

Paper B1

United Reformed Church Youth
Commitment to God's Creation





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Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Dan Morrell urcyamoderator@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p>a) Mission Council commends the work already carried out by children's and youth work committee, children's and youth work department and URC Youth Executive in reducing the overall carbon footprint of the annual URC Youth programme.</p> <p>b) Mission Council warmly receives the document 'Commitment to God's Creation', adopted by URC Youth Assembly 2017 as a mandate for change.</p> <p>c) Mission Council instructs URC Youth Executive to work collaboratively with mission committee and communications committee to advance this work and develop further ideas to get, particularly, children and young people involved in tackling climate change.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Ensuring enactment of the URC Environmental Policy, as well as URC Youth's own commitment to tackling climate change. Reducing the overall carbon footprint of the URC, in particular that of URC Youth. Also promoting climate justice among those of URC Youth age.
Main points	The work already done is good, but more is needed.
Previous documents	URC Environmental Policy; URC Ethical Investment Guidelines
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth Assembly; URC Youth Executive; Grace Pengelly; Lucy Zwolinska; Derek Estill; Andrew Weston; Alison Greaves; ACT Community

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Work will continue to be done with the Joint Public Issues Team, and the Big Church Switch group

Commitment to God's Creation

Background

1. Mission Council will recall the adoption of the United Reformed Church's Environmental Policy at General Assembly 2016. This highlights 'action which churches, synods and Assembly will seek to implement with respect to caring for Creation and reducing the Church's carbon footprint' (Assembly Reports, 2016).
2. Paragraph 5.6 of the policy 'encourages URC Youth to develop a strategy responding to the issues of climate change'.
3. Whilst the issue of Climate Change was, of course, already on the hearts and minds of many of URC Youth, the URC Youth Executive felt, in light of Paragraph 5.6, it appropriate to make a commitment of its own to tackling climate change and reducing the impact the URC Youth programme has on the environment. As well as continuing to uphold the appropriate sections of the URC's Environmental Policy.
4. As such, I drafted a list of commitments to this effect. This list, with a short introduction, is included as an Appendix to this paper.
5. The document was discussed, amended and approved by URC Youth Executive. It was then taken on their behalf to URC Youth Assembly 2017.
6. A conversation was held informally at Youth Assembly, before the business was tabled, between those who were particularly interested in the topic. Wonderful conversations took place and the young people highlighted several things:
 - a) It's not just our duty as Christians to take action on climate change, but our duty as humans;
 - b) Social media is a huge channel through which to make a change, and must be utilized to its full capabilities for this purpose;
 - c) Telling personal success stories has a huge impact;
 - d) People need concrete things to put their finger on if they are to do anything.
7. The business was tabled and was received very positively by Assembly the next day. The following resolution was passed by consensus:
 - a) Youth Assembly continues to express deep concern at changes to our global climate brought about by human activity and the disastrous consequences this is having for God's creation and people.
 - b) Assembly acknowledges and appreciates the steps that have already been taken by URC Youth Executive and the Children's and Youth Work Department to reduce the Assembly's carbon footprint.
 - c) Assembly warmly welcomes the URC's revised Environmental Policy accepted at its General Assembly in July 2016, outlining the need for: caring for God's creation, reducing its carbon footprint, improving recycling, minimising waste and improving efficiencies on finite natural resources.
 - d) Having recognised the need for action, Youth Assembly adopts the 'Commitment To God's Creation' as a mandate for change, and calls upon URC Youth to engage wholly with this document.
8. Another, largely procedural resolution, was passed after this asking for a report on this work to be delivered to Mission Council, which brings us up to the present.

The work so far

9. The key emitter in the yearly calendar is Youth Assembly, mainly because it is the largest event. Focus has, therefore, been put into reducing the Assembly's carbon footprint to begin with.
 - a) Youth Assembly's venue since 2012 has been Whitemoor Lakes, Alrewas, Staffordshire. This venue is very environmentally friendly. Well-insulated walls and ceilings reduce heat losses.
 - b) Its waste is taken to a site where it is burnt and used to power 40,000 homes in Derbyshire.
 - c) A coach is provided free of charge for those travelling by train to the nearby station (Tamworth). Whilst other primary reasons for this coach include cost reduction for participants, and convenience. A coach also saves on having numerous taxis take participants to the venue. It is also an incentive to get the train to Assembly, this being a more environmentally friendly option than cars.
 - d) This year each participant (young and old!) was given a thermos mug to use for tea and coffee. These were finely decorated, I must add. This avoids the use (and consequent disposal) of paper cups that the venue provides for guests. These mugs can be used again throughout the year, and indeed at the next Assembly.
 - e) All the forms that needed filling in by participants were uploaded onto a secure section of the URC Youth website. Printed copies were available for those who needed these. This reduced paper usage by over 1,000 sheets.
10. Venues for the 4 annual URC Youth Executive meeting are always selected close to train stations, for convenience and also to encourage use of trains. Correspondence is made beforehand so that Executive members coordinate taxi sharing from the station.

