



Catch the Vision

General Assembly 2006
Exeter University

July 7th-10th

Catch the Vision

“Called to live?”

Summary

We set out our strategic thinking under five headings, ecumenism, changing church, spirituality and core values, ways of working, and finance and resources. We conclude:

- That our commitment to ecumenism should not restrain us from focusing on mission. We are called to live, not die.
- That the structures have been put in place for local experiments in being church differently
- That we are summoned to renewal, to model the love of God and the unity we have given by moving beyond stereotypical divisions of ‘liberal’ and ‘evangelical’.
- That the local church is central to our mission, and must take priority in our use of resources.

Having established those principles, we then suggest ways in which the work of the Assembly might be re-configured to give priority to mission. The report ends by grappling with our limited financial resources and suggests options that the church might adopt to achieve a balanced budget.

1 Introduction

1.1 ‘Catch the Vision’ (CTV) has been working to a published three-phase timetable. Last year we dealt with the structures of the church. This year we are focussing on the resources and staffing of the church, and next year our attention will be fixed on spirituality and values. This was always going to be the most difficult part of our journey because it is about learning to work with fewer resources. So, we hope and pray that this may be the year of pain before the year of gain.

The strategic questions

a) ecumenism

2.1. We are a radical people because our God is radical. All God’s love is everyone’s birth-right. The CTV prayer was our way of saying that:

....we seek to be God’s people,
transformed by the gospel..
committed to making a difference to the
world’s kingdoms
as we live Christ’s kingdom.’

2.2 ‘A united church’, Desmond Tutu told the World Council of Churches (WCC) at Porto Alegre, ‘is no optional extra, rather it is indispensable for the salvation of God’s world’. He went on to link unity firmly with mission and difference making, arguing that the survival of apartheid for so long was in part a result of Christian disunity. The church in his vision is a harbinger of what the world might one day be:

‘Jesus was quite serious when he said that God was our father, that we belonged all to one family, because in this family all, not some, are insiders...Bush, bin Laden, all belong, gay, lesbian, so-called straight – all belong, are loved, are precious.’

2.3 That is real ecumenical radicalism, and the unity of the church is but the faltering first step on the journey. We need no persuading. We were the church created to die, the transitional catalyst that would bring about the unity of English and Welsh Protestantism. It was a wonderful dream, and part of our vocation is to continue to dream, and to be an ecumenical thorn in the side of our partners, reminding them that Jesus longs for his followers to share the unity that he shares with the Father and the Spirit. (John 17:20-24).

2.4 God’s unique gift to us has been to form us from three unions and call us from three nations. Our passion for unity is to be seen in a growing number of ecumenical partnerships, in our national pastoral strategy with the Methodist Church, worked out in a growing number of united areas and in continuing conversations about how we can work together nationally. We have learnt a good deal about the difficulties of local united working, but we also know that successful united churches can be incredibly dynamic and exciting places to be. Across these islands, in countless places, we continue to be passionately committed to local as well as national ecumenism.

2.5 However, despite the rhetoric of Porto Alegre, the language of organic unity which we speak is rarely spoken elsewhere. Rather the dialect is of rejoicing in diversity and learning to live diversely and respectfully. The kind of unity for which we longed is not about to happen. It is clear from the Ecumenical Committee’s investigations that this is not the time for discussions about organic unity. It could, though, be the time to develop parallel pathways which may converge in the fullness of God’s time.

2.6 There are no unity schemes on the far or near horizon. For thirty years the driving dynamic of the United Reformed Church has been unity. It has made us a movement, a pilgrimage, a people of no abiding city. But is God now asking something extra of us? Are we now being asked to balance our willingness to 'die' with a passion for 'life' and mission?

2.7 In a world where calls for unity receive no positive response, we could opt for the 'homeopathic' form of ecumenism. This is the 'dilute until no one knows you're there' option, and it has a certain validity. Well, it says, pull down the shutters. That was an interesting experiment. Let's sell off the silver and throw in our lot with the parish church or the Baptist meeting and strengthen the Christian presence.

2.8 Or we could opt for the 'passion fruit concentrate' version of ecumenism. That says, we might be a peculiar flavour, but the drinks cabinet would be much worse off without it.

2.9 The first strategic question with which we have been grappling in the Steering Group is, dilution or concentration? Which of those positions will best enable us to share God's gift with our Christian brothers and sisters? We have heard it said in ecumenical circles (granted when others thought we weren't listening, 'Don't bother about the URC, they won't be here for long'.) We are not persuaded that our particular offering to the future great church and indeed to the future of Christian witness in our three nations will be best served by dilution.

2.10 We believe that we need to accept that in the goodness of God's grace, this is where we are called to pitch our tent, roll our sleeves up and get on with it. In other words, our ecumenical commitment needs to be put at the service of mission, and mission has to take its place at the centre of our agenda. We've been given so much. Historically we know about living a radical witness, surviving in the face of oppression, refusing to bow to the authority of the state in matters of conscience. We know about reconciling diversity (we have, after all, experienced three unions). We know what it is to be captivated by Scripture and have our lives turned upside down. It happens week by week and month by month. Its electric and wonderful, and we don't know why we don't shout about it. We might be an odd flavour, but we're a catchy one. People might get to like us.

2.11 It is what Christ has spoken and what we have heard that is the source of both our unity and our uniqueness. The unity is obvious, the uniqueness lies in the richness of the incarnate Word whose speech translates into countless cultures and traditions. What we have heard, as Congregationalists, Presbyterians, members of the Churches of Christ and an increasingly diverse United Reformed Church in three countries, makes us unique. Christ's gift is not that we are either

'united' or 'reformed', but that we are 'united and reformed'. That is Christ's gift to us, and because it is his unique gift to us, it is his gift to all God's people, just as their unique hearing is part of his gift to us. For the moment then, we need to rest in that uniqueness, to allow that gift to nurture and nourish us, and to help us re-discover the roots of our own spiritual vitality.

2.12 So, we think we are called to be part of the scene. Here to live rather than called to die. Let's not be ashamed about being here. Let's be ourselves. Let's be glad to be ourselves. Let's not apologise for being the United Reformed Church. Let's celebrate God's gifts, and think about possibilities and mission and growth. Why not church plant? Why not set about pioneering pieces of work? Let's get confident, secure in the gospel. Our ultimate unity lies there after all, not in ecclesiastical designs, however sophisticated, for as Rowan Williams puts it, 'The Catholic Church is simply that gathering in which what Christ has promised is spoken and heard.'

2.13 In the dome of the magnificent Catholic church of Sacre Coeur in Paris is a huge mosaic of Christ with outstretched arms. At the back of the church is a poster, which reads 'Whatever you have done, however life might have hurt you, you are welcome here. The arms of God reach out to you. This is for you.' Sacre Coeur's web site begins:

'Pilgrims, visitors, simple passers-by,
Here God welcomes you to give sense to your life.
Here God waits for you to offer you all his love.'

We dare to hope that might be true of our churches too.

b) Changing church

3.1 Such traditional 'ecu-speak' lacks resonance in some parts of the contemporary Christian world. Richard Mortimer taught us to distinguish between fresh expressions of church, and what he helpfully calls 'new expressions of ecumenism.' We stand a fighting chance of recognising the former, – cell church, café church and so on – because they are places where the eucharist is celebrated and fellowship happens. The latter are really rather different – the isolated rural teenagers with a faith who find each other at Summer events and whose deepest Christian community for the next 11 months is an electronic network meeting in an organised online chatroom; the single issue Christian pressure groups on such social issues as justice, refugees, asylum, the environment and climate change. Some of these would say that their being in some sort of community with each other as an outworking of their faith is a much more compelling encounter with God than Sunday church. What kind of challenge do they bring? Should we try and relate to them, and if so, how?

3.2 Whether we like it or not, understand it or not, ways of being church are being spawned beyond the scope of institutional denominations like ours. This is a very odd transitional period in history, and in it the most judicious mission strategy is one which rides the waves, in all their diversity. The Spirit will be about her winnowing work, and that of lasting value will be left. The difficulty, as ever, is reading the signs of the times, and coping with conflicting and multiple demands.

3.3 *Equipping the saints* (resolution 30 of the 2005 Assembly) offers us exciting opportunities. It has freed us from the impossible dream of providing ministerial leadership for every congregation by offering a broader and more realistic understanding of the ways in which leadership is exercised locally. We are, in that sense, well placed to manage and pastor this complex scene in which traditional church and fresh expressions of church and ecumenism are all happening together. The complementary resolution 39 (2005 Assembly) allows us to use some of our ministers more creatively in responding to those challenges. Responding to our environment is filled with risk, but when was Christian witness anything other?

3.4 We need to manage that risk with skilful accountability, whilst at the same time maintaining an alert traditionalism, and we need to balance that continuum with a clear and insightful realism. However attractive we are, however cleverly we niche market ourselves, there is no guarantee of success. Gospel and church were never programmatic processes. The Spirit is too subtle for that, and God too generous. However, we should not underestimate the stress this can cause. Support for those in leadership, but particularly for those engaged in full-time ministries and Christian work on our behalf, is critical, and deserves close thought.

3.5 Doing and being church differently can never be imposed 'from above'. It would be quite improper for Assembly to tell any of our churches how to 'be' and 'do' church. Assembly has provided the structural framework within which experiment and evolution can happen, and we look forward eventually to hearing the stories about what has been accomplished.

c) Spirituality and core values.

4.1 Renewal is at the heart of our agenda. If concentration rather than dilution is required of us, we must seek renewal from the God who calls us. Desmond Tutu was right to say that a united church is indispensable for the salvation of God's world. All around we see nation set against nation, culture against culture, faction against faction. Scripture is full of alternative visions, of wolf and lamb together (Isaiah 11), of Jerusalem's streets full of well cared-for old folks and bubbly kids (Zechariah 8:5), of the leaves of the trees being for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2). The church is the harbinger of that new creation,

which has already begun in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:16ff). Granted, we hold that treasure in all too earthen vessels, but the world is right to have expectations that in the church they will see 'something different'.

4.2 Modelling that 'something different' calls us to repentance and renewal, for what the world actually sees is Christian pitted against Christian, fighting to the institutional death over issues like human sexuality and arcane aspects of Biblical interpretation. It is the most desperate witness. We who are committed to unity to need to live that commitment within our own local churches and amongst ourselves. We need to show that the old antagonisms between 'evangelical' and 'liberal' are outmoded and can be transcended.

4.3 We held a small consultation on mission and evangelism in December 2005, with the deliberate intent of seeing if there was common ground to build on. It turned out to be a quite remarkable 24 hours, bringing together 'evangelicals' and 'liberals', Biblical scholars and community ministry specialists, together with the odd church bureaucrat. In one memorable phrase, we discovered that the wings of the church either keep people apart or enable them to fly. We discovered a passionate excitement amongst all present about the reading of Scripture.

4.4 John Campbell, who was our main facilitator, posed the question, 'Why is the Bible so purposefully awkward?' Why does God communicate in this oblique, unusual way? Perhaps to defeat our inbuilt propensity to domesticate God and control religion, to challenge assumptions of closure, to seek our friendship, to show the value of vulnerability, to help us create community (for the Scriptures grew out of a community of believers), and show us that the text must be read anew in each generation. He summed up his thinking in the phrase, 'we have an amazing, intriguing, talkative God who is beyond us all but right there seeking us.'

4.5 And around that we converged, seeing both a God-given opportunity to leave behind the evangelical-liberal divide, and the possibility of a process of renewal which could gather the church into a community of difference makers for Christ's sake. We have seen a vision. We intend to follow it, and make it the key feature of 'Catch the Vision' 2007.

d) Ways of working

5.1 Our fourth strategic observation is that we believe the local church to be absolutely critical. It is here, more than anywhere else, that gospel and culture meet, here more than anywhere else that change can happen and discipleship flourish. That is not to endorse the way some churches do things now, but it is to say that we have a 'strategic footprint' across our nations that some commercial organisations would die

for! The possibilities of those places are only limited by our imaginations. We rejoice in Assembly's response to *Equipping the saints* because it allows us to resource local churches far more flexibly and creatively.

