



The
United
Reformed
Church

MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

MINUTES

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Paul Bedford. This included a discussion led by the Moderator, the Revd Bill Mahood, on the Theological Reflection by Christina Le Moignan which had been produced following the September/October 2000 meeting of Mission Council.

01/01 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioning in particular:- the Revd Adrian Bulley (Thames North, deputising for Mr Geoffrey Duncan), Miss Lucy Hartwell (FURY Council Representative), the Revd Victor Ridgewell (Eastern) and Mrs Jenny Carpenter (Rural Consultant).

01/02 Attendance

There were 55 members present with 20 staff and others in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Revd Ray Adams (South Western), Ms Suzanne Adofo (Church Related Community Work Development Officer), Mrs Karen Bulley (Pilots Development Officer), Revd Angus Duncan (Grants and Loans Group Convener), Mr Geoffrey Duncan (Thames North), Revd Arnold Harrison (Yorkshire), Revd Nannette Lewis Head (Equal Opportunities Committee), Mrs Barbara Hedgecock (Minute Secretary), Revd John Proctor (Training Committee), Mr Graham Rolfe (Wessex), Revd Roberta Rominger (Thames North), Miss Catriona Smith (Scotland), Dr Donald South (Mersey), Revd Pamela Ward (Northern), Mrs Roberta Wood (Northern), Dr Peter Clarke (Northern), Revd Frank Beattie (Life and Witness Committee), Mrs Christine Meekison (Southern), the Revd Sam Ansa-Addo (West Midlands) and Mr Hartley Oldham (Legal Adviser).

01/03 Minutes of Mission Council 29 September - 1 October 2000

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 September - 1 October 2000, which had been circulated, were presented by the Clerk. They were approved and signed with one correction:

00/54 Paragraph 3 should read "that the" (lower case).

01/04 Matters Arising

00/55 Review of Inter-Faith Relations Committee (Paper O)

In the absence of Mr Graham Rolfe, who had convened the review group, the Deputy General Secretary presented Paper O. Paragraph 4 would be taken with the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) report. See *Minute 01/05*. Mission Council accepted in full the recommendations contained in Paper O, and would therefore recommend to the Assembly that the Inter-Faith Relations Committee should continue with a revised remit.

00/56 Post of Deputy General Secretary

The Deputy General Secretary reported that all those invited had agreed to serve on the review group, and that a report would be made to the March meeting of Mission Council.

00/57 Task Group on local church premises

The Deputy General Secretary reminded the meeting of the background to this work and reported that the Task Group would be meeting representatives of the Communications and Editorial Committee soon. Between them, and with adequate consultation, they would determine in what form and by what means the report would be published.

00/60 Secession of local churches (Paper A)

The Deputy General Secretary presented Paper A, noting that it was almost exactly the same as the paper which had been presented to the previous meeting, with appropriate amendments consequent on it not being taken to the General Assembly. It was agreed that copies of the paper should be held for reference by the General Secretary, the Secretary of Mission Council and each synod.

00/61 Edmonton secession.

The Deputy General Secretary reported that those nominated had agreed to serve and that work had begun, although the Revd John Proctor had withdrawn because of ill health on the day of the visit to Edmonton. The remaining four people would complete the task and would report with a recommendation to the March meeting of Mission Council.

00/65 Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) membership

The Deputy General Secretary introduced the recommendations from MCAG that the Revd Julian Macro be appointed as convener-elect (to take office after Assembly 2001) and Mrs Erica Young be appointed as secretary (to take office immediately). Both recommendations were accepted. There being one remaining vacancy on the group for a member, the Clerk explained the procedure for an election which would take place later in the meeting. *See Minute 01/11.*

00/66 Yorkshire Synod resolution

The Revd Graham Long reported that the group had met once and had planned three further meetings.

00/68 Committee for Racial Justice programme (Paper F)

The Deputy General Secretary introduced Paper F, and outlined the options with their advantages and disadvantages. There was discussion following which the Deputy General Secretary proposed and the Revd Elizabeth Welch seconded that:
In the light of all the comments, Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, agrees that a Committee for Racial Justice be established as a standing committee of the Assembly. This was agreed. It was further agreed that the committee should have eight members including officers, and that the Nominations Committee be requested to bring names to the 2001 General Assembly for appointment.

00/74 Update on Training for Learning and Serving (TLS)

In the absence of the Revd John Proctor, and with the permission of the Moderator, the Revd Dr Lesley Husselbee reported that, following the United Reformed Church's (URC) offer to purchase the copyright of the *Training for Learning and Serving* programme, the Board of Directors of the Scottish Churches Open College (SCOC) agreed in December to sell the copyright of TLS material for the *Foundation* and *Worship and Preaching* modules to the URC. As a result, the URC would be able to run TLS in England and Wales, for the foreseeable future in a form similar to that of recent years. It was hoped that some ecumenical partners might wish to share in the use of the course. The material would be developed over time, and a *Pastoral Care* module was proposed. The Training Committee had strengthened the TLS Management Committee to deal with the additional management needs. Churches within the URC's Synod of Scotland would still have access to the TLS material if they wished to use it but they could also take advantage of the SCOC's *Living Theology* course.

00/75 Ruition Secession

The General Secretary reported that MCAG had appointed the following to form the group to advise Mission Council in this matter: Revd Keith Forecast (convener), Dr Graham Campling, Revd John Humphreys, Mrs Margareta Batchelor and Mrs Jill Strong.

01/05 Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) report (Paper H)

The Deputy General Secretary presented the report, noting that paragraphs 4 and 5 were matters of report.

Referring to paragraph 1 of the MCAG report, Mr Waller spoke to Paper L concerning Charity Trustees, and having briefly introduced the issue, he moved the resolutions at the end of that Paper as follows:

Mission Council resolves:

1. that the remit of Mission Council Advisory Group be amended to read as follows:

The remit of Mission Council Advisory Group ("MCAG") is

- (i) to plan the meetings of Mission Council;**
- (ii) to ensure that appropriate follow up actions are taken following meetings of Mission Council and General Assembly; and**
- (iii) to provide support and advice to the Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary.**

In carrying out the above remit, MCAG should have regard to the Functions of General Assembly, as set out in the Structure, and should seek to ensure that Mission Council and General Assembly are provided with appropriate reports to enable them to see that those Functions are properly carried out.

2. that General Assembly be asked to agree that the Charity Trustees of the United Reformed Church are considered to be the members for the time being of the Mission Council Advisory Group.

Following discussion, and having noted that the General Secretary should be added to the list of members of MCAG shown on page 3 of Paper L, the resolutions were passed. It was suggested that the sentence included in the paper: "For churches, the Charity Commissioners have indicated that they would normally regard the Elders' Meeting as the charity trustee."

might be brought to the attention of local churches. In response to a question about indemnity, the Treasurer gave it as his view that it would not be necessary to provide specifically that the members of MCAG be indemnified for their work, in that all those properly engaged in work for the URC had the right to be indemnified by the church. Discussions were in progress with the church's insurers to ensure that sufficient cover was in place. Mr Stacy said that it might be wise to bring a resolution on the matter to the General Assembly.

Referring to Paragraph 2 of Paper H, the Deputy General Secretary introduced the recommendation of MCAG and moved, seconded by Mr Graham Stacy, that **the staff link with the Inter-Faith Relations Committee should no longer lie with the Secretary for International Relations, but should be added to the job description of the Secretary for Racial Justice.** The Revd Peter Brain gave notice that, should the resolution fall, he would move an alternative resolution to the effect that the link should lie with the Secretary for Life and Witness. Twenty three votes were cast for the resolution and eighteen against, and the Moderator declared that the resolution had been carried. The alternative resolution was therefore not put.

Referring to Paragraph 3 of Paper H, the Deputy General Secretary proposed on behalf of MCAG that the tellers for Mission Council up to the end of the March meeting should be the Revd John Humphreys and Ms Avis Reaney. This was agreed.

01/06 Resource sharing task group (Paper G)

The Revd Tony Burnham, convener of the task group, introduced Paper G and spoke to the summary points contained at the end of the paper. It was recommended that the group should continue, and this had been agreed by the synods during the last annual consultation meeting. Mission Council, expressing thanks for the work of the group and appreciation at the results which had been achieved, agreed to re-appoint the present group of Mr David Butler (Secretary), the Revd Roger Whitehead, Mrs Fiona Smith and the Revd Tony Burnham. On the proposal of the Moderator, it was agreed that Mr Burnham should continue to serve as the group's convener.

01/07 Nominations Committee Report (Paper I)

This report was presented by the Convener, the Revd Glyn Jenkins.

Mission Council received the recommendation from the Nominating Group for the Southern Synod Moderator convened by the Revd Sandra Lloydlangston and passed the following resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd Nigel Uden to serve as Moderator of the Southern Synod for seven years with effect from 1st September 2001.

Mission Council received the recommendation from the Nominating Group for the National Synod of Wales Moderator convened by the Revd Christopher White and passed the following resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd Peter Noble to serve as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for seven years with effect from 1st September 2001.

The General Secretary drew the attention of Mission Council to the two small nominating groups for Clerk and Treasurer from the end of Assembly 2002 to be convened by Mrs Wilma Frew and the Revd John Reardon respectively, and asked that suggestions be given to the relevant convener or to him.

Referring to paragraph 2 of Paper I, Mr. Jenkins moved that: **Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints Mr Jim Wilkinson to be convener of the Windermere Advisory Group from Assembly 2001.** This was agreed.

Mr. Jenkins asked Mission Council to note the following who had accepted nomination as conveners-elect of Assembly committees:

Church and Society: the Revd Martin Camroux;

Equal Opportunities: the Revd Wilfred Bahadur;

Ministries: Mr John Ellis;

Retired Ministers Housing Sub-Committee: the Revd John Pugh;

Nominations: the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard.

All names would be brought to the Assembly in 2001 and each would become convener in 2002.

Referring to paragraph 3 Mr Jenkins invited Mission Council to confirm the appointment of URC representatives to ecumenical gatherings and meetings of sister churches by moving the following resolutions:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the following to represent the URC at the Churches Together in England (CTE) Forum 13-15 July 2001: Mrs. Wilma Frew, Revd Alan Thomasson, Mrs Val Morrison, Revd Peter Southcombe (all these were appointed in 1999 for two fora); Revd Graham Cook, Mrs Darnett Whitby-Reid, Mr Mark Argent, Revd Kirsty Thorpe, Revd John Rees and Revd Sheila Maxey plus two representatives from FURY Assembly (all these appointed for 2001 and 2002). This was agreed.

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd John Rees as URC Representative to the Methodist Conference for 2001 and 2002. This was agreed.

Mr Jenkins reported that the nominating group for the Principal of Westminster College Cambridge which had been convened by the Revd David Jenkins unanimously recommended that the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard be appointed with effect from 1 August 2001 for six years. Accordingly, Mr Jenkins moved that:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard to be Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge with effect from 1 August 2001 for six years. This was agreed.

It was noted that the Review Group for the Secretary of Ministries, convened by Mrs Wilma Frew, would unanimously recommend to the Assembly the re-appointment of the Revd Christine Craven for five years with effect from 1 September 2001. On the recommendation of the review group the following proposal was presented by the Deputy General Secretary: **Recognising that a vacancy in the post of Secretary for Ministries can cause particular difficulties, Mission Council asks the Staffing Advisory Group (SAG) to keep the post under regular review so that it is possible to make an early decision on its continuance, whether a year before the present term expires or at the time the present holder gives notice, whichever is sooner.** This was agreed.

It was noted that the Review Group for the South Western Synod Moderator, convened by Mrs Wilma Frew, would recommend to the Assembly that the Revd Raymond Adams be re-appointed for five years with effect from 1 September 2001.

Mr Jenkins expressed thanks to all the nominating groups and asked for suggestions for a nomination for Youth and Children's Work Committee Convener.

The Moderator warmly greeted the Revd Christine Craven on behalf of Mission Council on the news of her proposed re-appointment.

01/08 Mission Resources (Paper B)

The Deputy General Secretary introduced Paper B and there followed a wide-ranging discussion on the issues raised. Some members had been excited and encouraged by the paper. There was debate about the respective rôles of ministers, lay people and young people, and it was emphasised that the changing society in which the church is set must be acknowledged. The importance of making the issues relevant to local churches and district councils was recognised, but this was made difficult by the differing strengths of these various councils across the country.

It was agreed that there was a need to absorb this and the other papers which had recently been produced concerning resources, and that the Task Group which had been set up by Ministries Committee following the review of non-stipendiary ministry would also cover a similar area. Mission Council agreed that at its next meeting the synods would be asked to report their views and the views of district councils, all of which would be heard and taken into account by the Ministries Committee.

Mr Waller was thanked warmly for his work in producing the paper.

01/09 The National Lottery (Paper C)

The Moderator invited discussion on Paper C. Following clarification of the implications of earlier Assembly resolutions, it was agreed that no further resolutions should be brought to the Assembly, and that the references in the paper on local church premises would be corrected before its publication.

01/10 Jubilee Campaign Debt Network (Paper J)

With the permission of the Moderator, Dr Andrew Bradstock, Secretary for Church and Society, introduced Paper J and asked Mission Council to act for the General Assembly in support of the Network. Mission Council heard that the FURY Assembly had, at its recent meeting, expressed its support. The following resolution was agreed:

The United Reformed Church pledges its continued support to the national campaign, formerly co-ordinated by Jubilee 2000, to see the debt burden on the world's poorest countries lifted. Accordingly it welcomes the formation of the Jubilee Campaign Debt Network (UK), encourages the Secretary for Church and Society to play a full part in its work, and asks synod representatives to ensure that the formation of the Network is made known in local churches.

01/11 Election to RPAG

The Clerk reported that the following nominations had been received:

Revd Adrian Bulley Proposer: Simon Rowntree Seconder: Peter Poulter

Mr Roger Pickering Proposer: Graham Stacy Seconder: Bill Mahood

Revd Simon Thomas Proposer: Derek Wales Seconder: David Helyar

Following an election the Moderator announced that Mr Roger Pickering had been duly elected. Should he decline to serve the other two would be approached in the order of votes cast.

01/12 Diaconal ministry (Paper D)

The Deputy General Secretary, who had convened the inter-committee working party which had produced this report, introduced it. In doing so, he asked Mission Council to note an amendment to paragraph 26 which would replace the opening words: "Some New Testament scholars believe that" with the words: "There is a view that". The intention was to make it clear that, although the "go-between" concept had value, it was challenged.

The discussion which followed the exposition of the paper showed that the two views which were held within the working party were echoed by the members of Mission Council. While some felt that it would be good to recognise a diaconal order of ministry, the majority view was that there was no real enthusiasm for such a move. The paper had been valuable in setting out principles of ministry, and it was agreed that it should be accepted with gratitude and be used as a resource for future thinking about ministry.

The Moderator thanked all concerned for carrying out this significant piece of work.

01/13 The Hungarian Reformed Church (Paper K)

The Deputy General Secretary introduced this matter, and moved the following resolutions:

On behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves to take the following actions in accordance with the authority vested in it as the successor to the Committee named in Clause 4 of a Trust Deed dated 28th January 1966 regarding the property number 17 St Dunstan's Road London W6 (the property) held for the purposes of the Hungarian Reformed Church :-

- 1. To resolve that the United Reformed Church shall sell the property to the Hungarian Reformed Church Foundation (the Foundation) for a nominal consideration and**
- 2. In pursuance of such sale, to authorise and request United Reformed Church Trust to transfer the legal title of the property to such private trustees as the Foundation shall nominate for that purpose and**
- 3. To apply the net proceeds of such sale (if any) for the charitable purposes contained in the Trust Deed.**

This was agreed with a sense of joy.

01/14 Closing Remarks

The Moderator declared that the business of the meeting had been completed.

Closing Worship was led by the Chaplain.



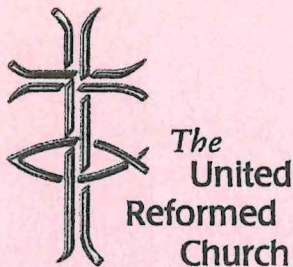
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MISSION COUNCIL

22 January 2001

PAPERS

A	PINK	Secession of Local Churches
B	SALMON	Mission Resources
C	LILAC	National Lottery
D	YELLOW	Diaconal ministry and the diaconate
E	GREEN	Small Churches task group
F	CREAM	Racial Justice Programme
G	BLUE	Resource Sharing task group
H	GOLD	MCAG
I	PINK	Nominations Committee
J	SALMON	Jubilee Campaign Debt Network
K	LILAC	Hungarian Reformed Church in UK
L	YELLOW	Charity Trustees of the URC
M	GREEN	Growing Up
O	BLUE	Inter-Faith Relations Committee - Report



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A

THE SECESSION OF LOCAL CHURCHES

In October 2000 Mission Council considered a paper on secession which re-stated the 1987 Assembly policy and added two paragraphs which brought the issue up to date. The Council decided not to take the matter to the Assembly because it was not felt opportune to promote a discussion of secession at that time.

In January 2001 Mission Council approved the content of the paper, to which had been added a possible amendment to paragraph 2.1, resolving that it should be held on file in the offices of the General Secretary and the secretary to Mission Council, in the event of future enquiries or discussion about secession.

The Secession of local churches from the URC

In 1987 the General Assembly agreed a statement about secession which is reprinted below. During the discussion of human sexuality Mission Council looked at the statement and came to the conclusion that there was no reason to depart from it. However in a few aspects it needed updating. The original statement is therefore reprinted below, followed by the updating.

The 1987 Statement

1. *The history*

1.1 *1972 Events* *In the preparation of the Basis of Union the joint Committee deliberately made no provision for secession by local churches and no procedures for it were described. The Parliamentary Bill was necessary to deal with the trusts and properties of the uniting bodies. A number of individuals lodged objections to the Bill and it was therefore considered by a committee of the House of Commons. Those opposing the Bill were seeking to amend it with clauses providing a right to secession by local churches. Those promoting the Bill resisted such amendment and pointed out that within the functions and powers of the General Assembly it would be able to permit secession and will be the council of the church with final authority in such matters. The Committee agreed to the next stages of the Bill unamended, and accepted the statement of the promoters that the URC 'will give very careful consideration to requests made in due form of individual churches to secede taking with them their property'.*

1.2 *1972 to 1980* *Subsequently, the General Assembly did receive such requests and in some cases agreed to secession. The numbers were: 1975: 1, 1978: 5, 1979: 1. The grounds cited in these cases were mainly that the uniting*

procedures of 1972 had been misunderstood, or were in error, or that the character of the new URC was radically different from what they had been led to believe. The main problem that arose was that the Charity Commission asserted that, in the absence of express statutory authority, they had no power to alter the trusts of property and a seceding church.

1.3 1981 *Therefore, the opportunity of the 1981 Act was used to include a clause which sets out how Trust responsibility would be dealt with. This clause is set out at the end of this paper.*

1.4 1981 to 1986 *In the following years the General Assembly received requests and agreed to secession in some cases. The numbers were: 1982: 4, 1983: 3, 1984: 2, 1985: 1. In some cases the grounds cited were confusion regarding the uniting process, but also included were cases where the local church claimed that it had not received from the URC the basic ministry of Word and Sacraments that is assured in the Basis of Union. In these latter cases the evidence of District Council and Synod was received that indeed the URC had failed to provide such pastoral care, because of the isolation of a very small fellowship. These arguments were dealt with in the Applications Committee which reported to Assembly. In 1983 the Committee reported that it regarded the time as now passed when the events of 1972 could any longer be cited as adequate ground for secession.*

2. Present Understandings

2.1 The meaning of Secession *Churches are voluntary bodies. Individuals may join or leave according to personal decision. A group may decide to leave at any time, and no conciliar process of the church is required to give approval or disapproval. Church history is full of such schismatic movement. But secession has meant a congregation acting as one whole body, and moving into a different denominational allegiance, and remaining in the same church property and transferring that property to the new allegiance.*

2.2 Theological understanding of the URC *From its inauguration the URC has not understood itself to be a federation of independent congregations, but to be one corporate whole within which the various councils are given specific authority to act in the sphere which is their concern. The URC has seen itself as embracing people of several cultures and traditions. It confesses itself to be part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. Its congregations are part of Christ's body, its fellowship open to all people, regardless of sex, race, class or culture.*

There are various consequences for the question of secession. Some would argue that secession is impossible because the corporate body can never give up hope of reconciling those who wish to part. Others would consider that there may be extreme cases where the wholeness of the total body of Christians may justify a separation. Severance is a very serious matter, demanding a careful process of consideration, not to be rushed.

