



MISSION COUNCIL
21 – 23 March 2000

MINUTES

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Peter Poulter.

00/23 Welcome

The Moderator, the Revd Peter McIntosh, welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioning in particular Mr Keith Jenkins (a FURY representative), the Revd Pamela Ward, Northern Synod), the Revd Henry Gordon (substituting for Mr Peter Devaney, Wales Synod), the Revd Paul Bedford (Chaplain to the Moderator-elect) and Professor Mary Grey (Theological Reflector).

00/24 Attendance

There were 69 members present with 20 staff and others in attendance and Mrs Barbara Hedgecock (Minutes Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Suzanne Adofu (Church Related Community Work Development Worker), the Revd Jean Black (Continuing Ministerial Education), Mr Peter Devaney (Wales Synod), the Revd Ken Forbes (Scottish Congregational Church), Mrs Roberta Wood (Northern Synod) and Mrs Lillian Covell (Mersey Synod).

00/25 Minutes of Mission Council 22 January 2000

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2000, which had been circulated, were presented by the Clerk. They were approved and signed as a true record by the Moderator.

00/26 Matters Arising

00/06 Congregational Union of Scotland (CUS)/United Reformed Church (URCUK) Union

The General Secretary reported that everything was on course for the Unifying Assembly on Saturday 1st April. It was hoped that all churches would include reference to the Assembly during worship on Sunday 2nd April.

00/18 Training Committee

Following a question about the arrangements between Mansfield College and Regent's Park College, it was noted that that there would be a report later in the meeting. *See Minute 00/46.*

00/27 Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper I)

The Revd John Waller, Deputy General Secretary, presented the report.

Referring to paragraph 1, he said that Paper L was brought to Mission Council as a proposal to help the changeover in conveners. Some concern was expressed by the Nominations Committee that the proposal would create practical difficulties. The Deputy General Secretary replied that

though it might cause extra work for the Nominations Committee in the first instance, in the long term it would not do so. Mission Council agreed to bring the following resolution to General Assembly:

General Assembly resolves that normally anyone appointed to the office of convener of an Assembly committee or sub-committee shall be appointed to serve, ex-officio, for a preliminary year as convener-elect.

Mr Waller introduced paragraph 2 and it was agreed that the present officers and members of the Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) should be asked to continue to serve until October when Mission Council would decide the way forward for this group.

Referring to paragraph 3, Mr Waller reported that the Thames North Synod had agreed to pass the request from the church at Edmonton for permission to secede to Mission Council and the Assembly. It was agreed to refer the matter to the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) in the first instance.

Referring to paragraph 4, Mr Waller introduced paper J, noting that this action was necessary to put into effect the decision taken by the Assembly when it approved the Proposals for Union. Mission Council agreed that:

1. **All appointments to the Assemblies and synods of sister churches, and to appropriate representative bodies, relating to England, Britain and internationally will continue to be made by the General Assembly.**
2. **From 1 April 2000, all such appointments relating to Scotland and Wales will be made by the relevant national synod and reported to the General Assembly.**

It was noted that the matter referred to in paragraph 5 of Paper I would be discussed later in the meeting. *See Minute 00/44.*

The appointments referred to in paragraph 6 would be made by means of the elections which would be taken as the next item.

It was noted that the matter referred to in paragraph 7 of Paper I would be discussed later in the meeting. *See Minute 00/34.*

00/28 Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council and Task Groups (Paper C)

The Clerk introduced the paper and gave additional information about the elections to be held. She noted that additional written advice would be available, and asked that written nominations should be given to her by 7.30 p.m. on Wednesday evening. *See Minute 00/37.*

00/29 Pilots' Affiliation (Paper D)

The Revd Derek Lindfield, Youth and Children's Work Committee, introduced this paper and Mrs Karen Bulley, Pilots Development Officer, speaking with permission, explained the background to the current situation. Mrs Bulley was in the process of securing the Pilots trade mark through the Patent Office. If the recommendation in the document was proceeded with it would mean that all Pilots companies should affiliate to the national Pilots' organisation. Only

then would they be able to obtain Pilots material. Mr Lindfield emphasised that an important reason for full affiliation was the need to safeguard the welfare of children. Mission Council noted the proposal and expressed pleasure at the growing success of Pilots.

00/30 Changes to the Manual (Paper F)

Mr Hartley Oldham, Legal Advisor, explained that certain changes to the Section O Process were currently being considered. Mission Council agreed that the group working on these detailed revisions could bring the changes direct to the Assembly. Referring to paragraph 2, the Clerk explained that these changes, having already been approved by the Mission Council in 1999, would be brought to the Assembly at the same time. The Clerk then introduced the proposed changes contained in paragraph 3. It was agreed that all the following should be commended to the General Assembly:

Changes to Section O Process, Part II

A.2.7 First line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod” and replace “Province” with “synod”

A.3 Third line – delete “Provincial”

B.2 First line – delete “Provincial”

Second line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod”

Third line – replace “Province” with “synod”

Fourth line – replace “Province” with “synod”

B.3 First line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod”

B.4 First line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod”

B.5 Second line – replace “Provincial Moderator” with “Moderator of the Synod”

Third line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod”

B.6.1 First line – replace “Provincial Moderator” with “Moderator of the Synod”

B.9.1 First line – delete “Provincial”

B.9.2 First line – delete “Provincial”

Second line – replace “Provincial Moderator” with “Moderator of the Synod”

Third line – delete the first “Provincial” and replace the second “Provincial” with “Synod”

Fourth line – replace “Province” with “synod”

B.9.3 Third line – replace “Provincial” with “Synod” and replace “Provinces” with “synods”

When, subsequently, the group working on the amendments to the Section O Process met, it was decided that the above should be included within all the other changes to be made. There were also a few necessary consequential changes to the details of paragraph B.9

Changes to the Structure

Amend paragraph 2(5)(b) by inserting “and” before “Deputy General Secretary” and deleting the words “and the Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee”.

Add a new paragraph 3(1)(h): For the purposes of this paragraph 3(1), only synods, district councils and churches in existence on the date set for responses to be made shall be counted in the calculations.

00/31 Task Group on grouping (Paper B)

The Convener of the Group, the Revd Arnold Harrison, introduced this report which had been revised since the October meeting of Mission Council. The Clerk noted the following corrections to be made to the report: page 16, last paragraph, the word “working” should read “wording” and on page 21, paragraph 2(I)(vii) after “district council”, the following words should be inserted “so long as the Group Constitution or the Statement of Intent of the Joint Pastorate shall so provide”.

Mission Council divided into groups to discuss questions arising out of the report, and to consider whether the paper was ready to be presented to the General Assembly. There followed a plenary session during which each group reported on its discussions.

Mission Council agreed that:

1. the Task Group be discharged with thanks;
2. the report should be amended in the light of the discussion and produced as a discussion document (not a policy statement);
3. Mission Council should send the discussion document to district councils and invite them to comment on it by the end of the year 2000;
4. at its October meeting Mission Council should set up a small group which would receive any comments and produce an amended report, which might include the constitutional resolutions, for the Mission Council meeting to be held in March 2001 and the General Assembly in 2001;
5. the Revd Arnold Harrison, the Clerk and the Deputy General Secretary should carry out the work in item 2 above.

It was further agreed the material sent to district councils should include questions which could be used as discussion starters.

00/32 Appointment of Deputy Clerk (Paper P)

The Deputy General Secretary presented the paper to Mission Council and moved the following resolution:

Mission Council agrees that in the event of the Clerk being unable to act at the General Assembly or the Mission Council, the General Secretary shall be asked to deputise.

This was agreed.

00/33 Westminster College business (Paper N)

The Revd John Proctor withdrew from the meeting and the Deputy General Secretary presented the first part of the paper and moved the following resolution:

Mission Council agrees that the Revd John Proctor be re-appointed to his present post at Westminster College until 31st August 2003.

This was agreed and Mr Proctor was welcomed back to the meeting.

Mr Proctor, as Convener of the Training Committee, introduced the remainder of the paper which referred to the appointment of a new Principal at Westminster College, noting that the proposal contained therein came from the Governors of Westminster College. After discussion the Revd Bill Mahood proposed and Mr Graham Stacy seconded:

Mission Council recommends to General Assembly that the Nominations Committee be asked to set up a committee to nominate a Principal for Westminster College.

This was agreed.

00/34 Human sexuality (Papers O)

The General Secretary introduced the first paper "O The Facts" and the Deputy General Secretary briefly introduced the remaining papers. It was noted that there had been 43 responses from the 74 districts to the statement contained within Resolution 34; 11 had notified acceptance, 30 had notified rejection and 2 had had a tied vote. It was not known how many of those district councils which had not responded had considered the matter, because they were only required to notify rejection of the statement.

Mr Waller then introduced Paper "O No" in more detail. It was hoped that this paper and its related resolution might be a way to help a divided church to recognise its division, maintain its unity and hear the Holy Spirit.

Papers O were considered later. See Minute 00/36.

The Chaplain led worship and Mission Council adjourned.

WEDNESDAY, 22ND MARCH 2000

Mission Council joined in worship led by the Chaplain.

00/35 Baptist Union Council

The Moderator took the greetings of Mission Council to the members of the Baptist Union Council which was meeting in an adjoining room and the Revd Michael Bochenski, President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, brought return greetings from the Baptist Council.

00/36 Human sexuality (Papers O) Continued from Minute 00/34

Mission Council divided into groups to discuss the issues raised by Papers O.

On reconvening the Deputy General Secretary noted the following correction to paragraph 9 of Paper "O Yes and No": after "resign their" insert the following words: "membership. Such decisions do not involve any of the councils of the".

Mr Waller reminded Mission Council of the advice of MCAAG concerning Paper "O Yes", and the groups reported on their discussions on this paper. It was agreed that General Assembly should be told that the work had been done, but that Paper "O Yes" should not be published because, in the light of the results of the consultation process, it was no longer relevant. It was further agreed that the General Secretary should write to the group on behalf of Mission Council and thank them for their work.

The Deputy General Secretary, referring to Paper "O No", introduced the alternatives to pursuing the course proposed which had been outlined therein. It was agreed that the best way forward was indeed that argued in Paper "O No", and Mission Council therefore discussed in detail the resolution proposed. It was agreed that further work should be done on this resolution, and that a second resolution should be drafted which would request that the church should observe a moratorium on the moving of resolutions concerned with human sexuality. A group consisting of the Revd Bill Mahood (convener), The Deputy General Secretary, the Clerk, Dr Peter Clarke and Ms Gabrielle Cox was asked to draft resolutions in the light of the discussions.

This matter was considered later in the meeting. See Minute 00/38.

00/37 Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council and Task Groups (Paper C)

Continued from Minute 00/28

The Clerk asked Mission Council for permission to appoint 3 people to take all the names that had been suggested for the Task Group on Personal and Conciliar Leadership and to propose a list of nominations the following day. This was agreed and Mrs Wilma Frew, the Revd David Helyar and the Revd Glyn Jenkins (as convener) were appointed. *See Minute 00/43.*

00/38 Human sexuality (Papers O) Continued from Minute 00/36.

On behalf of the drafting group, the Revd Bill Mahood presented the two resolutions and Mission Council spent some time working on the details of the wording. Before the resolution calling for a moratorium was discussed, the General Secretary reported on the letters and comments he had received as part of the Resolution 35 consultation process. The most common comment had been a request to refrain from further debate on the issue.

The form of the resolution to replace that contained in Paper "O No" was agreed, and it was agreed that a new moratorium resolution should be drafted by the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary and the Revd Robert Rominger. The accompanying text to Paper "O No" was discussed in detail, and the groups reported their views. The Deputy General Secretary would amend the document in the light of the discussions.

This matter was considered later in the meeting. See Minute 00/48.

00/39 Staffing Advisory Group (SAG) (Paper E)

The first part (pages 1-13) of this paper was presented by the Convener, Dr Donald South, who noted a correction to recommendation number 2 in that the post title should read: Secretary for

International Relations. In each case SAG had reviewed the posts against the five principles agreed by Mission Council in 1992 – mission priorities, economy, ecumenical possibilities, decentralisation and readiness to change. On behalf of the Staffing Advisory Group Dr South presented the following recommendations to Mission Council:

that the post of Secretary for Church and Society be continued from 1 September 2000, or from when the new postholder begins if later, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner;

that the post of Secretary for International Relations be continued from 1 September 2001, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner;

that the post of Secretary for Ministries be continued from 1 September 2001, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner.

Mission Council accepted these recommendations.

The remainder of the paper was discussed later in the meeting. See Minute 00/44.

00/40 Nominations Committee (Paper H)

The Revd David Lawrence and Mr Graham Stacy left the meeting and the report was presented to Mission Council by the Convener, the Revd Glyn Jenkins. Mr Jenkins invited Mission Council, acting on behalf of the Assembly, to re-appoint the Revd David Lawrence for a final period of five years from 1st July 2000 to 30th June 2005. Following discussion it was proposed that:

Acting on behalf of the Assembly, Mission Council re-appoints the Revd David Lawrence as Editor of Reform and Media Officer for a further period from 1st July 2000 to 31st August 2005.

This was agreed.

Mr Jenkins then reported that the Nominations Committee proposed that Mr Graham Stacy be invited to serve as Treasurer for a further two years until the end of General Assembly in 2002. This was noted.

It was further noted that the membership of the task group on authority (Resolution 39ii of 1999) would be the Revd Adrian Bulley (Convener), the Revd Ray Adams (Secretary), Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith, Mr Eric Chilton, the Revd Jack Dyce, the Revd Pat Nimmo and Mrs Irene Wren.

Mr Lawrence and Mr Stacy returned to the meeting and were greeted by the Moderator

00/41 Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) (Papers G and G1)

The Revd Duncan Wilson, Convener of the RPAG, introduced Paper G, then the Treasurer, Mr Graham Stacy spoke. Mr Stacy noted that the second side of the original Paper G had been replaced by Paper G1. He explained the situation outlined in the third bullet point on Paper G by reference to paper G1. Income in 1999 had shown a surplus in 5 areas, so the overall outcome had been better than budgeted. Mr Stacy explained the reasons for the policy of deficit budgeting and said that the intention was that, over time, income and expenditure would balance. It was

noted that to date the Ministry & Mission (M&M) contributions were £175,000 below target (a 1% shortfall). Mr Stacy introduced the 2001 budget and Mr Wilson gave further details. In 2001 it was proposed to ask the churches to contribute to the M&M Fund 4% more than the achieved 2000 level. Synod Treasurers, while agreeing to this target, had expressed doubt that it could be achieved. It was acknowledged that there was a need for advocacy, which in turn required a greater understanding of the budget and its implications. Following discussion Mission Council agreed to commend the budget to the General Assembly.

0/42 Task Group on Discipline (Paper A)

This paper, which had previously been discussed in October, was presented by the Deputy General Secretary who outlined the changes which the Group had made to the report in response to that discussion. It was noted that the final paragraph on page 5 should be amended to reflect the fact that the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee had produced a discussion paper on Church membership. There was discussion during which concern was expressed that there were issues connected with this matter which the Group had not adequately addressed. It was recognised that the Group had done considerable work and they would be thanked for that. The Assembly would be informed that consideration had been given to the matter. No immediate action would be taken to produce a further report, but it was noted that it might be appropriate to reconsider the issues raised in the light of a more comprehensive review of the Section O Process.

The Moderator adjourned the meeting and worship was led by the Chaplain.

THURSDAY, 23RD MARCH 2000

Mission Council, led by the Moderator and the Chaplain, met for worship and shared in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Subsequently the Moderator convened the meeting with prayer.

00/43 Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council and Task Groups (Paper C)

Continued from Minute 00/37

Ballot Papers for all groups except the Task Group on Personal and Conciliar Leadership were distributed, and the tellers, the Revd Keith Forecast and the Mr Clem Frank, retired to count the votes. *See Minute 00/47.*

00/44 Racial Justice Committee and post (Papers E, K, G) *Continued from Minute 00/39.*

Paper E (pages 14-18) was introduced by Dr Donald South (SAG) who then presented the recommendation on page 18. The Revd Duncan Wilson, on behalf of RPAG, presented the report on page 18.

The General Secretary presented Paper K "A Standing Assembly Committee on Racial Justice?" and the Deputy General Secretary spoke on behalf of the Management Committee. There was discussion, following which, given the recommendation from SAG and the advice of RPAG, it was agreed that:

- 1. the post of Secretary for Racial Justice be created;**
- 2. established parts of the programme be continued (including maintenance of the network and conferences of the advocates, staff support and the production of**

materials) the sum of £30,000 having been included in the 2001 budget for that purpose;

3. while further consultations took place, the existing Management Committee should continue.

The Moderator thanked the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper on behalf of Mission Council for her magnificent contribution to Mission Council and the life of the church as a whole.

00/45 Group discussion on Paper "ASS"

Members of Mission Council met in groups to discuss questions arising out of the reports. This was followed by a plenary session during which each group reported on its discussions. The Conveners and Secretaries of the Committees noted comments made.

00/46 Training Committee (Paper M)

Before presenting Paper M the Convener, the Revd John Proctor, reported on matters related to Mansfield College mentioning in particular discussions with Regent's Park College, which had been satisfactory although there were still some important issues to be resolved, and the post of Director of Ordinand Training.

Mr Proctor also reported on the work which the committee had been doing in connection with the future of Training for Learning and Service (TLS) A brief report on short term plans would be made to the General Assembly and a more detailed report would be presented to Mission Council in October when decisions on behalf of the Assembly would need to be made.

Referring to Paper M, the General Secretary reported that the legislation with regard to termed contracts was about to change which would have implications regarding the employment of lay people within the church. As a result, no such new contracts should be entered into without first seeking legal advice. The matter was being considered and legal advice being taken, and a report would be made to the October meeting of Mission Council. Mr Burnham advised that, meanwhile, existing contracts could legally be renewed but that employees should be informed that the church might be changing its policy in the near future, and that, in such a case, they would be offered the opportunity to change to a new contract under the new policy.

Mr Proctor presented the resolutions of the Training Committee which were printed in Paper M, and Mission Council noted these decisions.

00/47 Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council and Task Groups (Paper C)

Continued from Minute 00/43.

The Clerk reported that Mrs Val Morrison had been elected to serve on the Staffing Advisory Group and that Mr Steve Wood had been elected to be convener of the IT Task Group. Other members of the IT Task Group and nominees for convener of the Grants & Loans Task Group would be approached in order of votes received. Members of the Task Group on Personal and Conciliar Leadership would be drawn from the list provided by the group convened by the Revd Glyn Jenkins which had been charged with that task

00/48 Human Sexuality *Continued from Minute 00/38.*

After further discussion based on the revised resolutions brought by those charged with re-drafting, it was agreed that the following two resolutions be presented to the General Assembly:

1. General Assembly, recognising that the statement contained within Resolution 34 of 1999 has received a measure of support in the councils of the church, but not sufficient to allow it to proceed:

- a. accepts that there is a lack of agreement relating to issues of human sexuality, and that any further resolution attempting to declare the mind of the church on this subject would be unlikely to find sufficient support at this time;**
- b. affirms that the process the church uses to assess candidates and to call ministers is the means by which the church seeks to discern the call of God; and**
- c. acknowledges that discussion on these matters will continue within as well as beyond the church and encourages the United Reformed Church to base its consideration on the Human Sexuality Report 1999, wherever possible within an ecumenical context.**

2. General Assembly asks that for a period of seven years, during which reflection, prayer and sharing continue, no resolutions attempting to define the policy of the church on homosexuality should be proposed in any of the councils of the church.

There was further discussion about Paper "O Yes & No", taking into account the views expressed during the group session. It was agreed that the paper be amended in the light of these discussions and brought to the October meeting of Mission Council for further consideration. It was also suggested that it might be sensible to separate the matters of secession and ministerial resignation. In order to assist the re-drafting, the Deputy General Secretary asked that comments from the groups should be sent to him.

00/49 Closing Remarks

The Moderator thanked synod representatives and others who were attending their last meeting. He mentioned in particular the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper, Mr Clem Frank, the Revd Peter Brain (noting that as a Synod Moderator he would be a member of Mission Council), the Revd Keith Forecast and Mrs Wilma Frew.

The Moderator thanked the Revd Peter Poulter, who as his chaplain had made a significant contribution to the worship, and officers of the Assembly who had supported him during his time as Moderator.

The General Secretary thanked the Moderator for his leadership, both nationally and locally, for his spiritual insight and challenge, referring in particular to the way Mr McIntosh had led that morning's worship.

Closing Worship was led by the Chaplain.



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

PAPERS

A	blue	Task Group on Discipline
B	bright green	Task group on Grouping
C	lilac	Election of Advisory Groups
D	pink	Affiliation of Pilots Companies
E	salmon	Staffing Advisory Group
F	canary yellow	Ministerial Discipline
G	cream	Budget for year 2001
H	gold	Nominations Committee
I	blue	MCAG report
J	bright green	Nominations in Scotland and Wales
K	lilac	Committee on Racial Justice
L	pink	Assembly Committee Conveners
M	salmon	Training Committee
N	canary yellow	Westminster College
O	cream	Paper O the Facts "Paper O (Yes and No)" "Paper O Yes" "Paper O No"
P	gold	Deputy for Assembly Clerk





MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

A

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

URC Task Group on Discipline: a report to Mission Council

Task Group Members

Revd Ken Graham
Revd Julian Macro (Convener)
Mrs Dorothy Spencer (Secretary)
Miss Rosemary Wright

Terms of Reference

The task group is asked to consider how the Mission Council might respond to Part 1 of the Assembly resolution on discipline (1996: resolution 54 Record p23).

Resolution 54

Assembly commends Mission Council for the work done on the disciplinary procedures for ordained ministers of word and sacrament and asks Mission Council to continue this work by reviewing:

1. all the procedures for disciplinary action for all members of the URC whether they be ordained or not,
2. and also its procedures for when pastoral difficulties or breakdown occur.

doing so in a form intended to be helpful to local churches and district councils. The particular reason for this form is that the Structures give local churches, through their elders' and church meetings, responsibility for maintaining standards of membership.

It is asked to widen the brief to include people who are part of the fellowship of a local church but not church members, and officers of district councils who are not ministers.

The group should consider work already done, in particular by ecumenical partners and within the reformed tradition, and including the publication on discipline produced by the Doctrine and Worship Committee some years ago.

The group should consider theological issues. These will include the relationship of discipleship and discipline, the doctrine of forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as questions of justice.

Among other issues that may be included are:

- * possible guidance on standards of membership
- * with whom should the procedure start
- * criteria for making judgements
- * issues of confidentiality
- * discipline and pastoral care
- * procedures and processes: good practice
- * the keeping of records
- * the roles of elders' meetings and church meetings
- * discipline and civil or criminal litigation
- * discipline and its effect on fellowship
- * discipline and publicity
- * appeals procedure

The group should have in mind the existing Section O process for the discipline of ministers, recognising that ministers fall outside its brief but wanting to give advice which is consistent with that process.

Introduction

Noting this last point about the Section O Process, we feel that it is relevant to note the following excerpts from it:

"1. Why Discipline?"

1.1. The words 'disciple' and 'discipline' have obvious common roots. A Christian disciple is one who follows Jesus and whose desire is to learn from Him the meaning of life and to put that meaning into practice. Disciples learn in a variety of ways and grow as they learn. From time to time they err and require discipline to remind them of the standards they have espoused, to correct them and bring them into renewed commitment.

1.2. Those who are appointed to leadership within the community of disciples have particular responsibilities in learning, teaching and living. Their living affects and conditions their leadership. By virtue of their office, they also stand in a particular relationship to the Church which appoints them. Therefore, when they err, the Church has a responsibility to exercise discipline out of concern both for them and for the well-being of the Church."

Further reference was made to Schedule E, paragraph 2:

"Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry."

We note that the disciplinary process for ministers is not specifically "offence based" but is judged against the touchstone of "the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church." We therefore feel that for the sake of consistency any process affecting those who are not ministers should also not be offence based but rather be related to experience of the unity and peace of the church. Nevertheless we also recognise that many prophets of both the Bible and Christian History, not least the Reformers, disturbed the peace and unity of the church that had nurtured them. This leads us to be cautious about using "the unity and peace of the church" as the sole criterion by which Christians should be judged.

We found the following Bible passages helpful.