5.2 We wish to build on that. Gathering and dispersing is the tide of Christian living. That process is for us essentially parochial, although we are well aware that some still drive twenty miles to worship, and others shrink that distance in cyberspace, but the reality is still of gathering around the Word and then dispersing into discipling activity. Ministers and CRCWs are (with others in some places) the conductors and animateurs of that process. Or, to change the metaphor into management-speak – local churches are the only income generating part of the church process. Our ministers and CRCWs remain essential to that work, and that local work, presbyteral and diaconal, remains (and should remain) the focus of our resourcing.

5.3 If we are to continue to direct our resources there, we must press on with our quest for lighter governance and a leaner structure. Conciliar government is expensive government. Whilst we wish to reduce the cost of that government (which our auditors have identified as overly expensive for an organisation our size), we do not wish to forsake its principle. We have recognised that by proposing that Assembly will in future meet every two years, and by our acceptance that we wish to have one level of council between the Assembly and the local church. The representatives of that one local council will form both the Assembly, and the Council which will act on its behalf between Assemblies.

5.4 Our work this year on the governance of the church has fallen into two inter-related parts:

i) the structure of the church

5.5 First, the work begun last year on the number of councils between Assembly and the local church must be completed. Resolutions 40, 41 and 43 have each received the requisite two-thirds majority in the councils of the church.

Resolutions	40	41	43
Synods against	1	2	3
Districts against	3	21	

The Steering Group believes that the will of the church has been clearly expressed thus far, and therefore brings the resolutions back to this Assembly for ratification.

(Resolutions 43-47, p 136)

The report of the London Synod Commission is given in CTV Appendix 5 (p 161).

5.6 The legal advice which we have received, whilst not definitive, suggests that in all probability we will need to create a Statutory Instrument to amend the 1972 Act in respect of Section 5 Trusts. The Clerk's advice to the Steering Group is that, if this is necessary, it should be presented to the 2007 Assembly for agreement prior to its progress through parliament. That allows us a year to work out a smooth transition into new ways of working.

5.7 Second, we promised Assembly last year that we would present options about the possible size and composition of future Assemblies and (Mission) Council. We apologise that the material is not available in this report. We very much hope that it will be available as a separate paper within the Assembly mailing. Deciding about the size and shape of Assembly involves judgements about the balance of representation and trust, and (as within any Reformed system) representation has a direct relationship to the cost of governance (the larger the council, the more costly it will be). We trust that those will be amongst the factors affecting Assembly's decision.

ii) trusteeship

5.8 We must deal with the question of Trusteeship. In the United Reformed Church, the General Assembly (under God) is the source of authority and policy. The church operates under both its own laws and procedures, and under civil law, for it occupies a privileged position in civic life. The civil government therefore has a right to expect that churches and charities are managed and governed properly. It is the role of charity Trustees to give that assurance. Thus the Trustees of the Church should exercise the control and management of the **administration** of the church's policy (see s.97(1) of the 1993 Act). In other words, they are 'watch-dogs' who should have in place a series of measures to ensure that the administration of the church is being carried out according to the policy set by Assembly, and within the provisions of charity law. They must ensure that the charity is properly pursuing its purposes, preserving its assets and operating on a secure financial basis, and assessing and responding appropriately to risks and opportunities.

5.9 It has been clear for some time that our understanding of Trusteeship needs attention. The General Assembly of 2001 agreed that the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) should act as Trustees of the Church. That has proved less than satisfactory, not least because MCAG's busy agenda leaves it little time to carry out the necessary assurance processes. Given the way that our life is presently structured, the Finance Committee, the URC Trust, the Catch the Vision Steering Group (by default) and others have all found themselves doing trustee-type work. The Steering Group considers that we need to establish a more formal, rigorous, transparent process to provide checks and balances and assurance for those within and outside the church.

5.10 We believe that we now have the opportunity to do that, the better to comply with the requirements of good governance in the 1993 Act. After informal consultation with our Legal Advisors and the Charity Commission, we believe that we can do this simply, in two stages.

i) a transitional trustee body

5.11 Assembly is asked to appoint the directors of the URC Trust as Trustees in place of MCAG for a period of one year, and to instruct the Finance Committee to undertake the role of the Audit Committee for the Trustees.

5.12 Currently all the assets of the Church are held in the name of the URC Trust as holding trustees, and the URC Trust already has an investment sub-committee which, *de facto*, is undertaking a managing trustee role on the substantial investments of the Church. The Finance Committee's work already includes the preparation of the annual report and accounts which are already technically presented on behalf of the Trustees to the General Assembly by the Honorary Treasurer.

ii) a permanent trustee body

5.13 The 2007 Assembly should be asked to elect Trustees, whilst ensuring a proper degree of continuity with the URC Trust.

5.14 The aim is that within the shortest time possible the Trustee body should be entirely elected by the Assembly. Detailed descriptions of the number of Trustees, the skills needed by the Trustee body, and a suggested method of election are given in Appendix 2 (p 139).

iii) The Salaries Committee

5.15 We also recommend that the Salaries Committee, which at present has no reporting line, should become the Remuneration Committee for the Trustees.

5.16 In Appendix 1 (p 138) we offer in diagrammatic form a vision of the structure of the church, which includes the new Trustee body.

(Resolution 48, p 137)

5.17 If councils are presently one 'partner' in our governing structure, committees are the other. We have already (through the Staffing Advisory Group) undertaken extensive conversations with committees and staff secretaries to see how we might organise ourselves for the future. Once again, we do not believe that the *status quo* is an option, because we are a small church with limited resources. The days have gone when we could do all that we want to do. We therefore need to prioritise, and those priorities need to be set and evaluated by the councils of

the church. There are parts of our work where standing committees are vital, but other areas where a rapidly shifting environment demands a sure-footed, flexible response. We therefore offer an alternative vision, which we hope sets mission at the heart of our work (A more detailed picture is given in the diagram in Appendix 3 p 140). We adopt the term 'departments' on the advice of Mission Council, and we are happy to do so because the thrust of departments at an earlier stage in our history was to work with representative committees, acting as channels of information between Assembly and Synods. We believe this to be an important way of holding the work of the church together. Our hope would be that this could be further enhanced by allowing Mission Council to divide into three sections which could take a special interest in the work of the three departments.

- The Department of the Ministries of the Church, which will include training, eldership and youth and children's ministries, because they are part of the ministry of the whole people of God.
- The Department of Administration and Resources, which will provide support services like communications, human resources, finance and so on.
- The Department of Mission policy and Theology, which we hope will encourage teamwork and collaboration in the way we work out how we are to be the church, rather than the prevalence of our present committees to zoom off into narrow silos of limited yet passionate interest.

5.18. The Department of the Ministries of the Church will need much the same committee structure which we already have, as will certain functions (eg. pensions) within the department of Administration and Resources. However, the Department of Mission policy and Theology offers the chance of a new start. We would suggest one committee, with short-term working parties and reference groups where necessary. If this broad pattern is acceptable, we would come to the 2007 Assembly with detailed proposals for changes in committee structures.

5.19 We are also quite clear that this will have to be introduced and managed within reduced staffing and financial resources. We believe that to be possible. We do not believe that to be an ideal position; indeed, we note that in risk management terms, the staffing of the Assembly's work is so lean that it is unacceptably vulnerable. However, unless and until the giving of the church to the central budget increases, it would be irresponsible of us to suggest remedying this by increasing staffing. We wish to emphasise, though, that our motivation for suggesting this change of structure is not financial, but missiological. The church's mindset needs to shift to creative engagement with the cultures in which it is set.

5.20 We believe that this proposal will place mission and creative thought about the gospel at the centre of our corporate life. As it does so, it both reflects and will encourage best practice in other councils of the church.

(Resolution 49, p 137)

e) Resources and Finance

6.1 In our 2005 report (para 110a) we put the church on notice that ‘...unless giving increases considerably, programmes will have to be discontinued for further savings to be made.’ Giving has not increased, and we must therefore attend to other ways of reducing our expenditure.

6.2 In the paragraphs that follow we (and our colleagues in the Finance Committee) have attempted to reduce what we believe to be an unacceptable deficit on the 2007 budget. We have had to do that from monies which are within the control of the Assembly – namely M&M. As we have done so, we have been conscious of the fact that it is work sanctioned by Assembly that we have been reducing. We believe our actions were necessary and prudent, but the uncomfortable and difficult process we have been through leads us to make three observations about financial strategy.

a) the wealth of the whole church

6.3 We believe there should be a synergy between the resources of the whole church and the ministry of the whole church. At present there is not. We have a corporate strategy for ministry and local liberal economy of buildings. We realise that it will not be easy to move to such a synergy, not least for legal reasons. However, it might be possible by extending the voluntary covenant that we make with each other through resource sharing. It is probably wildly idealistic to have a vision of a church where each congregation and synod places its wealth on a common table with complete transparency (see Acts 5!), but we believe that to be God’s challenge to us. The United Reformed Church is resource rich, but cash poor. It is only by sharing those resources that in the long term we will be able to engage fully in the mission God calls us to.

b) cost control

6.4 As we have lived through this process this year we have noted how difficult it is to exercise cost control over Assembly’s programmes. That is because financial responsibility and budgetary control are diffused rather than concentrated. Responsibility lies with committee convenors and their secretaries, and there are many of them. We suggest that whilst the councils of the church should continue to control stewardship and financial

policy (in the sense of deciding what the priorities of the church are and what resources should be given to them), operational management (and therefore budget control) should rest ultimately with the General Secretariat and the Treasurer. Their lines of accountability to Mission Council and Assembly are clear.

c) Buildings

6.5 Whilst we accept that it is presently impossible to produce an ‘Assembly-wide’ buildings policy, we know that a judicious policy of deciding what buildings we want where is central to the United Reformed Church’s future, both financially and missiologically. We would urge Synods and local fellowships of churches to ponder this question carefully as they evolve strategies for the future. It may well be that what we cannot achieve through the Assembly might be achieved by the ministry of Synods.

6.6 If we are right in our contention that we are now called to live, not die, that what is required of us is concentration, not dilution, certain consequences follow. The way a church’s identity is sustained is complex. In part it has to do with the kind of people we are, but it also has to do with the history we inherit, including our buildings, and the institutions which we have formed through the years. Throughout at least the last ten years, this has been a recurring dilemma for Assembly and its Training Committee, for a significant number of those institutions are training institutions.

6.7 The Steering Group’s strategy, namely that we are being called to live, has important implications. A degree of concentration is essential if we are to maintain our unique contribution to the future of the church in these islands. It is essential both to maintain our self-understanding of organic unity (the precious gift of our history since 1972) and our perception of what it means to be part of the Reformed family (the heritage all of us brought to that and consequent unions). That concentration is intimately tied up with the life of the institutions of the church.

6.8 They represent a huge gift to us as we seek to further develop as a learning church. Our strategic intent is therefore at one with the proposals of the Training Committee. If we are to make an intelligent, creative and grounded contribution to the future church, we need to safeguard and nurture those few institutions which are still ‘ours’. Any further dilution will damage our partners as much as ourselves, for it will weaken our ability to sustain what we have to offer.

6.9 It is the Training Committee’s business to work out what that might mean in terms of theological education, and we would not wish to trespass on their territory. However, we would wish to make two further comments about other ‘institutions’ which are ‘ours’.

i) Church House

6.10 The offices of a church don't have the same emotional resonance as other institutions. As we reported to Assembly last year, professional valuation revealed that the value of the building would not cover the cost of re-location elsewhere. However, as we also reported last year, we are continuing to explore with the Methodist Church possibilities of working more closely together at Assembly/Conference level, and that may well have consequences for the future of our offices. Those conversations are at a preliminary stage, and we do not expect to have anything specific to report in the near future, but it is important that Assembly realise that we are making no assumptions about the status quo.

ii) the Windermere Centre

6.11 We believe the Windermere Centre to have been a remarkable and brave creation of our recent history. We are confident that the Centre has a central role to play in the fostering of learning, spiritual vision and *koinonia* (that sense of 'God-ness' which means so much more than the flabby translation 'fellowship') amongst us. We endorse warmly the report of the task group that reported to Mission Council in 2003, and we ask the Finance Committee to continue their conversation with the Windermere Advisory Group about ways in which the necessary development of the Centre might be financed.

6.12 We believe that we should support our own institutions, and we propose that when committees and working groups seek meeting venues, the first call on their expenditure should be the United Reformed Church through the Windermere Centre, its colleges and Church House. Only if that is not possible should outside institutions be considered.

