

Minutes of the Meeting of the Mission Council at the High Leigh Conference Centre

22 - 24 November 2013

Friday, November 22nd 2013

SESSION 1

The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, called Mission Council to order. The Revd Nigel Uden, chaplain, led opening worship. Mr Ellis led the Bible study.

Welcomes

The Moderator welcomed new members and continuing members, those in attendance and also a number of visitors who would be present at points during the business.

Those attending for the first time:

Dr Andrew Bradstock	Secretary for Church & Society
Ms Kathleen Cross	North Western Synod
Mr Andrew Evans	West Midlands Synod
Mr Colin MacBean	Wessex Synod
Mr Tim Meachin	Children's & Youth Work Committee Convener
Revd Lis Mullen	Northern Synod Interim Moderator
Mrs Carol Rogers	Nominations Committee Secretary
Revd Alison Termie	Yorkshire Synod
Ms Sheena Young	Alternate for the Revd Stephen Brown
Mr Tony Porter	Alternate for the Revd Sarah Moore

Those present in a new role:

Mrs Karen Morrison	Head of Children's & Youth Work Development
Mrs Gill Nichol	Interim Director of Communications
Revd Ruth Whitehead	South Western Synod Moderator

Visitors:

Mrs Linda Austin	Medium Term Strategy Group
Revd Dr Romilly Micklem	Medium Term Strategy Group
Ms Amy Slennett	Safeguarding Officer
Revd Sally Thomas	Synod of Wales

Apologies for absence

Mrs Suzanne Adofo	CRCW Development Worker
Revd Craig Bowman	Secretary for Ministries
Revd Stephen Brown	Synod of Scotland
Revd John Durell	Convener, Nominations Committee
Revd Sheila Maxey	Convener, Pastoral Reference & Welfare Committee
Revd Sarah Moore	North Western Synod
Mr Danny Pigeon	Northern Synod
Revd Jane Rowell	Secretary for World Church Relations

Revd Fiona Thomas
Revd Kirsty Thorpe

Secretary for Education & Learning
Immediate Past Moderator

Technical Support was provided by Ms Sara Foyle, Senior Graphics Designer.

The Moderator welcomed Mrs Melanie Campbell, Northern Synod Clerk, who was attending the meeting as an observer.

The Revd Roberta Rominger, General Secretary, outlined the business for the meeting.

The Moderator reminded Mission Council of the Communications Protocol circulated with the papers and asked members to abide by it.

He briefly explained the consensus process and proposed that the Revd Michael Hopkins, the Revd Roy Lowes and the Revd Jenny Mills be appointed as facilitation group leaders. Mission Council agreed.

Mr Ellis reminded members of the process concerning the resolutions which it was suggested should be taken en bloc and said that if members wished to move a paper from the en bloc group notice should be given by the end of that day. Three signatures would be required. A member commented that the late arrival of the papers for the meeting had not allowed adequate time for reading and consideration of the proposed en bloc matters. The General Secretary apologised, explained some of the reasons for the delay, and said that every effort would be made to send the papers out earlier in future.

The Moderator congratulated the Revd Melanie Smith, chaplain, on her recent marriage to the Revd Mark Meacher.

13/22 Minutes

The General Secretary presented the minutes of the meeting held 13 -15 May 2013 at the High Leigh Conference Centre.

Two amendments were noted:

On page 16 minute 13/16 should read: "Concerning the nomination of the Revd Gethin Rhys as Convener-elect of the Ministries Committee, Mr Durell reported that the possibility of a conflict of interest given Mr Rhys' work with the Unite union had been considered, and that it was believed that this would not be an issue given that Mr Rhys *had undertaken to ensure that any potential conflict of interest was appropriately mitigated.*"

On page 19 minute 13/10 (Children and Youth Development Officers' employment), the decision was by agreement, not consensus.

The minutes were then accepted as a correct record.

13/23 Matters Arising from the Minutes

Page 10, minute 13/10. Mission Council was asked to agree the name "Children's & Youth Work Committee".

This was agreed.

Page 20, minute 13/18. Mission Council noted that the officers had appointed the Revd Lis Mullen as Interim Synod Moderator for Northern Synod. The Moderator greeted Mrs Mullen.

The Revd David Grosch-Miller reported that the Moderators of the four northern English synods and the Synod of Scotland had met. A further meeting was planned for February 2014 at which representatives of the five synods would explore opportunities for cross-border co-operation. No conclusions had been reached to date; in due course there might be lessons for the wider United Reformed Church and, if so, these would be reported to Mission Council.

13/24

Mersey Synod Moderator Nominating Group

Mr Duncan Smith, the convener of the group, reported that no appointment had been made as a result of the recent interview process and that the post would be re-advertised with short-listing to take place in March 2014 and interviews in April 2014.

13/25

Communications and Editorial Committee

The Revd John Humphreys, Convener, presented an update from the Committee.

He asked that thanks for the work of the Revd Martin Hazell as Director of Communications be recorded. Mr Hazell had returned to pastoral ministry. Mrs Gill Nichol had been appointed as Interim Director of Communications until 31 July 2014 in the first instance. Mr Humphreys particularly thanked her for her help during the period immediately following the departure of Mr Hazell.

Mr Humphreys explained that, though the Prayer Handbook would normally be on sale by the end of November, it had been delayed. He thanked the Revd Sheila Maxey for her work in editing the manuscript and others who had contributed material quickly. The Handbook had gone to print and was expected to be ready for distribution early in December.

“Celebrated Lives”, compiled by Stuart Dew, would be included in the Year Book 2014, which would be produced in two forms, both as hard copy and on-line. Proposals for decision regarding the future of the Year Book would be presented to Mission Council in May 2015 at the latest.

A review of the work of the Communications department would begin in 2014, with the aim of completing it by the summer of that year. A report would be presented to Mission Council.

Mr Humphreys thanked all the staff for their work in changing times.