"If your brother sins against you, go to him and show him his fault. But do it privately, just between yourselves. If he listens to you, you have won your brother back. But if he will not listen to you, take one or two other persons with you, so that 'every accusation may be upheld by the testimony of two or more witnesses', as the scripture says. And if he will not listen to them, then tell the whole thing to the church. Finally, if he will not listen to the church, treat him as though he were a pagan or a tax collector." Matthew 18. 15-17

".... please, I beg you, try to agree as sisters in the Lord. And you too, my faithful partner, I want you to help these women; for they have worked hard with me to spread the gospel...." Philippians 4. 2-4

Some Biblical and Theological insights and perspectives

Notwithstanding our Terms of Reference we question whether "Discipline" is the right initial response when difficulties arise. We feel that conflict resolution and conciliation should be addressed first. A framework and general guidelines would be helpful in dealing with tensions and problems in church life. Such a framework requires a theological perspective to increase our awareness of what it means to belong to Christ. In devising such a framework, it is important to consider what sort of church we wish to belong to, therefore the following biblical perspectives may be considered.

1. First of all by what criteria are standards of behaviour and practice to be considered?

Some examples might include:

Isaiah 1. 16-17: "Cease to do evil, learn to do good: seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

Micah 6.8: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God."

Mark 10.23 observes "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God."

These examples (and there are others of a similar nature) might cause us to ask, are we not all under judgement?

2. This also raises for us the issue of judgement itself.

Here we have the word of Matthew 7.1ff: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged."

With this in mind we have to be careful in framing criteria for discipline lest we lay ourselves open to hypocrisy and self-righteousness.

3. Is it possible therefore to formulate criteria that are compatible with the gospel?

It is worth considering, in this context, whether we are members of an institution with its own code of practice or more akin to a community of friends. As a consequence how are we to view membership?

In Mark 2. 15-17 we find Jesus accused of eating with "sinners and tax collectors." We also read that those invited to be among the first followers and friends of Jesus were flawed people guilty of betrayal, denial and the pursuit of ambition.

These are the people with whom Jesus is engaged. As Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1.15: "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the foremost." This suggests that humility is a more than appropriate response to the gospel.

4. Bearing all this in mind we are forced to consider what the local church is, and who it is for, and how the community of Christians can sensitively be held together in a creative and loving way.

In Ephesians 4.1-16 reference is made to "building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ." And then goes on to speak of promoting "the body's growth in building itself up in love."

These insights suggest a model of the Church more appropriate for the needs of our time. The gospel points us towards a community whose characteristics are openness, humility, loving respect of others and their story, the provision of space to grow and mature as Christians, as well as tolerance, rather than the rigid application of disciplinary standards, standards that in fact might be impossible to apply.

Referring to some of the points listed in our brief, we can report that we consulted sister churches and an Appendix gives our summary of the information that they helpfully provided. It will be seen that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has developed a structured Conciliation Service in recent years. This has been a costly exercise which has proved helpful when invoked at an early stage in a problem. We understand that the Thames North has something comparable and in practice District Pastoral committees often need to provide such a service on an ad hoc basis.

We considered the booklet on Church Discipline published by the United Reformed Church in 1983 and feel that its style is more authoritarian than would be found either helpful or acceptable today.

Situations do arise which require conflict resolution. To whom should local congregations refer if they feel out of their depth? What help can be given by District Council or Synod? What support, guidance and training is given to Synod Moderators and other officers in dealing with such matters?

The fact that sister churches have not got legislation may be a helpful pointer for us, and the fact that they have minimal guidelines may also be a pointer!

As regards other issues listed in our brief, we make these observations:

* possible guidance on standards of membership: this would be a major piece of work that is beyond our brief and is probably part of the remit of the Life and Witness Committee. What are the criteria for Church Membership? What help should be available to people to discover and live out what it means to be Christian? What ethical standards should influence the way Church Members reach their personal decisions and adopt a lifestyle? As already noted we prefer to look to conciliation and conflict resolution rather than discipline when problems arise. It would be more helpful for people to be given guidance in finding the right way, rather than being confronted with a code of discipline when it is alleged that they are at fault. Furthermore, a code of discipline implies the availability of sanctions for misconduct and as the local church is in practice a voluntary association, sanctions are not a serious option, at least in our current understanding and practice.

* with whom should the procedure start: it begins with the local congregation of the church and the District Council.

* criteria for making judgements: these should follow the pattern of the Section O process and Schedule E, paragraph 2.

* issues of confidentiality and discipline and pastoral care: it is a pastoral task to deal effectively with these concerns.

* the keeping of records: by what means, by whom and for what purpose?

* the roles of elders' meetings and church meetings: The URC Basis of Union sets these out. Reflections on the twelve functions of the elders' meeting as laid down in our manual are contained in the 1998 URC publication, "Refreshing the Elders Meeting", compiled by Revd Peter McIntosh and Revd Graham Robson.

* discipline and civil or criminal litigation, discipline and its effect on the fellowship, discipline and publicity, appeals procedure: are all linked together and will be influenced by the differing facts of each case and the nature and seriousness of the allegations. The possibility of people being intimidated by those who are more forceful must be recognised but we do not know of any simple guidelines to deal with any and all situations! We note that the following situations, although diverse in themselves, have all given rise to problems in some congregations.

Dominant personalities using power games
Offensive and disruptive behaviour
Broken marriages, when ex-partners are in same congregation
Homosexual partnerships within the congregation
Abuse of spouse
Abuse of a child
Criminal offences against people and property
Financial irregularities and mismanagement
Litigious complaints e.g. advice, racism
Doctrinal disagreements

All may need skilled help in conciliation and conflict resolution. We think that it would be most helpful if "conciliation persons" were identified and recognised within each District and Province so that those in local congregations would know to whom they could turn.

The burden of this report is that normally difficulties in churches should be resolved within the fellowship, recognising the place of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. The wider fellowship can sometimes be called in to provide expertise or to act in a mediating role.

Occasionally, however, every effort to resolve a situation fails. A person or persons damage the peace and unity of the church and no attempt at resolution has succeeded. In such situations an Elders' Meeting, carrying out its task of spiritual oversight, must advise the Church Meeting on either the suspension of (a) member(s) or the removal of names from the membership roll. There are scriptural precedents for such action.

Because extreme cases will be rare and therefore outside local experience, and the issues involved difficult to assess, Elders' Meetings are advised to seek the help of the Synod Moderator and District Pastoral Committee before deciding to act.

Our conclusions

The members of the Task Group do not feel that a formal disciplinary process is required to be established for those who are not ministers but do feel that each congregation does need to know where to find help for a conciliation process.

It would be helpful if the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee were to produce guidelines to help people work out for themselves what it means to be a Church Member.

Preparation and training are essential to equip people in the church for their roles, which can have increasingly diverse responsibilities, reflecting the complex changes in our society. Conflict resolution needs confidentiality, maturity and sensitivity to achieve a positive outcome.

A formal conciliation procedure (as developed by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland) would be an expensive agency whose likely use might not be thought to justify the cost. However, experience such as that of the East Midlands Province (where John Quilter has helped with the development of mediation skills) and Thames North Province (which has also sought to identify those with such skills) could be of benefit to the whole Church. We therefore think that consideration should be given to the support, guidance and training available to Synod Moderators and other officers in dealing with such matters so that conciliators can be identified and recognised within each District and Synod, having received such training as is necessary. While conflict resolution is a local matter where issues enter the public domain the recognised conciliator, or some other previously identified by District or Synod, should guide and advise those concerned.

We accept that this report does not provide any code of discipline but offer it as our view that the areas of further work we have identified would be of greater value to our Church.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED KINGDOM
TASK GROUP ON DISCIPLINE
Consulting with other denominations

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland

There is provision for a formal trial of any accused person but in practice this is only invoked for ministers, and even then quite rarely. The prospect of such trial is usually enough to precipitate, for example, a voluntary resignation. A conviction in a civil court for a serious offence usually results in the resignation of, for example, elders, youth leaders etc., but these matters always seem to be dealt with informally.

"The Church cannot administer a censure simply on the basis of proceedings in a civil court (including a criminal court) but must conduct its own trial." (Weatherhead, the Constitution and Laws of the Church of Scotland p.73).

A Conciliation Service has been developed in the last few years. This has proved helpful when invoked at an early stage in a problem.

There is an "administrative" (i.e. non-judicial) process for dealing with a minister whose "usefulness has been seriously impaired". If an office-bearer or church member is found to have contributed to that situation, they can now be dealt with and removed from office in the congregation, or other appropriate action may be taken.

There is room for diversity of opinion within a congregation. It is not always the case that only the opinion of one person or one group should prevail. Open discussion and decision-making need opportunities to be provided within the system of church government.

A shift in emphasis in 1995 is reflected in the change of name from Panel on the Resolution of Conflict to Conciliation Panel.

The Church of Scotland

The discipline of elders and other non-ministers has not been the subject of major legislation during this Church's modern era. The only legislation commonly invoked in a situation where non-ministers are creating havoc is the Act Anent Congregations in an Unsatisfactory State, an Act of 1988. This was an attempt to provide Presbyteries with a mechanism whereby the pastoral tie of a minister could be dissolved in a situation of irretrievable difficulty in a congregation but without the attribution of blame and without any presumption that the blame must lie with the minister. The weakness of that approach in our experience is that the Church has no legislated method for declaring fault where it lies with those who are not ministers.

In terms of common law in the Church, elders and ordinary members are subject to the discipline of the Kirk Session whereas ministers, licentiates and deacons are subject to the discipline of the Presbytery. Predictably, difficulties arise in a situation of conflict where the parties are subject to different authorities. The Presbytery is the superior court while the Kirk Session is the inferior court. At worst, a Presbytery may have to exercise formal superintendence of a Kirk Session reluctant to discipline one of its members. The final resort in these difficult situations is the 1988 Act mentioned earlier, and beginning proceedings under the Act is often more of a threat than a reality.

While it may seem strange that this is such an unlegislated area in law, it is a field of practice in which the want of written law leaves scope for the most flexible and wise application of pastoral and supervisory assistance, and so perhaps this openness has its merits.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain

Most churches have their own disciplinary procedures with members which will probably tend to go along with the Matthew 18 principle, but given the diversity of this denomination with each church being free to act according to its own conscience, there is a wide experience of disciplinary procedures. David Coffey's book, 'Build that Bridge' has a chapter entitled, 'Discipline is Discipleship' and was written in 1985 for the Baptist community. "So why bother with Church discipline? Because the people of God are likened to sheep, not pigeons. The average believer has an instinct to stray, not to make for home. Sheep need shepherds."

The Methodist Council

Detailed papers cover health issues, disciplinary questions with a disciplinary process outlined, sexual harassment and abuse including the European Commission definition and a response to the issues.

In the 1998 Conference Agenda, the section on 'Disciplinary and Related Issues' contains proposals for dealing with 'Complaints and Discipline'.

A7 "These proposals are intended to cover ... types of complaint.

A8 There can be no exhaustive catalogue of possible complaints. Some examples must suffice to illustrate their variety. There may be:

- * a clash of strong personalities leading to deepening estrangement
- * inconsiderate or foolish behaviour causing hurt to another
- * behaviour misunderstood and perceived to be intended to cause hurt or harm
- * prejudice leading to derogatory remarks and discriminatory behaviour on the basis of race or gender
- * failure, through oversight or otherwise, to consult others before decisions are taken
- * abuse of power by those in a position to exercise it
- * ablatant intimidation in public
- * sexual harassment and abuse
- * neglect of the duties of office
- * other behaviour which the church has long recognised as incompatible with office in the church, such as adultery or drunkenness
- * expression of doctrinal views incompatible with the teaching of the Methodist Church

A9 Some of these warrant formal disciplinary action. Others are best dealt with in other ways. There can be no catch-all system to deal with such variety which avoids relying on the exercise of judgement as to how serious the complaint is."



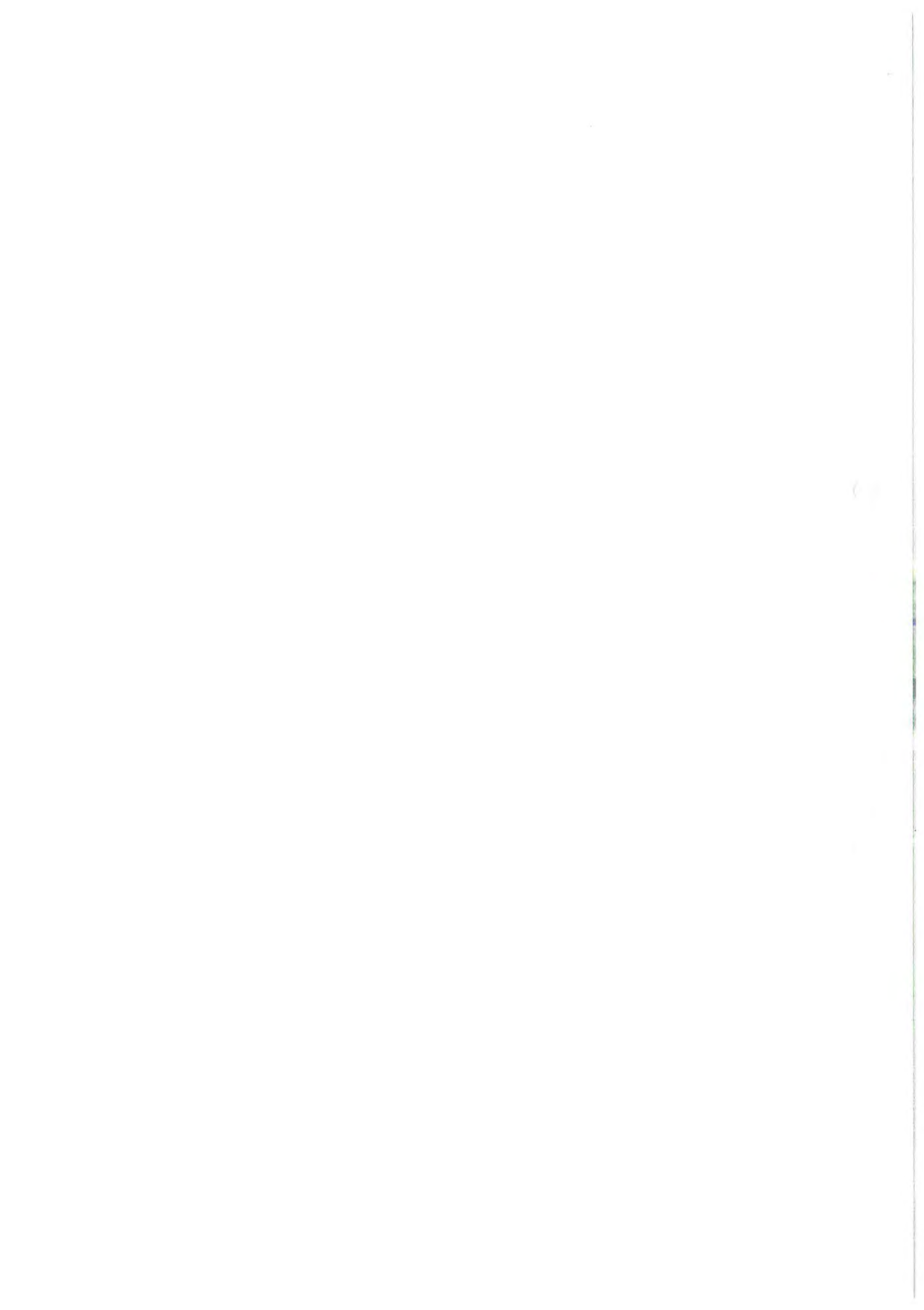
**MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000**

B

**Task Group
on the
Grouping of Churches**

Post Mission Council - Draft 3b - 07.03.2000

**Task Group on the Grouping of Churches
Post Mission Council - Draft 3b - 07.03.2000**



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A - Introduction

The Task Group

This report has been prepared by the Task Group on the Grouping of Churches at the request of Mission Council. It was commissioned to ensure that the broader mission of the United Reformed Church took full advantage of the opportunities offered by the recent developments in the practice of grouping churches.

Our brief -

To consider all aspects of the topic (i.e. the wider issues of the grouping of churches) as a positive contribution to the church's mission strategy..... explore the reasons for creating groups, different models of groups and their advantages, the relationships between groups and shared ministry, as well as possible changes in the structure of the church which might be needed for the creative development of groups.....

Presuppositions

It is quite clear that very often our perception of the world and the world as it really is do not always agree. That is no less true for the church. It is clear that many churches, and not a few ministers, still live with the assumption that the ideal pastoral arrangement is that of 'one church one minister'. It is reinforced by many candidates leaving our colleges, who express the view that such an arrangement, for their first pastorate, would be the ideal.

The Reality

This assumption is surprising given the fact that in reality many churches are not single minister pastorates. At present 356 of our churches are in LEP's or United Churches, there are 101 recognised Groups made up of 335 churches¹. Many of the LEP's involve the Methodist Church and therefore also require Circuit involvement. Joint pastorates also exist in large numbers. It is slightly more difficult to determine the exact numbers of truly single pastorates but there is some evidence that only between 10 and 15%² of our 1700 churches can be defined in that way.

Not for expediency

However that is not to imply that all such groupings and teams are based simply on 'expediency'. They are not always created merely to accommodate the deployment of ordained ministry. Many groups have been formed out of the recognition that grouping has positive value and can contribute to the wellbeing of the churches involved. The rationale for such a claim lies in the belief and experience that no one church can encompass all the skill and gifts necessary for mission. Indeed no Group or Team could claim such omnipotence. However there is a greater likelihood of a wider range of skills being discovered and shared when churches are willing to work together in a concrete way. Groups are by no means the only option, but have to be treated

¹ These figures are based on statistics held by the Ministries Committee. (July 1999)

² It is difficult to calculate this figure accurately as there are various determining factors but it is clear that the numbers are within the range given.

as a viable and realistic option alongside other possibilities including single pastorates.

Grouping can be seen as an opportunity

- for mission and outreach
- for sharing resources - ministerial, lay, financial etc
- for the sharing of support in the task of ministry and outreach
- and to explore and develop an ecumenical dimension

What follows assumes that the creation of Groups needs to be seen not as an aberration of the norm, but as one positive expression of the life of the local church.

B – Definitions

Definitions	within this report the following definitions will apply
Groups	two or more churches that have a structured relationship and a constitution governing the way in which they relate to each other, within which they share ordained ministry
Joint Pastorate	two or more churches that share ordained ministry and whose structural relationship relates only to the support of ministry.
Clusters	two or more churches that have an informal relationship, relating to each other for mission and ministry.
Teams	two or more ordained ministers, Church Related Community Workers, local church leaders or other recognised church workers who work together to offer ministry and leadership to one or more churches.
Groupings	is used where what is being said can refer equally to Groups, Teams or Clusters.

C

The Case for coming together

1. The case for Groupings as a focus for mission

Working together with other churches can be a great source of strength. The grouping of churches has, in many places, provided support and encouragement, which can be the springboard for reaching out into the community. This is particularly true for a church working in an area of urban and rural deprivation, or struggling with its own purpose and identity. This philosophy is the opposite of the recipe for decline in which churches group together simply to continue as they are, making the best of not being able to have their own full time minister. The grouping of churches should not be seen as a last resort. Instead it can make possible something new and positive in the life of the churches concerned, not least in the experience of the local church member. It can help members to discover what it is to be part of the wider church family and engage in mission alongside others. The grouping of churches makes possible greater flexibility in the use of resources and the valuing of diversity in size, theology and social context. It is therefore good when Groups, Joint Pastorates or Clusters evolve, responding to changing needs and circumstances.

2. Sharing resources

Groups in particular offer enrichment to the individual congregations concerned. Resources of leadership, skills and finance, in one congregation can be shared with the others in the group. The pooling of such resources makes possible intercal groups, PURY groups, and training groups, all of which can have a mission potential. Small congregations may not have viable numbers for this to happen.

3. Groupings for everyone?

It cannot, however, be assumed that Groups, Teams, Joint Pastorate or Clusters are right for everyone. The single pastorate is still one model of ministry and mission and is right for some places. Local circumstances as well as geographical constraints may be the shaping factor. Churches and Districts need a variety of options and models in their armoury as they develop a strategy for mission and ministry. "There is however, an underlying question. To what extent and in what ways does the United Reformed Church see the grouping of churches as one means of fulfilling its vision of the nature and purpose of the church? The 'body of Christ theology' (I. Cor. 12:12-13.26-27) has always provided a foundation for a theological understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. Churches could well benefit from renewed reflection on the meaning of the 'body of Christ' and its implications for an incarnational understanding of mission, in the light of their experience of groups."³

4. Teams

Ministers are not called to work in isolation. Indeed the essential picture of the church is that of the people of God working together and sharing the infinite variety of gifts available to them.

³ From the "Theological Reflections on Mission Council" 1-3.Oct.99 by Neil Davies

4.1. All Ministers are called to work in Teams with Elders and members. They also work with "Local Church Leaders". Such Local Church Leaders being recognised, accredited and acknowledged by the Local Church and District. They are also called to work with colleagues – including Stipendiary Ministers (SM) Non-stipendiary Ministers (NSM) Church Related Community Workers (CRCW) Youth and Social Workers. Clearly this is found most commonly in Teams of SMs and NSMs, but nothing in this paper is intended to suggest that Teams are limited in that way.

5. Why a Group?

Any form of Grouping of Churches must arise out of the local needs to engage in Mission. Even if we start from the premise that a Group, Joint Pastorate or Team is needed in order that the local church(es) may simply survive, the question "To survive for what?" still needs to be answered. Unless the ultimate objective is to engage in more effective Mission then not only is the establishment of any grouping questionable, so is the continuation of the church(es) involved

Local churches may be led to make the decision to form a Group for themselves. Local ecumenical councils can also prove to be the catalyst, as churches in a given area identify a common mission opportunity, or are experiencing similar difficulties. But District Councils also have a role in that process. To them falls the need to have a strategic view of the mission and ministry of the District. Often it is for the District to initiate the challenge to the churches to think in new ways about their relationships and their mission. Such opportunities occur naturally in at least two ways. The quinquennial consultation enables a District to engage a church in such a strategic appraisal of its relationship with its neighbouring churches. Vacancies too offer the same opportunity, and at a time when ministry is being reviewed anyway.

If, however, as is pre-supposed, the main purpose of any grouping is to facilitate the mission of the local church then the ecumenical implications must be considered. Exclusively United Reformed Church groupings may be unrealistic in that they could compete with local ecumenical arrangements, in which churches of the neighbourhood seek together to undertake mission in their own locality.

No local church can be a totally self-contained and self-supporting unit. Together we are all part of the body of Christ. Churches need to retain local identity which enables them to relate closely to their locality. This has much to do with local leadership, local membership and the needs of the immediate neighbourhood. The wider a geographical area covered by a grouping, the more difficult it becomes to maintain the intimate local knowledge. Ecumenical groupings may therefore need to be encouraged in preference to denominational links.

There is no one clear pattern, every situation is unique and requires a tailored response.

D

The Options open to us

6. Different Models

6.1. The Ecumenical dimension

As we have just indicated our commitment to ecumenism leads us to take seriously local ecumenical partnerships when plans for groups are proposed. Such groupings may deserve a priority above that of denominational possibilities. For many of our churches an ecumenical group or team will be their first experience of such a form of cooperation. Because ecumenical cooperation is almost always local and geographically focussed, it offers a potentially more effective base for mission to a community.

6.2. Minister Based Groupings

These are primarily formed to make the best use of ministerial resources, in particular Stipendiary Ministers, as membership and ministerial numbers have declined. Churches grouped together around the deployment of ministers often have no corporate identity and one should not be forced upon them. It is better for these churches to be thought of as a Joint Pastorate rather than a Group. (See Definitions)

6.3. Geographically Based Groupings

Here churches, in a defined geographical area, come together to carry out their mission more effectively. Geographical needs can often be more readily identified. They can cover a wide range of needs from social exclusion and poverty, to issues surrounding affluence and its attendant problems. Though the congregations may be very different from each other, they can have a sense of serving a particular area and can share resources to do so. They may celebrate and take risks together, which they may not do on their own.

6.4. Other links

It is sometimes right to link the pastoral care of local congregations with a District or Synod appointment, or with a chaplaincy post. Here the local church has the opportunity, through such a link, to experience and engage with a wider area of local life.

6.5. Clusters

These may comprise any combination of groups, joint pastorates and single pastorates in a defined geographical area. Their first purpose is to re-explore the mission of the churches and to bring pastorates together to share their vision of mission, to share some of the domestic tasks common to any organisation and to find resources for genuine outreach and service.

Clusters may have an increasingly important role if we can see their mission potential. The challenge is to find ways of defining them so that they fit within our present church order, yet at the same time freeing them from unrealistic constraints to enable them in their mission.

7. Team Ministries relating to Groups and Pastorates

Teams are almost always found in Groups or clusters of churches, although there are instances where single pastorates do have a ministerial team operating.