It may happen that a congregation moves from the understanding of the faith accepted by the URC to quite different perception, and seeks secession to join another denomination. This is not a ground for secession that can be accepted. Either the congregation should seek to win the URC to its new confession of faith, or it should leave its property to enter another centre of worship, so that the URC witness may continue.

- 2.3 Property** *As noted in paragraph 2.1, local church property is a major factor. Within the URC the local church manages local church property but is not the sole authority. The property is seen as a trust for the whole body of the denomination and the 1972 and 1981 Acts spell out the methods by which District Councils and Provincial Synods share with Church Meetings the final or major decisions about property. The Church Meeting is, in a sense, the steward caring for what has been received from previous generations and passing the property on to the future. This perception is necessarily a brake on any removal of church property outside the URC. But since human relationships rather than property is the centre of church life, the movement of property has been made possible in the 1981 Act so that if the Assembly is satisfied about the issues concerned with people then the property may follow.*
- 2.4 Ministry** *At the induction of a URC minister to a pastoral charge a promise is made to exercise ministry in conformity with the statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC. This does not mean that a minister then has to approve of every action or statement of the whole body. Any minister may seek to reform the body. But it does mean that a minister cannot, in good conscience, serve in a pastoral charge and at the same time lead the congregation to a position of faith or order which has the direct result of a plea for secession. The URC has room for a wide diversity of style and understanding. We have confidence in the councils of the church to discern the limits of diversity and to uphold the peace and unity of the church (Basis 10).*
- 2.5 Ecumenism** *The URC is committed to the greater unity of the whole church for the sake of faithfulness to Christ and effective mission in the world. The URC has an identity and a tradition which is its contribution to the wholeness of the church. Therefore, in questions of secession, the URC will wish to ensure that the wholeness of the church is not being further damaged by the action, and that no new sectarianism is arising. The URC will wish to discuss with other sister churches in the area the movement of a local congregation with its property into or out of the URC.*
- 2.6 Process** *If a local church reaches a decision to seek secession, it discusses the issue with the District Council and Provincial Moderator. Every effort will be made to discern the roots of the problem and to seek a resolution of differences. If the Council is unable to achieve this, it passes the matter to the Synod which again seeks a resolution. If it fails, it passes the matter to the General Assembly through its Executive Committee. The Executive will investigate the matter and, through representatives, will hear the parties involved before making a recommendation to the Assembly. Representatives of the local church are enabled to share in the Assembly debate under the*

Standing Order for Access to Assembly by named parties. The decision of the Assembly is final. (Structure, Section 12).

2.7 Considerations on which a decision can be based

- (a) Reasons expressed for secession The Assembly will need to be satisfied that there are reasons strong enough to justify a final break in fellowship.*
- (b) Has the local decision been a proper one? The Assembly will need to be satisfied that it is not a matter of emotionalism, nor a sudden attempt to avoid obligations, nor a financial matter, nor the effect of one individual's leadership, but a settled and thoughtful direction of faith and life in the whole fellowship.*
- (c) What follows? The Assembly will need to be satisfied about the consequences of the action. For example, would secession mean that the local fellowship would have no oversight or association? Would secession help or harm the missionary witness in the locality? Would it strengthen or weaken the ecumenical life of the churches? Would it lead to serious damage to other parts of the URC?*

- 3.** *All the councils of the URC will take great care not to act in a hasty way nor out of pride to oppose a church's desire to secede. The search will always be to seek ways in which we may live and worship and serve God together. If the case is pressed to the Assembly and the decision there is not to permit secession, then there is an additional burden on the whole church to express care for the congregation and to meet any particular complaints that have been shown to have a basis. Should a congregation, as a last resort, vacate its building in order to begin life outside the URC, then the District Council and Synod will need to decide on the future use or disposal of the building.*

The only real antidote to secession and the bitterness that is likely to accompany such a process, is awareness of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in which we are never living out our discipleship alone but always as part of a wider community which supports, teaches and holds us to Christ.

4. Changes since 1987

- 4.1** Since 1987 one local church has sought to secede and been allowed to do so. That was in 1988. The reasons were similar to those in the earlier cases. The small scale of secession viewed over a 30 year period underlines the importance of the theological understanding set out in paragraph 2.2 of the 1987 statement.
- 4.2** Since 1987 more local churches have entered into local ecumenical partnerships of various kinds. The point made in paragraph 2.5 of the 1987 statement therefore assumes added significance in that many local churches could not secede from the URC without affecting wider relationships between the URC and sister churches.

- 4.3 Changes in the Structure of the URC since 1987 mean that references to Provincial Moderators and Provincial Synods should be changed to synod moderators and synods, and references to the Executive Committee should be changed to Mission Council.

Postscript. In any future revision consideration should be given to the deletion of the last sentence in paragraph 2.1 and the substitution of the following: "However that action does not amount to secession. Secession has meant a congregation acting as one body, and with the consent of General Assembly moving into a different denominational allegiance. If a congregation is allowed to secede its property (ie. its buildings and funds) will also move out of the United Reformed Church. The assumption held by many people has been that the property would automatically follow the church into its new allegiance but this is not necessarily the case (see Paragraph 5.1 and 5.2).

5. Further legal clarification

- 5.1 However with the passing of the years another factor of increasing significance has emerged. The United Reformed Church Acts of 1972 and 1981 were framed on the assumption that any church wishing to secede with its property would do so in order to return to what it was before the decision to unite in those years. Therefore they provide that property would be held on the same trusts as it was before union. It will be seen from this that it is by no means certain (indeed it may now be considered to be fairly unlikely) that any church wishing to secede can take its property with it into its new allegiance.
- 5.2 There are two further unexpected consequences of the secession provisions in the Acts. One certain consequence of this is that no church formed since union can secede with its property. A further possible consequence is that any local church formed since union by the union of two or more local churches which existed before union, is also unlikely to be able to secede with its property. To discover whether secession would be possible in any given situation where there had been such a union, the "mechanics of the amalgamation" (to use the language of the Charity Commissioners) would have to be scrutinised and in this the assistance of the Church's legal advisers would be required. It can easily be seen that the legal framework surrounding the United Reformed Church reflects its essential unity or "oneness", as expressed paragraph 2.2 of this paper.



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20 January 2001

B

Assembly believes that the time is right for a radical look at the resources available for mission in all the councils of the church to see how they may be used more effectively for the purposes of the Kingdom, and to this end:

- (a) (challenge to local churches and district councils paras 25-6)
 - (b) (challenge to synods and Mission Council para 27)
 - (c) (request to Communication and Editorial Committee para 29)
 - (d) (possibly something about Heritage Lottery Fund: would need new paragraphs)
1. The background to this resolution lies in the two General Assemblies in the year 2000. In April in Glasgow those present sensed in a powerful way what can happen when people come together in praise and prayer and in the belief that they are doing God's will. In July in London those present recognised their deep differences in matters of human sexuality yet resolved with conviction to contain those differences within the embrace of Christian fellowship. Those two insights will be seen in what follows.
 2. The foundation of this resolution is to be found in Growing Up, adopted two years ago as the United Reformed Church's mission programme. Other efforts have been, and are being, made to breathe life into the dry bones of that document. New life has been witnessed and new initiatives begun. Mission Council believes that, in regard to the basic resources for mission, a concerted effort should now begin.
 3. This was not the planned intention of Mission Council. What had been planned was to offer local churches a paper produced by a task group on the use of premises. The paper is still being offered and it contains some useful and practical advice. It is available from..... However, as the paper was discussed in Mission Council, the scope of the discussion widened and it spread into a second day and a further meeting. For it was quickly realised that buildings do not exist in a vacuum. They are the home for a Christian community. They cost money to maintain and the cost falls often on a very small number of people. Many buildings are getting to an age when they are either irrelevant to the needs of the current mission of the church, or needing significant sums spent on repairs, or both. A few figures can illustrate this:

1972

1999

Church members
Churches with membership under 12
Churches with membership under 30
Church buildings
Number of stipendiary ministers
Number of members per building
Number of members per minister

4. Against this factual background, Mission Council began to ask some questions of itself. What is the significance of church buildings, to the worshipping congregation, to the wider community? What is the purpose of having a church building in the 21st century? Does a building in this place at this time fulfil the purposes of the Kingdom? Are there more church buildings in the United Reformed Church than our shrinking membership can afford to maintain properly? If a local church refurbishes its building, what are the chances of getting a minister to guide a renovation of its mission? Is that what ministers are for? If one third of our local churches decided to refurbish or redevelop their buildings, would there be enough money to help by way of grants and loans? If

not, who would decide which projects to support? Does anybody have a strategy for the use of resources for mission? If so, does anyone else take any notice? Once a few questions have been asked, it seems there is no limit to the number of further ones that present themselves.

5. Yet these are more than interesting questions. For the extent to which they are faced, answered, followed through and held together will determine the effectiveness of the mission of the United Reformed Church in the coming days.

Church buildings

6. The Bible is ambivalent about buildings for holy places. The building and rebuilding of the temple was an expression of the Israelites' faithfulness to God. Yet God was not restricted to buildings. God's word was heard in a burning bush and God's purposes were made clear in the actions of an enemy king. Jesus, who was regular in his attendance at prayer in the synagogue, often chose a hillside or a boat as his pulpit.
7. The same is true in Christian history. Whilst the disciples met in an upper room and their successors worshipped in private houses, the practice of setting apart buildings for worship has a very long history. Sometimes church buildings themselves witness to a present God. Sometimes they are designed to enhance worship in a particular style. In time buildings come to contain the story of a community's journey of faith. They can be oases of quiet in a busy and dirty world. Yet no building is able to contain God. It is not necessary to go to a particular place in order to find God.
8. In recent decades more emphasis has come to be placed on aspects of church buildings other than the aspect of worship. Church halls, meeting and counselling rooms, community provisions are seen to be a necessary part of a comprehensive church plant. They do not have the same spiritual significance but they do absorb a lot of emotional and financial investment. However in every local situation a fundamental question should be asked. Do we provide these facilities because they are the essence of Christian mission, or because we have these premises and we want to use them? The answer may not be as simple as the question but it may lead the way into more adventurous thinking.
9. To say that church buildings do not matter is to be far too simplistic. In the free time at the Mission Council in Durham it was significant that a good number of the members took the opportunity to visit the cathedral. Church buildings can contain a sacred space, be a witness to the faith, and a resource for worship and mission.
10. However buildings, can quickly cease to serve their purpose if they are not properly cared for and regularly refurbished to meet changing needs. That takes money, and the simple fact is that whereas in 1972 we had about 100 church members providing the resources for each church building, now we have 50. Either people must give twice as much now as then, or the proportion of church income spent on buildings must have risen significantly, or else more church buildings must be subject to neglect - and so putting off the new worshipper and storing up problems for the future. It is not possible to make decisions about the resource of church buildings without also considering the resource of money.

Money

11. Perhaps the Bible is not so ambivalent about money. The Jubilee 2000 campaign has been a protest against the injustice of third world debt. Money can be an agent of justice or a means of injustice. That should be true in the life of the church as in the world at large. It is not right that one part of the church should be poor while another part is rich. In thinking of money belonging to the individual Christian and to the church, a controlling factor is also stewardship. How money is used or not used is a matter for which we have to account to God. Money is a useful commodity as

a means of trade, as an expression of relative value, and as a vehicle of compassion to the poor and the needy. It is when money becomes a goal rather than a means, when treasure is stored up or riches seen as a proof of superiority, that it becomes the subject of the Lord's condemnation. St Paul saw the evil in many things: it was the love of money that he described as the root of all evil, not money itself. The line is sometimes a fine one but it is a distinction needing to be made.

12. As an organisation the United Reformed Church sets a good example in financial justice. The Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration operates on the principle that churches should receive ministry according to need (and availability) and pay for it according to means. All ministers and CRCWs are paid the same basic stipend.
13. In resourcing mission the United Reformed Church is both rich and poor at the same time. **Local churches** which depend entirely on the giving of the congregation will often find it difficult to make ends meet - and will often do so by cutting expenditure to the bare minimum. Those with rental or investment income have less of a struggle and sometimes have money to spare. **The synods**, where most of the United Reformed Church's financial assets are to be found, vary significantly in their wealth. Great strides have been made in recent years through the Resource Sharing Task Group to re-allocate 10% of the synods' investment income in inverse proportion to their wealth. This has been a wonderful encouragement to the smaller synods. However, it remains a fact that the synods vary considerably in the number of staff they can afford to employ and the level of help they can give to local churches. **The Assembly** has a large budget, mostly supplied by the giving of local churches and mostly spent on the stipends, pension contributions and other costs relating to stipendiary ministers. Money is also spent on training, children's and youth work, international relations and other programmes. Some is spent on administration. Some goes back to local churches in grants. The issue here is not only that the United Reformed Church is rich in some places and poor in others. It is also the fact that it is often a matter of historical accident, rather than planned strategy, where money is both held and controlled. That will sometimes limit mission rather than enable it.
14. A specific example of this dilemma concerns current experience with the Church Buildings Fund. Two or three years ago this fund had built up a very large balance and the Finance Committee (which administered the fund at the time) agreed that it could be used by local churches, (1) by way of grant or loan for major building projects, (2) by way of grants towards the cost of feasibility studies, and (3) by way of grants towards the cost of providing disabled facilities. This policy has resulted in many local churches being helped in recent times. However, the Grants and Loans Group (which now administrates the fund) realises that the legislation which requires the provision of disabled facilities in all public buildings by 2004 may result in a volume of claims for grants which will completely exhaust the Church Buildings Fund. Is it right to use up the fund for this sole purpose? Should the synods take over responsibility for disabled facility grants? Or should the funding be left to local churches?

Ministers of Word and Sacraments

15. The fact is that from the time of its first birth in 1972 until about 1999 the United Reformed Church has been served by a steadily declining number of stipendiary ministers. There have been two significant consequences. One is that, despite an even more rapid decline in membership, the Church has been able to pay ministers' stipends without too much difficulty. Nevertheless that is a considerable achievement and a result of generous giving. The other consequence is that the Church has had to consider how best to deploy a reducing number of ministers. Despite the existence of a deployment policy since 1974 which has led to fairer sharing, and despite some imaginative work in creating shared ministries, the Church has been less successful in coming to terms with this consequence. Deployment has been resisted as a strategy for decline and its implementation at the local level has often been opposed by those who (understandably) do not wish to lose any of their minister's time - for which they may be paying in full and more. The current high vacancy rate, and therefore the greater length of vacancies, is a consequence of an

inability to come to terms with deployment. If the number of pastorates does not keep in step with the number of ministers, the effect does have to be felt in vacancies.

16. Of course it is not as simple as that. The creation of the non-stipendiary ministry in 1981 has helped the situation in some places. A review of non-stipendiary ministry has been undertaken and a report was made to Assembly 2000. It seems incontrovertible that the non-stipendiary ministry does creatively fill some of the gaps left by the declining number of stipendiary ministers but it does not always help the deployment situation because NSMs are not necessarily available to serve in the places of greatest need.
17. The development of local church leadership in some places is another positive step in addressing the problem. This has so far been done on an experimental basis and the question must soon be asked whether local church leadership should be developed more generally and on the basis of an agreed ecclesiology.
18. Both of these are positive factors: there are negative ones. Or at least negative from a deployment viewpoint. Two seem particularly relevant.
19. Since 1974 the Assembly has agreed that there should be up to 30 special ministry posts. The purpose has been to deploy a proportion of stipendiary ministers in mission situations other than pastorates. The result has been impressive. Apart from supporting ministry in major institutions like universities and in industry, a great story could be written of creative and imaginative ministries in a variety of situations which have contributed significantly to the life of the Kingdom. The only question to be asked is about the number 30, which represents a higher proportion of the total than it did in 1974.
20. In the first two decades of the United Reformed Church's life there was a small increase in the number of stipendiary ministers deployed in Assembly-appointed posts. The number has since stabilised. However, the increase in recent years has been in the number deployed in synod and district-appointed posts. The decision to make such appointments lies with individual districts and synods yet the effect is felt by the whole church since it reduces the total number of ministers available for deployment. In addition consideration needs to be given to the tension between those who feel keenly a shortage of ministers in local pastorates and those who see the new posts as essential for mission and training development. Where are the two needs assessed together?
21. There is a question that has been raised in some recent documents but not answered with any conviction. It is the question of what ministers are for. Until there is an answer, it is difficult to see any understanding between those who believe we need more ministers and those who say we have too many. It is also difficult to have a sound basis for determining the nature and extent of the local church leadership programme. Is it too simple to say that in our tradition a minister is primarily a teacher? A church which declares that the supreme authority for Christian faith and life is the Word of God in Scripture discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, needs in its leadership those who are theologically trained and who are given the time to keep their own training alive and up to date. Because business as well as worship is under the authority of the Word, we say that ministers should be members of all the councils of the church and in leadership positions in many of them. This is not about status, or clericalism, but about a Reformed understanding of church and of ministry. To remind ourselves of this understanding does not give an answer to the question of how many ministers we need. It does give a solid foundation on which to base an answer.
22. Ministers of Word and Sacraments form a very small proportion of the church's ministry. When we add in the Church Related Community Workers, Youth and Children's Work Training officers, lay staff at Church House and in synod offices, and people employed locally in a variety of diaconal ministries, we are still describing a small proportion of the human resource available and committed to the mission of the church. Yet much talk about our membership is negative in

character. Our membership is declining, ageing, living on fixed pensions, stretched to the limit. Of course there is truth in such description. Yet it is also true that our membership represents a rich spiritual resource. In many instances it is willing to make a very considerable offering of time and talent. And when the mission is clear even pensioners (many of whom are not on fixed incomes) show themselves ready to be generous. Why do we talk ourselves down? The key issues are, "What is our mission in this place?" and "How are people enabled to play their part in that mission?"

The spiritual resource

23. Buildings, money and people are the main gifts that Christ has given for the continuation of his mission. That list is not a complete one. The major omission is that of the Holy Spirit. Here is the connection to the Assembly in Glasgow in April, but also to a great deal of other Christian experience. The idea of an Assembly called to rubber stamp what had already been decided seemed to many of limited value. Some even felt the effect on them would be minimal. In the event the occasion was full of excitement and hope. Surely the Lord was in that place - and that was the resource which made all the difference. Yet not only in that place.

The ecumenical resource

24. The Assembly has committed itself to ask at every point, "what are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?". In the matter of mission and mission resources the implications are considerable. For Christ's mission is one. Our partner churches in England, Scotland and Wales are engaged in the same mission and (apart from differences of scale) have the same riches and the same poverty of resources as has the United Reformed Church. It seems plain enough that if we and our partners had a common strategy for the use of resources and a common decision-taking process, we would be a good deal more effective than we are while planning and working separately. The fact that in some places there is a high level of co-operation while in others there is none, may actually complicate the situation
25. Our ecumenical strategy therefore has a very direct relation to mission. Should we be concentrating on more local partnerships, more ecumenical areas, or should wider agreements in each nation be the focus of our strategy? What might be the implications of the current formal conversations between the Church of England and the Methodist Church, the informal conversations between those churches and the United Reformed Church, the Scottish Churches' Initiative for Union, and the various Welsh ecumenical initiatives? Conversations cannot be allowed to be separate from living experience in mission.

