



MISSION COUNCIL

14/16 March 1997

Revd John Waller
Church House

Minutes of the Mission Council, held at Ushaw College, Durham, from 14 to the 16 March 1997, which was constituted by the Moderator, Dr David Thompson, who presided. Worship was led by Revd Fleur Houston and included Bible Study led by the Moderator on the 'I say unto you' sayings from the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matthew chapter 5.

97/16 WELCOME

The Moderator welcomed members and visitors to the meeting, including Revd Duncan McClements, Theological reflector; Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow, Convener of the Task Group on Human Sexuality; Revd Roberta Rominger, member of the Task Group on Human Sexuality; new Provincial representative Dr Graham Campling, (Southern Province); Mr David Coaker (alternate for Liz Burns, FURY Council); Revd Angus Duncan (alternate for Revd Graham Cook, Mersey Province); Revd John Jenkinson (alternate for Mr Brian Evans, Yorkshire Province); Mr Roy Lowes (alternate for Revd John Rees, South-Western Province); Revd George and Mrs Christine Thomas, (alternates for Revd Jeffery Evans and Mrs Christine Robertson, Wessex Province); Mr Steve Wood alternate for Revd Duncan Wilson (Yorkshire Province).

97/18 ATTENDANCE

There were 55 members present with 13 staff members in attendance, Revd Fleur Houston, Chaplain, Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith, Clerk elect and Mrs Christine Hardwick, Minute Secretary.

Apologies for absence were received from Revds Graham Cook, Jeffery Evans, Peter McIntosh, Margaret McKay, John Rees, Peter Roche, Mr Brian Evans, Paul Franklin, Hilary Gunn, Chris Wright, Mrs Christine Robertson and Miss Liz Burns

97/19 MINUTE OF WELCOME

The following minute of welcome had been received from Durham District Council:

The Durham District Council send greetings to the Mission Council meeting at Ushaw College on March 14-16th and pray that during their time within our District its members may be granted wisdom and guidance in their

deliberations, and know the encouragement of the wider Church as they fulfil the demands of their particular ministry.

97/20 MINUTES OF MISSION COUNCIL 18th January 1997

The Minutes of the Mission Council held on 18 January 1997, which had been circulated, were approved and signed with the following corrections:

- 97/5 d 2.3 first line: members of Mission Council
d 4.2 third line: Resource Planning Advisory Group
- 97/10 Revd Arnold Harrison will serve as Moderator of Yorkshire Province for 7 years from 1 September 1997 to 31 August 2004.
- 97/11 c. third line: to stay as a group
- 97/12 a. third line: commissioners

97/21 MATTERS ARISING

- a. PENSIONS ACT 1995 (97/4b) The Treasurer moved the following resolution which was agreed.

Mission Council, having noted that objections were received from three members of the Pension Fund (0.2% of the total) confirms that the statutory consultation procedure laid down in section 19 of the Pensions Act 1995 has been appropriately implemented, and therefore that the existing arrangements as to the appointment of member directors of the United Reformed Church Pension Trust Limited shall continue.

- b. BUDGET OVERSPEND (97/4d) The General Secretary, having consulted the Treasurer and the Secretary for Finance proposed, and it was agreed that

Mission Council confirms the established procedure that overspends may be authorised by the Treasurer of the Church, taking such advice as s/he considers necessary.

- c. MULTI-RACIAL, MULTI-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT WORKER IN THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH (97/5a)

The Deputy General Secretary proposed, and it was agreed that

Mission Council appoints the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper to the post of multi-racial, multi-cultural development worker for a period of approximately three years, ending on 31 July 2000.

She was selected from the three candidates interviewed. Particular reference was made to her communication skills, experience and interests. Provinces were reminded that they should send the names of their contact people to Revd Sheila Maxey as soon as possible and make plans for a 4 day/3 night visit to the Province by Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper.

- d. **YCWT/YLTO TEAM PROVINCIAL MANAGEMENT (97/7)** The Deputy General Secretary reported that the Assembly officers have appointed Mrs Helen Brown to manage the change from national to Provincial management.
- e. **APPEAL TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY (97/10)** It was reported that the Commission, acting on behalf of General Assembly, reached a decision and it was accepted by both parties as being final and binding. The finding was read to Mission Council and will be printed in the Assembly Record.

97/22 AGENDA The Deputy General Secretary said that there were no additional items for the agenda.

97/23 ALTERATION TO THE RULES OF PROCEDURE

The General Secretary asked that paragraph 1.4 should be altered so that the names and addresses of representatives attending General Assembly must reach Church House fourteen weeks before the meeting of Assembly. This would bring the Rules of Procedure clearly into line with current practice. This was agreed. The resolution would be printed in the Assembly Reports and moved at the start of Assembly.

97/24 ELECTIONS

The Clerk asked for nominations for one vacancy on the Staffing Advisory Group, the person not needing to be a member of Mission Council, and two vacancies on MCAG. Nominations were required by supper time on Saturday.

97/25 REPORT OF THE MISSION COUNCIL ADVISORY GROUP

The Deputy General Secretary introduced the report. There were three items for discussion.

- 4. **Membership of AGOGAL** The paper presented in January 1997 omitted the office of Financial Secretary from the list of members. It was agreed that

Mission Council adds the Financial Secretary ex officio to the list of members of AGOGAL.

- 7. **Dates of Future Meetings**

1997 30 September - 2 October

High Leigh, Hoddesdon

| | | |
|------|--|--|
| 1998 | 24 January 13-15 March 5-7 October | Arthur Rank Centre All Saints Pastoral Centre, St Albans Swanwick |
| 1999 | 23 January 19-21 March 1-3 October | Arthur Rank Centre All Saints Pastoral Centre St Albans Swanwick |

Suggestions of other locations for future meetings would be considered.

7. **THE NEW COMMUNITY CHURCH, HALSTEAD** This item was introduced by the Eastern Province Moderator, Revd Elizabeth Caswell, who explained the background to the proposed action, which would result in establishing a new United Reformed Church based in the Methodist Church building in Halstead, to replace a church burdened with a Grade 2 listed building. She assured the Council that there was no special significance in the name 'Community Church'; if admitted it would be an ordinary URC. Public Liability Insurance has been pre-paid for the next five years on the listed building. The residual funds of Halstead United Reformed Church would eventually pass to its custodial Trustee who could then allocate them to the new church. Legal advice had been given within the Province which indicated that as the building is held under a model trust there is no liability on the General Assembly. Questions were raised about whether it was right to act in this way regarding the building and whether it was right for Mission Council to admit new churches. After much discussion it was agreed that

Mission Council agrees to admit the New Community Church, Halstead as a member of the United Reformed Church.

97/26 REPORT OF THE RESOURCE PLANNING ADVISORY GROUP

The report, which will be presented to General Assembly, was introduced by Revd Duncan Wilson who explained that some of the problems in budgeting arose because it was difficult to forecast the number of ministers who would be on the pay roll at any one time. The 1998 budget is based on an expectation of 645 full-time equivalent stipendiary ministers compared to 665 at the end of 1996. A stipend increase of 4.17% is proposed in 1998; this represents RPI +1.5%. It was explained that national average earnings have risen faster than RPI and that if we do not give rises greater than RPI, stipends will fall behind salaries of comparable professions, as they had in the past. It was suggested that as well as asking, 'how many ministers do we need?', we should be asking the question 'what are ministers for?' The draft budget was received with thanks to those who produced it.

97/27 METHODIST/CHURCH OF ENGLAND INFORMAL TALKS

Revd Murdoch Mackenzie introduced the paper. It included a response to the invitation to comment on the report of the informal conversations. Members felt that we should indicate ways in which we would wish to see the issues for discussion developed, before any formal talks took place. The paper will be forwarded to Assembly with the suggested additions. Sheila Maxey said that these conversations only concerned England but that talks are also taking place in Scotland and Wales, which are not as far advanced at present.

97/28 CALLED TO BE ONE

Revd Murdoch Mackenzie introduced a draft response paper, saying that the process is primarily for the world not for the church. It was agreed to forward the response to the General Assembly.

97/29 GRANGE ROAD FUND

The Treasurer introduced the following resolution which was agreed

Mission Council approves the transfer of the Grange Road Fund (S White Fund) to the general funds (capital and unexpended income) of the Church.

An amendment to substitute for the words 'the church', 'the Synod of Mersey Province', proposed by Revd Angus Duncan, was lost. The Clerk commented that the change in wording could be seen as a change in the provisions of the original will. However a further resolution was agreed

Mission Council agrees to recommend to the Finance Committee of General Assembly (see Standing Order 3e ii) that these funds be transferred by General Assembly to the Synod of the Mersey Province.

Mission Council then adjourned for dinner.

97/30 REPORT OF THE TASK GROUP ON HUMAN SEXUALITY

Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow introduced the report. She indicated that there had been responses from 29% of churches, representing 42% of the membership, 43 District Councils and 12 Synods. The responses were analysed by Dr Sally Winter, experienced in handling survey work. The group felt that the responses, although limited in number, were representative of the whole church. The recommendations of the report were brought together in three resolutions which could be taken to Assembly, the first one emphasising our unity in Christ, the second offering two alternative decisions concerning the ordination of 'someone known to be in a homosexual relationship', and the third authorising further work, to be done ecumenically where possible. The discussion focused on the way in which the debate would be structured and the order in which resolutions would be taken. After

further discussion the Task Group was asked to revise the resolutions in the light of the debate. On Saturday afternoon the Task Group brought three new resolutions which Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow introduced. The first resolution was agreed:

Assembly recognises

- a. **the seriousness of the issues of human sexuality and their implications for acceptable behaviour and lifestyles among Christians, and**
- b. **the lack of agreement in the responses submitted to General Assembly by local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods concerning aspects of the contemporary debate on human sexuality and the teaching and application of scripture;**

and therefore

1. **believes that these disagreements, though serious, must not be allowed to injure the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church;**
2. **encourages local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods to apply with wisdom and sensitivity the pastoral practice and discipline set out in the Basis of Union and Structure of the United Reformed Church, in a way which respects the rights of personal conviction and which does not override conscientious decisions in these matters nor use such decisions as a reason for breaking the fellowship of the United Reformed Church:**
3. **calls on those who exercise pastoral care of members, elders and ministers in the Church to seek ways of ensuring that all those who experience rejection because of their convictions in these matters are sustained within the fellowship of the Church held together by Jesus Christ.**

Resolution 2 (which was an amended version of the previous resolution 3) was approved in the following amended form

General Assembly

noting the requests made in a number of responses from local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods for further time and space to reflect on these matters, asks Mission Council to arrange for further work to be done, ecumenically where appropriate and possible on

- a. **the nature of Biblical authority for the life of the church;**
- b. **the relationship between the authority of General Assembly and other Councils of the Church;**

- c. **the matter of ordination and human sexuality and also to consider ways in which the Church may be assisted in reflection on the wider issues of human sexuality.**

After some discussion of the new resolution 3, Revd Pat Nimmo proposed and Mr Simon Rowntree seconded, the proposition that the original resolution 2a, minus its first line, be voted on. This took place but 2a did not get majority support. Revd Bernie Collins then proposed and Revd Geoff Prentice seconded, that the original resolution 2b be accepted; this was also lost. Following a suggestion by Revd John Edwards, a straw poll was taken to see if resolution 3 should be left out. This was defeated. After much amendment the following resolution 3 was agreed;

General Assembly

- a) **recognises**
 - i) **that no candidate admitted for training can be assured of ordination until a call is issued and accepted with the concurrence of a District Council**
 - ii) **that all decisions on candidature and on the calling of a particular minister involve seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the weighing of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate:**
- b) **declares concerning persons in a homosexual relationship: that, during the process of further reflection and discussion set out in resolution 2,**
 - i) **no local church or pastorate is to be constrained to consider or accept such a person as their minister nor any District Council constrained to concur with such a call.**
 - ii) **Assembly will uphold a call to such an ordinand or minister, duly issued by a local church with the concurrence of the relevant District Council(s), leading to ordination and/or induction:**
 - iii) **Assembly will also uphold the refusal of a local church to call as their minister a person who is in a homosexual relationship**
 - iv) **In view of these options, the fact of a homosexual relationship shall not be the ground for rejecting a candidate for ministry, during the process of selection, entry to a college or course and ministerial training**
- c. **resolves that in the case of a disagreement wherein a local church still wishes to call such a person, when a District Council has refused concurrence, the relevant Synod, through an appropriate committee or commission, shall seek to secure agreement, failing which the appeals procedure can be applied.**
- d. **instructs the Ministries Committee to produce guidelines for the application of this decision in the cases of non-stipendiary ministers.**

Revd John Reardon expressed the Council's great gratitude to the Task Group for all the work they had done over a long period. The General Secretary asked that they be invited to carry through their work to General Assembly.

Members of Mission Council were asked not to report back the conclusions of this debate until an official text was available. A Press statement was to be prepared and would be circulated to members of Mission Council.

The meeting was adjourned at 9.30 following closing worship led by the Chaplain.

The meeting continued on Saturday morning at 9.30 with worship led by the Chaplain and further study of the passages associated with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel, given by Dr David Thompson.

97/31 LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

The report was introduced by the Convener of Discipleship and Witness, Revd Elizabeth Caswell. An attempt had been made to identify and address one of the unresolved areas in the 'Patterns of Ministry' report. The proposed way forward was to develop a common framework on which different patterns of local leadership could be built.

Mission Council then met in groups to discuss whether the report was ready for Assembly and, if not, what further needs to be done.

On Sunday morning the Deputy General Secretary gave a summary of the group conclusions. This indicated a considerable range of views, varying from those who wished the report to be submitted to the Assembly as it was to those who believed it should be substantially revised and rewritten. He suggested that the report could be used as the basis of a pilot scheme in two or three Provinces. This idea did not receive support. A vote on whether or not to take this matter to the 1997 Assembly revealed a difference of opinion and the Mission Council accepted the advice of the Moderator that the matter should be referred back to the Discipleship and Witness Committee. The Committee was asked to consider revision of the report in the light of comments made by the groups. It was also asked to produce a leaflet giving examples of good and bad practice.

97/32 REPORT OF THE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

Revd Jessie Clare invited Revd Bill Mahood to speak as Convener of the Review Group for the Secretary for Church and Society. The Group unanimously recommended that Revd Peter Brain should be re-appointed. It was agreed that

Mission Council reappoints the Revd Peter Brain for a further five years from 1st September 1997. In doing so the Council recognised the significant contribution that Peter Brain has made to the work.

The following resolution proposed by Revd Bill Mahood, was also agreed

Mission Council recognises the difficulties for the work of Church and Society caused by budget restraints and asks the Resource Planning Advisory Group to increase its budget if possible.

On his return to the meeting Mr Brain was thanked personally by the Moderator.

Review Group for the Secretary for Youth Work The Convener, Revd John Reardon, reported that, having carefully considered the arguments for and against offering Mr Paul Franklin a further contract, the Group came to the conclusion that at a time of considerable change it would be right to look for someone else to develop the work. The Review Group recommended that

Mission Council recommends that Paul Franklin's present contract, due to expire at the end of 1997, be not renewed.

This was agreed. In making this recommendation the group wished to place on record considerable appreciation of Paul's work at national level over a total period of ten years. The Moderator agreed to write to him.

The following nominations were brought by the Revd Jessie Clare:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Appeal to General Assembly | Convener - Revd Alasdair Walker; Mr Alex Mackie - Revd Denise Megson - Mrs Alison Morgan - Miss Margaret Compton |
| Caterham School | - School Council (formerly Governors) Mr John Mathias to replace Revd David Flynn |
| Cheshunt Foundation | - to regularise an earlier omission Reappoint for three years Mr Desmond Davis - June 1995-98 Revd Michael Dunford - June 1995-98 |

Towards the Promised Community

Ecumenical Decade, Churches in Solidarity with Women, Conference April 1998. Mrs Wilma Frew, Revd Bob Day, Revd Rowena Francis and two others.

Council for World Mission - Revd Philip Woods to replace Revd Mia Hilborn.

Nominating Group for Thames North Moderator It was agreed that the group convened by Mrs Wilma Frew, which had recommended the extension of the period of service of Revd Janet Sowerbutts for one year, should act as the nominating group for her successor.

All the above appointments were agreed.

Mission Council adjourned until 3.45

97/33 ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS

Mrs Wilma Frew, the Convener, told Mission Council that the 25th anniversary of the United Reformed Church will be celebrated in the opening worship. Each Province was being invited to bring an appropriate symbol.

Although it had been agreed last year that the Synod reports to Assembly should get proper consideration, given the time constraints, this might prove difficult this year. The Council agreed that in 1997 time only need be allowed for any comment or question on the reports.

Accommodation for the under 25's - The Committee considered the request made by Fury and referred to it by Mission Council in January, that accommodation should be provided together, for the under 25's, at Assembly cost. The Committee decided to refer the decision back to Mission Council as to agree to the request would create a precedent. This year the cost would be £3,000 but might be considerably more in future years. The Committee was in favour but wanted to know how it was to be funded. It was agreed that

Mission Council agrees that accommodation for Fury representatives should be provided in one place at Assembly cost.

In the light of its earlier discussion on the report and resolutions on human sexuality Mission Council considered how the debate on this matter should be handled. It had originally been allocated five and one half hours, spread over two days. It was finally agreed that the debate would take place on one day, preferably before and after lunch, starting with a presentation by the Convener when questions could be asked. After that the resolutions would be taken in turn. For resolution 3 agreement would be sought by the Assembly Arrangements Committee in the Order of Business for voting to be by ballot. Suggestions for a discussion time in Synod groups or for buzz groups were rejected.

The Moderator welcomed Revd Rhona Jones who had come to present the report of the Mission Council Task Group on Oversight Ministries. Unfortunately there was no time to consider the report, which was referred to MCAG and would be brought back to the next meeting.

97/34 SECRETARY FOR DISCIPLESHIP AND WITNESS

The General Secretary introduced the report on this post. At a meeting of Conveners it was established that there was some overlap in the remits of the Discipleship and Witness Committee, and Advocacy and Stewardship Task Group. After further discussion it was decided to recommend that Discipleship and Witness be given the responsibility for Advocacy and Stewardship but that some work would be carried out by a Stewardship Sub-Committee. It is proposed that there is a new

remit for the Committee and that a new post be created called Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness.

The following resolutions were agreed:

Mission Council agrees to

- (i) recommend the new proposals for Discipleship and Witness and for Advocacy and Stewardship to the General Assembly, in particular the new remit for the Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness Committee and the creation of a Stewardship Sub-Committee.**
- (ii) the creation as from 1 September 1997 of the post of Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness, in place of the present post of Secretary for Discipleship and Witness and in place of the Secretary for Advocacy and Stewardship as from the date when the present holder of the latter post leaves.**

It is envisaged that Revd Bill Wright would develop a programme to help others undertake the training that he is providing. It was felt that there needed to be a new paragraph on the way in which he and the new post holder will work together. Revd Arnold Harrison proposed and it was agreed that

Revd Jessie Clare be invited to convene a group to nominate the Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness.

After dinner Mission Council met in groups to discuss various papers.

At 8.15 the plenary session continued. Reports from the groups were received.

On Theological reflectors - it was suggested that there was a need for a review of the role of Mission Council after 5 years and the role of the reflector. MCAG was asked to look at these observations.

Resolutions that are going to Assembly that members could comment on:

Assembly grants 1997 - a suggested increase of £2000 in the grant to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, as a special contribution to retaining the post of WARC youth secretary, would be looked at by AGOGAL in April.

Re-dedication Sunday at the beginning of October - this idea will be taken to General Assembly.

A proposal for a Mission Council Hotline was rejected.

National Aids Adviser - this special category ministry will not be continued when the current postholder finishes later this year. Council passed the following resolution brought by the Church and Society Committee:

Mission Council

- i) **acknowledges with appreciation the distinctive contributions made by the three full-time postholders as National AIDS Adviser over ten years;**
- ii) **encourages Church and Society to establish a continuing group on AIDS to serve the whole church and requests a report for its October 1997 meeting;**
- iii) **agrees to include in the Central Grants budget an annual grant of £2,000 pa for the London Ecumenical AIDS Trust, payable from 1998, index-linked and reviewed in 2001.**

The meeting was adjourned at 9.15 after worship led by the chaplain.

Mission Council gathered together at 7.30 a.m. for a Communion Service at which the Moderator preached.

97/34 ELECTIONS After breakfast elections were held and in the absence of one of the Tellers appointed for the year and the candidacy for election of the other, Mr Clem Frank and Mrs Muriel Garrow were appointed. The following were elected to serve until 2001.

Staffing Advisory Group Mrs Angela Hughes
 Proposed by Mr Dennis Earp
 Seconded by Revd Pat Nimmo

MCAG Revd Lesley Charlton
 Proposed by Revd Pat Nimmo
 Seconded by Mrs Angela Hughes

 Mrs Barbara Martin
 Proposed by Revd Ray Adams
 Seconded by Revd David Jenkins

97/35 REPORT OF THE TRAINING COMMITTEE

The Convener, Revd John Sutcliffe, introduced the Training Committee statement to Mission Council regarding item 6 in the Committee's report to General Assembly. It focussed on the fact that there are only 73 students who are being trained at four colleges and proposed that no students should be sent to Queen's College, Birmingham at present. Also, following the confidential National Bishops' Review of the West Midlands Ministerial Training course, it was proposed not to send any students there this year and similarly none to the course run by the South -East Institute for Theological Education. Revd Elizabeth Welch proposed and Mr Simon Rowntree seconded a resolution that was carried:

Mission Council asks the Training Committee to withdraw paragraphs 6.2 and 6.3 from its report to General Assembly, and wait until the fully constituted Ecumenical Strategy Group has met and reported to General Assembly, before coming to a conclusion with regard to the sending of students to Queen's College and to the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course. In the meantime, the United Reformed Church reverts to the status quo with regard to sending of students to Queen's College and the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course.

Revd David Helyar suggested that there should be consultation with those affected before we withdrew students from any course.

After coffee members dispersed into Synod groups.

97/36 TASK GROUP ON THE MILLENIUM

The Convener, Revd Elizabeth Caswell, introduced the report. She indicated that there may be a request for extra funds but at present it is impossible to know the extent of our commitment. The report of the group will be included in the Mission Council report. It was agreed to take the resolution to General Assembly amended as indicated below.

Assembly

- 5. adopts the idea of 1999 being a year of renewal of commitment to Jesus Christ and urges Synods, Districts and local churches to participate by using the bible study material being prepared.**
- 6. a. agrees that, if there is an appeal for funds for the cost of the Churches preparing for the millennium which is approved by the Churches Together in England Millennium Co-ordinating Group, the URC will participate along with other Churches.**
 - b. agrees that the same principle will apply if a similar decision should be made within Action of Churches Together in Scotland or CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales).**

97/37 REPORT ON MINISTERIAL DISCIPLINE

The Convener, Revd Keith Forecast, reported that Part 1. is ready for confirmation by Assembly this year. For Part 2., Rules of Procedure, revised rules will be suggested, based on the responses received. Responses indicated that the alternative ways of proceeding, either by informal or formal hearing, were not thought to be helpful. There would now be an investigation in every case leading to a formal hearing. The new procedures will allow for a minister to have self-funded

legal representation if s/he so wishes, in which case the District Council could also do so. The Guidelines will be available for Mission Council in October.

The Task Group asked to be discharged from the additional task laid on it of producing procedures for the disciplining of members. This task was referred back to MCAG. The Moderator proposed that the Group should continue as at present, until the present job is finished at Mission Council in October.

Conveners were reminded that material for inclusion in Assembly Reports is required by Easter at the latest.

97/38 THANKS

The Moderator expressed thanks to all those members for whom this was their last Mission Council. Particular thanks were expressed to the Clerk, Revd Martin Cressey, for the way in which he had helped Mission Council through its meetings. Good wishes were expressed to Mr William McVey who is to become Financial Secretary for CWM and to Mrs Muriel Garrow, who is to be Mission Enabler for the European Area of CWM.

Thanks were also expressed to Ushaw College and the local arrangements committee and to Wendy Cooper from Church House who had stepped in to be responsible for support services. Dr David Thompson offered his personal thanks to members of Mission Council for making it easy for him to moderate. The General Secretary expressed thanks to Revd Fleur Houston for her work as chaplain and to Dr David Thompson, for the time he has given as Moderator, Convener of Doctrine Prayer and Worship and as Secretary to the Task Group on Human Sexuality.

97/39 CLOSING WORSHIP

This was led by Revd Fleur Houston.

mc 14-16 mrc 1997



The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place London WC1H 9RT
General Secretary The Revd Anthony G Burnham BA

Telephone 0171 916 2020
Fax number 0171 916 2021

Deputy General Secretary

The Revd John Waller MA

Ref: JW/MS/ltsr303
3 March 1997

To: All members of Mission Council
and staff in attendance

3 March 1997

Dear Colleague

Enclosed is the main mailing of papers for Mission Council. The remaining papers, the agenda and list of groups will follow in a few days.