Where the Team relates to a Group of churches, to a joint pastorate or to a clustering of churches, then the relationship is more complex. There is no single recommended pattern, and ways of working have to be established for each Group and Team.

Working agreements will include areas and division of responsibility, to whom the Team members are answerable, and what provisions exist for the building up of the Team. The latter includes both additional Team members, and the ongoing development of personal skills and training. At the heart of this policy must lie a flexibility which enables the pastorate(s) and Team to grow and develop. Such flexibility needs to be built in and to be recognised as part of the life and work of the pastorate(s). The ability to respond to changing circumstances is a prerequisite of all ministry, not least that expressed in every form of group and team work.

It is impossible to enumerate such arrangements, because of the variety. However what is essential is that such arrangements are made so that members of the Team know what is expected and what can be delivered.

E

Achieving Effective Groupings

8. Issues of Leadership

The United Reformed Church has never seen Ministers in any hierarchical structure. Leadership is not about superiority but about responsibility and efficiency. At the same time it is recognised that organisations need leadership, even if that leadership is shared and moveable. People need to know who are in leadership roles, what those roles are and how the members of the Team relate to one another.

8.1. Stipendiary Ministers (SM)/Non-stipendiary Ministers (NSM) /Church Related Community Workers (CRCW)

Leadership in Teams tends to lie with the Ministers of Word and Sacraments and often with SMs, rather than with others. This may be due to the assumption that they have been trained against a broader background and therefore are assumed to have the necessary skills and insights.

There is no justification for that as a defining principle. Leadership needs to emerge from the local situation, reflecting the skills that are actually present. Local Church Leaders may be identified for that purpose, relieving ordained Ministers from such work. Provision already exists for such Local Church Leaders to Chair Church and Elders Meetings (or their Group, Pastorate or Ecumenical equivalent).

8.2 Equal Opportunities Policy (EOP)

The United Reformed Church has an EOP. It is clear that much work still has to be done to ensure that it is effective throughout the whole of our church, not least in domestic and ecumenical teams. Attitudes to and questions about race, gender, sexuality, disability, age (and other issues) need to be continually addressed. It is, however, one thing to claim such a policy, it is another thing to make it a reality. There is anecdotal evidence that church members and even other Ministers assume that age and length of service will determine leadership roles, that male leaders will be chosen above female, and that SMs will be regarded as preferable to NSMs.

If our EOP is to mean anything those assumptions must be challenged.

9. Guidelines

The following guidelines are only intended to provide those setting up Groups, Joint Pastorates, or Teams with a checklist. They can do no more than offer a framework against which to check local experience. All situations are unique and any guidance will have to be modified according to local needs. There are however some fundamental issues that need to be considered.

9.1. Role of District Councils and Synods

The Structures of the United Reformed Church provide for Synods to "receive and decide upon recommendations from the district councils on all matters regarding the grouping..... of local churches...." [Manual -Structure 2(4)(A)(iv) p.B9 (1998)], and for District Councils to make those recommendations [Manual - Structure 2(3)(A)(xii) p.B6 (1998)]

This assumes that the rationale for any Grouping will be worked out both locally and within the District.

9.2. Consultation – Consultation – Consultation

The process of forming a grouping may begin with a local church initiative. It may arise out of a District strategy. It may begin in an ecumenical context. Wherever it begins, there are three essential elements to it – Consultation – Consultation and finally Consultation!

9.2.1. Ecumenical Consultations

There is good reason for maintaining that Ecumenical consultations ought to be given priority before moving on to exclusively United Reformed Church considerations. (see 6.1 above)

Any ecumenical involvement brings with it its own particular demands and responsibilities including the need to follow denominational procedures. Consultation takes on an even greater significance. The Synod Moderator, other church leaders, Intermediate Bodies and Ecumenical Officers must be involved from the earliest stages.

This has two elements to it.

First that openness and trust between the possible ecumenical partners is established from the beginning.

Secondly that any planned Group can benefit from the wealth of experience available. Ecumenical Officers in particular can give valuable advice and guidance. It is all too easy to spend unnecessary time “reinventing the wheel”, when many of the issues to be addressed have already been encountered and help is readily available. (e.g. “How to Make it Work” [Meth/URC]).

Our own national Ecumenical Committee and Secretary for Ecumenical Relations are available for consultation, as are Synod Committees and Secretaries and local ecumenical officers.

9.2.2. Local Consultations

The consultation process must begin and end with the local church members, who need to know and understand what is happening, and why it is being considered. “Owning the decision” is a crucial element. Without that understanding the seeds of failure are built in from the beginning.

The District Pastoral Committee (or its equivalent) has a crucial role to play, as it exercises its responsibility for an overview of church life and an overall strategy for Ministry and Mission in the District. It also has a primary responsibility to consult and be seen to consult. To move very far without the knowledge of the churches is to threaten its credibility as a servant of the churches and to foster an “us and them” mentality.

9.2.3. What sort of co-operation?

Groups, Joint Pastorates, and Clusters, like people, come in all shapes and sizes. It is crucial that the type selected meets the local needs. Consulting with and visiting other pastorates is one way of trying to determine what might or might not work. Those already working in such situations can speak of both the strengths and weaknesses of their form of grouping. Learning from others is a constructive way forward.

9.3. The need for a Constitution

All groupings need some sort of Constitution. Joint Pastorates and Clusters may need little more than elements to express their relationship and responsibilities. A full Group needs a detailed document. It is essential this be done before a Grouping comes into being. Such a document is designed to help a Grouping be clear about how it will operate, not least at times of disagreement. Such occasions can emerge early on, as new and unforeseen circumstances occur. They are the moments to have a Constitution already available, not to be seeking to write one!

It is not our task here to set out possible Constitutions. Many are available and Synod Offices will have copies of those operating in their Synod Area. Likewise draft constitutions are available for most ecumenical situations.

The Constitution must cover some essential elements

- basic principles / mission statement / aims and objectives
- membership of the Group
- decision making
- financial and legal accountability
- appointment of Group Officers
- how Churches join or leave.
- how the Group is to be funded
- how Leaders are to be called
- the provision and upkeep of buildings
- how grievances are to be handled
- review procedures

Only when all the essentials are in place should arrangements be made for the Group to come into being.

9.4. The Calling of leaders

This section is meant to deal with the Calling of Leaders to a Group or Joint Pastorate. It does not relate to the appointment of Group Officers (Secretary/Treasurer etc).

9.4.1 A Vacancy Committee

A vacancy committee is almost always the best way to deal with the selection and introduction of a candidate. A combined meeting of all the Elders (or their equivalent) will almost always prove too large. The procedure for meeting, interviewing and recommending a candidate to the church needs to be agreed and laid out in advance. It should then be for the Vacancy Committee to determine whether a candidate should visit with a view.

9.4.2. Role of the Church Meeting(s)

The principal and 'official' route for the introduction of Ministers to local pastorates in the United Reformed Church is through the corporate leadership of the Synod Moderators.

Under our present constitution the calling of a minister rests in the hands of the local church meeting(s). Only if churches worshipping at different locations have constituted themselves with one Membership, one Elders meeting and one Church Meeting which governs all church life, (as already provided for in the Manual – Structures para.1.1) can they meet and vote as a single body. This limitation has not always been realised and therefore is not practised

In every other situation each and every member church in a Group or Joint Pastorate MUST (according to the Manual) hold its own meeting, cast and count its own votes, and reach the required majority in order for the call to be issued. In such circumstances it is NOT possible, at present, to hold one joint church meeting and have a single combined vote. That does NOT constitute a call, and a District Council would not be able to concur with a call that was based on that procedure.

9.4.3. Voting Procedures

It is perfectly in order to hold a combined Church Meeting of all the Churches, on the same day, at the same time and in the same place. But when the voting takes place it MUST be church by church and each of the churches must achieve the agreed percentage. That may be achieved by a show of hands, church by church, or by dividing into separate meetings, or by using identifiable ballot papers.

The voting must be recorded and declared church by church and the District advised of the figures. The candidate should also be made aware of the voting figures.

9.5. Percentages Required

The percentage required for a call to be issued is not laid down in the Manual and already varies from pastorate to pastorate. It must be for the Group or Joint Pastorate to determine what that figure shall be for them. The only common and essential factor is that such a percentage MUST be agreed before the vacancy procedure is begun so that all concerned know, at the outset of the process, what will be required for a successful call to be issued.

If the required percentage is in favour, then a Call can be issued. If the Call is accepted by the Minister then the decision is referred to both the receiving and sending District Councils for concurrence.

9.6. Balance between member churches of a Group or Joint Pastorate in respect of their membership numbers

One of the problems that such separate voting raises is that it gives equal weight to the voting of each church irrespective of the membership. This means that in issuing a call the voting of a Church of 20 members has the same impact as a church of 200 members in the same grouping.

There will be different views on the wisdom of this situation.

The matter may be academic if a call is being issued with the support of all the churches. However, if a call is not issued, then it may lead to dissatisfaction and even resentment, particularly if the failure to call rests on one or two votes. If, for example, the issuing of a call requires the support of 90% of those present and voting, and a church of 20 members only has 10 members present and voting, it only requires 2 members to vote against for the call to be withheld. In effect one member has thwarted the will of the rest of the whole group or Joint Pastorate however large that may be, and even if the rest were unanimous.

It can be hoped that a combined meeting prior to voting will help produce a consensus in each of the votes. However it cannot eliminate altogether the possibility of such a situation occurring.

9.7. Effecting Change

9.7.1. How to restructure or dissolve

All groupings have to be created to permit change. They must have built into them the mechanisms for change so that they may respond to the changing circumstances of the member churches, the wider District, the ecumenical scene and the needs of the community.

Any constitution must provide for a process of change in the structure and membership of the Group or Joint Pastorate, as well as dissolution when the arrangement no longer serves the mission of the church.

9.7.2. Regular review

Regular reviews are already a part of much of church life. Groups and Joint Pastorates should not be an exception. The constitution must provide for this process. This should include internally and externally held reviews.

9.8 The Status of the church meeting

In the structures of the United Reformed Church (Section B of the Manual), certain authority is given to both the church meeting and the elder's meet of each local church. Also in the United Reformed Church Acts certain authority is given to the church meeting. For legal and constitutional reasons, these authorities cannot be ceded to a group meeting. Therefore, whilst such meetings may be useful for the purpose of effective communication, discussion and resource sharing, apart from the authority to issue a call to a minister which we are proposing that General Assembly should give to them, such meetings may only formulate proposals. It is essential that all other decisions are taken by the separate elder's and church meetings and recorded in their minutes. The status of the church meeting as a council of the United Reformed Church is not altered by the creation of a group.

It may be in some circumstance's that the local situation would be better served by giving more significance to group meetings, and in such case it would be worth considering using the model defined in

paragraph 1.1 of the Structure and referred to in paragraph 9.4.2 above.

The contents of this paragraph should always be drawn to the attention of those contemplating the formation of a Group to ensure that that they do not inadvertently include working in their Constitution which might conflict with the Structure and the United Reformed Church Acts.

F Other Issues

i. Ecumenical Considerations

One of the greatest tensions experienced by those working in ecumenical contexts arises in the area of the membership of church councils. All denominations involved in such cooperation rightly expect clear links to be maintained in order to avoid the risk of Local Ecumenical Partnerships becoming dysfunctional in respect of their parent bodies.

However, full membership of all the relevant councils places an intolerable and unreasonable burden on ministers, who unlike lay representatives are members by virtue of their post and not by election.

It is recognised that the Ecumenical Relations Committee is already aware of this problem. We invite Mission Council to urge them to continue to address the matter further and seek viable alternatives.

ii Councils of the Church

Relating to other councils

A second major area of concern for Groups is the added burden that comes when another tier of organisation is inevitably inserted between local church structures and those of the District and Synod. A problem that is further compounded when the Group has the ecumenical component and more than one denomination is requiring participation in wider Councils. (see App.1. above)

Because Groups are not recognised as units within the church structure they cannot be represented, for themselves, at District Councils or Synods.

We suggest that the time has come to address this issue.

Representation at District Council and Synod

We consider that Churches within a Group should not be required to be represented individually at District and Synod, but should be allowed Group representation. Group representation has the advantage of releasing some members from additional meetings. This has only a notional disadvantage of reducing the number of District Council and Synod members and depriving the councils of working members, or the breadth of consultation, because experience indicates that some churches do not send representatives anyway.

If Group Representation was to be allowed it would place greater responsibilities, on those so appointed, for reporting back to Group Churches.

We do not send delegates, but representatives to the councils of the church. The District Council and Synod have to function in their own right, fulfilling the functions laid down by the Basis of Union and the Structures. However the District Council and Synod are there to serve the Church and the pressure on all active church members is felt at all levels.

Groups functioning as Councils of the Church

The Working Party did consider whether or not Groups should be encouraged and allowed to take over some District Council functions. However, it was felt that the thrust of this Report was based on the assumption that one of the merits of Groups was that by sharing the workload they relieved the local church from some functions. This could offer the opportunity for reduced representation at both District Council and Synod. There was serious concern that by taking on District functions this would add to, rather than relieve them of, administrative burdens.

This issue needs further consideration when the Basis of Union is next reviewed.

iii Training

Initial Ministerial Training

It is essential that all candidates for ordination are made aware of the situation in the United Reformed Church, i.e. that most pastorates are shared in some form or another. It is also essential that they learn how Groups work and how they may be expected to work in a collaborative way with colleagues. The many advantages of Groups, such as sharing responsibility and dividing the work to suit each individual's talents, should also be emphasised. If possible all students should spend some time in a Group situation during their training.

Continuing Ministerial Education

Teams offer a particular opportunity for the sharing of many features of ministry. Skills are allowed to be complementary and members of the Team can be recruited for particular gifts.

Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) is intended (among other things) to develop skills needed and to augment those already available. In this way a Team can be seen as a genuine resource across the whole spectrum of the life of a pastorate, enabling it to have available a far greater range of expertise.

iv Changes

Structure and Mission

The present Basis of Union and Structure, although much modified since the 1970's, remains a structure for a settled church in a settled community.

With

- the appointment of Mission Enablers,
- the recognition of Mission Projects,
- the creation of Mission Council,
- the re-designation of the British Isles as a mission area by the Council for World Mission,
- the recent union with the Congregational Union of Scotland
- and the increase in Ecumenical Areas,

the time may be right to review the Basis of Union and the Structures as a whole. This would not only recognise Groups as normative, rather than exceptional, but try to provide a bias towards mission, innovation and new development, rather than settled patterns.

Our proposals are intended as a step in this direction, but we draw attention to this wider issue.

G

Conclusions

1. The value and place of Groups and Joint Pastorates, in the life of the United Reformed Church, is amply demonstrated in the diversity and breadth of opportunity and experience they offer.
2. The primary value of such groupings lies, however, in enabling the local church to engage in effective mission
3. Ecumenical opportunities must be encouraged wherever possible because of the local focus of mission and the richness of opportunity they can offer.
4. The United Reformed Church is committed to a collaborative pattern of ministry, and working together in groupings and teams is one expression of this commitment.

6. Examples of Good Practice in the Church of England

H

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General Recommendations

- 1.1. That Districts be encouraged to develop the United Reformed Church commitment to working together ecumenically, and to encourage churches to consider the ecumenical opportunities when exploring any form of grouping
- 1.2. That training programmes (Initial Ministerial Training, Continuous Ministerial Education, and lay training) make particular provision for developing the skills necessary for group and team work.
- 1.3. That District Councils ensure that in future Constitutions are in place and signed before Groups are allowed to begin their life, and that Joint Pastorates and Clusters also have 'heads of agreement' drawn up.
- 1.4. That District Councils make provision for the regular review of Groups, possibly alongside the Quinquennial consultations.

2. Recommendations that would require changes to the Structures of the United Reformed Church

- 2.1. To recognise Groups as a constituent part of the United Reformed Church
- 2.2. To allow local churches (which are members of constituted Groups) the choice of being represented on District Council and Synod either by individual church representatives *or* as a single Group
- 2.3. To enable Groups to have the option to meet as a single church meeting in all matters relating to the calling of a minister. The exercising of such an option to be included in the constitution at the setting up of the Group and to include the agreed percentage for a successful call to be issued.

3. Resolutions that would require approval of General Assembly

- 3.1 General Assembly, noting the report on the Grouping of Churches printed in the Book of Reports:
 - a) encourages district councils to develop the United Reformed Church commitment to working together ecumenically and encourages local churches to consider the ecumenical opportunities when exploring any form of grouping;
 - b) requests that training programmes (Initial Ministerial Training, Continuous Ministerial Education and lay training) make particular provision for developing the skills necessary for group and team work;
 - c) requests district councils to ensure that in future Constitutions are in place and signed before Groups are allowed to begin their life, and that Joint Pastorates and Clusters also have Statements of Intent drawn up;
 - d) requests that district councils make provision for the regular review of Groups, possibly alongside the quinquennial consultations.

3.2 General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure (See the procedure for constitutional amendment set out in paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.):

Paragraph 1(1)

Number the present paragraph from the second sentence to the end as paragraph 1(1)(i) and add the following two paragraphs:

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

attend and vote. They may, on the recommendation of the district council and the decision of the synod, form an association known as a Joint Pastorate, with a structured relationship with respect to the provision of ordained ministry only and a Statement of Intent governing the way in which they relate to one another in relation to the sharing of ordained ministry. Each church within the Joint Pastorate shall retain its own identity, and its church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, provided that the Statement of Intent shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii)) may be taken by a single Joint Pastorate church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the Joint Pastorate shall be eligible to attend and vote.

Paragraph 2(1)(vii)

Add the following:

(Where two or more churches have formed a group or joint pastorate in accordance with paragraph 1(1)(ii) or (iii) above on the decision of synod under its function 2(4)(A)(iv), the church meetings of each church may, with the agreement of the synod on the advice of the district council, join together as a Group or Joint Pastorate church meeting for the purpose of calling a minister, in which case this function shall be exercised by the Group or Joint Pastorate church meeting.)

Paragraph 2(3)(c)

Change the words in brackets by amending "the second sentence of para. 1(1)" so that it reads "para. 1(1)(i)" and adding the following:

Where two or more local churches have formed a group in accordance with Paragraph 1(1)(ii) above, the synod may, on the advice of the district council and so long as the Group Constitution shall so provide, authorise the group to appoint representatives to the district council in the place of representatives from the local churches to such numbers as would be permitted by the above rule if the group were one church.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(ii)

Change the second word "church" to "church(es)".

Paragraph 2(4)(c)

Change the words in brackets by amending "the second sentence of para. 1(1)" so that it reads "para. 1(1)(i)" and adding the following:

Where two or more local churches have formed a group in accordance with Paragraph 1(1)(ii) above, the synod may, on the advice of the district council and so long as the Group Constitution shall so provide, authorise the group to appoint representatives to the synod in the place of representatives from the local churches to such numbers as would be permitted by the above rule if the group were one church.

4.

I Resources

The Basis of Union	The United Reformed Church	
How to Make it work	A pack of advice for locally united Methodist and United Reformed Churches Meth/URC Liaison	
	Comm.	
This Growing Unity Roger Nunn	Handbook on ecumenical developments	CTE
Under the same roof	Guidelines to the Sharing Of Church Buildings Act 1969	CTE
Travelling together Welch & Winfield	A Handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships	CTE
Getting to know you 1998	Information pack for local	
Guidelines for local ecumenical partnerships		CTE
Constitution of a United Area in Wiltshire and of an Oversight Group		

J

SIX STORIES

One *(An example of growing together)*

For many years four churches, within a radius of three miles had operated independently. Following changes the two city center churches came under one ministry as a joint pastorate. Some time later the remaining two, a suburban church and a village church likewise became a joint pastorate and ministry was provided by a half time non-stipendiary minister.

After a time of operating as two independent pastorates they combined to form a single group, but with the ministers retaining their primary pastorate responsibilities. They combine for a variety of activities and make use of the particular skills they each have.

More recently the suburban and village churches have combined into one membership worshipping on two sites. This helped resolve the problem of finding adequate leadership within one of the churches, which otherwise might have faced closure. What began as two joint pastorates, developed into both a Group and a Team, and made effective use of the provision in the Structures of the United Reformed Church 1.(1) (Manual p.B1.)

**Two** *(A five church group for fifteen years)*

This group comprises five churches near one of our major cities but each in its own distinct community. **Small village** with a monthly service and buildings recently renovated and used as village community center has been linked for many years with **Large town** which traces its history back 350 years but looks to the future with an active programme for all ages. **Garden suburb** is a church founded 40 years ago, which has always been small but has a busy life with some children's work. In the 80's full time stipendiary ministry became impossible to maintain. **Small town** founded for the industrial workers of the 1880's is also small and found itself unable to sustain a full time minister. **Council suburb** is a 1930's foundation with a declining congregation of local people and officers living away from the area.

The needs of the churches, the call to ministry and the need to find a position for a NSM who was a member of Large Town provided the spur for a link between Large Town/Small Village and Council Suburb and, as ministers came to the end of their terms of service, Garden Village and Small Town were also included.

A Constitution was agreed with a Group Committee, comprising Secretary, Treasurer plus one further elder from each church meeting, and the Ministers. A comprehensive preaching plan, of a circuit type, was a feature of the early years but this has been less evident recently. The committee has also agreed the way in which the work of one NSM and two SMs has been shared, and used consultants to address various difficulties in relationships at various times. The District Council and Synod have given approval and encouragement but the main drive came initially from the vision of one minister who saw the need and a possible solution.

The main activities of the Group are:

- sharing ministry, discussing problems and opportunities together;
- providing fellowship for the ministry team which is enriched by lay preachers, retired ministers and people seconded from the world church;
- providing a natural grouping for elders' training and other such events;
- financial sharing' giving each group of officers a wider perspective;
- organising occasional group worship or social events.

Modest aims and addressing problems at an early stage have allowed the group and the team to develop through various changes in the ministry team, giving all the churches some of the benefits and some sense of really belonging together, especially at officer level.



Three *(An illustration of flexibility)*

Four churches served by two full time stipendiary ministers, each church having an equal share of the preaching time.

Phase 1. An experienced minister, nearing retirement, and a young minister made up the team. The older minister took responsibility for the two larger churches and much of the organisation. It was not an ideal situation and after a few years the younger minister left, and in time the older minister retired.

Phase 2. The older minister was replaced by a younger minister who was

decided to change the system as he left out of touch with the two larger churches. The group did hold joint events where both ministers took part.

Phase 3 (B) was joined by an ordinand (C) and a new preaching plan was put in place in which they preached equally across the four churches. Service times were changed to allow each to conduct two services most Sunday mornings. This enabled both to know all the churches but suffered from lack of continuity. Attempt to use Partners in Learning had only limited success.

Phase 4 When (B) left the system was changed again in the interests of greater consistency. (C) along with a new colleague agreed to adopt a pattern in which each minister cared for two churches for a year before changing over, the summer months being used as a period of overlap. This system proved to be effective.



Four *(One church in three places)*

The three congregations are situated within one mile of each other on the edge of the inner city serving distinct areas with many social needs. The single church was formed over 20 years ago using the provisions in our structure 1.(1) (Manual p.B1.) after careful consideration had been given to the forming of a conventional Group involving two of the churches and a third church

some distance away. In the event the proximity of a Churches of Christ congregation (union with the Churches of Christ was imminent) suggested a different possibility.

At first a conventional group of three was suggested. But talks revealed an opportunity to move towards a practical demonstration of unity. The forming of one church was not simply a streamlining of the organisation but an attempt to maintain effective non-conformist witness in the three areas under a single name.

The working out of what it means to be "one church in three places" is still going on. It has been said that things have to move at the speed of the slowest church, and that has led to some frustrations. However, the three congregations have grown together, because they have learned to trust each other, even at times of disagreement, and their coming together grew out of a positive reaction to an opportunity, rather than a negative reaction to circumstances.

The principle "to do nothing separately that can be done together" still prevails. Even the need to rebuild one of the churches, that became unsafe, was seen by all as an expression of their single life together. Physical resources as well as human resources are regularly shared. The gifts of the two traditions have also been valued and used. Even a long vacancy (following the retirement of both ministers close together) enabled them to discover and share new gifts.

The church has discovered what it means to be "one" and there is a growing confidence in the experience.



Five (*Grouping over a wider area*)

This illustration grew out of a District decision to develop a strategy that could be applied consistently when vacancies occurred within the District.

It established five criteria.