13/26

United Reformed Church/Baptist Safeguarding Officer

The Moderator welcomed Miss Amy Slennett, the newly appointed United Reformed Church/Baptist Safeguarding Officer, and Miss Slennett addressed Mission Council. She spoke briefly about her work and said that a new version of the Good Practice pack would be available early in 2014. Miss Slennett challenged Mission Council to consider whether the Church was truly a safe place for children and vulnerable adults.

The Moderator thanked Miss Slennett for her presentation and then led Mission Council in prayer for all those undertaking new roles in the Church.

13/27

Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG)

The General Secretary presented Paper U, and said she would welcome feedback about the new way of working of Mission Council.

Mrs Rominger introduced the matter referred to in paragraph 2 of the report and, with the consent of the meeting, proposed the resolution in the following revised form: Mission Council notes the concern expressed by the elders of Plymstock United Reformed Church that a minister who is in a civil partnership has been inducted as their Synod Moderator and agrees to record their concern in the minutes.

Following discussion it was clear that Mission Council, though believing that pastoral care was needed both for the church in its concern and for the Synod Moderator, was not willing to proceed to a vote on the resolution. Having summarised the discussion the Moderator proposed:

that the General Secretary reply to the elders of the Plymstock Church in a form which would:

note the concern of the local church;

indicate that Mission Council did not consider it appropriate to record their concern in the minutes;

suggest that it was open to them to raise their concern through the councils of the Church, and specifically through the Synod;

assure them that the Human Sexuality Task Group (HSTG) would be informed of their letter; and

that the HSTG would be asked to think further about where any individuals or councils who were unhappy about a matter such as this should go for guidance in the context of the 2007 Commitment.

This proposal was accepted by consensus.

The General Secretary referred to paragraph 3 of the MCAG report. She said that some members had requested and been given copies of the final report of the Resolution 38 Commission, and that a statement would be made to Mission Council on behalf of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.

Referring to paragraph 4 of the MCAG report Mrs Rominger said that MCAG had charged her with asking the HSTG to consider how all of the committees and groups of the Assembly could be supported to exercise their decision-making in accordance with the 2007 Commitment.

13/28

Statement from the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC)

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair for this item, as Mr Ellis is a member of the PRWC. He reminded Mission Council that it was not usual for the PRWC to report on specific items of business. This report was an update on the work being done by the Committee in response to the report of the Resolution 38 Commission. He further reminded those present that this matter was confidential and that no names should be mentioned.

The statement was read by the Revd Clare Downing on behalf of the Revd Sheila Maxey, Convener of the Committee. The statement is attached as Appendix to these minutes.

There were no questions or comments.

The Moderator thanked the Committee for its ongoing work concerning this matter.

The Revd Nigel Uden, chaplain, led the meeting in prayer.

SESSION 2

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair. Dr Jagessar congratulated the Revd Peter Meek on his recent marriage to the Revd Dr Deborah Baird and welcomed the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, Convener of the HSTG.

13/29(1)

Faith and Order Committee

The Revd Elizabeth Welch, Convener, introduced Paper F1: 'Future of the Church'.

Ms Welch explained that the paper built upon the discussion at the May 2013 meeting of Mission Council. What was sought was a shared discernment as to where God was leading the United Reformed Church. Mission Council discussed Paper F1 in groups following which each group briefly presented to the plenary its most significant thought.

Ms Welch introduced Paper F2: 'The Church Meeting', following which Mission Council discussed the subject in groups. ([Continued in Session 8](#) on page 20.)

The Revd Ruth Gee, President of the Methodist Conference and Methodist representative at the Council, arrived during the previous item and was welcomed to the meeting.

SESSION 3

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair.

13/30(1)

Law and Polity Advisory Group (LPAG) and Human Sexuality Task Group (HSTG)

The Moderator explained that since on the matter of same sex marriage the work of these two groups was related, reports from both would be taken together. The Secretary of the LPAG, Dr Augur Pearce, was present for this item and was welcomed by the Moderator.

The Revd Professor David Thompson, Convener of the LPAG, introduced paragraphs 1 and 2 of Paper P. There were no questions.

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell, Convener of the HSTG, presented Paper N. She reported that the Task Group had concluded that any form of marriage should include an expectation of faithfulness. Dr Pearce confirmed that the legislation on same-sex marriage included adultery as grounds for divorce because of

unreasonable behaviour. It was understood that individual ministers who did not feel able to conduct marriages of same-sex partners would be protected by the legislation together with the Church's own decision making processes. She asked for confirmation from Mission Council that the Group's approach and time-scale were suitable, and, with the consent of Mission Council, proposed the following revised resolution:

'Mission Council affirms the work of its Human Sexuality Task Group and encourages it to follow the direction of travel set out in Paper N. In so doing Mission Council understands that the Task Group is working towards preparing proposals relating to same sex marriage, following full consultation, to be presented to General Assembly in 2016.'

On behalf of the Law & Polity Advisory Group, Professor Thompson said that the Group hoped that wider consultation would take place with synods and churches this time on any proposed way forward. He noted that in the case of Baptism both convictions were stated to be 'honoured by the Church', and that if it was proposed to permit same-sex marriage, a similar phraseology might be used. Finally he noted that Mission Council needed to decide which Council of the Church would make any decision.

There was considerable discussion and the conveners responded to the various concerns which were voiced. Of particular concern was the question as to at which level within the United Reformed Church any decisions concerning same-sex marriage should be taken. Representatives of the Synod of Scotland referred to a statement which had been included in the Proposals for Union 1998, concerning circumstances in which the National Synods of Wales and Scotland could speak for the whole United Reformed Church.

A facilitation group convened by the Revd Roy Lowes was established to work on all the issues and report to the meeting in due course. ([Continued in Session 8](#) on page 20 [and in Session 9](#) on page 21.)

The chaplains led closing worship.

