially with regards to platforms, safeguarding and ecclesiology.

2.3.3 Many local congregations of the URC have used technology capably and imaginatively to respond to the current Covid-19 crisis. This work has kept people connected, worshipping, praying and living out their faith together, even in isolation and lockdown. The importance of this is visible in the good news stories of comfort, reassurance, hope, action and inspiration that have come directly from these efforts, shared through the [Walking the Way news](#) page and the main [URC news](#) page. There is also an increase, reported by local congregations, of people engaging in church-related activity as a result of this work. The steering group feels that our task is now to establish how, not if or when, the URC ought to develop its approach to online church, in order to support and equip this crucial area of creative development, which is already growing across the denomination.

## 2.4 Stepwise

2.4.1 This intercultural, intergenerational education programme for all people seeking to deepen their discipleship is being developed by the URC's education and learning committee, and is offered as a programmatic element of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*. The steering group and Stepwise task and finish group enjoy representation in each other's meetings to ensure that Stepwise can benefit from the steering group's insights and vice-versa. Further information on the development of Stepwise can be found in the education and learning report.

## 2.5 The URC's 50th Anniversary

2.5.1 In seeing this milestone as a chance to reflect on all that has gone well in the URC's life, consider the things we are thankful for and think where things might be heading in the future, the steering group, in consultation with mission, children's and youth work, ministries and communications, is setting up a task group to consider proposals for taking this forward, including potential sources of funding.

## 2.6 Synod networks

2.6.1 In addition to coordinating the above work, Simon Peters, project manager for *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, has, along with steering group members and others, spent time visiting various synods, attending events and shadowing synod staff/volunteers in their work with local churches to gain a deeper insight into the various strategies employed by different synods on whole-of-life discipleship. This includes a series of twice-yearly virtual meetings (via Lifesize) of synod contacts to share news and wisdom more widely, as well as continuing regular contact with training and development officers (TDOs), children's and youth development officers (CYDOs) and the mission enablers network (MEN), and seems to have strengthened the relationship between the steering group and synods. It has also been very encouraging to form connections with our Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs), and to see responses to whole-of-life discipleship in various offices and departments of Church House.

## 3. How has *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* been received?

- 3.1 From the outset, it has been vital for the steering group to monitor the effectiveness of its work. If what it is doing is not helpful to churches, communities and individuals locally, then it is not worth continuing. As such, the group has sought to view evaluation, not as a process to be employed at the end of activities, but as an ongoing process to help the group shape its work accordingly.
- 3.2 More detailed information about the evaluation process can be found in the appendices to this report, which are available online, as follows: [bit.ly/GA-Papers](https://bit.ly/GA-Papers)
- i) Appendix A covers the methodology, analysis and commentary of the evaluation process.
  - ii) Appendix B contains data extracted from the 2018 annual church returns, and shows churches' level of engagement with Holy Habits, this being the main initial emphasis of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* at the time.
  - iii) Appendix C shows data from the 2019 annual church returns, by which time the steering group was able to enquire about churches' level of engagement with *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* more explicitly across a spectrum of activity.
  - iv) Appendix D is an attempt to capture more qualitative data, including data about how churches used the materials they ordered, data from email queries and data from requests to use the logo which were submitted during 2019. Please note that the spreadsheets in this appendix do not note everything, only significant comments or feedback. For examples of the real-life stories which have been gathered and shared, visit the [news page](#).
- 3.3 Some general findings include:
- 3.3.1 **The majority of URC congregations are engaging** – From the 2019 returns, taking a sample of 60 churches across six synods, we see that

42 are engaged, in some way, with whole-of-life discipleship. Doing the arithmetic of the number of churches in the URC versus sample size etc, and taking into account the fact that around 10% of churches do not respond to the annual church returns process, we arrive at 52-74% being actively involved in whole-of-life discipleship, which is between half and three-quarters of local churches. We can be confident in the lowest estimate, and assert that it is probably higher. This is very encouraging indeed.

**3.3.2 People respond well to openness** – The highly positive reception of synods and local churches to the steering group’s open attitude of wanting to learn more of what God is doing with them, and to share the riches of this in empowering whole-of-life discipleship more widely, demonstrates well the effectiveness of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* as a focus.