1. That the district deploy ministers within four major towns and their environs, the quota of ministers being determined by the District.
2. That there be an agreed ratio of ministers:members, within which NSMs would be a key factor.
3. Churches would pay for ministry from their direct giving (using some investment income – but not relying on lettings/fund raising).
4. The mission field of the individual church and how it interfaced with other United Reformed Churches be taken into account, and
5. That ecumenical opportunities would be kept under constant review. Any grouping within the URC to take account of ecumenical relationships.

Two Groups were formed north and south of one city, with a SM each and one NSM. Two similar Groups were created in another city, each with a SM and an NSM for a short while.

The arrangement was not without its problems.

The Groups/District observe –

- Parochial thinking prevailed and hindered Groups working satisfactorily.
- Where there were more than two churches in a group additional ministry (to that provided by the SM) was essential.

- The NSM provision was unsatisfactory because of the uncertainty of their availability.
- Grouping is only part of the answer.
- The establishment of one church as provided for in the URC Structures 1.1 (Manual p.B1.) is one way forward.
- In this case, however, the widely varying locations make full integration difficult.
- Lay members need to take on more responsibility for management and administrative roles in Groups.



Six (Five city churches)

This group of five churches was formed in the 1970's. The policy and decision making body of the group is the Group Officers, which meets once a quarter. Ministers, Church Secretaries and Treasurers are invited to this meeting. Each church still operates its own Church and Elders meetings.

When the group calls a minister s/he is called to the group of churches, so will preach to a group service. Each church will then meet as separate church meetings to decide upon the call. There has to be a unanimous decision from all churches in the group, although within the individual churches the percentage is set at 85%.

In the usual case of a group, the decision is made by all the churches on a vote basis. It is 85%.

Percentage used in decisions will usually remain in those churches, although the congregation's better.

The strengths of having a group have been:

- Strong mutual support (especially for those in 'difficult' areas)
- Belonging together
- Financial support for ministry
- Sharing of skills and experience (e.g. music)
- Group magazine
- Diverse membership
- All age groups represented within the group

The weaknesses are:

- Group identity is not as strong as it was
- Lack of effective communication
- Do not meet often for shared worship and social events
- Apathy

Concerns are:

- Upkeep of buildings
- Financial cost of ministry
- Declining membership



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

C

Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council

The groups are listed below. Under each there is a statement of its remit, a list of the current members and the date on which their service ends. There are also details of eligibility and length of service.

1. Mission Council Advisory Group

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

Moderator	Peter McIntosh	
Immediate past Moderator	Wilma Frew	
Moderator-elect	Bill Mahood	
2 Committee Conveners	Graham Long	2001
	Alasdair Pratt	2001
Treasurer	Graham Stacy	2002
4 members of Mission Council	Delyth Rees	2002
	Roberta Rominger	2003
	Donald South	2003
	Ken Woods	2003
General Secretary	Tony Burnham	2001

(Deputy General Secretary in attendance).

Conveners serve for 4 years from year of appointment or until they cease to be conveners, whichever is the shorter.

Members serve for 4 years from year of appointment or until they cease to be members of Mission Council, whichever is the shorter.

2. Resource Planning Advisory Group

The Group prepares a rolling five year plan which takes account of possible changes in society and in the life of the church on which the allocation of resources may be based. It is responsible for budgets. It holds one or two consultations with the financial representatives of the synods each year. It also consults with those responsible for human resources. Mission Council makes all recommendations to the Assembly about the use of resources.

Convener:	Duncan Wilson	2000
Secretary:	Dai Hayward	2000
4 members	Derek Wales	2000
	Bill Mahood	2002
	David Thompson	2002
	(one vacancy)	2004

General Secretary	Tony Burnham
Treasurer	Graham Stacy
Secretary for Finance	Clem Frank
Secretary for Ministries	Christine Craven

The Convener must be a member of Mission Council, or be invited to attend. S/he serves for 4 years.

The Secretary may or may not be a member of Mission Council and serves for 4 years. Members must be members of Mission Council at time of appointment, but they then serve for 4 years whether or not they remain members of Council.

3. Staffing Advisory Group

The Group considers any Assembly post due to become vacant, or proposals for new posts and recommends to Mission Council whether this post should continue or be created.

3 members	Graham Maskery	2000
	Angela Hughes	2001
	Christine Meekison	2002
Convener	Donald South	2003
General Secretary		

The Convener must be a member of Mission Council and serve for 4 years or until s/he ceases to be a member of the Council, whichever is the shorter. Members may or may not be members of Mission Council and should serve for 4 years.

(This group will consider the following)

projects - 2003 including the following - Grants and Loans, grants and loans from the Church Buildings Fund, and the consideration of grant applications to the CWM self support fund. It also stimulates reflection on the theology and practice of mission in the light of its experience.

Convener	Simon Rowntree	2000
Secretary	Jean Thompson	2001

One representative from each synod.

Plus as consultants:
 Secretary for Finance
 Secretary for International Relations
 Secretary for Life and Witness
 Secretary for Church and Society
 A CRCW development worker
 A Youth and Children's Secretary
 Deputy General Secretary

At March 2000 Mission Council we need to elect:
 A convener, secretary and two members of Resource Planning Advisory Group
 A member of Staffing Advisory Group
 A convener of Grants and Loans Group



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

D

Pilots Affiliation

At the November meeting of the Youth and Children's Work Committee the question of Pilots Affiliation was brought to the attention of the Committee and discussed by members (99/44) The following recommendation came from the Pilots Management Committee.

'All Pilots Companies must be affiliated to the national Pilots Organisation from #### (date tba) any Company working outside the 'affiliation scheme' will cease to be recognised by the national Pilots organisation.'

After some discussion, the Committee agreed in principle with the resolution, suggesting that the date by which Companies should affiliate or cease to use the name Pilots should be January 2002.

(The Pilots Management Committee has since revisited this issue at a meeting of its Executive in January 2000. The date preferred by that Committee is 2001.)

The Youth and Children's Work Committee agreed that this information be brought to Mission Council to indicate the mind of this Committee that 'all companies using the Pilots name should be affiliated'. In consequence, only affiliated Pilots Companies would be allowed to use the Pilots name, resources and obtain Pilots materials.

Karen Bulley, Pilots Development Officer, was asked to check to see whether or not the name 'PILOTS' "belonged" to the United Reformed Church. She has since carried out this check and, on discovering that the name was not registered, took the necessary action to register it with the appropriate authority.

Attached is a background paper from Karen, for information for members of Mission Council and would ask that this resolution come to Mission Council in March as a point of information and discussion.

Background Paper on Pilots Affiliation Process

The facts

In the Summer of 1995 news was published in 'The Bridge' (the magazine produced three times a year for the sharing of news and views between Pilots Companies) that the Pilots Panel felt it was necessary to introduce an 'affiliation scheme'.

The main reason given for this was that although materials were being produced they were not always being purchased, resulting in an accumulation of stock and an inevitable financial loss. The introduction of the scheme would ensure that all affiliated companies would be sent materials free of charge and therefore only materials needed would be produced. Also the organisation's identity would be enhanced.

The Bridge report took the form of a pole, suggesting several possible ways the scheme could be introduced and companies were asked to respond as to what was their preferred way forward.

The Affiliation Scheme was introduced in the summer of 1996. Although many companies joined many did not.

Since 1998 all new companies have had to affiliate to the organisation.

Since my appointment I have 'tidied up' and introduced new benefits for affiliated companies and in the Spring of this year wrote to all companies outlining the 'new deal' in a clear and concise way, strongly advising companies to affiliate or tell me why they wouldn't. This letter received a good response.

The problem

The scheme was introduced at a time when the Master Pilot was finishing his post. Therefore continuity and strong leadership were not in place to advocate the scheme.

Some Companies are not well managed, they do not utilise any of the organisation's strengths. Whilst many companies use the centrally produced materials, some choose not to. Traditionally local Pilots Companies have been run on a shoe string and receiving materials whether they were wanted or not did not necessarily seem an advantage to some.

More recently awareness has been raised about safe guarding the welfare of children through good working practises. The Pilots Management Committee needs to be assured that parents can assume that a group meeting in the name of Pilots will be run under the organisations guidelines and requirements. This is extremely difficult to monitor but impossible if a company is not affiliated.

The Present situation

The organisation is split approximately 50:50 between affiliated and non-affiliated companies.

Affiliation costs £1.25 per child per year (less than 2½ pence a week).

The reasons given for not affiliating are not usually financial but more fundamental; 'I don't agree with it', 'we can't see the point of it', 'I'd rather make my own decisions' 'I don't have time to do it'.

The Solution

The Pilots Management Committee feels that the time has come when all companies must be affiliated. This decision has been driven by certain recent events which have convinced the committee that it needs to have:

- greater 'ownership' of the use of the name 'Pilots'
- reassurance that all companies have at least received all working materials
- confidence that children and young people within Pilots are being offered every opportunity
- knowledge that all officers are able to access advice and information from the Pilots Desk

All of which can only be achieved by a compulsory affiliation scheme.

Karen Bulley – Pilots Development Officer – Autumn 1999



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

E

**Report from Staffing Advisory Group
including a separate report on the post of Secretary for Racial Justice from RPAG**

The Staffing Advisory Group submits the papers making the case for the continuance of the posts of Secretaries for

- ◆ Church and Society
- ◆ International Church Relations
- ◆ Ministries

together with the recommendations of the Group. It also submits the report prepared for the Resources Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) on the application for a new post of Secretary for Racial Justice. (pp 14-18) Following the SAG Report and Recommendation is printed the report of RPAG. (p. 18)

Recommendations

1. **Secretary for Church and Society.** This post will become vacant on 1 September 2000 due to the appointment of Peter Brain as Moderator of the North Western Synod. The Group met Gabrielle Cox, the Convener of the Church and Society Committee. No significant changes in the job description are suggested. However there should be a careful consultation between the newly appointed postholder and the Secretary for International Church Relations regarding the overlap between the two posts with regard to international affairs. (pp 2-5)

It is recommended that:

the post of Secretary for Church and Society be continued from 1 September 2000, or from when the new postholder begins if later, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner.

2. **Secretary for International Church Relations**

Philip Woods will complete five years' service on 31 August 2001. The Group met Bob Andrews, Convener of the Ecumenical Committee. No significant changes in the job description are proposed. (pp 6-9)

It is recommended that:

the post of Secretary for International Church Relations be continued from 1 September 2001, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner.

3. **Secretary for Ministries**

Christine Craven will complete five years' service on 31 August 2001. The Group met Graham Long, Convener of the Ministries Committee. No significant changes in the job description are proposed. (pp 10-13)

It is recommended that:

the post of Secretary for Ministries be continued from 1 September 2001, for a period of five years or until the postholder resigns, whichever is the sooner.

for Mission Council Staffing Advisory Group, February 2000

Rationale for a full-time post of Church and Society Secretary to accompany the revised job description.

1 The need for the Church to engage with society remains as strong as ever. Indeed, it is arguable that the need is even greater as a rapidly changing society throws up ever more issues for debate and involvement. There is little doubt that the 21st century will pose continuing challenges to the church in relation to how society is developing and the role of the church in engaging with such developments. "Growing Up" reminds us of the five marks of mission, two of which relate particularly to the work of Church and Society: *to seek to transform unjust structures of society and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.* In both these areas Church and Society has been making invaluable contributions (e.g. through *Commitment for Life* and *Roots and Branches*) and without a Secretary for Church and Society such work would be impossible.

2 The objectives for Church and Society were revised in 1994 to read:

This committee seeks to serve local churches, district councils and synod, ecumenical and appropriate secular bodies, in raising awareness, sharing information and encouraging reflection and action on matters of justice and peace, healing and reconciliation. It seeks to represent the concern of the church for such matters to government and others with power over the life of people in these islands, acting ecumenically wherever possible. It is responsible for Commitment for Life (including the 1% appeal) and will promote such other programmes as will help the above aims.

3 Our report last year to General Assembly is intended to give an account of how this mandate is being fulfilled. It also takes account of the fact that three annual reports demonstrate the work of the committee in the last three years. It also takes account of the fact that the SAC's situation is as follows:

- overseeing specific programmes in which people are trying to contribute to the work of the church and society
- drafting statements and letters to government and others with influence;
- preparing reports and resolutions for General Assembly;
- liaising fairly frequently with other national URC committees and staff on matters of mutual concern, including attending FURY Assembly;
- networking with ecumenical colleagues across a range of issues.

Topics tackled have been very varied over the years and may be illustrated by resolutions brought to the General Assembly in 1999: on supporting the 'children are unbeatable' alliance; on the broad Middle East situation; on racial justice, following the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry; on peace prospects in Kosovo and Northern Ireland. Other programmes of work include ageing and health care rationing. The problem is always not what to do but what not to do.

4 With the demise of national Departments, the direct link with Synod and District representatives and committees was lost, though Synod representatives do meet most years. A national Church and Society Network has therefore been established with a quarterly mailing to keep in touch; five successful annual Gatherings have been held. In 2000 the Gathering will be transformed into an ecumenical event.

5 Less directly the Secretary has been responsible for the work of specialist Advisers associated with Church and Society since 1991, each of whom has contributed (in person and in print) to the work of the committee and the life of the whole church, e.g. on Housing and Homelessness, on European Issues and on HIV / AIDS. Latterly the Secretary has acted as link staff member for the URC/Methodist Health and Healing group. Each year the Secretary reports to the committee on other work outside the committee's direct responsibility.

6 There is a very strong ecumenical dimension to most of the work of Church and Society, which will be strengthened with the recent setting up of a Church and Society Forum within CTBI. However, it would not be possible to be engaged ecumenically if the URC did not have its own dedicated staff Secretary working consistently on this agenda and able to represent the denomination in many places and to reflect back to the URC the work and thinking of other denominations and the ecumenical bodies. Working ecumenically is not an alternative to having denominational staff; within the new instruments denominational work is itself meant to be done ecumenically. Church and Society is directly represented on a dozen bodies linked with the CTBI and indirectly connected with a dozen more. These are listed in our reports to General Assembly, especially 1995 (q.v.).

7 The Committee has just committed itself to a new programme of work on economics, which it is hoped will involve local churches across the country in specific research on employment in their own areas, leading to debate locally and nationally with politicians and others over the "welfare to work" strategy and allied issues. The programme should make more real for local churches some of the issues raised by the Churches' Enquiry on Unemployment and the Future of Work and should take that debate forward. Oversight of this work by a Secretary for Church and Society is essential; s/he will also need to support the work of a Steering group being set up to develop the emerging ideas and themes and plans, and to explore economic 'alternatives' locally and nationally.

8 The Secretary is budget holder for Church and Society, which has been somewhat under-spent in recent years. By using the funds which otherwise would support a second post to fund other more concentrated work (e.g. part-time advisers, commissioned work, etc.) we believe the Committee has evolved a creative and flexible way of using available resources. However, the full-time post of Secretary remains central to the development of these other initiatives.

9 It is hard to see how the United Reformed Church could fulfil its mission objectives without a significant and serious engagement with society. It is also hard to see how this will happen without this full-time post. The remit of the post is (absurdly) wide but it is vital in ensuring that, locally and nationally, we try to engage with those issues and challenges which affect us all and our world so profoundly.

Gabrielle Cox, convener
February 2000

**Secretary for Church and Society - revised for Staffing Advisory Group,
February 2000**

Responsible to:

The post-holder is accountable to General Assembly through the General Secretary and the Convener of the Church and Society Committee.

Responsible for:

The post-holder is responsible for supervision of the Administrative Assistant, the Co-ordinator for Commitment for Life and such other programme and support staff as the Committee engages from time to time.

Purpose:

The Church and Society committee was reconstituted by General Assembly 1994 with the following terms of reference: *It seeks to serve local churches, district councils and synods, ecumenical and appropriate secular bodies, in raising awareness, sharing information and encouraging reflection and action on matters of justice and peace, healing and reconciliation. It seeks to represent the concern of the church for such matters to government and others with power over the life of people in these islands, acting ecumenically wherever possible. It is responsible for Commitment for Life (including the 1% appeal) and will promote such other programmes as will help the*

The role of the Secretary is to ensure the effective fulfilment of the commitment for life and to forward

Main duties (not in any order of priority).

- 1 to service the Church and Society committee and to ensure the effective operation of such other groups as may be established by the committee from time to time;
- 2 to initiate, co-ordinate and promote the work of Church and Society on behalf of the committee and General Assembly as outlined in the above terms of reference;
- 3 to monitor and manage specialist advisers or consultants appointed by the committee from time to time and to liaise with and supervise as required individuals or organisations who may be engaged to work for the committee (see also 'responsible for' above);
- 4 to inform, advise and support the General Secretary and the Moderator of General Assembly so that appropriate representations are made on behalf of the United Reformed Church in line with the terms of reference (above) and decisions of the General Assembly and other councils of the church;

- 5 to develop and maintain networks for consultation and collaboration involving people from the synods, districts and local churches to support and strengthen their work on Church and Society;
- 6 to play a full part in the work of ecumenical and other groups or bodies which enable the churches to co-operate on public issues;
- 7 to enable the Church to reflect on the Biblical and theological understandings affecting its relationship to and mission in society;
- 8 to work with the Ecumenical Committee, in particular on international affairs in collaboration with the Secretary for International Relations;
- 9 to serve as staff link for the URC / Methodist Health and Healing Group and to serve on other task groups as agreed;
- 10 to attend meetings of Mission Council and General Assembly;
- 11 to be responsible for the overall progress of the Commitment for Life programme;
- 12 to collaborate as appropriate with other members of the Assembly staff team;
- 13 to prepare and manage the relevant budgets;
- 14 to ensure personal compliance and that of support staff with health and safety at work regulations, equal opportunity policy, etc.
- 15 the Secretary for Church and Society, is expected to be open to new styles or patterns of working and new responsibilities or tasks as General Assembly may determine from time to time.

MEMORANDUM TO THE STAFFING ADVISORY GROUP

POST OF SECRETARY FOR INTERNATIONAL CHURCH RELATIONS

The following is a response to the questions concerning the influences affecting future staffing as identified by Mission Council in October 1992.

MISSION PRIORITIES

In endorsing the "Belonging to the World Church" programme (BWC) in 1998, both Mission Council and the General Assembly encouraged the Ecumenical Committee to implement the programme in accordance with its purpose

- * to help the United Reformed Church to rediscover its missionary calling
- * to enable the church to realise more fully its place as part of a world church facing global problems and opportunities
- * to enable the church to learn from overseas partners how they are able to relate to their local culture in order that the URC can relate to its own situation more effectively
- * to stretch the imagination and extend the vision of our own church through increasing contact with churches overseas, and
- * to increase the likelihood of people from our own church serving as mission partners through CWM and overseas.

An International Relations Programme Officer has been appointed to administer some of the large amount of detail involved in the running of the programme, but the overall responsibility for keeping to and extending the vision behind the programme of 1998 remains with the Secretary for International Church Relations who is particularly responsible for keeping in touch with all the...

OFFICER FOR INTERNATIONAL CHURCH RELATIONS

ECONOMY

Mention has already been made of the appointment of a Programme Officer who is responsible to the Secretary for International Relations for the detailed administration of part of the BWC programme. Much of the programme is being funded from CWM grants, the URC's own world church unexpended income fund, and money which has traditionally been allocated to CWM but which CWM have now suggested should be used to promote mission in this country. The post of Secretary for International Relations is essential, however, because it is vital that an officer in the URC has specific responsibility for cultivating, maintaining and extending links with European and world church partners because of the vast range and complexity of the relationships involved.

ECUMENICAL POSSIBILITIES

Because of the very nature of the post, it is essential for the post holder to work ecumenically, for the essence of the work involves relating closely to overseas partner churches. Because of the close relationships with CWM and with churches particularly of the Reformed tradition, it would not be appropriate for such work to be carried out by an officer from a church of another tradition within the United Kingdom, although there is close cooperation and consultation through CTBI and the Churches' Commission on Mission.

DECENTRALISATION

Much of the work of promoting European partnerships is now done through the

Synods, and the current policy is that each Synod should have a European partnership coordinator and a partnership with a particular European church. These partnerships are seen as being undertaken on behalf of the whole of the United Reformed Church and not just the Synod concerned. The Secretary for International Relations is responsible for the networking, some training, and offering help and support to such partnerships as well as to the network of world church advocates which also exists at Synod, and sometimes District, level.

READINESS TO CHANGE

Attempts have been made over the past four years to make the URC more pro-active in its international relationships, particularly through the BWC programme. Examples of this include the promotion of World Exchange among our churches, and the implementing of the parts of the BWC programme relating to visiting speakers from overseas and overseas training opportunities. The purpose is to raise awareness of the world church by actively seeking world church partnerships, rather than simply reacting to invitations and opportunities which might arise.

In view of what has already been achieved, it is the hope of the Ecumenical Committee that the Staffing Advisory Group will recommend the continuation of the post of Secretary for International Relations along the lines of the revised job description dated February 2000.

Bob Andrews
on behalf of the Ecumenical Committee
February 2000.

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE: Secretary for International Church Relations

RESPONSIBLE TO: The General Assembly through the General Secretary and the Convener of the Ecumenical Committee

RESPONSIBLE FOR: International Relations Programme Officer
Personal Assistant to the Secretary for International Relations

PURPOSE OF JOB:

1. To develop and maintain the relationships of the United Reformed Church with churches, ecumenical organisations and world confessional bodies outside the United Kingdom
2. To promote the United Reformed Church's understanding of and involvement with the world church, with special reference to the "Belonging to the World Church" programme
3. To develop and maintain the United Reformed Church's relationships with international political institutions

To maintain and develop the relationships of the United Reformed Church with churches, ecumenical organisations and world confessional bodies outside the United Kingdom and to advise on

To attend and provide the General Assembly and Mission Council with information necessary for the proper conduct of their business, and to be a resource to the General Assembly, Mission Council and the General Secretary on world church matters.

- B. Ecumenical Committee
To assist the Secretary of the Ecumenical Committee in the preparation of the agenda, documentation and minutes in relation to that part of the Ecumenical Committee business dealing with relations beyond the United Kingdom. To conduct correspondence in the Committee's name.
To be the budget holder of the Committee and to be accountable for budget matters to the appropriate budget committee.
- C. Overseas (International) Exchange Sub-Committee
To act as Secretary to the Overseas Exchange Sub-Committee, assisted by the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations. To process the recruitment, training, sending, leave arrangements and resettlement of mission partners serving through the Council for World Mission, to oversee arrangements for their pastoral care, and to work where appropriate with the Secretary for Ministries. To maintain links with and provide appropriate support for United Reformed Church personnel serving in churches overseas whose arrangements are made other than through the Council for World Mission. To work where appropriate with the Secretary for Ministries
- D. Council for World Mission
To be the main link between the United Reformed Church and the Council

for World Mission and to serve on the CWM Council. To foster through the United Reformed Church's membership of CWM an interest in the world church and opportunities for learning and for enriching the mission of the church in the United Kingdom.

- E. World Exchange
To oversee the connection between the United Reformed Church and World Exchange.
- F. "Belonging to the World Church"
To be responsible for the "Belonging to the World Church" programme, working with the Programme Officer, in accordance with the decisions of the General Assembly.
- G. Synods and Districts
To maintain and develop networks of Synod and District world church advocates and European partnership coordinators, and with them to undertake the promotion and advocacy of the United Reformed Church's involvement with the world church and European churches. To be a resource person for Synods and Districts on world church and European partnerships.
- H. International affairs
To work closely with the Secretary for Church and Society on all international affairs matters, attending the Church and Society Committee as required. To be the main link between the United Reformed Church and the CTBI International Affairs Liaison Group. To work with the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Conference of European Churches. To be the main link between the United Reformed Church and the European Union and the Council of Europe. To work with the United Nations Churches Center in New York, and to be the main link between the United Reformed Church and the United Nations.
- I. Inter-Faith Relations
To be the in-house staff contact person working with the Committee for Inter-Faith Relations and overseeing its budget.
- J. To remain well informed about the world ecumenical scene, to be aware of developments in other Reformed churches and to alert the General Secretary to any necessary initiatives.
- K. To initiate invitations to official representatives to the General Assembly from outside the United Kingdom on behalf of the General Secretary.
- L. To work closely with the General Secretary, the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations, the Secretary for Church and Society and such others as appropriate in areas of mutual interest and concern.
- M. To ensure personal compliance and that of support staff with Health and Safety at Work regulations.
- N. To remain open to new patterns of work and to new responsibilities should the General Assembly, or its appointed committees, so decide.