Linking resources to mission

26. A central feature in Growing Up is the challenge to each local church to ask the question, what does God require of us, in this place, at this time? If there is any vision, any imagination in the answers most of us give to that question, the answer will be followed by a statement about a shortage of resources. The building may need an impossible amount of money before it will be suitable for our mission vision, or even before it is fit to be put to any other use. There may be a need for a minister or a CRCW, or both. Where are they to be found? In most cases the money barely pays for the present programme: how could it possibly pay for a new one? And there just aren't the people in the church to put into effect all that could and should be done.
27. For most local churches these responses are not pessimistic or defeatist, they represent the facts. In a few cases there is an answer: the resources are there if only people look in the right place. But in many cases they are not.
28. Therefore at the heart of this resolution is a strong request to local churches and district councils to look at the challenge in Growing Up, paragraph, together. Some have already begun to do this

and they should carry on from wherever they have got to. For others this will be a novel idea and they will have to start at the beginning. The key point is that Assembly is being asked to encourage every local church and every district council to consider mission in the light of available resources.

29. Why local churches and district councils together? The answer at a pragmatic level is that at a time when resources are stretched, mission needs to be looked at strategically on a wider canvas than the very local. To take a simple example: if there are three churches in a district needing money to be spent on their buildings but there is not enough money to help all of them, it makes sense to target the money to where the best mission opportunity is and to see that the deployment of ministers and CRCWs is consistent with the targeting. That may mean that one of the buildings has to be sold - a sale whose proceeds will increase the money available in another place. Not to work together in this way limits the possibilities of development. More than that, Assembly in July 2000 was reminded of St Paul's word, "Because there is one loaf, we, though many, are one body". That one-ness was able to contain our differences over human sexuality. It can also strengthen us when resources are short.
30. To be effective, the call cannot stop with local churches and district councils. Resources of all sorts are held or controlled by synods and the Assembly itself. Here the synods are the important link. They need to dialogue with district councils about the effectiveness of the present methods of sharing resources and at the same time Mission Council (supported by the relevant Assembly committees) needs to examine with the Synods the way the total resources of the United Reformed Church are shared so that they are directed, ① where they support local and district mission strategies, ② when the need for support is greatest and ③ in a way that is consistent with the Assembly's understanding of mission and ministry.
31. The call to local churches and district councils is to be bold and radical in considering the way resources are used at the moment. To be a credible call, synods, Mission Council and Assembly need to be equally bold and radical.
32. There is also a need for good communication. It is certainly the case that, despite all the electronic paper and verbal communication that currently goes on, a lot of messages do not get through. This is something that needs careful attention. One weak link may be a lack of clarity concerning the role of those who report back from meetings. Another weakness is the assumption that people can present material at meetings without any guidance or training on how to do it effectively. It may be that another problem lies in the volume of detail that is sometimes included in the papers for meetings. The volume may determine that a lot is not read, or at least not fully taken in. These issues concern us all and must be addressed in every place. However the Communications and Editorial Committee is particularly asked to ensure that Reform and the URC web site are used to give account of what is happening in all parts of the country and in all the councils of the church in regard to this use of resources initiative. The Life and Witness Committee and the Windermere? Advisory Group are asked to liaise particularly with synods and Mission Council in running some courses when experience and insights can be shared across the country and between the councils. There will need to be inter-committee communication so that a coherent programme is developed.
33. On the first Sunday in October 2000, when all these ideas about resources for mission were buzzing around in the minds of the Mission Council, the Moderator and his chaplain led worship based on material provided for Commitment Sunday in the United Reformed Church. The prayer of commitment and one of the hymns (both printed in an Appendix) spoke with a remarkable directness to what was being discussed. The challenge, as ever, is - Are we prepared to do in our lives what we say and sing in our worship? God waits for the answer from the United Reformed Church.

We will delay our mission no longer.
We will stand up and show those around us
the good news of God's love in Jesus.

We will let go of patterns that no longer work
and grasp new methods that make sense to
people.

We will demonstrate by our deeds as much as
our words how much God longs for the
healing and wholeness of God's world.

We will build one another up in love, so that
those who encounter our common life will see
in our sharing a true glimpse of God's
kingdom on earth.

Amen.

God who sets us on a journey
to discover, dream and grow,
lead us as you led your people
in the desert long ago;
journey inward, journey outward
stir the spirit, stretch the mind;
love, for God and self and neighbour,
marks the way that Christ defined.

Exploration brings new insights,
changes, choices we must face;
give us wisdom in deciding,
mindful always of your grace;
should we stumble, lose our bearings
find it hard to know what's right,
we regain our true direction
focused on the Jesus light.

End our longing for the old days,
grant the vision that we lack -
once we've started on this journey
there can be no turning back;
let us travel light, discarding
excess baggage from our past,
cherish only what's essential,
choosing treasure that will last.

When we set up camp and settle
to avoid love's risk and pain,
you disturb complacent comfort,
pull the tent pegs up again;
keep us travelling in the knowledge
you are always at our side,
give us courage for the journey,
Christ our goal and Christ our guide.

The National Lottery

In 1995 the Assembly resolved to urge "the members and councils of the church to disassociate themselves from the Lottery

- i) by refusing to buy tickets and
- ii) by declining to apply for Lottery-generated funds for church purposes".

This remains the policy of the General Assembly.

In 1997 the report of the Church and Society committee to Assembly contained the following paragraph:

Several local churches have become involved in applications for Lottery funding. Church and Society was asked by some to interpret the Assembly resolution (or to give absolution!). Our provisional response has been that, where the application is more broadly based than from a single church and where it seeks funding for projects to benefit the whole community and not merely or primarily the church and its organisations, this does not breach the spirit of what Assembly determined.

The Assembly was not invited to comment on this interpretation and so it remains the opinion of the Church and Society committee at that time.

The use of local church premises task group has suggested in its report that local churches might apply for grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The suggestion seems to cut across (ii) in the 1995 Assembly resolution.

Mission Council needs to consider certain questions:

1. Does the task group's suggestion contravene the Assembly resolution of 1995?
2. Whether it does or not, are there good reasons (possibly not apparent in 1995) why local churches should consider applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund?
3. If there are good reasons but it is considered that the Assembly resolution would not allow such applications,
 - 3.1 Should Assembly be asked to consider rescinding its 1995 resolution?
 - 3.2 Should Assembly be asked to consider rescinding the second part of its 1995 resolution?
 - 3.3 Should Assembly be invited to make an exception in the case of the Heritage Lottery Fund?

Diaconal ministry and the diaconate

Introduction

1. The origin of this paper lies in the Patterns of Ministry report to the General Assembly of 1995. In 1997 Mission Council asked the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship committee, in consultation with other committees, to do some work on a number of specific issues, one of which was diakonia (service).
2. Other factors informed the way in which this matter has been taken forward. There was a review of the ministry of Church Related Community Workers which recommended a goal of 30 CRCWs for the sake of the mission of the church. The Assembly encouraged the development of new initiatives in regard to local church leadership. The "Growing Up" report was commended by Assembly as the mission programme of the United Reformed Church. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland floated the idea of a working group on the diaconate, but held back because a number of member churches were doing their own work on the subject.
3. It was therefore agreed to set up an inter-committee working party on diaconal ministry and the diaconate containing representatives from the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship committee, Ecumenical committee, Life and Witness committee, and Ministries committee together with their relevant staff secretaries. The secretary of the CRCW central management committee and the CRCW development workers were also members of the group, which was chaired by the Deputy General Secretary.
4. The report which follows is made to Mission Council but it is also being offered to the parent committees. It comes in five sections:
 - [1] A theological and historical overview of the diaconate in the Reformed tradition,
 - [2] a description of the wider ecumenical and contemporary scene,
 - [3] the current situation in the United Reformed Church,
 - [4] the ministry of a diaconate in the United Reformed Churchand [5] where do we go from here?

A theological and historical overview of the diaconate in the Reformed tradition.

5. Distinction needs to be made from the outset between diaconal ministry, the office of Deacon, and the idea of an ordained Diaconate.
6. All diaconal ministry is 'Christ-centred' representing 'the face of Christ, (the servant), to the world and the face of the world to God and the church'. Diaconal ministry 'mediates love, concern and service of God's people to the world, and

brings the world in both its richness and poverty to the church'. (*The Face of Christ - The Ministry of Deacons*, William W Emilsen, Australia.) Such ministry belongs to the whole people of God, to all the baptised, as well as being an aspect of the distinctive ministries of the ordained Elder and Minister of Word and Sacrament. In considering the history of the church Emilsen points out that deacons have become an 'endangered species' when emphasis has been placed on them in a liturgical role rather than on their ministry of service to the world.

7. The office of Deacon finds biblical expression in 1 Tim.3:8-12 but the personal qualities of such a person rather than the duties of the role are the focus of attention here. However, the word *diakonia* (service) is used in specific reference to apostolic service (Acts 1:7, 25; 20:24; 21:19; Rom.11:13; II Cor.4:1; 5:18 and 6:3) and to denote specific service to the needy, for poor relief (Acts.6:1; 11:29; 12:25; Rom.12:7; 15:31; 1 Cor.16:15; II Cor.8:4;9:1, 12, 13; and 11:8). In the Reformed tradition it is the latter understanding that has dominated. In his *Institutes* Calvin commits the care of the poor to deacons among whom he distinguished two classes; those who distributed alms and those who actually took care of the poor.
8. The threefold pattern of ministry, bishop, presbyter and deacon emerged in the third century CE and this pattern of ordained ministries continues today in many traditions of the church. From the time of the Reformation the Reformed tradition has developed distinctive understandings of the local church and of (orders of) ministries.
9. Accounts of the historical and theological developments of these matters are to be found in the Appendices to the *Patterns of Ministry* report received by the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church in July 1995. Particular reference to deacons is expressed in Appendix C historical Note on Ordination which traces the development of theology and practice in relation to this office (through the churches which evolved into the URC) from Calvin's *Institutes* down to the late twentieth-century. This draws attention to the fact that 'the question of the length of tenure has tended to influence attitudes to ordination' (Para.6), ordination being less likely when deacons were appointed to serve for a set number of years rather than 'for life'. Appendix A Theology of Ministry also includes a consideration of deacons drawing on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry; God's Reign and our Unity; and URC Basis and URC Structure* and argues that 'a case could.... be made for ordaining Church Related Community Workers as deacons' (Para.3.10).
10. In *Deacons for Scotland?* (1990, The Multilateral Church Conversation Committee: St Andrew Press) Part 1, section 6, J A Breslin and R J Bade indicate various understanding of deacons and the diaconate within the Presbyterian, Congregational and Churches of Christ strands of the URC. Deacons have been understood as those 'responsible for the financial and temporal affairs of the congregation'; as 'lay leaders charged with executive responsibility in the Church'; as assistants 'in the administration of the sacraments', with the permission of Church Meeting as president of the Lord's Supper and collectively the diaconate has been understood as having 'a pastoral responsibility for the members of the church'. Service as a deacon has also been understood as preparatory to service as an elder. The existence of Church Sisters (subsequently

called Deaconesses) and Women Deacons, and the relationship of these roles to those of Elder and Minister of Word and Sacrament at times when the ordination of women was at issue, has added further dimension to the understanding of what deacons are theologically.

11. In a dissertation *Concepts of Ministry in the Reformed Tradition: A Theological review in response to 'Patterns of Ministry' - the United Reformed Church 1991* submitted to London University for the degree of MTh, 1993, Margaret McKay considers the Church of Scotland's Report on Ministry, 1989, p.200 which defines the ministry of the eldership as 'diaconal... leading the people in their worship ... and seeking the fruit of it (the gospel) in the life and mission of the whole diaconate and eldership within the Church of Scotland. The eldership and the diaconate should be the visible expression and active demonstration of... partnership (in) ... the Church's mission and ministry.'
12. The basic conclusions of this overview are:
 - a) Distinctions between 'diaconal', 'deacon', and 'diaconate' have not been maintained in many discussions of these issues in the history of the Reformed tradition.
 - b) There is no clear line of historical or theological development in regard to the diaconate within the Reformed tradition. There is, rather, a diversity of complementary or at times conflicting understandings of the ministry of deacons.
 - c) Diaconal ministry belongs to the whole church but this does not preclude the possibility of deacons exercising specific ministries. Many examples of 'lay' ministry can rightly be understood in this way.
 - d) A consensus on these matters has not been discerned.

The wider ecumenical and contemporary scene

13. One response of the churches of Europe to the radical changes in 19th century society as a result of the industrial revolution was to form diaconal orders, some for men and some for women.
14. **Deacons.** In **Germany** the 19th century founder of the order of deacons, created to express the witness of the Church in the daily life of the poor, was also the founder of the 'Home Mission' movement. So, from the beginning, social work and mission were held together in the Church's understanding of 'deacon'. The order was opened to women in 1960.

The role of the deacon in the German protestant churches continues to develop in response to a changing society. They are not ordained: they are inducted into their particular appointment. Their training lasts 5 years. Most work with an ordained minister, with an emphasis on social and pastoral work. Recently they have been given permission to preside at baptisms, weddings and funerals where they have a pastoral relationship with the people concerned. Deacons are also to

be found in special ministries, with the disabled, with asylum seekers, with alcoholics. Some are RE teachers on behalf of the church.

Also in recent years their social work training has been accepted as equivalent to that required for state social workers.

There are 250 deacons (both men and women) in the Baden-Wurttemberg Landeskirche alone.

Deacons in **the Hungarian Reformed Church** continue to play an important role in the social work of the Church. It is worth remembering that both the Hungarian and the German churches play a large part in the welfare system of their countries, running many kinds of institutions for the sick, the poor and the needy. Deacons play no role in the worship of the church.

They are not an order of ministry, although there have been some attempts in the past to create such an order. A new Act on Diaconia, reviewing the position of the church on diaconal work, will be presented to the Synod in 2001.

15. **Deaconesses.** The 19th century Protestant orders of deaconesses, although largely German Lutheran in origin, included Reformed churches such as the Church of Scotland from the beginning. By the end of the century the Church of England and the Methodist Church had orders of deaconesses of a broadly similar type. In 1936 the Methodist Church described their work as 'preaching, teaching, leading worship, feeding the hungry, nursing the sick, caring for the needy, giving hope to the hopeless and befriending all.'

The ordination of women to the ministry of Word and Sacrament brought the various orders of deaconesses to crisis point as their members had the opportunity to become ministers or priests. However, the crisis was also an opportunity to consider afresh the place of a diaconal order within the life of the churches.

16. **The Church of Scotland**

After the ministry of Word and Sacrament was opened to women and a motion to the General Assembly to close the deaconess order had been defeated, work began on a scheme for a renewed diaconate open to both men and women.

In 1987 the report from the Panel on Doctrine identified two particular ministries, in addition to the ministry of all the baptised. They were described as *kerygma* (proclamation of the Gospel) and *diakonia* (the ministry of service). The latter is described as follows:

'Again acknowledging call and gifts, the Church commissions some members to take a lead in the Church's servanthood, and to encourage the obedient response of all to God's word of grace. They are to direct the practice of Christian love in the Church and in the world. Their primary concern with *diakonia* does not exclude them from the tasks of *kerygma*. Nor does it exempt anyone else in the Church from the demands of costly discipleship'

In 1988 men who had formerly been called 'lay missionaries' were admitted to the diaconate and in 1990 deacons (both men and women) became full voting members of Presbytery. They are commissioned, not ordained, using an order of service authorised by the General Assembly. Each deacon is then presented with his or her badge of office. Today there are 73 active members of the diaconate (compared to 1236 serving ministers). Most are working alongside ministers of Word and Sacrament in community and pastoral work, often on the margins of

both church and society. It is interesting that they come under both the Board of Mission and of Ministries and that the latter is seeking through the development of the diaconate to explore new patterns of ministry and therefore of training. The ordination of deacons is currently under discussion.

17. **The Methodist Church**

In 1973 the Methodist Church agreed to admit women to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament and most deaconesses offered as candidates. In 1978 recruitment to the diaconal order ceased and work began on redefining the place of diaconal ministry in the Methodist Church. In 1986 Wesley Deaconess Order was renamed the Methodist Diaconal Order and recruitment began of both men and women. By 1994 over 60 candidates had been accepted for training. That same year the Methodist Church agreed to recognise presbyters (ministers of Word and Sacrament) and deacons as its two orders of ministry. The report of the Faith and Order Committee to Conference that year states:

'The three important features of both diaconal and presbyteral ministry identified in 'the Ministry of the People of God' are much more concerned with **being** than with **doing**. A person **is** ordained, **is** committed for life, is available for stationing' Today there are 125 deacons in active service. Almost all are parish workers, doing pastoral work, youth work, Christian education or community work. The Methodist Church, and especially the Diaconal Order, resist placing deacons in pastoral charge. They are not authorised to preside at the sacraments. Most, but not all, are also trained as Local Preachers.

18. **The Church of England**

In 1974 a motion proposing the abolition of the diaconate was defeated in General Synod. At present there is a confused situation in the Church of England because of their two patterns of diaconate - the transitional diaconate recovered at the Reformation and the permanent diaconate which developed from the 19th century deaconess movement. The members of the former are on the way to becoming priests. The potential for the latter in terms of the mission and outreach of the church today is as yet largely untapped. However, the important link between the two patterns of diaconal ministry is the place of the deacon in the worship of the church. That is an aspect of *diakonia* which the Anglican churches have to offer to the Reformed.

Today there are 80 active members of the permanent diaconate, 20 of whom are men (out of 13,104 priests). Only 26 out of the 43 dioceses have any permanent deacons and half are concentrated in three dioceses where the potential of this order of ministry has clearly been grasped. These deacons must have an appointment before ordination can take place. Only half have paid appointments. Most are parish based and their work combines pastoral care, social action, schools work and some leadership of worship. However, some are also in diocesan appointments as, for instance, director of ordinands, hospital or prison chaplains, or even academic posts. In terms of status they are regarded as junior clergy no matter how experienced, and their life is regulated by canon law.

In 1998 the General Synod, mindful of the changing patterns of ministry in the Church of England, and conscious of the new insights arising from discussions both ecumenical and within the Anglican communion, asked the House of Bishops

to set up a working party to consider the concept of a renewed diaconate. It is expected to report in Spring 2001.

19. In the 1990s there were a number of **UK ecumenical conversations** on the diaconate, beginning with some discussions in Scotland. These led to a consultation at St George's House, Windsor, in October 1997 at which the URC was represented by Christine Craven. The consultation agreed the following statement which was sent to the Steering Group of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland:

"CONTEXT

It is our experience that in the late twentieth century, the voice of the diaconate is increasingly audible around the world - in the stories it is telling, the part it is playing in changing patterns of ministry, the witness it is giving to its work and discoveries. Out of both catholic and reformed traditions has arisen a converging vision for ministry, through the opportunities and challenges offered by declining resources.

'The Second Vatican Council provided for the restoration of a permanent diaconal ministry The deacon will therefore be concerned with the preparation of God's people for their part in the life of the Church, and with the care of their needs, especially such needs as would hinder anyone's full participation in the community.'

'The permanent Diaconate' RC Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 1987.

'The Diaconate is a distinctive office, complementary to that of the ministry of the word and sacrament. 'Report to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. 1989.