Each paper has a distinguishing letter which will be shown at the relevant point in the agenda. In most cases there is a descriptive comment under the letter, indicating what Mission Council is required to do. In particular it should make clear which matters we must decide ourselves and which we shall be forwarding to the General Assembly.

I am sorry that there were one or two errors in the list of names I sent to you. Flora Winfield is not our theological reflector this time. Among the staff in attendance, with their correct designations, are: Bill Wright (Advocacy), Arnold Harrison (Nominations) and Rosemary Johnston (Childrens Advocate).

As Shelagh Richardson is still off sick and Sheila Andrews is only recently back after major surgery, Wendy Cooper has agreed to come to Mission Council to provide office back-up. She has not been involved in the preparation for the meeting: any contact before we get to Durham should be with my office.

Some may be interested to know that Ushaw College has its own large, heated indoor swimming pool. Visitors are welcome to use the pool by arrangement at the general office. There is also a tennis court and racquets and balls can be obtained from the general office. It is not immediately clear to me when you will have time to use these facilities!

Most of those coming by train will use the transport provided by the Northern Province. If for any reason anyone has need of a taxi the local firm can be contacted on (0191) 373-1586. You may not be surprised to learn that the name of the firm is "Tony's Taxis".

I look forward to seeing you soon.

Yours sincerely,

John Waller
Deputy General Secretary



The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place London WC1H 9RT

General Secretary

The Revd Anthony G Burnham BA

Telephone 0171 916 2020

Fax number 0171 916 2021

Deputy General Secretary

The Revd John Waller MA

JW/mas

19 February 1997

To: Members of Mission Council
and staff in attendance

Dear Colleague

***Mission Council 14-16 March 1997 - Ushaw College,
Durham DH7 9RH 0191-373-1254***

Here we go again! The meeting runs from lunch on Friday 14 to lunch on Sunday 16. Arrivals are from 12 noon and, to fit in with train times, lunch on Friday will be at 1.15pm.

I enclose

- a list of members, to enable people to consider travelling together if coming by car.
- an expense slip
- directions for getting to Ushaw College
- a form, which you are asked to return immediately so that people can make the necessary arrangements.

The Northern Province is arranging transport to meet trains which arrive at Durham station at 12.18 pm and 12.57 pm. Transport will also be available on Sunday to enable people to catch trains leaving at 2.22pm and 2.52/3.01 pm. However you need to book a place!

There are no ground floor bedrooms at Ushaw College but there is a lift to all floors. If you would find it helpful to have a bedroom near the lift, please indicate this on your form. Similarly, we may have a very small number of bedrooms with en-suite facilities available to us. In case we do, and if you have a health reason for doing so, please indicate on your form that you would prefer one of these rooms.

Our theological reflector this time is the Revd Duncan Mc Clements, the Convenor of the Committee on Ecumenical Affairs of the Church of Scotland. We shall also be joined for part of the time by Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow and the Revd Roberta Rominger, from the human sexuality task group.

Cont/d....

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Please make a note to bring a Bible and a copy of Rejoice and Sing with you.

The papers for the Council meeting will probably come in two mailings, the first of them in 10-14 days' time. Allow yourself some reading time!

Yours sincerely

John Waller

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MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

The Moderator: Dr David Thompson
 General Secretary: Revd Tony Burnham
 Clerk: Revd Martin Cressey Clerk Elect: Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith
 Moderator Elect: Revd David Jenkins
 Past Moderator: Revd John Reardon
 Treasurer: Mr Graham Stacy
 Deputy Gen Sec: Revd John Waller
 Legal Adviser: Mr Hartley Oldham Theological Reflector: Flora Winfield

Assembly Standing Committees

Doctrine, Prayer & Worship Dr. David Thompson
 Discipleship & Witness Revd. Elizabeth Caswell
 Church & Society Mrs Val Morrison (alternate)
 Youth & Children's Work Revd. Stephen Thornton
 Ecumenical Revd. Murdoch Mackenzie
 Ministries Revd. Keith Forecast
 Training Revd John Sutcliffe
 Finance Mr Graham Stacy
 Communications and Editorial Mr Chris Wright
 Nominations Revd. Jessie Clare
 Assembly Arrangements Mrs Wilma Frew
 Equal Opportunities Mrs Susan Rand
 Inter-Faith Relations Revd. Bill Mahood

Task Groups

Advocacy & Stewardship
 - Revd. Julian Macro

Fury Council

Ms Jenny Hale
 Miss Liz Burns

12 Provincial Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each Province:

- | | | |
|----|------------------------|--|
| 1 | Revd David Jenkins | Revd Peter Poulter, Mr Peter Clarke, Revd. Ann Jackson |
| 2 | Revd Keith Forecast | Revd Bob Day, Mrs Ann Sutcliffe, Mr Gordon Ollerenshaw |
| 3 | Revd Angus Cook | Mrs Barbara Martin, Mr Wesley Woodside, Revd. Peter Roche |
| 4 | Revd Donald Hilton | Revd John Jenkinson, Mr Steve Wood, Mrs Angela Hughes |
| 5 | Revd Malcolm Hanson | Mr Geoff Prentice, Revd. Graham Maskery, Mrs Irene Wren |
| 6 | Revd Elizabeth Welch | Mr Simon Rowntree, Mrs Erica Young, Revd Patricia Nimmo |
| 7 | Revd Elizabeth Caswell | Mr William McVey, Mrs Elizabeth Whitten, Revd Margaret McKay |
| 8 | Revd Ray Adams | Revd John Rees, Mrs Mary Eden, Mr Geoff Lunt |
| 9 | Revd Derek Wales | Revd Bernie Collins, Revd Jeffrey Evans, Mrs Christine Robertson |
| 10 | Revd Janet Sowerbutts | Dr Jack Gow, Miss Marian Crack, Revd. John Edwards |
| 11 | Revd David Helyar | Mrs Christine Meekison, Revd Lesley Charlton, Dr Graham Campling |
| 12 | Revd John Humphreys | Dr Jean Sylvan Evans, Mr Denis Earp, Mr Peter Devaney |

In attendance:-

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Minute Secretary | Mrs Christine Hardwick | Editor, Reform | Revd. David Lawrence |
| Moderator's Chaplain | Revd Fleur Houston | Training | Revd Dr Lesley Husselbee |
| Church & Society | Revd Peter Brain | Ecumenical Relations | Revd. Sheila Maxey |
| International Church Relations | Revd Philip Woods | Director, Windermere Centre | Revd Peter McIntosh |
| Ministries | Revd Christine Craven | Communications | Mrs Carol Rogers |
| Chief Accountant | Mr Clem Frank | Advocacy | |
| Youth Work | Mr Paul Franklin | Nominations | Revd. Bill Wright |
| Discipleship & Witness | Mrs Muriel Garrow | Childrens Advocate | Revd. Arnold Harrison |
| Office & Personnel Manager | Mr Hilary Gunn | | Mrs Rosemary Johnston |
| Rural Consultant | Revd Michael Cruchley | Theological reflector | Revd Duncan Mc Clements |
| Convener. RPAG | Revd Duncan Wilson | | |



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

FRIDAY

12.00

Onwards Check in

1.15 LUNCH

2.15 **WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY**

Welcomes and apologies

Minute of welcome from Durham District Council

Minutes of meeting on 18 January 1997

Matters arising

97/4b Pensions Act 1995 (Paper Q)

97/4d Budget overspends (Paper N)

97/5a Multiracial development post (Paper D)

97/7 YCWTs: Change to Provincial management

Our agenda and additional business

Election procedures

4.00 TEA

4.30 Mission Council Advisory Group (Papers F&M)

Resource Planning Advisory Group (Paper E)

Methodist/Church of England talks (Paper B)

Called to be One response (Paper C)

6.30 DINNER

7.30 Human sexuality task group (Paper P)

Introduction and group work

8.45 **PRAYERS**

SATURDAY

8.30 BREAKFAST

9.15 **WORSHIP AND BIBLE STUDY**

Local leadership (Paper H)

Introduction and groups

10.45 COFFEE

- 11.15 Assembly Arrangements Committee
Nominations Committee
Human sexuality task group (Paper P)
Plenary discussion
- 1.00 LUNCH
FREE TIME
- 3.30 TEA
- 4.00 Local Leadership (Paper H) Plenary
Oversight ministries task group (Paper G)
Grange Road fund (Paper Q)
- 6.30 DINNER
- 7.30 Group work (See separate note)
Theological reflections: A, E, H (Paper K)
ASS papers : D, G
Suggesting responses : B, C, F (Papers I, J, L, O)
Reporting back
- 8.45 **PRAYERS**

SUNDAY

- 7.30 **COMMUNION**
- 8.30 BREAKFAST
- 9.15 Elections
Training Committee Statement (Paper A)
Ministerial Discipline working party
Millenium Task Group
- 10.45 COFFEE
- 11.15 Synod groups. Conveners' group
Result of elections
Thanks
- 12.30 **CLOSING WORSHIP**
- 1.00 LUNCH



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

GROUPS

A list of groups for this Mission Council is on the back of this sheet. The Advisory Group felt we should remain in basically the same groups as for the last two meetings, particularly as being with people we know may help discussion of the possibly sensitive matter of the human sexuality task group report.

I shall be grateful if the first named person acts as group leader and second person as reporter.

There are likely to be three sessions of group discussion:

- 1. Friday evening.** Having heard an introduction to the human sexuality task group report, we will have about an hour in groups for general discussion of the report. This is in preparation for a plenary discussion and decision in the second session on Saturday morning.
- 2. Saturday morning.** After the report on local leadership is introduced we shall have a time in groups. Our discussion needs to be focused: is this matter ready to be brought to General Assembly? Or not? Are there any changes which might easily be agreed which would make the matter ready for Assembly?
- 3. Saturday evening.** In this session different groups are being asked to prepare advice for the Council as to how it should respond to various matters. As they report back, we may hope the Council may be able to come speedily to decisions.
Groups A, E and H will look at Paper K and the theological reflections. The paper suggests the particular responses required.
Groups B, C and F will look at Papers I, J, L and O and propose how the Council might respond to each.
Groups B and G will look at the papers designated ASS and prepare any comments which can be considered by the committee conveners.

We shall have 40 minutes in groups. Any group which completes its task in less time than that, can of course look at any of the other topics.

It would be possible for the groups which have the same task to meet together as one larger group. If this idea appeals, group leaders must feel free to negotiate with their opposite numbers.

John Waller
6 March 1997

GROUPS

MARCH 1997

A

Lesley Charlton
Angela Hughes
Peter Brain
Tony Burnham
Peter Clarke
Peter Devaney
Jenny Hale
Malcolm Hanson
William McVey
Val Morrison
Elizabeth Welch

B

Barbara Martin
Martin Cressey
Bob Day
Mary Eden
John Edwards
Lesley Husselbee
Geoff Prentice
Simon Rowntree
John Sutcliffe
Iren Wren

C

Graham Stacy
Rosemary Johnston
Marian Crack
Clem Frank
Paul Franklin
John Humphreys
John Jenkinson
Pat Nimmo
Gordon Ollerenshaw
Margaret Carrick Smith
Stephen Thornton

D

Susan Rand
Michael Cruchley
Graham Campling
Elizabeth Caswell
David Coaker
Bernie Collins
Muriel Garrow
Ann Jackson
Hartley Oldham
Derek Wales

E

Raymond Adams
Angus Duncan
Jessie Clare
Jean Sylvan Evans
Wilma Frew
David Lawrence
Carol Rogers
David Thompson
John Waller
Wesley Woodside

F

Graham Maskery
Keith Forecast
Christine Craven
Denis Earp
Christine Hardwick
Roy Lowes
Geoff Lunt
George Thomas
Steve Wood

G

Julian Macro
Fleur Houston
Jack Gow
Donald Hilton
Bill Mahood
Christine Meekison
Peter Poulter

H

Murdoch Mackenzie
Sheila Maxey
Arnold Harrison
David Helyar
David Jenkins
Janet Sowerbutts
Christine Thomas



Training Committee

Extract from Report to General Assembly 1997

6.2. We have consulted with our ecumenical partners and now report to the General Assembly from September 1997, that the Training Committee will recognise Mansfield, Northern and Westminster Colleges to receive newly assessed ordinands on a full and part-time basis. We have asked to maintain our links with the Queen's College, Birmingham, through being represented on the Governing body, but for the time being will not be using the College to receive ordinands.

6.3 From September 1997, the Training Committee will recognise the following Courses to receive newly assessed ordinands, North East Ordination Course, Manchester Christian Institute, East Midlands Ministerial Training Course, St Albans and Oxford Ministry Training Course, East Anglian Ministerial Training Course, Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme, and South West Ministerial Training Scheme. This year, we will not be using the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course and the South East Institute of Theological Education and will be guided by Bishops' Inspections in the coming year for future use

Training Committee Statement to the Mission Council about item 6 in the Committee's report to the General Assembly.

1. Almost all the Training Committee's work has ecumenical ramifications. Therefore in making decisions about colleges and courses to be used by the United Reformed Church, great care is taken to consult our ecumenical partners, principally through the Ecumenical Strategy group. In addition, the Revd Ken Howcroft, who is responsible for Ministerial Education in the Methodist Church has shared the Committee's deliberations.
2. In 1995 the Assembly agreed that the Training Committee should validate programmes for ordination training and report its decisions to the Assembly and Provincial Ministerial Committees. The accompanying report accepted by the Assembly made clear that this would be a recurring and detailed task and that where the documentation was inadequate recognition would be withdrawn.
3. There are several programmes - a word we were advised at a meeting of the Mission Council to use to cover both Courses and Colleges - which at various times have been validated by the URC which have not been included this year. Our Ecumenical partners have been kept informed and discussed the issues at two meetings of the Ecumenical Strategy Group. Among those listed are the West Midlands Ministerial Training Course, the Queen's College, and the South East Institute of Theological Education about which questions have been asked.

4. In 1996 there was a National Bishops' Inspection of the West Midlands Course. The URC provided an inspector for this inspection. This kind of ecumenical inspection takes place every five years. As Ecumenical partners we received a copy of their confidential report. In the light of this, the Committee decided that the West Midlands Course would not be open to receive new ordinands into training this coming September. Representatives of the inspectors will visit again in a year's time and the Training Committee will review its decision in the light of their follow up Report.
5. Similarly, the Training Committee will review its position about sending URC ordinands to the South East Institute for Theological Education in the light of the National Bishops' Inspection of this course which is taking place in Spring 1997.
- 6(i) Our longer term aim is that, with our ecumenical partners, we hope to work towards the creation of a number of regional centres of theological education. In only a very limited number of these will it be possible for there to be a significant number of Reformed tutors in the faculty. URC candidates will be placed only where there are Reformed Church tutors working in an ecumenical context. We look forward to these centres drawing together resources so that courses for lay people and ordinands can be offered on a full-time and part-time, weekday and weekend, classroom and locality and open learning basis.
- 6(ii) Our immediate problem is the low number of ordinands and the need to create viable year groups of students. Currently we have only 73 students in full-time training - Mansfield 16, Northern 25, Queens 3, and Westminster 29, and these are spread over three or four year groups. 23 of the 73 are due to complete their Course this summer. The number of 73 in full-time training compares, looking back over ten years, with 91 in 1995, 94 in 1993, 113 in 1990, 100 in 1988. This issue has been discussed at two meetings of Ecumenical Strategy Group whose members, having themselves experienced the problem of the over provision of college places, are sympathetic to the decision the Training Committee has made.
- 6(iii) The decision is that we shall concentrate our few full-time students where there are Reformed facilities and from September this year will not place new students at the Queens College. This has been communicated to the Principal of Queen's to whom it cannot have come as a surprise. He has received all the papers associated with our review of training. The Convener of the Training Committee visited him to talk about our over-provision of places in the autumn of 1995. In 1996 he took part in two URC inter-college staff discussions of the Training Review and responded to the same enquiry as was addressed to members of Mission Council about the number of Colleges needed by the URC. More recently he has had conversations with Lesley Husselbee who is a denominational adviser to the Governing Body of the College.
7. We do not wish to disassociate ourselves from Queen's and with Ecumenical support have asked if the URC might continue to be linked with the College by being represented on its Council. In doing this we wish to keep open the possibility of using Queen's in the future if the number of candidates increases significantly and we also find URC tutors to serve there and to be open to the possibilities of being involved in new opportunity promoted there by the Ecumenical Strategy Group.

MISSION COUNCIL

14 -16 March 1997

B

For discussion and forwarding to General Assembly

Resolution ?

The General Assembly approves the response prepared by the Ecumenical Committee to *Commitment to Mission and Unity*, the report of the informal conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

Commitment to Mission and Unity, the report of the informal conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church.

Text relating to Resolution? above.

This report, published in September 1996, recommends that formal conversations between the two churches be established and identifies ten issues which need to be addressed in any talks.

The ten issues are:

- ◆ Initiation and membership
- ◆ Authorization of lay persons to preside at the eucharist
- ◆ The three-fold ministry
- ◆ The nature and role of the diaconate
- ◆ The nature and style of the office of bishop
- ◆ The ordination of women to the episcopate
- ◆ The reconciliation of ordained ministries
- ◆ The structures of authority, oversight and government
- ◆ The relation of Church and State
- ◆ Relations of our world cummions

Ecumenical partners have been invited to comment before the General Synod of the Church of England, in November 1997, and the Methodist Conference, in June 1998, make their view known.

The Ecumenical Committee offers the following response:

As a church committed to the search for the organic unity of the Church, the United Reformed Church welcomes the recommendation of the report of the informal conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church that they now enter formal conversations. Encouraged by the extent of local sharing in mission and worship and service which the United Reformed Church already enjoys with both the Church of England and the Methodist Church we want to express our interest in becoming participants in the process which those two churches have initiated and in contributing to the development of the agenda set out in the report. We await with interest the responses of the Church of England Synod and the Methodist Conference to the recommendations of the report and look forward to the contribution the United Reformed Church may be able to make to this process from our united traditions.



C

For discussion and forwarding to General Assembly

Resolution ?

The General Assembly endorses the response to *the Called to be One* process presented by the Ecumenical Committee and encourages its representatives attending the July Forum of Churches Together in England to seek God's guidance as to an appropriate form of visible unity for churches in England as they enter the Third Millennium.

Responding to the Called to be One process of Churches Together in England
Text relating to Resolution ? above.

Recalling Resolution 31 of the General Assembly urging local churches in England to study *Called to be One* and to continue to express the United Reformed Church's commitment to the goal of visible unity through active participation in initiatives leading to organic union, the Ecumenical Committee offers the following response.

The United Reformed Church responds to *Called to be One*

1. General comments on the process.

- 1.1 The Presidents of Churches Together in England remind us in the Preface of *Called to be One* that a divided Christendom cannot bear witness to the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in the midst of a divided world. The real mission issues concern racial tensions, the gap between rich and poor, employed and unemployed, as well as a Europe struggling to overcome the enmities of past centuries in a world where a few powerful nations dictate the terms of trade to all the rest. The ability of the Church to witness to the Gospel in the midst of these evil divisions, is directly related to overcoming division within itself. As a contribution to this work of reconciliation, the *Called to be One* process has gathered together the different churches' understandings of how they are called to respond to the prayer of Jesus that they may all be one that the world might believe.
- 1.2 The United Reformed Church welcomes this imaginative initiative by Churches Together in England. By asking the member churches to reflect, at every level of church life, on what they mean by 'church' and 'unity' and 'visible unity', the ecclesiological questions are being faced by a very wide range of people.
- 1.3 Such broad consultation exposes a tension between the official church statements drawn up by trained theologians and historians, and grass roots faith and experience. The United Reformed Church, as a conciliar church, is used to working with that tension whenever it seeks to make new policy or alter its agreed statements of faith. It may, however, be difficult for churches with very different traditions of consultation and decision-making to travel this road in parallel with churches like ours.
- 1.4 We see the *Called to be One* process as an on-going process with no end in sight. The responses received will feed the discussion at Forum in July and that discussion will, in turn, direct and even quicken the next stage of the pilgrimage towards that unity to which the Church is called.

2. How the United Reformed Church has handled the process.

- 2.1 The United Reformed Church has been committed to the process from the beginning. Its Mission and Ecumenical Work at Home Committee (now the Ecumenical Committee) commented on the original questions and then gathered a group of people from different theological positions and ecumenical experience to draft a response which was finalised after consultation with the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee.
- 2.2 Widespread discussion of the *Called to be One* book and group use of the *Workbook* were encouraged through the ecumenical officers' network. Local churches were each sent a leaflet entitled *Questions and Challenges for the United Reformed Church*.
- 2.3 This response has been sent to Churches Together in England from the Ecumenical Committee on behalf of the United Reformed Church to be used in the preparation for the July Forum, but will also be offered to the General Assembly in July 1997 for its approval. The grass-roots views, gathered at the March Synods, will be reported to the Assembly and added to the submission to Churches Together in England.

3. The United Reformed Church's commitment to and experience of unity in relation to this process.

- 3.1 The 1972 Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church makes clear that commitment to the unity of the Church is part of its very being. At the 1996 General Assembly that commitment was re-affirmed in terms of the current stage of the ecumenical journey. An additional clause, proposed from the floor of Assembly, committed the United Reformed Church to *active participation in initiatives leading towards organic union*. It was approved by an overwhelming majority.
- 3.2 The United Reformed Church is the only member church of Churches Together in England with experience of organic union across the denominational divide. It illustrates what is described in *Called to be One* 6.13 as organic unity or union.
'This unity would retain many of the gifts and traditions at present distinctive of different denominations, but the separate denominations would die to be reborn within the unity of a living and integrated fellowship' (CTBO 6.13)
It can bear witness that this model does not mean uniformity. For example, the United Reformed Church holds together in fruitful tension two different convictions about baptism.

4. Responding to some of the specific challenges in the *Called to be One* process

- 4.1 Within the overarching commitment of the United Reformed Church to the full, visible unity of the Church, the *Called to be One* process poses some specific and immediate questions and challenges. Most of these were already on the United Reformed Church's agenda, either being tackled with ecumenical partners or alone. Where the latter is the case, the first challenge is to begin to tackle the matter with ecumenical partners.

A. *What do we mean by Church?*

- i. The United Reformed Church is too small in England to be present everywhere. Strategic decisions about deployment of ministers and the planting and closing of churches have to be taken. More work needs to be done on an ecumenical ecclesiology to inform those decisions.

The United Reformed Church welcomes the challenge to renewal (CTBO 7.6 i) which urges it to rediscover and renew its own traditions. This 25th year of its union is a good time to identify, renew and offer its traditions of corporate discernment through the councils of the church, of shared leadership by ministers and elders, and of the exposition of the Bible in the context of worship. Each of those traditions is, of course, shared with some other members of Churches Together in England. The United Reformed Church needs to explore further how these elements are to be recognised and affirmed in single and multiple - congregation Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

The United Reformed Church also needs to seek ways to help United Reformed Churches who are not in ecumenical partnerships of any kind to come close enough to other traditions to be able 'to examine one another's traditions' and 'to explain what it is in other traditions that they find it difficult to accept' (CTBO 7.6 ii and iii)

Belonging to the Church

The United Reformed Church understands membership as the calling of the baptised on confession of faith to join with the people of God in worship and in service and in corporate discernment of God's will. This calling is expressed primarily, but not only, through the local church.

Today the United Reformed Church is concerned at the growing reluctance of worshippers to become members. It is also concerned at the emphasis on individual commitment and choice at the expense of the corporate calling. A renewed understanding of the Church as a holy people, in the world but not of the world, may be a timely offering to all the churches. However, the United Reformed Church, through its experience of sharing in parish ministry with the Church of England in various kinds of Local Ecumenical Partnerships, also recognises and appreciates that inclusive understanding of belonging to the Church. More work is needed to try to reconcile the two understandings of membership. In particular, the United Reformed Church will continue, for the sake of those in rural areas, to look at the possibility of meaningful membership of two churches. The United Reformed Church recognises its confused position on the relationship between baptism, membership and admission to communion. It warmly welcomes the report of the CTE working party on Christian Initiation, Baptism and Membership. A recent URC consultation on *Believing and Belonging* will also contribute to the work which the United Reformed Church needs to do in this area, both within its councils and through the ecumenical instruments.

Authority and Leadership

The United Reformed Church's experience of bringing together a Congregational and a Presbyterian system of authority is worth sharing. It has required a tactfulness on the part of District Councils and a tolerance and restraint on the part of Church Meetings. These have not, of course, always been in evidence. This flexible and sensitive kind of relationship between local and wider church is an offering to the ecumenical pilgrimage.

There has, however, also been some confusion about where authority rests in particular matters. The January 1997 meeting of the Mission Council discussed a paper on the exercise of authority in the United Reformed Church and asked for more work to be done. The United Reformed Church would welcome an ecumenical working group on this.

