

Paper M2

Listening – follow up from November Mission Council

Derek Estill and Nigel Uden

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Nigel Uden nigel.uden@urc.org.uk
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To reflect on the group discussions on listening at last November's Mission Council.
Main points	We do not need a formal listening project, but listening is vital. It is a practice to cultivate and pursue.
Previous relevant documents	Presentation and discussion at last Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	MCAG.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No formal direct impact.

1. Listening seems to be on everyone's lips. Parliamentarians are being challenged about how much they are listening. People with the courage to speak of being abused plead to be heard. And on our travels around the United Reformed Church, we hear people wondering if their particular stories and fears are being heard.
2. At the November Mission Council we introduced a paper that suggested 'A conciliar church is a listening church. It takes account of the discernment reached by its constituent parts. It listens for the voice of God in its members' voices, in the voices of its ecumenical and interfaith partners, and in the world's voices.' The council then went into groups to discuss listening. The feedback suggests some considerable support for enabling listening, but also a real caution about having a specific *programme* of listening. Rather, both from the group feedback and in many subsequent conversations we sense a heightened commitment to listening as part

of the lifestyle of the United Reformed Church – our default position in our engagement with one another, with the community and ecumenically. It's how we will best discern what the Spirit is saying to the church.

3. We have heard an anxiety that any attempt to make listening a 'project', might run counter to *Walking the Way* (WTW). It was helpful to hear that concern. The aspiration of WTW is to enable a culture shift in the URC, and in advocating a more deliberate listening that is exactly what we have in mind – listening is less a programme than a part of our cultural identity.
4. Equally, we have heard how many synod personnel identify listening as a key skill that they bring. So it is that an emphasis upon listening would be to complement the listening that already characterises much of our life together.
5. People feeling unheard may not mean that they are, but if their perception is that their voice is ignored, then there is value in us exploring how we can ensure people are reassured that they are heard and prevent them feeling they are not.
6. Having listened to the variety in what the groups said at November's Mission Council, we do not bring a proposal for a specific listening project that is separate from and additional to the life and work of the URC. Rather, we suggest that whenever proposals and initiatives are being advanced there will be a conscious determination to listen. Formally, consensus decision making is designed to assist. Informally, there is a much to be gained from the thought that the five Chinese characters used for writing 'to listen' are ear, you, eyes, undivided attention and heart.
7. The paper that Alan Yates introduced in November, and the feedback upon which he reports to the May meeting, may spawn some specific ideas for 'acting with strategic intent'. In particular, it may lead to discussions around our Trust work, and to co-ordination of some services. These radical possibilities will require listening of a high order, if they, or something else, are to take us into a new tomorrow with unity.