Saturday, November 23rd 2013

SESSION 4

Mr John Ellis took the chair. The Revd Nigel Uden, chaplain, led opening worship. Mr Uden recalled the life of the Revd Martin Cressey, a former Moderator of Assembly, and spoke of his outstanding service and legacy to the Church. The Cressey family were upheld in prayer.

The Moderator drew attention to the TV series 'The Bible' due to be screened in December on Channel 5. A set of posters and other materials were available for members to use.

The General Secretary reported that Papers D, J3 and M2 would be removed from the 'en bloc' group of resolutions.

Paper M4 was withdrawn with the consent of Mission Council.

13/31(1)

The Officers of General Assembly

The General Secretary introduced Paper M2. With the consent of Mission Council Mrs Rominger proposed Resolution 1 in the following revised form:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees that the following office-holders should be recognised as the Officers of Assembly:

**the serving Moderators of General Assembly
General Secretary
Clerk
Treasurer
Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee**

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Mrs Rominger proposed Resolution 2:

Mission Council agrees that the three Deputy General Secretaries and the Deputy Treasurer should be members of Mission Council, but not of the Mission Council Advisory Group.

Following discussion it was concluded that Mission Council was not ready to take a view about the Deputy General Secretaries and the Deputy Treasurer being members of Mission Council. Further consideration would be given to this at a later date. The resolution was therefore proposed in the following amended form:

Mission Council agrees that the three Deputy General Secretaries and the Deputy Treasurer should not be members of the Mission Council Advisory Group.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

The General Secretary proposed Resolution 3:

Mission Council recommends that General Assembly agrees to the addition of the three Deputy General Secretaries and the Deputy Treasurer as members of Assembly and Mission Council.

On the advice of the Clerk discussion was suspended so that the officers could give further thought to the issues raised concerning this matter. Mission Council would be informed later as to whether it could be proceeded with during the current meeting or deferred to a later one. ([Continued in Session 5](#) on page 17.)

13/32

Ministries of the Church Department - new name

The General Secretary introduced Paper M5. The Moderator ruled that a decision must be reached on this matter at the current meeting, because the job title of the relevant Deputy General Secretary should be determined before the post was advertised.

Mrs Rominger proposed the resolution:

Mission Council agrees that, with immediate effect, the Ministries of the Church Department should be known as the Discipleship Department, and the Deputy General Secretary responsible for that department should be called the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship.

In speaking to the resolution Mrs Rominger said that the proposal should be considered in the context of the vision4life process; the proposed change was not about restructuring but about genuine renewal.

Following questions and comments to which the General Secretary responded there was discussion.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

13/33

Human Resources Advisory Group (HRAG)- review of the General Secretariat

The Moderator said that this business constituted an update on previous reports, and indicated that it would not be appropriate to re-open a debate on the structure of the General Secretariat. He welcomed Mr Keith Webster, Convener of the HRAG.

Mr Webster paid tribute to the work of his predecessor, the Revd Rowena Francis, and introduced Paper O2 including a revised version of one section of it which had been tabled at the meeting. Mr Webster reminded Mission Council of the work which had been done concerning the re-organisation and expressed regret that it had been a lengthy process which inevitably had had an effect on the staff. It had been important that the exercise had been thorough. Mr Webster noted thanks to Dr David Goodbourn who had assisted the Group in its work.

Mr Webster explained that the Group had considered the issue of whether membership of a Christian Church was a 'Genuine Occupational Requirement' for the post of Deputy General Secretary (DGS) Administration and Resources. In consultation with the officers of the Assembly, which had continued after the report of the HRAG to Mission Council had been issued, the Job Description had been revised to reflect the requirements of the job which hitherto had been understood but not explicitly stated. The Job Description for the DGS Administration and Resources contained in the revised Paper O2 required some further editing, and those for the DGS Discipleship and the DGS Mission also needed to be adjusted. When this had been done all three would be posted on the URC web-site.

The Moderator thanked Mr Webster for his report and the HRAG for the considerable amount of work which had been done.

13/34

General Secretary Review

As Secretary of the General Secretary Review Group the Clerk made a statement which outlined the time table for the process which it was hoped would lead to the appointment of the next General Secretary. Expressions of interest and suggestions of suitable candidates were to be sent to the Clerk by January 7th 2014. All those suggested would be invited to submit information by February 7th 2014. The Group would then compile a short-list and expected to invite those selected to meet with them on March 31st 2014. If following that process the Group was in a position to nominate a General Secretary that nomination would be presented to the General Assembly in July 2014 with a view to the person appointed taking office as soon as possible after that. It was hoped that the nominee would be able to take some part in the later stages of the appointment process of both the DGS Discipleship and the DGS Administration and Resources, expected to take place from April onwards.

There were no questions or comments on the Clerk's statement. The Moderator indicated that a later opportunity would be taken to acknowledge the work of the Revd Roberta Rominger as General Secretary.

13/35

Safer Sacred Space - Mandatory Learning

The Revd John Smith, Convener of the Education and Learning Committee, said that following comments received from members he wished to withdraw Paper D and its resolution and replace it with a new resolution as follows:

Mission Council agrees in principle that the United Reformed Church approved Safer Sacred Space training should be mandatory in terms of the decision of General Assembly 2012 (Book of Reports p. 250). Mission Council asks the Education & Learning Committee to bring before Mission Council at its next meeting a full resource-impact assessment and implementation schedule with a view to beginning to offer training in the last part of 2014.

Mr Smith responded to questions and comments.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

13/36

MIND Advisory Group - Suggested changes to the Structure

The Clerk introduced Paper T2 and proposed the resolution:

Mission Council agrees to make the following changes to the Structure:

Insert the following immediately after **2.(6)(A)(xxiii)** so as to become **(xxiv)** and renumber the later functions accordingly.

“(xxiv) to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information;”

Remove references to the Deputy General Secretary as follows:

2.(6)(A)(xxiii) delete the words **“, the Deputy General Secretary”** replace the words **“(acting through the Deputy General Secretary or his/her duly appointed deputy)”** with **“(acting through the General Assembly Representative or his/her duly appointed deputy)”**

6.5

Replace the words **“Deputy General Secretary”** with the words **“General Assembly Representative”**.