Revised February 2000

United Reformed Church **Ministries Committee**

Application to the Staffing Advisory Committee to renew the post of Executive Secretary to the Ministries Committee

1. Remit of the Ministries Committee

The Committee is responsible for the ministry of word and sacraments, church related community work and lay preaching. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education, and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, church related community workers and lay preachers, including supervision, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the work of the National Assessment Board. It is assisted by five sub-committees.

1.1 Accreditation Sub-Committee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment.

1.2 Church Related Community Work Central Management Committee

It is responsible for managing the Church Related Community Work

It is responsible for the delivery of any pastoral ministry to all members in the United Reformed Church

1.4 Maintenance of the Ministry

Advises on the level of stipends and ministers' conditions of service through the Plan for Partnership. It is also concerned for pensions through its associated Pensions Sub-Committee.

1.5 Retired Ministers Housing

Works in association with the United Reformed Church Ministers Housing Society Ltd.

2. Key Working Emphases

At the heart of the work of the Ministries Committee are two key working emphases;

2.1 mission

2.2 ecumenicity

3. Role of Executive Secretary

3.1 The Executive Secretary is crucial in holding together the many aspects of the work of the Ministries Committee so that they complement each other to provide the Church with a coherent strategy for the provision and sustenance of ministry, primarily but by no means exclusively ministry of word and sacrament, a vital element in the mission of the whole church.

- 3.2 The Executive Secretary provides an important continuity in working through ecumenical implications with the Secretary for International Church Relations and the Executive Secretary of the Ecumenical Committee, and with those holding comparable responsibility for ministry matters in our sister denominations and ecumenical partners and agencies.
- 3.3 The Executive Secretary is critical in ensuring the effective operation of the Ministries office, leading the team which includes a Personal Assistant and the Manager of the Data base, and in dealing with the many personal and confidential matters which arise within the exercise of the Committee's remit.

4. **Developments since the last review**

The chief developments within the remit of the post since last it was reviewed have been;

- 4.1 the extension of responsibility to include acting as Secretary to the main Ministries Committee and as Secretary to the Accreditations Sub Committee. Experience had shown that the provision of a separate voluntary secretary for these committees produced confusion, unacceptable delay, and an overall inefficiency.
- 4.2 the sharpening of focus and strategy for deployment. At the time the current post was established the whole issue of deployment had been referred to the Resource Planning Advisory Group for attention though always in co-operation with the Ministries Committee. More recently Mission Council has returned deployment to the Ministries Committee as a more sharply focused and strategic concern.
- 4.3 much improved organisation. The organisation of the Ministries office has been pulled together and new systems put in place to increase the efficiency of the office in every respect.

5. **Continuing Need**

The continuing process of reviewing facets of the "ministry" of the United Reformed Church and of exploring potential new forms of ministry all point to the necessity of continuing flexibility in the Job Description. In the opinion of Ministries Committee the need for the appointment of an Executive Secretary will continue to be a requirement for the effective fulfilment of the overall remit established by General Assembly for its work.

6. **Costing**

It is anticipated that the cost of the continuation of the post will be in line with the current cost basis.

7. **Application**

With the above factors in mind Ministries Committee requests renewal of the post of Executive Secretary.

Graham Long February 2000

Job Description

- Job Title:** Secretary for Ministries
- Responsible To:** The post holder will be accountable ultimately to the General Assembly through the General Secretary and also to the Convener of the Ministries Committee.
- Responsible For:** Personal Assistant to the Secretary for Ministries
Manager of the Database
- Purpose of Job:** The post holder's major responsibility is to stimulate the development of the concerns which are within the remit of the Ministries Committee, and ensure that necessary action is taken.

Main Duties:

- a) To administer and manage the work of the Ministries Committee in collaboration with the Convener.
- b) To liaise with the Convener of the Ministries Committee.
- c) To liaise with the Chief Accountant who provides administrative support for the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee, the Retired Minister's Housing Sub-Committee and the Pensions Executive.
- d) To act as Secretary to the National Assessment Board, arranging the induction and training of members of the Board, planning and organising National Assessment conferences and Re-Assessment panels, liaising with Synod Ministries Committees and others involved in the assessment of those offering for the ministries of Word & Sacrament and Community Related Church Work.
- e) To respond to ministers of other churches who seek to transfer to the ministry of the United Reformed Church, to advise the General Secretary in the case of enquiries regarding ministers seeking to transfer from the ministry of the United Reformed Church, and to present all relevant information to the Accreditation Sub-Committee.
- f) To work collaboratively with colleagues, in relation to areas where there is shared responsibility.
- g) To act as budget holder for the Ministries Committee.
- h) To be a member of the Resource Planning Advisory Group.

- j) To advocate the work of the Ministries Committee. To listen to, respond to and communicate with, Synods, Districts and Local Churches.
- k) To develop ecumenical relationships in the work of the Ministries Committee, within both the UK and the World Church.
- l) To ensure personal compliance and that of support staff with Health and Safety at Work Regulations.
- m) The Secretary is expected to remain open to new patterns of work and new responsibilities should the General Assembly, or its appointed Committees so decide.

Revised February 2000



for the Mission Council
Staffing Advisory Group
February 2000

Secretary for Racial Justice

Mission Council, on January 22, 2000, resolved the following, inter alia:

Mission Council acknowledges the support given by the Council for World Mission and gives thanks for the ministry of the Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper as multi-racial / multi-cultural development worker during these past years;

and accepts the need for a continuing programme of work which seeks to ensure that the United Reformed Church becomes and remains an instrument for racial justice within its own life and the life of society.

1 The arguments for sustaining a pro-active programme have thus been accepted by Mission Council. They derive from the convictions which led to the appointment of Revd Marjorie Lewis-Cooper in July 1997 and from the findings of her research and our common experience during these

b) *consideration of the role of minority ethnic members in the church;*

c) *to foster awareness of racism and racial justice in congregations and councils of the United Reformed Church.*

3 The elements of the continuing programme, as modified in the light of Mission Council discussion, are to:

a) develop the advocacy work across the church, recruiting, training and supporting some advocates in each synod;

b) oversee the availability of regular racism awareness training for URC leaders, Assembly staff, committee's etc. and to ensure racism awareness training is an element in URC ministerial and other training programmes;

c) encourage, strengthen and empower minority ethnic URC members and leaders and single ethnic congregations in the practice, application and manifestation of their faith and to promote adequate resources for projects involving minority ethnic people and groups within the church and society;

d) liaise with Assembly Committees in monitoring the participation minority ethnic members in all the committees and councils of the church;

e) represent the United Reformed Church on relevant ecumenical and civil bodies.

These elements would be incorporated and spelt out in more detail in the terms of reference for a managing group for the continuing programme (committee or subcommittee or whatever) and in the job description of any new post.

For example, Marjorie's visits revealed concerns held in different places about other issues of culture and ethnicity such as Welsh and Scottish national aspirations and the plight of travellers. There is also an evident need to address Christian - Muslim tensions in Britain at more than an 'inter-faith' level. Some tasks on this list lend themselves to measurement against specific targets; others are not readily quantifiable.

4a The current Management Committee believes that this agenda requires a **staff post**. The experience of the Urban Churches Support Group in London and the Commitment for Life programme nationally both point to the need for a clear focus of management with a person available to recruit, support and co-ordinate volunteers in advocacy. Neither of these programme would have survived without paid leadership.

4b We shall argue that there is potential here for significant growth in the United Reformed Church, with evidence from the Church of England and Methodist Church that such appointments have led to increases in membership, leadership and financial giving. The General Secretary notes in "Growing Up" under the heading of "Mission in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society" that "*A modest step has already been taken in this field. Assembly will need to decide in 2000 how the whole of the United Reformed church, not merely those parts of it with a visible ethnic mix, is to respond to the findings of this research ... this work has enabled the church to begin to tap deep and diverse spiritual gifts which members of ethnic minority backgrounds bring to our own life and mission.*"

4c More than is the case with some other proposals, the Staffing Advisory Group should acknowledge the considerable significance of a refusal by the United Reformed Church to establish a continuing post at all. After initial doubts, the many minority ethnic members and leaders who have been involved with the work of Marjorie Lewis-Cooper are now convinced that the church must press forward with a properly resourced post.

5a Further, we believe that a **full-time post** is required and that a part-time appointment will not do. The findings of Marjorie Lewis-Cooper points us to that conclusion, as one scans her reports from all the Synods and reflects on the list of tasks listed above. We must, however, note the possibility that such a person, working in inter-ethnic issues, might if appropriate venture in the more precise field of inter-faith relations.

5b We have considered two possible **options for a part-time post**. Both imply that the United Reformed Church could not expect a full-time job to be done when in our view there is a full time job to be done.

One would be to **share the post-holder** with another denomination. Our understanding is that the Baptist Union are considering a fresh initiative in this field, although with no firm time-scale or job description. However, we feel sure that the Baptist Union, at a stage roughly parallel to that of the United Reformed Church in 1996, would require more than a half a post to get started and therefore that any such sharing would place impossible demands on the post-holder. The 'savings' by doing things jointly would be not great, given the different expectations of the two denominations.

The other would be simply to **declare a half-time vacancy** and leave the post-holder to find alternative part-time employment. Again the pressures would be very great as expectations rise and opportunities open up. A part-time post-holder might have other employment or not; either way, this pressure and the fact that so much was going undone would be a severe strain.

5c We have therefore considered some **means of raising additional help** to reduce the total cost on Assembly funds. These enquiries will be reported more fully to Resource Planning Advisory Group but are outlined here since it seemed from the Mission Council discussion that resource constraints, rather than objections in principle, were preventing an acceptance of the staffing proposal.

i) One option would be to explore specific Synod support, in kind or in funds, for elements of the budget. This has been done before. Contributions would vary in proportion to the resources available to any Synod. We would also hope that every Synod might contribute the cost of sending its own advocates to the bi-annual training events which appear so costly on the draft budget.

ii) Another option would be to return to the Council for World Mission and seek some help from one of their funds, e.g. the Mission Support fund.

iii) A more distant but not unrealistic prospect would be to seek non-URC funding to support an identifiable element in the programme, such as the material for training of advocates.

Secretary for Racial Justice

A report from the Staffing Advisory Group to the Resources Planning Advisory Group

1. The Staffing Advisory Group received the attached paper and then discussed the issues raised with two representatives of the Development Worker's Management group: Marjorie Lewis-Cooper and Naboth Muchopa, who holds one of two full-time racial justice posts with the Methodist Church.
2. In speaking of some of the work done in the past 2½ years, Marjorie reminded the Group that the original Assembly resolution described the 3 years of her post's life as *initial*, implying that there was a commitment to continue beyond its ending. 500 years of racism could not be dealt with overnight. Since the Stephen Lawrence Report racism in institutions was now firmly on the national agenda.
3. Other more specific arguments for the post referred to the rapid build up of a network of 75 racial justice advocates from all synods. Also the need to work with minority ethnic ministers and lay people, the implications for all kinds of training especially the preparation of ministers, the absence of minority ethnic representatives in the councils of the church and in the committees of the Assembly. All these issues of race, together with the regrettable expressions of

in his prophetic role the subject of racial injustice within these islands is a serious challenge and no less important than our financial needs.

5. The Group explored with Marjorie and Naboth the priority concerns affecting staffing decisions:
 - 5.1 **Mission Priority.** It was argued that this fitted into the Growing Up proposals. Quite apart from the implications of some of the Five Marks, the evidence from the report *The Tide is Running Out* about the Church of England was that since beginning a racial justice programme in 1992, the number of ethnic minority people attending church had doubled. This was in sharp contrast to the general decline. Over a similar period the Methodist's ethnic minority members increased from 3-4%. The comparatively limited approach of the URC had stimulated the growth of a network of 75 advocates. Regarding ethnic minority ministers, out of 24 only 3 were British born. There was scope for growth here.
 - 5.2 **Ecumenical possibilities.** These had not been explored by the Management Group, committed as they were to a full time post. However Naboth argued that this was not the way forward because churches had different ways and cultures. When pressed about URC-Methodist co-operation, he conceded that the two churches did

collaborate but, he reverted then to the argument for a full-time post. However it was noted that there is local ecumenical activity in different parts of the country. (e.g. Merseyside and Region Churches' Ecumenical Assembly, Churches Action for Racial Equality). The Group noted also that some of the work would be the same in each church e.g. resourcing the training of advocates and ministers and providing background for prophetic judgements.

5.3 **Decentralisation.** Much had been done through the Advocates to push out towards the local churches but national co-ordination and support was necessary for this to be successful in the measure required.

5.4 **Economy.** Marjorie and Naboth were pressed on this but were reluctant to accept anything but a full-time post. If it had to be part-time, they were clear that it could not be the whole job done in a reduced way, it would require a narrowing to undertake some specific tasks.

6. **Conclusions.** The Group found it difficult to reach a common mind. Partly this was on the answer to the question as to whether a full-time post in this field would actually meet the needs of the local churches. The concern was also expressed that to be against a *full-time* post did not mean that a person was against racial justice. The Group were of a mind to state that there was a task to be done and rejected the possibility of recommending that there be no post. However further explorations would be needed before resolving whether the full-time or the part-time option could be recommended.

6.1 **Full-time.** The role of the Staffing Advisory Group is to consider specific posts. However there is a question about overall staffing provision. For example, the Group is aware of the generous provision of staffing in the field of youth and children's work, with an equivalent of nine posts funded from the central budget. The Group has no authority to compare the priorities of youth and children's work with that of racial justice. Presumably it is the responsibility of RPAG to advise Mission Council on this.

6.2 **Part-time.** It was not easy to explore the ecumenical option of working with the Methodists, given that one of the Management Committee's spokes-persons was a Methodist postholder in this field. However the Advisory Group believes that it would be ecumenically irresponsible to act without formally consulting the Methodist Church about this.

6.3 **Church and Society.** The strong case for dealing with racial justice leads us to consider the post's relationship to that of the Secretary for Church and Society. It is clear that racial justice belongs, in principle, to that field of work. Nevertheless it would do less than justice to all the other issues of peace and justice simply to lodge responsibility with the Secretary for Church and Society. However the Secretary for Racial Justice could be a colleague, with the possibility of the oversight being given to a sub-committee of Church and Society. In the event of the post being part-time, this would give the postholder a colleague. If this

approach was followed, it is important that the two colleagues would not be a senior and junior but a collaborative partnership comparable to that of the Secretaries for Ecumenical Relations and International Church Relations working with the Ecumenical Committee.

Recommendation

The Staffing Advisory Group recommends that the post of Secretary for Racial Justice be created, that RPAG explores whether within the overall staffing a space could be created to allow it to be full-time and that Mission Council ask the General Secretary (or the Deputy) to consult with the Secretary of the Methodist Conference about ecumenical possibilities in a shared post. In order that support could be given to the Secretary, s/he should work in partnership with the Secretary for Church and Society. This is particularly important if the post is part-time.

Secretary for Racial Justice

A report from the Resources Planning Advisory Group to the Mission Council

It was noted that more work remains to be done on the programme, the post, including a job description, ecumenical possibilities and the financial implications. It was therefore resolved that a sum of £30,000 be put into the budget for 2001. This will allow established parts of the programme to continue, an office to be maintained, together with the costs of some limited supervision. This will also allow time to prepare the foundations for the establishment of such an important post.



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

F

CHANGES TO THE MANUAL

1. Certain changes to the disciplinary process for ministers, which have arisen in the light of experience, are currently being considered. It will be suggested at the meeting how the changes may be brought to Assembly.
2. The following changes to Part II of the Section O process were approved by Mission Council in January 1999 but were not taken to the Assembly that year. It is intended that they will be proposed to this year's Assembly:

PART II - Rules of Procedure

A.2.7 First line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod" and replace "Province" with "synod"

A.3 Third line – delete "Provincial"

B.2 First line – delete "Provincial"
Second line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod"
Third line – replace "Province" with "synod"
Fourth line – replace "Province" with "synod"

B.3 First line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod"

B.4 First line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod"

B.5 Second line – replace "Provincial Moderator" with "Moderator of the Synod"
Third line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod"

B.6.1 First line – replace "Provincial Moderator" with "Moderator of the Synod"

B.9.1 First line – delete "Provincial"

B.9.2 First line – delete "Provincial"
Second line – replace "Provincial Moderator" with "Moderator of the Synod"
Third line – delete the first "Provincial" and replace the second "Provincial" with "Synod"
Fourth line – replace "Province" with "synod"

B.9.3 Third line – replace "Provincial" with "Synod" and replace "Provinces" with "synods"

3. Mission Council is asked to agree to propose to Assembly the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Amend paragraph 2(5)(b) by inserting “and” before “the Deputy General Secretary” and deleting the words “and the Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee”.

This paragraph deals with certain officers who are members of General Assembly. The Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee is made a member of Assembly by the following clause, which refers to all conveners of standing committees. The inclusion of this officer in 2(5)(b) is unnecessary duplication.

Add a new paragraph 3(1)(h): For the purposes of this paragraph 3(1), only synods, district councils and churches in existence on the date set for responses to be made shall be counted in the calculations.

Paragraph 3(1) relates to the reference of certain decisions to synods, district councils and local churches. The present resolution 35 process has revealed a weakness in this section, in that it does not say on what date the total ~~number of synods, district councils and churches is determined~~. This addition makes clear that only those councils in existence at the date set for



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

G

BUDGET FOR THE YEAR 2001

NOTES FOR MISSION COUNCIL

- **Policy of deficit budgeting**
Objective is to avoid accumulating surpluses arising from unanticipated income, underspending of budgeted expenditure and investment value gains.
- **M&M contribution levels**
Move to deficit budgeting enabled M&M targets to stand still for some years. Standstill came to an end in 2000. Current policy on stipends and minister numbers implies a continuing increase in costs and therefore a continuing increase in M&M contributions.
- **1999 result (provisional)**
Surplus of £202,000 plus investment gains of £430,000 on unrestricted funds. Budget for 1999 was a deficit of £251,000.
- **2000**
Budget showed a deficit of £660,000.
Too early to predict outcome but M&M contributions are £175,000 below target. (2% increase compared to target 3%).
- **2001 budget**
SCC additional costs not included but expected that expenditure will be broadly covered by M&M contribution.
Ministry - assumptions, stipend up 3.5%, numbers down 1%.
Training - increased take-up of CME.
Administration - includes continuation of URC House refurbishment programme (long overdue).

Preferred budget deficit is between £600,000 and £700,000.
M&M requirement is an increase of 4% over 2000 achieved level. (This includes 1% to catch up 2000 shortfall).
- **District Treasurers' workshop - Swanwick, 23/24 February 2000**
Trusted the budget figures.
Not entirely happy with system of allocating M&M targets.
Agreed to inclusion of 2001 M&M target at 4% up on 2000 level.
Not confident that it will be achieved.

Set up group to review M&M allocation basis.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2001

	1998	1999	1999	2000	2001
	Actual	Actual	Budget	Estimate	Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
EXPENDITURE					
Ministry					
Excluding SCC	13,799	14,040	14,376	14,758	15,159
Estimate SCC					
Training					
	933	1,175	1,176	1,397	1,534
Other mission activities					
Ecumenical grants and AGOGAL	345	364	379	298	303
Ecumenical committees and international	275	261	244	311	310
CWM	100	94	100	50	50
Church and Society committee	92	67	90	90	93
Racial Justice Programme	16	29	11	32	30
Life and Witness committee	110	103	128	90	99
Windermere Centre	46	72	40	42	43
Youth and Childrens Work Committee	104	142	106	196	210
Yardley Hastings	53	84	59	106	106
Pilots development	14	59	41	64	66
	14	11	11	11	11
Total Expenditure	17,201	17,878	17,940	18,949	19,450
INCOME					
General income					
Interest, dividends and Memorial Hall Trust	(933)	(1,025)	(861)	(836)	(850)
URC Insurance Company Limited	(83)	(33)	(75)	(40)	(50)
Legacies and sundry income	(1,169)	(289)	(53)	(54)	(54)
	(2,185)	(1,347)	(989)	(930)	(954)
M&M contributions					
Excluding SCC	(16,712)	(16,629)	(16,700)	(17,020)	(17,717)
Estimate SCC					
CWM Mission Support programme					
		(71)		(116)	(126)
Total Income	(18,897)	(18,047)	(17,689)	(18,066)	(18,797)
Total income excluding SCC					
Net (Surplus)/Deficit	(1,696)	(169)	251	883	653



MISSION COUNCIL
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**NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE
REPORT TO MARCH 2000 MISSION COUNCIL**

Editor of Reform and Media Officer

A review Group was convened by Revd Donald Hilton and met Revd David Lawrence. They propose that David should be re-appointed for a final period of five years - 1st July 2000 to 30th June 2005. **Mission Council is asked to act on behalf of Assembly in considering this proposal.**

Church Treasurer

Mr Graham Stacy will have completed a four year term as Treasurer at this year's General Assembly. The Nominations Committee proposes that he should be invited to serve for a further two years until General Assembly 2002. **Mission Council is asked to note this intention.**

Task Group on Authority [Resolution 39ii]

Revd Ray Adams has agreed to act as Secretary and Revd Pat Nimmo has agreed to be a member: the full list is therefore

Convener: Revd Adrian Bulley

Secretary: Revd Ray Adams [representing the Moderators' Meeting]

Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith

Mr Eric Chilton

Revd Jack Dyce

Revd Pat Nimmo

Mrs Irene Wren

Mission Council is asked to note the membership of this group and to report its response to resolution 39(ii) to Assembly.



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

I

Mission Council Advisory Group

1. The group has considered the fact that many Assembly committee conveners come to the post with knowledge of the committee's field of work but no knowledge of the committee itself. Paper L is being brought to Mission Council as a proposal to help the changeover in conveners.
2. There has been a suggestion that, as the need for a Five Year Plan has not been established, and as the issue of deployment is now handled by the Ministries Committee, the remaining work of the Resource Planning Advisory Group could be done without having a separate group. Discussion of the options has begun, and in order to allow it to be a thorough process, MCAG proposes that the present officers and members of the Resource Planning Advisory Group be asked to continue in office until October 2000. Mission Council would then decide the future of this piece of work at the next meeting.
3. MCAG was told at its meeting that a resolution was coming to the forthcoming meeting of Thames North Synod proposing that a petition from the church at Edmonton to secede from the United Reformed Church be passed to Mission Council and Assembly. In the event that the synod has passed the resolution MCAG will suggest a procedure for dealing with the matter.
4. As a result of the work of the Scottish Synod Preparation Group, MCAG brings a paper on nominations in Scotland and Wales to Mission Council (Paper J).
5. Following discussion at the last Mission Council MCAG received a paper from the management committee of the multi-racial, multi-cultural development programme. The paper set out the reasons for establishing a racial justice committee. Recognising that any decision on this matter has to relate to discussions in both the Resource Planning Advisory Group and the Staffing Advisory Group, MCAG passes the paper to Mission Council without comment (Paper K) but with a further option added as a result of its discussion.
6. MCAG proposes that the appointment of a task group on personal and conciliar leadership, and three members to the IT task group, should be done by the full Mission Council along with any other elections. Members are asked to think of possible names.
7. Mission Council will need to consider what, if anything, needs to be done to prepare Assembly to handle the situation following the resolution 35 consultation process on matters of human sexuality. Papers are in the course of preparation which should enable Mission Council to carry out this responsibility, whatever is the outcome of the process.

John Waller
February 2000



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000



Nominations in Scotland and Wales

The following proposal is offered for consideration:

- 1. All appointments to the Assemblies and synods of sister churches, and to appropriate representative bodies, relating to England, Britain and internationally will continue to be made by the General Assembly.**
- 2. From 1 April 2000, all such appointments relating to Scotland and Wales will be made by the relevant national synod and reported to the General Assembly.**

Part 5 of the CUS/URC union proposals makes it clear that national synods will be responsible for arranging proper representation of the United Reformed Church in the area of their nation. This means that some appointments currently made by the Assembly, on the advice of its Nominations Committee, will cease to be so. The proposals relate to the responsibility for **making** appointments: national synods may sometimes appoint people from other parts of the United Reformed Church. Given that those appointed represent the whole Church, in some cases it will clearly be appropriate to include people from other nations. In other situations the continued appointment of Assembly officers may be desirable.

Note: These current Assembly appointments would be affected by this proposal:

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland
Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Wales
Assembly of the Union of Welsh Independents
ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland)
CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales)
Free Church Council for Wales
ENFYS (the Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales)
Council for Wales Consultation on Forming a United Free Church in Wales
Scottish Churches Initiative for Union (SCIFU)



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K

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.



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The following proposal is commended by MCAG. It is set out in the form in which it will go to the General Assembly.