The Budget

6.13 As we have pointed out in previous reports, the finances of the church are complex. The national budget (which is Assembly's responsibility) is only part of the whole. Significant resources exist in some Synods (but not all) and in some local churches (but not all). Similarly, we are property rich, but cash poor. Our wealth is tied up in assets, mainly housing ministers in both active service and retirement, and in investments, many of which are restricted funds where we can only enjoy the income. We cannot realise that wealth, and where we can, it is not available immediately. However, that means that our current operation has to be funded principally by giving. The details of our proposals to maximise that giving are set out in the M&M review. The state of our finances is made clear in the draft budget which potentially shows a deficit of over £1 million. Had we unlimited reserves, we might be able to bear that, but we don't.

That deficit needs to be cut drastically as our reserves are very limited and we are conscious of our existing responsibilities to provide for ministers' pensions and retirement housing.

6.14 We have five options as we seek to manage this situation.

- a) we can increase our income through M&M
- b) we can cut back on ministry, which is by far our largest item of expenditure
- c) we can make cuts elsewhere in the budget
- d) we can agree to explore moving items out of the central budget to Synod budgets through a process similar to resource sharing
- e) we can produce a mixture of the above three measures

We will deal with each option in turn:

- a) increasing income

6.15 We have set out our suggestions for maximising income in the M&M review (see especially para 11). We hope and pray that this will commend itself to the church. However, it will not deal with our underlying problem, our age structure, which means that we are locked into expecting more giving from fewer people. Even if giving increases, we must have the courage to lay aside our 'large church' mentality, and adopt a structure which fits our size and resources.

6.16 Experience also suggests that Assembly's enthusiasm for programmes and expenditure is not echoed in local churches and Synods. We worry about the serious accountability gap between Assembly and the local churches and Synods, and we understand only too well the ecclesiological implications of that statement.

6.17 Nonetheless, we challenge to the church to maximise its stewardship, but we do so as realists who know that despite such appeals, for the last three years Synods have been unable to pledge their targets, and that the gap between actual and targeted income has been increasing.

- b) cutting ministry

6.18 We have made it clear in our strategic thinking that we do not believe that the church would countenance any further cuts in 'front-line' ministry. That is an assumption that we will have to test at Assembly. However, it is hard to see how we would be able to manage the necessary immediate reduction because a saving of £1 million would require the loss of forty ministers. It remains a medium-term possibility, but not one we believe the church would welcome.

c) cutting the budget elsewhere

6.19 We wish to pay tribute to our staff who manage budgets. Over the past five years they have struggled to keep expenditure level, often with little margin, for the bulk of most budgets consists of stipends, salaries and other items that cannot be easily reduced. It may be that there is still room for reducing discretionary expenditure. However, although savings in travel, committee and other expenses may be significant, they will not be dramatic.

6.20 Lasting and significant savings will only be made if Assembly addresses the question of non-discretionary budget expenses. We believe that Assembly must exercise that responsibility this year.

d) moving items to the budget of other parts of the church

6.21 Part of the rationale of 'Catch the Vision' was exploring what services needed to be delivered at each level of church life. We note that the combined income of Synods is greater than the national programme budget, and we therefore wish to explore the possibilities of shifting parts of our programme into Synod budgets.

e) A combination

6.22 A combination of the above measures will probably be necessary if we are to manage this situation creatively.

6.23 We do not rejoice in this. It is not where we wish to be. We wish to be in the position where we have a revenue rather than an expenditure led budget. We wish to be in the place where the church gives joyfully out of gratitude to God to enable the mission of God. However, we are not there. It is our hope that one day we might be. In the meantime we offer the following. Our prayer is that this will be a provisional state, and that within five years increased stewardship will result in an improved financial position which will enable us to expand rather than contract our work.

6.24 General Assembly needs to know the rationale behind our proposals. The background is one of sustained cost-cutting and budget reductions in the activities of the Assembly. Some budgets have already been cut to the point where to cut anything else would be to imperil the programme (for example, Church and Society). The M&M report (para 5:1) bears witness to the fact that over the period 2002-5 the costs of training and administration have been held. General Assembly needs to be clear that that has meant reductions in support staffing and administration (for example, one administrator now services International and ecumenical relations, and the General Secretary and

the Deputy General Secretary work to one PA). We have not, nor will we in the present financial climate, replace the Financial Secretary. In other words, administration is bearing a share of the costs. It is very difficult to see how we could cut central administration further without undue risk to the church's infrastructure.

6.25 Our options have therefore been severely limited, and at the time of writing the budget is still subject to negotiation. The following should therefore be understood as an interim statement of the measures that are under consideration.

a) substantial savings have been offered in the Ecumenical committee and Communications and Editorial committee budgets.

b) savings have been offered in the Racial Justice and Multicultural ministry budget.

c) after ministry and training, the largest item of expenditure in the central budget is Youth and Children's work. The vast majority of that is composed of salaries. The budgeted figure for 2007 is £650k (the committee, central cost of YCWT team, and PILOTS), to which must be added a further £280K which is the Synod portion of the cost of the YCWT team. In other words, we spend £930K on youth and children's work.

We suggest

(i) that the Youth and Children's Work budget be reduced by £60K (a cut of 6.5% in the church's total expenditure on Youth and Children's work at Assembly and Synod levels).

(ii) that the costs of the YCWT team be met entirely by Synods, perhaps by an extension of the resource sharing principle.

(d) should the proposals for re-structuring into 3 'areas' of work be accepted, we would envisage the eventual discontinuing of the Life and Witness post, because the focus of the new area will be mission, and the support of eldership will move to the training area. Given the present financial constraints, we would not feel justified in appointing an extra member of staff. We would therefore envision savings in the area of £40K.

(e) we note the proposals of the Training committee. It is difficult to anticipate what savings might occur should it be accepted, but we note that savings might well occur from 2008. However, we are also aware that if we are to maintain our present level of ministry (tracking at 3% membership decline

Resolutions 44-47

<p>as Assembly has directed) we will soon need to foster vocations. A prudent and wise church would be opening a vocations campaign at this point. If we do that, it will be very hard for the Training Committee to cut costs.</p> <p>(f) if Assembly is held every two years, we should effect a saving of c. £100K p.a. (ie. the saving of £200K in alternative years)</p> <p>6.26 In summary therefore, the following economies are suggested (to which will be added the substantial cuts under negotiation with the Ecumenical and Communications committees):</p>	<p>£000</p> <p>Racial Justice 10</p> <p>Youth and Children's work 60</p> <p>Re-structuring mission 40</p> <p>Reduced Assembly 100</p> <p>Financial Secretary 50</p> <p>----</p> <p>Sub-total 260</p> <p>Moving costs of YCWTs 280</p> <p>----</p> <p>Total 540</p>
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We hope that the final result will be in the region of £700K, reducing the deficit to a manageable £300K.

Catch the Vision Resolutions

- a) Resolutions 40, 41 and 43 of 2005, which are returned for ratification

Resolution 44 (40 of 2005) Resolutions returned for ratification 1

General Assembly resolves that there shall be one level of council between the General Assembly and the local church.

Resolution 45 (41 of 2005) Resolutions returned for ratification 2

General Assembly resolves that as from General Assembly 2007, there shall be one level of council between the General Assembly and the local church, the thirteen 'new Synods.'

Resolution 46 (43 of 2005) Resolutions returned for ratification 3

General Assembly resolves that, as from 2007, General Assembly shall meet every two years.

- b) Resolutions consequent upon that decision:

Resolution 47 Changes to the Basis and Structure

General Assembly approves the changes to the Basis and Structure of the United Reformed Church consequent upon its acceptance of resolutions 40, 41 and 43 of 2005, as set out in Catch the Vision Appendix 4, pages 141-160 of the book of Reports 2006.

c) New resolutions

Resolution 48

General Trustees

General Assembly appoint the United Reformed Church Trust to be the General Trustees of the church from the close of Assembly 2006.

Resolution 49

The future work of Assembly

General Assembly approves of the principle of dividing its work into three departments, Ministries, Administration and Resources, and Mission policy and Theology, and instructs the Catch the Vision Steering Group to prepare detailed proposals for the 2007 Assembly.

Southern Synod has given notice that, in the event of Resolution 43 of Assembly 2005, "General Assembly resolves that, as from 2007, General Assembly shall meet every two years." not being approved, it will move:

Resolution 50

Southern Synod

General Assembly instructs Mission Council to consider whether some other form of General Assembly might be appropriate for the future, e.g. a much wider General Assembly every 3-5 years comprising ministers and representatives from all churches, funded by local churches, with Mission Council being given increased powers to act between Assemblies.

*Proposer: The Revd Michael Davies
Seconder: Dr Graham Campling*

1.1 During the Synod discussion of Resolution 43 of the 2005 Assembly, it was clear that there was considerable hesitation about the proposal. Part of the genius of the United Reformed Church is that it is a connexional church – a family. A smaller, less frequent Assembly will merely increase to gap between the local Church and General Assembly and deepen the "them and us" divide, which is quite contrary to our ethos.

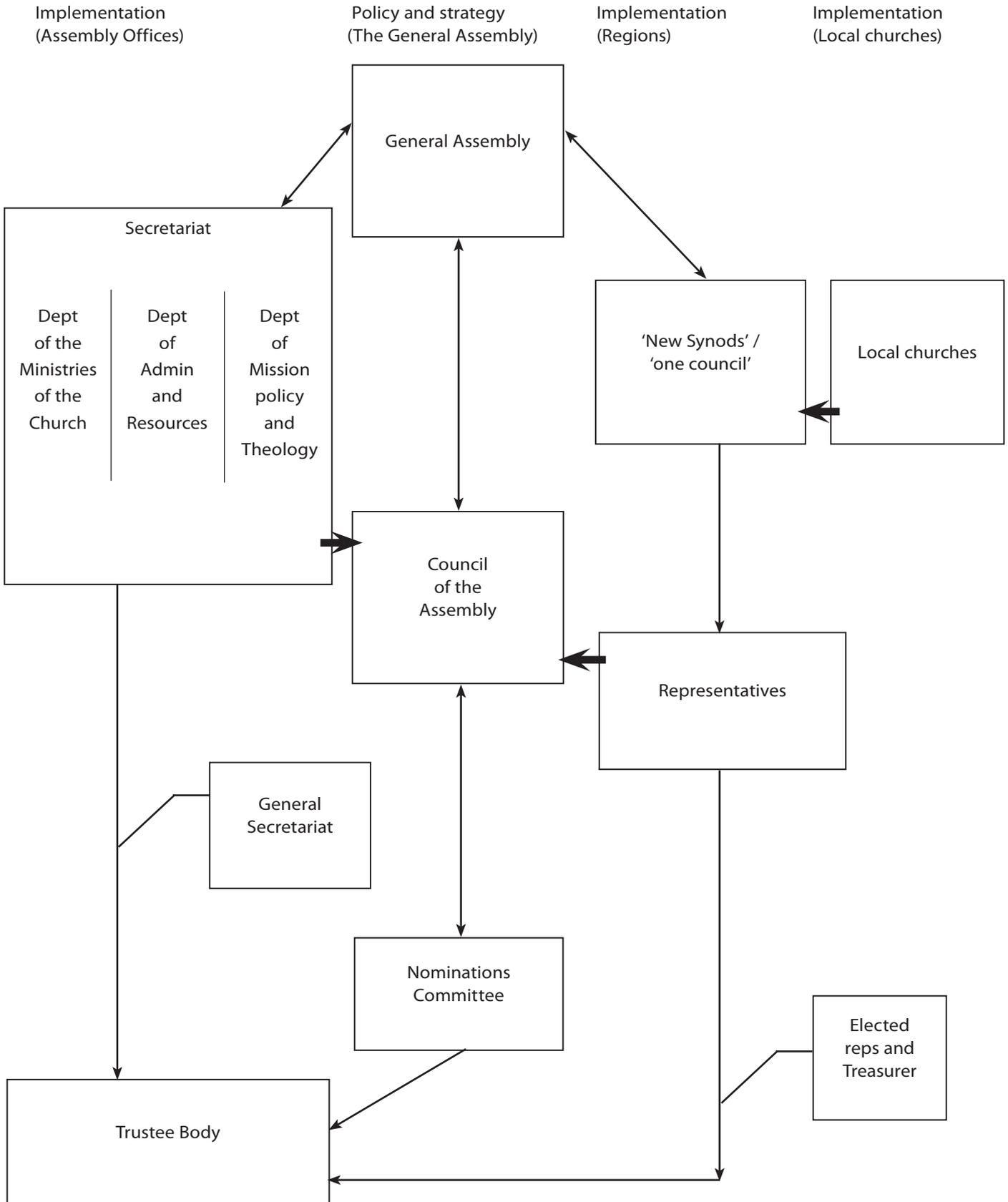
1.2 Whilst we have moved on from the days when May Meetings and General Assembly packed Westminster Chapel and the City Temple every year and anyway, no one suggests that 2,500 people would actually gather for an all-inclusive Assembly, we need to find a way to recapture that sense of the whole family meeting, at least once in a while.