Although we remain convinced that authority must be exercised in councils consisting of ministers and elders and members, the term *collegial leadership* needs clarification. It could mean an elders' meeting as well as the moderators' meeting. Further work needs to be done between the churches on collegial leadership and its relationship to oversight ministry.

Passing on the Faith

The United Reformed Church is called, with all the other churches, to pass on the faith of the Gospel from generation to generation. It fully recognises that *God's mission is greater than any individual church can grasp*. (CTBO A.33) and it believes that division has *made it impossible for Christians fully to know, experience and communicate the life of the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church*. (Basis of Union A.7)

A major stumbling block to that mutual acceptance of ministry and eucharistic sharing so necessary to our growing together is our different understandings of how to safeguard the handing on of the faith. The United Reformed Church therefore welcomes the call to the Church of England and the Free Churches (in CTBO 7.9) to consider the renewed understanding of apostolicity to be found in the Porvoo Common Statement. However, it believes the understanding set out in the report of the 1984 Anglican - Reformed Dialogue *God's Reign and our Unity*, and in the more recent Leuenberg discussion document on *The Church of Jesus Christ* should also be part of any further work.

In addition, the United Reformed Church is also committed, with partner churches in Wales and in Scotland, to exploring alternative routes to a mutual acceptance of each other's apostolicity.

Conclusion

The United Reformed Church gives thanks to God for the many ways in which it has been enriched, enabled and inspired by the churches who are its fellow pilgrims on the way to the Kingdom. It also acknowledges, with penitence, that it may have contributed to continuing division through complacency, prejudice, or impatience. It believes the *Called to be One* process is calling the United Reformed Church to the renewal of its life at every level, whether in Local Ecumenical Partnerships or not, with various partners, through all kinds of ecumenical bodies, so that it may faithfully be 'part of what God is doing to make his people one'. (Basis of Union para.8)



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

D

Multi-Racial, Multi Cultural Development Worker in the United Reformed Church

Mission Council appoints the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper to the post of multi-racial, multi-cultural development worker for a period of three years from (approximately) 1 July 1997.

The group which was appointed to prepare for this post, and which now will become the management group, consists of Peter Brain (Church & Society), Sandra Ackroyd, John Macauley (Equal Opportunities), Sheila Maxey (Overseas Exchange Sub-Committee), Simon Walkling (Equal Opportunities) and John Waller (Convener).

A total of 11 completed applications was considered and 3 candidates were shortlisted and interviewed. It is the unanimous view of the group that the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper should be appointed to the post. She is willing to accept the appointment.

Marjorie Lewis-Cooper was ordained in 1980 as a minister in the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. After service in a local pastorate, she worked as a programme officer with the Caribbean Conference of Churches (1983-1987), as project officer for Jamaica for Oxfam UK (1987-92), and is currently the General Secretary of the Jamaica Council of Churches.

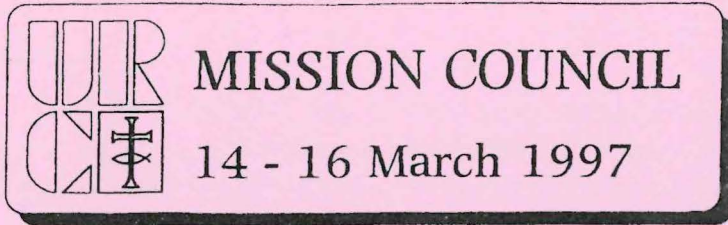
She has a degree in theology from the University of the West Indies and is currently preparing a thesis for a Master of Philosophy degree.

Marjorie Lewis-Cooper has a particular interest in feminism, development, the family and the relationship between religion and culture.

Those who interviewed her were impressed by her ability to communicate, her obvious grasp of the information she had been given beforehand, and the remarkable breadth of her interests. It is not likely always to be comfortable having her working with us but we have no doubt of her being able to work creatively and positively with all groups within the United Reformed Church.

With a deep sense of thankfulness to God for the high quality of those who were offered to us for this post, the group commends the name of the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper.

John Waller
26 February 1997



E

FOR DISCUSSION AND FORWARDING
TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

RPAG Report to Mission Council - March 1997

With the arrival of some new members in the autumn of 1996 RPAG has reconsidered its overall remit. In doing so it has sought firstly to discharge its duties in relation to the budget for 1998. This has been prepared and submitted by the Finance Department with the full support of RPAG. The full budget is not discussed here. However, the assumptions underlying the 1998 budget relating to the two most significant items are noted below.

- Ministerial numbers: This has been a major source of inaccuracy over the last two years and of gross (7%) variation of actual expenditure over budgetary expectations in 1996.

The evaluation for 1998 is based on rational analysis together with an equal measure of past empirical experience. These lead to the expectation that there will be 645 full-time equivalent stipendiary ministers in December 1998 compared to 665 at the end of 1996. One thing is certain, that this projection will be wrong but it is the best available.

- Ministerial stipends: RPAG has accepted the recommendation of the MoM Sub-Committee for an increase of 4.17% in stipends (being RPI + 1.5%) for 1998. In arriving at this conclusion RPAG took into account the observations and outcomes of the last full scale review of ministerial stipends which resulted in the substantial increases introduced in 1992 and 1993. It also took into account the concern expressed by two provinces that increases of this level called for a greater increase in the giving of individual church members due to falling members of members. The MoM is to undertake a full review of stipends through a bench marking exercise.

The requirements of all budget holders have been reviewed by the Chief Accountant. As RPAG went through the autumnal consultations about ministry and finance it became very clear that addressing the individual elements of the church's life was increasingly unsatisfactory. As a result, RPAG felt that simply to update the financial elements of the five year plan was an equally unsatisfactory way forward. RPAG has begun to draw together some of the different strands of a complex debate. These include an examination of the effect of apparent continuing decline in church membership set against the desire to keep church buildings open and the feeling that church members generally look for a 'personal chaplain' type of ministry. The question of what ministers are for comes into the frame very quickly. The implications for the way we train ministers (and where and what for) consequently becomes important. There is a need to address the issue of the need to modify the expectations congregations have about ministry. In fact, there is a need for significantly enhanced communication with congregations about the cost of ministry in personnel and financial terms. From this comes And this is just the tip of the iceberg!

**Draft budget for 1998 with, for comparison,
results and estimates for 1996 and 1997**

| | Actual 1996 £'000 | Budget 1996 £'000 | Estimate 1997 £'000 | Budget 1998 £'000 |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| INCOME | | | | |
| INVESTMENT INCOME | | | | |
| Dividends | 304 | 324 | 158 | 144 |
| Income from Ecumenical fund | | | 50 | 50 |
| Interest | 320 | 171 | 260 | 250 |
| | 624 | 495 | 468 | 444 |
| GRANTS | | | | |
| Memorial Hall Trust | 448 | 440 | 448 | 448 |
| New College London Trust | 225 | 216 | 225 | 225 |
| Deed of Covenant - URC insurance Company Ltd | 78 | 37 | 75 | 78 |
| Department of Education | 58 | 58 | 61 | 63 |
| CWM toward cost of multi racial development worker | | | 6 | 8 |
| | 809 | 751 | 815 | 822 |
| MINISTRY AND MISSION CONTRIBUTIONS | 16,462 | 16,464 | 16,807 | 16,973 |
| LEGACIES AND MAJOR DONATIONS | 74 | | 50 | 50 |
| OTHER INCOME | | | | |
| Sundry income | 87 | 63 | 24 | 25 |
| Provincial contributions to the YLTO/YCWT programme | 152 | 88 | 194 | 202 |
| | 239 | 151 | 218 | 227 |
| TOTAL INCOME | 18,206 | 17,851 | 18,392 | 18,516 |
| (SURPLUS)/DEFICIT IN YEAR | 1,780 | 574 | (325) | 16 |



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

F

Decision sought on
paragraphs 3,4,7.

Report of the Mission Council Advisory Group

1. Theological reflectors. The Revd Dr John Clark of the Scottish Congregational Church has agreed to be the reflector at our meeting in October.

2. Theological grouping. MCAG discussed whether or not this matter should be on Mission Council agenda. It concluded that the discussion begun by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee in October would be better allowed to take its natural course within the life of our Church. The matter therefore does not appear as an agenda item.

3. The New Community Church, Halstead. The Eastern Province gave advance notice that its Synod was likely to ask the Mission Council to act on behalf of the General Assembly and receive this new church into the United Reformed Church. So far the reception of new churches has only taken place at Assembly. Because the circumstances surrounding the formation of this particular church are unusual and complicated, the Province has been asked to provide a background paper (Paper M) and the legal adviser has been asked to give his advice to the Council. If the Synod on 8 March does resolve to ask us to receive this local church we will need to have three aspects particularly in mind:

Are we convinced a decision is needed before General Assembly?

Is the case advanced for receiving this particular church satisfactory?

Have any necessary legal and constitutional questions been answered?

The Advisory Group was satisfied that there was a prima facie case for Mission Council considering this matter.

4. Membership of AGOGAL. In January 1996 Mission Council revised and agreed a paper concerning the Advisory Group on Grants and Loans. In January 1997 it received another paper which confirmed the membership of the Group. Both papers omitted the office of Financial Secretary from the list of members, even though the present holder of that office has been a valued member ever since the Group was formed. MCAG believes (with considerable apologies to Clem Frank!) that Mission Council will wish to resolve to add the office of Financial Secretary to the list of members of AGOGAL.

5. Advocacy and Stewardship Group. This Group gave notice of two proposals which it wished to present to Mission Council. These appear on the agenda. In regard to the suggestion that the first Sunday in October should be a Dedication Sunday in the United Reformed Church, MCAG will recommend that this should be referred to the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee in the first instance.

Cont/d.....

6. Elections. It is suggested that we change the timing of elections, so that they take place in March. This has two advantages. If new members take office as from the date of General Assembly, they can share in preparation for the October Mission Council. Secondly, an October Council always contains a number of first-timers whereas the electorate in March is experienced and knowledgeable.

There are three vacancies in 1997. Angela Hughes and Margaret McKay cease to be Provincial representatives and so leave the Mission Council Advisory Group. Their successors will serve until 2001 or until they cease to be members of Mission Council, whichever is the sooner. John Maitland finishes his term on the Staffing Advisory Group. His successor does not have to be a member of Mission Council and will serve until 2001.

7. Dates of Future Meetings. The dates and places of meetings to the end of 1999 is submitted. MCAG is aware that no residential meetings are planned on the Western side of the country and invites the suggestion of any suitable venues:

| | | |
|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <u>1997</u> | 30 September - 2 October | High Leigh, Hoddesdon |
| <u>1998</u> | 24 January | Arthur Rank Centre |
| | 13-15 March | All Saints Pastoral Centre, St Albans |
| | 5-7 October | Swanwick |
| <u>1999</u> | 23 January | Arthur Rank Centre (provisional) |
| | 13-15 March | All Saints Pastoral Centre, St Albans |
| | 1-3 October | Swanwick |

John Waller
28 February 1997

For discussion and decision

MISSION COUNCIL TASK GROUP ON OVERSIGHT MINISTRIES

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Moderators stand in a unique position, between the national church and the local congregations. From this standpoint they are able to speak with a prophetic voice, calling the whole church to its mission and purpose, and challenging our parochialism by reminding us of the larger picture behind the local decisions we make. The URC needs this gift of prophetic leadership. We therefore request the church to give serious and urgent consideration to the following issues:

1. The conciliar form of church government with its theological underpinning in the ministry of the whole people of God is central to our heritage and is one of the treasures the URC brings to ecumenical relationships. It cannot be denied, however, that councils also have limitations, and that these limitations have hindered us in our mission. Sometimes oversight requires a "face" and a personal voice in order to be effective.
2. We must not allow fear or an overbearing loyalty to the past to blind us to the range of possibilities God sets before us today. Drawing upon its reformation insight, but allowing this to be informed by its ecumenical experience, the URC should strive to create a model of episcopate, personal, collegial and communal, which is liberating and empowering for the church: faithful to the past but designed to meet the challenges of the present and the future. This vision should be clearly expressed as a matter of urgency at this stage of our ecumenical pilgrimage.
3. The moderators should be affirmed in their role as church leaders in partnership with ecumenical colleagues, and we should make a positive effort to release them from some of their present workload to enable them to support and develop ecumenical ventures and relationships. This may call for delegation of some tasks to specific persons, whose role would be recognized by the province.
4. The councils of the church could be more effective in their oversight. We would particularly recommend a re-examination of the pastoral role of the district council in its care for both ministers and churches and of the support provinces could give to districts in their oversight role, as too much of this responsibility currently falls to the moderator alone.

Rev. Rhona Jones (Convener)
Rev. Roberta Rominger (Secretary)
Rev. Gethin Abraham-Williams
Rev. Bill Gathercole
Mr. Geoffrey Lawrence

REPORT TO MISSION COUNCIL
TASK GROUP ON OVERSIGHT MINISTRIES
MARCH 1997

1. Background

1.1 In their report to the 1995 General Assembly, the Patterns of Ministry Working Party identified the need for a review of the oversight ministry exercised by URC provincial moderators.

Oversight is a significant feature of the church's ministry, and in some traditions it is an integral part of a three-fold pattern of ministry incorporating bishops, priests and deacons. Clearly, for us, oversight is shared between the councils of the church and their officers. It is most clearly focussed in the work of the Moderators of provincial synods. The responsibilities of the Moderators have grown and developed...but the need for their ministry has become increasingly accepted. We think it is time to review and reflect on the role of the Provincial Moderators in relation to the workload, expectations and the exercise of oversight generally.

1995 Reports to General Assembly, p. 126, para 5.4

1.2 Assembly agreed, resolving:

Assembly asks Mission Council to carry out a review of our present understanding and practice of oversight, and in particular to consider the work and responsibilities of moderators of provincial synods, keeping the ecumenical context in mind. (Res. 50)

1.3 Mission Council subsequently voted to appoint a Task Group of five members, including a provincial moderator and someone with district experience, to report to Mission Council in 1997. The Task Group was appointed by the Moderator of the URC and comprised the Revs. Rhona Jones (Convener), Roberta Rominger (Secretary), Gethin Abraham-Williams, Bill Gathercole, and Mr. Geoffrey Lawrence.

1.4 The Task Group met four times between October 1996 and January 1997. Time was not adequate to enable us to undertake the comprehensive review requested by Assembly. We noted that a similar study published by the Baptist Union in November 1996 entitled Transforming Superintendency was the culmination of a 30-month process including nationwide consultation with people at every level of church life. The Group also questioned whether its members represented the breadth of competencies (biblical, theological, historical, experiential) required for such a review. Therefore, on the agreement of the Deputy General Secretary, we defined our task as a preliminary one:

- a) the identification of the primary issues needing to be addressed by the URC in reference to the oversight role of provincial moderators, and
- b) the gathering of work which has already been done on these issues.

1.5 The Group took as its starting point the reflections of the Patterns of Ministry Working Party, who identified various areas of concern:

- a) URC understanding and embodiment of the traditional three-fold pattern of the ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, and the place of moderators within this pattern;
- b) the relationship between moderators and district councils in their shared responsibility for the oversight of ministry and local churches;
- c) changes since 1972 in the expectations placed upon moderators, in light of the maturing of the URC, the growth of ecumenical involvement at the regional level, and changes in the culture at large;
- d) the tensions that have been noted between the moderators' pastoral, representational and prophetic roles (mission vs. maintenance,

- discipline vs. pastoral care);
e) the evolving understanding of oversight amongst our partner churches ecumenically.

1.6 We note with appreciation and concern the work done over the past few years on these and related issues. In January 1994 Mission Council received the report of a Working Party on "Authority in the URC", with theological reflection and a reaffirmation of the conciliar nature of authority in the URC, as spelled out in the Basis of Union. In April 1994, a Working Party on "The Nature of 'Oversight' of Provincial Moderators and District Councils" brought a report to Mission Council, examining key biblical texts and offering insight and recommendations on how districts and moderators could be more effective in the oversight responsibility they share. The 1994 General Assembly asked the Mission Council Advisory Group to review the "Guidance for Provincial Moderator Review Groups" adopted in 1986. Their report was submitted to Mission Council for discussion in January 1995. In January 1996 Mission Council considered a paper by the Deputy General Secretary on the theme of "Authority".

1.7 Much of this work is of the highest quality, with good insights and strong recommendations to the wider church. Why was yet another Task Group appointed to cover the same ground? We are in danger of commissioning group after group to identify issues without ever undertaking the substantive work that these groups urge upon us. Our Group feels that what is needed is a serious review of our beliefs and practice, conducted by persons of significant competence, to enable the URC to move into the 21st century with new clarity. At this 25th anniversary juncture, it is right that the URC should reflect thoroughly and creatively on the strengths and weaknesses of conciliar forms of oversight, the experience of personal oversight ministry as it has evolved in the role of the provincial moderator, and the legitimate challenges posed by our ecumenical partners and critics. We should be prepared in this reflection to be open to the possibility of new patterns of oversight, informed by tradition with all its wealth of insight, but guided by a sense of mission that acknowledges our need for prophetic leadership. We note the URC's submission to Called to Be One:

The commitment of the churches to more visible unity is tested by their willingness to address obstacles and to submit to continual reformation.

'We cannot determine what that unity will be like, but we believe it requires a journeying (Abraham-like) into the unknown.' Called to Be One p. 22 para. 4.8

2. Introduction: Changes in the Moderator's Role since 1972

2.1 The moderator is minister to the whole church: to local congregations, districts, province, and ministers, and with a provincial and national responsibility for vision, strategy, mission and resources. The job has grown as the vision has grown, as strategy has become more urgent, and as resources have become more scarce. Professional omni-competence is assumed in our moderators, despite the fact that we offer them no specific training for the job and very little orientation.

2.2 Provincial staff levels have also grown. In 1972 it would have been usual for the moderator to be the only full-time person working at provincial level, with perhaps some secretarial support. Now s/he works alongside Youth Leadership Training Officers/Youth and Children's Work Trainers, training officers, development officers, mission enablers and others. Each province has a different sort of team operating at provincial level, and there are also different expectations of the moderator's role. In some provinces s/he is clearly the line manager for other staff; in others, s/he is a team member; in still others, the provincial team is seen as working alongside the moderator without his/her particular oversight or direct involvement.

2.3 The moderator's ecumenical brief has grown tremendously since 1972. Most moderators now relate to several intermediate bodies, and LEP's also consume great amounts of time and energy. There are relationships with other church leaders to be fostered, and ecumenical consultation is expected to a far greater degree in matters of appointment and regional

strategy. The moderators are in the front line in expressing the URC's commitment to ecumenical partnership. Some of the work can be delegated, but the moderator must be personally in touch with all of it so as to be able to speak and act effectively for the URC at intermediate level.

2.4 These changes have resulted in ever-increasing complexity in the ministry exercised by the moderators, creating great pressures upon the moderators in their work and tensions for the church in its expectations.

3. Defining the Moderator's Role: Moderator as Representative

3.1 The provincial moderator stands in a unique position within the URC, combining wide-ranging knowledge of local URC life within one region of the country and deep involvement in the national life of the church. From this perspective, moderators are able to speak of the local to the national and of the national to the local. This perspective and voice is of such value to the life of the church at all levels that we would wish to identify it as the primary responsibility of the moderators. All expectations currently brought to the role of the moderator should be weighed against this central principle. If that "trans-local" dimension is not present, someone else should probably be doing the job.

3.2 As moderators represent the national to the local, they become the "face" of the national church within a regional or local situation, both denominationally and ecumenically. Moderators are perceived as representatives of the wider church when they preside at ordinations or inductions. The Basis of Union states that moderators are representing the district council when they function in this way; we would question whether this is an adequate description of what is happening. When a new bishop is installed or an LEP is inaugurated, the URC people in the congregation see the moderator on the platform alongside the Anglican and Roman Catholic Bishops, Methodist Chairman and Baptist Superintendent, and say, "Our person is there "

3.3 Within a local or regional context, the moderator represents the URC in a way no one else can. Whatever our ecclesiology may say, s/he is recognised by the other church leaders as a key person to contact if one wishes to do business. This can place heavy burdens upon a moderator whose province boundaries encompass several Intermediate Bodies. Provincial and district ecumenical officers play a critical role in seeing that the moderator is freed from the day-to-day burden of ecumenical administration in order to be available in a representative capacity, and provinces and districts need to ensure that this support is in place.

3.4 Moderators come to ecumenical relations as persons in their own right. Church Leaders' Covenants are made between individuals, though usually with reference to districts, provinces and local URC ministers. This is essentially a personal act, but the church recognises a representational dimension in it: the expectation is that successive moderators will be prepared to share in these covenants.

3.5 The moderator is appointed by General Assembly. The province to which s/he is inducted will have been involved in the appointment process, but it is not the province which inducts. The president of the induction, normally the Moderator of Assembly, represents the national church. This underlines the degree of independence which we ask the provincial moderator to bring to his/her local and regional ministry. We need him/her to interpret national policy and to help implement it at local/regional level. We expect the moderator's voice to be prophetic in its challenge to our local isolationism. Sometimes the moderator shoulders the burden of people's hostility against the wider church and its decisions. The moderator exercises a pastoral ministry in speaking to this hostility and working to transform it.

3.6 By tradition we are wary of particular forms of personal oversight, with good historical reason. But there are circumstances in which this caution hinders our life as a church. There are limitations to the conciliar form of church government which we urgently need to

acknowledge. Our ecumenical partners challenge us in our suspicion of leadership: we have a tendency to set up leaders and then cut them down to size, or to define their roles in such diffuse ways as to render them ineffectual. In the process we disable qualities of leadership which are one of the gifts of the Spirit to the Church.

3.7 Our instinctive caution against personal ministries of leadership assumes that the models of the past are the only models possible, which is clearly untrue. In recent years we have seen our Roman Catholic and Anglican brothers and sisters embrace a style of episcopacy which is increasingly collaborative. We urge the URC to take note of this breadth of possibility in models of personal oversight and to develop a model which reflects uniquely Reformed insights.

3.8 The moderator's function in introducing available ministers to vacant churches is a positive experience in general. It is positive because the moderator is able in his/her representative role to bring objectivity and wide experience, thus enabling individuals and churches to sharpen their self-perception.

3.9 The Moderators' Meeting is not a council of the church and the moderators themselves have strongly resisted the temptation to issue joint statements which might influence the decisions taken by the church. However, the annual report presented by the moderators to Assembly is always read with great interest and attention. We would challenge the URC to look again at the role of the Moderators' Meeting. It is a tremendous resource of insight and perspective: twelve people who between them know every local church and every minister of the URC. This is a collective voice that deserves to be allowed to speak.

3.10 The moderators can also represent the church collectively, as on their periodic study tours abroad. Meeting with Christians in other parts of the world, they share URC concern and experience and then bring their learnings back for the benefit of the whole church.

4. Defining the Moderator's Role: Moderator as Colleague

4.1 URC moderators are part of a collegial structure of partnership, with personal ministry functioning alongside the ministry of the church's councils. Although it is not always easy for us to define where responsibility for oversight lies in particular situations of need, we would affirm this sharing of ministry. We note the URC's comments in Called to Be One concerning episcopate:

The United Reformed Church responds that personal oversight and authority need to be rooted in an understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God and the authority of such individuals has to be exercised within the councils of the church.

Called to Be One p. 25 para. 4.19

4.2 The moderator has responsibility for vision, strategy, mission and resources. S/he presides at the Provincial Synod and acts as consultant to the province committees in their work. This consultancy role is important: both provinces and districts have responsibility for tasks which arise only occasionally, and they need advice as to procedures and examples of good practice which the moderator, with his/her wider perspective, experience and network of contacts, can provide. The moderator also works as a colleague alongside provincial training officers, YLTO's/YCWT's, development officers, mission enablers, etc. The Task Group notes that in the Basis of Union 1972 the title used for moderator was "moderator of synod". We do not believe that this adequately describes the role of the moderator, which is now much wider. Common usage refers to the "provincial moderator", which is a more suitable title.

4.3 Significant work has already been done on the question of the relationship between the moderators and the district councils (see April 1994 report to Mission Council, "The Nature of 'Oversight' of Provincial Moderators and District Councils"). District councils are responsible for

the mission of the church within a given area and the oversight of local churches and ministers. The moderator's responsibility is for the good of the church as a whole: mission in its broadest sense, ministers, and local congregations. This leads inevitably to an overlap of oversight responsibility. We do not see this as a weakness, but potentially as one of our greatest strengths. Trusting in the leadership abilities of our moderators and the wisdom of our councils, we believe that the result is a creative partnership in which each works to safeguard an appropriate balance of responsibility, for the good of ministers and churches alike.