'Waves of renewal in the formal diaconate, at the Reformation, in thenineteenth century and at the present time, may be seen as responses to the leading of the Spirit which refocus identification with the servant ministry of Christ.' **Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee, Report on the Methodist Diaconal Order, to the Methodist Conference 1993.**

'As the world moves towards the new millennium, humankind faces enormous turbulence and insecurity as a result of the speed of change and the ending of previous political and economic patterns. This is both a threat and an opportunity. Diaconia is particularly active at the point where these changes impact on people. It sees the human face behind the statistics and it sturrgles for a Europe which allows a dignified life for all.' **Bratislava Declaration, Conference of European Churches 1994.**

'The renewal of the church's diaconate at this time presents a unique opportunity for deepened unity and joint endeavour in the life and mission of the Anglican and Lutheran, as well as other churches.' **The Diaconate as Ecumenical Opportunity. The Hanover Report of the Anglican-Lutheran International Commission following the Porvoo Statement 1996.**

Within and across the denominations, the roles can and do, differ. But deacons increasingly perceive their role to be pioneering and prophetic, responding to needs, proactive in opportunity through commitment to mission and pastoral care within and beyond the church. Opening doors of opportunity, encouraging others to take risks, the contemporary diaconate acting in its capacity as 'agent of change', engages imaginatively and collaboratively with issues of justice, poverty, social and environmental concerns. Deacons often find themselves spanning boundaries, especially official ones of church and society. They are willing to offer brokenness and vulnerability to serve and empower the powerless, that diaconal ministry may be Christ focussed, people centred and lived out in a contemplative and active lifestyle.

WE BELIEVE THAT THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR THE CHURCHES TOGETHER TO ADDRESS THE MANY ISSUES RAISED BY DIACONAL EXPERIENCE."

The current situation in the United Reformed Church

20. There are a great variety of diaconal ministries being exercised in the United Reformed Church at the present time. Most of them are local, voluntary and part-time, a small number are paid. The one diaconal ministry recognised by the General Assembly is that of the Church-Related Community Worker.
21. In 1987 Assembly resolved that "in Church-Related Community Workers, properly trained and appropriately employed, the Lord Jesus Christ is giving particular gifts for a particular ministry and is calling such individuals to exercise them in an office which is duly recognised within His Church". The language of the resolution draws upon paragraph 20 of the Basis of Union, in which the particular ministries of elders and ministers are defined. However, the Assembly did not include the ministry of CRCWs in the Basis of Union (although it is recognised in the Structure). Nor did it formally describe this ministry as diaconal.
22. However diaconal ministry in a general sense is very much a part of the daily life of the United Reformed Church. Many, if not most, of our members are engaged in it. The question is whether the recognition of a diaconate, as a "particular ministry" alongside that of ministers and elders would be beneficial to the mission of the church in the current situation. A diaconate would not include everyone engaged in a ministry of service, any more than the roll of ministers includes everyone who leads worship. It would, however, identify those whose calling had been tested, whose training had been approved and who had the authority of the Church in the exercise of their ministry.
23. Paragraph 19 of the Basis of Union makes clear that every Christian has a vocation and a part in the continuing ministry of Christ. Paragraph 20 then deals with "particular ministries" and identifies the following elements:
 - a) They are recognised by the Church.
 - b) The main purpose of such ministries is to equip the people of God, individually and communally, for their various ministries.
 - c) Such ministries are a life-long calling.
 - d) Those called to the "particular ministries" are to be set apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces - which in the case of ministers and elders will be termed ordination.
24. The working party is clear that if the United Reformed Church decided to create a diaconate as a "particular ministry" it would need to bear in mind the elements in paragraph 20 of the Basis. The discussion that follows is about church order: issues of lay employment, in particular, were deemed outside the remit.
25. The working party agrees that any bringing-together of all the various ministries of service into a diaconate would not benefit the United Reformed Church. Indeed the effect might be exactly the opposite: service is very much governed by local circumstances and needs, and the gifts available. A uniform pattern could stifle initiative and be unable to cope with the unexpected opportunity. The ministry of service needs to be a general ministry and offered by all in each place.

26. Some New Testament scholars believe that diaconal ministry has another meaning different from the traditional understanding of it as a ministry of service. The suggestion is that *diakonia* is a "go-between" ministry, a way of crossing boundaries and bridging gaps. This understanding clearly influenced the penultimate paragraph of the Windsor statement (see paragraph 19) and it led some members of the working party to believe that a diaconate based on this interpretation would benefit the United Reformed Church in its contemporary mission situation. Other members were not so convinced. The two views are set out in the paragraphs of the next section.

The Ministry of a diaconate in the United Reformed Church

27. The role of a diaconate would be to equip people for their "go-between" ministries. Following the lead given in "Growing Up", go-betweens are seen to be particularly needed between the community of faith and those of no faith (or no committed faith), and between the church and the community in which it is set: in other words, in the particular fields of evangelism and community work. The diaconate would not do these things for the church although it might serve as an example and set up initiatives; the ministry would be to equip the church to do these things more effectively and more coherently.
28. A diaconate would need to be given a structure which included the vocational, training and support elements available to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. It could be both stipendiary and non-stipendiary. It could include both existing and new categories of ministry: for example, evangelists, church-related community workers, other community workers, youth and children's workers. It would be seen as a life-long calling, and, for reasons of consistency with the other "particular ministries", those entering this ministry would be set apart with prayer for all needful gifts and graces at a service of ordination.
29. Such a diaconate would include those at present engaged in the ministry of Church-Related Community Work, since their calling is very much of a go-between nature. However, the rights of conscience of those currently engaged in this ministry would have to be respected, and for an interim period allowance would need to be made for any who did not want to enter the diaconate.
30. A diaconate conceived in this way might also include model 3 non-stipendiary ministers, whose ministry is in their work place where it does not also have a sacramental element. Some more thinking would need to be done about this.
31. What is set down in outline here would need to be worked out in detail. Before that was done, the question "What are the advantages of identifying the diaconate as a particular ministry?", needs to be answered. Among possible answers are:
- a) The diaconate would be recognised by the whole church as being for the good of the church in its mission to the world and would thus gain its authority.
 - b) Whatever sub-divisions existed within the diaconate, all candidates would be theologically trained. Equipping the saints for go-between ministry would be rooted in the things of God.

- c) There would be benefit for the deacons themselves, through the solidarity that comes from being identified with others in a shared particular ministry.
 - d) The diaconate would be a structure of ministry designed to meet the agreed missionary needs of the church.
32. The members of the working party who are unconvinced by these arguments are not opposed to go-between ministry as such. They doubt that the creation of a particular ministry is the best way to go about it. Among the points made are:
- a) The identification of a further particular ministry would inevitably cause "ordinary" Christians to feel that their ministry (which may well have a go-between element) is of lesser value.
 - b) There is a danger that some people would feel they could leave go-between ministry to the deacons.
 - c) There could be a perception that the church is more concerned with itself, with who does what, than with the community and world it professes to serve.
 - d) If the diaconate was seen as a "churchly" ministry, church related community work could easily lose its community focus.

Where do we go from here?

33. This report will be considered by Mission Council. The Council also needs to hear any additional comments from the parent committees of the working party. In the interests of keeping the timetable reasonably tight, it is hoped that these comments might be fed in by the respective conveners at a Mission Council discussion in January 2001.

34. Once principles have been agreed, the points at issue will be:

In the United Reformed Church, is diaconal ministry best continued only on a local and informal basis or should steps be taken to create a diaconate?

If a diaconate is favoured, is the shape suggested in this paper the right one, or should it be different?

How should the ecumenical implications of this discussion be taken into account?

Who should take the next steps, if any?

October 2000

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
SMALL CHURCHES TASK GROUP

REPORT

Contents

I	The resolution	2
II	Introduction	2
III	Numbers	3
IV	Statistics	4
V	Questionnaire responses	5
	District responses	5
	Church responses	6
VI	The small church in its context	8
	Affirming and developing the small church	8
	The rural context	9
	Opportunities	9
	Challenges	10
	Difficulties	11
	The ecumenical context - Christians meeting together	11
	Opportunities	11
	Challenges	12
	Difficulties	13
	A meditation	13
VII	Resourcing from within the small URC congregation	14
	Marks of viability	14
	Scenario A	15
	Scenario B	16
	Scenario C	16
	Discerning priorities	17
VIII	Resourcing from within the structure	17
	Role of District Councils	17
	The recognition of small churches	17
	Appropriate strategies	18
	Denominational communication and support	19
XI	Conclusion	20
	Outline proposals	21

I The resolution

General Assembly recognises the value of the work done by small Churches and requests Mission Council to set up a Task Group to consider and report on the opportunities, challenges and difficulties which such Churches face.

II Introduction

This report is the result of wide ranging discussion within the Task Group of the opportunities, challenges and difficulties of the small United Reformed Church. It is the fruit of the experience and expertise of those from diverse backgrounds and of varied expertise within the group, but we have been grateful for others input. In particular, we thank the Urban Church Support Group for their work in bringing the concern about the small church to the attention of the wider church through the initial resolution to General Assembly and for their early meeting with us to provide background for our discussions. We also thank others who have given time in responding to requests to meet with us or for information, views and perspectives. These include the Small Church Officer for the British Church Growth Association, the Synod Moderators, the Pastoral Committees, District Secretaries, elders, church meetings, secretaries and ministers who responded to our questionnaire, the training colleges and course directors from whom we sought information, and the members of Mission Council, particularly those from whom we sought further comment following the response to the preliminary report in January 2000.

It is clear that, in considering the opportunities, challenges and difficulties facing the small church, there are no quick fixes, instant solutions or short cuts, and no single approach for every such church. It is also clear that the response to these opportunities, challenges and difficulties are not for the small church alone but belong to every church. There are key roles and tasks for those in the wider church and for District Councils in particular. There are harsh realities that need to be faced openly and honestly, together. There are difficult questions to ask of one another, if churches are to continue to grow up, and if we seek both to affirm and develop the small church.

The body of this report presents a range of options and some broad priorities and may not meet every expectation across the wide range of context and approach in small churches within the denomination. However, it will give some vitally important pointers forward for small churches, for all churches, for District Councils, Synods and national committees within the United Reformed Church. It should be read in conjunction with the preliminary report submitted, after the first year of our reflection, to the January 2000 meeting of the Mission Council. In this second year, the group have met on four further occasions before a concluding meeting in November. In the course of these meetings, members of the group have contributed written papers on specific areas relating to the brief and reflecting on our discussions. The content of these papers, with a degree of editing, form the basis of this report. There may as a result be some duplication, but any repetition will serve to emphasise and underline key elements in our discussions which now require action.

III Numbers

The account of the feeding of the 5000 that occurs in all the gospels reminds us that Jesus cared for large numbers of people. Elsewhere the image and his identification as the "good shepherd" demonstrates his care for individuals. He lovingly seeks out the one "lost sheep".

Further, the “little ones” of the faith are so important to Jesus that he sternly warns against causing any of them to stumble. (Luke 17.2)

In both Old and New Testaments, the Bible records numbers as important and of particular significance. Ephesians 4.4-6 describes a number of *unities*. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.” There are references to *small numbers*. For example, Matthew 18.20 records “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” - the combined authority of two who meet in Christ’s name becomes the divine quorum for communion. 1 Kings 5.22-23 records a further striking use of two.

In orthodox Christian doctrine, the trinity demonstrates God as three in one. Genesis records the material creation complete on the fourth day. The parable of the sower gives four different kinds of soil (Matthew 13). The incident in which David kills Goliath tells of the “five smooth stones out of the brook” that he used (1 Samuel 17.40). On the sixth day man was created. There are seven gifts mentioned by Paul in Romans 12.6-8. David was the eighth son of Jesse. There are nine fruits of the spirit (Gal. 5.22-23) and nine gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.8-10). Moses receives the law as ten commandments. Matthew 20.6 points to the “eleventh hour” and there were twelve disciples. Larger numbers (666, for example) also have their significance but, large or small, numbers matter.

The Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church states, “The Church is catholic or universal because Christ calls into it all peoples and because it proclaims the fullness of Christ’s Gospel to the whole world.” The church (or “fellowship”), whether large or small, is understood as the place where the good news of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and the word of God is broken open for our understanding.

The apostle Paul compared the Christian community to a body that has many members. “There are many members in the one body” (1 Cor. 12). No single monochrome model of church is offered. “Members”, as Paul uses the term may be understood in a much wider sense than the definition of “church” as traditionally defined. Today’s church, in any case, is hybrid. It takes into its life diverse cultures, religions (particularly evident in the world church), a variety of rural contexts, inner city community development and concepts of a world where the real and virtual reality meet on the Internet.

The issues addressed by the task group relate not only to size, to large or small churches. The radical love of Jesus makes its impact on individual lives and the life of the church together in the response of discipleship. When small or large churches act authentically as disciples together, they share in the life of the one body.

In any particular church or fellowship numbers are important, but the biblical emphasis on small things to convey the truth of the love of God to those on the margins, the vulnerable, the broken, the alienated cannot be overstated. We might quote, for example, the widow’s mite, Zacchaeus, such parables as the pearl of great price, the lost pearl, or the mustard seed, or references to grains of sand on the seashore. Such small things are used in the revelation of divine truth - God’s grace and love for all his creation. It is the “still, small voice” which demands to be heard and can impact the world and Christian discipleship more than the earthquake or whirlwind.

Small churches then offer us a paradigm, even a norm. There must be a place for them in the “body”. They have an inherent value and much to contribute. Let us not despise “the day of small things (Zech. 4.10) or forget that “small is beautiful”.

IV Statistics

These are the statistics from the most recent returns, based on the published figures in the 2000 Yearbook. (As such they do not include the Synod of Scotland, welcomed into the new United Reformed Church on 1 April, 2000.) They are calculated on the entry for 'average congregation'. The entries which are not complete (i.e. have no recorded 'average congregation') have not been taken into account.

Synod	Regular worshippers of twelve	Regular worshippers of thirty	Regular worshippers of fifty
Northern	15	47	72
North Western	5	36	86
Mersey	3	22	49
Yorkshire	2	34	68
East Midlands	17	69	96
West Midlands	10	41	81
Eastern	19	59	88
South Western	16	50	75
Wessex	17	53	77
Thames North	7	49	87
Southern	10	60	92
Wales	38	83	101
Totals (of churches)	159	603	972

We have sought to keep the statistics as simple as possible so that others may interpret them according to the rules and processes of statistics in any further analysis. Some indication of the age profiles of these congregations may be helpful but are unavailable without much further research. The extension to our present remit would be beyond the limits laid down for us. However, the comments from the churches we canvassed, although subjective and qualitative rather than quantitative, will help to provide a fuller picture.

Some conclusions can be drawn from these statistics. Against the criterion (accepted by a growing body of opinion, including that of academic research) that defines a 'small church' as fifty worshippers, the percentage of small churches within the United Reformed Church is 56.32%. Taking on board the perception that fifty is uncomfortably high, and adopting a number between what might be considered "tiny" and "small", a worshipping congregation of thirty, say, the percentage of such churches within the United Reformed Church is 34.94%. Our original remit, however, from the Deputy General Secretary, detailed the size of small churches - although in academic terms such would be seen as "tiny", rather than "small" - as a worshipping congregation of twelve. Adopting this criterion the percentage of small churches in the United Reformed Church is 9.21%.

What is the perception of identity in the small church? The task group has suggested that the local church is a community of people covenanted together, forming part of a wider covenanting community in the United Reformed Church. It is also related to churches of other denominations, particularly locally. It is apparent that for many small churches this is very far from the local churches own perception of its identity, in which isolation predominates.

V Questionnaire responses

The Task Group sought to hear the voice of small churches across the then twelve provinces of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales and to explore the relationship between small local Churches and District Councils through questionnaires. One District from each Province was selected at random and a questionnaire sent to the Pastoral Committee or its equivalent. We had sought a cross-section of small churches and had asked for a thumb-nail sketch from the Moderators of four Churches in each Province, declining, growing, static and

a Local Ecumenical Partnership. The response from the Moderators was varied, but in due course the Task Group mailed a further questionnaire to around fifty small churches. A cross-section of the responses follows.

District responses

One District perceived that its *"smaller churches are ... situated in over-churched areas"*. It was also suggested that a particular church *"would not feel to be a small church because of the skills within the congregation"*. Another District was aware of a *"resource shortage in terms of people and/or skills"* but that *"the most vulnerable churches are not the smallest"*. One District highlighted *"a very strong sense of fellowship and caring"* at least partly due to *"the small and compact nature of the District"*. One District has *"aimed to strengthen the ministry of small churches by formation of ... group and by shared ministry"*.

A question was asked about the criteria used as a basis for decisions about the scoping of churches in the District. One District gave this comprehensive list.

1. *background and history*
2. *recent mission and outreach*
3. *potential for growth*
4. *local ecumenical links & possible linking*
5. *spiritual vigour, motivation and vision*
6. *congregational leadership*
7. *membership fluctuations*
8. *finances, giving levels, ?-----*
9. *ability to meet ministerial costs*
10. *future vision*
11. *buildings ?problems*
12. *quality of congregational leadership*

Another referred to *"resources available"* but added *"which unfortunately often proves to be a constraint"*.

A question was asked about the provision of resources (personnel, literature, advice, etc.) for those who are part of small churches in the District. One response indicated a seeking to *"provide/encourage local leadership/ participation"*. Another suggested *"non-stipendiary ministry if possible"* and another seeking *"to support through contact with churches"*. In response to an enquiry on the subject of encouragement offered to those who are part of small churches in the District, one District commented *"some of our small churches remember when they were large, have been unable to change and live with profound disappointment. Pastoral Consultations aim to encourage and affirm them in realistic mission objectives."* Another pointed out *"transport to District events can be difficult"*.

The Task Group sought information about the bearing of ecumenical relations on decisions about small churches. One District observed *"the URC has felt severely let down on three occasions in the last three years"* and described the need for *"slow and patient commitment"*. Another said *"It is always considered in the pastoral committees thinking, but is usually not successful"* largely due to *"unenthusiasm and isolationism"*. One District commented *"In the survival of congregations and in mission ecumenical co-operation is sought, where possible. In seeking ministerial cover the possibilities are normally explored. However the maintaining of the URC faith contribution in LEP's and sharing arrangements is at times in danger of being lost."*

An enquiry was made about the help provided for those who minister in small churches (ordained ministers of word and sacrament, 'local leaders', pastoral assistants etc.). One response described resources as stretched, observing "*weakness in leadership within the District makes this difficult.*" Another made the telling response "'? - probably not enough'".

Church responses

Some Churches in returning the questionnaire made other comments. One Church stated: "*Because of our small numbers each Sunday we are all involved in the actual mechanics of running the church service. This is very difficult to sustain week after week. As a result we sometimes feel no sense of joy, and our attendance at worship is in danger of being due to a sense of duty or habit.*" Another offered the view: "*As a whole we feel the emphasis on ministry is misplaced; the area in which the church is placed should be considered, and small, struggling churches should receive more ministry than those with larger congregations who are able to give more assistance to a minister.*" Another highlighted the provision of ordained ministry: "*Since joining URC 25 years ago - we have not had a minister for over 22 years. Can't ministers be seconded? If larger churches can't manage without a minister for a few months - how can churches be expected to survive for over twenty years?*" Another described their situation in these words "*..we are so vulnerable when nearly everything originates from one source... in the context of human resources we are hanging on by the skin of our teeth!*"

Another response said: "*We put our survival down to collaboration by which we each retain our integrity, but share our resources both financial and human. We think that rather than needing less ministry small churches working in collaborative groups need teams of staff of different kinds to enable and empower local people to work in teams.*"

A response from a rural community said: "*Certainly a village community vitally needs a person with whom to identify, and in the past we have proved that a minister living at a distance, however dedicated, cannot adequately cater for the Church's life and needs. I applaud the General Assembly's directive to District Councils to give greater consideration to the individual requirements of Churches, although I recognize that this is not easy in scattered rural areas.*"

The questionnaire asked, "What is the most important thing to your congregation at the moment?" One Church replied "*always just to be*".