1.3 We therefore suggest a model such as that used by the World Council of Churches, which has a full Assembly – every member church welcome – every 7 years for worship and fellowship, to elect leaders and to set broad policy guidelines, with a strong Central Committee to meet regularly meantime to implement policy. In the case of the United Reformed Church an Assembly every 3-5 years would probably be about right (with a strengthened Mission Council with powers to act). If local Churches were asked to save up and pay for their minister and representative, it would not be a great burden, but even if the cost were met centrally, it would be much less expensive spread over a period.

1.4 Such an Assembly would give us that sense of belonging, of being the church and ownership of our visions and policy, which seems so lacking at present.

CTV Appendix 1

Proposed model of governance



CTV Appendix 2

The Trustee Body

1 There needs to be a sufficient number of Trustees to have access to a broad range of knowledge and experience. The role of Trustee is an exacting role and demands a significant time commitment and has specific legal responsibilities.

2 Who will the Trustees be?

2.1 Two of the existing members of the Mission Council Advisory Group – the Moderator and the Treasurer – are Trustees by virtue of their office and should continue. The General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary will continue to be in attendance. Other Trustees (with relevant experience) should be elected by General Assembly. These Trustees are to provide independent advice and assurance. They should complement the skills of those Trustees already serving as directors of the URC Trust.

2.2 In the process of election, Assembly needs to be aware that the Trustee body *must* include members with legal, investment, financial and human resource experience. All Trustees should, of course, be fully involved in the life of the church. Those experiences are needed so that the Trustees can assure Assembly that the professional officers employed by the church are performing their duties with due propriety.

2.3 The quorum of the Board of Trustees is six or greater.

2.4 Trustees are ex-officio members of General Assembly and Mission Council.

2.5 The number of Trustees can be varied by General Assembly on the recommendation of the Council, following consultation with the Trustees.

2.6 The Board of Trustees may co-opt members with the agreement of Council in the event of:

1. Unexpected vacancy
2. Requirement of specific expertise

2.7 Trustee indemnity insurance will be provided.

2.8 Trustees will be given an induction to the role that equips them with the tools they need to become effective and valuable Trustees as quickly as possible.

3 How will Trustees be appointed?

3.1 The Officers of the Church are appointed by General Assembly for a specific term of years and serve during their term of office as ex officio.

3.2 The other Trustees will be elected by General Assembly for a term of six years. After this time the Trustee must stand down for a minimum of two years but will then be eligible for re-election.

3.3 Timetable and process for nomination (every two years to coincide with General Assembly):

- Synods consider candidates for Trustees and Honorary Treasurer and seek their consent and agreement to stand for election
- Synods provide nominations (together with CV and two references – one from the local church and one professional, for each nomination) to the Nominations Committee by the end of March
- Nominations Committee take up references, review eligibility and discuss with the Trustees
- The Trustees then interview candidates and nominate preferred candidates to the General Assembly for election

3.4 The Trustees will elect one of their elected United Reformed Church members as Chairperson who will act as a facilitator and serve the office of Chairperson. His/her term of service as a Trustee may be extended by up to two years if necessary to provide continuity of Chairperson. This appointment will be endorsed by General Assembly. After this term the Chairperson must stand down for a minimum of two years.

3.5 If an elected Trustee is appointed Honorary Treasurer his/her term of service may be extended by up to two years if necessary to provide continuity.

3.6 A special “start up” process of appointment will be required to prevent all Trustees retiring at the same time.

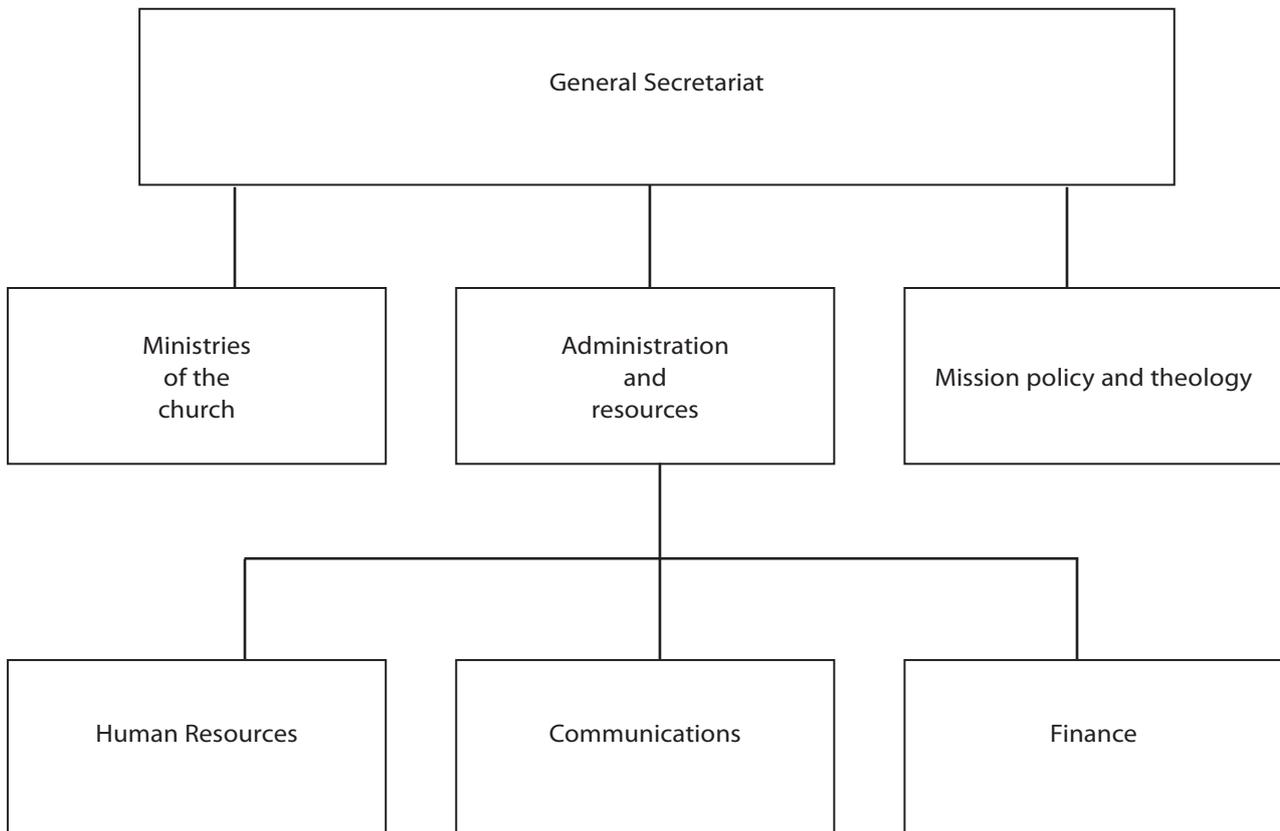
CTV Appendix 3

Proposed re-structuring and staffing

1.1 This proposal organises the work of Assembly into three 'areas' (albeit ones which will need permeable membranes between them).

1.2 The General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary would oversee all the work, as they do now, but with distinct areas of responsibility, for Mission and Theology and Ministries of the Church respectively. They would, in effect, be Co-ordinating Secretaries for those areas, and divide the work of the Administration and Resources between them.

1.3 In the mission and theology area, one member of the team would be the team leader, as Secretary for Mission and interfaith relations, and would co-ordinate the operational work in church and society, racial justice, international relations, theology and ecumenical relations. We envisage that this area would eventually be the responsibility of four members of staff.



CTV Appendix 4

Changes to the Basis and Structure consequent on the adoption of resolution 40-43 of 2005.

The Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church

The Church and The United Reformed Church

1. There is but one Church of the one God. He called Israel to be his people, and in fulfilment of the purpose then begun he called the Church into being through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. The one Church of the one God is holy, because he has redeemed and consecrated it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and because there Christ dwells with his people.

3. The Church is catholic or universal because Christ calls into it all peoples and because it proclaims the fullness of Christ's Gospel to the whole world.

4. The Church is apostolic because Christ continues to entrust it with the Gospel and the commission first given to the apostles to proclaim that Gospel to all peoples.

5. The unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church have been obscured by the failure and weakness which mar the life of the Church.

6. Christ's mercy in continuing his call to the Church in all its failure and weakness has taught the Church that its life must ever be renewed and reformed according to the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

7. The United Reformed Church humbly recognises that the failure and weakness of the Church have in particular been manifested in division which has made it impossible for Christians fully to know, experience and communicate the life of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church.

8. The United Reformed Church has been formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled. It sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

9. The United Reformed Church testifies to its faith, and orders its life, according to this Basis of Union, believing it to embody the essential notes of the Church catholic and reformed. The United Reformed Church nevertheless reserves its right and declares its readiness at any time to alter, add to, modify or supersede this Basis so that its life may accord more nearly with the mind of Christ.

10. The United Reformed Church, believing that it is through the freedom of the Spirit that Jesus Christ holds his people in the fellowship of the one Body, shall uphold the rights of personal conviction. It shall be for the church, in safeguarding the substance of the faith and maintaining the unity of the fellowship, to determine when these rights are asserted to the injury of its unity and peace.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH AND THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

11. Within the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church the United Reformed Church acknowledges its responsibility under God:

- to make its life a continual offering of itself and the world to God in adoration and worship through Jesus Christ;
- to receive and express the renewing life of the Holy Spirit in each place and in its total fellowship, and there to declare the reconciling and saving power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
- to live out, in joyful and sacrificial service to all in their various physical and spiritual needs, that ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love which Jesus Christ brought to all whom he met;
- and to bear witness to Christ's rule over the nations in all the variety of their organised life.

THE FAITH OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

12. The United Reformed Church confesses the faith of the Church catholic in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It acknowledges that the life of faith to which it is called is a gift of the Holy Spirit continually received in Word and Sacrament and in the common life of God's people. It acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people.

13. The United Reformed Church believes that, in the ministry of the Word, through preaching and the study of the Scriptures, God makes known in each age his saving love, his will for his people and his purpose for the world.

14. The United Reformed Church observes the gospel sacrament of baptism into Christ as a gift of God to his Church, and as an appointed means of grace. Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is the sacrament of entry into the Church and is therefore administered once only to any person.

When the Church observes this sacrament it makes explicit at a particular time and place and for a particular person what God has accomplished in Christ for the whole creation and for all humankind – the forgiveness of sins, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit and newness of life in the family of God. In this sacrament the Church affirms its faith in the action of God in Jesus Christ; and takes corporate responsibility for those receiving baptism, promising to support and nourish them as it receives them into its fellowship. Baptism may be administered in infancy or at an age of responsibility. Both forms of baptism shall be made available in the life of every worshipping congregation. In either case the sacrament of baptism is a unique part of the total process of Christian initiation. When baptism is administered at an age of responsibility, upon profession of faith, those baptised enter at once upon the full privileges and responsibilities of membership. When baptism is administered to infants, upon profession of faith by their parent(s), they are placed under the nurture of the Church that they may be led by the Holy Spirit in due time to make their own profession of faith in Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and enter upon the full privileges and responsibilities of membership. These two patterns of Christian initiation are recognised by the United Reformed Church.

The profession of faith to be made prior to baptism by a believer or at an age of responsibility by one baptised in infancy is indicated in Schedule A.* This profession, and its acceptance by the church which shares in it, is a necessary part of the process of initiation and whenever possible it should be made at a celebration of the Lord's Supper.