Remove an inappropriate reference to Section O:

2.(4) In the sixth bullet point following the words **“The moderator shall”** replace the words **“Section O”** with **“Disciplinary”**

Remove inaccurate references to **Paragraph (B)**:

2.(4)(A), 2.(5)(A) and 2.(6)(A)

In each case replace the words **“(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph (B) below)”** with the words **“(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph 7.4 below)”**

The Resolution was passed by majority vote, achieving the necessary two-thirds majority required for a change to the Structure.

The General Secretary proposed:

In accordance with para 3.1.c of the URC Structure, Mission Council agrees that this matter be referred to the synods asking them to report their response to the General Secretary by March 31st 2014.

The resolution was passed by majority vote.

13/37(1)

Synod reports on vision2020 implementation

The General Secretary introduced Paper X2, reminding Mission Council that all synods had been asked to report on this matter every two years. Since printing a report had been received from the Wessex Synod. The Mersey Synod reported that they had been unable to report by the deadline set because of the timing of their recent meeting of Synod. Mrs Rominger said that all material submitted by the synods had been passed to the Mission Team, and, in answer to a question, undertook that it would be posted on the URC web-site. Mrs Rominger encouraged those present to indicate on displays provided where exciting work was being done. The Revd Tracey Lewis, Convener of the Mission Committee, said that the Committee was keen to hear stories, and wanted to respond, resource, encourage and strengthen. To that end there was a form on the vision2020 section of the web-site which could be used to report such work. Mrs Lewis further said that more resources would be made available on the web-site soon. She also reminded members that vision2020 grants of up to £1,000 for small projects were available to local churches. ([See further note in Session 5](#) on page 17.)

SESSION 5

Mr John Ellis took the chair.

13/38

Methodist / United Reformed Church Strategic Oversight Group - A proposal for Faith and Order Conversations

The General Secretary introduced Paper W1, explaining that the resolutions had developed from conversations following the last Joint Council Meeting. Mrs Rominger proposed the resolution:

- 1) Mission Council agrees that bilateral conversations should take place with the Methodist Church to undertake theological exploration of the beliefs and practices of the two denominations. These conversations should be commissioned on the following terms:
 - a. There should be three people from each of the two Churches, with the URC participants appointed by Mission Council in consultation with the Faith & Order Committee;
 - b. The group should meet over a period of two years, with any extension approved by the Methodist Council and the Mission Council as appropriate;
 - c. Conversation should focus in the first instance on the particular questions of theologies of ministry, including appointment/call, and the ecclesiological foundations for connexionalism, congregationalism and Conciliarity;
 - d. Other topics may be explored as time permits.
- 2) Mission Council agrees that the group should report regularly to the two Faith & Order Committees and the Methodist/URC Liaison Group.
- 3) Mission Council agrees that it will be for the Strategic Oversight Group on the advice of the Methodist/URC Liaison Group to determine whether it is appropriate to take discussions to Methodist Council and/or Mission Council.

Mrs Rominger responded to questions and discussion followed, during which the President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Ruth Gee, addressed Mission Council. Mrs Gee said that the Methodist Church was enthusiastic about the proposal.

During discussion several changes to the first part of the resolution were agreed, and it was then proposed in the following revised form:

1) Mission Council agrees that bilateral conversations should take place with the Methodist Church to undertake theological exploration of the beliefs and practices of the two denominations. These conversations should be commissioned on the following terms:

- a. **There should be three people from each of the two Churches, with the URC participants appointed by Mission Council via the Nominations Committee in consultation with the Faith & Order Committee;**
- b. **The group should meet over a period of two years, with any extension approved by the Methodist Council and the Mission Council as appropriate;**

c. **Conversation should focus in the first instance on the particular questions of theologies of ministry, including appointment/call, and the ecclesiological foundations for connexionalism, congregationalism and conciliarity;**

d. **Other topics may be explored as time permits.**

The resolution was passed by consensus.

There being no further discussion concerning parts 2 and 3 of the resolution they were proposed in the original form:

2) Mission Council agrees that the group should report regularly to the two Faith & Order Committees and the Methodist/URC Liaison Group.

3) Mission Council agrees that it will be for the Strategic Oversight Group on the advice of the Methodist/URC Liaison Group to determine whether it is appropriate to take discussions to Methodist Council and/or Mission Council.

Both resolutions were passed by consensus.

13/39

National Synod of Wales - United Reformed Church response to the Commission of Covenanted Churches (The Gathering)

The Revd Simon Walkling, Synod Moderator, asked permission for the Revd Sally Thomas, Synod Ecumenical Officer, to present Paper X1 and to propose the resolution. The Moderator agreed. Mrs Thomas briefly outlined the history and the context of the current document. The Commission of Covenanted Churches had prepared proposals not for a full scheme of union, but for a future where the covenant partners would agree to interchangeability of ministry as a step on the journey towards a united Church in Wales the form of which was not yet known. The proposed response contained in Paper X1 followed consultation within the Synod. Although this consultation had not produced agreement, all were still committed to continuing the conversation. It was recognised that continuing conversations and education were necessary in order to develop consensus both within the United Reformed Church and with the Covenant partners. With the permission of Mission Council Mrs Thomas proposed the resolution in the following revised form:

Mission Council, content that the response to the Gathering recommendations formulated by the National Synod of Wales represents an appropriate contribution to the conversations, accepts that the Synod will make the response set out in the papers for the November 2013 Mission Council, and encourages those with particular comments to send them to the National Synod of Wales office by June 30th 2014.

There was discussion during which it was suggested that the Commission might consider the experience of the Church of North India, and particularly the significance of the 'Laying on of Hands'. It was further suggested that the Synod might seek to engage a 'partner' from outside Wales to accompany them through the process. The representatives of the Synod of Wales were grateful for the suggestions and noted that they had already received pertinent and helpful

comments from the Faith and Order and Mission Committees. Mission Council expressed prayerful support for the Synod during the process.