Responses to the question "What do you do well?" focused predictably on *fellowship, friendliness and caring*. The Task Group asked: "Where would you see yourselves as failing?" Responses included "*limited impact on the local community*" and "*(1) no growth (2) outreach now limited by lack of human resources*". One Church stated "*We're not good at filling in forms or complying with formal denominational structures. We see ourselves on the edge of the URC and not very well understood.*" Another Church said "*We have always found it difficult to reach out and make any impact in our area.*", while another described the lack of leadership in the Church in these terms "*2 elders, no secretary, acting treasurer, no-one to do youth work*".

One Church mentioned the building "*With a cold, unwelcoming church building and an almost derelict hall, it has been practically impossible to fulfil our Mission to the Community.*" Another described the lack of personnel in this way: "*there are great difficulties in convincing adherents to become Church Members. This limits those available for certain jobs which puts even more pressure on a small number of people. This ... may also reflect a lack of spiritual commitment.*"

A response to a question about what is fundamental to the life of the Church was *"Sunday worship and support for each other"*.

Responses to a question about ordained ministry received from the United Reformed Church/ other denominations and to a following question about other support offered demonstrated a *wide variety of provision and practice* in the former and an *apparent lack* in the latter.

A question sought a specific response in describing the Church's relationship with the District Council. Replies were mixed; one Church even commented *"For some people its good"*. However there was evidence in the responses of a perception of the Council as a meeting rather than a body of people with specific responsibilities in the structures of the denomination. One Church described its relationship as good, adding *"we were received into the URC in 1997 so we have tried to attend these since."* Another described the relationship as *satisfactory*, commenting *"our limited resources mean we cannot contribute much to District Council affairs"*. However, another said the relationship was excellent, adding *"We always attend. Problem is that we are the exception"*. A further comment was *"improving, but still some way to go. The wide area our District covers (we are at one corner of it) discourages a better attendance of our members at its meetings."*

Some Churches however felt the District Council was remote. One commented *"Rep. attends meetings if a lift is offered"* and another *"Most of our people are not aware of the District Council... loyalty is to this local church, which ministers to their needs. Denomination is not seen as important."*

Weakness was apparent in some District Councils. One Church stated *"District Council struggles, so has not been able to give us much support, but we know who to go to for help there when we need it."*

Geographical factors come into play. One Church responded: *"The relationship is cordial but we are geographically on the edge of the District and the Council does not seem particularly relevant to the church. We are members of a local covenant and tend to work with other churches in the area rather than with other URC's as the nearest in the District is 10 miles away."*

The final question asked "What is your main hope?" One Church responded: *"continue to worship"* but added *"we would like to expand, but have no clear plan (or idea!) how to achieve this"*. Another said their hope was *"keeping up our standards"* but also gaining *"new members to take the church forward"*. One Church offered this response: *"to continue to celebrate life in all its fullness with our local community for many years to come"* and another *"to attract families"* and *"to find within them the leadership which we need to fulfil our calling and duties as a church"*. Expectations of specific forms of ministry were apparent in the response *"Growth now we have a minister and our hope for a CRCW to enable our outreach into the community."*

VI The small church in its context

Affirming and developing the small church

Small churches are to be found in every part of the country and in a variety of contexts; in villages (probably most numerous), small towns, housing estates, suburbia, and in the inner city.. There are differences in the incidence of small churches from north to south. Research

has demonstrated that the age profile is older in the north than the south in general, but has also recorded more children in small churches in the north than the south.¹ This may reflect less mobility in the north than the south. In a denomination experiencing decline, the number of small churches is increasing.

Small churches are not just small. We make some observations which affect the general perception of small churches.

Firstly, some churches have always been small.² Robin Gill makes the point well: “The Victorians built extra churches because they needed them to meet the demands of rapidly expanding urban and rural populations but it is highly misleading. In the second half of the nineteenth century rural areas were radically depopulating while the Free Churches were building in such areas more vigorously than ever. In urban areas, the Free Churches built chapels faster than the rate of urban population growth, and faster than they could fill them.”³

Secondly, there are churches which are currently in decline. They may have been built in response to a growing housing stock in the area, but the houses have deteriorated, and even been demolished and the church is left bereft of surrounding habitation. In other cases, villages and towns have grown and outstripped what was, fifty years ago, a thriving, close-knit community. In some places, perhaps particularly in the north, churches are the remaining building in a cleared and undeveloped area. Yet there are also churches which have survived such dereliction to find themselves again in the centre of a housing development. This source and focus of a new mission may bring benefit to the church, but not necessarily so.

Thirdly, some buildings are impractical, probably built against a background of over-optimistic expectation, and now an albatross round the neck of a declining and ageing congregation. The construction of nineteenth century buildings is a further factor – usually without damp-proof courses and prone to both damp and dry rot. In response to belief in a transcendent God, roofs were steeply pitched, as a symbol and reminder of the grandeur and majesty of God. Such roofs may have given some protection from the effects of the weather, but the costs of repairing them are commensurate with the steepness.

Fourthly, some churches are growing. The reasons for growth may be as varied as the churches themselves. A church may start as a small church, but with an outgoing attitude, a concern for its surrounding community, a desire to be relevant in its context, and the ability to communicate with organisations as well as the population in general, and families in particular. Hope contributes to such an environment and ethos and these factors themselves inspire the congregation with further hope and expectation as well as a desire and readiness to embrace change.

Growth may be measured in more than one way. It is a half truth to say that numbers are not important. If the Church is the instrument of the will of God, and part of his plan, people matter, people who themselves are living in faithful obedience. This affects numbers. Growth then is the result of those outside being attracted to the worshipping community because of its relevance in the community.

Small churches are to be found everywhere. For whatever reason, historical or otherwise, small churches are common and account for about a significant proportion of the churches of the United Reformed Church. They require support and affirmation. They need to be known that their size can bring strengths, which can be encouraged before they become weaknesses. Carl Dudley, from a background of experience of and research into small churches in the United States writes: “Members are united by common interests, beliefs, tasks and territory.

They are not self-conscious about their relationships and are bound together more by sentimental ties than by contractual agreements. They have a solidarity, a feeling of belonging, nourished by experiences and personal need.^{2,4} There is a danger that such small, intimate communities may become self-centred and closed, repelling rather than attracting others. Smallness is not always a strength but can lead to incestuousness, the club mentality, feeding on itself and producing unhealthy exclusiveness. The development of such a religious club is not church as most would understand it.

The small church needs affirmation but how? It bears repeating as often as necessary that there is nothing intrinsically *wrong* with being small, and that being small in itself is not a mark of failure. There are distinct advantages to being small. (For example, the individual in a small congregation is missed if they are absent.) Each person in the small church has an important part to play in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, as the church responds in bearing the five marks of mission. Each person is called by Christ to serve in obedient discipleship, to develop significant relationships and so bear witness to love, truth and justice. In the small church, there is no place to hide.

1 See unpublished thesis. 1998 Leeds University
4 Carl Dudley

2 See Robin Gill; 1993; The Myth of the Empty Church; SPCK

3 Ibid. pg. 186

The rural context

Opportunities

The relationships that small village churches have with their village community is often very strong. The village community itself is usually quite stable with extended families who have lived there for several generations. The church is an accepted extension of the village community, its members fully involved in village life. Networking is strong. Even though there may be no/few children in the church there will be grandparents with links with pre-school and first-school/primary. Church people usually belong to and play a considerable part in the leadership of other village organisations - WI, local societies and social clubs. There is little a minister can teach a village congregation about the concept of "community". (For example, one village church weekly distributed its church flowers to anyone in the village who was sick, bereaved, or celebrating a happy event, not just to those with church connections. This was much appreciated by the whole village.)

Because the membership is small, people within the village church know each other very well and are usually well aware of each others gifts. A close family atmosphere can develop which can be very attractive to in-comers (provided it is not allowed to become cliquish). Individuals are more ready to offer their particular gifts.

The village church is part of local folk culture. Opportunities for mission are present at baptisms, weddings and funerals, and at the annual festivals (Christmas, Mothering Sunday, Easter, Harvest). Often regarded as central to the life of the village, fund-raising activities and social events are well supported.

In some areas the URC is the only non-conformist presence in the community and is therefore attended by members and adherents from a variety of denominations, creating an opportunity for a rich tapestry of liturgy and music in worship. The church hall may also be the only place in the village where social gatherings can take place, which provides opportunities for witness and service - providing, of course, that the hall itself is modern and inviting.

Challenges

The village church is challenged to respond actively to the needs of the community it serves imaginatively and creatively. In one case, the minister observed that no out-of-school activity was provided in the village for local children. A Pilots group was set up after school which not only attracted up to twenty first-school children each week, but also brought children and young families into the church for monthly parade services.

The village church is also challenged to develop its networks within the community; for example members might visit elderly care homes for monthly acts of worship, take assemblies at the local school and give other support to the staff. Responding to the challenge to modernise and refurbish buildings, including improved facilities for the disabled makes the church more attractive for community use and is another way of developing networks links (as well as improving finances.)

Many villages have experienced considerable building expansion. New housing estates have attracted families who have deliberately chosen a rural situation. Churches are challenged to make contact with "in-comers" who are less interested in denominational differences and more concerned about finding a friendly and family-orientated congregation in which to worship and bring up their children. "This is a church which is good with kids" is a label worth cultivating.

The ecumenical dimension in a rural area is to be encouraged and be seen by the community to actually work. This can be achieved in co-operation in planning and running Holiday Clubs in the long summer vacation, Christian Aid Week activity, joint services, a joint newsletter, Bible study groups and the annual distribution of Christmas cards to the whole village.

Rural churches are challenged to identify and develop what they do well, and not to be concerned if they are unable to fulfil what are seen as the requirements by the wider church.

Difficulties

Village churches can sometimes think of themselves as failed large churches, rather than successful small churches in their own right. More may be expected of them than they can fulfil in terms of leadership and resources of personnel, and the consequent guilt trip can be overwhelming.

A disproportionate amount of time and money is often spent on maintaining buildings which are too large for the needs of the present congregation, to the detriment of the church's engagement in mission.

Small rural congregations are often predominantly elderly. There is neither the energy nor the confidence to offer leadership and there may be no-one able to fulfil the tasks and responsibilities of church secretary, treasurer, District and Synod representatives. New initiative tends to be seen as the responsibility of the minister. In addition, those rural churches which are served by a minister) share him or her with at least two or three other congregations some distance away. This ministry is often all the churches have in common as village churches are reluctant to share in elders or church meetings across such a grouping. This leads to a multiplicity of meetings for the minister. This multiplicity may be energy draining and stressful. It is apparent that the well-being of church and minister may demand some modification of denominational church structures with regard to the frequency of elders and church meetings.

The ecumenical context - Christians meeting together

It is not true that small Churches are always failed big Churches. It is true that for a small Church to be truly Church, it must have members who are enthusiastic, outgoing and confident of their reason for being. It is not true that a small Church is untenable if it does not have a minister. It is true that a small Church is untenable if it has a minister and no members.

In local experience, the best kind of ecumenism is seen to grow from very tentative beginnings. "One member of clergy was reluctant to take risks, but through a steady progression of joint activities – fund-raising, study groups, shared worship, trust and energy grew. Communion has been shared three times. Perhaps the most moving thing was when an ad hoc village group, held a summer event which produced a profit, which they volunteered to share with the two Churches in the village. That was two years ago. That generous gesture has made both small churches feel accepted and secure in this community."

Opportunities

In a time of reduced Church attendance, it must make sense for Christians to meet together, recognising

- different paths to this point in time
- different emphases within worship
- different styles of worship
- different styles of leadership
- different use of language
- different needs
- different ways of being 'united'

but

- a common bond in Christ
- common dates in the Christian Calendar
- similarities of purpose
- similarities of liturgy
- similarities in perceptions of community

The 'dividends' will include:

- less division in community
- a better understanding of what Church really is
- a better use of all resources
- a united front to the wider community
 - e.g. the parish meeting/council, school, the retired, Mums and Toddlers
- a properly considered and efficient use of plant
- less duplication of fund-raising and maintenance
- a common sharing of debate on social and international issues, instead of separate church agendas.
- a better understanding of the Churches stand on issues
- a sense of shared purpose.
- an increased opportunity to share faith without compartmentalising it into Sunday and weekday
- a breaking of divisive Church patterns.
- a more attractive proposition for incoming Christians to join
- the possibility of a united celebration for the Church for Easter, Pentecost etc., united training courses with Alpha, Disciple etc.

- less office-holders required across the whole community, but more people within a team of leaders

Challenges

What does the non Church-goer see if there is no ecumenical co-operation.?

1. Several buildings, each demanding good stewardship of plant, often by a diminishing group of Christians in each building.
2. A multiplicity of events - often focused on fund raising, in competition with other denominations, placing demands on people locally for support.
3. A question of which to go to - are they not all Christian? How do I choose?

Greater sharing will call for

- patience and prayer
- persistence and positive thinking
- the desire to set short term and long term goals
- a realistic consideration of plant and people

Difficulties

However there are several hurdles to face:

1. It seems essential that the Churches consider a better method of deployment of staff and clergy.
2. Shared personnel can help to destroy barriers and present opportunities.
3. There needs to be some mechanism of ensuring better denominational clergy representation and involvement when new appointments are being arranged and considered.
4. Shared issues make the possibility of sharing responsibility within the community for particular facets of work e.g. uniformed organisations, youth work, school assemblies, OAP concerns etc.
5. Shared churches might still be small churches. They need to be allowed by their parent denomination to develop appropriate styles of leadership. Small churches sometimes experience a sense of failure because they cannot fill all the offices found in larger churches.
6. Ministers are often clustered in larger communities. Greater recognition of each other's ministry would enable ministers to be deployed in smaller communities.
7. The sheer practicality of different geographical boundaries and relationships when working with a national denomination.
8. The assumption of superiority of Church buildings in the face of survival and tradition.
9. The need to recognize and respect one another's traditions over several centuries.
10. The courage to see the need to work and serve the community together.
11. The sense of guilt in loosening denominational ties so that we might serve the present age and the communities where we live more effectively.

A meditation - History has a lot to answer for!

There was one man who founded one Church.
The Church was there to serve the people.
He left an important legacy which many people felt called to live.
People had to be trained.
Most people still lived in small communities.
Living and working and mostly having fun together.
And then big leaders came.
The Church was divided up-like badly cut pieces of cake.

People developed divided loyalties.
They went to separate buildings to worship the same God.

It all got very complicated.
And people still had to be trained to become clergy.
Over the years an idea developed.
The potential clergy could be trained in the same place.
To serve and minister to people.
People who live in small places that have existed for generations.
But somehow for them, Ordination means different things.
Different status for different pieces of the cake.
And so the people still have to divide
In order to attend Church and worship God.
And yet most times they live very happily together
In community.

Perhaps if we live long enough
We will live to see people.
People from those same small places,
All moving in the same direction –
Christians together.
Going to Worship
In the same place
Because of one man who
Founded One Church.

And there will be rejoicing in heaven
For the sense that has been seen
For the energy that has been re-couped
For the energy that can be released and replenished
Because of being together
Of halving burdens
And doubling joys
And 'the world' in those same
Small places will be a happier place.

VII Resourcing from within the small URC congregation

Marks of viability

The primary vision, direction and purpose of the small church must come from within. In the preliminary report of the Task Group, the following were offered as marks of viability, in considering and reflecting on the life of the small local church.

1. open to the Spirit (sense of purpose; vision; in worship)
2. open to one another (covenanting together; sharing ownership; participation; responsible stewardship of finance)
3. open to people (open door; welcoming)
4. open to change (desire to be effective for the sake of the gospel)
5. open to the community around (serving; visible presence; resource; socially and globally aware)

6. open to receiving help (knowing their allies; ecumenism; those who share common concerns; District; financial resources available)
7. open to developing local leadership
8. open to learning and nurturing
9. open to listen

Considering further the resourcing of the small church from within, it is important to recognise that there are a variety of small churches. There is a range of scenarios that might be considered. The three which follow may not be mutually exclusive, but reflect certain emphases and approaches.

Scenario A

The focus here is on the small urban congregation that has declined in size and membership and has not received regular full-time stipendiary ministry in recent years. (Many congregations fit this description.) The congregation is predominantly elderly, feeling tired and worn out. Conversations reflect the glory of the past, looking back and yearning for what "used to be". The present situation makes them vulnerable, particularly with large buildings and bills.

Such congregations might be encouraged to consider the following steps:

(1) *reaffirmation* from within that God loves them and is in control. They might be asked to reflect on Israel as a small nation and God's economy (Gen. 12.2ff and Judges 7.2 ff. Jesus calls a small band of followers (disciples) to share and fulfil his mission. A study of Haggai or Nehemiah demonstrates God urging and encouraging his people to recognise and use what they have and where they are to do his work, to be his people and to be the instruments of his will.

(2) *acceptance that change is necessary* to move from what is to what might be, to discover potential and open doors of opportunity; there may be a need for a change of attitude and mind set, and a willingness to seek help and work alongside partners. Such help may be from the District Council, Churches Together groupings, and Synod but also through partnership with other local groups with common aims and values, businesses and the government.

(3) *rediscovery of the purpose of being the church* for the community context in which they are set; a readiness to ask some deep and searching questions of themselves and their way of being and doing church in worship, fellowship and witness. This entails addressing some basic questions relating to identity. Who are we? Why are we here? What does it mean for us to be the Church? What is the significance of the church to those who live, work and share life in the community in which we are set? Where are we going? What does God have for us to do and to be for the sake of the community and for the sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ here and now? There is a task to inform, teach and equip the saints for the sake of the church and the world. (Ephesians 4.12) Some of this task is the responsibility of the ordained ministry, and others with pastoral care and oversight of congregations and those who lead worship. Yet few if any of the colleges and courses have specific content for the challenge of ministry in small churches, and there is little other training available in this area, with the exception of that developed by the Small Church Network of the British Church Growth Association.

(4) *to revitalise links with the community.* It is important to recognise that the church must be a part of its local community. If there is a perception that somehow it is set apart, cut off, there is a danger again that it ceases to be church in any real sense of the word.

Scenario B

There are small churches that have received stipendiary ministry or paid leadership outside of the normal deployment figures in order to fulfil a particular piece of mission work in terms of identified potential for development of a particular community. In these and other contexts, new ways of being church are being discovered. Changes of attitude are evident. Buildings are no longer seen as a burden but as a gift to the community. In the developing political and social climate, there is the potential for growing partnership between church and community organisations. In particular situations, however, the time frame of Synod committees has led to difficulties and frustration. There are opportunities to be grasped and welcomed but flexibility in response and a willingness to recognize a variety of ways of working is necessary within denominational structures.

Scenario C

Small rural churches have the potential to resource themselves from within in different ways. In providing pastoral care, the disproportionate impact small churches have in small communities needs to be recognised. This impact crosses denominational and non-church barriers. Elders lists may include adherents and their families as well as members. People in small rural communities may be very adept at pastoral care - aided by the passing chat in the street and the concerned gossip at the corner shop.