4.3.1 We note that the Baptist report Transforming Superintendency, in exploring the relationship between Associations and Area Superintendents, attributes responsibility for local congregations to the Association and pastoral care of the ministers to the Superintendent. The Task Group felt that such a separation in oversight creates an unfortunate dichotomy between the interests of the local church and the interests of the minister, with potential for adversarial confrontation. A church in dispute with its minister could become an Association in dispute with its Superintendent, with no one available to mediate between them. (We note that similar concerns are being expressed in Baptist circles.) In our situation, a church in dispute with its minister could become a district in dispute with the moderator, undermining the moderator's role as minister to all concerned.

4.3.2 The moderator typically works alongside the district pastoral committee in its ministry of oversight, acting as a partner and resource to strengthen that ministry. S/he brings wider experience of the church to inform the local committee in its work and is available to step in as a representative of the wider church whenever such a presence is helpful. The moderator's effectiveness in caring for the local churches and ministers depends upon his/her being one step removed from the day-to-day matters of administrative oversight. We would remind districts that the moderator's role is that of prophet, not chaplain.

4.3.3 The moderator's pastoral role within a district comes into play most noticeably in situations where confidentiality is a major concern. When it is not appropriate for a problem to come to the attention of a committee, it is often the moderator who receives the call for help.

4.3.4 The province can offer support to the district council in its oversight of ministers and churches, not only through the person of the moderator, but also through provincial committees. We urge the church to reassess the role of the province in the oversight and support of its districts, particularly when a mediator is needed in situations of dispute. Some disputes are best addressed by the moderator; in other situations a conciliar response is more appropriate than a personal response.

4.4 One frequently quoted definition of the moderator's role is that the moderator is "minister to the ministers" within the province. The Task Group resists this chaplaincy definition, while at the same time recognising the moderator's ability to respond in situations of pastoral need where confidentiality is critical (4.3.3.) Care for ministers is the Achilles' Heel of the whole Church. We would ask Mission Council to consider this carefully, arguing strongly that the care of the ministers is not the primary responsibility of a moderator. Delegating responsibility for the care of ministers to the moderators alone underestimates the need of the ministers for pastoral care and overestimates the ability of one person within the province to give it.

4.5 Moderators are seen as the primary providers of pastoral care to retired ministers and their spouses or widows. The moderator visits as the face of the wider church expressing its ongoing appreciation and care. Although we are aware of how much this ministry is valued by those who receive it, we believe that it should not be the sole concern of the moderator.

4.5.1 The Task Group noted that the Baptist report places responsibility for the pastoral care of retired ministers/widows in the hands of the local church. However, not all retired URC ministers/widows are members of URC congregations. There are also situations where tensions arise between a retired minister within a congregation and its serving minister. It is better, therefore, for this responsibility to lie at district level, and for it to be seen as the

responsibility of the district. The moderator, through his/her participation in district pastoral committees, can share in this work as appropriate.

4.5.2 Moderators function as welfare officers for ministers and their families, advising them of support to which they may be entitled and providing information to various national officers. This work can be highly confidential and could not easily be devolved to any other district or province officer.

4.6 Individuals who feel they may be called to ordained ministry submit their sense of call to the testing of the wider church through its various councils and committees: church meeting, district council, national assessment panel and provincial synod. At an early stage in the process they also seek the advice and guidance of the moderator. The moderator serves church and candidate alike when, through wisdom and experience, s/he helps to discern the shape and authenticity of a call.

4.7 Some moderators are aware of a responsibility to encourage ministry development among individuals within their provinces. They take it upon themselves to be alert for signs of particular gifts of leadership and to endeavour to foster those gifts for the good of the whole church. The importance of this task cannot be overestimated, and the moderators, with their knowledge both of local people and wider need, are well-placed to perform it. However, it is an "extra", beyond the scope of their day-to-day responsibilities, with little support from outside, and thus depends upon the personal commitment of an individual moderator for the future of the church.

5. The Appointment and Care of Moderators

5.1 Not least among the issues of pastoral care of ministers is the care of the moderators themselves. The General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, both former moderators, have undertaken annual visits to the moderators, and this has been much welcomed. The Moderators' Meeting can also provide a certain amount of support, as can the more informal sharing which takes place on the moderators' joint study tours. Support for the moderators' spouses is an area which remains to be addressed. The moderator's spouse can often feel particularly isolated in his/her role. Most moderators have support groups, and this should be encouraged, but the care of the moderators and their spouses remains an ongoing issue.

5.2 Although it is widely assumed that the maximum term a moderator may serve is twelve years (seven plus five), the URC has never taken a policy decision to limit the number of times a moderator may be reappointed. A paper submitted by the General Secretary to Mission Council in 1994, "Moderators of Synods: Length of Service", outlines the case for and against such limitation. We have studied the arguments, and it is our view that a twelve year limit (with flexibility for those near retirement age) would be beneficial both to moderators and to the church. Twelve years has become our practice, if not our formal policy, because in most cases, given the pressures of the job, twelve years is enough. A twelve year limit would free the church to appoint younger moderators, with clear expectations that after a period as moderator, they would go on to other forms of ministry. It would allow new people with fresh ideas and energy to offer their service to the church in this most important role.

5.3 Evidence shows that care of moderators after they have completed their term of service is also important. We note that service as a moderator can be followed by a different kind of ministry. This needs to be handled sensitively, and we urge Mission Council to consider this carefully along with the value of continuing to use the gifts and experience of former moderators, where appropriate.

5.4 At present the General Secretary arranges a programme of orientation and training for new moderators. We encourage the church to fund an adequate transition period to aid this induction process.

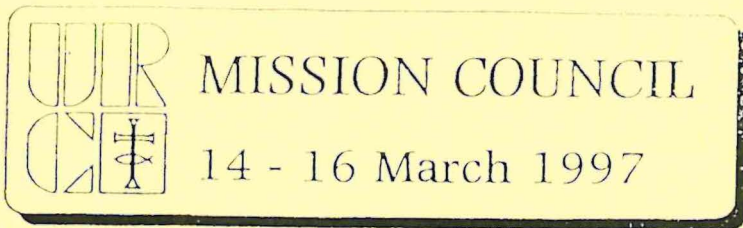
6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Moderators stand in a unique position, between the national church and the local congregations. From this standpoint they are able to speak with a prophetic voice, calling the whole church to its mission and purpose, and challenging our parochialism by reminding us of the larger picture behind the local decisions we make. The URC needs this gift of prophetic leadership. We therefore request the church to give serious and urgent consideration to the following issues:

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2. We must not allow fear or an overbearing loyalty to the past to blind us to the range of possibilities God sets before us today. Drawing upon its reformation insight, but allowing this to be informed by its ecumenical experience, the URC should strive to create a model of episcopate, personal, collegial and communal, which is liberating and empowering for the church: faithful to the past but designed to meet the challenges of the present and the future. This vision should be clearly expressed as a matter of urgency at this stage of our ecumenical pilgrimage.
3. The moderators should be affirmed in their role as church leaders in partnership with ecumenical colleagues, and we should make a positive effort to release them from some of their present workload to enable them to support and develop ecumenical ventures and relationships. This may call for delegation of some tasks to specific persons, whose role would be recognized by the province.
4. The councils of the church could be given off-peak duties to carry out. We would particularly recommend a re-examination of the pastoral role of the district council in its care for both ministers and churches and of the support provinces could give to districts in their oversight role, as too much of this responsibility currently falls to the moderator alone.

19 February, 1997

Rev. Rhona Jones (Convener)
Rev. Roberta Rominger (Secretary)
Rev. Gethin Abraham-Williams
Rev. Bill Gathercole
Mr. Geoffrey Lawrence



H

For discussion and decision

LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPOSALS

THE NEED

- 1.1 The Patterns of Ministry report to Assembly in 1995 recognised "*the need for effective, continuous and identifiable local leadership within each congregation*" and suggested this be rooted in the eldership. However, a resolution proposing the identification of **moderating elders** was not accepted by the Assembly.
- 1.2 It was clear that there continued to be a need and desire for local leadership in congregations to assist them in their mission to the world. This led Assembly to agree that

In view of the desire of many churches to have their own identifiable congregational leader and the much larger number of congregations than ministers, Assembly requests Mission Council to explore possible new forms of congregational leadership accredited by District Council and accountable to District Council and to bring proposals to a future Assembly.

Assembly encourages District Councils in consultations with Synods and local churches to explore the deployment of all ministry, especially Stipendiary Ministers, and the development of a variety of styles of ministry in ways which will stimulate the life of the Church, be ecumenically responsible, and enable more effective missionary engagement.

2 THE PROCESS

- 2.1 The Mission Council Advisory Group invited the Discipleship & Witness Committee to take forward this Assembly resolution. The committee based its work on the 'Patterns of Ministry' Report, in particular its section on the theology of ministry (Appendix A) and its work on the Mission Context (section 2) and Shaping and Using Ministry for Mission (section 3). It also recognized that Assembly had received "*the statement on Presidency at the Sacraments set out in para 5.1 of the [Patterns of Ministry] report, as expressing the mind of the church at this present time*". The committee consulted those involved in preparing the Patterns of Ministry Report, the Provincial Moderators and some of those exercising a local leadership in different parts of the country. A draft report was then widely circulated for comments, and a consultation for representatives of Provinces was held in January 1997.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?

Because we believe that:

- the ministry of Christ is exercised by the whole people of God
- there are men and women in our churches with gifts of ministry and skill of leadership which ought to be used alongside ministers so that the whole work of God can be more fully exercised and the ministry of the whole church be more effective
- God is using this crisis [of shortage of ministers] as an opportunity for us to put into practice what we really believe about the nature of the church
- we will continue to need more ministers of the Word and Sacraments, both stipendiary and non-stipendiary

Mersey Province "Developing Elders and Others for Local Ministry"

3. RECOMMENDATION FOR DEVELOPING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

3.1 Encouragement of innovation within the Church

3.1.1 Since 1995, in the absence of any Assembly guidelines, several Provinces have been considering a provincial strategy for developing local leadership and others have encouraged the development of a variety of patterns to meet local situations. It is also clear that new patterns of ministry are developing in which the ordained minister is seen increasingly as a resource and stimulator of a ministry team of elders and members serving one or more congregations.

3.1.2 The factors which have led to this variety of developments so far include:

- * a continued exploration of the United Reformed Church's understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God
- * the possibility of developing ministry teams to use the gifts of the elders and members
- * the desire for identifiable local leadership in many congregations
- * the pressure resulting from there being fewer stipendiary ministers for basically the same number of churches.

3.1.3 Within the United Reformed Church local churches vary greatly and each has its own needs and opportunities, and therefore differing requirements for leadership. It seems wise to have a period of experimenting and learning about local leadership within a nationally agreed framework. This would mean exercising local leadership in ways which

- * are flexible and varied
- * enhance the gifts in the congregation
- * are part of the eldership of the local church
- * are collaborative, almost invariably under the leadership of a minister (in some areas ecumenically)
- * are within a national framework which allows local leadership to be developed to suit local needs, and gifts, and allows experimentation.
- * are recognized by and responsible to the District Council and for an agreed period of time.

3.2 Framework

3.2.1 What is proposed, therefore, is a **Framework** (details are given on page 4) which will facilitate a period of piloting and learning. This is amplified in Guidelines on pages 5 - 8. The Framework

- * is deliberately open-ended and provisional
- * is consistent with the Reformed understanding of leadership and the United Reformed Church's understanding of eldership, ordination and ministry set out in the "Patterns of Ministry" Report, and in particular is in line with the statement on Lay Presidency in the Report which was adopted by Assembly
- * allows the patterns of local leadership emerging in one place to be recognized and acceptable in other parts of the United Reformed Church, thus avoiding a situation in which experiments in one province may seem to conflict with experiments in other Provinces
- * cooperates with our ecumenical partners and is a United Reformed Church contribution to ecumenical discussion about ministry.

In due course it may be wise to move towards greater uniformity, but not until further experience has been gained.

3.3 Recognition

3.3.1 It is important that those who are appointed by District Councils to exercise local leadership should be acknowledged, after agreement on the appointment and job description, at a Service of Recognition conducted by the District Council. As no single title is suggested for those exercising local leadership, it is recommended that the same title for the Service of Recognition be used throughout the United Reformed Church.

3.4 Training

- 3.4.1 An essential element in the proposals is that on-going training should be a requirement.
- 3.4.2 It is recommended that training should:
- be modular, giving education, skills and encouragement
 - not take individuals away from exercising local leadership
 - relate to the needs and experience of the individual and take account of past training
 - relate to the particular responsibilities being undertaken
 - be in a group context to develop a collaborative style of leadership, providing mutual encouragement and support
 - wherever possible use existing resources.
- 3.4.3 Because these proposals emphasize experimenting and learning, it is not proposed that there should be national accreditation or a nationally prescribed training course at this stage, but it is anticipated that Provinces will share experience in order to learn from one another.
- 3.4.4 If a person is appointed to exercise local leadership in an area in which there are already training courses, s/he should be encouraged to take the relevant course; eg the appropriate on-going training for a person giving leadership in worship is likely to be (parts of) a lay preachers course. This on-going training may provide some people with a base from which to go on to further training.
- 3.4.5 Discussions continue with the Training Committee about how best to use the existing training resources, eg "Training for Learning and Serving Course", and the Manchester Christian Institute's "Faith in Living" Course. As part of Mersey Province's "Developing Lay Leadership", a twenty session introductory course is being prepared by the Province and the Manchester Christian Institute.

4.

THE VISION

- 4.1 The Discipleship & Witness Committee believes that good local leadership is one of the God-given ways of enabling members of local churches to grow in faith and of encouraging them to witness to and serve Christ in their daily living. When local leadership is effective the local church becomes an outgoing community, able to face up to the challenges before it. In Ephesians, Paul makes clear that the gifts the ascended Christ gives his people are "to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ . . . so we shall become mature people growing up in every way into Christ . . . so the whole body grows and builds itself up through love." (4:12f, 15f)
- 4.2. If what follows seems to focus on procedures rather than vision, it is because the Discipleship & Witness Committee believes that properly established local leadership can be of enormous benefit to the mission of the local church, and that appropriate guidelines will enable local leadership to be set up and exercised to greatest effect.

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 fo the United Reformed Church.

Basis of Union (19)

5.

THE FRAMEWORK

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS IN LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Affirming the United Reformed Church's commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God, Assembly determines that local church leadership will be exercised:

- 1 in conformity with the Basis of Union
- 2 according to needs identified by Church Meeting and District Council
- 3 by those who have been recognized and appointed by the local church and the District Council
- 4 for an agreed period of service, according to a clearly defined Agreement and Job Description, approved by all parties
- 5 under the authority of the District Council which, in consultation with the province, is ultimately responsible for all aspects of local leadership including training
- 6 with a title chosen in relation to the work being undertaken
- 7 in partnership with those exercising ordained ministry
- 8 rooted in the local eldership, and in collaboration with others exercising lay ministries in the local church
- 9 by those who have made a commitment to take part in in-service training
- 10 by those who have been affirmed in a Service of Recognition conducted by the District Council.

6. GUIDELINES FOR DISTRICTS AND LOCAL CHURCHES

6.1 Purpose

Because the United Reformed Church is encouraging innovation in local leadership within a nationally agreed Framework, it is important that District Councils follow the Framework, beginning by defining the role for local leadership in each situation.

6.2 Ministry Teams

It is clear from the existing experiences of local leadership in various forms that it is healthiest and most effective when exercised within a team. There should always be at least one ordained minister within a team (in some cases the 'team' may be one ordained minister and the person exercising local ministry'). The ordained minister will have overall pastoral responsibility for the team and the churches covered by them.

6.3 Discernment

The need for local leadership is discerned in the context of a District Council's mission strategy; the role of local leadership in each situation is then seen as fitting into the overall ministry needs of the congregation and the mission opportunities of the area. It may be helpful if the churches involved are encouraged to draw up a pastorate profile detailing its leadership needs and the gifts it has available (including ordained ministers, elders, youth and children's workers etc) and discuss this with the District Council.

6.4 Identification

6.4.1 Those who might serve in local leadership should be identified in a dialogue between District Council and the local church(es) concerned, considering possible people (a) from the membership of the local church concerned; (b) from potential local leadership in neighbouring churches; and (c) from those who offer themselves. It may be helpful for districts to convene a meeting of elders from the churches to share thinking and seek help in identifying possible people. It must be made clear that this is not an alternative way into stipendiary or non-stipendiary ministry.

6.4.2 District Councils, probably working in concert with the province, should devise means of ensuring the suitability of the persons who are identified. There should be consultation with the ordained ministers, elders and local church(es) involved.

6. It is assumed that those exercising local leadership, whilst not necessarily coming from the local church concerned, will usually be members of the local church they serve and members of its elders' meeting for the period of their appointment. For this reason any who are not members of the United Reformed Church when selected for local leadership must signify their acceptance of the ethos and discipline of the United Reformed Church.

6.4.4 It is assumed that local leadership is not normally remunerated, though expenses should be paid. There may be issues concerning establishing local leadership which need further discussion within the United Reformed Church; any local decisions should be included in the terms of the Agreement.

6.5 Agreement & Job Description

6.5.1 District Councils are responsible for determining the Agreement and Job Description and should take the lead in working them out in consultation with the local church(es), the team members and individuals involved. They should follow the Guidelines provided in order to ensure consistency throughout the United Reformed Church. The District Council should be involved throughout discussions about an Agreement. A more detailed check-list is available on request. *[For Members of Mission Council this is set out in Appendix B.]*

The Church has the task of shaping and using ministry in the most effective ways for its missionary task.

Within our understanding of the whole people of God, patterns of ministry need to be flexible, coherent and collaborative; they need to be responsive to the needs and opportunities of local churches and communities; different ministries need to be seen as part of a wider spectrum.

Patterns of Ministry Report, 1995

- 6.5.2 As local leadership will be exercised as part of a ministry team, there may be particular need for guidance when there is a change in team membership. This may mean some readjustment in work and role, and incomers may need some careful induction. The Agreement needs to include a mechanism which allows this to happen smoothly and without hurt to individuals.
- 6.5.3 Recognizing that the mission and needs of a local church change and evolve, it may be appropriate for a particular local leadership to finish at the end of an appointment. This can often cause hurt if there are false expectations on either side. It is strongly recommended that the Agreement sets out the possibilities of renewal or termination or change of role at the start of the appointment. Arrangements for the final review need to include a programme allowing time for the consequences of a decision not to renew the appointment.
- 6.5.4 Professional advice on employment legislation and tax matters should be sought if appropriate.

6.6 Recognition

The District Council is responsible for arranging a 'Service of Recognition' (this should be the title used throughout the United Reformed Church) at the start of a period of service in local leadership. The Service should include a reading of the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D), and an affirmation of personal acceptance of the exercise of local leadership in conformity with the Basis of Union. It may also include a reference to the ministry team in which local leadership is exercised.

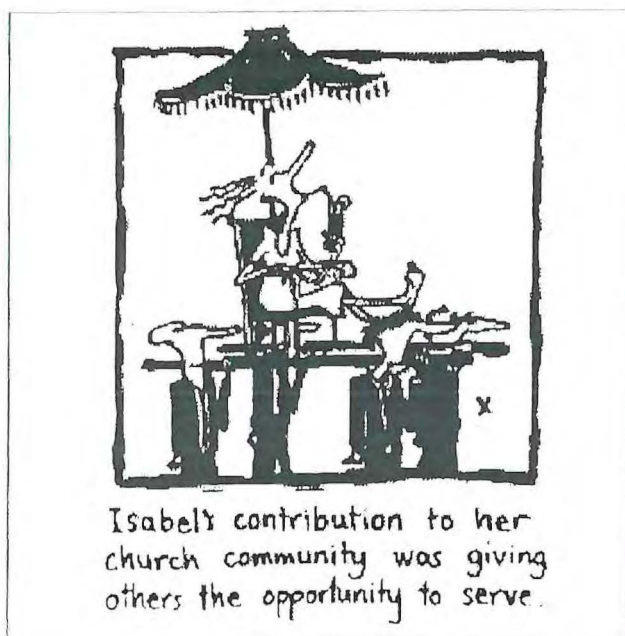
6.7 Title to be used

It is recommended that there should not be a common title for those exercising local leadership. District Councils should determine the title to be used in discussion with the local church(es), the ecumenical partners (if appropriate) and the individual concerned, so that it relates to the functions exercised and the context in which it is to be exercised. This title should be used during the Service of Recognition and be the only title used subsequently. Among titles currently in use are Pastoral Worker; Pastoral Assistant; Worship Leader; Senior Elder and Local Leader. It is important not to use a title currently being used to describe a different office, and so, for example, minister and moderator should be avoided.

6.8 Ecumenical relations

It will be necessary to discuss the Agreement in an ecumenical context. This will involve discussions with other denominations at the appropriate level, and these may be acknowledged in the Service of Recognition. (Many problems are the result of it not being clear to everyone at the outset what the expectations are and what an individual has been given permission to do.)

A Check List for use when drawing up the Agreement and Job Description (6.5 - 6.8) follows on pages 7 - 8.



This section (pages 7 & 8) is not necessarily for inclusion in the Report to Assembly. It would be available to District Councils

7 DETAILS ON THE JOB DESCRIPTION AND THE AGREEMENT

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 Local leadership arises out of the prayerful seeking of the will and purpose of God for the mission and service of the local church in its community. In each case it is defined by an Agreement and a Job Description which are drawn up by the District Council, the ministry team, the local church(es) and the individuals concerned.
- 7.1.2 The Agreement and Job Descriptions should be dated, and signed by the person concerned and representatives authorized by the District Council and local church.
- 7.1.3 No appointment should begin without a signed Agreement.

7.2 Check list for A Job Description

7.2.1 The work to be done

*this may be a useful check list (the work to be done will **not** include all or even a majority of what is listed below)*

Does the work include

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| pastoral responsibility | being a focus of pastoral care (crisis and/or on-going) <i>(how does this relate to the minister and the elders with their eldership lists?)</i> |
| leadership | the identifiable representative of the congregation in the community chairing elders and/or church meetings and any others in other areas (eg youth work, study groups, evangelism) |
| worship responsibilities | leading services in the local church(es) and beyond presiding at the sacraments (Baptisms & Communion) leading services of Confirmation conducting weddings and funerals |

7.2.2 The relationship with the wider United Reformed Church

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Does the work involve | being the church's representative at District Council and/or Provincial Synod attending never/regularly/occasionally the District's Ministers Meeting |
|-----------------------|--|

7.2.3 The relationship with ecumenical partners

(after consultation with ecumenical partners and the local church)

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| What role is envisaged | in local Churches Together meetings at the Ministers Meeting (should s/he attend occasionally or always) as a leader of worship at united services at united Communion and Confirmation Services |
|------------------------|---|

7.2.4 The title

What specific title is to be used, chosen to relate to the functions exercised and the context in which the local leadership is to be exercised

7.3 **Check list for An Agreement**

7.3.1 **An introduction** *setting out*

the context of the local church(es) and pastorate
 what is seen as the likely development of the local church's mission during the period of the Agreement
 the role of the ordained ministry in relation to local leadership
 and the role of the local leader (see Job Description).

7.3.2 **The details** *setting out*

7.3.2.1 **Length and sphere of service**

the congregation(s) within which local leadership is to be exercised
 procedures to be followed when a new member of the team is to be appointed, and mechanisms for any subsequent change in the work to be done and relationships within the team
 the date of starting and concluding the appointment, with an explicit indication about the possibility or not of renewal at the end of the Agreement (5.5.3).

7.3.2.2 **Responsibility**

how there will be responsibility with

- the team leader
- the local church
- the district council

how oversight is exercised by the minister

7.3.2.3 **Relationships**

with the rest of the team and the team leaders, including the Church Secretary
 Church Meeting and Elders Meeting
 those designated to offer personal support
 those designated to offer oversight

how care is offered, including

- dealing with any problems as they may occur
- copng with a breakdown of relationships

7.3.2.4 **Reporting**

requirements for regular (written) reporting and on-going review
 arrangements for the final evaluation and recommendations for the future

7.3.2.5 **Training**

which is put in place and resourced by the District Council and the province
 tailored to suit the individual taking account of the context in which the local leadership is to be exercised and the Job Description
 details the training which will be undertaken including how and by whom it is delivered

7.3.2.6 **Financial details**

expenses (what they cover, how and when they are paid)
 if there is to be any remuneration details of the contract etc need to be approved and recorded

8. NOTE ON POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER MINISTRIES

8.1 Ministers of Word and Sacraments

8.1.1 The ministry of Christ is exercised by the whole people of God, but within that ministry, different functions may be exercised by particular individuals. Under these proposals, ministers will be called upon to take responsibility as leaders, within in ministry teams. Because of their own training, stipendiary ministers are uniquely placed to help in the training of those exercising lay leadership. NSMs also bring particular insights and experience from their daily living which can be used to help and support those exercising local leadership.