* Admission to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the Church shall be in accordance with paragraphs 2(1) and 2(2)(vi) of the structure and with Schedule A

The United Reformed Church includes within its membership both persons whose conviction it is that baptism can only be appropriately administered to a believer and those whose conviction it is that infant baptism also is in harmony with the mind of Christ.

Both convictions are honoured by the church and both forms of baptism are understood to be used by God in the upbuilding of faith. Should these differences of conviction within the one church result in personal conflict of conscience it will require to be pastorally reconciled in mutual understanding and charity, and in accordance with the Basis of Union, in the first instance by the elders' meeting of the local congregation, and if necessary by the wider councils of the church. Whether the baptism is of an infant or a believer, whether it is by pouring or immersion, it shall not be such to which a conscientious objection is taken either by the person administering baptism, or by the person seeking it, or by the parent(s) requesting it for an infant.

15. The United Reformed Church celebrates the gospel sacrament of the Lord's Supper. When in obedience to the Lord's command his people show forth his sacrifice on the cross by the bread broken and the wine outpoured for them to eat and drink, he himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives himself to them for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. United with him and with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, his people gathered at his table present their sacrifice of thanksgiving and renew the offering of themselves, and rejoice in the promise of his coming in glory.

16. The United Reformed Church gives thanks for the common life of the Church, wherein the people of God, being made members one of another, are called to love and serve one another and all people everywhere and to grow together in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Participating in the common life of the Church within the local church, they enter into the life of the Church throughout the world. With that whole Church they also share in the life of the Church in all ages and in the communion of saints have fellowship with the Church triumphant.

17. The United Reformed Church at the date of formation confesses its faith in the words of this statement:-

We believe in the one living and true God, creator, preserver and ruler of all things in heaven and earth, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Him alone we worship, and in him we put our trust.

We believe that God, in his infinite love for men, gave his eternal Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who became man, lived on earth in perfect love and obedience, died upon the cross for our sins, rose again from the dead and lives for evermore, saviour, judge and king

We believe that, by the Holy Spirit, this glorious Gospel is made effective so that through faith we receive the forgiveness of sins, newness of life as children of God and strength in this present world to do his will.

We believe in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church, in heaven and on earth, wherein by the same Spirit,

the whole company of believers is made one Body of Christ, to worship God and serve him and all men in his kingdom of righteousness and love.

We rejoice in the gift of eternal life, and believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.

18. The United Reformed Church, under the authority of Holy Scripture and in corporate responsibility to Jesus Christ its everliving head, acknowledges its duty to be open at all times to the leading of the Holy Spirit and therefore affirms its right to make such new declarations of its faith and for such purposes as may from time to time be required by obedience to the same Spirit.

At the same time the United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. It recognises as its own particular heritage the formulations and declarations of faith which have been valued by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and members of Churches of Christ as stating the Gospel and seeking to make its implications clear*.

* e.g. Among Presbyterians: The Westminster Confession, 1647; A Statement of the Christian Faith, 1956.

Among Congregationalists:

in England and Wales: The Savoy Declaration, 1658;

A Declaration of Faith, 1967.

in Scotland: A Statement of Faith, 1949.

Among Churches of Christ: Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address, 1809.

At the General Assembly of 1997 the United Reformed Church adopted the following alternative version of the statement in paragraph 17 to be available alongside the 1972 statement:

1. We believe in the one and only God, Eternal Trinity, from whom, through whom and for whom all created things exist. God alone we worship; in God we put our trust.
2. We worship God, source and sustainer of creation, whom Jesus called Father, whose sons and daughters we are.
3. We worship God revealed in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God made flesh; who lived our human life, died for sinners on the cross; who was raised from the dead, and proclaimed by the apostles, Son of God; who lives eternally, as saviour and sovereign, coming in judgement and mercy, to bring us to eternal life.

4. We worship God, ever present in the Holy Spirit; who brings this Gospel to fruition, assures us of forgiveness, strengthens us to do God's will, and makes us sisters and brothers of Jesus, sons and daughters of God.
5. We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, united in heaven and on earth: on earth, the Body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit to glorify God and to serve humanity; in heaven, eternally one with the power, the wisdom and the love of God in Trinity.
6. We believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in heaven and on earth through Christ, and be perfectly honoured and adored.
7. We rejoice in God who has given us being, who shares our humanity to bring us to glory, our source of prayer and power of praise; to whom be glory, praise and adoration, now and evermore.

MINISTRY IN THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

19. The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it. This service is given by worship, prayer, proclamation of the Gospel, and Christian witness; by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility; and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one. The preparation and strengthening of its members for such ministry and discipleship shall always be a major concern of the United Reformed Church.

20. For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church. The United Reformed Church recognises that Christ gives himself to his Church through Word and Sacrament and through the total caring oversight by which his people grow in faith and love, the exercise of which oversight is the special concern of elders and ministers. Those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills: the United Reformed Church having solemnly acknowledged their vocation and accepted their commitment shall appoint them to their particular ministry and give them authority to exercise it within the church, setting them apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces for its fulfilment, which solemn setting part shall in the case of ministers and elders be termed ordination and in the case of church related community workers be termed commissioning.

21. Some are called to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world. Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a **Synod** and in a context it has approved.*

* Those persons who, at the time of unification serve as Registered Pastors and are so recognised by the Congregational Union of Scotland, may continue in that service under the same conditions. Such persons shall be authorised by a **Synod** to preside at the sacraments and to serve as members of that **Synod**. They may seek further training with a view to applying for recognition as ministers.

22. Some are called to the ministry of church related community work. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be church related community workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, and are then commissioned and inducted to their office to serve for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with Schedules D & F. Church related community workers are commissioned to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community, to discern with others God's will for the well-being of the community, and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world. Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a **Synod** and in the context it has approved.

23. Some are called to be elders. They share with ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders' meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care. They shall be associated with ministers in all the councils of the church. Elders elected by the church meeting are ordained to their office and are inducted to serve for such limited period as the church which elects them shall determine. All elders are eligible for re-election, and those elected shall enter upon their office by induction. On moving to another local church an ordained elder is eligible for election by that church to the elders' meeting, and, if so elected, is inducted. The ordination and induction of elders shall be carried out in the course of public worship by a minister of the local church (or, during a pastoral vacancy, by the interim moderator) acting with the serving elders (see Schedule B).*

* Within the Synod of Scotland those office bearers who fulfil the functions of the United Reformed Church eldership will be called elders, or by local church meeting decision, may retain their existing titles. Such persons will be recognised as elders for all purposes by the wider councils of the Church.

24. All other ministries recognised by the uniting churches at the date of unification (as defined by the United Reformed Church Act 1981) shall continue to be exercised in the United Reformed Church without further commissioning, subject always to the decisions of the General Assembly. The United Reformed Church shall determine from time to time what other ministries may be required and which of them should be recognised as ministries in the whole church. It shall decide how those who are to exercise them shall be set apart.

25. The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen, the United Reformed Church shall (a) take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained ministers of the Word and Sacraments are readily available to every local church; (b) provide for the training of suitable men and women, members of the United Reformed Church, to be accredited by **Synods** as lay preachers; (c) make provision through **Synods**, in full consultation with the local churches concerned, for the recognition of certain members of the United Reformed Church, normally elders or accredited lay preachers, who may be invited by local churches to preside at baptismal and communion services where pastoral necessity so requires. The pastoral needs of each situation shall be reviewed periodically by the district or area council in consultation with the local church. Apart from ordained ministers of the United Reformed Church and of other churches, only such recognised persons may be invited.

'The provisions of paragraph 25 are intended to establish the principle that worship should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as by the local church. The provisions do not prevent the congregation assembled for baptismal or communion service from themselves appointing, as a church meeting, a suitable person to preside at the celebration of the sacrament in a case of emergency, for example if the expected president is taken ill or held up in travel. The provisions do not require such an action rather than a postponement of the baptismal or communion service if that seems preferable.'

26. The ordination and induction of ministers shall be in accord with Schedules C and D. Appropriate affirmations of faith shall also be made by those entering upon other ministries within the life of the church. In the United Reformed Church all ministries shall be open to both men and women.

The totality of ministers who fall within any of the categories defined in Schedule E, Paragraph 1 and are in good standing may be referred to as the Roll

of Ministers. Ministers shall conduct their ministry according to the criteria set out in Schedule E.

SCHEDULE A

(see clause 14 in the Basis of Union)

Affirmation of faith to be made at admission to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the Church

It is the responsibility of the minister and elders' meeting, before bringing the names of candidates to the church meeting, to be assured of the sincerity of their intention. After adequate preparation, and acceptance by the church meeting, candidates shall be publicly admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the Church of Jesus Christ and in particular to the membership of the local church.

This act may include the laying on of hands as a sign of the commissioning of those called by God to the service of Jesus Christ. Acceptance of the candidates, as also their acceptance of their commission, shall be signified by the giving and receiving of the right hand of fellowship.

Thereafter they shall be commended to the love and care of their fellow members.

During the act of admission public profession of faith and of commitment to the Church shall be made:

VERSION I

Either:

(a) by question and answer thus:

Q: Do you confess your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, taking the Father to be your Father, the Son to be your Saviour and Lord, the Spirit to be your helper and guide?

A: I do.

Q: Do you promise, in dependence on God's grace, to be faithful in private and public worship, to live in the fellowship of the Church and to share in its work,

and to give and serve, as God enables you, for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world?

A: I do.

Q: Do you promise, by that same grace, to follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of your life?

A: I do.

Q: And do you trust in his mercy alone to bring you into the fullness of the life of the world to come?

A: I do.

VERSION II

Or: (b) in the form of a declaration such as the following:

I confess my faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, taking the Father to be my Father, the Son to be my saviour and Lord, the Spirit to be my helper and guide. I promise, in dependence on God's grace, to be faithful in private and public worship, to live in the fellowship of the Church and to share in its work, and to give and serve, as God enables me, for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world. I promise, by that same grace, to follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of my life. And I trust in his mercy alone to bring me into the fullness of the life of the world to come.

Or: (c) Addition to Schedule A: Version III

(At Baptism at an age of responsibility or at profession of faith for those baptised as infants)

Q: Do you believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, giver of life, redeemer of the world?
A: I do.

Q: Do you repent of your sins, turn away from evil, and turn to Christ?
A: By God's grace, I do.

Q: Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?
A: I do.

(At reception into the full privileges and responsibilities of membership)

Q: From the beginning, believers have continued in the worship and fellowship of the church:
N, do you commit yourself to this life?
A: I do, with God's help.

Q: With the whole Church, will you proclaim by word and action the good news of God in Christ?
A: I will, with God's help.

Or: (d) in a form which includes the following elements:

- a Trinitarian confession of faith
- repentance of sin
- a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord
- a promise to share in the worship, fellowship and mission of the Church.

SCHEDULE B

Affirmations to be made by elders at ordination and induction

NOTE: The service, which takes place at public worship, shall include the reading of the Statement contained in Schedule D and a statement regarding the functions of the elders taken from clauses 19, 20 and 23 in the Basis of Union.

Afterwards the presiding minister shall say to the elders elect:

In the light of this Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church and the statement concerning the functions of the eldership, the elders elect are now asked to answer the following questions:

Q: Do you confess again your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
A: I do.

Q: In dependence on God's grace do you reaffirm your trust in Jesus Christ as saviour and Lord and your promise to follow him and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of your life?

A: I do.

Q: Do you believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people?

A: I do.

Q: Do you accept the office of elder of the United Reformed Church in this congregation and do you promise to perform its duties faithfully?

A: I do.

SCHEDULE C

(see clause 21 in the Basis of Union)

Affirmations to be made by ministers at ordination and induction

NOTE: The service will also include the reading of the Statement contained in Schedule D, and provision will be made for a statement to be made concerning the circumstances of the call. Ministers may also make a personal statement about their faith and sense of calling. After the statement has been read the presiding minister shall then ask one of the following sets of questions:

VERSION I

Either:

1. A.B., Do you confess anew your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

I do.
2. Do you believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people?

I do.

3. Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world? Do you believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people? And will you faithfully proclaim this Gospel?

By the grace of God this I believe and this I will proclaim.

4. Do you believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ?

I do.

5. Are zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, so far as you know your own heart, the chief motives which lead you to enter this ministry?

