

Paper G1

Update on current work

Mission Committee

Basic information

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Action required	For information and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council encourages all churches and individuals to keep in mind the significant environmental impact of single-use plastics. While there may be occasions during this pandemic when it is impossible to avoid the use of single-use plastic items, their use should be kept to an absolute minimum. They should also be carefully disposed of in a way that minimises their impact on the environment.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Mission Committee.
Main points	Updates on Legacies of Slavery task group work, resolution on becoming an anti-racist church, Partners in Mission, Beirut emergency appeal, Church and Society/JPIT work, Ecumenical and Interfaith matters, review of the National Rural Officer post, evaluation of vision2020, Greenbelt, resolution on single use plastics.
Previous relevant documents	Paper I1 to Mission Council, March 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Legacies of Slavery task group, Equalities Committee, National Synod of Scotland, Rural Strategy Group and NRO review group, Greenbelt planning group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various items in the paper are covered by the mission committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Legacies of slavery (LoS)

- 1.1. Mission Committee received an update from the Legacies of Slavery task group. In November 2019 the Legacies of Slavery task group presented its initial findings to Mission Council. Mission Council made a number of recommendations to which the task group subsequently began its response. Then came the lockdown due to the pandemic, necessarily delaying the task group's progress. At the same time, the disproportionate impact of the virus on black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and the killing of George Floyd in the US sparked a widespread outcry against the structural racism impacting black communities around the world.
- 1.2. At the subsequent synod clerks meeting, Alan Yates was urged to make some LoS resources available in time for the autumn synods. The task group sought to respond to this request. However, the group recognised a need to review its work in light of the changed context and felt that the material that was originally planned needed to be reviewed and amended. It was decided to collate a body of (pre-existing) resources covering the breadth of themes the task group itself is seeking to address, to be made available in time for the beginning of October, Black History Month. The aim was to resource and encourage local reflection, conversation and engagement. The Legacies of Slavery resources are now available on the URC website (www.urc.org.uk/legacies-of-slavery).
- 1.3. The task group is still working towards the denomination-wide consultation to be formally launched at General Assembly 2021, with a view to bringing specific resolutions to General Assembly 2022, an aim which feels particularly apt, this being the URC's Jubilee year.

2. Resolution on becoming an anti-racist church

The Mission Committee agreed to bring a resolution to Mission Council on committing the URC to a journey towards being an anti-racist church. See Mission Council paper G2.

3. Partners in Mission

- 3.1. We continue to give thanks for the work of our mission partners through the Council for World Mission. The Taiwanese and Mandarin Speaking Fellowship at Lumen URC, London continues to be blessed by the ministry of the Revd Yufen Chen from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan. Much of her ministry has taken place online, but this has enabled her to reach people well beyond the fellowship, London and the UK.
- 3.2. Ms Alison Gibbs, who is working with the United Church of Zambia, had to return to the UK in March for a medical emergency. After treatment and a long recuperation, she returned to Mabel Shaw school in Mbereshi, Zambia in August. The extension of her term of service until the end of 2021 has now been formally approved by CWM.

- 3.3. Ms So Young Jung continues her ministry in South London with Korean young people, having developed a range of creative ways to reach and keep in touch with them, especially during lockdown.
- 3.4. Ms Selena Tai (assistant chaplain for Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students, St Peter's House, Manchester) was furloughed during lockdown, but has now returned to her ministry.

4. Beirut Emergency Appeal

- 4.1. Following the devastating explosion in Beirut in August 2020, the global and intercultural ministries staff launched a URC-wide emergency appeal to support the relief efforts of our local partner in Beirut, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. The appeal ran until the end of September, with the intention that proceeds are match-funded through the URC's World Church and Mission Fund.