The revised resolution was passed by consensus.

The Moderator led prayer for the churches in Wales.

13/40

Nominations Committee - Supplementary Report

In the absence of the Committee Convener (the Revd John Durell) Mr Duncan Smith presented Paper J3. Mr Smith pointed out that, contrary to the original expectation, the Revd Dick Gray, appointed as Deputy Treasurer, was not the Treasurer-elect. This was a relatively short-term appointment. Mr Smith gave notice that Mr Peter Knowles had accepted nomination as Convener-elect of the Communications & Editorial Committee. The appointment would be proposed to the General Assembly in 2014.

Mr Smith proposed the following resolution:

Mission Council welcomes the appointment of Mrs Bridget Fosten as clerk to the Board of Governors of Westminster College.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

{N.B. Following the meeting it was established that the appointment of the clerk to the Board of Governors of Westminster College is an Assembly appointment; this will be confirmed at the next meeting of Mission Council.}

Mr Smith proposed the resolution in Paper J3:

Mission Council appoints:

The Revd Nigel Uden as Convener Elect of the Board of Governors of Westminster College;

Mr Richard Nunn as Chair of the URC Pensions Trust;

Ms Ellen Quaye as a member of the Education and Learning Committee;

Mr Doug Maxell as a member of the Church House Management Group;

Mr Cliff Patten as a member of the Joint Property Strategy Group;

The Revd Dick Gray as Deputy Treasurer

All of these appointments would take effect immediately.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

13/41

En bloc papers to be noted

The General Secretary proposed that the following papers be noted:

C, I1, J1 and O1.

Mission Council agreed to note these papers.

13/42

En bloc papers containing resolutions

The resolutions contained in the following papers were proposed en bloc:

13/42(1)

Paper E2 - Equal Opportunities Committee Change of Name

Mission Council agrees to change the name of the Equal Opportunities Committee to the Equalities Committee.

13/42(2)

Paper G3 - Finance and Ministries Committees - Plan for Partnership amendments

Mission Council agrees the amendments to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration set out in Paper G3.

13/42(4)

Paper J2 - Nominations Committee

Mission Council appoints the Rev Dr John Bradbury as Director of Studies in Theology and Church History at Westminster College for a further seven years from 1st September 2014.

13/42(5)

Paper M1 - Membership of Mission Council - Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee Convener

Mission Council agrees to present the following resolution to the General Assembly: General Assembly resolves that the Convener of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee shall be a member of Mission Council.

13/42(6)

Paper M3 - Minor amendment to the Structure

Mission Council agrees that in Paragraph 2.(3)(d) of the Structure the words "(currently four)" be deleted.

13/42(7)

Paper M6 - The Church's Engagement with 20-40 year olds

- 1. Mission Council agrees to form a task group of six people with the insight and expertise to give leadership on the issue of the integration of 20 to 40 year olds into the life of the United Reformed Church.**
- 2. Mission Council asks the Nominations Committee to identify the appropriate people to serve.**

3. Mission Council asks the Mission Council Advisory Group to approve the terms of reference for this task group, including a date for completion of the work, and to report to the next meeting of Mission Council.

13/42(8)

Paper R - Terms of Reference for Safeguarding Advisory Group

Mission Council confirms the appointment of a Safeguarding Advisory Group, to meet at least three times per year. Its membership would include the Safeguarding Officer, the Secretary for Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, the appropriate Deputy General Secretary, and up to three co-opted members with relevant experience.

The Group's responsibilities will be as follows:

- 1. to oversee the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the Church in the safeguarding of children, young people, and adults in need of protection, making recommendations to Mission Council as appropriate;**
- 2. to ensure that Good Practice documents are published, circulated and updated as appropriate;**
- 3. to develop systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice, and to devise strategies for addressing identified weaknesses;**
- 4. to foster collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy;**
- 5. specifically to work closely with the Baptist Union in the development of policy, the delivery of safeguarding education, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers;**
- 6. to oversee the service which the United Reformed Church receives from the Churches Agency for Safeguarding and other relevant agencies.**

13/42(9)

Paper T1 - Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group (MIND) - Changes to the Disciplinary Process

Mission Council agrees to make the following changes to the Disciplinary Process:

A.3

Replace the whole of this paragraph with the following:

"Accordingly, where under the provisions of this Disciplinary Process, any notice specifies a time limit for a certain action to be taken by the recipient and that action is not carried out within the time specified in the notice to the satisfaction of the person or body sending the notice,

that person or body shall have a discretion to allow a reasonable further period for such compliance, except as regards the strict time limit imposed on the right of appeal under Paragraphs AA.8.1, E.5.3.1 and G.1 and upon the steps to be taken by the Synod Moderator under Paragraphs AA.10.2.4 and AA.10.2.5. In other cases, if the person or body sending the notice considers that sufficient time has been allowed and the action required has still not been carried out or there has been an unreasonable delay in the carrying out of the action (whether or not the Disciplinary Process imposes a time limit for the carrying out of the action), that person or body may proceed, bearing in mind the need for the Process to be conducted as expeditiously as possible.”

AA.1.5.3

Replace the existing paragraph in its entirety with the following:

“If any member of a Synod Panel or the Joint Panel is a member of a local church connected with the case or has any pastoral or personal involvement in the case or is the subject of a disciplinary complaint, that person shall not be one of the Synod Appointees for that case.”

B.3.2

Delete the word **“other”**.

B.3.3

Delete the word **“other”**.

B.4

In each of the expressions **“connected with a case”** and **“involvement in a case”** insert the word **“particular”** between **“a”** and **“case”**.

E.9.1

In the last sentence, after the words **“...appropriate so to do...”** insert the words **“...and having supplied the Mandated Group with a copy of the minister’s statement...”**.