8.1.2 The proposals in this report for lay leadership are not developed in order to replace stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry, but are an affirmation of the need for both if the local church is to fulfil its purpose in God's mission to the world. There is a need not only for lay leadership but for challenging individuals to consider whether they have a vocation as a stipendiary and non-stipendiary minister especially within the context of a ministry teams.

8.2 Ministers of other Churches

8.2.1 Many other denominations are creating or developing non-stipendiary ministry along side complementary but different lay ministries. For example, many Anglican dioceses are developing Local Non-Stipendiary Ministers (LNSMs); they are trained before being ordained to serve in a local congregation. The Methodists have a similar pattern. What is proposed fits in well with the practice of many of our ecumenical partners.

8.3 Elders

8.3.1 The Assembly resolutions of 1995 suggest that the Church was not seeking an additional Order of Ministry (eg Local Ministers), but a development of the lay ministry of the eldership, which is the bedrock of the local church life in the United Reformed Church. **The proposals are intended to affirm the responsibility of the Elders Meeting for corporate leadership**, developing the different and varying gifts of the elders in the context of the needs and opportunities of local churches.

8.3.2 Thus the proposals see local leadership serving for a limited period in an evolving, changing role. Local leadership is not a preliminary to nor a training for non-stipendiary ministry.

8.3.3 Those exercising local leadership do so within the eldership of the local church; their training should **not** take them away from their local responsibilities; they should not be required to complete a prescribed training course before exercising local leadership. Training needs to take account of qualifications, past training and experience.

8.4 The Church Secretary

8.4.1 One of the offices most valued in the United Reformed Church is that of the Church Secretary, many of whom exercise local leadership in their church and community as their contribution to the local eldership. This needs to be recognized and the role of the Church Secretary affirmed as one of the most effective ways of providing local leadership.

8.4.2 However, it is clear that for many churches the Church Secretary does not provide the complete answer for local leadership. Some Church Secretaries see their role primarily as undertaking clerical duties such as administration and organisation. In these situations development of other forms of local leadership will complement the Church Secretary's contribution. In other situations the Church Secretary may be encouraged to delegate many of the administrative duties and so take up the role of local leadership.

POSSIBLE RESOLUTIONS

1. Assembly adopts the Framework as the basis for providing local church leadership and commends the Guidelines to District Councils for use in future appointments.
2. Assembly invites District Councils to review any present arrangements for local leadership in the light of the Framework.
3. Assembly encourages District Councils in consultation with local churches to seek to provide local leadership wherever it is needed.
4. Assembly asks Mission Council to initiate further exploration of the financial and training implications of the Framework and Guidelines and requests that a report be made as soon as possible.
4. Assembly asks Mission Council to monitor progress in operating the Framework and Guidelines, and to report in 2000, including whether it may then be necessary to make changes to the Basis of Union.



Please note that the illustrations in the 0th draft are for the amusement of Mission Council members. Discipleship & Witness

think that such a serious subject should be treated frivolously.



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

For Report

ASSEMBLY GRANTS 1997

AGOGAL (the Advisory Group On Grants and Loans) invites Mission Council to note the following Assembly grants for 1997.

| | cttee contact | BUDGET 1997 | notes | end date |
|---|---------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Council of Churches for Britin & Ireland | Ecum | 26805 | | |
| Churches Together in England | Ecum | 18193 | | |
| Action by Churches Together in Scotland | Ecum | 126 | | |
| CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales) | Ecum | 1192 | | |
| Churches' Main Committee | Fincc | 1554 | | |
| Conference of European Churches | Ecum | 2054 | paid in SFr | |
| Free Church Federal Council | Ecum | 511 | | |
| URC History Society | G Sec | 1174 | | |
| World Alliance of Reformed Churches | Ecum | 6069 | paid n SFr | |
| World Council of Churches | Ecum | 16802 | paid in SFr | |
| Welsh Commission of Covenanting Churches | Ecum | 357 | | |
| Churches' Cte for Defence And Disarmament | C&S | 400 | | |
| Chs' Advisory Council on Local Broadcasting | C&P | 1550 | | |
| Churches' Commission on Racial Justice | C&S | 3881 | | |
| Churches' Community Work Alliance | CMC | 5923 | | |
| CTE Group for Evangelisation | D&W | 4800 | | |
| Church Action on Poverty | C&S | 4749 | | |
| Christian Enquiry Agency | D&W | 1532 | | |
| Churches' Commssion On Mission (CCBI) | Ecum | 11083 | | |
| Leuenberg Conversations | Ecum | 450 | paid in DM | |
| Churches' National Housing Coalition | C&S | 2000 | | |
| Centre for Black & White Christ'n Partnership | Ecum | 3084 | | |
| Chs' Commission on Inter-Faith Relations | CIFR | 1638 | £1000 of this comes from Jewish Fund | |
| CCOM's China desk | Ecum | 6000 | | 1998 |
| Churches' Commission on Overseas Students | Ecum | 2000 | | |
| Chs' Enquy into Unemploy't & Future of Work | C&S | 1000 | All from Industrial Evangelism Fund | 1997 |
| Churches' Council on Health & Healing | C&S | 500 | | |
| Ecumenical Forum of Christian Women | Ecum | 163 | | |
| Women's Inter-Church Council | D&W | 150 | | 1998 |
| Ecumenical Millenium Officer support | Ecum | 3000 | | |
| United Board | Min | 350 | | |
| Alliance of Asian Christians | D&W | 1050 | | |
| Challenge 2000 | D&W | 1050 | | |
| European Ecum Commn for Church & Society | Ecum | 3000 | | |
| REVISED TOTAL | | 134190 | | |



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

J

Advocacy and Stewardship Group

The Group has two proposals to bring to Mission Council:

1. That the first Sunday in October each year be designated a Rededication Sunday in the United Reformed Church.
2. That to improve communication within the Church and to make people more aware of the work of Mission Council, a hotline be produced after each meeting.

Note: To explain how this might look, the Group has proposed the attached specimen texts and title sheet. The Advocacy and Stewardship Group would be willing to be responsible for producing a Mission Council hotline.

Mission Council

Latest News

**Central
Post to
Go**

Specimen

United Reformed Church Mission Council Hotline - October 1996

→ Church Union in Scotland - and England and Wales?

The United Reformed Church is to start talks immediately on proposals for the Congregational Union of Scotland to join the U R C. Members of Mission Council asked about the implications for the URC of the new Anglican - Methodist discussions.

→ C W M Hong Kong Windfall

Most of the £97 million received from the sale of a redundant hospital in Hong Kong has been invested to provide future income. The U R C, like other CWM member Churches, has received £80,000 as a gift of grace: this is offered to our three Provinces with least resources to enable them to undertake special projects.

→ U R C Multi racial - Multi cultural post

With financial help from CWM a new appointment will be made in 1997: District Councils and local churches are asked to think of ways the new officer can be used to help the whole church.

→ No more N Y C T O ?

A group was appointed to look into the implications of discontinuing the National Youth and Children's Training Officer post.

→ Our Eight Priorities

Identity : Collaboration : Growth : Discipleship : Children & Young People :
Outward-looking : Local training : Ministerial Training -
we shared our plans in the light of the priorities identified.

→ Church Related Community Workers

The whole scheme is due for review: should the system of recognition be opened to those from other traditions, and extended to "non-stipendiaries"?

→ Letter to Jerusalem Church Leaders

The U R C had received a letter from Christian leaders in Jerusalem and Mission Council responded with a message of support, affirming that true peace depends on the security and respect for all parts of the community.

Further information from your Provincial representatives to Mission Council

Specimen

United Reformed Church Mission Council Hotline - January 1997

→ In place of the N Y C T O

Mission Council recommends that there be no National Youth and Children's Training Officer post, but that management of the team of Provincial Officers (YCWTs and YLTOs) be undertaken by Provinces with support from a national Consultant. Care would be taken to ensure proper professional development for the Officers.

→ Advocacy and Stewardship to become part of Discipleship and Witness ?

Discussions are taking place about bringing this work under one umbrella.

→ National Lay Preaching Commissioner

A non-salaried appointment should be made to encourage the development of Lay Preaching.

→ Secretary for Youth Work

This post is to be renewed with an increased emphasis on FURY and Yardley Hastings.

→ Lay Presidency at the Sacraments

A statement has been prepared to clarify what actions are permitted *in an emergency*. The members present at the Service may (as a Church Meeting) decide to appoint another person to preside or to postpone the Celebration of the Sacrament. Either decision would be proper.

→ Resource Sharing

The £80,000 "gift of grace" from the C W M Hong Kong money will be shared among the Wales, East Midlands and Mersey Provinces to undertake work that would not otherwise have been possible.

All Provinces are being asked to pool at least 2% of their investment income, to be re-distributed in inverse proportion to their investment income.

Further information from your Provincial representatives to Mission Council



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

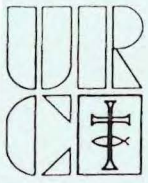
K

Theological Reflectors

There was a feeling expressed at the last meeting of Mission Council that we had not done justice to the written reports prepared for us by Preman Niles and Flora Winfield.

The reports are attached. We will look at them in groups. Whilst the discussion can be quite general, the groups are asked to identify any specific matters which they believe could be helpful (1) to the life and work of Mission Council and (2) to the life of any other groups within the Church.

John Waller
28 February 1997



MISSION COUNCIL

15-17 March 1996

REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS ON THE URC MISSION COUNCIL 15-17 March 1996

Having listened to the debates and following the decision making processes, I read the purpose of the Mission Council as set out in the Minutes of the 1992 Assembly (pp.57f.) to understand better my remit as a 'theological snoop'. It says,

The purpose of the Mission Council is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and the policy of the Church, to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the Community... It is a Mission Council and so the aim it will have in mind is to ensure that all we undertake centrally and all we are as a denomination is directed towards the mission of God in the world, towards that Kingdom of justice, peace, forgiveness and hope which is true life and which Christ brings in his person.

The role of the theological reflector is 'to stand aside from the debate and then reflect on the process in the light of the word of God, so providing a more objective theological critique of the discussion'.

At the end of the first day of meetings, several persons commented, 'There wasn't much there for you to reflect on, was there?' And one said to me, 'For a small denomination we try to do too much.' Since members of the Mission Council themselves felt that Mission Council may have gone adrift of its real purpose, I will not labour the point. Instead, I will do two things. First, suggest alternative ways for selecting and organising business which may help Mission Council to fulfil better its purpose. Second, make some comments on a particular theological concern, namely, relating to people of other faiths and cultures, which surfaced at several points in the proceedings and is challenging the URC to move forward in its mission thinking and action.

I. Business for Mission Council - Some suggestions

1. All the papers were well written and the process for dealing with them carefully identified at the top right hand corner of the first page. I noted four categories of papers: (i) those with matters for Mission Council decision and adoption, (ii) those from Mission Council going to the Assembly for decision and adoption, (iii) those going to the Assembly on which Mission Council is invited to make comments, (iv) those whose time has not yet come but on which Mission Council is asked to give

advice. This is not an exhaustive list. Mission Council had still other business to do. The problem is not that some of these are not necessary, but that one short meeting is expected to do too much.

Suggestion: That Mission Council deal with the first two categories of papers only. And that it appoint a small group consisting of one or two persons from each province to deal with the third and fourth categories at a separate meeting, or meet for a day before the meeting of the Mission Council.

2. More thought needs to be given to the way in which Mission Council can lead the General Assembly in taking a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church and to decide on priorities and outreach. For this to happen, Mission Council has to provide a theological framework - a theme - for an Assembly, and decide on mission priorities. Given the importance of this task, it is not sufficient for a reflector to gather up the theological crumbs from under the tables of debate and try to compose a meal out of them. In fact, the work has to start before the meeting.

Suggestion: That a theological reflector (could be the Moderator or General Secretary) be asked to look at the papers in categories (i) & (ii) above, and present at the beginning of Mission Council a theological appraisal that could be discussed. This could lead to identifying a theme for Assembly, topics for Bible Study and sub-themes for Worship.

3. According to its aims, as given in the 1992 Minutes of Assembly, Mission Council also has to ask two questions. (a) How does the business to be decided relate to and empower the life and mission of local congregations? (b) What makes for mission and what simply maintains church institutions?

Suggestion: That a second theological reflector be invited to provide a critique of Mission Council debates and decisions with questions (a) and (b) particularly in mind. This task must not be seen as one of 'fault finding', but as one providing Mission Council with theological insights and practical advice.

II. Mission of the Church in a plural religio-cultural situation

Not all the papers and sessions were of equal theological worth. Neither were they intended to be. But some, though still inchoate, were pressing the Church to reflect more seriously on its mission. It is on a few of these that I intend to reflect. The Bible studies of the Moderator, John Reardon, started the process for me. His questions, arising out of a study of the Corinthian letters, especially the first letter, had to do with the ways in which we are to understand the Gospel, how it influences and shapes our lives, especially as we relate to others in church and in society, and finally what makes the church indeed the church. Listening to his Bible studies, I recalled a very helpful proposal of J. Christiaan Beker in his book, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Fortress Press,

Philadelphia, 1980) which implies that, as for Paul, there is for us the ever present task to distinguish between the coherent theme of the Gospel and its contingent expressions as it relates to every day life. In other words, what makes the Gospel what it is intended to be, namely, good news? And what are the interpretations of the Gospel as it relates to the life and work of the church at any one time?

As I listened to John Reardon, I sensed that he was alluding to a very real issue for us. We often confuse contextual perceptions of the Gospel, however valid in a particular time and place, with the essence of the Gospel, and protect our perceptions by arguing that these perceptions are part of the coherence of the Gospel. We then take the next step of turning Gospel, as we understand it, into Law so that the Gospel ceases to be the Gospel, i.e. good news, and becomes bad news. Symptomatic of this mode is the oft asked question, 'What are the non-negotiables of the faith?' instead of the positive question, 'How does the Gospel speak as good news in a particular situation?' My non-negotiables may not be some one else's non-negotiables.

In practical terms, as John Reardon pointed out, Paul's argument over eating meat offered to idols is pressed both in terms of the stronger one not causing the weaker one to stumble - a pastoral concern - and the weaker one not terrorising the stronger one to succumb to the weaker one's position - a theological concern (1 Cor.10:23-30).

This distinction is important for us who have been brought up on a diet of 'let's go get the heathen', which many feel is the real purpose of mission and the thrust of the Gospel message. This is the position of the weaker one who tends to terrorise the stronger one who has a more mature understanding of the reality of religious plurality and the task of Christian mission. Many in the URC are still as the weaker one on this matter. This is why I argued in one of the small groups that in continuing the task force on Mission and Other Faiths as a full committee of Assembly, the name should be changed to the Committee on Inter-Faith Relations. This suggestion was accepted. I advocated this change because I felt that it is important for us to appreciate plurality, both religious and ethnic, as God-given. Only when we have done this can we speak in a more mature way of mission and other faiths. In fact, 'mission and other faiths' is the correct theological formulation. How do we relate witnessing to the Gospel to the reality of many faiths? This is an important question that goes beyond either 'the other faith people are there for us to convert to Christianity' or a 'live and let live relativism'. Not only do we need the committee to explore this question, but we also need it to help local churches understand, both theologically and pastorally, the relationship between, what a WCC study called, 'my neighbour's faith and mine'.

The need to distinguish between the coherence and the contingency of the Gospel also came up in the debate on revising the basis of faith. While we are willing to look at inclusive language from a gender perspective without denying or subverting several biblical metaphors for God and God's work, we were not yet able to be sensitive to the reality of other partners. I will illustrate. To say, 'We

believe in the one and only God, Eternal Trinity,' is to say that only a so-called Christian metaphor 'Eternal Trinity' can be used to describe the One God. Try this: 'We believe in the One God, Eternal Trinity, from whom, in whom and for whom all created things exist.' Commentary: There is One God. We Christians call the One God, 'Eternal Trinity'. Such a formulation does not exclude sharing the faith with persons of other faiths be they Jews or Muslims, Hindus or Sikhs. In this context, to use 'only' is to restrict the metaphor. It is a defensive posture of the weaker one.

A third point at which this matter came up was in the debate on 'A Multi-Cultural Development Post'. Is the problem one of racism or is it an issue of cultural intolerance? Perhaps I am arguing for too fine a distinction. My point is that URC churches, with a few exceptions, are not racist. But the URC is very mono-cultural. If the United Reformed Church is to be a blessing to the nations, it must have a representative group of the nations in it. Why is it that with one exception, all those representing the URC in ecumenical and other denominational committees and assemblies are European ethnically? Why is it that there was only one non-European at the Mission Council? Tokenism does not mean that the one or two non-Europeans who represent URC are not good. Tokenism is the self-satisfaction of the majority group that enough has been done for representation. Tokenism is a way of side-tracking the issue. The issue is that the URC is mono-cultural and therefore is, consciously or unconsciously, intolerant of other religio-cultural understandings of the Christian faith and practice. It is unable to receive the religious and cultural riches of the nations. When it is able to do this, it can indeed be a blessing to the nations. Those who argued that this is our problem and we need to deal with it using our resources were right. And so too were those who said we have failed and we need to receive help. Once this work develops, with the help of a missionary from outside, those who insist that God is European and can only be understood and worshipped as such (the weaker one?) will be in conflict with those who say the God we worship is the God of all nations.

The concerns of confessing our faith today, URC becoming truly representative of the nations, and proclaiming the Gospel in a situation of many faiths, are inter-related. This complex calls for intensive theological work. There is also an enormous pastoral task. Nothing is solved by the stronger one terrorising the weaker one. There is also the task of communication, if we are not to send confused and confusing signals to local congregations.

I have been selective in my theological reflection picking up on what I feel is a frontier for the URC. Perhaps next time someone else will take on the tantalising vision John Sutcliffe put before us, 'Equipping all God's People for Mission and Ministry'.

D. Preman Niles
25 March 1996

U.R.C. MISSION COUNCIL : 1 - 3 OCTOBER 1996

Some reflections.

On the first door, leading from the Dining Room down to our place of meeting, the sign said " THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH " in large, bold letters; on the second, at the top of a steeply sloping corridor, a second sign added " Please Tread Carefully ". So I'll try.

It is very important to the ecumenical process that we sometimes see one another ' at home ', rather than always in ecumenical contexts, and these days were, for me, a tremendous opportunity to observe the URC in its inner life as a church and to come to a closer understanding of the denomination - I much appreciated the invitation to undertake this task of theological reflection. I also appreciated the honesty and forthrightness with which people engaged with one another and with the issues of the meeting, combined with the happy and open atmosphere in the bar and at meal times: generally I felt that people were able to clash and forgive. It was good also to share the venue with friends from C.W.M. who, by their presence, gave a constant reminder of wider perspectives.

Over the three days of meeting, a great many areas suggested themselves as suitable for theological comment, but I have decided to confine my reflections to three sets of questions which seemed to run through the whole meeting : the questions concerned Identity and Belonging, Conflict and Confrontation and Symbols, Signs and Significance.

1. Identity and Belonging

- How does the URC work out its identity in ecumenical living, and how does it continue to live creatively with difference, while still working out its own identity as a uniting church ? We need partner churches, and one another, to help us to understand the distinctive contributions made by our traditions, and who we are and what we have to offer, and to be willing and able to receive the treasures we bring, and to live with us in mutual response to our calling to become the church. It is of other people, those who know us well, that we should ask ' What do we have to contribute ? ', and it is in relationship that we begin to understand the truth, that we are God's gifts to one another.

- If we are a church which both gives and receives in the ecumenical process, how do we find boundaries for defining community or belief. During one session I heard this exchange :

" People think we don't believe anything, we're just woolly ",
" We're not as woolly as some others ".

How does the URC act as an ecumenical instrument, while retaining an appropriate sense of its distinctive nature(s) and therefore of its contribution to the ecumenical process ?

- Would it be helpful, sometimes, to allow the ecclesiological fault-lines within the denomination, which are largely the result of the continuing process of a uniting church, to be expressed more

explicitly: this might lead to greater honesty in discussion, and also to bringing towards resolution some of the tensions which are clearly at work under the surface ?

2. Conflict and Confrontation

" Mission Council is a filtration plant, a place where prioritising takes place." It was clear during the meeting that Mission Council is also a body which is required to take difficult decisions, in the face of reduced numbers and resources, and at two points during the meeting there were sparks, and a crackle of conflict and confrontation. There was also, suddenly, more energy in those discussions than in other parts of the meeting.

How would you define your theology of disagreement and discernment, in the decision making process of Mission Council ?

And how is Mission Council a " church meeting ", and how is Christ at the centre of it in authority ?

How does Mission Council understand its collegially and communally exercised ministry of episcopate ?

Some strong words were used in these discussions, and hurt and anger were expressed; there were also attempts to control and set boundaries for disagreement: I wanted to put up a third sign on the way down to our meeting hall " Danger : Deep Water ".

3. Symbols, Signs and Significance

" Denominations do not matter to young people " is a truth universally acknowledged which I suspect may not be strictly true. Denominations, and all that they represent of the experience of relationship with the Divine, known and interpreted through human community, of the inheritance of the apostolic faith, and of the natural human longing for a sense of identity, are not to be dismissed as structures now bypassed by something simply called ' being a Christian', and which is, of course, far from simple and perhaps on the way to the creation of another denomination. Having said this, the question of work with children and young people came up a number of times on the agenda, under a variety of guises, and I began to wonder what the discussion about this area of work represented for members of the Mission Council, and of the denomination. Discussions about work with children and young people, and about training those who work with them, prompted outbursts of energy and sometimes passion from the Mission Council, suggesting that although some of its members might think that denominations do not matter to young people, young people obviously matter to the denomination.

As this area of work was consistently identified as an area of high priority, I would like to ask, whether it carries for this community a significance which is beyond itself ? What might it represent for the denomination in terms of hopes or fears about the future ? Members of Mission Council might find it helpful to continue to observe areas which raise energy levels in their meetings, and ask themselves - is the subject of our discussion really what we are talking about ?

Flora Winfield
October 1996



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997



NATIONAL
AIDS ADVISER

The special category ministry post of National AIDS Adviser, associated with Church and Society, is due to come to an end later this year. Revd Martin Hazell served from 1987 to 1992, Revd Hazel Addy from 1992 to 1994 and Revd Justine Wyatt from 1994 until the present.

Church and Society has always emphasised the need for this ministry to be broadly based within the church; this was reinforced by the presentation at General Assembly in 1996. Some ongoing means of relating to the continuing concerns around HIV/AIDS is vital. Discussions are currently under way to establish a group to do this, linked with the Church and Society committee but broadly based and serving the whole church.

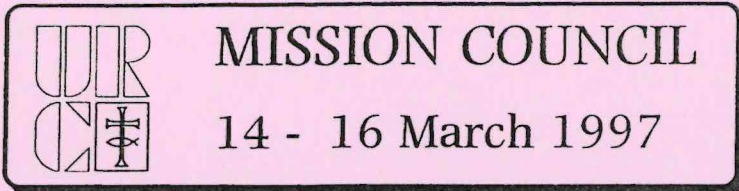
It may be possible to retain the involvement of the current post-holder on a different basis beyond the conclusion of the Assembly post.

In any event, Church and Society recommends that the church supports the ecumenical work of LEAT (London Ecumenical AIDS Trust) which despite its name is increasingly working beyond London across the country. The Director of LEAT, Mr Barry Gower, shared in the Assembly presentation last year. In recent years the United Reformed Church has contributed in kind through the time and expertise of our National Adviser; now that the full time post is ceasing it is appropriate to continue this support for working ecumenically by making a grant which is done by Methodist Church and the Church of England.

Church and Society therefore brings this RESOLUTION

Mission Council

- 1 *acknowledges with appreciation the distinctive contributions made by the three full-time postholders as National AIDS Adviser over ten years;*
- 2 *encourages Church and Society to establish a continuing group on AIDS to serve the whole church and requests a report for its October 1997 meeting;*
- 3 *agrees to include in the Central Grants budget an annual grant of £2,000pa for the London Ecumenical AIDS Trust, payable from 1998, index-linked and reviewed in 2001.*



M

THE NEW COMMUNITY CHURCH, HALSTEAD

The meeting of the Eastern Provincial Synod on Saturday, 8 March 1997, will be invited to ask the Mission Council to act on behalf of the General Assembly in admitting the New Community Church, Halstead, into the United Reformed Church.

The present Halstead United Reformed Church which has 76 members, has encountered serious problems with its Grade 2 Listed Building. It has expended over £40,000 in its endeavours to achieve a solution to its building problems and can see no way forward.

In October 1996 a number of Elders and Members resigned from Halstead URC and formed themselves into a new congregation meeting in the premises of the Methodist Church, and describing themselves as the New Community Church Halstead (United Reformed). The Church Meeting of Halstead URC has in the meantime resolved to close as a Church after worship on Sunday, 6 April 1997. It is anticipated that the members will then seek membership of the New Community Church.