5. Church and Society/Joint Public Issues Team

- 5.1. The Church and Society team, together with others, were involved in the development and launch of the 'New reality, same mission' booklet, to enable individuals and local churches to explore questions of community presence and engagement and social justice in the new reality which we all face. (www.urch.org.uk/same-mission)
- 5.2. The Joint Public Issues team conducted research into poverty under lockdown and identified the build-up of debt by low-income households as a major impending problem which was not being addressed by others. JPIT committed significant time and energy to researching this issue, building alliances, preparing a report and developing a campaign to 'Reset the Debt'. The campaign was launched on 4 October: www.ResetTheDebt.uk

6. Ecumenical and Interfaith matters

- 6.1. Mission Committee received a report on conversations with the Church of Scotland on possible areas for future joint working. These include representation in the Conference of European Churches and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, possible involvement in the Church of Scotland's English-speaking congregation in Rome, and cooperation on matters involving Israel-Palestine. These conversations are at an early stage and more will be reported at a future meeting of Mission Council.
- 6.2. Working with the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the URC has taken the lead in a pilot initiative for National Interfaith Week (8-15 November 2020), whereby a small number of churches commit to hold conversations with their local mosque. URC churches from Surrey, Salford and Blackburn are taking part in this year's pilot. The hope is that this programme might become a model for larger scale conversations in future years.
- 6.3. Two General Assembly themed digital discussions were held in July, the first one featuring a panel drawn from participants of the 2019 educational visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the second a lecture from the Revd Dr

Munther Isaac of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Both were extremely successful and drew large audiences. Munther Isaac's lecture has been recorded and will be rerun on Tuesday 17 November at 7pm using Zoom. Anyone who wishes to attend this closed session should email carole.sired@urc.org.uk to register.

7. Review of the National Rural Officer post

- 7.1. The Methodist Conference has approved the new Connexional Evangelism and Growth strategy, and by implication the creation of a full time National Rural Officer post, starting in the summer of 2021. The focus of the post will be on equipping the Methodist Church to be a confident and vibrant Christian presence in rural communities, particularly focusing on evangelism, church growth, and pioneering/planting new Christian communities.
- 7.2. This effectively means an end to the shared National Rural Officer post from August 2021, when the Revd Elizabeth Clark retires. Conversations on the future of this post for the URC are still ongoing and it is expected that a proposal for a way forward will be brought to the mission committee in February 2021.

8. Evaluation of Vision2020

- 8.1. In the light of the cancellation of General Assembly 2020 mission committee agreed to extend the evaluation of vision2020 and to bring a full report with recommendations to General Assembly in July 2021.

9. Greenbelt 2020 and 2021

- 9.1. The traditional Greenbelt August Bank Holiday weekend for 2020 was limited to online activity. Our creative URC team have contributed with blogs from URC Youth and Roo Stewart, craft ideas and other website material. For 2021, URC at Greenbelt will continue our 'revolting Christians' theme and we are aiming for a larger presence at the Festival. Sam Richards and the CYDO team will be heading the youth provision at Greenbelt. We are investigating the possibility of running a family friendly café tent, which would host talks, music, crafts and much more.

10. Single use plastics

- 10.1. The URC's commitment to caring for God's creation is expressed in its Environmental Policy (adopted by General Assembly in 2016) which sets out an intent "to reduce our carbon footprint, improve recycling, minimise waste and improve efficiencies on finite natural resources in all of our operations."
- 10.2. In this context, the Synod of Scotland's Church & Society committee brought to Mission Committee a concern about the huge increase in the use of disposable items during the Covid-19 pandemic, especially single-use plastics. While some of this has been driven by necessity, it has resulted in higher levels of waste, litter

and ocean pollution. It threatens to stall and even reverse the welcome progress made in recent years in tackling the single-use plastic problem.

- 10.3. Mission Committee discussed the Synod of Scotland's concern and agreed to propose the following resolution to Mission Council:

Mission Council encourages all churches and individuals to keep in mind the significant environmental impact of single-use plastics. While there may be occasions during this pandemic when it is impossible to avoid the use of single-use plastic items, their use should be kept to an absolute minimum. They should also be carefully disposed of in a way that minimises their impact on the environment.