E.9.2

Insert a new second sentence as follows:

“The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall supply the minister with a copy of the Mandated Group’s Notice.”

G.8.

Add the following to the list at G.8.5 and move the existing G.8.5 and renumber the following accordingly:

G.8.5 “Any Cautions (other than those successfully appealed against).”

13/42(10)

Paper T1 - Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group (MIND) - Changes to the Incapacity Procedure

Mission Council agrees to make the following changes to the Incapacity Procedure:

Renumber current paragraph B.1.1 to become B.1.1.1 and add a new paragraph B.1.1.2 as follows:

“Should the General Assembly Representative make the enquiry specified in Paragraph B.1.1.1, the officers of the General Assembly shall appoint a Synod Moderator or other member of Mission Council to be the third member of the Consultation Group along with the General Assembly Representative and the Convener of the PRWC.”

K.5.2

After the word **“include”** insert the words **“in the Decision Record”**.

Delete the words **“the General Assembly Representative”**.

L.11.2

After the word **“include”** insert the words **“in the Decision Record”**.

Delete the words **“the General Assembly Representative”**.

13/42(11)

Paper W2 - Methodist/URC Strategic Oversight Group - Terms of Reference for the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group

Mission Council approves the Terms of Reference for the Methodist-United Reformed Church Liaison Group contained in paper W2.

13/42(12)

Paper W3 - Methodist/URC Strategic Oversight Group - The future of the Joint Property Strategy Group

Mission Council asks the Nominations Committee to identify two people to join the Revd Lucy Brierley as the United Reformed Church members of the Joint Property Strategy Group, and grants authority to the Assembly officers to confirm their appointment.

The en bloc resolutions were passed by majority vote.

The Moderator expressed thanks and best wishes to the Revd Graham Jones, the Rural Consultant, who was moving on to another phase in his ministry, and would leave the meeting later that day.

13/37(2) (Continued from Session 4)

Synod reports on vision2020 implementation

The General Secretary apologised that the submission from the Synod of Wales concerning vision2020 had been omitted from her report. It would be forwarded to the Mission Committee.

13/31(2) (Continued from Session 4)

The Officers of General Assembly

The Moderator announced that Resolution 3 on Paper M2 had been withdrawn. A revised resolution would be presented to the March meeting of Mission Council.

13/43

Equalities Committee - Inclusive and Expansive Language

The Revd Elizabeth Nash, Convener, presented Paper E3 and invited the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar to explain his understanding of Expansive Language.

Dr Jagessar encouraged members of Mission Council to consider images which speak positively to all people within the diverse community of the United Reformed Church.

There followed group discussion on the questions posed in Paper E3 and the group reporters were asked to pass responses to the Equalities Committee.

Mission Council adjourned until 4.30pm, there being no necessary business for the afternoon session (Session 6). The chaplains had prepared material for personal reflection which would be shown in the hall during the afternoon.

SESSION 7

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair.

13/44

Finance Committee - update

The Treasurer, Mr John Ellis, reported that following a re-tendering exercise the auditors for the funds held by the URC Trust and those in the Ministers' Pension Fund would be Mazars, replacing PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Mr Ellis gave a brief report on the relationship between the United Reformed Church and 'One Church 100 Uses' (1C100U). Following a resolution passed by Mission Council in 2007 which gave thanks for work already undertaken by 1C100U and encouraged further co-operation, there had been some successful projects and others where there had been difficulties. An instance of the latter was a project in East Sheen which the Southern Synod had decided to abort in 2012. Since that time there had been a dispute which had been resolved through a formal mediation process. The Treasurer reported that the cost of that process had been borne by the central church funds, and said that churches and/or synods thinking of working with 1C100U might want to know of possible pitfalls as well as potential success; it was for them to make their decisions, aware that 1C100U was one company among others that might be engaged to work with any church.

13/45

Finance Committee - Budget 2014 and Beyond

The Treasurer, Mr John Ellis, introduced Paper G1 with the appendices in Paper G2 and reported that since the paper had been written the URC Trust had endorsed the stipend increase of 1.6% which meant that the stipend would be £24,564. Mr Ellis noted that had the calculation been based on new inflation and earnings figures which had been issued the previous week, the result concerning the stipend would have been the same.

Mr Ellis proposed Resolution 1:

Mission Council notes with gratitude the continuing Pensions support from the synods and requests synods to continue this support in 2014 at a reduced level which will yield a total contribution of £300k.

The resolution was passed by majority vote.

Mr Ellis proposed Resolution 2:

Mission Council adopts the budget for 2014 set out in Paper G2.

The resolution was passed by majority vote.

Mr Ellis drew attention to the budget projections for 2015-16 contained in Paper G2, which indicated that a deficit was likely in 2016. Just a 1% per annum increase in giving to the M&M Fund in place of the recent experience of a 1% per annum decline would be sufficient to provide a surplus of £1million by 2016. This would avoid a decrease in funds available for committee programmes. There was thus a clear need to challenge everyone to give generously.

Mr Ellis responded to questions and comments and commended the new TRIO pack. The Moderator thanked the Treasurer and the Finance Committee for their work and good stewardship.

13/46

United Reformed Church Trust - Location of Church Offices

The Revd Professor David Thompson introduced Paper L. There was nothing further to add about possible options at present, but Professor Thompson said that the Trust continued to consider ways in which the fixed central costs could be reduced. The Moderator thanked Professor Thompson and noted that suggestions on this subject would be welcomed by the Trust.

13/47(1)

Medium Term Strategy Group - Even Better Synods

The General Secretary presented Paper S, referring in the first instance to paragraphs 1 to 16. Mrs Rominger reported that the Group had been operating for about one year, and she introduced the other members of the Group: Mr John Ellis, the Revd Dr Romilly Micklem and Mrs Linda Austin.

Paper S reflected responses gathered at the previous meeting of Mission Council. Mrs Rominger introduced paragraphs 1 to 16 and asked Mission Council to consider the two questions which followed.