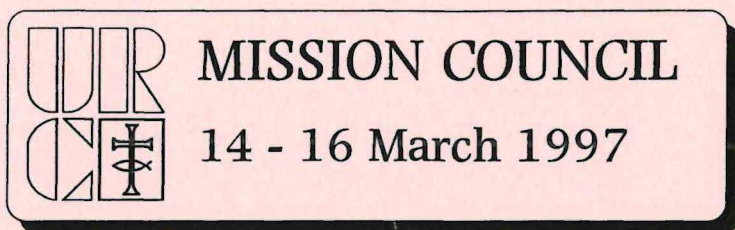
It is the intention of the Church thus to maintain a reformed witness within the community of Halstead whilst being enabled to walk away from the buildings which have become such a burden to them. On the closure of the Church, their residual funds (possibly up to £100,000) will pass to their Trustees who will immediately exercise their discretion and allocate them for the benefit of the new church. This new church will then probably appoint a different body as its custodian Trustee. The custodian Trustee for Halstead United Reformed Church will then have no assets of its own and therefore will not be liable for payments for repair and upkeep of those premises. It is anticipated that at some stage the Local Authority will notice that the buildings need repair and will issue Notices in the usual way but that since no-one will have funds to repair them, will be forced to compulsorily purchase the buildings for a nominal sum.

It is important that the new church is in official legal existence before the demise of the old church! Accordingly it is hoped that on the recommendation of the Synod, the Mission Council at its March meeting might act on behalf of General Assembly and admit the new church into the URC forthwith.

It might appear that all this is to do with money. In fact it is very much at the forefront of our minds that the United Reformed Church witness at Halstead should be allowed to continue unencumbered and if the procedure set out above is not followed, there is a strong possibility that the new church will be left with no financial resources whatsoever to begin its new life. The Province has sought legal advice and has discussed the matter fully with the Officers of the United Reformed Church and believes that, not only are we acting within the law but within the best interests of the Church.

We hope Mission Council will accede to our request and admit the New Community Church, Halstead as a member of the United Reformed Church at its meeting in March.

Elizabeth Caswell
Moderator
Eastern Province



N

Minute 96/62 of the October MC reads:

a question was asked as to how an overspend of a committee budget was dealt with. As no definitive answer was available, the Moderator invited the officers concerned to bring back a statement in due course

I have consulted the Honorary Treasurer and the Secretary for Finance in this matter. For some time the form of words which have been used with regard to overspends is that

Overspends may be authorised by the Treasurer of the Church, taking such advice as he considers necessary.

However we have been unable to discover any authority for this policy. Therefore we recommend that MC approves it as a statement of policy.

The following should be noted

- ♦ the budget for a calendar year is shaped at the MC in the March of the previous year and approved by the July GA
- ♦ during the financial year common sense may require variations on what has been agreed
- ♦ new matters not allowed for may occur (e.g. conversations with the SCC)

It would be possible to budget a sum for contingencies. However past experience has shown this not to be necessary provided that the Treasurer is given authority to vary particular items and to authorise expenditure from the reserves. In small matters the Treasurer acts alone, on others he may consult, in ascending order, the General Secretary, the Convener of the Resources Planning Advisory Group, the Finance Committee, the Mission Council or even the General Assembly.

In recommending that this established procedure be confirmed, the officers concerned are agreed that it has served us well for many years.

Tony Burnham



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

O

Secretary for Discipleship and Witness

1. With regard to the future of the post of Secretary for Discipleship and Witness, Mission Council in October 1996 agreed to ask

the General Secretary to convene a meeting of the Conveners of all Committees where overlap is thought to exist, to see if agreement can be reached on the way forward. The General Secretary is asked to report to Mission Council on the outcome, consulting the Staffing Advisory Committee, if necessary and/or appropriate.
2. All Conveners of Assembly Committees were informed and, at a meeting held on 28 November 1996, Conveners or their representatives of the following committees and groups were present: Discipleship & Witness, Ministries, Training, Ecumenical, Advocacy and Stewardship and the NYCTO Working Party.
3. There was a full discussion of all areas of possible overlap but, with the exception of the post for Advocacy and Stewardship, it was believed that these did not preclude the continuance of the post. It was noted that overlap was inevitable and, provided committees were not covering the same ground, could be healthy.
4. Nevertheless it was agreed that care should be taken by all staff members with regard to avoiding improper overlap. It was their responsibility to ensure that the committees on which they served shared information on a regular basis with other members of staff. They should also monitor the reports they received in order to alert their committee to overlapping initiatives. It was noted that, in addition to informal ways, a mechanism existed whereby staff provided all other colleagues with a short digest of decisions taken by committees. Following each meeting the staff member prepares a short digest of decisions taken which are then circulated to other staff, usually at the monthly team meeting.
5. There were two specific subjects where there was a lack of clarity: the care of lay preachers and Christian Education. It was noted that the care of lay preachers was the responsibility of Ministries, though the training of lay preachers belonged to the Training Committee. Christian Education was part of the responsibility of Discipleship and Witness as it was concerned with *growth in faith*.

6. Following other discussions, a second meeting was held on 13 February 1997 at which the Discipleship and Witness Committee and the Advocacy and Stewardship Task Group were each represented by their Convener and Secretary. The present remits of both were considered. It was noted that parts (i) and (ii) of the remit of the Task Group overlapped with the work of Discipleship and Witness. In 1994 the General Assembly charged the Task Group with suggesting "an appropriate committee focus for the work at the end of its life". This would be either 1 April 1999 or when the present Secretary leaves his post.

Discipleship and Witness Committee remit:

The committee's task is:

to encourage growth in faith among people of all ages;
to support the work of exercising pastoral care, particularly by elders, lay preachers and members of local churches, and the work of District Councils in their pastoral oversight of the local church;
to challenge the local church to share the gospel and stimulate District and Synods in the development of their own strategies for outreach;
to encourage churches in their participation in the Decade of Evangelism;
to listen to concerns raised, to share information and provide appropriate support;
to be responsible for the Windermere Centre.

Advocacy and Stewardship Task Group remit:

(i) to communicate a vision of the work and the needs of the wider church to the local church.
(ii) to enable the local church to capture a vision of God's mission for itself, to plan its life, to challenge its members about their financial and other responsibilities and to communicate local visions and needs to the Mission Council.
(iii) to help the church at all levels to exercise real stewardship of the gifts entrusted to it.

7. It was agreed that the matter of the staff post could not be settled until the overlap between the Committee and the Task Group was settled. It was also agreed that the work of Advocacy and Stewardship needed to be secured for the future. Therefore it is proposed that Mission Council be invited to recommend to the General Assembly that the responsibility for Advocacy and Stewardship be given to the Discipleship and Witness Committee. However because the work is specialised and clearly focused, a Stewardship Sub-Committee be created to carry out the work. It was therefore agreed to recommend to Mission Council the following revised remit for the newly named Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness Committee:

Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness

The committee's task is:

to enable the local church to capture a vision of God's mission for itself and to plan its life accordingly;

to encourage growth in faith among people of all ages;

to support the work of elders and the work of the district council in its oversight of the local church;

to encourage the local church to share the gospel and to participate ecumenically in evangelism;

to challenge members in their stewardship and witness;

to stimulate district councils and synods in the development of their own strategies for mission; and

to support the work of the Windermere Centre and the Rural Consultant.

8. It was then agreed to recommend that the post of Secretary for Discipleship and Witness be discontinued at the end of the present postholder's period of service in 1997 and that a post of **Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness** be created. The person appointed would work with the present Secretary for Advocacy and Stewardship until not later than the end of the latter's contract in March 1999. The post of Secretary for Advocacy and Stewardship would not be continued. During that period particular attention would be paid to the continued development of stewardship training in the provinces.
9. The basic task of a **Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness** is to network, resource and inspire those who are concerned with helping local churches to develop their members' faith and their thinking about mission in their particular context.

The Secretary would therefore relate to synod development or training officers/mission enablers (whatever title is used provincially) recognising that the Training Committee also relates to training officers.

The Secretary would assist the Committee by evaluating the many programmes for renewal, witness, mission planning and the deepening of faith which are available and advocating the appropriate ones including *Developing Discipleship* and Advocacy and Stewardship's *Vision Workshops*.

The work of the Windermere Centre is also a concern of the Committee. The Secretary would relate to the Home Mission and Stewardship Secretaries of other churches and would work through CTE's Group for Evangelisation and the equivalents in ACTS and CYTUN and CCBI's Stewardship Network.

10. Job Description

Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness

The postholder will

1. be involved in developing new thinking and programmes for action on the frontiers of discipleship, stewardship and witness;
2. co-ordinate and take forward the work of the Discipleship and Witness Committee, and its Stewardship Sub-committee, giving a lead in their work;
3. supervise and encourage the work done on behalf of the Committee and its Stewardship Sub-Committee by its members, consultants and correspondents in the specific responsibilities which they undertake;
4. work alongside those holding similar positions in the other denominations through the ecumenical instruments, and be prepared to undertake agreed major work on behalf of all;
5. convene meetings of, and offer support to, those who have related responsibilities in the provinces;
6. work with the present secretary for Advocacy and Stewardship during the remainder of his term of office and liaise and collaborate with other members of the Assembly staff;
7. ensure personal compliance and that of his/her support staff with health and safety at work provisions; and
8. be expected to remain open to new styles of work and new responsibilities as required by the decisions of the Mission Council or the General Assembly.

11. Person Specification

The Postholder will have

vision and discernment and will be capable of inspiring and helping the United Reformed Church face the challenges and opportunities for discipleship, stewardship and witness;

administrative skills, and be capable of delegating work and enhancing the gifts of others;

the ability to represent the United Reformed Church.

12. Recommendations

that Mission Council agrees to

- (i) recommend the new proposals for Discipleship and Witness and for Advocacy and Stewardship to the General Assembly, in particular the new remit of the committee and the creation of a Stewardship Sub-Committee;
- (ii) the creation of the post of **Secretary for Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness**, in place of the present post of Secretary for Discipleship and Witness and in place of the Secretary for Advocacy and Stewardship as from the date when the present holder of the latter post leaves.

Tony Burnham

February 1997



Note: we offer this report in the first place to Mission Council but in a form that may be forwarded to General Assembly with relatively straightforward amendment if agreed.

1 1994/5.

i Mission Council in October 1994 established a Task Group *"to work out a process whereby the United Reformed Church can be enabled to hold an informed debate on the matter of human sexuality and come to a decision on the implications for ministry within the church."* Those appointed to serve were Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow (convener), Dr David Thompson (secretary), the Revd's Donald Hilton, Roberta Rominger and Peter Brain.

ii The Task Group met six times between November 1994 and June 1995, after which the material it had prepared was circulated by post to every local church in July 1995 according to the resolution agreed in Eastbourne, viz.: *"Assembly*

a *invites the Mission Council Task Group on Human Sexuality to circulate material to enable the Church in all its councils to discuss the matter of human sexuality and its implications for ministry within the church;*

b *requests that this discussion takes place in Provincial Synods, District Councils and local churches, leading to a further discussion in Synods in the autumn of 1996;*

c *requests Provincial Synods, District Councils and local churches to send their responses to the General Secretary by December 1, 1996, in order to allow Mission Council to bring any further resolutions to General Assembly in 1997."*

iii This material comprised

- the relevant section of the Mission Council report to General Assembly ('How we got to this point'),
- a major background paper from the Task Group,
- some resources for worship,
- notes for guidance for those chairing meetings,
- some questions as discussion starters,
- a description of the process of ministerial candidating and call,
- plus an order form introducing other available URC and other material.

2 1995/6

i Mission Council in October 1995 noted progress and resolved *"that the Task Group be thanked for their work so far and be invited to continue, keeping a watch on the process and then collating replies due to be received by the General Secretary and suggesting resolutions to be offered to General Assembly by Mission Council."*

ii The Task Group met again in March 1996 and agreed that the convener and secretary should be available on a specified day for short meetings with individuals or groups. This was advertised in REFORM and one group met with them. They also agreed to commission an independent consultant to examine the responses received from local churches. In the autumn of 1996 Dr Sally Winter (out of a group of five names considered) was asked to do this work; she is a college lecturer and experienced in handling survey work and research and is also married to an Anglican clergyman. In the event, the work was *much* more arduous than anticipated; the Task Group members wish to record their warmest appreciation for the contribution Dr Winter has made to this whole process, including sharing with the Group in person during their residential meeting.

iii The responses from the 12 Synods were read in full by Task Group members as were almost all the responses received from 43 District Councils. Some District Councils, however, sent extended transcripts (in two instances tape-recordings) of presentations and reports of group discussions or merely forwarded copies of local church responses; the Task Group found it difficult to assess these submissions.

3 1997

- i The Task Group met residentially during January and offer to Mission Council:
 - a this **report** containing drafts of possible resolutions of which we recommend that Mission Council should forward to General Assembly those numbered 1 and 3 and either 2A or 2B, plus
 - b the following **4 annexes** containing some of the information received by the Task Group:
 - 1 a summary version of the tables prepared by Dr Winter;
 - 2 a summary of the points being made in the responses from local churches as identified by Dr Winter, with a cross-section of illustrative extracts from the submissions;
 - 3 an outline summary of District Council responses;
 - 4 copies of the principal pages of Provincial responses.

Mission Council needs to determine how much of this material should be submitted to General Assembly; the Task Group recommends that it should all be submitted. (*See also 3 iv below*)

- ii The Task Group believes that the use of quotations from the submissions is **essential** because although the proportion of churches responding was low (under 30%) and therefore statistically unreliable as a quantitative survey, there is, in our view, no reason to believe that the sample does not contain the full range of views held by people throughout the church.
- iii The second reason for emphasising the use of quotations from the letters and reported discussions is by way of reminder that, whilst we are necessarily giving most attention to one aspect of the matter, this is within the wider context of comment and concern over a wide range of topics covered by the heading 'human sexuality', some of which will inevitably engage the closer attention of the Church in the future.
- iv The Task Group has asked Peter Brain to prepare **for sale** a set of the full survey reports on responses from local churches, District Councils and Synods, in a form that will not breach the confidentiality of local church responses. This should be available in May 1997.

4 Legal issues

The Task Group consulted the Legal Adviser on certain matters and the following points have been made.

- i Homosexuality in itself is not illegal, although there are specific circumstances defined by law in which homosexual acts constitute the offence of gross indecency.
- ii An active homosexual relationship might be defined as "a relationship involving sexual contact with a person of the same sex". This is the sense in which the Task Group uses the term 'homosexual relationship' in this report and in the resolutions it has prepared. Of course, it is possible for a person of homosexual orientation to have a relationship with another person not involving sexual activity.
- iii It is not illegal to discriminate against a person on the grounds of his or her sexuality in itself. Section 19 of the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) specifically excludes employment for the purposes of organised religion. But in any case the Church is not subject to secular employment law since it has been ruled in recently decided cases that the service of Ministers of Religion does not constitute 'employment'. It has, however, been noted that this point has been challenged and could be reversed in future cases.
- iv A minister who ceased to serve the United Reformed Church without receiving an early retirement pension or other benefit (see Rule 41 of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund) would have his or her pension rights preserved whether he or she had voluntarily resigned from the ministry or had had his or her name removed from the Roll after disciplinary proceedings.
- v A congregation of the United Reformed Church which wished to secede as a result of any decision taken by General Assembly on this or on any other matter could only do so with the consent of General Assembly.

5 Ways forward

i The Task Group notes that various churches in continental Europe and North America have been exercised by this matter in the past ten to twenty years, including some in our Reformed family. As yet no consensus has emerged. We believe that the Church is on a journey of faith and has not yet clearly discerned the mind of Christ for us today on this matter.

ii There is evidence that some people in the United Reformed Church have been changed by the experience of these discussions and that some appreciated the opportunity afforded by the process, though we acknowledge that many found it difficult or painful. Many churches (around 70%) did not hold a meeting - or at least did not send in a response to the General Secretary - and some of the meetings that were held were poorly attended. In this, as in all issues, it is clear that encounter and experience, alongside rigorous discussion rather than confrontational debate, can change minds and hearts.

We therefore **recommend** that Mission Council considers ways in which local churches may be assisted in their further reflection.

iii The Task Group agrees that more time is needed for further study on the nature of Biblical authority for the life of the church, as has been urged by several responses.

We therefore **recommend** that Mission Council arranges for further work to be undertaken on this, if possible ecumenically.

iv The Task Group is conscious that this issue has raised in a potentially damaging form the matter of the relationship between the decision-making of the various councils of the church, including the nature of the authority of General Assembly itself. For example, a local church issues a call to a minister but a District Council needs to concur in that call; General Assembly committees and Provincial Synods each have different responsibilities in decisions over candidacy for the ministry. In 1996 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada had to decide on an appeal from a minority of members of a Presbytery who dissented from the Presbytery's decision to concur in the call of a homosexual minister by a congregation. That situation might occur in the United Reformed Church but the Task Group feels that the existing appeals procedures of the church are not the appropriate means for determining policy on these matters.

We therefore **recommend** that Mission Council considers how further work may be undertaken on this matter, whether through a standing Committee of General Assembly or through a specially appointed Task Group.

v The Task Group was faced with the challenge of what to say about homosexual relationships that are, as far as can be discerned, permanent and stable. There are some both among those who support and those who resist the ordination of anyone in a homosexual relationship who believe that the Church needs to decide whether and, if so, how to recognise such relationships publicly.

We therefore **recommend** that Mission Council arranges for further work to be done on this, if possible ecumenically.

vi These **recommendations** are brought together in draft resolution 3 (section 9 below).

6 Our unity in Christ

i The strongest note in the evidence we have received is that this issue, though important, should not - and need not - divide the church. We therefore submit this statement, which also acknowledges the range of views expressed, for acceptance by General Assembly.

(Draft Resolution 1)

Assembly **recognises**

a) *the seriousness of the issues of human sexuality and their implications for acceptable behaviour and lifestyles among Christians; and*

b) *the lack of agreement in the responses submitted to General Assembly by local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods concerning aspects of the contemporary debate on human sexuality and the teaching and application of scripture;*

and therefore

1 **declares** *that these disagreements, though serious, must not be allowed to injure the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church;*

2 **calls on** *local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods to apply with wisdom and sensitivity the pastoral practice and discipline set out in the Basis of Union and Structure of the United Reformed Church, in a way which respects the rights of personal conviction and which does not override conscientious decisions in these matters nor use such decisions as a reason for breaking the fellowship of the United Reformed Church;*

3 **recognises** *that a local church may decline to receive members, appoint leaders, elect elders or call a minister - and that a District Council may decline to concur with a call or to induct a non-stipendiary minister - on grounds of his / her sexual views or behaviour;*

4 **calls on** *those who exercise pastoral care of members, elders and ministers in the Church to seek ways of ensuring that all those who experience rejection because of their convictions in these matters are sustained within the fellowship of the Church held together by Jesus Christ.*

ii The Group also feels that it is necessary that a further resolution should be submitted to General Assembly in order to remove the current doubts over what the present position of the United Reformed Church is.

7 No unqualified decisions

i The Group considered whether to recommend either this simple resolution "*that the United Reformed Church should never knowingly ordain someone who is in a homosexual relationship*" or conversely

"*that the United Reformed Church should be prepared knowingly to ordain ...(such a person)*".

ii The Group believes that to pass the former resolution implies certain foreseeable consequences:

- existing ministers in a homosexual relationship would be obliged either to leave their posts or to abandon their partner;
- everyone in ministry and leadership, possibly including all members or would-be members, would be subject to explicit questioning on their sexual relationships;
- some people (including some ministers) might leave the United Reformed Church;
- some local churches might seek to secede.

iii It is felt that to pass the latter resolution also implies certain foreseeable consequences:

- some people (including some ministers) might leave the United Reformed Church;
- some local churches might seek to secede;
- there might be pressure on local churches to accept such a candidate;
- there might be an influx of such persons into the United Reformed Church.

iv We **recommend** that it would be inappropriate for General Assembly to pass either of these two resolutions. In the light of the range and strength of the views expressed in the responses received we believe that to pass either would aggravate continuing dispute and bitterness.

8 Choice

i The Task Group therefore suggests that any further resolution should recognise the complexities of the current situation and provide a framework for the development of a future policy.

ii The Group offers two draft texts which are not 'balanced' because, in our view, the situations are not symmetrical. Otherwise one resolution would suffice, with a vote for or against to decide the matter. However they are sufficiently different for it to be illogical to pass both. We therefore **recommend** that Mission Council choose between these two alternatives and forward one to General Assembly.

iii The Group offers in 2A a resolution which gives qualified approval but in a form which seeks to remove any pressure or sense of misgiving from a local church or council of the church that might be faced with the possibility of receiving a minister in a homosexual relationship. It implies that there are among potential ordinands, as among our ministers already, persons with gifts and experiences that would enable them to live and work effectively and authentically as ordained ministers in an appropriate situation in the church, though they are in a homosexual relationship.

iv The Group offers in 2B a resolution which declines to accept for training or ordination a candidate in a homosexual relationship but in a form which removes the threat of removal from office from some serving ministers and leaves open the possible candidacy of homosexual persons since no self-declaration as to any relationship would be sought.

v Because the Task Group is well aware that the situation of non-stipendiary ministers is more complicated, each resolution includes a clause instructing the appropriate General Assembly committee to interpret whatever is passed and apply it to the situation of NSMs.

vi The first alternative reads as follows: **(Draft resolution 2A)**

Assembly, **recognising**

- *that intrusive questioning as to sexual practice is inappropriate in a community of trust;*
- *that no candidate admitted for training can be assured of ordination until a call is issued and accepted with the concurrence of a District Council;*
- *that all decisions on the calling of a particular minister involve seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the weighing of the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate;*
- *that in certain circumstances a Church Meeting may, after due prayer and reflection, be convinced that it is right to call a ministerial candidate who is in a homosexual relationship;*

resolves

- *that in such a case the homosexual relationship is not **in itself** an obstacle to the issue of a call by a local church (or pastorate) with the concurrence of the District Council, nor to consequent ordination and induction;*
- *that no local church (or pastorate) shall be constrained to consider or accept such a candidate nor any District Council be constrained to concur with such a call;*

and instructs the Ministries Committee to produce guidelines for the application of this decision in the cases of non-stipendiary ministers.

vii The second alternative reads as follows: **(Draft resolution 2B)**

Assembly, **recognising**

- *that intrusive questioning as to sexual practice is inappropriate in a community of trust;*
- *that there are already ordained ministers of the United Reformed Church who are in a homosexual relationship;*

resolves

- *that no candidate in a homosexual relationship shall be accepted for training nor go forward to ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament for the time being;*
- *that no disciplinary action shall be taken on the grounds of such a relationship in itself against any person on the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church at July 11, 1997.*

and instructs the Ministries Committee to produce guidelines for the application of this decision in the cases of non-stipendiary ministers.

9 Future work

A third resolution would authorise the future work outlined in paragraph 5. (Draft resolution 3)
Assembly,

noting the requests made in a number of responses from local churches, District Councils and Provincial Synods for further time and space to reflect on these matters,

asks Mission Council to arrange for further work to be done, ecumenically where appropriate and possible, on

a the nature of Biblical authority for the life of the church;

b the relationship between the authority of General Assembly and the other Councils of the Church;

c the question of whether and, if so, how the Church might recognise homosexual relationships which are intended to be permanent and stable;

and also to consider ways in which local churches may be assisted in reflection on the wider issues of human sexuality.

March 1997

(ends)

Note: Since finalising the draft resolutions in this report the Task Group has learned that the Legal Adviser is concerned that one situation arising from passing Resolution 2B could have serious implications for the Disciplinary Procedures of the church and he will raise this at Mission Council.

Annex I: totals of responses from local churches

figures taken from the full statistical (Province by Province) report

WARNING: Please remember throughout this annex that only 29% of the churches responded directly to the General Secretary by the due date. Since 71% did not respond, the statistical findings alone cannot be taken as representative of all the local churches in the United Reformed Church.

February 1997

A Participation of churches

Table 1 Response of Churches

| | Total Churches | Church Responses | % |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|------------|
| Totals | 1,768 | 513 | 29% |

The Provinces with the highest responses were North West with 64 (41%) and Southern with 75 (40%). Over a third of churches responded in Thames North Province (56). Under a third responded in South Western (44), Northern (39) and East Midlands (32) Provinces. Over a quarter responded in Mersey (27), West Midlands (39) and Eastern Provinces (40). Under a quarter responded in Wessex Province (40). In Yorkshire and Wales Provinces, 21% of their churches responded (27 and 30).

Table 2 Membership of responding churches

| | Total Membership | Membership of Responding churches | % of Membership |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Totals | 102,582 | 43,452 | 42% |

Responding local churches contained 42% of the overall URC membership which was higher than the number of churches responding (29%) reflecting the greater response rate from larger churches. This was the pattern in all the Provinces. The variation between Provinces corresponded closely to that shown in Table 1.