In developing mission ("Growing up") innovative approaches are essential. Without waiting for the invitation (which will never come) groups and needs within the community need to be identified. Active participation should be sought in response from church leaders alongside the minister. This might involve outreach to and through the whole range of community activity (elderly care homes, parent and toddler groups, playgroups/ nurseries, schools, WIs and other community groups, Sports Clubs, Men's Meetings etc.) The initial approach made by a clearly identified "contact" person, is a bridge for other church members to be active and involved. There is scope for mission to children and young people through school assemblies, after-school clubs, holiday clubs for younger children, music groups, Prayer and Praise services, and coffee drop-ins at a church member's home.

Any new initiative should involve ecumenical consultation which will make possible the sharing of people, ideas and resources. The ALPHA course has been particularly successful in the ecumenical context, bringing new people to faith and strengthening the faith of those already in the church.

Leadership in a small rural church needs to be inspirational, enthusiastic and visionary. Against the background of choice and mobility in today's world, worship and service are not a high priority for most people. Leadership requires an ability to cope with disappointment and apparent failure and a willingness to address the issues of change and conflict, remembering that as disciples faithfulness and not success (however that may be defined) is required. (In many cases, the church secretary is seen to play a very strong leadership role in the village church, particularly if he/she is resident within the village itself).

Discerning priorities

Whatever their context, small churches must discern priorities. Such Churches must first ask themselves what the needs of the community are and then work and pray for the provision of those needs both with its own resources and in partnership. Both duplication and irrelevance should be avoided.

Buildings need to be made more user-friendly for the worshipping congregation and the wider community. Attention should be given to first impressions - is the building open and inviting, or dark and dreary?

The role and expectations of the minister must be considered with regard to priorities of *time*. Small churches are usually in joint pastorates. A minister may spend a disproportionate amount of time at elders, church and other meetings when his or her gifts could be used more effectively. The United Reformed Church might rethink its priorities and modify its structures to be more clearly the servant of church and gospel.

A model used by secular institutions is suggested. District visitation might lead to the drawing up of a Church Development Plan to be monitored and evaluated to establish effectiveness in the use of resources. Aspects of congregational life would benefit from specific review and the discernment of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and growth points. Objectives and a time scale might be set in consultation with the District visitors according to the following cycle:

1. Establishment of agreed priorities, targets or initiatives
2. Drawing up of agreed plan for action
3. Implementation
4. Monitoring
5. Evaluation and review

VIII Resourcing from within the structure

The consistent aim is not to make small churches large, but to promote the health and well being of each individual church and congregation and further to offer support and appropriate resources for initiatives in a wide range of contexts . This has implications throughout the structures of the United Reformed Church but particularly for District Councils.

Role of District Councils

The recognition of small churches

It is important to recognise Districts as areas of shared mission and resources, and not just for the maintenance of failing causes. For there to be true mutuality of sharing and support it is incumbent on local churches (according to their resources) to play their part in District Council, enabling it to fulfil its functions. Congregations might be challenged to strengthen their relationship with the District Council and its committees, not always looking to receive but being aware that they have much to contribute.

The Manual (page B4) describes the purpose of District Council as providing “fellowship, support, intimate mutual oversight and united action” While it is not the brief of this report to gauge the effectiveness of District Councils in general, small churches have a particular need of such “support, intimate mutual oversight and united action”, and often feel the lack of them. An openness and mutuality in the relationship is essential. The District might then respond appropriately, ensuring small church concerns are on its agenda. The small church

needs to know and experience that it belongs and has the encouragement and support of the District Council and committees.

A District may feel at times to be an artificial grouping of churches across a number of more local and ecumenical boundaries. Local churches may tend to concentrate their energies on their own priorities, but there is a strong New Testament imperative that the strong should help the weak (2 Corinthians 9), which arises from a shared response in thankfulness for God's gift of his Son.

Because a small church has a smaller pool of members to draw upon to fulfil specific administrative tasks required by the District or Synod it does not mean that a small church is not a significant spiritual, pastoral and missionary resource in its local community. Districts need to consider the particular needs of small churches in order to help them continue to do the things they do well and to take advantage of new opportunities. Such churches need to be encouraged to regard themselves not as poor relations, but as those with gifts, stories, local experience and faith to share with other churches in the District.

Appropriate strategies

District councils should consider devising appropriate strategies of "intimate mutual oversight" for its churches. Areas of action may include;

- 1) examining financial and administrative procedures required by the District/ Synod, to assess their suitability and practicability for small churches possibly with limited leadership and to see how form-filling and systems in general could be simplified. Communication of relevant information in appropriate ways is particularly important. The vision and direction of the small church needs to be supported by District and Synod or guidelines and good practice may be ignored. Particularly where there is a diversity of approach and theology, understanding and support are necessary to further the growth of the church
- 2) providing people with particular skills which are lacking in small churches, perhaps on a short-term basis. (For example, small congregations could be advised on specific financial concerns, and guidance given in applying for funds.)
- 3) giving consideration to the grouping of small churches, in areas of shared ministry or clusters for example, to ensure that, where possible, skills and other resources are pooled. One key to the health and well-being of the small church is the availability of leaders who can offer encouragement and resources to the congregation and act as links themselves to the wider church and community. The same demands are often made of small churches with inadequate leadership as of larger churches with a number of leaders with varied skills. In the particular case of consultations and surveys of buildings but also in other ways, following consultation between District officers and the officers of the church, people with appropriate skills could be asked to assist smaller congregations in effective action.

(Alternatively, there may be a more radical challenge to deploy ministers in different ways, for example as District appointments; attention might be given to the deployment of non-stipendiary ministers, or the consideration of a team appointed by the District to serve a group of churches. A small church might be served by an interim minister, offering more support and leadership than an interim moderator, and ensuring paid leadership if new potential and opportunities arise. Synods without his model might have to draw up a job description.)

4) appointing a District Council member to liaise with and represent the concerns of small churches at District Council

5) creating a *Small Churches Forum* within each District Council to provide a focus for issues concerning small churches, and specific help. (This could be a self-help group sharing expertise, or a group appointed by the District to provide financial, buildings and training experience for small churches.)

6) Those Synod and District officers, appointed with particular responsibility for development, mission, training and youth might take the initiative in engaging the small church in discussion, offering help and advice and working alongside them. This might be more effective through a Small Church Forum. The size, number, role and powers of such *Small Churches Forum(s)* should be at the discretion of individual District Councils to develop according to local circumstances.

We make no specific reference to the current size of Districts. More Districts would result in more administration for more people and it is a matter of debate whether greater burdens can be advocated for some in order to lighten the burdens of others. More bureaucracy itself might lead to an exacerbation of the experience of isolation on the part of small churches. There is no reference either to the allocation of specific resources particularly relating to deployment. It is felt that it is not possible to base a special case on the situation of small churches without considering the total picture, and this consideration is in process elsewhere. Deployment beyond doubt affects small churches. It is possible to argue that small rural churches benefit from positive discrimination because of their geographical isolation, but it may be difficult, particularly in the current situation, to make all small churches a special case.

Denominational communication and support for small churches

The District Council is the closest council of the wider United Reformed Church to the local church. The *Small Churches Forum* could provide a way for information to be shared with small churches without the pressure of the local church being swamped and unable to respond. One purpose of the Forum is to be interpretative of existing structures and supportive to the small church rather than creating another level of bureaucracy.

The District would have to be quite clear about the limits of the Forum's responsibility, yet it offers a lifeline to the small churches which experience isolation from the wider Councils of the Church, and creates an opportunity close to the ground for dialogue, for opportunities and challenges to be explored and for local difficulties and problems to be addressed.

Alternatively, the individual small congregation might share its hopes and dreams, the opportunities, challenges and difficulties it faces within areas of shared ministry, clusters, or groups of churches, and so find here support, leadership and financial resources but also opportunities to develop creative ideas, and to move forward imaginatively and sensitively. Such clusters would be a smaller working unit and could be effective in offering pastoral care.

XI Conclusion

Over two years the Task Group has wrestled with the opportunities, challenges and difficulties faced by small churches in the United Reformed Church. We present these results of our discussion and reflection to the Mission Council for further discussion and comment on behalf of the whole church in the hope that constructive steps might be taken to affirm and

develop the small church, that small churches might be given the support and resources they need to face the hard questions that the future poses to all our churches, and, in responding, to grow up. In conclusion we offer this list of the opportunities, challenges and difficulties faced by small churches, and some outline proposals.

Opportunities for

- i. networking, covenanting, collaboration, teamwork
- ii. mission in small and fragile communities, among the vulnerable
- iii. relational witness, which is both local and contextual
- iv. potential for depth of fellowship and care from knowledge of needs
- v. exploration of ecumenical possibilities
- vi. informality, flexibility and creativity
- ix. partnership with local groups and government
- x. ecclesiological renewal

Challenges to

- i. travel light, discern priorities, maximise resources
- ii. engage in contemporary mission in multi-community living
- iii. respond to the mobility of populations and the lack of mobility of congregations
- v. discover health in its own context, with resources available
- vi. discover identity as URC/LEP
- vii. live with and work to change expectations and previous models particularly of worship and ministry

Difficulties in

- i. tension between affirming and developing the small church
- ii. tension between the status quo and experiment/ coping with change
- iii. living in maintenance mode
- iv. buildings
- v. lack of resources (people, leadership, expertise, finance)
- vi. fitting the structures
- vii. isolation
- viii. issues of power/authority/control and freedom

Outline proposals

We encourage the small church to

1. Identify, maximise and emphasise corporate successes and individual gifts
2. Search for and establish a vision for the future
3. Identify the needs of the local community
4. Respond to such needs imaginatively and creatively, avoiding duplication
5. Develop greater involvement in community life proactively rather than reactively - being the church in the community
6. Use opportunities for mission through worship - baptisms, weddings and funerals, and church festivals
7. Develop a policy for family-friendly worship and witness
8. Move towards "one church one community" through ecumenical involvement in community activities and shared worship, and a regular and consistent invitation and welcome to leaders of worship from other denominations
9. Consider plant resources and offer hospitality where appropriate, upgrading buildings creatively with the community's needs in focus
10. Prioritise the use of ministers time particularly in joint pastorates with reference to meetings and travelling

11. To seek support from larger churches and District Council when necessary e.g. for necessary skills, leadership, church officers, musicians, children and youth workers
12. To work with Churches of different denominations locally to cover the Church's total agenda together, recognising that small Churches may be unable to fulfil every role and issue in the life of the Church, but information and responsibilities may be shared

We encourage District Councils to

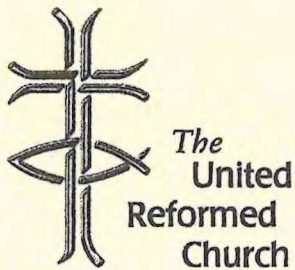
13. Provide appropriate training opportunities, through which leaders of worship of all denominations might be invited to deepen understanding of the ethos and expectations of worship in the United Reformed Church
14. Consider the appointment of either a member responsible for liaising with small churches or a Small Churches Forum
16. Establish through District visits the creation of a Church Development Plan, to be reviewed annually

We encourage all with responsibility for the deployment of ministers and other church leaders to

17. Consult ecumenically and share future plans, considering the best use of skills, resources and people to enable Christian ministry to be exercised in a given geographical area.

We encourage all in the United Reformed Church at the appropriate levels to

18. Be informed and to promote where appropriate affiliation to the Small Church Network being developed through the Group for Evangelisation of Churches Together in England and the British Church Growth Association.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

F

A committee for the Racial Justice programme

To date this programme has been supported by Mission Council through a management committee made up chiefly of representatives of other related Assembly committees. The Deputy General Secretary acts as convener.

The management committee presented a paper to the March 2000 Mission Council suggesting that a standing committee on Racial Justice should be established. The paper was not discussed because it was not possible to make a decision about a staff post. Now that the post has been agreed, the question about a committee needs to be resolved.

The original paper is reprinted below.

A Standing Assembly Committee on Racial Justice?

The management committee of the present programme believes that future work will best be served by a standing committee of the Assembly.

This is because of the size, importance and extent of the agenda set out in paragraph 3.2 of Paper B presented to the January Mission Council. The committee would be responsible for advocacy, training, maintaining and developing contacts with people in all the councils of the church, collaboration with other Assembly committees, and representation on relevant bodies across its wide remit.

It seems to the management committee that the creation of a sub-committee to an existing committee is another option and it offers three possibilities with an indication of the weakness of each:

Church and Society: This would put the emphasis on racism in society (which is part of the brief) but the parent committee could not be expected to be involved in the "church life" and "mission" parts of the remit.

Equal Opportunities: This seems to the management committee to imply a too-narrow understanding of the remit.

Life and Witness: This would be the best option in the view of the management committee, since "church life" and "mission" are concerns of the parent committee. It would not naturally look at societal issues. Further, the management committee has serious doubts as to the ability of the Life and Witness committee to do justice to the business of an active sub-committee in addition to its already heavy agenda.

As it is seen that none of the obvious "parents" for a racial justice sub-committee will be able to do full justice to the work, another possibility could be an inter-committee working group. The management committee can see the value of such groups for specific and time-limited tasks, but doubts their appropriateness for such a wide-ranging and lengthy (five years in the first instance) programme.

These considerations lead the management committee back to its original suggestion, a standing committee of the Assembly. An added advantage of this would be that the convener would be a member of both Mission Council and Assembly, with the right to speak in both about the programme and the concerns of the committee.

The management committee does not discern any significant cost difference between a standing committee and a sub-committee.

Note from MCAG: Another option would be to revise the remit and title of Equal Opportunities so that its role was the positive affirmation of all people in the church. This might meet the management committee's present objection to Equal Opportunities being a home for the programme.



MISSION COUNCIL *20 January 2001*

G

Resource Sharing Task Group

From the beginning of its life, the United Reformed Church has shared resources through the Ministry and Mission Fund and its predecessors and through the deployment of ministry of word and sacraments. To develop that sharing process in other parts of the church's life, the Resource Sharing Task Group was set up by Mission Council at its meeting in January 1994 (Minute 94/5) with terms of reference that had been agreed at its previous meeting (Minute 93/82). The Group was asked to adopt a staged approach to its work, to make interim reports to Mission Council as appropriate and to consult widely before taking any specific proposals to the General Assembly. An interim report of the Group was adopted by Mission Council at its meeting in October 1994 (Minute 94/65). The report concluded that:

- the URC's resources of buildings, people and money are chiefly controlled within the synod, as distinct from being available at 'national level'
- the sharing of resources within and between synods cannot, and should not, be imposed by other councils of the church
- enterprising models of resource sharing already exist and these should be identified and shared by means of a 'one-off' inter-synod consultation

The proposed consultation took place in the first two months of 1995 and at its autumn meeting that year, Mission Council received a full report from the Task Group. As a result, Mission Council asked the Task Group to focus its future work on the inter-synod sharing of financial resources, while expressing the view that:

- such sharing would not be achieved by passing money through central church funds
- consultation between the synods was the way forward
- openness and trust were key ingredients
- standardisation of accounting and sharing of financial information between synods should be explored
- we need to share a vision of what could be achieved
- the preferred mechanism for sharing was based on the CWM approach of every synod contributing according to its resources and every synod agreeing how the overall contributions should be allocated
- the suggestion of the Task Group should be developed of using contributions to ensure that 'essential activities/facilities' in each synod are adequately funded

A very constructive consultation between representatives of all the synods took place in May 1996, as a result of which, a great deal of information was shared about the availability and deployment of synod resources. A further consultation in October of that year provided the opportunity for comparisons to be made and explored. At the General Assembly in 1997, Mission Council was able to report that the principle of inter-provincial sharing of financial resources had been established, with each synod being asked to agree to contribute a minimum of 2% of 1996 investment income for re-distribution inversely in proportion to investment income. By the following Assembly, the work of the Task Group had become clearly focussed in the annual consultation with the synods. As a result of the two consultations in 1997:

- £75,000 had been given and re-distributed in 1997. The poorest synod had received £19,000 more than it contributed
- it had been agreed to share financial resources in 1998 broadly on the same basis as in 1997
- proposals had been made to the Training Committee and Resource Planning Advisory Group which would ensure that the availability and amount of In-service Training grants for ministers do not depend upon the resources available to the synod in which the minister serves
- synods which made personal loans to ministers for the purchase of cars had agreed to allow such a loan to continue on the same terms when a minister moves to another synod
- it had been suggested that the minimum student book grant should be £125 p.a.

- details of policies for the use of capital and for the provision of grants and loans had been exchanged, and there were indications that synods were seeking to harmonise their policies where appropriate

During 1998, all the synods made a firm commitment to the ongoing inter-provincial sharing of financial resources and offered a minimum of 5% of 1998 investment income as a contribution in 1999. This gave those synods who were net recipients in the resource sharing process, assurance of future financial support for longer term programmes.

As a result of the comparisons that have been documented, there has been concern that the variation in the standards of manse accommodation across the church is so marked. As with the other differences that the resource sharing process has identified, synods will be asking themselves whether they need to review their own arrangements, although it has been encouraging to note that this matter is now on the agenda of the General Assembly. The synod representatives to the consultations were also very pleased to see that the method of funding for Continuous Ministerial Education responded fully to their stated hope that ministers would not be disadvantaged as a result of working in a synod which had limited financial resources.

In the past two years, the annual consultation between the synods has continued to focus on the sharing of information and, where appropriate, on the harmonisation of policy. Those present have often been reminded that sharing involves both giving and receiving, and that all synods are engaged in both aspects of sharing. Those synods which give much more than they receive in financial terms, have been asked to consider how the gift they receive, however small, should be applied. The most recent consultation has heard a response to that request, together with heartening stories from synods which are engaged in training and mission activity which they could have never undertaken without the money they have received through inter-synod resource sharing.

The consultation in October 1999 took a bold step to seek a commitment from all synods to move towards giving based on 10% of investment income. The Synod of Scotland was represented at the consultation in October 2000 and it was good to hear that Scotland will participate fully in the resource sharing process. At that consultation it was confirmed, with only one exception at that stage, that in 2001 all synods will be contributing 10% of income received in the year of jubilee.

At the consultation in October 2000, it seemed appropriate to ask whether the Group had discharged its remit and whether its task was now complete. After some discussion, it was agreed to ask the Task Group itself to present a report to Mission Council, summarising its work and what the synods had achieved through the consultation process, and inviting the Mission Council to renew the Task Group's remit for a further term and to re-appoint the Revd Tony Burnham as its convener.

It was generally felt that the task group was necessary to sustain the initiative and the process of inter-synod resource sharing and to stimulate new patterns of sharing. It was also agreed that the present synod representatives were the appropriate people to maintain the link with the task group but that others in the synods could be drawn into any non-financial aspect of resource sharing as needed and as had been the case in the review of lay training resources.

The Resource Sharing Task Group has considered it a privilege to serve the United Reformed Church for the past seven years and gives thanks to God for what has been achieved in that time:

- the Resource Sharing initiative is one of the 'success stories' of the URC;
- there is now a great deal of openness between the synods, as information about the availability and use of resources of all kinds is shared;
- the principle of inter-synod resource sharing has been established as part of the church's way of life and in that we rejoice.