There was considerable discussion but no enthusiasm for the creation of the position of paid synod managers. Most synods already had methods to manage the work that would be undertaken by a manager and some Moderators said that they did not believe the role would lighten their own work-load.

Mr Ellis introduced the remainder of the paper - from paragraph 17 onwards, reminding members that the May 2013 meeting of Mission Council had asked for more consideration to be given to the process of Inter-Synod Resource Sharing. That part of the paper had been written in response to that request. Mr Ellis suggested that the uneven distribution of resources across the denomination was a matter of fairness and justice and he challenged Mission Council to consider how synod wealth might be more equally shared. Mission Council proceeded to discuss the matter based on the questions contained within the paper.

In discussion many agreed that this was a justice issue and believed that more sharing was possible. Receiving synods under the existing Inter-Synod Resource Sharing process expressed their gratitude for the money received. The range of contributions from the floor and an informal vote suggested that the option of “guided donations” was a model of sharing which might be pursued.

Mr Ellis thanked all who had contributed to the discussion and for the helpful points made. He said that he had detected a spirit of generosity within Mission Council. He understood that long term commitments to giving might be more difficult to achieve although it would be helpful for longer term planning in the synods if all could be certain of a guaranteed minimum income. ([Continued in Session 9](#) on page 23.)

SESSION 8

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair.

13/48

Equalities Committee - United Reformed Church Policy in relation to the Equality Act 2010

The Revd Elizabeth Nash, Convener, introduced Paper E1, noting that in an earlier form it had been presented to Mission Council at its previous meeting. Although some updating had been done the paper would require further editing. It was offered as a tool for churches to use as a check-list. The Committee was grateful to the Synod of Scotland, particularly Dr Jim Merrilees, for his major contribution to the paper. Some suggestions of amendments were made by members of Mission Council. The Convener said that when the necessary changes had been made the document would be put on the URC web site, with a note to indicate that further amendments would be made as and when necessary and appropriate.

Ms Nash proposed the resolution:

Mission Council accepts the document, ‘United Reformed Church Policy in relation to the Equality Act 2010’ and recommends its use throughout the United Reformed Church.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

13/29(2) (Continued from Session 2)

Faith and Order Committee - The Church Meeting

The Revd Elizabeth Welch, Convener, reminded Mission Council that this was part of the 'Future of the Church' discussion. She thanked the groups for their contributions so far and invited further discussion in groups on Paper F2. ([Continued in Session 9](#) on page 23.)

Following group work Mission Council reconvened in plenary.

13/30(2) (Continued from Session 3)

Law & Polity Advisory Group

The Revd Roy Lowes, convener of the facilitation group, proposed the following resolution:

Mission Council, conscious of the issue raised by the Law and Polity Advisory Group regarding the location of decision-making in the church and the forthcoming referendum regarding Scottish Independence, resolves to establish a task group to consider what it means today for the National Synods of Scotland and Wales to “speak and act in the name of the United Reformed Church.” (Proposals for Union Part 5.1) The task group will bear in mind particularly the terms of the Proposals for Union in 1998, the different legislative framework of those countries and the Basis of Union.

Mission Council authorises the Officers of General Assembly to appoint the task group on suggestions from the Nominations Committee. The membership should include two people from each of the National Synods, two to represent the synods in England and two from the Law and Polity Advisory Group. The task group should be advised by the Clerk and consult some from both the partners in the Joint Negotiating Committee which drafted the 1998 Proposals for Union. It should aim to report in the spring of 2015 to the two National Synods and to Mission Council.

Mr Lowes responded to questions and comments, then the Moderator called for decision.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

The Moderator thanked Mr Lowes for his work.

The chaplains led closing prayers.

Sunday, November 24th 2013

SESSION 9

Mr John Ellis took the chair.

The chaplain, the Revd Nigel Uden, led opening worship.

The Moderator noted that all the business to be conducted that day arose from matters considered during previous sessions and he thanked those who had worked to develop proposals from the earlier discussions.

13/30(3) (Continued from Session 3) Human Sexuality Task Group

The Revd Roy Lowes, convener of the facilitation group, proposed the following resolution:

Mission Council affirms the work of its Human Sexuality Task Group and is grateful for the work it has done to indicate a direction of travel regarding our deliberations on same-sex marriage.

Mission Council asks the Human Sexuality Task Group to build on its work so far undertaken and bring to Assembly 2014 materials which will allow Assembly in consensus mode to have an open and informed discussion on the policy or policies it might want to adopt in relation to the law regarding same-sex marriage.

Ancillary to that it further asks the Group to ensure Assembly has in front of it materials to assist in the tasks of:

1. reminding Assembly that this whole discussion is set in the context of the 2007 Commitment to hold together across our differences.
2. helping Assembly decide its advice to local churches on the issue of dealing with host congregations whose intentions regarding same-sex marriage differ from those of the hosting congregation.
3. helping Assembly consider the option of all local churches no longer being registered premises and ministers or members being authorised persons for the registration of marriages but be places where marriages are blessed.

Mr Lowes responded to questions and comments.

There was considerable discussion. Mission Council warmly agreed that it would be right to take to the Assembly in 2014 the whole issue of same sex marriage and how and when the URC should reach the necessary decisions. There would be no resolution placed before the Assembly, and the consensus procedure would be used to determine the way forward. It was understood that whilst the Human Sexuality Task Group would be responsible for providing materials which would enable the discussion at Assembly, and that it might produce some of those resources itself, it might also source some elsewhere. For example, it would expect to work in conjunction with the Faith and Order Committee and the Law and Polity Advisory Group. Mission Council welcomed the suggestion from the facilitation group that the United Reformed Church as a whole might in the future cease to offer the legal part of marriage on their premises, instead requiring couples to take this step first in a Register Office before celebrating their marriage in church. It was noted that some of our ecumenical partners were also considering this option, and it was suggested that it might be good to discuss the matter with them.