RESOLUTION X

Assembly Committee Conveners

General Assembly resolves that anyone appointed to the office of convener of an Assembly committee or sub-committee shall be appointed to serve, ex-officio, for a preliminary year as convener-elect

1. The term of office of committee members, including the convener, is four years. This proposal would mean that the person appointed as convener would serve a fifth preliminary year.
2. It has been realised that, at present, a convener may be appointed to a committee with no previous experience of its working. This has sometimes resulted in a period of uncertainty in the committee's life. The preliminary year of service will enable a convener to get to know the members, to become familiar with the agenda and to observe the committee's style of working.
3. During the year the convener-elect may play a full part in the committee's work.
4. If agreed, this proposal will take effect immediately with regard to any conveners taking office at the Assembly in 2001.

Note *If MC agrees to recommend this proposal to the General Assembly then it will take effect immediately with regard to all the standing committees and advisory groups of MC.*



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000



TRAINING COMMITTEE

The Training Committee, which met on Wednesday, 5th January 2000, agreed the following resolution:

Henry Playle:

- 1 **The Training Committee resolves to reappoint Henry Playle with effect from 1st October, 2000 as Youth Leadership Training Officer for Eastern Synod for a further period of 5 years subject to legal advice about the duration of the appointment.**
- 2 **The Training Committee authorises the Convener and Secretary for Training and the Deputy General Secretary to amend the duration of the appointment in the name of the committee should legal advice make such action appropriate.**

The Training Committee, which met on Monday 14th February 2000, agreed the following resolutions:

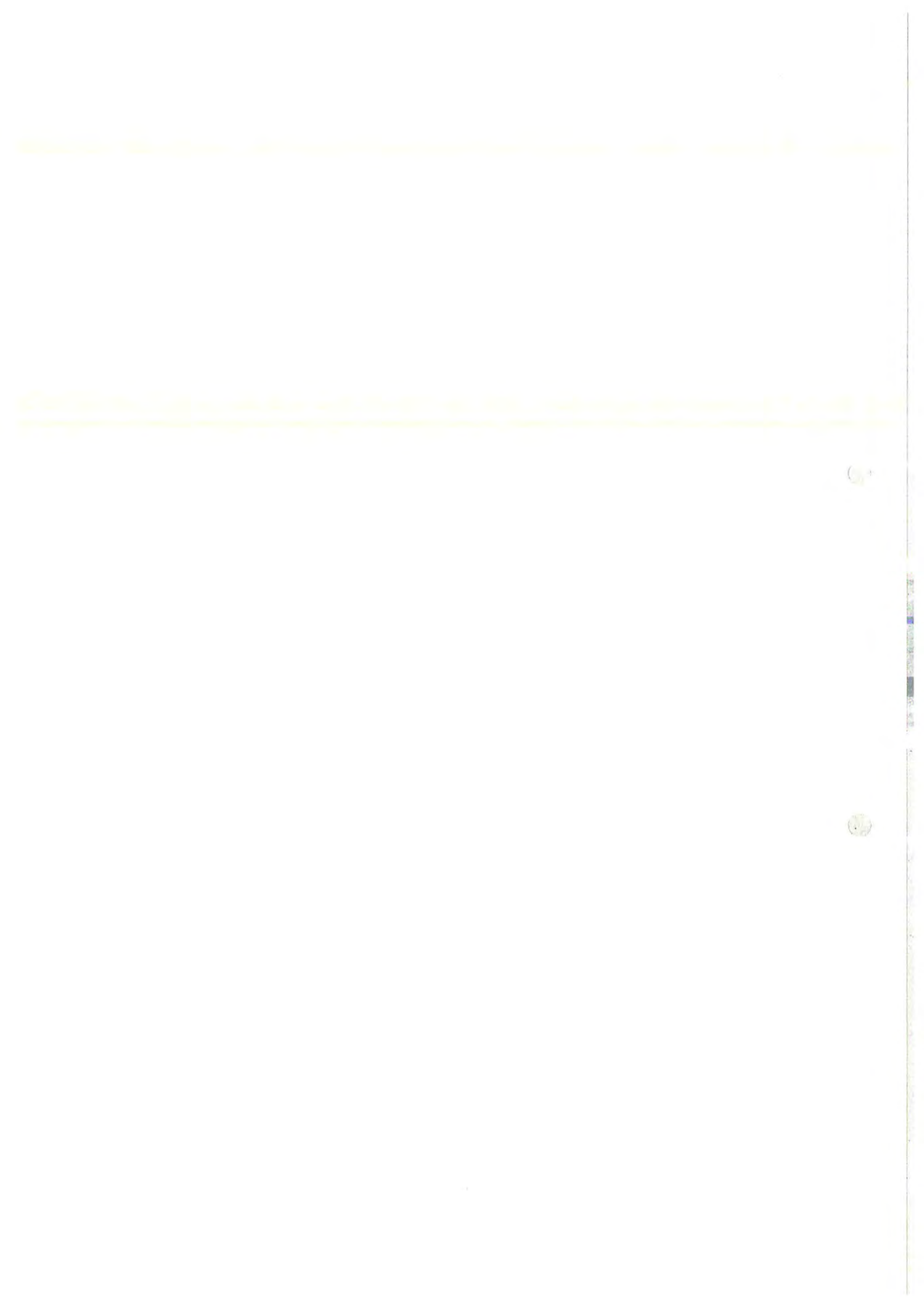
A Leo Roberts:

- 1 **The Training Committee resolves to reappoint Leo Roberts with effect from 1st September, 2000 as Youth and Children's Work Training Officer for North Western Synod for a further period of 5 years subject to legal advice about the duration of the appointment.**
- 2 **The Training Committee authorises the Convener and Secretary for Training and the Deputy General Secretary to amend the duration of the appointment in the name of the committee should legal advice make such action appropriate.**

B John Brown:

- 1 **The Training Committee resolves to reappoint John Brown with effect from 1st September, 2000 as Youth and Children's Work Training and Development Officer for Mersey Synod for a further period of 1 year subject to legal advice about the duration of the appointment.**
- 2 **The Training Committee authorises the Convener and Secretary for Training and the Deputy General Secretary to amend the duration of the appointment in the name of the committee should legal advice make such action appropriate.**

C The Training Committee concurred with the appointment of the Revd Hilary Collinson as Special Training for Learning and Serving Co-ordinator for 12 months from 1st March 2000.





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N

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

John Proctor's Appointment at Westminster College

1 John Proctor was appointed to his present post in New Testament at Westminster College from 1 September 1986. §13 of Mission Council's Report to the General Assembly at Portsmouth in 1993 notes that it had been agreed to extend the New Testament Studies post at Westminster College for a further five year, i.e. until 31 August 1998.

2 This meant that it was necessary to review John's post while the wider review of the future of URC Colleges was going on. The General Secretary advised the Board of Governors that there was no requirement to reconsider the necessity of having the post (minute 97.04R), and so a Review Group was appointed by the Board to meet with John. This met in September 1997, and a note of its meeting is attached. Its report was received by the Board at its meeting on 11 November 1997. Minute 97.09R reads: 'The Convener and the Principal had met with Michael Roberts (Cambridge Theological Federation), Professor Hooker (University of Cambridge) and the Revd Dr Jack McKelvey (URC). They had recommended that the Revd John Proctor be reappointed for a further three years. This was ratified by the Board of Governors unanimously.'

3 This was the first occasion since the inception of the Board that such a Review had taken place, and unfortunately the Clerk omitted to notify the Training Committee of this recommendation, so that it could be forwarded to Mission Council or the General Assembly. No-one else noticed this, and nothing further was done (unlike last year when a similar omission by the Clerk in respect of the reappointment of Janet Tollington was rectified by a resolution moved at Assembly). The matter only came to light this year, when the need to consider a further reappointment arose, and the previous paperwork was checked.

4 The matter was brought to the Board of Governors at its meeting on 29 February, when it was noted that the situation is further complicated by the fact that John is now Convener of the Training Committee. **It was agreed to ask Mission Council at its March meeting to approve this reappointment retrospectively.** In view of the fact that this reappointment would have been for five years, if there had not been a ban in force on any appointments to Westminster College beyond 31 August 2001, **the Board also agreed to ask Mission Council whether, since circumstances have now changed, the appointment could be extended to 31 August 2003.** Two other current members of staff are being reviewed with a view to reappointment in the near future, and the Board felt strongly that it would be advantageous to secure a more evenly distributed flow of appointments and reappointments.

D.M.T.
7 March 2000

Westminster College Board of Governors

Review Group appointed to review the Revd John Proctor

2.ix.97, 1:30 pm

Present:

Dr David Thompson (convener)
The Revd Dr David Cornick (Principal)
The Revd Michael Roberts (CTF)
Professor Morna Hooker (Faculty of Divinity)
The Revd Dr Jack McKelvey (United Reformed Church)

The convener opened the meeting with prayer.

The group met at Westminster College.

1. The convener explained that the unusual term of possible re-appointment was consequent on the decisions of wider councils of the church about the work of the college.

2. Due consideration was given to the papers presented by the Revd John Proctor at the request of the convener (previously circulated). The group then met with Mr Proctor to discuss various issues. After Mr Proctor had retired the group unanimously agreed to recommend to the Board of Governors at their next meeting that Mr Proctor be re-appointed for a further three years.

3. The convener thanked the group for their work, and agreed to communicate the decision to Mr Proctor and to the Board of Governors.

DCC2967

The Appointment of a New Principal of Westminster College

1 If the General Assembly approves the nomination of David Cornick to succeed Tony Burnham as General Secretary of the United Reformed Church from 1 September 2001, it will be necessary to replace David, both as Principal and as holder of the Nivison Chair of Church History. It is clear that no action can be taken on either of these matters until after 4 July, but that is where the clarity ends. The questions which arise are:

- a) who has responsibility for making the nomination(s);
- b) in which order should the nominations be made;
- c) what procedure should be adopted.

2 Paragraph 2.2.4.2 of the Report of Mission Council on the Future of Westminster College, as approved by General Assembly in 1996, reads: 'The Board of Governors shall establish an Appointments Committee, which shall include a member nominated by the Training Committee, representatives from the Cambridge Theological Federation and such specialist members outside their own number as they consider necessary, to make recommendations to them for appointments to the teaching staff of the College. These recommendations, if approved by the Board, shall be submitted to the General Assembly for approval.' There is no separate reference to a procedure for the appointment of the Principal, apart from the statement in §2.2.5 that the Principal shall be appointed by General Assembly.

3 In 1979 the nomination was made by the Committee on Nominations to Teaching Staff at Westminster College, a sub-committee of the Training Committee, and in 1996 by what had then become an ad hoc committee, set up by the Nominations Committee of the Assembly for particular teaching posts (*Reports to Assembly 1994*, p 141). The intention of the 1996 changes was to transfer responsibility for nominations to teaching posts to the Board of Governors from ad hoc committees; but the procedure for the Principal was not specified. There are therefore two possible views of where responsibility for nominating the Principal lies: one is that, as the Principal is a member of the teaching staff of the College, (s)he should be nominated by the Board's Appointments Committee as laid down in §2.2.4.2; the other is that a special Assembly Nominations Group should be appointed. It is therefore urgent that Mission Council should resolve this matter, and specify a procedure for the future.

4 When the Board of Governors approved its procedure for appointments in 1997 (copy attached), it assumed that responsibility for recommending to Assembly the appointment of the Principal had been devolved to it, along with other recommendations for the appointment of teaching staff. Since all members of staff are appointed by the Assembly, it is not clear why the procedure for appointing a Principal should be different. However, it has been argued that no different procedure is specified in §2.2.5 because it was assumed that the procedure would be the normal one for Assembly appointments, i.e. a specially constituted committee. Actually, as para 3 above indicates, it was the latter procedure which was novel in 1996, because of the end of the Committee on Nominations to Teaching Staff at Westminster College.

5 The Board discussed this matter at its meeting on 29 February and agreed to seek a ruling from Mission Council as a matter of urgency. There was a general feeling that it was appropriate for the recommendation to come to Assembly from the Board. One member pointed out that he was a member of the Board as a representative of

the United Reformed Church, and if he was to be told that he was not an appropriate person to share in the nomination, he wondered whether he was an appropriate person to be there at all! Another member pointed out that it was customary in other higher education institutions for the appointment of the Principal to be made by the Governing Body.

6 The Board invited the Senatus to prepare a case to be considered at its next meeting for the replacement of teaching in the area of Church History, but it was clear that the appointment of a new Principal needed to take priority. The Board also agreed that the post should be advertised, notwithstanding the fact that this could result in some duplication of existing teaching expertise and run the risk of not being able to make a replacement appointment in Church History.

7 Mission Council might like to consider in what way (if any) it would wish to appoint a special nominating group which was differently composed from that envisaged by the Governors. This might help to clarify whether a special group was really necessary. The idea of a jointly appointed group might be attractive, though it should be remembered that it would be expected that the group would contain a member of the Senatus, a student, a representative of the Cambridge Federation, and a representative of one of the two Universities whose awards are administered by the College; so if the group is not to be too large, there is probably not room for more than two members each appointed by the Governors and Mission Council respectively.

8 It would also be helpful, if the recommendation is not to come from the Governors, for the new procedure to be written into the regulations governing Westminster College.

D.M.T.
7 March 2000

The appointment of academic staff

1. The constitution of the Appointments Committee

(i) There shall be an Appointments Committee, which will operate as a sub-committee of the Board of Governors of the College. Its membership shall consist of:

A Convener (The Convener of the Board of Governors or his/her appointee)

Secretary (A Governor)

The Principal (or a member of Senatus if the process is to appoint a new Principal)

A Federation representative (appointed by the Cambridge Theological Federation)

A University representative in a subject-specific area (appointed by the Faculty of Divinity)

A representative of the Cheshunt Governors

A representative of the National Church (appointed by the Training Committee)

A Student (elected by the Student Body)

(ii) The Appointments Committee shall agree both the job description and the person specification after such consultation as may be necessary.

2. The process of appointment

(i) Administration of appointments should be the responsibility of the Governing Body. If the Secretary of Training is a Governor, they may wish to devolve that administrative task to her/him, but as a Governor rather than a central staff member.

(ii) Shortlisting is the responsibility of the Appointments Committee.

(iii) The process of appointment should contain the following elements:

A social occasion to meet staff and students of the Federation

An academic / teaching presentation

Individual interviews

3. Equal opportunities

We hope that, as far as possible, due consideration will be given to good equal opportunities practise in the creation of individual appointments boards.

4. Emergency procedure

The committee shall a standing committee in the persons of the Convener, the Secretary and the Principal (or Senatus representative) so that it can meet at short notice in emergencies.

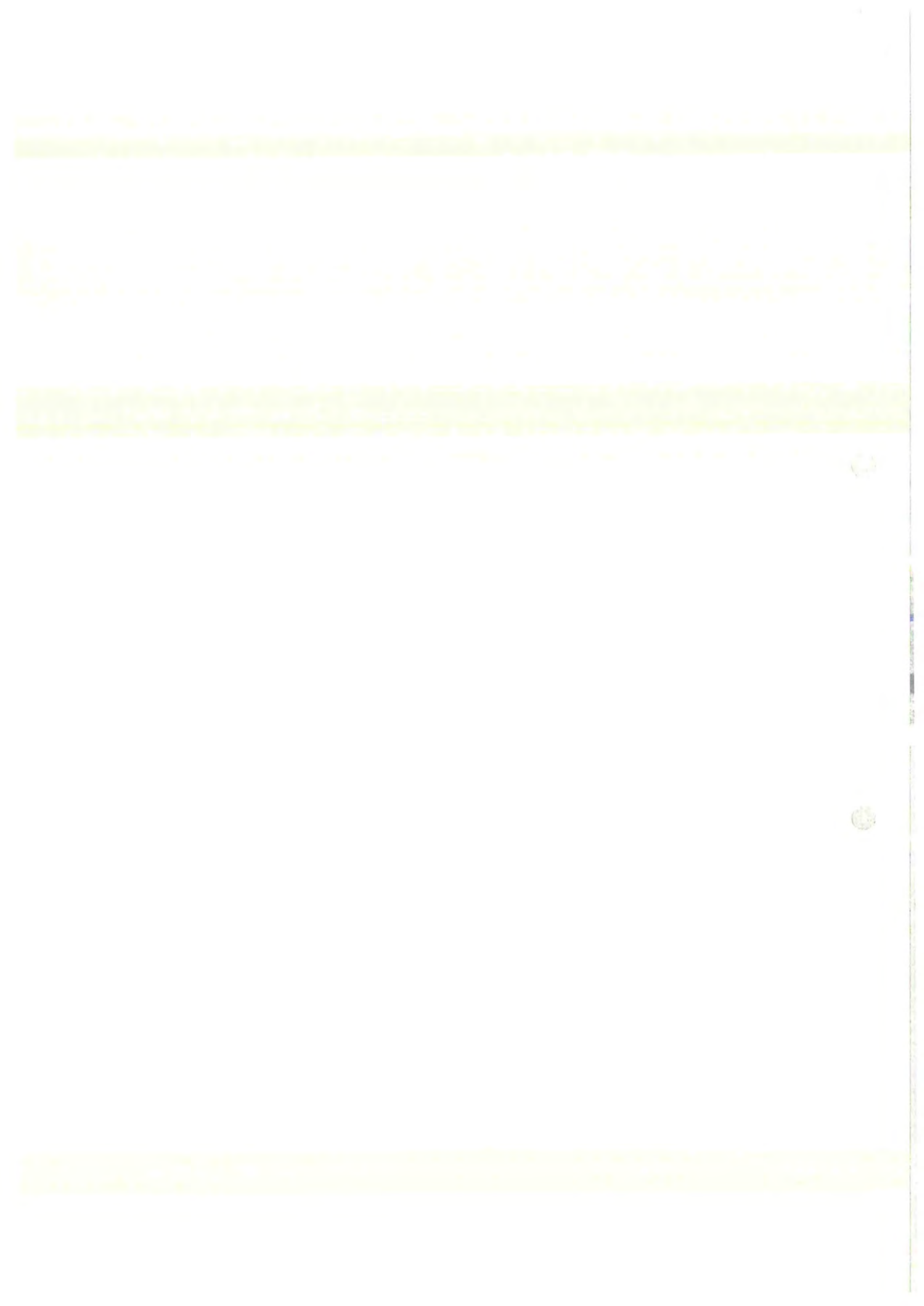
5. The review of appointments

The appointments committee will oversee the review of posts towards the end of periods of contract. The whole committee need not be involved, but continuity of personnel is important

should review lead to a new rather than a renewed appointment. It shall be responsibility of the Governors to appoint members of the committee for each review.

DGC6297

(a revision of paper 10 presented to the Board 11 March 1997)





MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000



Paper O The Facts

Consultation on Resolution 34

General Assembly 1999. The following resolutions were agreed:

- 34 In order to test the mind of the church regarding homosexuality, General Assembly asks the councils of the church to consider the Human Sexuality Report 1999 and to come to a view on the following statement:

In the context of the affirmations commended to the church in Resolution 31, the United Reformed Church affirms and welcomes people of homosexual orientation within the life of the church and society, but does not believe that there is a sufficiently clear mind within the church at this time to affirm the acceptability of homosexual practice.

35 General Assembly:

- (i) invites local churches, district councils and synods to discuss the statement contained in Resolution 34;
- (ii) agrees that if any local church, district council or synod passes a resolution that *the statement be not accepted* by a majority of members present and voting at a duly convened meeting of such a body, notice of such a resolution must reach the General Secretary by 14th March 2000;
- (iii) agrees that if by 14th March 2000 such notice has been received from more than one third of local churches or more than one third of district councils or more than one third of synods, then the Assembly in its concern for the unity of the church shall not proceed to accept the statement;
- (iv) agrees that if by 14th March 2000 such notice has not been received, a motion to accept the statement shall be put to the Annual Meeting of the Assembly in 2000, such motion requiring a simple majority of the members present and voting to pass.

The Voting

Since the Assembly of 1999 some local churches have closed and two district councils have joined together. The resolution did not make clear on what date the total number of local churches, district councils and synods should be calculated. In the event this does not affect the outcome but, to avoid any dispute, the table below gives the figures both on the day of the Assembly decision and the date given for the conclusion of the process.

	7 July 1999	14 March 2000
The number of those NOT in favour of accepting the statement in Resolution 34, shown also as a percentage of the total number of churches, district councils and synods.		
Local churches	439 (25.4%)	436 (25.3%)
District Councils	30 (40.5%)	29 (39.7%)
Synods	6 (50%)	6(50%)

It is therefore clear that the Assembly will be in the situation envisaged in Resolution 35(iii). In its concern for the unity of the church, the Assembly will not proceed to accept that statement.

Anthony Burnham
General Secretary

14 March 2000



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

O

CONFIDENTIAL

Paper O. (Yes and No)

The Human Sexuality debate: possible resignations of ministers and secessions of local churches.

The possibility that ministers may resign and local churches seek to secede following the General Assembly discussion on human sexuality has been well signalled. Mission Council has considered what advice to give to the Assembly, bearing in mind that the advice needs to be relevant whatever decision is reached.

Any advice ought to start from an understanding of the nature of the Church. An appropriate biblical text for this paper is I Corinthians 12:12-21. It is not simply that every member, every minister, every local church is a distinctive and vital part of the whole. We could say something like that about many human organisations. It is the Lord's will and purpose that in our variety we make up one body. It was by the work of the Spirit that we were brought into one body by baptism. Therefore resignation and secession are to be seen as very serious indeed, and not to be treated or accepted lightly. Each one affects all of us, and it affects our common calling.

That is the basic premise of this paper. However, it cannot be used to coerce people to be or do what in conscience they cannot. Personal conviction must still be upheld.

What the text does do is to emphasise the need for the Church, through her General Assembly, not to do things which separate or alienate people from the body. This paper starts from the text but deals with a potential situation of separation or alienation. In no way does it intend to encourage such a situation.

Ministerial resignations: the present policy

1. It must always be open for ministers to be able to resign from the roll on grounds of conscience or belief. It is a very serious step for the individual and for the Church. Yet from time to time it is a step which ministers have felt obliged to take. Sometimes the resignation is in order to transfer to the ministerial roll of another Church. Sometimes the person no longer wishes to exercise the ministry to which s/he was ordained and inducted.

2. Transfer to the ministerial roll of another church has little material cost normally. Those who resign without transferring lose stipend, housing, access to retirement housing - if they are stipendiary ministers. The nearer a person is to 65, the more serious is this loss.
3. Ministers are not employees of the Church (1998 Manual, page M6) and do not have contracts of employment. Those resigning do not receive any compensation or financial aid, other than the rather limited payments in interim situations which are made through the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee (1999 Book of Reports to General Assembly, page 122, paragraph 1b, 1c, 1d).
4. It seems clear enough that if a minister wishes to transfer to the ministry of another Church as a result of the human sexuality debate, the United Reformed Church should be willing to give her/him a commendation.
5. The question of compensation is a different issue. It probably would not have been an issue at all had not the Church of England decided to offer a "package" to priests who felt unable to continue after the ordination of women to the priesthood. That appears to set a precedent.
6. Clearly the fact that the Church of England did it in that one instance is not of itself a reason for our departing from our present practice in the current or any other situation. However, it must be asked if it is a good precedent. Why choose one doctrinal or ethical issue for special treatment? Why should ministers whose conscience on this issue causes them to resign be treated differently from ministers who resign on other issues? The concept of stipend as defined in the Plan for Partnership is applied to the time when a person is in a pastorate or a post but does not continue after that time.
7. There is a general argument that it is not wise to change principles to meet particular cases. Mission Council advises Assembly that no special financial arrangement should be made for any ministers who feel obliged to resign over the human sexuality issue. That advice should carry with it a reminder of the short-term help available through the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee.
8. It should be added clearly that retired ministers who resign their church membership and also from the roll will lose neither their pension rights nor their occupation of retired ministers' housing.

The secession of local churches

9. It is, of course, possible for anyone to resign their membership of a local church and so of the United Reformed Church. That carries the implication that all the members of a local church may resign their

church other than the Church Meeting. This section is concerned with secession, the decision of a Church Meeting as one fellowship to seek to leave the United Reformed Church, with its buildings and other assets (throughout this paper called its property).

10. Language is important. A local church cannot secede from the United Reformed Church as of right. It can seek to secede. It is for the General Assembly to decide whether or not to allow secession.
11. The General Assembly declared its policy on secession in 1987 (Book of Reports, pages 39-42). This is attached as an appendix.
12. The number of churches which have asked and been allowed to secede in any year is as follows:

1974:1	1975:1	1978:5	1979:1	1982:4
1983:3	1984:2	1985:1	1988:1	

(Another interesting, if not immediately relevant, statistic is that in the same period 96 local churches have applied to join the United Reformed Church and been accepted by the General Assembly).