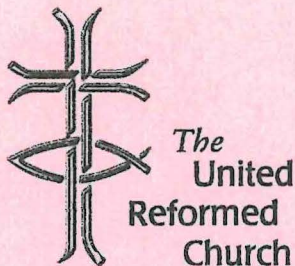


MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001



Mission Council Advisory Group

1. MCAG has had two discussions about who should be designated as the "charity trustees" of the United Reformed Church. Paper L contains the recommendation resulting from these discussions.
2. At the October Mission Council meeting it was agreed that the staff link with the Inter Faith Relations committee should no longer lie with the Secretary for International Relations (Philip Woods). MCAG recognises that this is an important link but not one requiring significant time, since the Committee has its own officers who are chiefly responsible for running its business. With that in mind the recommendation is that the staff link with the International Faith Relations committee should be added to the job description of the Secretary for Racial Justice.
3. Normally the October Mission Council appoints tellers for this year. This was overlooked at the last meeting and names will be suggested this time.
4. The task group on the authority of the General Assembly and other councils of the church has asked for its reporting date to be changed from March to October 2001. This is due to the size of its agenda and also to difficulty in arranging meetings. The request has been granted.
5. MCAG agreed to the General Secretary nominating the Deputy General Secretary to be part of a CTBI delegation to visit the Middle East Council of Churches in March, although this would mean his missing the March Mission Council. The Deputy General Secretary has been appointed to the delegation.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

I

Nominations Committee
Report to Mission Council - January 2001

1. Assembly Appointments

1.1 The Review Group for the Secretary for Ministries was convened by Mrs Wilma Frew and unanimously recommends the re-appointment of Revd Christine Craven for five years w.e.f. 1st September 2001.

Furthermore they added

1.1.1 Recognising that a vacancy in the post of Secretary for Ministries can cause particular difficulties, Mission Council asks the SAG to keep the post under regular review so that it is possible to make an early decision on its continuance, either a year before the present term expires or at the time the present holder's giving notice, whichever is sooner.

1.2 The Review Group for the South Western Synod Moderator, convened by Mrs Wilma Frew, recommends that Revd Raymond Adams be re-appointed for five years w.e.f. 1st September 2001.

1.3 The Nominating Group for the Southern Synod Moderator, convened by Revd Sandra Lloydlangston, unanimously recommends that Revd Nigel Uden be appointed for seven years w.e.f. 1st September 2001.

1.4 The Nominating Group for the National Synod of Wales Moderator, convened by Revd Christopher White, unanimously recommends that Revd Peter Noble be appointed for seven years w.e.f. 1st September 2001.

1.5 An Appointment Group for the Secretary for Racial Justice is being convened by Revd Peter Brain

1.6 A small Nominating Group for the post of Clerk-Elect to General Assembly [to take office as Clerk at the end of Assembly 2002] is being convened by Mrs Wilma Frew.

1.7 A small Nominating Group for the post of Treasurer-Elect [to take office as Treasurer at the end of Assembly 2002] is being convened by Revd John Reardon.

2. Conveners-Elect for Assembly Committees

The following have accepted nomination by the committee

2.1 Windermere Advisory Group: Mr Jim Wilkinson [to become Convener in 2001]

2.2 Church and Society: *to be advised* [to become Convener in 2002]

2.3 Equal Opportunities; Revd Wilfred Bahadur [to become Convener in 2002]

2.4 Ministries: Mr John Ellis [to become Convener in 2002]

2.5 Retired Ministers Housing Sub-Committee: Revd John Pugh[to become Convener in 2002]

2.6 Nominations: Revd Dr Stephen Orchard [to become Convener in 2002]

3. URC Representatives to Ecumenical Gatherings and Meetings of Sister Churches

The following recommendations from the Ecumenical Committee are endorsed by the Officers

3.1 CTE Forum 13-15 July 2001

Mrs Wilma Frew, Revd Alan Thomasson, Mrs Val Morrison, Revd Peter Southcombe
all these were appointed in 1999 for two fora

Revd Graham Cook, Mrs Darnett Whitby-Reid, Mr Mark Argent, Revd Kirsty Thorpe,
Revd John Rees and Revd Sheila Maxey plus two representaives from FURY
Assembly.

all these to be appointed for 2001 and 2003

3.2 Methodist Conference 2001 and 2002

Revd John Rees.

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, is asked to confirm paras. 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, 3.1 and 3.2.

Mission Council is asked to confirm para 1.1.1

Members of Mission Council should note paras.1.6 and 1.7 and pass any suggestions to the appropriate Convener

The remaining items are for information. Nominations Committee will bring appropriate Resolutions to General Assembly.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

J

Jubilee Campaign Debt Network (UK)

On 31 December 2000 the Jubilee 2000 coalition dissolved itself. As its name implies it had always seen itself as having a limited life-span, though such was its success in raising awareness of the debt issue, and in the motivating people to campaign around it, that many felt the momentum it had built up should be maintained. Accordingly a number of development agencies, non-governmental organisations and faith groups, including the URC, came together towards the end of 2000 to form a new coalition - provisionally named the Jubilee Campaign Debt Network (UK) - and this is now operating in close collaboration with two other new initiatives: 'Drop the Debt', which is focusing particularly on the next G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001, and 'Jubilee Plus', which, among other things, is undertaking research into the causes of the debt crisis and its continuation.

Mission Council is therefore invited to adopt the following motion:

Mission Council pledges its continued support to the national campaign, formerly co-ordinated by Jubilee 2000, to see the debt burden on the world's poorest countries lifted. Accordingly it welcomes the formation of the Jubilee Campaign Debt Network (UK), encourages the Secretary for Church and Society to play a full part in its work, and asks synod representatives to ensure that the formation of the Network is made known in local churches.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

K

The Hungarian Reformed Church in the United Kingdom

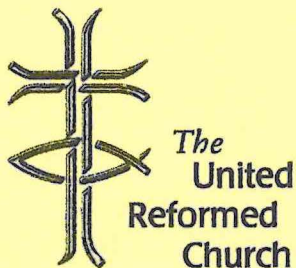
In 1958 the Presbyterian Church of England acquired 17 St Dunstan's Road London W6 for the use of the Hungarian Reformed Church (then in exile). The property was vested in the Presbyterian Church of England Trust (now United Reformed Church Trust) which in 1966 executed a Trust Deed setting out appropriate trusts for the property.

Discussions have been proceeding with the Hungarian Reformed Church Foundation with a view to the property being transferred to trustees for that body; and the Charity Commission have advised that the best way of doing this would be for the United Reformed Church to sell the property to the Hungarian Reformed Church Foundation for a nominal consideration.

Mission Council is now the appropriate body to authorise this and it is therefore asked to pass the resolutions set out below, which have been prepared by the legal adviser:-

“On behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves to take the following actions in accordance with the authority vested in it as the successor to the Committee named in Clause 4 of a Trust Deed dated 28th January 1966 regarding the property number 17 St Dunstan's Road London W6 (the property) held for the purposes of the Hungarian Reformed Church :-

- 1 To resolve that the United Reformed Church shall sell the property to the Hungarian Reformed Church Foundation (the Foundation) for a nominal consideration and**
- 2 In pursuance of such sale, to authorise and request United Reformed Church Trust to transfer the legal title of the property to such private trustees as the Foundation shall nominate for that purpose and**
- 3 To apply the net proceeds of such sale (if any) for the charitable purposes contained in the Trust Deed.”**



MISSION COUNCIL 20 January 2001



Who are the Charity Trustees of the United Reformed Church?

This paper discusses the question "Who are the Charity Trustees of the United Reformed Church?" in so far as it concerns the General Assembly (i.e. it does not deal with synods, districts and local churches). It concludes that the answer is Mission Council Advisory Group ("MCAG") and proposes changes to the remit of MCAG to recognise the duties of Charity Trustees.

Introduction

In recent years most Synods and some District Councils and Churches have spent time discussing the question "Who are our charity trustees?". We have also had discussions with the Charity Commissioners about this question in connection with their preparation of an internal policy instruction document about the URC but we have not considered the question in relation to General Assembly.

What is meant by the term "charity trustees"?

The Charities Act 1993 defines charity trustees as "the persons having the general control and management of the administration of a charity".

The Charity Commission booklet on the subject goes on to amplify this definition in the following way:

"The charity trustees are the people responsible under the charity's governing document for controlling the management and administration of the charity regardless of what they are called.

Some charities have custodian or holding trustees, whose function is simply to hold the legal title to the charity's property or investments. Custodian or holding trustees have no role as such in the charity's management".

What conclusion has been reached for local churches and synods?

In relation to local churches and synods the first response of the Charity Commissioners to the question was that the charity trustees would be the Church Meeting and the synod members respectively. However, it was soon recognised that these bodies were far too large to be effective in the role; it was unrealistic to assume that every church member or every member of synod could share responsibility for controlling management and administration. It was agreed that the charity trustees had to be a smaller group of people, capable of maintaining contact with what is happening on a fairly regular basis.

In practice, most synods have designated a smaller committee, often called the synod executive, to act as the charity trustees. For churches, the Charity Commissioners have indicated that they would normally regard the Elders' Meeting as the charity trustee.

What about the General Assembly?

At first sight it might appear that the charity trustees of the General Assembly are the people who conduct the ongoing debates and discussions and reach the actual decisions. If this were the true test, the charity trustees for the church nationally (as distinct from synods and local churches) would be either the members of General Assembly or Mission Council, which has authority to take executive decisions on behalf of General Assembly.

However, it is clear from the discussions that have already taken place with the Charity Commissioners that, because of the degree of close involvement required, they do not regard large bodies as fulfilling this role. Therefore, although both General Assembly and Mission Council have detailed agendas and make policy decisions, they are in neither case appropriate bodies to act as the charity trustees of the United Reformed Church.

It is therefore helpful to study the definition once more. The acid test is that the charity trustees exercise the control and management of the **administration** (not the policy making) of the charity. Thus, the charity trustees are not necessarily required to make the decisions or to control the overall policy of the charity. It is true that, as regards many small charities, these functions will often be carried out by the charity trustees but this is not an invariable requirement.

In the case of the United Reformed Church, which by any standard is an organisation of some complexity, we have already seen that neither the General Assembly itself nor Mission Council will fill the criteria of charity trusteeship. Therefore, to discover who are the charity trustees, it is necessary to look elsewhere and to identify a group of people, small in number who are at the centre of the church's affairs.

MCAG has discussed this matter at two meetings in the past year. One possibility considered was the officers of Assembly but they do not operate in a structured way, meeting only occasionally on an ad hoc basis when necessary. MCAG has come to the conclusion that MCAG itself is the most appropriate group to be expected to carry out the responsibilities of charity trustees of the United Reformed Church. It meets regularly, its agendas already cover most matters of importance affecting the URC and its membership includes people who are likely to have an awareness of what is happening in the URC.

The remit of the Charity Trustees

Charity Trustees are responsible for controlling the management and administration of the charity. The Functions of General Assembly are set out at length in section B of the Manual - The Structure of the United Reformed Church ("the Structure"). It would be reasonable to assume that, if these functions are carried out properly, the affairs of the charity we call General Assembly will be well managed. So, in broad terms, the responsibilities or remit of the charity trustees of General Assembly should be to ensure that General Assembly carries out its functions properly.

Remit and membership of Mission Council Advisory Group

The remit and membership of MCAG are as follows:

The group plans the meetings of Mission Council and the follow up necessary. It provides personal support and advice for the Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary.

Membership is made up of:

Moderator

Immediate past Moderator

Moderator-elect

2 Committee Conveners

Treasurer

4 members of Mission Council

(Deputy General Secretary in attendance).

Conveners and members of Mission Council serve for 4 years from year of appointment or until they cease to be conveners or members respectively, whichever is the shorter period.

It could be argued that the existing remit of MCAG is a sufficient remit for charity trustees since Mission Council at its meetings should be concerned to ensure that all the Functions of General Assembly set out in the Structure are carried out properly. However, MCAG recommends that its remit should be expanded to make the link to the Functions of General Assembly more explicit. The proposed revised wording is set out in the resolution below.

Resolution

Mission Council resolves:

1. that the remit of Mission Council Advisory Group be amended to read as follows:

The remit of Mission Council Advisory Group ("MCAG") is

- (i) to plan the meetings of Mission Council;**
- (ii) to ensure that appropriate follow up actions are taken following meetings of Mission Council and General Assembly; and**
- (iii) to provide support and advice to the Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary.**

In carrying out the above remit, MCAG should have regard to the Functions of General Assembly, as set out in the Structure, and should seek to ensure that Mission Council and General Assembly are provided with appropriate reports to enable them to see that those Functions are properly carried out.

2. that General Assembly be asked to agree that the Charity Trustees of the United Reformed Church are considered to be the members for the time being of the Mission Council Advisory Group.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001

M

**GROWING UP
TO THE ROLE AND RECOGNITION OF EVANGELISTS
IN THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

1. Introduction

1.1 Growing Up charted the serious numerical decline of our church and concluded that *there is no quick-fix, no simple human solution to reverse this downward spiral.* (1.14). The report recalled the initiatives in mission that had been attempted over the years but noted *that the URC as a whole has sometimes seemed uncomfortable with the word 'evangelism':* (2)

1.2 A resolution at the 1998 General Assembly called on local churches, District Councils, Synods and the Life and Witness Committee (DSW) to engage in particular activities to encourage evangelism. A year later the Growing Up report challenged the Life and Witness Committee to sharpen its focus to help the people to become more effective in its witness of proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. (7.2)

1.3 The Life and Witness Committee believes that Growing Up challenges us to confront our church's perceived reluctance to engage in evangelism. Evangelism Enablers have begun the work of bringing evangelism within our acceptable vocabulary and have helped many to see that evangelism is not an activity best left to those on the fringe of the church in the hope that if we ignore them, they will go away. Local churches, District Councils and Synods all need help if they are to come to the place where they regard evangelism as a core activity of the Church. As ever, the Holy Spirit has anticipated our need. We believe he has always been calling and equipping men and women as evangelists. It is to our shame that we have not always known what to do with those who have been so called.

1.4 This report is offered in the hope that it will encourage us to grow up to the role of evangelists within the church and that it will lead us to the following actions:

- i. to recognise the evangelists in our midst,
- ii. to set them apart for this specific ministry,
- iii. to support them as they speak the truth of the Gospel in missionary situations and as they encourage us to become more credible witnesses where we are.

2 The wider picture

2.1 A number of factors have combined to make a re-examination of the role and recognition of evangelists in the life of the church important as we begin a new millennium. The past ten years have been marked by the Christian denominations as a Decade of Evangelism and this has put the evangelistic task firmly on church agendas. Its importance has been further underlined by the continuing decline in church membership across most of the major denominations. Society

has changed, and the predominant culture is now secularized, and thought of by many as post-Christian in which we can no longer assume that people have any basic Christian knowledge or understanding. If the need in earlier years was to call people back to faith, the need today is for forms of primary evangelism which start much further back and assume nothing. We have entered a new missionary era which makes the importance of discovering, developing and deploying those within the church who have evangelistic gifts a vital and urgent need.

2.2 In 1995 a working party, commissioned jointly by the Churches Together in England Group for Evangelisation and the Evangelical Alliance, published a report entitled *Evangelists and the Local Church*. At the same time the Church of England was engaged in developing a proposal for a College or Fellowship of Evangelists to give recognition and support to those working as evangelists at national level within that denomination. Other churches, including the URC, have been involved in joint conversations about how these developments might be applied within the different Free Church contexts. This paper draws heavily on Conference 2000 report of the Methodist Church and we are grateful for their permission to use it in such an extensive form. What follows is an attempt to explore what all this might be saying to us for the life of the United Reformed Church from the year 2000 onwards.

3. THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 All mission is God's mission. The Methodist Conference report of 1985 entitled *Sharing in God's Mission* put it thus: "There is only one mission to the world that matters and that is God's continuous activity of caring for and reaching out to all that he has made. The church engages in true mission when it shares in God's one mission to the world. God's love is expressed not just for the church but for the world, and our mission is not so much to draw people into the church as to initiate them into the Kingdom of God." The report went on to say: "By mission we mean any way in which Christians are sent to share in experiencing and expressing that love. It involves *evangelism* since God has declared his desire for all mankind to know and love him. It includes *social caring* for God's mercy reaches out especially for the poor and needy. It incorporates the political *struggle for justice* in our society because God intends men and women to live at peace together. These three do not exhaust the missionary task, neither are they alternatives in our mission, for they belong inextricably together. They are imperatives, not options"

3.2 This understanding has been well articulated in "The Five Marks of Mission"

1. To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth

And much work is rightly being done to encourage the whole church in understanding and applying these principles in the whole of life.

3.3 There is a breadth and flexibility about approaches to mission in the New Testament. Evangelism is not itself a biblical word at all. However, evangelists are referred to three times (Acts 21:8, Ephesians 4:11 and 2 Timothy 4:5); the verb *euaggelizein* (to evangelise) occurs frequently, especially in Luke-Acts and Ephesians; and the cognate noun *euaggelion* (gospel)

is so fundamental that it crops up all over the pages of the New Testament. It is no more plausible to expect in the New Testament writings a clear role for evangelists than it is to look for definitive models for deacons or presbyters. What is beyond question, however, is that in a variety of pioneering and innovative ways the early Christian leaders (whether termed evangelists or not) and the whole Christian community (by their lifestyle and everyday witness) articulated God's good news in Jesus Christ with such conviction and commitment that many were brought to faith.

3.4 It is clear that evangelists (alongside apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and those with a variety of other gifts) were equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit for the church's mission and ministry and that their gifts were legitimately exercised both inside and outside the church. The contexts in which these gifts are described in the New Testament (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:27-30; and Ephesians 4:11-13) make it clear that they were intended to function as part of a team, the Body of Christ, and not in isolation. Furthermore, whilst the Holy Spirit clearly gave some gifts as evangelists, the New Testament leaves us in no doubt that all Christians are called to bear witness to Christ and to share their faith with others. To argue for the recognition and use of evangelists in the contemporary church therefore in no way diminishes the calling of the whole church to be a witnessing community, any more than to suggest that to appoint some as deacons releases every Christian from their servant ministry. On the contrary, evangelists focus, encourage and enable the vocation of all Christians to witness to God's grace and power in the gospel.

4. THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH CONTEXT

4.1 The issue of evangelism and evangelists has been debated within the United Reformed Church since its birth. The United Reformed Church has never had recognised 'evangelists'. Evangelists employed by para-church groups, unlike the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and others, have not played a significant part in the life of the URC.

4.2 And yet we can look to a rich heritage of missionaries and to the former Churches of Christ whose paid ministers, in earlier years, were essentially evangelists with the pastoral duties being the responsibility of the lay leaders. Something of this emphasis was lost with the wholesale ordination of these lay leaders to the Non-Stipendiary ministry of the URC.

4.3 In 1991 the long discussed "Patterns of Ministry" report was presented to the General Assembly. In a section headed "Other recognised ministries" such ministries as Elders, worship leaders, Church Related Community Workers, Youth leadership Training Officers were listed and the concept of "diaconal" ministries was hinted at. Absent from the report was the possible recognition of evangelists. This controversial report failed to get support at the Assembly and the debate has proceeded at a more local level

4.4 Although at a local level many congregations were fully involved with the Decade of Evangelism, for most of the decade the United Reformed Church structures were engaged in a debate about Human Sexuality. Theological perspective and Biblical understanding were bound up in this issue as they are in the issue of the "proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom" (Mark of Mission 1). It was not until the end of the decade that the church began to refocus on Mission. In 1998 The General Assembly passed resolution 30 which, amongst other things, encouraged "local churches to engage actively in evangelism and evangelisation using those with appropriate gifts". The recognition of people with those gifts will encourage the process of 'modelling' evangelism. The resolution also encouraged "the Discipleship, Stewardship and

Witness Committee (now the Life and Witness Committee) to explore ecumenically the possibility of establishing a College of Evangelists". This exploration is continuing slowly, but it is clear that we need to recognise and identify such people before engaging fully with other denominations on this issue. The committee did not, at that stage, recommend the recognition of the ministry of the evangelist. The present committee, however, feel strongly that the time is right for such recognition.

4.5 Then in 1999 the "Growing Up" report was prepared and presented to the General Assembly. Whilst it would be wrong to claim this to be a mission strategy for the URC, it was certainly an analysis of our situation and a series of stimuli which, it was hoped, would enable the URC to grow. Set in the context of the Five Marks of Mission the report, as well as proposing new initiatives, argued that every person within each congregation should be a "credible witness". Proclaiming the good news and bringing others to faith has therefore become the major emphasis for the work of the renamed Life and Witness Committee since the report was passed.