Work proposed or underway

11. In January I attended a meeting for the Big Church Switch. This is one of the flagship parts of the document. The simplicity of signing a church up to this means that individuals from URC Youth can take this initiative back to local churches. Members of Mission Council are encouraged, as is also indicated in the Environmental Policy, to encourage and promote the Big Church Switch in their own settings.
12. Promotion work will also take place for Eco-Church or Eco-Congregation (in Scotland). URC Youth Executive will ensure young people feel adequately equipped to help their churches achieve an Eco-Church or Congregation award.
13. The URC Youth website resources for mental health have proven useful to many people since their inception. The aim would be to replicate something similar for tackling climate change. Resources will therefore be made available on the website, both in house and from other organisations, to aid young people in making a difference in their local settings and synods.
14. Isolation among young people in a local church setting is a common issue; often they are alone or in a very small group. As such it is very easy for young people to feel like they cannot make a difference in their church or local area. However, the URC Youth structures allow for effective use of each synod youth representative (serving on URC Youth Executive) as a liaison between local/synod and Assembly level to ensure that no young person feels like they are climbing the mountain alone.
15. Further reductions will be made by URC Youth Executive and the Children's and Youth Work office in paper usage.

16. As the work continues, it is hoped that URC Youth Executive will liaise with, in particular, mission and communications committees, and relevant Church House staff, to further this work and ensure that the collaborative thinking can bear good fruit.

Conclusion

17. It is the mind of Youth Executive that the Church has made environmentally based decisions when it is convenient. Rather than as a vital decision that has to be made in order to preserve God's creation. The Church does need to be going out of its way, bending over backwards, to preserve our world, not just do it when it suits us.
18. The commitment passed at Youth Assembly acknowledges this and reminds us all that not all things are necessities. Some things are, indeed, luxuries. As such it is time that the URC moved on from its luxuries and started taking action.
19. Promoting awareness is vital, and if people knew the disastrous effects some of these luxuries have on the environment, then perhaps they'd be considered for removal.
20. This report doesn't mark the start, or the end of URC Youth Assembly's work, but is simply an update. The commitment acknowledges that work has already been done to reduce the carbon footprint of the URC Youth programme, in particular of the URC Youth Assembly.
21. However the commitment does call for more work to be done, and so all relevant bodies will be consulted as this moves forward to ensure that the maximum potential can be achieved from children and young people's evident enthusiasm for this issue.

Appendix: The Commitment

Introduction

As Christians we are called to be stewards of God's creation and to care for all God's people. The United Reformed Church Youth continues to recognise that human activity is causing significant changes to our global climate with disastrous consequences.

The Youth Assembly has a history of taking action on this issue, and appreciates the efforts that have been made on its behalf by many people to help live lives that demonstrate our commitment to being good stewards.

As part of continuing efforts by the wider United Reformed Church, the Youth Assembly has been called to "develop a strategy responding to the challenge of climate change" (Para. 5.6, Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church, 2016). This commitment is for all young people within the United Reformed Church and is both a response to this call, and the next step on our continuing journey to live lives that reflect God's love to all.

Commitments

United Reformed Church Youth Assembly:

1. Resolves to:
 - a) enact the United Reformed Church's environmental policy as far as is possible, stating our intent and providing a basis upon which appropriate action may be undertaken.
 - b) raise awareness of the issue of climate change at all levels of the church;
 - c) pray for the people and places affected by climate change, and for those people who are working to promote climate justice;
 - d) 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;
 - e) '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 of vision2020);
 - f) promote the 'Big Church Switch' as a clear and powerful message to governments and businesses that Christians are prepared to lead the way and that switching to renewable energy sources is crucial if we are to live.

2. Mandates the URC Youth Executive to:
 - a) make efforts to reduce the annual Assembly's carbon footprint, paper usage and general waste;
 - b) consider transport emissions when selecting meeting venues and locations, with the hope of a reduction in car and air travel;
 - c) promoting personal engagement in addressing climate change, emphasising that little steps can be made individually to make a big difference altogether;
 - d) encourage and support local and Synod youth groups/bodies in their efforts to lobby local councils, MPs and churches to get on board with tackling climate change;
 - e) ensure the United Reformed Church uphold the "...in relation to climate change" addendum (Mission Council November 2015, Paper G2) to the Ethical Investment Guidelines passed at its General Assembly in 2010.

3. Calls on Synod Youth Executives and local youth groups to:
 - a) encourage local churches to become 'Eco-Churches' (England and Wales) or 'Eco-Congregations' (Scotland);
 - b) forge relationships in both ecumenical and interfaith circles to achieve our common goal together;
 - c) consider transport emissions when selecting meeting venues and locations, with the hope of a reduction in car and air travel.