13. The smallness of these numbers, and the fact that no local church has sought to secede since 1988, underlines in particular the theological principles contained in section 2.2. of the appendix. The third paragraph of that section has especial relevance to the current situation.
14. The ecumenical dimension referred to in section 2.5 of the appendix has assumed even greater significance 10 years on, given the large number of churches in local ecumenical partnerships of various sorts. If any of those churches contemplates secession, the implications are much wider than local.
15. However the passing of the years has made another factor of increasing significance. 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. 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.

16. Some may not have been aware of these facts. However, whilst the particularities of our present situation are unlikely to have been foreseen by those preparing for union in 1972 and 1981, it can easily be seen that the legal framework surrounding the United Reformed Church reflects its essential unity or "oneness", as expressed in the second introductory paragraph of this paper.
17. It is also clear that the Assemblies which decided to unite deliberately did not make provision for a section of the United Reformed Church to split off and form a new Church.
18. With these few observations, the fact is that the General Assembly has a policy and process for secession which was prepared in the light of reflection and experience. Once again it would be foolish to amend the policy in the light of one particular situation.
19. This paper has been concerned with "what if" questions. It is suggested by Mission Council that no steps should be taken by ministers or local churches at least until the end of the 2000 General Assembly.

A major split in the Church

20. In our present context it seems sensible to consider another scenario. This is the situation in which, rather than a small number of local churches seeking secession for their own (or similar) reasons, a significant number of local churches seek to leave together for the same reason. The General Assembly does not have a policy on how to deal with a split in the Church.
21. If such a policy is to be developed, it will run counter to the spirit and the letter of the Basis of Union. For example, paragraph 8 reads: "The United Reformed Church has been formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled. It sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people." A church which values unity with other churches so highly must also value unity within the fellowship as a fundamental principle. What God is doing, we must not undo.
22. A major split could cause a practical problem, in that the time required by district councils, synods, Mission Council and Assembly to deal with cases one at a time could deflect the church from its essential mission for a considerable time. This could be an even bigger problem if the disaffected churches were particularly concentrated in one or two areas.

23. Real though this problem might be, Mission Council does not propose any arrangements for handling applications to secede other than those accepted by the Assembly in 1987. The reasons for this advice are:
- 23.1 Although the overriding reason for wishing to secede might be the same in each case, the underlying positions taken by the churches might not be. Furthermore the circumstances prevailing in each local church are bound to differ (even if only slightly).
 - 23.2 A procedure which allowed a number of churches to apply to secede en bloc would (a) deny the Assembly the opportunity to consider all the relevant factors involved in each case and (b) be an encouragement to any local church feeling aggrieved on any issue to see this as an easy way out.
 - 23.3 It would depart even further from our commitment to the unity of the church.
 - 23.4 Pastoral care, never more important than when people are feeling upset and alienated, can best be exercised by synod moderators and district council representatives if they can "get alongside" every local church involved on an individual basis, in a manner which would be quite impossible if one application was brought forward covering all the dissident churches.

Conclusion

24. This paper urges, in the light of our understanding of God's will in the Basis of Union, that energy is always better spent on ensuring that we find an honest basis for continuing the unity of the fellowship - and wherever possible and with all speed, on extending that unity to include more and more of God's people.
25. Resignation and secession are not easy options. They can involve pain at a very deep level. This paper is designed to help those who feel forced to contemplate such options to know clearly what they may expect. However, the last word should not be about rules and procedures. It should be about the nature of Christian community as we approach new decisions on human sexuality and then handle the consequences of those decisions. The last word therefore is in Colossians 3:11-15, and the last prayer is for peace to overcome pain.



The Secession of Local Churches from the URC

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 of 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 a 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 on 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 its 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.



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000



Paper O YES

The Report of the Resolution 34 Consequences Group

1. Introduction

At the General Assembly 1999 Resolution 34 was agreed and, in a process of consultation, was sent to local churches, district councils and synods. Unless more than one third of local churches, or district councils, or synods reject the statement, it will come to the General Assembly 2000 for ratification. In anticipation of that, General Assembly in Resolution 37 asked *Mission Council to do further work on the consequences (as indicated in section 8.7 of the Human Sexuality Report 1999) of accepting the statement in Resolution 34 and to report to the next Annual Meeting of the Assembly.*

2. The Group

The Mission Council appointed the following to undertake the work:

Revd. John Reardon (Convener), Revd. Ken Chippindale, Mr John Ellis,
Revd. Malcolm Hanson, Mrs Barbara Martin, Mrs Helen M. Mee, Mrs Val Morrison
and Revd. Tony Burnham (Secretary)

The Group met on three occasions.

The consequences of accepting the statement in Resolution 34

The references are to the Human Sexuality Report 1999 Core Group Report para 8.7

3. Candidates for the ministry of Word and Sacraments (8.7.2)

- 3.1 The assessment procedure for candidates for the ministry begins with a conversation between the candidate and the synod moderator. Usually this is initiated by the local minister of the candidate. The primary purpose of the conversation is pastoral, allowing the candidate to articulate their beliefs about the call and for the moderator to offer advice about the appropriate next steps. In the conversation, the moderator will explain the stages of the assessment procedure and refer the candidate to the significance of the Basis of Union and Schedules C and D. The moderator will also draw to the candidate's attention the General Assembly's statement, agreed in 2000, that the church, acting as a whole, cannot affirm the acceptability of homosexual practice and ask if they would be willing to exercise their ministry in conformity with this statement. If the reply to this, as in other matters, is in the negative, then the candidate should be warned that to proceed would be against the declared policy of the church. This places a responsibility on a candidate to make a judgement about his/her own life.

3.2 Following the conversation with the synod moderator, if the candidate wishes to proceed with an application for training, support has to be sought from those who know the candidate best, including the local church. The call is further tested by the district council, the Assembly's Assessment Panel and the synod. It is the responsibility of the Assessment Panel, to judge whether the person will exercise their ministry in accordance with the Resolution 34 statement.

4. Ordination and induction (8.7.3)

When a candidate, student or minister is being introduced to a vacant pastorate, the assumption should be that they will exercise their ministry in accordance with the policy of the church in this, as in any other matter. However it is recognised that the local church, when meeting a candidate, is free to ask a variety of questions before issuing a call.

5. A minister in a homosexual relationship and the Disciplinary Process (8.7.4)

5.1 The 1999 Assembly agreed the following resolution (see Assembly Record 1999 p 35 Resolution 36)

General Assembly declares that the adoption of the statement contained in Resolution 34 would not of itself justify bringing a case under the Section O Process against a minister in a homosexual relationship (Basis, Schedule E, para 2).

The following aims to clarify the circumstances in which the Section O Disciplinary Process could legitimately be invoked against ministers in a homosexual relationship.

- 5.2 The Basis of Union states in Schedule E that all ministers "must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the peace and unity of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and (the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry."
- 5.3 In the introduction to the Disciplinary Process (page O1 paragraph 1.2) it is stated that when ministers "err, the Church has a responsibility to exercise discipline out of concern both for them and for the well-being of the Church." There is no definition of what it means to "err".
- 5.4 The initial responsibility for assessing conduct lies with the individual minister, who as a matter of conscience will want to consider their lifestyle against the teaching and expectations of the Church.
- 5.5 Secondly, it is possible to have a pastoral breakdown between a minister and congregation which does not fall within the terms of the Disciplinary Process. If such a breakdown relates to a minister's lifestyle it has to be addressed locally in the same ways as other forms of pastoral breakdown.
- 5.6 Thirdly, when it is legitimate to invoke the Disciplinary Process, all the preliminary pastoral work explained in Section O is just as crucial in a case involving a minister in a homosexual relationship as in any other case.
- 5.7 The Disciplinary Process can only be invoked if an allegation has been made; it is therefore irrelevant to relationships which are known only to the minister concerned. However if a relationship is alleged, it is the nature of the alleged conduct and not the degree of

attendant publicity that must decide whether the Disciplinary Process should be considered.

- 5.8 The following imaginary scenarios are designed to clarify how Resolution 36 will be interpreted. The question in each case is "Could the Disciplinary Process be invoked in relation to a homosexual minister?"

Scenario 1

Minister alleged to have engaged in fraud or financial corruption.

Invoke? Yes; as would be the case for any minister.

Scenario 2

Minister alleged to be homosexual but living a celibate life.

Invoke? No; Resolution 34 does not condemn homosexual orientation.

Scenario 3

Minister ordained before 2000 General Assembly alleged to be in a stable relationship with a single partner, established before Resolution 34 ratified.

Invoke? No; Resolution 36 implies the Church will not act in these circumstances and leaves it to the individual minister to decide whether they can remain a minister of the Church.

Scenario 4

Minister ordained before 2000 General Assembly alleged to be in a stable relationship with a single partner established after Resolution 34 ratified.

Invoke? No; Resolution 36 implies all ministers on the Roll at the time Resolution 34 is ratified are covered by the protection from the Disciplinary Process.

Scenario 5

Minister ordained after 2000 General Assembly alleged to be in a stable relationship with a single partner.

Invoke? No; ordination implies the Church is satisfied that the minister intends to conduct their ministry in accordance with its policies; thereafter Resolution 36 protection applies. In an exceptional case where the minister had given untruthful answers to factual questions posed at a stage before ordination, the lack of honesty could become a disciplinary matter.

Scenario 6

Minister alleged to be in relationships with more than one partner.

Invoke? Yes; 1999 Resolution 31 confirms that the Church expects "faithfulness" in all relationships and by implication this applies to heterosexual and homosexual ministers equally.

Scenario 7

Minister alleged to be engaged in promiscuous or casual relationships.

Invoke? Yes; the "faithfulness" test of Resolution 31 applies.

Scenario 8

Minister alleged to be deliberately seeking to criticise or ridicule formal position of Church.

Invoke? No; the Church generally leaves to individual ministers' consciences how they speak or write about official policies from which they dissent. In extreme cases, the Church might judge a minister was promoting their own views in a way that damaged the Church's unity and peace and then consider disciplinary action; but the threshold for taking action would be no different if the issue at stake was human sexuality than for any other controversial topic.

5.9 Summary

- 5.9.1 All ministers in the United Reformed Church are subject to Schedule E of the Basis of Union and the Disciplinary Process in Section O of the Manual.
- 5.9.2 For ministers already ordained when Resolution 34 is confirmed, a stable homosexual relationship will not of itself be grounds for invoking the Disciplinary Process.
- 5.9.3 All candidates seeking ordination after Resolution 34 is ratified will only be eligible for ordination if the Church is satisfied they intend to conduct their ministry in accordance with the Basis of Union and the policies of the Church. Any questions about known lifestyle should be addressed then, not left for the Disciplinary Process.
- 5.9.4 For all ministers, sexual relationships not characterised by faithfulness could be grounds for invoking the Disciplinary Process.

6. A minister sharing a manse with a friend (8.7.5)

If a minister is sharing a home with someone of the same sex it is reasonable to suppose that they are good friends. It is not then appropriate to enquire about the relationship or to assume that it is a sexual relationship.

7. The care of ministers in a homosexual relationship

Pastoral care offered by synod moderators and district councils should always, as far as possible, be readily available to all, without prejudice. In particular circumstances, where for whatever reason the care offered is not felt to be helpful, it is always possible for ministers to seek help elsewhere, for instance through the moderator of another synod. It would be good if, in such circumstance, the difficulties could be faced openly, for instance in discussion with a pastoral committee convener or synod moderator, and the appropriate support sought in fellowship. This might be through colleagues or through the group set up under Resolution 41 of the 1997 General Assembly which has a broad pastoral remit and which can be contacted through the Deputy General Secretary.

8. The role of the district council in giving concurrence

- 8.1 The district council has the responsibility to ensure "fellowship, intimate mutual oversight and united action" and should therefore consider any issue which may impact on its work.
- 8.2 Unless there is deep pastoral concern, there is no reason for a district council to withhold concurrence to a call.
- 8.3 However it could be right for the district council to consider withholding concurrence in particular situations and there may be circumstances in which it is necessary to give consideration to wider issues. The important point then is to ensure that assumptions are not made about life and conduct and individuals are not asked unnecessarily intrusive questions.

9. Assembly appointed lay staff and Church Related Community Workers (CRCW)

The Assembly inducts its lay staff using an adaptation of the affirmations made by ministers of the Word and Sacrament. This includes an undertaking to exercise their ministry in accordance with the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the

United Reformed Church. It is expected therefore that they will exercise their ministry in accordance with the policies of the church. CRCW's at a Commissioning Service are asked to make similar affirmations. They too are expected to exercise their ministry in accordance with the policies of the church.

10. Other lay staff.

It is not a condition of service that these have to belong to the Christian Church. There is a procedure under which breaches of discipline are dealt with. This specifically refers to *social misconduct which would bring discredit upon the United Reformed Church*. Nevertheless, outside the working environment, standards based on the policies of the church cannot be imposed.

11. The implications for members and elders

The Group on Ordination and Sexuality stated in its report (Human Sexuality Report 1999 para 5.4.6)

"Our theology of ministry depends very much on the principle of the priesthood of all believers and there is no valid reason for distinction in the question of ordination and human sexuality between ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments and ordained elders."

Whilst this statement is true at one level, it is also true to say that there are different expectations of members, elders and ministers. For instance, the promises set out in Schedules A, B and C respectively are different, and the leadership and representational roles of each are different.

Nevertheless, Resolution 34 makes no distinction between the way members, elders and ministers are to be treated in this regard. In other words, homosexual people are to be welcomed and affirmed, whether as members, elders or ministers, but that will be against the background of the church's statement on its current position.

How this is worked out in practice will depend on decisions in local churches. Nowhere, however, should matters of sexual orientation or activity be subject to particular questioning or scrutiny. How people respond to the church's statement is a matter of personal conscience as expressed in the promise made by members "to seek to do and to bear his will..." Only when someone's conduct, of whatever nature, becomes a matter of offence or concern does further enquiry or the issue of discipline begin to arise.

12. The unity and peace clause

The statement concerning personal conviction appears in the Basis of Union (para 10). It also appears in the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) and partially in function (x) of the General Assembly. It reads as follows:

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

Any minister or member of the United Reformed Church who felt unable to accept the

implications of the Assembly statement (Resolution 34) and who felt in conscience that it should be resisted, would of course be free to speak against it and to seek to change it through the normal conciliar channels. They would need to accept however, that this is the stated position of the church, and to recognise that there is a constraint on all to seek to maintain the unity and peace of the church.

It is possible that some might feel unable in conscience to remain within the church. That would be a personal decision.

The judgement as to when the assertion of personal conviction is damaging to the life of the church is an extremely difficult one. The church does not normally exercise a close discipline over what is said by members or ministers. It has to be conceivable, however, on this as over other issues, that a council of the church might need to ask someone to be more restrained in the expression of their views - assuming these to be at one extreme or another - for the sake of the whole body.

The issue of personal conviction is, of course, relevant to all. There are, potentially, several different grounds for people being troubled about the implications of Resolution 34. It would not be appropriate or helpful to try to anticipate all of these. The implications of this clause therefore, would need to be worked out in practice in the light of experience.

The effect of the statement in Resolution 34 is to indicate the church's current position. It is an attempt to determine the limits of the exercise of personal conviction where the unity and peace of the church might be threatened. It is therefore more a statement about corporate responsibility than about personal conviction. It endorses (a) the affirmations set out in the Report, (b) a positive attitude towards those of homosexual orientation, but recognises (c) that the church as such is not of a sufficiently clear mind at this time to "affirm the acceptability of homosexual practice". It would be expected of ministers that they would recognise all these features of the church's current position whatever their personal views. While this recognition would not be expected of others, it would clearly indicate the framework within which the church is currently seeking to work.

Note The members of the Group are aware that there could be consequences which involve the resignation of ministers or applications from churches to secede. These matters do not only relate to Resolution 34 and have therefore been dealt with by the Mission Council Advisory Group.

March 2000



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000



Paper O NO

After resolution 35

Assembly, recognising that the statement contained within resolution 34 of 1999 has received a measure of support in the councils of the church, but not sufficient to allow it to proceed:

- (a) accepts that it is unlikely that any other resolution on this subject would do so at this present time;**
 - (b) believes that the way in which traditionally the church has assessed candidates and ministers is still capable of enabling it to discern the call of God:**
- and**
- (c) encourages the human sexuality debate to continue, based on the reports made in 1999 and wherever possible in an ecumenical context.**

The present situation

1. The statement contained within Resolution 34 has not gained a sufficient level of support in the councils of the church. Therefore, by its own decision in 1999, Assembly cannot now proceed to accept the statement.
2. Mission Council is of the view that to search for an alternative form of words at this stage is extremely unlikely to be successful, and would almost certainly prolong the argument and hurt that has marked parts of our common life over the past three years or so. In coming to that conclusion Mission Council is aware that, not only have two different approaches failed to unite the church, but various attempts to modify those approaches by amendment in Assembly have also failed.
3. Mission Council, by virtue of its representative nature, is also very aware that the difference is not simply between two clearly-defined points of view. There is a wide spectrum of opinion on many aspects of sexuality within the United Reformed Church. Those who have voted for, or against, the various resolutions have sometimes done so for very different reasons. Reason has been a characteristic of this whole discussion. Yet in each person, as in the other, emotion, experience and culture also play a part. None of this encourages the use of more time in trying out another resolution on human sexuality at the moment.

A way forward

4. To leave the matter there may sound like a counsel of despair. It also leaves unanswered questions around homosexual candidates for the ministry. Mission Council believes that in the resolution and this supporting paper it has set out a framework within which members of the church may continue in worship and fellowship together, whilst still holding and discussing varied and often opposing views. It also allows any candidate for the ministry to be assessed according to tried and tested procedures. (See paragraph 15.)
5. The framework will be an uncomfortable one for a number of people. In an early draft it was submitted to six former Assembly Moderators. Whilst they generally supported it as a way forward in a difficult situation, for some it was barely tolerable, yet for totally different reasons. The reaction of these senior people will no doubt be reflected in the Assembly. Yet Mission Council has searched for an inclusive framework because of the strong commitment to unity contained in resolution 17 of 1997. A path that led in any other direction was not to be contemplated.

Some New Testament considerations

6. Of course this cannot be simply a matter of cool calculation. All have to ask, where is God in all this? What is the Spirit saying to the church? There is no doubt that God is in the situation. What we have been debating is the nature of our creation in the image of God; the interpretation of Scripture in order that we might hear the Word of God; the ability of councils of the church to discern God's will for God's people in the contemporary situation; and the nature of a holy life, particularly in the case of those called to the ministry of Word and Sacraments. In all the discussions and debates of the past three or four years, prayer for guidance has been real and urgent.
7. So the question will become; is the church in this situation because people have ignored, or not heard, the guidance that has been given? Or is the current situation the place of God's leading? It is easy for anyone to say that those they profoundly disagree with have ignored, or not listened to, the guidance which God has given. In this situation, if for a moment it is possible to be both dispassionate and compassionate, no-one can justly accuse the other of ignoring God. To do so would be to overlook the hours of study, prayer, discussion and tears that have been given to this matter. There must have been serious openness to God in that.
8. Many have been attracted by the position that the four working groups reached in 1999: to a recognition that there are significantly different points of view held among us, views held with integrity and with Christian commitment: to a discovery that in charity it is possible to sit with those we disagree with and talk about matters that affect us all - but in vastly different ways. If that was possible for the working groups in their very intense task, why not for the whole church in the much less intense atmosphere of church life? Why not wait until the way forward is clearer? Isn't that the finest model of Christian fellowship and community?

9. This is no new model. The debate in the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) over whether or not Gentiles could be accepted into the church without first becoming Jews was not one of quick and easy agreement. It was also followed by a sharp disagreement between Barnabas and Paul. In Galatians 2 (1-14) we have a sense of the strength of the differences within the church and particularly between Paul and Peter, and the robust way in which they were expressed. Yet these main protagonists remained within the church because "we know that no-one is ever justified by doing what the law requires, but only through faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16a).

Unity and diversity

10. Unity with diversity is not a new experience for the United Reformed Church. It describes the basis on which the church was formed in both 1972 and 1981. Since then diversity has been revealed on such issues as the use of nuclear weapons, the ethics of the national lottery, the covenant for unity, and the alternative statement of faith. It is not always comfortable to realise how different one is from those in the same fellowship, but the church was never intended to be gathering of the like-minded. It is by God's grace that we are called and God's grace embraces many whom we do not agree with or even understand
11. Some have seen unity as in a sense an alternative to truth. If we know something to be true, why compromise it for the sake of unity? Unfortunately it is not as simple as that. Unity is itself part of revealed truth (Ephesians 4: 1-6). The wrestling between different understandings needs to go on, without deadlines, in the belief that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his Word".

Candidating for ministry

12. If we end the current stage of the debate in this way some questions remain unanswered. What is to happen when people in homosexual relationships offer themselves as candidates for the ministry? Are they to be accepted, rejected, or told to wait until a conclusion is reached?
13. The Assembly is asked to consider the possibility that it has been approaching the answer to this vital question in the wrong way. That the mistake has been to take a particular theological and ethical question and to try to relate it to ministerial candidacy in a way that is different from the way every other theological and ethical question is approached. To see whether this may be the case, the rationale for the consideration of ministerial candidates needs to be rehearsed.
14. It is clearly part of our tradition, and its uniting strands, that those called to the ministry of Word and Sacraments should live in a way that is consistent with the Gospel. At ordination a question is asked about a candidate's willingness to live a holy life. It is a serious matter that we look for godly ministers.
15. However, the way in which until now the church has assessed the suitability of a candidate is to ask those who know him/her best. That is the point of

asking the candidate's Church Meeting and minister and the representatives of the District Council. No-one tells them what suitability means. Their judgement, which will have been informed by worship, bible study, fellowship and varied Christian experience, is trusted by all. Their judgement will also be informed by theological and ethical discussion in the church at large. In recent years the Assembly has guided that discussion by accepting Criteria for Assessment in 1996 and a statement on holy living in 1997. It has now added the 1999 human sexuality reports.

16. Reflection makes it clear that over the years a Church Meeting's judgement is likely to change. For example, early in this century many would not have supported a candidate unless he was a teetotaler. Until rather more recently a candidate who had been divorced would not be commended. These changes have not come about by Assembly decision or even Church Meeting decision. Christian understanding changes and evolves all the time. The Spirit is alive and active and gentle. However it would be wrong to infer that every judgement we make will change, and change in a liberal direction. Neither of those inferences can stand the test of Christian history.
17. What has been said about a candidate's suitability for training applies also to a pastorate's call to a minister. It is for the particular pastorate, with the concurrence of the district council, to call a minister. The rest of the church is not given the right to approve or disapprove of that decision. Yet the decision is taken recognising that everything done by a limb or organ affects the whole body, and that discernment of a holy life is an aspect of every call.
18. It is very important not to depart from the principle that ministers (and not only ministers) need to live a holy life. Of course those exercising public ministry do have an entitlement to a private life. The point is not that anything goes in private life. Holiness is a Christian calling and it should apply in the whole of life. The point is that those who exercise a public ministry must accept that much of their lives is lived under the oversight of the church. They are also entitled to private lives, subject to conscience, the correction of friends and ultimately the judgement of the Lord. That said, it has long been accepted that it is proper for those considering candidates for ministry and for pastorates to look for evidence of a holy life.
19. The key point, however, is that the evidence is not seen in terms of absolute principles or rules of behaviour, but in the wholeness of a person's life as a disciple of Christ. The wholeness is assessed by those who know the person best and always with due regard to the theological and ethical views current throughout the church. Of course that means that the assessment of individuals is not done with absolute consistency. A person may be accepted or rejected in one place who would not have been so in another. The church has long lived with that possibility because it is prepared to accept that those who carry out the responsible task of assessment are honourable people, who on each occasion will pray for and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

20. The Assembly is asked, in the second part of the resolution, to recognise that the assessment of ministerial candidates and ministers (heterosexual and homosexual) should include a consideration of a way of life which takes account of the wholeness of each person in the context of current theological and ethical understanding.
21. This is not seen as a way of avoiding a difficult issue. It is to maintain consistency with the tradition. The alternative would be to identify a number of ethical tests which would be applied to all ministerial candidates. To do this we would have to draw up a set of ethical criteria to be applied to every conceivable situation in which moral judgement has to be exercised. Even if it was desirable, it would be difficult to find a form of words relating to each of them which would obtain significant agreement throughout the councils of the church. However, Assembly is advised that such a course is not even desirable.