4.6 In recent years the church has begun to appoint people to "mission enabling" type roles. The Southern Synod made an early appointment and other synods and districts have made more recent appointments. These enabling roles are an important step in pursuing the goals of the Growing Up report. An emphasis on mission and witness at significant times such as vacancy visits, oversight visits and vision workshops will be an important feature of any future growth of the URC. Work is in process to link together such posts on a national basis.

4.7 The Life and Witness committee believes that the URC needs to begin the process of recognising and encouraging people in the church who are operating as "evangelists". Such people do exist and we need to develop a structure to enable others to engage in this ministry as God leads. As well as needing people gifted in training to enable congregations in their mission the church also needs more examples of people working as evangelists. This paper is therefore intended to stimulate discussion as to how that can be achieved.

4.8 It is clear that the United Reformed Church has increasingly recognised a wide variety of gifts and callings and made provision for appropriate training and recognition. This paper does not seek to raise the ministry of evangelist above other callings but forcefully argues that the role of an evangelist is a valid calling within our church and as such should be resourced and recognised.

4.9 The resourcing of Lay Preachers and Youth and Children's workers has played a very important part in the life of the URC in recent years and the TLS material is only the latest in a succession of training courses to equip preachers for their task. For many years training has also been provided for workers among children (notably through *Kaleidoscope*) and theirs has been recognised as a distinctive and important ministry. More recent years have seen the development of the *Spectrum* training course and official recognition for youth workers. All this is a welcome realisation of the fact that God gives different gifts to different people and that it is the church's responsibility to discern, develop and deploy those gifts. The recognition and training of evangelists in the life of the church is simply a logical extension of this process whose time has surely come. It has been well said that what a church truly values can be deduced from what sort of people it trains.

4.10 It is true that some have seen 'other ministries' such as CRCW, youth work and lay preaching as a stepping stone to Stipendiary Ministry. In view of all this, the tacit assumption of some that the calling to be an evangelist is a passing phase out of which keen new converts and

younger people will eventually grow (or candidate for ministry) needs to be vigorously challenged. The calling of evangelist is an honourable one in its own right and the church needs to make room for those so called whether as lay workers (paid or unpaid), Elders or Ministers. Nor is the concept of the evangelist to be limited to working among younger people. Evangelists are needed to work among those of every age group. Indeed, faith development theory and the research published in *Finding Faith Today* (Bible Society 1992) underline the need for the evangelistic process to be an ongoing one incorporating teaching as well as challenge. For most people conversion is a process rather than a crisis. Perhaps this supports the argument for a much clearer continuing education so that those who might begin as youth evangelists would have opportunity to continue their evangelistic role among their own peer group as they themselves grew older. That is not to confine the evangelist to working within his or her own age group, but to recognise that the calling to be an evangelist may well be a life long calling.

4.11 Further thought needs to be given to those ordained ministers with evangelistic gifts and how they can be released to more specifically evangelistic forms of ministry without overloading them with the tasks attached to pastoral charge. Even though the deployment process means that stipendiary ministers are a 'precious commodity' the national church needs to have situations where its paid staff are working as evangelists. This could be done as some Synods have done, by including in its ministerial figures mission projects which need to be staffed by an evangelist. In addition the URC nationally seeks to appoint 'Special Category Ministers'. It would be entirely appropriate to set aside a number of these projects as requiring an evangelist. These Special Category Ministers could take their place alongside equally necessary hospital chaplains, industrial chaplains etc.

4.12 All of this needs to be set in its ecumenical context. The Methodist Church has begun the process of recognising evangelists. The important report on Diocesan Evangelists prepared by the Board of Mission of the Church of England was unanimously approved by the House of Bishops in June 1999 and published under the title *Good News People: Recognizing Diocesan Evangelists* (Church House Publishing 1999). The Church of England has now formally established its College of Evangelists (fellowship or network rather than an institution) with the first 25 evangelists commissioned by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in October 1999. Representatives of the Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed Churches have kept in close touch with the Anglican Board of Mission over these developments which have also been the subject of discussion on more than one occasion by the Churches Together in England Group for Evangelisation. Whilst the major denominations each have their own structures and distinctive emphases, the possibility of some form of ecumenical version of the College of Evangelists at some stage in the future could usefully be borne in mind. At the very least we need to learn from each other's experience of recognising and using evangelists in the life of our respective denominations. Nor should lessons from the World Church be overlooked: A look at the place of evangelists in our partner churches of CWM, and black majority churches in the UK, will play a part in this process and we might learn from their experience.

5. QUESTIONS TO BE EXPLORED

5.1 Mention of the word 'evangelist' unfortunately opens the flood-gates for all sorts of stereotypes, misconceptions and caricatures, some of which, indeed, have resulted from over-zealous and inappropriate approaches to evangelism by the evangelists themselves. In particular, during much of the 20th century the word was perhaps predominantly associated with big campaigns, mass evangelism and well-known names which resulted in local evangelists, especially those gifted in reaching people on a more one-to-one basis, being overlooked or marginalised.

A further problem has been that evangelists, finding little opportunity for employment within the denominational structures, have often gone to para church agencies or become freelance entrepreneurs. Whilst this has continued to affirm the necessity for evangelism, we have not always known what to do with evangelists, or at least how to use them formally within our structures. Yet those called and gifted in this way represent different theological persuasions (we must resist the idea that one has to be an evangelical to be an evangelist) and a wide variety of approaches: some are preachers, others are more at home in visitation, pastoral evangelism, leading groups, personal faith sharing or working alongside young or older people. Some evangelists travel widely whereas others function within a church or group of churches and are relatively unknown beyond it.

5.2 The role and use of evangelists in the United Reformed Church undoubtedly raises many questions, therefore, and these need to be faced. In particular, we identify the following specific issues:

a. **Calling**

5.3 It is clear from the New Testament that some are called and gifted as evangelists. Some have argued that their role was purely temporary and limited to the formative years of the church. Yet the need for evangelists in the church remains and the fact that people are still being gifted in that way in the contemporary church cannot be denied.

5.4 We need to recognise the importance of giftedness: being an evangelist is not simply the exercise of a personal interest or enthusiasm, but a response to the calling and equipping of the Holy Spirit

5.5 We need also to devise ways of testing those called as evangelists, perhaps in ways parallel to the testing of those called as lay preachers, worship leaders or lay workers. For them the testing takes place largely at local church or District level and this would seem to be appropriate for evangelists also. Even if they go on to serve at District or even national level their calling needs first to be tested locally. A distinction needs to be drawn between those who are to be formally employed within the church (e.g. employed Lay Workers) and those who will serve in a purely voluntary capacity. Yet for both the same criteria will need to be applied. These might include:

- i. Active membership of the local church and involvement in its life, worship and witness.
- ii. A genuine personal experience of Jesus Christ and a disciplined spiritual life.
- iii. A self-evident commitment to the work of evangelism and some understanding of the breadth of approaches and methods which might be adopted.
- iv. A mature understanding of the gospel and the way in which it relates to and interacts with individuals and contemporary society.
- v. The ability to relate naturally and easily to other people both within and beyond the church.
- vi. Proven gifts as a communicator of the gospel and the ability to express its message in a variety of imaginative ways, especially to those unused to Christian insights and vocabulary.
- vii. Evidence of some fruitfulness in terms of effectiveness and the response of others to previous evangelistic work.

5.6 It has been increasingly recognised in recent years that every local church needs a pastoral leader. Perhaps it is equally important for every local church to have an evangelist. If the decline of the church is to be reversed and the gospel is to be spread effectively this possibility certainly needs to be explored further. Yet it should not simply be the prerogative of the evangelist to announce his or her availability to the church. There is much to be said (and clear biblical precedent - see Acts 13:1-3) for the local church taking the initiative, identifying and calling out those within its membership who have evangelistic gifts.

b. Training

5.7 Just as the United Reformed Church has provided training for other forms of service so, too, adequate provision needs to be made for those called as evangelists. There is already a great deal of training on offer through various colleges and courses. Most of it, however, is on mission understood very broadly, rather than specifically on evangelism, and is of a biblical, theological and historical nature without offering the more practical training which is also required by those serving as evangelists. Other training includes:

- i. Foundation, certificate, diploma, degree and post-graduate courses in Biblical and Evangelistic Ministry at Cliff College. In particular the MA Course in Evangelism offers a comprehensive course recognised by both the Methodist Formation in Ministry Office and the Anglican Diocesan Training Officers.
- ii. The former Open Learning Centre had a diploma course in evangelism developed in collaboration with St John's College, Nottingham and written by the Principal of Cliff College. That course is now available through Cliff College.
- iii. Courses in evangelism at other Bible colleges (notably St John's College, Nottingham, Spurgeons College and London Bible College).
- iv. A number of other organisations and agencies have published helpful material suitable for basic training in evangelism. These include the Church Pastoral Aid Society, Scripture Union, the Bible Society, Grove Books and others.

A developing relationship between the URC (through its Life and Witness Committee) and the national and international ministry of Methodist evangelist Rob Frost's ministry might be useful in providing hands on experience and training.

5.8 Since evangelists are likely to be working in different ways and at many different levels within the URC it is probably unnecessary to insist on any one form of training although there would be great value in producing a basic training course parallel to *Kaleidoscope* and *Spectrum* or integrate it within TLS. For now, some way needs to be devised of assessing individual needs and pointing people in the direction of existing training which is appropriate to them and the work they are to do. Such training would need to include the theology and practice of evangelism, contemporary apologetics, cultural awareness (including the inter-faith perspective) and communication skills.

5.9 Training needs to be both initial and continuing. An ongoing opportunity for URC evangelists to meet nationally can play an important part here by providing fellowship and support networks, information and training; but training should also be available more locally as with other ministries.

c. Recognition

5.10 A specific order of evangelists is unnecessary, but some means is needed of enabling evangelists to be affirmed and formally recognised by the church. This needs to apply not just to those employed by the church but to all who are called to work as evangelists in whatever capacity. It would be appropriate for an evangelist to be formally recognised at the level of church life (local church/ District/ Synod) in which he/she was to work, but there would need to be some standard form of recognition and authorization which applied to all. This might be helped by devising and authorizing a commissioning service parallel to those now available for other workers, and perhaps also a new Service of Commissioning for special periods of evangelistic outreach by the church. This would have the effect of raising awareness of the appointment and work of evangelists and affording them recognition within both the structural and liturgical life of the church.

d. Accountability

5.11 With official recognition comes the need for ensuring some form of accountability for evangelists. Since this report envisages evangelists as working within the structures of the church at local, District or Synod level rather than independently, this makes the matter of oversight rather more straightforward. It is important from the evangelist's point of view to have adequate structures for support, guidance and accountability; and it is important from the church's point of view to have a clear set of procedures for oversight and, if necessary, discipline. Thus for an evangelist working in a local church context, the Church Meeting would be the appropriate oversight body; in a District it would be the District Council.

5.12 Evangelists who are ordained Ministers or Elders would have the normal forms of accountability through their District Council and nationally and any other oversight and support structure which was devised in connection with their work. Those employed by the church as lay evangelists should have contracts in line with other workers.

e. Role

5.13 In arguing for the recognition of evangelists in the United Reformed Church it is important to reiterate and underline two points made earlier:

- The task of evangelism is only part of the overall mission of the church (see 1.1) and those engaged in it must see their role in that wider context.
- Evangelism is the task of the whole church (see 1.4). Every local church is called to be a missionary congregation and every Christian is called upon to be a witness to Jesus Christ. Evangelism must not simply be left to the evangelists.

5.14 The evangelist, however, is one who is especially gifted in sharing the Christian gospel with others so as to win a response of faith and has been released and authorized to exercise those gifts. In so doing he or she might act both as an evangelist and as an evangelism enabler - encouraging, training and resourcing others to engage in the church's evangelistic task. This raises the question of whether the Evangelism or Mission Enabler comes within the purview of this report, and whether it is essential for such an Enabler also to be an Evangelist. We believe both roles to be important and complementary, and would want both to be embraced in the provisions outlined in the preceding pages. A further question is whether an evangelist would be expected to be a Lay Preacher, and we do not envisage that as being a requirement. There are many other

forms of evangelism besides preaching.

5.15 The precise work of an evangelist (or evangelism enabler) will vary with the nature and requirements of the appointment. It is not particularly helpful at this stage to list possible projects. Hands on work on a one to one level or with specific evangelistic projects will be at the heart of the evangelist's activity.

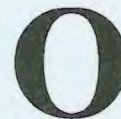
Draft Resolutions

This Council

1. Recognises the urgent missionary challenge facing the church at the start of the 21st century as expressed in the Growing Up report and underlines the need to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom and to teach, baptise and nurture new believers and as part of this affirms the importance of evangelism for the church and its ministry at every level;
2. Acknowledges the need for identifying, training and appointing those with evangelistic gifts in lay or ordained ministry into a 'college' or 'fellowship' of evangelists, and directs the Life and Witness Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee explore more effective ways of meeting that need;
3. Invites the appropriate committee to explore, in consultation with other churches, appropriate training resources and opportunities for evangelists.
4. Invites the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee to consider what new services might need to be devised in the light of this report.
5. Recognizing that the appointment of evangelists would be an appropriate use of Special Category Ministry posts, invites Districts and Synods to consider the possibility of Special Category appointments of evangelists in certain situations.



MISSION COUNCIL
20 January 2001



REPORT OF REVIEW GROUP ON - INTER-FAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The Inter-Faith Relations Committee was established by General Assembly in 1996 for a period of five years. Its work had previously been done by a task group, and Assembly clearly felt that the establishment of a standing committee should not be made permanent unless and until the arrangement had been tested and reviewed.

In September 2000, Mission Council decided to set up a small review group in order to advise it on what to propose to Assembly. The group consisted of Mrs Rosalind Goodfellow, the Revd Brenda Willis and Mr Graham Rolfe, and it received valuable information and advice from the present Convener of the committee, Mrs Daphne Beale.

The group conducted a brief review of the current work of the committee, and wishes to make the following recommendations.

1. Changes in society and in particular the continuing growth of the various religious groups make the need for a free-standing committee with this brief even more important within the United Reformed Church than it was five years ago. There are established links with other committees, both within the URC and in other denominations through the Churches' Commission for Inter Faith Relations. However, the role of committees and the relationships between them can change with time, and we therefore recommend that the committee be given a **further term of five years**, with a full review at the beginning of the fifth year.

2. The current composition of the committee is six full members, together with specialist advisers on the various faiths and the usual ex officio members. We note that it is planned that some of the administrative work will in future be done by the Kilburn Inter-Faith Centre. We recommend that this **size of committee be maintained**.

3. The group was unable to discover any definite policy on the costs of the committee, although admittedly there was no indication that these are large. We recommend that a **clear budget** be established in line with the priorities of the committee.

4. At present the **staff link** with the committee is the Secretary for International Relations, but we understand that his review group recommended that this responsibility should be removed from his brief, without specifying an alternative destination. We wonder whether it may fit more naturally with the Racial Justice worker when that appointment is made, or possibly with Church and Society.

5. The **task of the committee** was reprinted at the head of its report to General Assembly 2000. The group considers that the five points are entirely appropriate, but recommends one amendment and one addition. The third bullet point does not include Hinduism in the list of other faiths, and this omission should be corrected. In the context of the Human Rights Act which became law in October 2000, the issue of religious discrimination has become more urgent and should become part of the committee's brief.

6. It is clear from the points above that the group would urge that the committee should continue and build upon the valuable work which has been done since 1996 and through the earlier groupings. However, in view of the importance of the whole subject, we recommend that the committee should seek to establish a **higher profile** within the United Reformed Church. Two suggestions in this area are greater use of the columns of Reform, and a website.

gives me pressure to influence the report of ERM.

= show the negative pressure

- main attraction which we suggest in our party :-

• what we maintain 370 is like a broad definition of 'main business'

that it shall be up to ERM to

• that the definition of 'main business' be replaced by a

• that we lay aside the activities of a company's 'main business' as

being 370 of their activities, and replace it with a more flexible

statement which will mark the ERM to mark which are primary

the ERM is drawn in particular instances what constitutes a

'significant part' of the company's business.

• we hope that will help us to make more precise judgments about

range in financial companies who are involved in activities which

we would not wish to support but which ~~at~~ cash flows less than

30% of their business.

• And, minor alterations, we have included amongst these activities

which would not currently appear appropriate for investment - companies

whose business is the provision of pornography

• either a negative pressure

Question: is the company that should be its response to that risk?

Debat

• a) arms: not be included as support but

arms exporting is the problem:

- but old - justified - avoid

- pornography - where do we draw the line?

Bsky B.

- environmental restrictions

- human rights abuses

- precisely a step forward for this process

- MSBE has a dubious investment policy supporting armaments.

- tax investment

- how much difference can we make? Is it not already set

by on the boards is make a difference or not?

Do we know what total Synod expenditure is on staffing and salaries?

If not, can we find out?

RPAG.

GC. Getting towards £1m in debt. Synod also getting larger and larger - what about moving those around.

power

Barbara Turner Where do small churches get their money from?

NW A consultation with the churches:

- is this a one-off jump? Y/N?
- are we in a situation of making ministers redundant.

JM We actually need a lot more than Barbara thinks.

Prags we are committed to means that rises must be above inflation.

MH Need to relate national and Synod budget figures. Need to be discussed in detail at Feb. meeting

Angela Bebbington. Relationship between contributions and ministry: i.e. is ministry too far removed from its financial base.

GT In NW MAT is starting to break because resources are dwindling.

Pamela Brier Dinosaur structure of church - how we ~~use~~ use our buildings and structure of leadership. Need to look at whole concept of ministry - maybe G has given us this crisis.

AH 6 month extn - to what extent are interim emergency measures needed.

GL To make impact need to ~~lose~~ lose 25-30 posts for 2003. But in danger of causing a serious lack of confidence if we do that. Run thru range of options. Still heartfelt feeling in local churches that all will be solved if they had their own minister.

Expenditure

Val Morrison

Calling churches to look radically at what we do.

What can we afford to do, and how can we be creative in our mission sites.

Challenge all churches - you won't have ministers unless something happens.

Veronica Taylor

Ought we to do all that we do as such a small denomination?

There are profoundly important ecumenical implications - which are really radical. So consider which work could be done ecumenically, particularly in ethics etc.

Maxine Bentley

So be shutting buildings and look at resource sharing locally.

1. 'Influence on financial

2003 ~~notes for budget~~

2003 Need to balance our income against our expenditure. Responsible

Stewardship - must be managed. To do otherwise will be

irresponsible

~~clear at the moment~~

So, hope that at the next few months ministers and careers

can think together about how we might accomplish that.

~~If we are to maintain our present commitments, first~~

~~step~~ The committee will be making in writing and we'll be

in the reviews that are available to us. The question before us is what

we wish to commit ourselves to in 2003. If we are to continue to do all

that we normally do in 2003, giving must increase by ?

If giving does not increase to that level we must attempt, under Lord's guidance, to

divert some of our premises etc. Roly set before the facts and figures before

me to ensure it is what is in the interest of the community.

Key questions are the number of ministers (sets of budget)

and the level of giving.

Over next couple of weeks there are several issues to be set before the

committee.

Civil servants are asked to look at a small number in all this

budgets.

Things

etc

need to be back on the agenda.

Option to give more should be given to local churches

Para 1 - there is not an escape clause

To figure is ~~not~~ ~~going~~ ~~on~~ ~~for~~ ~~9%~~ 7.25%
cut out paragraph about 5% cut.

End with a specific question?

Crying wolf?