During the course of the discussion several changes were made to the original resolution from the facilitation group, and the resolution was finally put in the following form:

Mission Council affirms the work of its Human Sexuality Task Group and is grateful for the work it has done to support our deliberations on same-sex marriage.

Mission Council asks the Human Sexuality Task Group to build on both its work so far and the discussion at the November 2013 Mission Council and bring to Assembly 2014 materials which will allow Assembly in consensus mode to have an open and informed discussion on the policy or policies it might want to adopt in relation to the laws regarding same-sex marriage.

Ancillary to that it further asks the Group to provide materials to assist in the tasks of:

- 1. reminding Assembly that this whole discussion is set in the context of the 2007 Commitment to hold together across our differences.**
- 2. helping Assembly decide its advice to local churches, including Local Ecumenical Partnerships, on the issue of dealing with host congregations whose intentions regarding same-sex marriage differ from those of the hosted congregation(s).**

3. helping Assembly to consider the current situation where legal registration of marriage and its Christian celebration are combined and to discuss their possible separation.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Thanks were expressed to Mr Lowes and the facilitation group for their work.

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar took the chair.

13/47(2) (Continued from Session 7)

Medium Term Strategy Group

The Revd Dr Romilly Micklem announced that following feedback from the previous day's discussion the Medium Term Strategy Group would not pursue the idea of paid synod managers. The Group was, however, encouraged by the discussions to pursue the suggestion of strengthening the Inter Synod Resource Sharing process by introducing guided donations. Dr Micklem acknowledged that it would not be possible to achieve total fairness, but urged Mission Council to refer the matter to the Resource Sharing Task Group in the hope that the church could move closer to that end.

On behalf of the Group Dr Micklem proposed the following resolution:

Mission Council asks the Resource Sharing Task Group to propose an inter-synod resource sharing mechanism:

- **based on a system of guided donations from synods;**
- **taking into account their income from financial investments and the sale of church buildings but excluding the sale of manses;**
- **with a view to achieving a guaranteed minimum income for each synod.**

Dr Micklem responded to questions and comments and there was discussion.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Mr John Ellis took the chair.

13/29(3) (Continued from Session 8)

Faith and Order Committee - The Future of the Church and the Church Meeting

The Revd Elizabeth Welch, Convener, thanked Mission Council for all the helpful contributions made in the earlier sessions' discussions. She promised that the committee would give due consideration to the comments made before preparing a paper for the General Assembly 2014.

13/49

World Council of Churches Assembly

A number of URC personnel had been present at the recent World Church Assembly in Korea. Materials from the event had been displayed during the Mission Council meeting.

The Revd David Tatem and the Revd Dougie Burnett spoke about their experiences.

Mr Tatem spoke of a unique event bringing together people from all parts of the world who encompassed the whole spectrum of theological understanding, yet were willing to work together. He would continue to consider how the United Reformed Church might connect with other parts of the world.

Mr Burnett was impressed by the immense scale of the event and the huge diversity of people attending, all held together by the Spirit in their ongoing work.

13/50

Thanks and Farewells

On behalf of Mission Council the Moderator expressed thanks to those for whom this would their final meeting, and wished them well in the future:

Mrs Sarah Lane Cawte, South Western Synod

Ms Elizabeth Lawson, Thames North Synod

Mr Peter Pay, Wessex Synod

Miss Rebecca Whiffen, FURY Moderator

Thanks were also due to others not present, but who would no longer serve on Mission Council: the Revd Sarah Moore, North Western Synod and the Revd Graham Jones, Rural Consultant, already mentioned.

The Moderator thanked all the staff in attendance, with special gratitude to Sara Foyle. The Moderator also thanked the General Secretary and the Clerk.

SESSION 10

Members of Mission Council gathered for worship led by the Moderators and their chaplains which included the celebration of Holy Communion and the induction of Dr Andrew Bradstock as Secretary for Church & Society and of Mrs Karen Morrison as Head of Children's & Youth Work Development.

It was noted that the next meeting of Mission Council would take place March 10-12 2014 at High Leigh Conference Centre.

APPENDIX

Mission Council November 2013

Report from the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) was given the responsibility by the 2012 General Assembly, through Resolution 38, for seeking personal and collective reconciliation in the United Reformed Church, following the resignation of Lawrence Moore as moderator elect.

As one part of this work, in October 2013 PRWC brought together some of the key people for a 24 hour meeting facilitated by two members of Place for Hope, a reconciliation agency under a Church of Scotland banner. Thirteen people were invited and eight agreed to attend. The convener and one member of

PRWC were also present. Due to unforeseen circumstances, some of the participants were only present for the second half of the meeting.

Whilst providing a place for people to listen to others who had been involved in the situation, in terms of healing and reconciliation the meeting seemed to have only very limited success. A number of those present heard viewpoints and/or facts which were new to them. However, it is clear that at this stage we are not yet able to produce a 'common narrative' of the relevant events.

Those present at the meeting were, however, agreed that harassment and bullying have taken place unchallenged, in many parts of the United Reformed Church over many years. This, and any continuing bullying or harassment is completely unacceptable. Guidelines for responding to allegations of bullying or harassment were agreed by Mission Council in March 2012 and reported to the General Assembly that year. Worthy as they are on paper, they need to be more effective in practice.

Our failings as a Church in the particular matter for which we had gathered were, of course, to the fore. These have already been highlighted in the reports of the Assembly Commission (resolution 38) to Mission Council. Where these failings were seen to be related to systemic failures or the lack of clear processes, the Law and Polity Advisory Group continues to work on these matters. Where these failings are part of the complex tangle of fallible human relations which can only be untangled through forgiveness, given and received, they continue to be the concern of the PRWC.

The external facilitators reminded us of a comment by Martin Luther King: "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. Forgiveness is not an occasional act. It is a permanent attitude." They have also made suggestions about a way forward and the PRWC are looking at ways of pursuing these.