**3.3.3 Resourcing and sharing are still the highest priorities** – Feedback has consistently shown the importance of sharing examples of individuals and churches living out discipleship day to day. It has also shown the importance of producing simple, accessible resources which help to unpack and make sense of what being a whole-of-life disciple of Jesus looks like.

**3.3.4 Clarity, quality and practicality matter most** – A few things, done well, within the capacity available, to the highest quality, is better than lots of approaches which fail to meet people’s needs.

**3.3.5 Other available data gives positive feedback** – Monitoring shows that virtually every email query submitted in 2019 and the early part of 2020, from both local churches and synods, led to a positive outcome. Even those conversations which began with negative comments led on to gratitude and pleasure once the query had been answered or need met. Interestingly, social media content which shares personal stories or examples of real-life action on discipleship in small, achievable, realistic ways, also seems to outperform content which shares resources or events.

3.4 All of this helps the steering group to shape its work, ensuring this remains relevant for as many people across the URC as possible.

## 4. Future

4.1 As a result of everything mentioned above, it seems worth continuing *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, as the URC’s long-term focus on whole-of-life discipleship. As such, here are some items which the steering group could, with General Assembly’s blessing, work on in the next 18 months:

**4.1.1 Story/resource sharing** – A continuation of gathering stories and resources to share, including more visits to and communication with synods and Church House offices/departments.

**4.1.2 Accompaniment/mentoring** – Continuation of pilot activities in participating synods, gathering of data and formation of a URC wide accompaniment /mentoring strategy for discipleship.

- 4.1.3 **Online church and URC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary** – Continuing, through the management of task groups, to establish ways forward on these topics for the denomination.
- 4.1.4 **Ecumenical/interfaith relations** – Making use of key upcoming opportunities to connect with friends, domestic and global, on issues of discipleship and faith development.
- 4.1.5 **Seasonal resources** – Production of materials to keep whole-of-life discipleship in people's hearts and minds throughout the year.
- 4.1.6 **Stewardship** – Efforts to support people in making more explicit connections between their use of financial and practical resources (both individually and collectively) and their life as disciples of Jesus.
- 4.1.7 **Spirituality** – Supporting the work of URC: Spirituality and the development of a worship reference group for the URC (in so far as it promotes whole-of-life discipleship).
- 4.1.8 **Social justice** – Working with church and society, the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), Commitment for Life and global and intercultural ministries on issues of domestic and global justice.
- 4.1.9 **Other sources of inspiration/action** – Keeping on the lookout, with a readiness to respond, for events, opportunities, encounters and other sources of inspiration or activity in whole-of-life discipleship development.

## 5. Financing

- 5.1 At the end of 2020, the Council for World Mission's MSP funding for *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus* will come to an end.
- 5.2 Great savings have been made through the extensive use of virtual meetings, especially for steering group meetings, consultations, task group work and other events, as well as the use of online publishing over print materials. The steering group's aim of celebrating and building on existing work has also reduced costs.
- 5.3 However, keeping a full-time project manager, events and publications going, even with savings, will require some funding. General Assembly is asked, therefore, to consider this paper's resolution on the future funding of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*.
- 5.4 To assist with decision-making, Appendix E offers an overview of spending on the development of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* in 2019 and the first part of 2020. The full-year figures from 2019 are below.
- 5.5 In the short term, finance committee projections suggest that this can be achieved through existing budgets for some months beyond the end of 2020, and possibly right through 2021, allowing more time to think about the long term.

## Appendix E: Finance

Spending in 2019									
Total Programme Budget									
238,262									
Expenditure as per original application:	Original Budget (see note)	Revised Budget, if applicable	Cumulative spend from previous periods	Current Period Expenditure/ Spend	Total Actual Expenditure /Spend	Future Periods' Expenditure /Spend	Total Estimated Expenditure	Variance from Budget	
1	104,780		54,238	54,937	109,175		109,175	(4,395)	
2	10,500		150	4,067	4,217		4,217	6,283	
3	47,000		10,403	858	11,261		11,261	35,739	
4	5,000		12,299	4,131	16,430		16,430	(11,430)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>167,280</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>77,090</b>	<b>63,993</b>	<b>141,083</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>141,083</b>	<b>26,197</b>	

Note: Original budget figures are cumulative for 2017 and 2018