They are

6. Do you promise to live a holy life, and to maintain the truth of the gospel, whatever trouble or persecution may arise?

Relying on the strength of Christ, I do.

7. Do you promise to fulfil the duties of your charge* faithfully, to lead the church in worship, to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take your part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the Church in its mission to the world?

By the grace of God, I do.

8. Do you promise as a minister of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?

By the grace of God, I do.

9. Will you undertake to exercise your ministry in accordance with the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church?

I will, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

VERSION II

Or:

1. A.B., will you confess anew your faith?

I confess anew my faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people.

I believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary,

lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world.

I believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people.

And by the grace of God I promise to proclaim this gospel faithfully.

I believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ.

2. What leads you to this ministry?

So far as I know my own heart, I believe that zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, are the chief motives which lead me to enter this ministry.

Relying on the strength of Christ, I promise to live a holy life, and to maintain the truth of the gospel, whatever trouble or persecution may arise.

3. Will you faithfully fulfil the duties of your charge?*

* The presiding minister (after appropriate consultation) may modify the wording of question 7 or the answer to question 3 to fit the kind of ministry to which the candidate has been called.

By the grace of God I promise to lead the Church in worship, to preach the word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take my part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the Church in mission to the world.

As a minister of the United Reformed Church I promise to seek its well-being, purity, and peace,

to cherish love towards all other churches, and to endeavour always to build up the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I undertake to exercise my ministry in accordance with the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church.

All these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

SCHEDULE D

A statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church

(One of the following authorised versions to be read aloud at ordination and induction services.)

VERSION I

1. The United Reformed Church confesses the faith of the Church catholic in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
2. The United Reformed Church acknowledges that the life of faith to which it is called is a gift of the Holy Spirit continually received in Word and Sacrament and in the common life of God's people.
3. The United Reformed Church acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people.
4. The United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and recognises as its own particular heritage the formulations and declarations of faith which have been valued by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and members of Churches of Christ as stating the Gospel and seeking to make its implications clear.
5. The United Reformed Church testifies to its faith, and orders its life, according to the Basis of Union, believing it to embody the essential notes of the Church catholic and reformed. The United Reformed Church nevertheless reserves its right and declares its readiness at any time to alter, add to, modify or supersede this Basis so that its life may accord more nearly with the mind of Christ.
6. The United Reformed Church, under the authority of Holy Scripture and in corporate responsibility to Jesus Christ its everliving head, acknowledges its duty to be open at all times to the leading of the Holy Spirit and therefore affirms its right to make such new declarations of its faith and for such purposes as may from time to time be required by obedience to the same Spirit.
7. The United Reformed Church, believing that it is through the freedom of the Spirit that Jesus Christ holds his people in the fellowship of the one Body, upholds the rights of personal conviction. It shall be for the church, in safeguarding the substance of the faith and maintaining the unity of the fellowship, to determine when these rights are asserted to the injury of its unity and peace.

8. The United Reformed Church declares that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ruler and head of the Church, has therein appointed a government distinct from civil government and in things spiritual not subordinate thereto, and that civil authorities, being always subject to the rule of God, ought to respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind.

9. The United Reformed Church declares its intention, in fellowship with all the churches, to pray and work for such visible unity of the whole Church as Christ wills and in the way he wills, in order that people and nations may be led more and more to glorify the Father in heaven.

VERSION II

With the whole Christian Church
the United Reformed Church believes in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
The living God, the only God,
ever to be praised.

The life of faith to which we are called
is the Spirit's gift
continually received
through the Word, the Sacraments
and our Christian life together.
We acknowledge the gift
and answer the call,
giving thanks for the means of grace.

The highest authority
for what we believe and do
is God's Word in the Bible
alive for his people today
through the help of the Spirit.
We respond to this Word,
whose servants we are
with all God's people
through the years.

We accept with thanksgiving to God
the witness to the catholic faith
in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.
We acknowledge the declarations
made in our own tradition
by Congregationalists, Presbyterians
and Churches of Christ
in which they stated the faith
and sought to make its implications clear.
Faith alive and active:
gift of an eternal source,
renewed for every generation.

We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union in which we give expression to our faith in forms which we believe contain the essential elements of the Church's life, both catholic and reformed; but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ. Our crucified and risen Lord, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

Held together in the Body of Christ through the freedom of the Spirit, we rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit's gifts and uphold the rights of personal conviction. For the sake of faith and fellowship it shall be for the church to decide where differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace. We commit ourselves to speak the truth in love and grow together in the peace of Christ.

We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head. Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind, and to respect the rights of conscience and belief. While we ourselves are servants in the world as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

We affirm our intention to go on praying and working, with all our fellow Christians, for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses so that people and nations may be led to love and serve God and praise him more and more for ever. Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal glory. Amen.

SCHEDULE E

1. The following constitute the categories of ministers comprising the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church;
 - a. Ministers of the former Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England who became ministers of the United Reformed Church at its formation in 1972.
 - b. Ministers of the former Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ who became ministers of the United Reformed Church in 1981.
 - c. Ministers of the former Congregational Union of Scotland who became ministers of the United Reformed Church in 1999.
 - d. Ministers who have been ordained as ministers of the United Reformed Church and inducted to a local pastorate (or some other post approved by Synod) after having received a call with the concurrence of the **Synod** or have been appointed to a post by councils of the Church or are associate members of **a Synod**
 - e. Ministers of other churches who have been granted a Certificate of Eligibility by the General Assembly, or the committee designated by the General Assembly with the responsibility to grant Certificates of Eligibility, and who subsequently transferred to the United Reformed Church upon ordination and/or induction to a local pastorate following a call with the concurrence of the District or area Council.
 - f. Ministers of other churches who, with the approval of a Synod, have been permitted by the General Assembly, or the committee delegated by the General Assembly to act on its behalf, to transfer to the United Reformed Church without receiving a call to a local pastorate or without being appointed to a post approved by Synod.
2. Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry.
3. Acting in due exercise of their functions as contained in the Structure of the United Reformed Church, the councils of the Church have authority in certain circumstances (without prejudice to a minister's conditions under the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial

Remuneration) to suspend a minister which involves a temporary ban on the exercise of ministry by the minister concerned but not his/her removal from the Roll of Ministers.

4. A minister under suspension, whether in pastoral charge or not, shall not present him/herself as a minister and shall not preside at communion. The minister shall refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as a minister of religion. Suspension also means that the minister may not exercise the ministerial rights of membership of any council of the Church. Suspension does not remove any of the rights accorded by the process of determining the disciplinary matter which had led to the suspension.

5. A person whose name has been deleted from the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church and who remains a member of the United Reformed Church has the privilege and responsibilities of that membership, but not those of a minister of Word and sacraments, and should refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as a minister of religion. However, should that person be re-instated to the Roll of Ministers, he/she would, on being called to a pastorate, need to be inducted to that pastorate, but not ordained, since ordination is not repeatable.

SCHEDULE F

(see clause 22 in the Basis of Union)

Affirmations to be made by church related community workers at commissioning and induction.

NOTE: The service will also include the reading of the Statement contained in Schedule D, and provision will be made for a statement to be made concerning the circumstances of the call. Church related community workers may also make a personal statement about their faith and sense of calling. After the statement has been read the presiding minister shall then ask one of the following sets of questions:

Either: **VERSION I**

1. A.B., Do you confess anew your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

I do.
2. Do you believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people?

I do.
3. Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world? Do you believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people? And will you faithfully proclaim this Gospel?

By the grace of God this I believe and this I will proclaim.

4. Do you believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ?

I do.
5. Are zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, so far as you know your own heart, the chief motives which lead you to enter this ministry?

They are.
6. Do you promise to live a holy life, and to maintain the truth of the gospel, whatever trouble or persecution may arise?

Relying on the strength of Christ, I do.
7. Do you promise to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community, to discern with others God's will for the wellbeing of the community? Do you promise to take your part in the councils of the Church and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world?

By the grace of God, I do.

8. Do you promise as a church related community worker of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?

By the grace of God, I do.

9. Will you undertake to exercise your ministry in accordance with the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church?

I will, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Or: **VERSION II**

1. A.B., will you confess anew your faith?

I confess anew my faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people.

I believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world.

I believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people.

And by the grace of God I promise to proclaim this gospel faithfully.

I believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ.

2. What leads you to this ministry?

So far as I know my own heart, I believe that zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, are the chief motives which lead me to enter this ministry.

Relying on the strength of Christ, I promise to live a holy life, and to maintain the truth of the gospel, whatever trouble or persecution may arise.

3. Will you faithfully fulfil the duties of your charge?

By the grace of God I promise to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community, to discern with others God's will for the wellbeing of the community.

I promise to take my part in the councils of the Church and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world.

As a church related community worker of the United Reformed Church

I promise to seek its well-being, purity, and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches, and always to endeavour to build up the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I undertake to exercise my ministry in accordance with the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church.

All these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Structure of the URC

1.(1) Members of the United Reformed Church associated in a locality for worship witness and service shall together comprise a local church.

1.(1)(a) Since the proper functioning of the local church is so fundamental to the life of the United Reformed Church, where there is a number of small congregations in proximity to one another unable separately to provide leadership and resources for the work of the church, such congregations shall consult with the Synod to formulate an acceptable scheme for joining together with a single membership, a common church meeting and elders' meeting, representative of all the constituent congregations, and a shared ministry.

1.(1)(b) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the **Synod**, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share resources and ordained ministry, they may, on the decision of the synod, form an association known as a group of churches with a structured relationship and a constitution governing the way in which they relate to one another as to the sharing of both resources and the ordained ministry. Each church within the group shall retain its own identity, and the church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the constitution shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii) may be taken by a single group church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the group shall be eligible to attend and vote.

1.(1)(c) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the **Synod**, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share ordained ministry (but not other resources) they may, on the decision of the synod, form an association known as a joint pastorate, with a structured relationship with respect to the provision of ordained ministry only and a statement of intent governing the way in which they relate to one another in relation to the sharing of ordained ministry. Each church within the joint pastorate shall retain its own identity, and its church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the statement of intent shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii)) may be taken by a single joint pastorate church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the joint pastorate shall be eligible to attend and vote.

1.(2)(a) The United Reformed Church in England shall be divided into provinces, each having a synod. In Wales and in Scotland, in recognition of the different status of these nations there shall in each case be a single synod to be known as a national synod.

The expression "Provincial Synod" when used in the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972 and 1981 shall in relation to property in Wales be read as referring to the national Synod of Wales

1.(2)(b) Throughout this statement of the Structure of the United Reformed Church references to 'Provincial Moderators' shall be read as meaning 'Moderators of Synods' in respect of Scotland and Wales.

1.(3) The oversight of the United Reformed Church shall be the concern both of the local church and wider representative councils. The councils of the United Reformed Church shall be:

- (a) the church meeting and the elders' meeting of each local church;
- (b) the council of each area of ecumenical cooperation to be known as an area meeting
- (c) the synod of province or nation to be known as a provincial or national synod; and
- (d) the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.

These four parts of the structure of the United Reformed Church shall have such consultative, legislative and executive functions as are hereinafter respectively assigned to each of them and each shall be recognised by members of the United Reformed Church as possessing such authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, as shall enable it to exercise its functions and thereby to minister in that sphere of the life of the United Reformed Church with which it is concerned. **The consultative, legislative and executive functions of an area meeting shall be devolved from the synod and shall in all cases be subject to an agreement between the Synod and the equivalent body or bodies in the relevant ecumenical partners.**

The Composition and Functions of the Councils of the United Reformed Church

2.(1) The Church Meeting of the local church shall consist of those persons who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the United Reformed Church and whose names are included on the membership roll of such local church. The church meeting may invite other persons who regularly worship with the local church but whose names are not on the membership roll to attend and speak at its meetings on particular occasions but no such person shall have the right to vote. In the church meeting which shall meet at least once a quarter and at which the minister or one of the ministers shall normally preside, the members have opportunity through discussion, responsible decision and care for one another, to strengthen each other's faith and to foster the life, work and mission of the Church.