Table 3 Number of meetings

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4+ | Several | Not stated | Total |
|---------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Totals | 296 | 90 | 31 | 10 | 49 | 37 | 513 |

Over half the churches (58%) held one meeting to discuss the issue of Human Sexuality (296). 36% held two or more meetings - with 90 holding 2 meetings, 31 (6%) three meetings, 10 four or more meetings and 49 holding several meetings. 37 churches did not state how many meetings they held.

Table 4 Type of Meetings

| | Elders | Church | Special | Combination | Not stated | Total |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|
| Totals | 21 | 242 | 66 | 131 | 53 | 513 |

Nearly half the churches (47%) called Church meetings (242) to discuss the Human Sexuality issues. Over a quarter (131) organised a combination of Elders, Church and/or Special meetings, which in some churches included House Groups. 66 convened Special meetings. 53 (11%) did not state what type of meetings they held.

Table 5 Author of Reports

| | Minister | Secretary | Joint | Others | Not stated | Total |
|---------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Totals | 155 | 278 | 14 | 11 | 55 | 513 |

The Secretary reported on the discussions in over half the churches (278) and the Minister in under a third of churches (155). Yorkshire and Wales were the two Provinces where more Ministers reported on the proceedings than Secretaries. In a few churches both the Secretary and Minister wrote a joint report (14). Other Members, including Elders and a Treasurer, wrote the report in 11 (2%) of churches. 10% of churches did not state who was the author of their reports.

B Resolutions and Voting

Although Mission Council advised against voting on formal resolutions, some were moved; some other votes were taken, to agree a statement or report, etc. Some churches used a questionnaire.

Table 6

| | A <i>Used a Resolution</i> | <i>No Resolution</i> | <i>Withdrew Resolution</i> | <i>Total</i> | B <i>Used a Questionnaire</i> | <i>Voted at the meeting</i> | <i>No vote at all</i> |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Totals | 81 | 428 | 4 | 513 | 81 | 156 | 276 |
| Percentage | 16% | 83% | 1% | 100% | 16% | 30% | 54% |

A Out of the 81 resolutions passed, 70 were against calling practising homosexuals to the ministry. Of these, 10 churches used the 'Medway resolution'. 7 churches in the Sussex East district used their district's resolution.

B Under a third voted on their resolutions or statements (156). 276 churches took no soundings at all. 81 (16%) churches used a questionnaire; most of these were based on the questions asked in the Paper E of the Task Group papers. Churches used questionnaires extensively in only two Provinces - 53% of churches in North West Province and 41% in West Midlands Province. 20% of churches used them in Eastern Province. In other Provinces, very few churches used questionnaires to assess their members' opinions.

C Acceptance of homosexuals as Members, Leaders and Ministers

These figures are derived by Dr Winter from letters and reports of meetings as well as from resolutions or local questionnaire findings. The full report sets out the basis for this result.

Table 7.1 Acceptance of Homosexuals as Members

| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Split</i> | <i>If celibate</i> | <i>No Vote</i> | <i>Not stated</i> | <i>total</i> |
|---------------|------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Totals | 178 | 18 | 30 | 59 | 18 | 210 | 513 |

Over a third of churches responding (35%) were willing to accept homosexuals as members, with a further 12% willing to accept celibate homosexuals. In contrast, only 18 (3%) were unwilling to accept homosexuals as members. However, 41% did not state their views; no reasons were given.

Table 7.2 Acceptance of Homosexuals as Leaders

| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Split</i> | <i>If celibate</i> | <i>No Vote</i> | <i>Not stated</i> | <i>total</i> |
|---------------|------------|-----------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Totals | 62 | 87 | 58 | 76 | 19 | 211 | 513 |

62 churches (12% of those responding) were willing to elect homosexuals to leadership roles, with a further 15% willing to elect celibate homosexuals as leaders. A higher percentage of churches (17%) were not willing to elect them (85) compared with only 4% (19) not willing to accept them as members. Again, 41% did not state their views with no reasons given.

Table 7.3 Acceptance of Homosexuals as Ministers

| | <i>Yes</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>Split</i> | <i>If celibate</i> | <i>No Vote</i> | <i>Not stated</i> | <i>total</i> |
|---------------|------------|------------|--------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Totals | 48 | 259 | 64 | 97 | 19 | 26 | 513 |

In contrast to membership and leadership (Tables 7.1 & 7.2), only 5% of responding churches (26) did not state their views.

48 churches (9% of those responding) were willing to call a practising homosexual to the ministry. A further 97 (19%) were willing to call a celibate homosexual. Half the churches were not willing to call a practising homosexual as their minister (259). It is possible that some of those churches which did not state their views on leadership would also be against electing homosexuals to leadership roles.

PS Much more analysis would be required to discover any correlation between the findings in the sections, e.g. whether having more meetings led to a different result on acceptance or whether the type of meeting is reflected in the level of acceptance. The full report gives the figures Province by Province.

Annex 2: cross-section of responses from local churches

In the main report, the Task Group declares that the use of quotations from the submissions is **essential** because although the proportion of churches responding was low (under 30%) and therefore statistically unreliable as a quantitative survey, there is, in our view, no reason to believe that the sample does not contain the full range of views held by people throughout the church.

♦ *As elsewhere in these reports, direct quotations are printed **in this style** (italics plus 'bullet pointer')*
These few extracts illustrate the range of responses from over 500 local churches in different Provinces, many of which are reproduced in the published Task Group Report. This abridged version is based on Dr Winter's work in categorising the responses.

Participation of churches

Positive and negative experiences of discussions were reported:

- ♦ *If it is possible to sum up: the meeting grasped that we are talking about a complex issue, and was grateful for the opportunity to reflect in the way we did. A number of those present could see a need for further discussion and clarification, including what the real 'yes' or 'no' issues were. For a substantial part of the meeting, it was unprecedented in their experience to consider the matters that were before us. For some, their "position" shifted as a result of the discussion, due to being better informed. It is not possible to say that the meeting was of one mind even if we were one in spirit.*
- ♦ *I wish the church would spend as much time and energy on other matters as it has on this. Hopefully, the matter will be resolved at the next Assembly because if not, much damage will have been done.*
- ♦ *It has been an interesting matter for discussion, but provoked one of the most difficult incidents that I have ever had to cope with since I was ordained! In brief, it led to the resignation of two elders and the leader of junior church. In a sense the debate was a catalyst, and the real issue was about rigid biblical literalist interpretation.*

Opinions correlate with age and gender:

- ♦ *Our discussions were friendly, frank and open. The difference in opinion seemed to be part of the 'generation gap' - it tended to be our younger members who supported the freedom to be homosexual in all aspects of life.*
- ♦ *We found the women much more willing to discuss what they read, even if they disagreed with it, than the men were, many of whom felt quite 'threatened' by the whole subject.*

Many churches found the sensitive issue of Human Sexuality almost too difficult to discuss:

- ♦ *The meeting at which the issue of 'Human Sexuality' was discussed was poorly attended, in part because some members deliberately stayed away, not wishing to be involved in even discussing the subject. In addition there were others who were upset by the subject matter within the meeting, including one of our elderly members who found the subject so distasteful that she had to be accompanied home while the meeting was still in progress.*
- ♦ *However, both elders and church meetings were concerned that some of our members, because of age or cultural background, were unable to take part in the discussion at all because it was a taboo subject. At church meeting it was proposed that the statement be sent along with a letter saying that this was the case.*

Some saw this as a main factor for poor attendance:

- ♦ *One or two people attended that meeting specifically for the discussion, but I fear others avoided it for the same reason: the overall attendance was the smallest for any Church Meeting this decade!*

Comments and challenges on the nature of Biblical authority:

- ♦ *Finally we agreed that the portrayal of homosexuals in the media has built up a stereotype that many can not accept. The more the church can do to break down this stereotype the easier it will be for people to accept homosexual ministers. Biblical interpretation was agreed to be the biggest factor and perhaps the area where there needs to be more discussion."*
- ♦ *All biblical references to homosexuals are negative.*
- ♦ *We have been prepared to accept women in ways very different from those accepted in the Middle East when the Bible was written, so why not homosexuals?*
- ♦ *We are saddened and disappointed by those who use the authority of the Bible as a weapon to attack those of a different opinion than their own. The Bible is a tool for healing the wounds of God's people not an instrument of anger for inflicting hurt and division.*

- ♦ *There was considerable debate on the definition of 'sin' and the perceived conflict between Biblical teaching and contemporary morality. However, it was accepted that if a Christian life is to be founded on the tenets of the Ten Commandments, any homosexual activity must be perceived as turning away from God i.e. a sin.*

Points made in sympathy with homosexuality

Homosexuality is not sinful, but part of creation; we should celebrate diversity:

- ♦ *We were unanimous in affirming that sexuality is about more than procreation. We named the expression of love, tenderness, and physical desire and other reasons for engaging in sex.*
- ♦ *We were of the opinion that homosexual orientation is not, in itself, sinful and is not a barrier to being a Christian. Human relationships should show love, care and support of one partner to another and should not be destructive in any way. We could not find any reasons why this criteria should not apply to both heterosexual and homosexual relationships*

In the 'nature vs. nurture' debate, homosexuals are not one of God's mistakes:

- ♦ *God is the Creator of all things and the variety of human beings is part of his creative intention. Homosexuals are no exception. They are not God's mistakes.*

Homosexuals bring gifts and talents to the wider community (the arts; caring professions):

- ♦ *There seems to be in this country a tendency for some people (men) to have a proclivity to be feminine. It is recognised that there are men and women, especially in the arts, often particularly gifted, including many eminent names, who are openly confessed as practising homosexuals. The contributions they make to society through their artistic ability is both acknowledged and appreciated.*

Homosexual men are less threatening to women than many heterosexual men:

- ♦ *Why do we feel threatened by ministers who are gay and not doctors or teachers?*

There has been persecution of homosexuals by churches:

- ♦ *The meeting agreed that very few people would have admitted being homosexual in previous generations because they would have been persecuted. But society has changed and become much more tolerant. Why should the church not be more tolerant.*

Homosexual clergy are nothing new:

- ♦ *There have been practising homosexual clergy since the church began. For being honest about their sexual orientation candidates are turned away, but honesty is a good quality in a candidate and we should be grateful for such honesty.*

Attitudes change over time:

- ♦ *In summary, the meeting was inclined towards a liberal point of view recognising the changing attitudes of both society and the church to many other controversial issues over the years such as divorce, remarriage, the roles of females in ministry and cohabitation of heterosexuals.*

Homosexual and heterosexual relationships should not be treated with different rules:

- ♦ *The majority did not consider homosexuality to be sinful but were quite clear that it should be judged by the same standards as heterosexuality, e.g. that it was sinful if it was promiscuous, or hurt others.*

Celibacy for homosexuals should be the preferred option:

- ♦ *I sense the feeling was that if ministers said nothing about their sexuality (or nothing for several years) there would be no difficulty, but if they made an issue of their being gay or lesbian, practising or not, they would find it difficult to find churches that would call them.*

Arguments against homosexuality

The argument that it is against Biblical and Church teaching and therefore God's wishes was put in various ways, e.g.:

- ♦ *Our elders are of the opinion that homosexuals are not born as such. The elders interpretation of Biblical instructions on the subject is that homosexual acts are contrary to God's wishes. As parents they would find it difficult to accept one of their own children's admission as being gay or lesbian.*
- ♦ *... URC, after prayerful discussion with regard to Scripture and the traditions of the church, believe that no practising homosexuals be ordained to the Ministry of the URC.*

Homosexuality is unnatural. The only natural relationship is heterosexual marriage. All sexual relationships outside marriage are therefore wrong (whether homosexual or heterosexual).

- ♦ *Having discussed the issue in question and whilst not against genuine homosexuality, the church fellowship at ... believes that the ordination of homosexual men and women is not within God's purpose for the leadership of His church.*

The so-called 'Medway resolution' (first passed by that District Council and circulated nationwide) was used with minor variations by 16 local churches in different Provinces:

- ♦ *We believe that the expression of human sexuality outside the bounds of faithful marriage between a woman and a man is contrary to our discernment of the Word of God, to the Basis of Union and to the general ethos of joining churches: therefore we will not knowingly concur in the call of ministers of word and sacrament whose sexuality finds its expression outside these stated bounds.*

Homosexuality is against the vows of Ordination:

- ♦ *A minister of the church, although, like every other human being in the congregation, not perfect, is nevertheless looked up to, and expected to lead a life worthy of his calling. This congregation felt it could not call as minister a practising homosexual. Therefore it cannot agree to the training of such people as ministers.*
- ♦ *We cannot visualise candidates for ministry who practise same-sex genital activity, as honestly making their vows accepting the scriptures as rules of conduct and faith and a holy life.*

Worry about the influence on young people. Inappropriate role model:

- ♦ *As regards application for ministry, the elders feel that a practising homosexual in a position of influence could adversely affect the conduct of young persons and as such would not be acceptable to ... URC.*
- ♦ *Considerable concern was expressed at the influence a practising homosexual Minister could have on both children and adolescents in veering them towards homosexual relationships at a highly formative period of their lives. A Minister has to get close to the children in a congregation and occupies a considerable position of trust. Brigade and Junior Church leaders would be worried by the presence of any known homosexual and would be even more watchful for child abuse.*

There is concern for the church's reputation:

- ♦ *What would the villagers say if a Minister and his/her partner moved into the manse?*

There is a basic repugnance:

- ♦ *Others held the view that homosexual practice was not a Christian option.*
- ♦ *As was expected the subject has proved to be controversial and also distasteful to several of our members.*
- ♦ *Only a small minority can bring themselves to discuss any matter of a sexual nature with their own families, let alone in meetings. They are mostly rural, conservative in attitudes and far removed from urban sophistication where the gay movement is active.*

Flaunting of homosexuality is counterproductive:

- ♦ *We find it difficult to understand why there seems to be this need for homosexuals to 'come out' and declare their sexual orientation. It seems to be the thing for them to tell us of their orientation on TV, radio and at gatherings etc. Some members wondered 'are they trying to shock us or are they afraid?' If a homosexual is celibate why do they want to tell us; is it a kind of release?*

Churches should not pander to politically correct views:

- ♦ *Ministers and elders should set a high stand in Christian lifestyle which is not consistent with active homosexuality. The church must be aware of abdicating its God-given moral authority to the prevailing tide of politically correct opinion.*

General Issues

There is widespread anxiety that the issue of ordaining homosexuals will split the URC:

- ♦ *The only consensus view was that to pose the question and force a vote would split the church.*
- ♦ *Concern was expressed that whatever decision the URC reaches at the end of the debate, there is a great danger of splitting the Church. Concern was also expressed that while the Church should be prepared to make a stand on certain issues, what happens to existing Ordained Ministers, or even existing Ordained Elders if the decision of the URC is not to accept homosexuals.*
- ♦ *Every denomination that has voted on this issue has been divided into so-called 'winners' and losers'. No matter how the United Reformed Church decides about whether practising homosexual persons may be ordained, we too will be split.*

Threats to leave URC were expressed:

- ♦ *If it became the policy of the URC to accept practising homosexuals for Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, a warning was given that some members would vote with their feet.*

Pleas for tolerance came from several quarters:

- ♦ *In the light of our experience of a homosexual minister, we hope that the United Reformed Church will not set up barriers to the ministry of men and women on the grounds of their sexuality.*

Some felt this will run and run:

- ♦ *This is a debate that will continue and whatever resolution is made at the General Assembly there will remain a potential problem at local church level by virtue of the way the URC works in respect of accepting persons into membership, election of elders and the calling of ministers.*

Some general comments on policy

It is churches against homosexuality who request the URC to stand firm:

- ♦ *The church is called upon to make a decision. Is it going to accept the Lordship of Christ, or is it going to follow the way of the world where the prevailing pressure of present day culture is that any kind of sexual relationship goes? If we say we believe that Christ comes to us promising his grace is sufficient for us, no matter what difficulties we have to face, how can we fly in the face of that and go the way of the world?*
- ♦ *The meeting felt it was essential that the United Reformed Church should make its position known unequivocally, and avoid the confusion that has been caused by the Methodist Conference decision.*

Others urged that no vote/no action should be taken, to give more time and space:

- ♦ *It was felt that the discussion which had taken place was only a 'starter' and no vote should be taken on any aspect of the matter. We were left with the questions as to whether the homosexual tendency is inborn and also whether the sexual act within a homosexual relationship is considered acceptable. It was felt that the whole question of homosexuality needs to be thought about - also what will happen in the future and what will be the views of young people as they grow up.*
- ♦ *It gives time for attitudes to change and views to soften. We are less likely to tear ourselves apart over just one, although very important, issue.*

Several interpreted the present position as depending on local decision-making:

- ♦ *Homosexuals should not be stopped from entering the ministry of the United Reformed Church. It should be left up to each individual church to make its own decision when the time comes for them to call a minister.*
- ♦ *The majority opinion was that neither our local fellowship nor General Assembly should prejudice the suitability of a candidate or a trainee for the Ministry on the grounds of their sexual orientation and practice. If there was a reasonable possibility that some churches would be happy to invite such trainees to become their Minister, they should be allowed to be trained, ordained and inducted.*
- ♦ *It should not be the place of the General Assembly to prejudice whether or not some local congregations will find these men acceptable or not. If no congregation is willing to accept them then they are unlikely to become ordained into the Ministry but this is a risk that the men themselves must accept as no local congregation can or should have a Minister with whom they feel unable to work.*

Two churches proposed holding a referendum:

- ♦ *In addition, there was a very strong feeling that this matter should not be finalised merely taking into account the 'feelings' from churches who take the trouble to respond. We would recommend that a referendum is undertaken so all members have the opportunity to vote on a resolution and this will give a voice to all.*

One implication not drawn elsewhere:

- ♦ *We are alarmed by the level of violence against lesbian and gay people in our neighbourhood. This has been particularly acute as a result of fascist groups operating in our part of London. This violence cannot be ignored and the Church must not give an ambiguous message. Those under attack need our solidarity.*

Another church called on the URC to stand firm in a different way:

- ♦ *Whilst most people in the church would understand and be sympathetic to a person's sexuality, they may not necessarily accept them as the "norm" - but the Free Churches fought against the "norm" in the Reformation anyway!*

A postscript:

- ♦ *It was recognised that either a Yes or a No from the church on this issue will cost the church a lot. It is hard to say No without compromising the open welcome of Christ's Gospel; it is hard to say Yes without compromising what some see as Christ's call to holiness. The church, as well as her homosexual children, will need compassion and loving support throughout this debate.*

Annex 3: reports of Provincial Synods

The full report of the Task Group contains a two or three page extract from each of the responses submitted by the Provincial Synods.

This annex contains the outlines of Synod submissions, followed by a note of some figures from questionnaires and votes taken.

The Mission Council Task Group read and studied in full the reports from all the Synods.

♦ *As in all our reports, verbatim extracts from texts received are reproduced thus (in italics with bullet point).*

Northern Province

Synod considered the matter on November 1 & 2. On the Friday evening a presentation was made by Revd Rhona Jones and Synod agreed the procedure for the following morning. On the Saturday, personal statements were made by a panel of five, Ms Janet Turner, Revd Graham Hoslett, Ms Carolyn Smyth, Mrs Pat Atthey, Mr Ian Buist. This was followed by discussion in groups of 8. There was then a plenary for reporting back and putting points to the panel.

Each person was given a short questionnaire which they completed in silence after a prayer. Some of the questionnaire results are reproduced in tables at the end of this annex.

The Synod submission comprised a 15 page booklet which was produced later, containing the presentations and group reports. This may be obtained from the Province office.

North Western Province

Synod in March was addressed by five speakers, Revd Walter Houston, Revd Hazel Addy, Revd John Hall, Mr David Evans, Mrs Hylda Hurst. This was followed by group discussion and an open session at which questions were asked of the panel and many points of view expressed. 160 copies of a questionnaire were distributed and 149 returned. Some of the questionnaire results are reproduced in tables at the end of this annex.

In October Synod expressed its regret that the subject of Human Sexuality had been reduced to this aspect.

The Synod submission comprised a letter from the Provincial Moderator with a 27 page booklet which was produced later, containing the plenary addresses and group reports, plus a further contribution from Dr Jack McKelvey. This booklet may be obtained from the Province office.

♦ *It is the carefully considered and overwhelming view of this synod that the United Reformed Church is not yet ready to make a decision on the matter and that to do so would harm the unity of the church.*

Mersey Province

Synod in October 1995 agreed a process. Three training events were held attended by 58 people. A collator was appointed in each District. Reports from around half the churches were sent to the collators who reported on 10 recurring themes and offered some statements for synod to vote on. Among the themes were the authority of the Bible, the difference between practising and celibate, the different expectation of people in leadership positions, the reputation of the denomination, the welfare and pastoral support of homosexual candidates and ministers, the generation gap in these matters.

The Synod submission comprised the statements and the voting with a note on the procedure.

In addition to the votes tabulated at the end of this annex, Synod voted against leaving things as they are for 5 more years while further discussion takes place (40 for, 71 against) and also against a moratorium for the next 5 years on candidates for the ministry who declare themselves practising homosexuals (37 for, 64 against).

Yorkshire Province

Synod in October 1995 appointed a monitoring group of 3 who eventually received 58 responses and made a report in October 1996. This was discussed in the morning and questionnaire were completed by those present; the group then analysed these and drafted a Synod statement which was discussed during the afternoon, amended and agreed. This statement, with a note on procedure from the Synod Clerk, formed the Synod's submission.

No figures of questionnaires were submitted.

- ♦ *The views from the churches showed a greater overall tendency to resist the involvement of homosexuals.*
- ♦ *50% of Synod members felt they were still on a journey, continuing to learn about the issues involved and not yet ready to reach a decision.*

East Midlands Province

Synod tackled the subject in October 1996. During the morning session, members of synod filled in the questionnaire covering 26 questions on aspects of the matter, 3 of which are tabulated at the end of this annex. Among the many other questions, Synod members agreed:

(by 86 - 6) that it is appropriate for the URC to discuss the issue;

(by 56 - 32) that when someone applies as a candidate for the ministry questions about sexual orientation or practice should be asked;

(by 67 - 20) that the church should treat sexual activity generally as a private matter; and

(by 47 - 36) that the church should treat sexual activity generally as acceptable within a stable homosexual relationship.

The results were tabled later in the day and Synod resolved *"to adopt this analysis as Synod's response to the Human Sexuality debate"*. The Synod Clerk submitted the findings with a brief covering letter:

- ♦ *I am particularly requested to say that it does not represent division even if it does represent a divergence of views.*

West Midlands Province

- ♦ *Our discussion (at October Synod) opened with an exercise used at one of our District Councils which was designed to get people to think about where they stood on various ethical and moral issues other than human sexuality.*

Synod then heard four speakers (Revd Dr John Sampson, the Methodist District Chairman, Revd John Hall, Mr David Evans, Dr Iain Frew) followed by a brief plenary discussion. After lunch there was an hour of group discussion after which a questionnaire was circulated. Some of the questionnaire results are reproduced in tables at the end of this annex.

The Synod submission comprised a letter from the Provincial Moderator with a 40 page booklet which was produced later, containing the plenary addresses and group reports. This booklet may be obtained from the Province office.

Eastern Province

Synod submission comprised the findings of a questionnaire used in October 1996, with a similar report on the questionnaire completed by non-members present at Synod.

in addition to the answers tabulated at the end of this annex, voting members of Synod felt it would not be right to ask questions about sexual orientation and behaviour of would-be church members (70% - 18%) or of nominee elders (55% - 31%) but it would be right in the case of ministerial candidates (60% - 27%).

South Western Province

Synod submission comprised the findings of a questionnaire used in October 1996.

In addition to the answers tabulated at the end of this annex, voting members of Synod felt that matters of sexuality are, in considering a person's suitability for:

| | not at all | have some bearing | very important | of vital importance |
|--------------------|------------|-------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Church membership | 59 | 59 | 19 | 7 |
| Ordained Eldership | 25 | 48 | 39 | 25 |
| Christian Ministry | 18 | 36 | 41 | 49 |

Wessex Province

The Synod Clerk submitted a letter reporting a Synod discussion in October 1996.

No formal report or figures were given.

- ♦ *Probably the overriding feelings are that the whole subject is very complex and one we have only just begun. The hope was expressed fairly strongly that this issue will be dealt with not only sensitively but also without undue haste. We need to remember always that we are dealing with people and that all people, whatever their sexual orientation, are the children of God.*

Thames North Province

The Acting Synod Clerk submitted a copy of a report containing the papers prepared by Dr Lesslie Newbiggin and Revd Janet Webber and notes of the discussion in 18 small groups in Synod October.