Functions:

Concerning the outgoing of the Church:

- (i) to further the Church's mission in the locality;
- (ii) to develop local ecumenical relationships;
- (iii) to further the Church's compassionate ministry in the locality and throughout the world;
- (iv) to consider and support the wider work of the Church at home and abroad;
- (v) to consider public questions in relation to the Christian faith;
- (vi) to bring concerns for consideration by the elders' meeting and wider councils of the church.

Concerning the nurture of the fellowship:

- (vii) to call a minister with the concurrence of the district council(s) concerned (see paragraph 2 (3) (ii)); (Where two or more churches have formed a group or joint pastorate in accordance with paragraph 1(1)(b) or (c) above on the decision of synod under its function 2(4)(A)(iv), the church meetings of each church may, with the agreement of the synod on the advice of the district council and so long as the group constitution or the statement of intent as appropriate shall so provide, join together as a group or joint pastorate church meeting for the purpose of calling a minister, in which case this function shall be exercised by the group or joint pastorate church meeting.)
- (viii) to elect elders and officers, determining their number and period of service, and representatives to wider councils;
- (ix) to admit and transfer members, to maintain standards of membership, and to suspend or remove names from the membership roll, always on advice from the elders' meeting;
- (x) to consider, always on advice from the elders' meeting, any application for recognition as a candidate for the ministry and to transmit it, if approved, to the **Synod**;
- (xi) to adopt financial reports;
- (xii) to receive reports and proposals from the elders' meeting, synod and General Assembly and to authorise appropriate action;
- (xiii) on the recommendation of the elders' meeting to make or provide for the making of arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church.

And generally:

- (xiv) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

2.(2) The Elders' Meeting of the local church shall consist of the minister(s) and the elders elected by the church meeting of such local church and shall exercise oversight of the spiritual life of the local church. The elders' meeting shall serve the local church and by its relation to the wider councils of the United Reformed Church represent the whole Church to the local church. The minister, or one of the ministers, or during a pastoral vacancy the interim moderator appointed as hereinafter provided, shall normally preside over the elders' meeting.

Functions:

- (i) to foster in the congregation concern for witness and service to the community, evangelism at home and abroad, Christian education, ecumenical action, local inter-church relations and the wider responsibilities of the whole Church;
- (ii) to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered, and generally to promote the welfare of the congregation;
- (iii) to ensure pastoral care of the congregation, in which the minister is joined by elders having particular responsibility for groups of members;
- (iv) to nominate from among its members a church secretary (or secretaries), to be elected by the church meeting, to serve both the church meeting and the elders' meeting;
- (v) to arrange for pulpit supply in a vacancy;
- (vi) to keep the roll of members (see paragraph 2 (1)) and (as an aid to the discharge of the congregation's pastoral and evangelistic responsibility) lists of names of adherents and children attached to the congregation, and in consultation with the church meeting to maintain standards of membership and to advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer, on the suspension of members, and on the removal of names from the roll;
- (vii) to be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and of all organisations within the congregation;

- (viii) to call for the election of elders and advise on the number required;
- (ix) to consider the suitability of any applicant for recognition as a candidate for the ministry and to advise the church meeting about its recommendation to the **Synod**
- (x) to recommend to the church meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church;
- (xi) to act on behalf of the church meeting and bring concerns to the wider councils of the United Reformed Church;
- (xii) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

2.(3) The Synod being representative of the local churches in that province or nation united for the purpose of dealing with matters of wider concern shall consist of:

- (a) All ministers, registered pastors (in Scotland) and church related community workers who are for the time being **engaged directly in the service of the United Reformed Church** within the province or nation;
- (b) All missionaries of the United Reformed Church for the time being on furlough and for the time being resident within the province or nation;
- (c) Representatives of local churches within the province or nation who shall normally be members of the elders' meeting of a local church and who shall be appointed by the church meeting of such local church, the number of such representatives to be: 1-200 members, one representative; over 200 members, 2 representatives; **A Synod may, at its discretion vary the number of representatives of local churches so that both local churches with 1-200 members and local churches with over 200 members appoint two representatives.**

(where a local church, whether a local ecumenical partnership or a local church organised according to the second sentence of paragraph 1.(1)(a), comprises two or more congregations worshipping in separate locations, the synod may authorise that local church to appoint representatives to the synod from each constituent congregation to such numbers as would be permitted by the above rule if each congregation were a separate local church);

- (d) Such members of local churches, normally elders, not exceeding twelve (or such other number as the General Assembly may from time to time determine) as may be co-opted by the synod;
- (e) Such members as shall from time to time be appointed by the General Assembly;
- (f) Such retired ministers who have been appointed by the synod as officers of the synod, for the period of their appointment;
- (h) All retired ministers not covered by clause **2.3a or 2.3f** residing within the province or nation served by the synod, who shall be associate members of the synod having the right to speak but not to vote at meetings of the synod;
- (i) Two young people, being members of the United Reformed Church, nominated by the synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent;
- (j) Representatives, not exceeding the number approved by the General Assembly, of other denominations as the synod may from time to time determine;
- (k) An elder appointed by the **synod** as an interim moderator who shall be a full member of the synod for the period of the appointment.

The synod shall elect from among its members a clerk, a treasurer and such other officers as it shall from time to time think desirable and shall determine their periods of service. It may also appoint such committees and for such purposes as it from time to time may think desirable and may appoint to any such committee any members of the United Reformed Church notwithstanding that they are not members of the synod.

Moderators of synods. There shall be a moderator for each synod being a minister appointed from time to time by the General Assembly according to its rules of procedure and responsible to the General Assembly.

The moderator shall:

- be separated from any local pastoral charge,
- stimulate and encourage the work of the United Reformed Church within the province or nation,
- preside over the meetings of the synod and exercise a pastoral office towards the ministers and churches within the province or nation,

- suggest names of ministers to vacant pastorates, in consultation with interim moderators of local churches,
- preside, or appoint a deputy to preside, at all ordinations and/or inductions of ministers within the province or nation,

The moderators of the synods shall meet together at regular intervals for the better discharge of their duties.

Functions of synod:

A. The Synod is responsible for exercising the following Functions (subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph (B) below):

To take action which supports

- the spreading of the Gospel at home and abroad
- the **spreading** of the Gospel at home and abroad,
- **the life and witness of the United Reformed Church**
- the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole,
- the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed;

(ii) to **encourage** church extension within the province or nation, decide upon the establishment of new causes and the recognition of mission projects;

(iii) to decide upon all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of local churches.

(iv) **to take appropriate action on matters referred to it by the General Assembly**

(v) **to provide a forum for concerns brought forward by Local Churches and to advise thereon.**

(vi) **to make proposals to and raise concerns for consideration by the General Assembly.**

(vii) **to give (or, where deep pastoral concern for the church requires it, to withhold) concurrence in calls to ministers and, with the moderator of the synod or the moderator's deputy presiding, to conduct, in fellowship with the local church, any ordinations and/or inductions of ministers within the synod.**

(viii) **to appoint, in consultation with the local church, an interim moderator during a pastoral vacancy, such interim moderator normally being a serving minister or a retired minister. In**

exceptional circumstances an elder may be appointed;

(ix) **to care for all the churches of the synod ensuring that visits are made at regular intervals for consultation concerning their life and work.**

(x) **to appoint from time to time such number of representatives to the General Assembly (ministerial and lay in equal numbers) as the General Assembly shall determine. This shall include, when possible, at least one representative under the age of 26.¹ As far as possible all appointments shall be made in rotation from local churches.**

(xi) **to appoint to service on synod :**

(I) **United Reformed Church ministers/ lay people serving as (a) full-time chaplains to universities, colleges, hospitals, factories, where their work is seen to be an extension of the ministry of the synod concerned, (b) secretaries and other full-time officials of ecumenical bodies with which the United Reformed Church is in relationship;**

(II) **United Reformed Church ministers giving significant oversight to local churches, under the general direction of the synod concerned;**

(III) **Ministers, or members of Diaconal Orders, of other churches appointed to serve on behalf of the United Reformed Church in charge of a United Reformed Church or in an ecumenical group including United Reformed Church interests;**

(IV) **Ministers not in pastoral charge who perform duties within the synod in respect of which the synod has some direct responsibility;**

(xii) **to consider and where appropriate appoint to service on Synod**

(I) **United Reformed Church ministers/ lay people serving as (a) part-time chaplains to universities, colleges, hospitals, factories, where their work is seen to be an extension of the ministry of the synod concerned, (b) part-time officials of ecumenical bodies with which the United Reformed Church is in relationship;**

(xiii) **to devise strategies which enable and support the exploration of mission opportunities in the region and to encourage in Local Churches concern for service and a sense of responsibility for**

the wider work of the Church at home and abroad.

- (xiv) to exercise oversight of all ministers falling within any of the categories 2(3) (a), (b) (f) and (g) except moderators of synods who are the responsibility of the General Assembly.
- (xv) to give oversight to candidates for the ministry and to candidates for any form of full-time service in the Church at home and abroad, and, in the case of candidates for the ministry, determine their eligibility for a call.
- (xvi) where following initial enquiry either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party the Synod considers that a Minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that Minister to be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the Minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process;
- (xvii) to appoint, or to concur in the appointment of, non-stipendiary ministers to their particular service and to review this service at stated intervals.
- (xvii) to accredit and provide support and training for lay preachers and worship leaders and, in consultation with the Local Churches concerned, to give authority for appropriate lay persons to preside at the sacraments. Authorisation for lay persons to preside at the Sacraments in Ecumenical Areas shall only be given after consultation with the appropriate Ecumenical Partner, (In most cases the Methodist District)
- (xviii) to receive the resignation of ministers and to decide upon appropriate action (see also paragraph 2.5.xviii)
- (xix) to seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and in Scotland and Wales to undertake responsibility for national ecumenical relationships on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church, subject to the final authority of the General Assembly.

(xx) to decide upon all matters regarding erection, major reconstruction or disposal of buildings..

(xxi) to receive, hear and decide upon references and appeals duly submitted.

(xxii) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.

(B) As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case under the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline, the Synod shall not exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'

(C) No Appeal shall lie against a decision by the Synod to refer any case to the Assembly Commission under Function (xv) above.

2.(4) The area meeting of each Area of Ecumenical Co-operation being representative of the local churches in that area grouped together for the purposes of fellowship, support, intimate mutual oversight and united action shall consist of representatives of all churches engaged in the area of ecumenical co-operation. The United Reformed Church membership of the area meeting in each area of ecumenical co-operation (hereinafter referred to as the United Reformed Church Committee) shall consist of the moderator of synod, all ministers, church related community workers and registered pastors (in Scotland) engaged directly in the service of the United Reformed Church within the area, representatives of local churches within the area, and such other persons as determined by the constitution of each area meeting as approved by resolution of the synod.

(A) The Synod shall delegate to the area council the following functions, unless by agreement with the relevant ecumenical partner it is felt that some of these functions should be reserved to the Synod, and it shall be the responsibility of the Area Council

(i) to exercise oversight of all ministers falling within any of the categories 2(3)(a), (b), (f) and (g) except moderators of synods who although members of the area council are responsible to the General Assembly;

(ii) to give (or, where deep pastoral concern for the church requires it, to withhold) concurrence in calls to ministers and, with the moderator of the synod or the

moderator's deputy presiding, to conduct, in fellowship with the local church(es), any ordinations and/or inductions of ministers within the district;

- (iii) to appoint, or to concur in the appointment of, non-stipendiary ministers and church related community workers to their particular service and to review this service at stated intervals;**
- (iv) to appoint, in consultation with the local church(es) and the moderator of the synod, an interim moderator during a pastoral vacancy, such interim moderator normally being a serving minister or a retired minister. In exceptional circumstances an elder may be appointed;**
- (v) to care for all the churches of the area council and to visit them by deputies at regular intervals for consultation concerning their life and work;**
- (vi) to consider on the recommendation of local churches applications for recognition as candidates for the ministry and to transmit them, if approved, to the synod for decision;**
- (vii) to accredit lay preachers**
- (viii) to consider resignations of ministers not currently the subject of any case within the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline referred to in Function (xviii) below and, in consultation with the moderator of the synod, to decide upon appropriate action (see also paragraph 2.4.xviii);**
- (ix) from time to time to recommend to Synod such number of representatives to the General Assembly as the Synod shall determine;**
- (x) to engage in study concerning the Church's mission in the region and to encourage in the local churches concern for youth work and social service and a sense of responsibility for the wider work of the Church at home and abroad;**
- (xi) to promote church extension within the area and to submit proposals to the synod for the establishing of new causes and the recognition of mission projects;**
- (xii) to make recommendations to the synod in consultation with the churches concerned and to act on behalf of the**

synod in consultation with the moderator on all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of local churches;

- (xiii) to make recommendations to the synod in consultation with the churches concerned and to act on behalf of the synod on all matters regarding erection, major reconstruction or disposal of buildings;**
- (xiv) to provide a forum for concerns brought forward by local churches and to advise thereon;**
- (xv) to hear and make decisions upon appeals brought forward by local churches and church members;**
- (xvi) to take appropriate action on matters referred to the council by the synod or General Assembly, and to initiate or transmit proposals for consideration by those bodies;**
- (xvii) to maintain contact with ecumenical and missionary work in the area;**
- (xviii) where the area council considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister to be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process at the appropriate time as specified in that Process.**

(D) Such functions as relate solely to the work of the United Reformed Church may be discharged by the United Reformed Church Committee of each area meeting.

2.(5) The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life shall consist of:

a) The moderators of the General Assembly and of the synods and such other officers of the General Assembly and of the synods as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine (The Assembly has determined that Clerks of Synods, Treasurers of Synods, the Clerk of Assembly, the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary shall be members of Assembly);

(b) *The convener of each of the standing committees of the General Assembly;*

(c) *A staff representative and a student representative, being members of the United Reformed Church, from each of such recognised theological colleges as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine;*

(d) *Up to twelve representatives from the partner churches of the United Reformed Church outside of Britain and Ireland or such other number as the Assembly shall from time to time determine;*

(e) *Such other ministers and elders of the United Reformed Church as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine (the Assembly has added to its membership one serving United Reformed Church chaplain to the forces, nominated each year by the Organising Secretary of the United Board, in consultation with the three Principal Chaplains, nine representatives of the Synod of Scotland and three representatives from each other synod);*

(f) *All former moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church and all past chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, all past presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, all former moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, all former chairmen and presidents of the Annual Conference of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, and all former presidents of the Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, provided that such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church;*

(g) *Such number of representatives of the Fellowship of United Reformed Youth, being members of the United Reformed Church, as the Assembly shall from time to time determine (at present two);*

(h) *Representatives, not exceeding the number approved by the General Assembly, of other denominations in the United Kingdom as the Assembly on the advice of the Mission Council may from time to time determine;*

(i) *A representative of the Council for World Mission.*

In making its determination from time to time as to the number of members the total number of members shall not exceed 250

The General Assembly shall elect a moderator and such other officers as it shall from time to time think desirable. (The Assembly has appointed the following to serve as officers with the moderator: the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Clerk of Assembly, The Treasurer and the Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee.) It shall also appoint a Mission Council with power to act in its name

in matters of urgency between meetings of the General Assembly and to discharge such other functions as the General Assembly may from time to time direct. The General Assembly shall appoint standing committees which subject to the General Assembly shall have charge of the continuing interests of the church. It may also appoint special committees which subject to the General Assembly shall have charge of such matters as the General Assembly may assign to them from time to time. The General Assembly may appoint to any such committee members of the United Reformed Church who are not members of the General Assembly.

Functions:

(A) General Assembly is responsible for exercising the following Functions (subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph (B) below):

- (i) to oversee the total work of the church;
- (ii) to make decisions on reports and recommendations from its own committees, issue such directions and take such actions as it deems conducive to the propagation of the gospel, the welfare of the United Reformed Church, the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole and the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed;
- (iii) to conduct and foster the ecumenical relationships of the United Reformed Church;
- (iv) to support and share in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad;
- (v) to determine the standards and scope of an adequate ministerial education and training;
- (vi) to make regulations respecting theological colleges belonging to the United Reformed Church, to appoint the principal, professors and other members of the teaching staff, and Board of Governors, and to superintend their work;
- (vii) to recognise theological colleges previously recognised by the Congregational Church in England and Wales or the Congregational Union of Scotland and such other colleges in such manner and for such purposes as the General Assembly may determine;
- (viii) to appoint moderators of synods;
- (ix) to remit questions concerning the witness and judgement of the church for general discussion in church meetings, elders' meetings, and synods, and to call for reports from these councils;

- (x) to interpret all forms and expressions of the polity practice and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church including the Basis and the Structure and to determine when rights of personal conviction are asserted to the injury of the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church;
 - (xi) to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church and Part 1 of the Statement of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below;
 - (xii) to make, alter or rescind rules for the conduct of its own proceedings and of those of other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church and such other rules, bye-laws and standing orders as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable for the performance of its functions and the carrying into effect of any of the provisions contained in the Basis and the Structure and for the conduct of the business and affairs of the General Assembly and of the other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church;
 - (xiii) to appoint at its discretion additional members to serve on synods;
 - (xiv) to make such alterations in the boundaries and groupings of synods and to establish such new synods as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;
 - (xv) to consider and decide upon references and appeals duly submitted;
 - (xvi) to make, alter or rescind rules of procedure for the submission and conduct of references and appeals to and by the councils of the United Reformed Church;
 - (xvii) to receive and decide upon applications for admission into the United Reformed Church from ministers, probationers and congregations, transmitted by synods through their moderators;
 - (xviii) to decide upon questions regarding the inclusion on the Roll of ministers of the United Reformed Church which have been previously considered and transmitted with recommendations by synods (but excluding any matter which is being dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below);
 - (xix) to provide for the raising of funds for the work of the United Reformed Church and to determine arrangements for payment of stipends and expenses to ministers and officers of the United Reformed Church and for such other financial matters as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;
 - (xx) to consider and decide upon issues and representations duly transmitted by other councils of the United Reformed Church;
 - (xxi) to make and (if necessary) to terminate all appointments to the Commission Panel and to any administrative office under the Process for Ministerial Discipline contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and to exercise general oversight and supervision of the operation of that Process (save only that decisions in individual cases taken in accordance with that Process are made in the name of the General Assembly and are final and binding);
 - (xxii) to provide for the setting up of an Appeals Commission in accordance with Paragraph 12 of Section O, Part 1 of the Manual for any appeal brought under Paragraph 11 of Section O, Part 1 of the Manual;
 - (xxiii) In the absence of any reference to the Assembly Commission by the appropriate synod (the case of any minister who is a moderator of synod being necessarily dealt with under this provision) and where either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party the General Assembly (or the Mission Council acting on its behalf) considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister to be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process at the appropriate time as specified in that Process.
 - (xxiv) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.
- 2(5)(B) 'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case against a minister under the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline, neither General Assembly nor Mission Council on its behalf shall exercise any of General Assembly's functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or

interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'

Constitutional Amendments

3.(1) No exercise by the General Assembly of the function of constitutional amendment contained in 2.5.xi shall have effect unless the following procedure has been followed:

(a) The proposal for the amendment shall be made in accordance with the Standing Orders of the General Assembly.

(b) The General Assembly shall vote on a motion to approve the proposal which shall require a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass.

(c) The General Assembly shall, if such motion to approve the proposal is passed, refer the proposal to synods and may, if it deems appropriate, in exceptional cases refer the proposal also to local churches.

(d) The General Assembly shall in making any such reference set a final date for responses to be made, which shall normally be at an appropriate time before the next annual Assembly.

(e) If by such date notice has been received by the General Secretary from more than one third of synods (or, if it has been so referred, more than one third of local churches) that a motion 'that the proposal be not proceeded with' has been passed by a majority of members present and voting at a duly convened meeting of such body, then the Assembly in its concern for the unity of the church shall not proceed to ratify the proposal.

(f) If by such date such notice has not been received, a motion to agree the proposed amendment shall come before the General Assembly at its next meeting. Such a motion shall require a simple majority of the members present and voting to pass. In its concern for mutual understanding within the life of the church, before voting on such a motion the General Assembly shall invite a representative of any synod from which the General Secretary has duly received notification under 3(1)(e) to present the main reasons for its objection.

(g) If such a motion is passed by such a majority the amendment shall have effect.

(h) For the purposes of this paragraph 3(1), only synods and **local** churches in existence on the date set for responses to be made shall be counted in the calculations.

3.(2) In the case of motions which would have the effect of terminating the separate existence of the United Reformed Church, or of a synod within it, by union with other churches, the voting process to be used shall be not less stringent than in 3 (1) and that process shall be determined by a single vote of the General Assembly which shall require a two-thirds majority of those present and voting to pass. In the case of a proposed union affecting only Scotland or Wales no action will be taken by the General Assembly until a decision in favour of union has been taken by the relevant synod.

Consultation

4. Decisions on the part of any council shall be reached only after the fullest attempt has been made to discover the mind of the other councils or of local churches likely to be affected by the decision.

5. APPEALS

5.(1) No right of Appeal shall lie against the decision of any council of the Church (acting with due authority in the matter) to refer any case to the Assembly Commission, and once such reference has been made that case shall be resolved in accordance with Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and not under Paragraph 5(2) below.

Any decision reached in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church has the status of a decision of the General Assembly and is final and binding.

5.(2) The procedure for dealing with reference and appeals falling outside paragraph 5(1) is as follows:

A local church or any member thereof or elders' meeting may appeal to the **synod** upon which the local church is entitled to be represented for the resolution of any dispute or difference and may appeal from any decision of such synod to the General Assembly.

A synod may refer any dispute or difference, whether or not the same shall have come before it on a reference or appeal, to the General Assembly.

The decision of the General Assembly on any matter which has come before it on reference or appeal shall be final and binding.

Note: The procedure for appeals appears in paragraph 8 of the Rules of Procedure for the conduct of the United Reformed Church.

CTV Appendix 5

LONDON SYNOD COMMISSION Interim Report 2006

The London Synod Commission was established by Mission Council in Autumn 2005 with the following members: Revd Bill Mahood (Convener); Mrs Sheila Brain (Secretary); Revd Wilf Bahadur; Ms Rachel Greening; Revd Malcolm Hanson; Revd Heather Pencavel.

The Commission has given priority to identifying the principles underlying the suggestion of a London Synod and assessing the basic advantages and disadvantages. In addition it has given careful consideration to the process of consultation with local churches and Districts, ecumenical partners and other relevant bodies. This will clearly take time and cannot be completed in time for Assembly 2006. It is however able to bring an interim progress report this year, with a full report to be presented to Assembly 2007.

Terms of reference

1. To investigate the feasibility of creating a London Synod and to submit an initial report to the 2006 Assembly (Resolution 42, Assembly 2005). To submit a full report to the 2007 Assembly.
2. To open up a broad consultation process, in order to assess the rationale for such a change and to consider whether the advantages significantly outweigh the disadvantages
3. To consult in-depth with the Southern and Thames North Synods, and in lesser detail with the surrounding Synods whose boundaries might be significantly altered by the creation of a London Synod (Eastern, East Midlands, Wessex).
4. To consider the ecumenical dimensions of the proposal and the implications for future ecumenical work and mission in Greater London.
5. To explore alternative ways in which the URC could relate more effectively to London in mission and service.
6. To recommend practical means by which any changes might be implemented.

Progress Report

1 Principles to be established and questions to be raised include (among others): Is there a strong vision for a London Synod and what has changed since 1972? What would be its size and where would the boundary be? What happens to the churches/Districts outside and how would this affect surrounding Synods? What are the specific concerns expressed in opposition to the idea and how might these be met? Would the loss of the broad spread of church life (urban, suburban, rural) be outweighed by the commonality of interest of the churches lying within the whole Greater London Authority (GLA)? How are other denominations dealing with the London situation? What are the legal and financial implications?

2 Consultation Process

Both written and verbal submissions are currently being sought, covering a broad spectrum of all those concerned. This includes contact with ecumenical colleagues, most notably the Methodists, who have recently taken the decision to establish a London District following a major consultation process across the region. As a result of these initial deliberations the Commission plans to produce a detailed set of proposals which will be submitted to the local churches and Districts covered by the two London Synods for consideration during the Autumn, with a view to reaching a consensus on the way forward by Spring 2007. If the decision proves to be in favour of establishing a London Synod, then further work will need to be done on the practical details concerning precise boundaries and the legal requirements concerning Trusts and finance.



The
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Church