- ♦ *No formal vote was taken on any of the issues involved, although some of the small groups took their own.*
- ♦ *The discussion in the groups indicated: In the groups which discussed the issue the majority view was that the General Assembly should not legislate about accepting or rejecting openly homosexual people in leadership positions in the church. The discussion on homosexuality and scripture showed the division between those who said the Church should accept the clear guidance which rejects homosexual practice and those who state that scripture should be interpreted more broadly in the light of modern scientific anthropology and culture. The general points revealed a common desire to show understanding and love to homosexuals. However there appeared to be a division on whether or not practising homosexuals should be accepted in positions of leadership in the Church; in this a majority view is not clear.*

Southern Province

Two main papers produced by a small group in the Province were circulated prior to the discussion in October Synod. Paper A presented a number of propositions relating to Theology (4 paragraphs), Homosexuality (5) and the Church (10). Paper B offered a possible draft statement incorporating in 9 paragraphs the main substance of the propositions presented in paper A. Both papers are reproduced in the Task Group full report.

After the discussion questionnaires were distributed and posted back later showing more than two-thirds agreeing with both texts. Paper B was thus submitted, 12 persons formally dissenting, and was studied with care by the Task Group as they formulated their report. Some Synod members described it as fudging the issue between orientation and practice where there is a call for a clear unequivocal message to be given; others (reportedly fewer) felt it offered a sensitive and helpful way forward since it leaves the final decision with the local church.

Province of Wales

Provincial Synods 1996

Some apparent figures can be deduced from the reports of questionnaires completed at seven Synod meetings. Other Synods do not quote figures at all.

The different questions put and several provisos attached make this an unreliable statistical base.

If we try to ascertain how many Synod members would accept practising homosexuals into church membership, positions of leadership or the ministry of word and sacraments, we find these totals and percentages:

A Into membership

| <i>Province</i> | <i>"yes"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"no"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"maybe"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>total</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|----------|--------------|
| 1 Northern | 141 | 83 | 11 | 6 | 19 | 11 | 171 |
| 2 North Western | 116 | 80 | 15 | 10 | 15 | 10 | 146 |
| 5 East Midlands | 78 | 76 | 13 | 13 | 11 | 11 | 102 |
| 6 West Midlands | 120 | 83 | 7 | 5 | 18 | 12 | 145 |
| 7 Eastern | 109 | 83 | 14 | 11 | 8 | 6 | 131 |
| 8 South Western | 119 | 81 | 27 | 18 | 1 | 1 | 147 |
| total of these | 683 | 81 | 87 | 10 | 72 | 9 | 842 |

B Into leadership

| <i>Province</i> | <i>"yes"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"no"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"maybe"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>total</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 Northern | 112 | 64 | 45 | 26 | 17 | 10 | 174 |
| 2 North Western | 95 | 65 | 29 | 20 | 21 | 15 | 145 |
| 5 East Midlands | 37 | 37 | 39 | 39 | 25 | 24 | 101 |
| 6 West Midlands | 107 | 74 | 20 | 14 | 18 | 12 | 145 |
| 7 Eastern | 87 | 66 | 30 | 23 | 14 | 11 | 131 |
| 8 South Western | 72 | 49 | 74 | 50 | 1 | 1 | 147 |
| total of these | 510 | 61 | 237 | 28 | 96 | 11 | 843 |

C Into ministry

| <i>Province</i> | <i>"yes"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"no"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>"maybe"</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>total</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|--------------|
| 1 Northern | 96 | 60 | 50 | 31 | 13 | 8 | 159 |
| 2 North Western | 75 | 58 | 36 | 28 | 18 | 14 | 129 |
| 3 Mersey | 58 | 51 | 34 | 30 | 22 | 19 | 114 |
| 5 East Midlands | 33 | 32 | 53 | 51 | 18 | 17 | 104 |
| 6 West Midlands | 90 | 63 | 38 | 26 | 16 | 11 | 144 |
| 7 Eastern | 72 | 54 | 44 | 33 | 15 | 13 | 131 |
| 8 South Western | 51 | 34 | 95 | 64 | 3 | 2 | 149 |
| total of these | 475 | 51 | 350 | 38 | 105 | 11 | 930 |

Annex 4: reports of District Councils

The full report of the Mission Council Task Group contains a summary of the responses submitted by District Councils. The Task Group members read these submissions. A few District Councils merely forwarded local church responses or sent extensive transcripts of group discussions and, in two cases, tape recordings; the Task Group was unable to appraise these submissions.

- ♦ *Throughout these reports, verbatim extracts from texts received are reproduced thus (in italics with bullet point).*

43 District Councils reported:

1B; 1C; 1D; 1E; 1F; 2A; 2B; 2F; 2G; 4A; 4B; 4C; 5A; 5B; 5E; 5F; 6B; 6C; 6E; 6F; 7A; 7B; 7C; 7D; 7E; 8A; 8C; 8E; 9A; 9B; 9C; 10A; 10B; 10E; 10F; 11A; 11B; 11D; 11E; 11G; 12B; 12D; 12F.

These responses varied from a short letter to a lengthy submission of agreed statements and survey results. 10 Councils took some measurable soundings of members' views, 3 via a 'straw poll', 7 through a questionnaire. 18 Councils submitted the secretary's record of the discussions. 6 submitted an agreed response, in 2 cases a statement, in 4 cases a agreed record of discussion. 5 specifically mentioned that they would not make a statement. 4 reported on specially held meetings.

There is no statistical base to report any figures from District Council meetings.

Most of the extracts included in this random cross-section contain points made elsewhere by local churches or Provincial synods.

[The Task Group wishes to report to Mission Council that by way of a double-check we have asked those Councils from whom no response appears to have been received whether in fact they have sent one (e.g. to the Province) or knowingly sent none.]

We offer this cross-section of comments, beginning and concluding with ones with which the Task Group identifies.

- ♦ *Having spent some time writing this report as a synopsis of all the comments received I can say that the most significant part is not the summary of voting results but the comments made.*
- ♦ *The officers agreed not to put a resolution to the Council but with something of a heavy heart a straw poll was taken in November.*
- ♦ *A number of people complained about the time that had been taken over the issue at the various levels within the URC.*
- ♦ *Whatever is decided by the church will hurt many. ... We met and leave as friends. There is much more to say in our search for truth and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*
- ♦ *A District opinion is a difficult one to represent.*
- ♦ *There is a need to balance carefully the three issues of biblical authority, respect for human individuality and the safeguarding of the unity and the credibility of the whole church.*
- ♦ *Ministers practising homosexuality could be a scandal to the community.*
- ♦ *Members were asked to indicate if they agreed or not with the proposal that 'practising homosexuals may be ordained to the URC ministry in future' A secret ballot revealed 3 for, 22 against, 4 abstentions.*
- ♦ *Concern was expressed for homosexual ministers already in service.*
- ♦ *The District consultation concluded that further debate within the church should focus on four inter-related issues: the authority of the Bible and how we use its witness today; the nature of vocation and calling; the nature of the Christian community; the need to recognise gifts already offered in ministry as the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.*
- ♦ *The fact of orientation does not bestow licence to behave in a way which might damage oneself, other people or the cause we represent.*
- ♦ *There was a wide belief that the church is not yet ready to accept admitted practising homosexuals into membership.*

- ♦ *Homosexuals face prejudices and problems because of society's pressures and may therefore be unable to sustain a permanent stable relationship.*
- ♦ *I sensed that people had made their minds up before the meeting.*
- ♦ *What of the silent majority?*
- ♦ *Although a straw poll was suggested it was not the majority wish of those present that this be taken.*
- ♦ *There was considerable effort made by ... to ensure that churches voted on a particular resolution.*
- ♦ *Is the present strong tradition of prejudice particularly Anglo-Saxon?*
- ♦ *The views of the students (at Westminster College) range across all opinions in regard to the ordination of homosexuals.*
- ♦ *It would be better if the church goes on discussing this and other deep issues.*
- ♦ *On one thing were unanimous, our hope that the wider debate when it comes will not harm the Church.*
- ♦ *... District affirmed the procedures currently in use in the URC as adequate for assessing and approving or rejecting candidates for ministry and believes that such candidates for ministry, as for eldership and church membership, should be considered on the basis of whether they are perceived as being called of God.*

The 'Medway resolution', subsequently passed by several local churches, was passed by that District in April 1995:

- ♦ *Medway District Council believes that the physical expression of human sexuality outside the bounds of faithful marriage between a woman and a man is contrary to our discernment of the Word of God, the Basis of Union and the general ethos of the joining churches. Therefore we will not knowingly concur in the call of Ministers of Word and Sacrament whose sexuality finds its physical expression outside these stated bounds.*

In another District this 'Medway resolution' was proposed with the comment that "it had not been the intention of the proposers that this should be seen as directed against those divorced or married to divorced partners"; the Council minute notes that "various speakers pointed out that it could be so interpreted (and) after an unsuccessful bid to move that the question be not put the resolution was rejected by 25 to 0, with 1 abstention".

- ♦ *In summary it appeared that if homosexuals were to be openly ordained in the United Reformed Church a few people in the District would be quite happy, most would be uneasy and some would be dismayed.*



MISSION COUNCIL

14 - 16 March 1997

Q

FOR DECISION

GRANGE ROAD FUND (S WHITE FUND)

In 1934, a Mr S White gave £5,000 to trustees instructing that the income should be made available to Grange Road Presbyterian Church and to Beckwith Street Mission initially. In the event of the closure of the Church and Mission, the instruction was that the money should be transferred to "the trustees if the funds for the various schemes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England who shall divide and use the income thereof as a General Assembly in its discretion may determine."

The trustee believes that both the Church and the Mission have been closed for many years.

In past years, grants have been made to churches in the Birkenhead area, upon the advice of the Synod of the Mersey Province.

The capital of the fund, as at 1 January 1997 was valued at £7,700. The unexpended income was valued at £35,000.

The trustee, United Reformed Church Trust suggest that steps be taken to wind this Trust up, by transferring the money to the general funds of the Church. Mission Council approval is required.

RESOLUTION

Mission Council approves the transfer of the Grange Road Fund (S White Fund) to the general funds (capital and unexpended income) of the Church.

RESOLUTION ON APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTORS OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MINISTERS PENSION TRUST LIMITED

1. This matter was considered by the Mission Council on 1 October 1996. (See paper G of that meeting for details.)
2. As a consequence, a letter was sent to 1,395 of the 1,416 members of the Pension Fund. The difference is accounted for by 21 deferred members who have not kept us advised of their current address.
3. Three members of the Pension Fund objected to the proposal.
4. Due to a drafting error, the members of the Pension Fund were further circulated in January. No further objections were received by the date stated, 28 February.
5. The following resolution will therefore be moved by the Treasurer:-

"Mission Council, having noted that objections were received from three members of the Pension Fund (0.2% of the total) confirms that the statutory consultation procedure laid down in section 19 of the Pensions Act 1995 has been appropriately implemented, and therefore that the existing arrangements as to the appointment of member directors of the United Reformed Church Pension Trust Limited shall continue."

The URC Task Group on the Millennium

Resolution to General Assembly

General Assembly:

1. accepts that "The task of the Churches in the Millennium is to forge a link between the year 2000, the name of Jesus Christ, and the possibility of personal meaning and public hope." (A Chance to Start Again p9);
2. encourages local churches to become involved in local community activities and celebrations for the Millennium;
3. encourages all churches and individuals to become involved in the acts of prayer and witness being planned nationally and ecumenically;
4.
 - a.) endorses and commends 'Jubilee 2000' to every church and adopts the Charter (set out below) as a "model for a workable and acceptable solution to the problem of poor country debt";
 - b) urges church members and adherents to subscribe to the supporting petition being distributed in the Information Service and to take other actions as part of the Jubilee 2000 campaign;
 - c) notes the link already made with Jubilee 2000 through Commitment for Life;
 - d) commends the British Government for their proposals on debt relief but urges them to press with more vigour for the adoption of such proposals within the International Monetary Fund and G7 nations, especially in relation to sub-Saharan Africa;
5. urges all Synods and churches to use the bible study and worship material being prepared for use within the URC during 1999.

The URC Inter-Committee Task Group on the Millennium, whilst encouraging churches to become involved in local millennium activities recommends that the URC as a denomination becomes involved in three main areas.

- A. By becoming involved in nationally promoted ecumenical activities.
- B. By supporting Jubilee 2000
- C. By responding to a call to renewal through bible study and worship.

A. National Events being promoted ecumenically.

- Use of the booklet 'A Chance to Start Again'
- Friday 31st December 1999 at 8.00 pm. Churches may wish to hold a service at this time before joining with local celebrations.
- Friday 31st December 1999 at 11.58 pm. Wherever people are, at celebrations or at home, a short period of silence when small candles are lit. Then at half a minute to midnight those who want to, join in a simple four-line prayer. Special candles will be available.
- Saturday 1st January 2000, 12.00 noon - 12.15 Nationwide peal of bells and a time of prayer.
- Pentecost 2000 (June 11th) Churches Celebration Day.
- Activities at the Millennium Exhibition site(s).

Ecumenically prepared worship and prayer material will be available for the various events.

B. Jubilee 2000

'A Chance to Start Again' explores the idea of Jubilee and the 1000 days between the 6th April 1997 and the year 2000 will be crucial for churches to work on behalf of Jubilee 2000. Jubilee 2000 is fully ecumenical, Church and Society is an affiliate member of the campaign and Commitment for Life is linked. Churches are encouraged to get fully involved. The Jubilee 2000 Charter is printed overleaf.

C. URC Call to Renewal through bible study and worship

For the Church the Millennium must be about Jesus. There is need for a sense of renewal about our knowledge of Jesus, both in terms of His life and the Church's teaching concerning Him. This can lead to a sense of renewal of personal faith and commitment. We want the members of the URC to explore what the Church has said and continues to say about Jesus. We therefore recommend that every congregation be asked to be involved in two study periods during 1999. We hope that each Province would set aside time (1 hour) at their Synod meetings in March and October to introduce themes which would be followed up in four or five week study periods in congregations between Easter and Pentecost and leading up to Advent and Christmas. Material, prepared by a team of writers, would be provided.

The Jubilee 2000 Charter

The Jubilee 2000 Charter suggests a solution to the problem of Third World debt which is attractive to both debtors and creditors. It proposes the remission – by 31 December 2000 – of the unpayable debts owed by highly indebted poor countries to commercial banks, creditor governments and multilateral bodies (such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and Regional Development Banks).

The Jubilee 2000 Charter proposes that:

- **There is an overwhelming need for remission of the backlog of unpayable debts owed by highly indebted poor countries. Debt remission should relate to commercial, government and IMF/World Bank debts, and debt reduction should comprehensively include all three forms of debt.**
- **Creditors as well as debtors must accept responsibility for these high levels of indebtedness.**
- **The remission should be a one-off, unrepeatable act, tied to the celebration of the new millennium. It would set no precedents for future loans.**
- **The precise details of remission should be worked out in consultation with both creditors and debtors for each debtor country.**
- **These details should be agreed by arbitrators nominated in equal numbers by both creditor and debtor, under the aegis of the UN.**
- **Their deliberations should be transparent and well-publicised, taking into account for each debtor country, that country's probity, economic management, social policies and human rights record.**
- **Funds available after the remission of debt should be channelled into policies which benefit the poor, in line with UNICEF's recommendations for investment in social development.**
- **Low income countries – with an annual income per person of less than US \$700 – should receive full remission of all unpayable debt.**
- **Higher income countries – with an annual income per person between US \$700 and US \$2,000 – should receive partial remission.**

The Jubilee 2000 Charter is offered as a model for a workable and acceptable solution to the problem of poor country debt. It would create a new, disciplined beginning to financial relations between North and South, and a fresh start for millions of the world's poor.



A S S

For discussion and comment

In order to ease the Mission Council agenda, committee resolutions for General Assembly have been separated into one of three categories:

- a) Resolutions on which a committee wants advice or comment from Mission Council before going to Assembly. These have a separate place on the agenda and are designated by a letter of the alphabet.
- b) Resolutions of formal nature (e.g. "Assembly adopts the accounts for....") which do not find a place among our papers.
- c) Other resolutions, which committees are happy to take direct to Assembly. These are attached to this sheet. Mission Council is asked to look through these: there will be opportunity for the Council to make comment to the Conveners of the Committees on any aspect of what is proposed. It will then be for Conveners to decide what action to take.

John Waller
7 March 1977

MINISTRIES COMMITTEE

RESOLUTIONS FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY

RESOLUTION 1

- 1 General Assembly approves a national Ministerial Accompanied Self-Appraisal scheme as set out in **Ministerial Accompanied Self-Appraisal - a scheme for the United Reformed Church**
 - 2 General Assembly approves the timetable set out in section 8 of **Ministerial Accompanied Self-Appraisal - a scheme for the United Reformed Church**
-

Ministerial Accompanied Self-Appraisal - a scheme for the United Reformed Church

In September 1993, the then Ministries Committee presented a paper on the Appraisal of Ministers to Mission Council. A considerable amount of time had then been taken to research the subject with other denominations and with secular sources, and to develop a theology of Appraisal. The outlined proposals were broadly accepted by Mission Council and, at the committee's suggestion that the Scheme be piloted for two years, it was agreed to use the West Midlands provincial scheme which was already in operation for this purpose. Through 1993 - 1995 the original group monitored the work being done in the West Midlands province. The Province is to be congratulated for the work carried out.

Other provinces have also shown an interest in the West Midlands scheme and Southern Province is currently preparing a scheme largely based upon it.

As a result of this monitoring period we request General Assembly approves the setting up of a national ministerial accompanied self-appraisal scheme using the West Midlands provincial scheme as a basis.

A proposed Timetable

If the 1997 General Assembly approves the setting up of the scheme we suggest the following timetable:

(i) July - December 1997

Provinces appoint Appraisal teams and set up the administration

(ii) The Ministries Committee liaises with the West Midlands and Southern Province in particular but also with the other provinces about the range of provincial diversity possible within an overall scheme.

(iii) The Appraisal booklet is finalised.

(iv) January/February 1998 National Training consultation.

(iv) January/February 1998 National Training consultation

The Training committee will invite two representatives from each provincial Appraisal Team to the consultation

(v) February - June provincial training of their colleagues by those who attended the national consultation. (Training will be organised annually for new Appraisal partners)

(vi) By July 1988 the Appraisal scheme will be in operation. A report on the implementation will be made to General assembly

RESOLUTION 2

1. Assembly resolves that ministers should normally retire from full time stipendiary service not later than six calendar months from the date on which they have attained the age of 65
2. Assembly agrees that in exceptional circumstances a minister may remain in full time service for a maximum of three years beyond that age, with the support of the pastorate, the concurrence of the District Council and the agreement of the Accreditation Sub-committee. Ministers wishing to apply for such an extension should do so not later than one year before they reach retiring age

RESOLUTION 3

Age of entry into Ministry and Ministerial Training

1. Assembly resolves that training for the stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments may begin from the date of a candidates 18th birthday, recognising that enquiries may be made several years earlier
2. Assembly resolves that the normal minimum age for the commencement of training for the non-stipendiary Ministry for Word and Sacraments shall be 25
3. Assembly believes that Ordination to the stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments should take place by the age of 55, and to this end, given the present Assessment and Training processes, resolves that formal application for training for the stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments must be received by the Province by the date of the applicant's 50th birthday
4. Assembly believes that Ordination to the non-stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments should take place by the age of 55, and to this end, given the present Assessment and Training processes, resolves that formal application for training for the non-stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments must be received by the Province by the date of the applicant's 50th birthday.

MINISTRIES

5. Assembly resolves that the provisions of resolutions 3 and 4 above shall apply to all applications received by the Provinces after the close of the 1997 General Assembly
6. Assembly resolves that applications to transfer from non-stipendiary to stipendiary ministry must be received by the Province before the date of the applicant's 53rd birthday
7. Assembly resolves that the provisions of resolution 6 above shall apply to any applications received by the Province after October 1 1997
8. Assembly resolves that any variation to the requirements established in resolutions 1-7 will need the agreement of the Accreditation Sub-committees

ECUMENICAL

RESOLUTION ?

General Assembly urges the councils and committees of the United Reformed Church, including the local, to lead every agenda, as a matter of regular practice, with the question "what are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?"

Test relating to resolution? above.

This resolution arises from the joint meeting of the Unity Committees of all the major churches in England held in September 1996. Some years ago, there was a suggestion that each committee meeting should remember to switch on the ecumenical light. This resolution seeks to strengthen that commitment.

RESOLUTION ?

The General Assembly gives second approval to an addition to the composition of the membership of Assembly in Section 2 of the structure of the United Reformed Church as follows:

- 2(5) (j) A representative of the Council for World Mission

RESOLUTION 1

Assembly accepts the following qualifications for entry into the United Reformed Church Ministry.

- a. A GCSE (Grade A-C) in English Language or the equivalent as an essential prerequisite.
 - b. Plus one of the following:
 - i. 2 'A' Levels including at least one in a discursive subject
 - ii. 3 Scottish "Highers" including at least one in a discursive subject
 - iii. a degree from UK University
 - iv. 120 first degree credits from the Open University or other UK University working on a modular system
 - v. An advanced GNVQ, involving a substantial quality of discursive work.
-

Entry Qualifications for Ministry

1.1 The 1996 General Assembly approved rigorous assessment criteria, submitted by the Ministries Committee, so that we now weigh with great care the personal qualities and experience of applications. The criteria require candidates to be able "to respond positively to ministerial education and training", and the accompanying report points out that "the existing requirement of five GCSE passes is an inadequate measure of learning potential". The Training Committee now brings forward proposals for Assembly's consideration, to clarify what the church means by "ability to respond positively to ministerial education and training".

1.2 Competence in using the spoken and written language, (English or Welsh), as tools of communication is essential for ministry; competence in English is essential as a basis for serious study. A reasonable confidence in study skills and in managing a personal study programme will be needed if a student is to engage properly with the substance of a theological course. Without these various basics the work itself may be seen as an obstacle and a threat, rather than as a means for developing strengths, shaping wisdom and identifying and addressing weaknesses. We must ask ordinands to show an initial readiness and desire for learning if the training institutions are to serve the students and the church effectively. This is partly a matter of attitude and enthusiasm, partly a matter to be demonstrated.

1.3 The Training Committee is aware of the wide variation in school, college and professional qualifications that help people to develop study skills. This is the reason for the variety of paths suggested in (b) above. In addition, one year's work on the *Training for Learning and Serving* Course (TLS) with essays assessed to an agreed standard, will exempt a candidate from one 'A' Level, but the Committee is firmly convinced the candidates would also be tested by an examining body outside the church. Thus TLS will not gain full access qualification.

1.4 A small group, convened by the Secretary for Training and taking advice from outside consultants, will adjudicate on equivalence of other qualifications and on individual cases where there is any lack of clarity.

1.5 Candidates should normally have secured their access requirements before they seek to attend a National Assessment Conference.

1.6 These qualifications should apply for those accepted for training for United Reformed Church Ministry after September, 1997.

RESOLUTION 2

Assembly recommends that, at the end of initial ministerial training, the minimum qualification for ordination should be 240 undergraduate credit points, or the equivalent of two thirds of a first degree on a course recognised by the Training Committee, plus 800 hours of supervised and assessed placement or internship work.

Minimum Qualification for Ordination

2.1 It is difficult, in seeking to work towards parity of training between Stipendiary Ministers and Non-Stipendiary Ministry ordinands, to see how a four year full-time and a three year part-time course can be thought to be comparable. Diversity in learning in ministry is important; we do not envisage all ministers becoming theology graduates. So, rather than attempt to define upper limits, the Training Committee has discussed the need for a definition of minimum qualification for entry into the URC ministry.

2.2 The above qualifications should apply to those accepted for training for United Reformed Church Ministry after September, 1997.

YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S WORK COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION

- * General Assembly
- * Encourages Provinces and Districts to support their Children's and Youth Work Secretaries
- * Welcomes initiatives aimed at developing work with children and young people
- * Challenges local churches to set targets for growth

CHURCH AND SOCIETY

ASSEMBLY

- i Welcomes the serious attempt made by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) to discover what values are commonly held in different sections of society and affirms the need to continue with this exercise.
- ii Applauds the efforts by many teachers and governors to promote such values within the ethos of their schools and colleges as they assist the development of children and young people growing up in a society which is often hostile to such values.
- iii Believes that, in the "promotion of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at school" (as required under the 1988 and 1992 Education Acts), moral principles must be linked with the spiritual and cultural education and therefore resists the suggestion that 'values' might be taught as a separate subject on the curriculum.
- iv Instructs Church and Society to pass on these views to the FCFC Education Committee, the government and the SCAA.

In the accompanying report, it is argued that the SCAA report is flawed but encouraging for a number of reasons given.

Church and Society are sharing in the millennium resolution with the report and text on 'Jubilee 2000', the broad-based (and increasingly international) campaign for third world debt relief in 1999.

The committee report from Church and Society will review what has happened to some resolutions passed in Assembly in recent years, set out the progress being made with Commitment for Life, report on other work, including the AIDS ministry, the Advisor programme for 1997/9 (focusing on environmental issues, economics and ageing) and other shorter items.