The continuing debate

22. An open debate without any agreed time limit will be hard for some in the church to accept. That needs to be recognised by those who would prefer no debate at all. Those who see things so very differently also need to keep in mind that the whole Christian Church is divided on the matter of homosexuality at the moment. Orthodox and Catholics are divided from Protestants, east from west, north from south. Then there is division within each tradition. Ecumenical discussion may widen and deepen our understanding of the complexities and so, by God's grace, enable us to find together where truth lies.
23. Such an apparently leisurely approach to a burning issue will inevitably be under pressure from society. The church finds itself in a climate of intense debate on this ethical and justice issue. The church's silence on the issue can easily be interpreted as the Church's irrelevance. It may be that at the moment all the church can contribute is a statement of our divided views and the pain that causes us. That cannot be a long-term answer.
24. The last word is with the apostle John. "If God thus loved us, my dear friends, we also must love one another..... Love must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action. This is how we shall know that we belong to the realm of truth, and reassure ourselves in his sight where conscience condemns us; for God is greater than our conscience and knows all." (I John 4.11 and 3:18-19)





MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

P

Deputy for Assembly Clerk

In 1993 Mission Council agreed that during the remainder of her membership of Mission Council, Wilma Frew would be available to deputise in the event of the Clerk's absence from either Mission Council or Assembly.

Wilma Frew ceases to be a member of Mission Council in the year 2000 and so a new arrangement is proposed from the time of the July General Assembly:

Mission Council agrees that in the event of the Clerk being unable to act at the General Assembly or the Mission Council, the General Secretary shall be asked to deputise.

The reason for this proposal is, first, that the Rule of procedure 5(i) specifically allows for the offices of Clerk and General Secretary to be held by one person. Secondly, by relating the deputy to an office rather than a named individual, it will not be necessary to bring further resolutions of this sort in future.

This is obviously an emergency arrangement, intended to cover short-term absence. In the event of a longer absence, say for the whole of an Assembly, the General Secretary might wish to propose that a named individual should act as deputy for a specific period. The resolution above would leave that to the General Secretary's discretion at the time.



MISSION COUNCIL
21 - 23 March 2000

ASS

ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS

MAINTENANCE OF MINISTRY SUB-COMMITTEE

2. United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund

- 2.1 As was reported to Assembly in 1999, the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee appointed a group under the chairmanship of Howard Bridge to undertake a review of every aspect of remuneration for ministers both in service and retired. The report of the group suggested (inter alia).
 - 2.1.1 that there should be an increase from twice annual basic stipend to three times annual basic stipend in the lump sum death in service benefit where the member leaves a spouse or dependent children;
 - 2.1.2 normal retirement to be available at 65 years of age or 40 years service whichever is earlier;
 - 2.1.3 that the level of pension paid in respect of dependent children of ministers who die in service should be the same as the level of children's allowances paid to active ministers.
- 2.2 In reviewing these proposals the Pensions Executive felt it would also be appropriate to recommend that pension in respect of dependent children should be paid to retired ministers and widows who have dependent children.
- 2.3 The Pensions Executive has, from time to time, received requests for reinstatement from former members upon their return to the stipendiary service of the Church. Although this is permissible under the current rules where the minister returns to full-time service, the rules do not provide for such reinstatement if the minister returns to undertake part-time service. This is not in line with current thinking in the Church, and in fact it may not be legal to prevent members returning to part-time service from being reinstated to the pension scheme. In one or two other cases it has been felt that the rules are not as clear as they might be. We propose that it be made clear that all ministers returning to part time service should be permitted to rejoin the pension fund.
- 2.4 In the examination of the rules to implement these various changes, it was noted that rule 14.2 purports to make contributory membership of the fund mandatory for ministers who return to service after a period out of service. This is not in line with law, which provides that membership of an occupational pension fund must be voluntary. This has been rectified in these rule changes.
- 2.5 Changes in the rules to implement these improvements, and to make clarifications are contained in resolution **

**ASSEMBLY REPORTS 2000
DOCTRINE, PRAYER AND WORSHIP COMMITTEE**

Resolutions

RESOLUTION 1 New Service Book

General Assembly notes that the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee has begun work on producing a new Service Book. It encourages use of and comment on the draft services provided for Baptism and Holy Communion (in the period July 2000 to February 2001), in order to assist with the process of drafting.

1.1 The Committee has considered carefully the purpose and form of the new service book and has concluded that the book should contain the core services of the church, rather than be a resource book. It plans to produce new or revised orders of the services contained in the existing book and add a small number of additional orders of service and materials.

1.2 There are also plans for an electronic form of the contents of the book and possible opportunities for additional resources being made available from time to time through this means.

1.3 The Committee is making available draft orders of the two central services for experimental use in the churches and seeking responses from churches that use them. Responses are required by the end of February 2001.

1.4 Two sub groups have been formed to carry forward the work, recognising the aim to produce a book by 2002. One group will focus on matters of publication and production, the other on matters of drafting and redrafting. Contributions from a wide range of sources are being sought.

RESOLUTION 2 Addition to Schedule A

General Assembly accepts the addition to Schedule A of the Basis of Union of Version III, as follows:

(c) Addition to Schedule A: Version III

(At Baptism at an age of responsibility or at profession of faith)

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

A: I do.

Q: Do you repent of your sins, turn away from evil, and turn to Christ?

A: By God's grace, I do.

Q: Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord?

A: I do.

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

**Q: From the beginning,
believers have continued in the worship
and fellowship of the church:
N, do you commit yourself to this life?**

A: I do, with God's help.

**Q: Do you accept the gift and the cost of following Christ
in your daily life and work?**

A: I do, with God's help.

**Q: With the whole Church, will you proclaim
by word and action
the good news of God in Christ?**

A: I will, with God's help.

RESOLUTION 3 Change in Schedule A

General Assembly agrees to delete from Schedule A of the Basis of Union

**"Or: (c) in the forms customarily used in the uniting churches before unification."
and to add**

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

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

RESOLUTION 4 Celebrating Church Membership

General Assembly receives the discussion paper Celebrating Church Membership and encourages local churches to discuss and respond to it.

RESOLUTION 5 The United Reformed Church and Creeds

Recognising that "the United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds" (paragraph 4 of Schedule D of the Basis of Union), the General Assembly commends the paper Do we believe in Creeds? to local churches for discussion.

Report of the Assembly Arrangements Committee – July 2000

1. Assembly 2002

In view of the union with the Congregational Union of Scotland, it seems right to hold a meeting of General Assembly in Scotland at an early date. The committee, therefore, brings a resolution that this be at the University of St. Andrew's from Thursday July 4th to Monday July 8th 2002. In view of the time and distance involved, it is proposed that this Assembly begins on the Thursday evening, with a free session built into the programme on the second or third full day.

2. Future patterns of Assembly

The committee is grateful to those synods, district councils, Assembly committees and others who responded to our initial requests for views on possible changes to the way Assembly conducts its business. A variety of interesting comments were received but although last year the hope was expressed of bringing a full report to this Assembly, more time is needed for consideration of these comments and for further consultation.

We do, however, bring one recommendation that can be introduced immediately and which comes in response to suggestions from many parts of the church. This concerns the way committees report to Assembly.

Under the present system many committees feel themselves to be restricted by pressures of time. There is only the autumn in which to follow up on the previous Assembly and to initiate new work before they have to prepare their report to the following Assembly. Because of this, and because there is a widely held view that Assembly attempts to do too much, there is strong support for the idea that most committees should report only in alternate years.

The advantages of a two-year reporting programme are that it would:

- a) allow more time to consider issues, develop ideas and work out programmes;
- b) remove the expectation that committees will produce 'new business' every year,;
- c) reduce the pressure on other councils and local churches to respond in what is often, at present, a very tight time-span
- d) allow more time for debating issues when presenting at Assembly.
- e) Provide opportunity for greater consultation with and involvement in business by synods and districts.

For legal and administrative reasons a few committees would continue to report annually. These are: Assembly Arrangements, Finance, Ministries (necessary administrative matters), Mission Council and Nominations. The Moderators will also continue to report annually

3. Synod Reports

After consultation with synod clerks, the General Secretary has arranged a programme whereby normally only a third of the synods report to Assembly each year.

(Contd overleaf)

4. Other issues

Assembly works best when it is not only receiving reports and making decisions, but is a forum engaging in debate with incisive questioning. Members of Assembly appreciate it when a wide variety of opinions are expressed. The committee particularly encourages participation by those who are present for the first time, as well as those who have been before and speak regularly. However, concern has been expressed that a few representatives speak too frequently without always contributing significant arguments that take the debate forward. It is hoped that no-one who has thoughtful contributions to offer is deterred or prevented from speaking.

Resolutions

1. Assembly agrees that General Assembly in 2002 will meet at the University of St. Andrew's from July 4th -8th.
2. Assembly agrees that from 2001 committees will report in alternate year, except where for legal or administrative reasons annual reports are required, namely Assembly Arrangements, Finance, Ministries, Mission Council and Nominations.
3. Assembly agrees to make the following change to the Rules of Procedure for the conduct of the United Reformed Church.
In the last line paragraph 2(3) delete "annually" and add at the end. "as and when the Assembly shall direct"

Ministries Committee: resolutions for General Assembly 2000

Three resolutions relate to two reports commissioned by the Ministries Committee.

Non-stipendiary Ministry in the United Reformed Church

Resolutions for General Assembly

- 1 Assembly expresses gratitude for the service offered by our non-stipendiary ministers and offers encouragement in their ministries by
 - i) thanking the working party for its support;
 - ii) urging the speedy implementation of recommendations 1 to 6 in the report on non-stipendiary ministry in the United reformed Church.
- 2 Assembly notes the concern expressed in Section 4 of the report on non-stipendiary ministry in the United reformed church and instructs the Ministries Committee, in consultation with others, to draw up proposals for a new diverse pattern of ministries, building on ecumenical insights and designed to enable the church to respond more effectively to the challenge of the mission strategy outlined in Growing Up.

The working party on non-stipendiary ministry in the United Reformed Church consisted of the Revds. John Slow, Sandra Lloydlangston, and Bill Sewell and was convened by Mr Michael Harrison. The report on non-stipendiary ministry was compiled as a result of a questionnaire to all non-stipendiary ministers, to District Councils and to synod offices. The work was carried out between 1998 and 1999. Section 4 of the report referred to in the second resolution is set out below.

4. What do we want ministers for?

- 4.1. We would have greater confidence that the plans we have just referred to would bear the desired fruits if as a church we were to address the more profound questions which our review of NSM has exposed.
 - Why is NSM so widely perceived as not just a distinct but an inferior mode of ministry?
 - Why has the church not made greater use of it?
 - And in particular, why have we so neglected model 3 (Ministers in Secular Employment)?

As we have wrestled with these questions we have repeatedly found ourselves coming back to a more general one:

- What do we want ministers for?

4.2. There is amongst us a conventional answer to that general question, enshrined in our foundational documents, which goes deep into the history of our Reformed tradition. "Some are called to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments"¹¹.

Although there is widespread agreement within the Reformed tradition that it is unsatisfactory to define the nature of ministry in terms of function, that in the minister we look for a pointer to the presence of the risen Christ in the local congregation¹², nevertheless it is significant that it is by stating these two particular functions that ministry has amongst us customarily been defined. We want ministers because we believe that God calls them and gives them to his church to preach and to preside over their gathering as his people.

¹¹ *Basis of Union para 21*

¹² cf. "Public ministry is never completely described by listing the minister's tasks": *Theology of ministry, a paper presented to Mission Council, Sept/Oct 1997, p 4 para. 3.6.*

There can be no doubt that the church has been enriched by this formulation of ministry. It has led us to value a learned ministry, capable of intelligently expounding the Word of God, in ever-changing contexts. It is significant, also, that by emphasising presidency in the sacraments it has helped to undermine the widespread Protestant tendency to see God's communication with us exclusively in verbal terms. But it is worth remembering that it is a description of ministry which only arose out of the controversies of the 16th Century, not one deeply rooted in Scripture. The consequence of defining ministry in this way, has not always been benign.

- It has meant that the focal point of ministry has been the gathering of local church, in particular its gathering for worship. Thus we make the final judgement on a minister's sense of call, and subsequently his/her competency to exercise a particular ministry, by taking a decision after "preaching with view". To be sure congregations have looked for other qualities in a future minister - to have a sympathetic ear as well as a golden tongue, for instance but one result of the manner in which we describe ministry has been that pioneering role of MWS in all increasingly secular world has not been given a high priority.
- Another perhaps inadvertent consequence is that many a gathered congregation has come to see as its ideal having "its own" minister, exalted in his/her pulpit, its own pointer in its midst to the Christ who has called him/her. This has fostered an individualism which has encouraged in some MWS delusions of omnicompetence and makes collaborative ministry uncongenial. Furthermore it has tended to turn the remainder of the church, "sitting beneath" their minister (until lately a widely used phrase), into more or less passive consumers of ministry.

4.3. The concept of a non-stipendiary ministry sits uncomfortably with this conventional picture, perhaps to an extent that no one realised when it was introduced. In the first place, if the minister were to be exercising his/her ministry not in the setting of a local church but in an essentially secular environment - and it was primarily with this in view that Auxiliary Ministers were originally introduced¹³ - it was inevitable that the business of

formal preaching and presiding, central to the idea of a MWS, would be at the most a peripheral feature of that ministry. Here lies the reason why much of the original vision of NSM has been lost by all but a few. Instead we have increasingly seen NSM as a valuable way of supplementing the diminishing pool of full-time stipendiary ministers.

But here again there is a problem. The provision of a stipend, as we have seen, has been an essential feature of our understanding of the MWS. Thereby the minister was set free not merely to perform certain functions, but also to be the sort of person the church has been led to expect. When ministers began to be ordained to exercise these functions without becoming at the same time unreservedly free to do so (i.e. NSMS), it was inevitable that such ministers would come to be seen as in some sense second-rate. The church's response to this situation has been to insist that, if they are to exercise equivalent functions, without making an equivalent commitment, at least they must undergo in equivalent training to stipendiary ministers. Increasingly we have been raising the barriers candidates for NSM must surmount, to an extent that one is permitted to wonder whether, at least in the minds of some, the intention is not to cut off the supply of NSMs altogether.

¹³ See *Reports to General Assembly, 1979, p 47, where the reasons for introducing an Auxiliary Ministry are listed.*

4.4. Indeed our analysis of the present situation suggests that there are only two courses of action open to us. Either we must re-affirm our commitment to the existing pattern of ministries based on that of Elders and MWS, and as a consequence admit that the decision to ordain to a non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments was a mistake and discontinue the experiment, or we must recognise that ever since the time we were led to ordain NSMs God has been steering us in a direction which would eventually lead us to out-grow the present limited and limiting pattern of ministry which we have inherited from our Reformed patrimony. This latter is the course we strongly advocate.

4.5. There are a number of straws in the wind which give us some encouragement in this view.

- General Assembly in 1998 gave its encouragement to the identification of forms of local church leadership, rooted in the Eldership, but part of ministry of the whole people of God. We are glad to have seen details of work done in the Mersey Synod to further this decision. What is not clear to us is how these forms of local leadership are intended to relate in particular to that model of NSM (model 1) which was inherited from the Churches of Christ and which has largely been neglected by the church ever since its introduction.
- Meanwhile many of those already ordained to the Eldership do not altogether recognise their call in the description of functions set out in the Basis of Union and the normal form of the Ordination Service, functions which largely replicate those of MWS. Our response has generally been to insist on more Elders?

training. We believe that there is a case to be made for a complete redefinition of the ministry of elders (see below para. 4.8).

- The church has for some years experienced and come to appreciate the work of Church Related Community Workers. A recently adopted report committed the church to support a greater number of such workers; and to explore their relationship to what other churches understand by the Diaconate.
- The range of tasks laid upon the shoulders of twelve Synod Moderators has increased enormously in recent years. Mission Council is currently considering the responses from Districts and Synods to papers exploring the nature of oversight ministry

Taken together with the decision to conduct the present review of NSM, there are here indications that the church may be ready to enlarge its vision of the nature of ministry beyond that of the existing, rather monochrome one of Elders and MWS

Where might it be that we are being led?

4.6. We start with the conviction that we shall only get our pattern of ministry right once we have become clear about the nature of the mission in which God is involving us today. In the report *Growing Up - A Mission programme for the United Reformed Church* adopted by General Assembly in July 1999, to which we referred above, a foundation has been admirably laid for us. We welcome in particular the breadth of vision which is leading the church to model its calling on the five marks of mission drafted by the 1988 Lambeth Conference and endorsed by the Forum of Churches Together in England in 1997. The next stage is to recognise that our whole pattern of ministries needs to be re-shaped so that the church is liberated to participate effectively in these five dimensions of its mission.

4.7. This leads us back, in the first place, to the WCC Faith and Order Commission's consensus-seeking document on Ministry, part of the BEM process. So long as the United Reformed Church has felt content simply to remain loyal to its Reformed heritage of ministries, it has been able to dismiss that document's suggestion that, although the historic threefold pattern of bishops, presbyters and deacons "stands evidently in need of reform", churches like the United Reformed Church which have not maintained that pattern need to ask whether it "does not have a powerful claim to be accepted by them"¹⁴. It has been able to regard that pattern historically arbitrary and its adoption to be merely the importation of something from an alien tradition. Instead we believe we are now being presented with an opportunity, in consultation with other denominations, to give this historic pattern of diaconal, presbyteral and oversight ministries a renewed relevance, one differing in form from that currently exercised in the catholic tradition and more attuned to our Reformed heritage.

¹⁴ The quotations are from WCC, BEM, Ministry para 24 & 25

4.8. In this way: If we look at *Growing Up*'s five marks of mission and regard, as we

believe we should, the first of those marks ("to proclaim the good news of the kingdom") as a dimension which embraces all that follows,¹⁵ then the other four correspond closely with the historic threefold dimensions of the church's ministry. The second mark ("to teach, baptise and nurture new believers") corresponds closely to that presbyteral ministry which we have seen elders and MWS together called to enable in our local churches. The third mark ("to respond to human need by loving service") clearly points to the church as a whole possessing a diaconal ministry. The fourth ("to seek to transform unjust structures of society") may be interpreted as an element of that same diaconal ministry; it may equally be understood, along with the fifth mark ("to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth"), as the church's obedient acceptance of its calling to exercise oversight of God's creation. This it derives from the calling of the Christ who saw in his world a people "harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36). What we are saying, then, is that if the churches' mission, in its five marks, broadly embraces these three dimensions, presbyteral, diaconal and episcopal, it is reasonable to assume that God's provision of an ordained ministry, called to be a pointer to and to enable the church in that mission, should possess a correspondingly diverse pattern.

¹⁵ *cf. op. cit para 4*

4.9. What we envisage is that at least in each locality, and even in each local church there would be teams of ministers exercising a variety of ministries, some presbyteral, some diaconal, and some with an oversight dimension, corresponding to the five marks of mission, and to the historic threefold pattern. All will necessarily be working collaboratively. Some few would be stipendiary and full time, many more would not. We live in a society in which much of the work is of a casual and part-time nature. The church has no option but to adapt to that social climate, however critical it might be of elements within it. Already some NSMs receive a salary (e.g., as hospital chaplains). Already there is scope for many more MWS to serve part-time perhaps combining their service with a part-time secular job. We see no reason why the exercise of ministry should not be completely flexible. In this way we believe that the Reformed preference for a continuum of ordained ministries, from full-time to (very) part-time, rather than a sharp clerical/lay divide, would be best maintained. Above all we see ministry, in whatever form, being deliberately and explicitly geared to enable and equip the whole people of God in its mission.

4.10 Clearly much more work needs to be done in order to map out in detail the proposals which, in the time at our disposal, we have only begun to outline. We are convinced that this work needs urgently to be undertaken. Our final and more far-reaching recommendation is therefore:

7 - that the Ministries Committee should take the necessary steps to ensure that proposals are drawn up for a new, more diverse pattern of ministries, building on ecumenical insights and designed to enable the church to respond more effectively to the challenge of the mission strategy outlined in *Growing Up*.

Stipendiary Ministry in Retirement

Resolution for General Assembly

Assembly welcoming the statement on stipendiary Ministers and Retirement,

- i) thank the working party for its assistance;
- ii) urges stipendiary ministers, local churches, District Councils and Synods to adopt it as an aid to the development of good practice;
- iii) instructs Ministries Committee to prepare a further statement on church related community workers and non-stipendiary ministers and retirement.

In 1998 and through to 1999 a working party led by the Revd Nelson Bainbridge. Once the initial report was drafted it was sent for comment to at least one retired minister in every District.

TRAINING COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2000

St Michael's College, Llandaff

Resolution: Assembly adds the non-residential course at St Michael's College, Llandaff, to its list of recognised colleges and courses for initial ministerial training.

During the year an approach was made by the Synod of Wales, to enquire whether the non-residential course at St Michael's might be recognised for the training of non-stipendiary ordinands. St Michael's is a Church In Wales foundation, in Cardiff. Members of the Committee have visited St Michael's and have studied the course documentation, and we have since written to indicate that we should favour recognition, should the course meet the Assembly's criteria for this. This will require further attention by St Michael's to a couple of matters, chiefly in regard to ecumenical breadth. We have been encouraged to expect a positive response - in which case we shall put the above resolution to Assembly.

COMMUNICATIONS AND EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

RESOLUTION TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The United Reformed Church thanks the BBC for much splendid religious broadcasting over many years and calls upon the Corporation:

- 1) to broadcast more religious radio and television programmes at peak listening and viewing times;**
- 2) to restore the hours of religious television to the average of the 1980's;**
- 3) to ensure that in a time of budget reductions high production values are maintained;**
- 4) to produce programmes for young people, which treat religion seriously; and to give religious programmes a prominent place in existing and future digital radio and television channels.**

1. The United Reformed Church is a member of the Churches Advisory Council on Local Broadcasting (CACLB) which has been following closely the debate about the current state of BBC national religious broadcasting.
2. Questions asked in Parliament and in other denominational assemblies indicate a fear that religious programmes are being marginalised, with widespread worries about scheduling, quality of content, staff cutbacks and budget restrictions.
3. CACLB believes that accessible and good quality religious programmes nourish the human spirit and offer insights into whom, why and what people believe and how that affects our society and the world. In contributing to an open and honest discussion about BBC religious broadcasting it is hoped that it will continue to flourish as an essential part of the Corporation's core public service responsibilities.

Note for Mission Council:

This is a provisional wording –but the sentiment is correct. The resolution will be presented by Peter Moth who is the URC representative to CACLB

Resolutions and report from CHURCH AND SOCIETY for General Assembly.

We intend to bring two resolutions. Here are the texts, with an extract from the opening paragraph of the supporting report in each case.

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE

Assembly

- a welcomes the growth in the number of local churches participating in *Commitment for Life* and the consequent increase in funds raised and associated activity, including production of worship material, a pack for children and campaigning around debt and fair trade;
- b recognises the personal effort in promoting the programme put in by advocates in each synod and the effective work of the Co-ordinator and support staff;
- c notes the fresh emphasis on the four countries with primary partners in each country;
- d agrees that the disbursement of *Commitment for Life* income shall remain at 75% going overseas via Christian Aid, 10% for World Development Movement, 15% for Grants and Advocacy, and that Church and Society shall continue to devote staff time to the programme;
- e therefore urges non-participating churches, large or small, to join in the *Commitment for Life* programme.

1.1 When the *Commitment for Life* programme first grew out of the former 1% appeal and was launched in 1992, the Church and Society committee decided to make a **fuller report** to Assembly with accompanying resolution every four years. The re-launch in 1996 led to a substantial increase in the number of participating churches to **over 500** at present (30% of churches with 54% of recorded members), with that involvement signifying much more in the life of those churches. This is a rise from under 300 in 1996, with 10% more churches during 1999 and a corresponding rise in income during 1999 of about 10%, to almost £380,000.

End of life

Assembly

- a invites Church and Society to gather a working group, including members suggested by other Assembly committees, to examine the range of issues listed in the report below and other related matters associated with the end of life, to work on some of them and to report in 2002;
- b in particular reaffirms its belief in and support for the National Health Service as a necessary expression of our common life.

1.1 Several factors have led Church and Society to bring this resolution before Assembly to seek encouragement and endorsement for further serious work on a range of apparently disparate issues which are nevertheless connected in personal experience, in political and economic analysis and in the perceptions of belief. The current difficulties for the NHS reflect a deeper and more general crisis in society, especially in the public sector, as technology continues to advance more rapidly than most ethicists are able to interpret and more demanding than taxpayers and others are willing to pay.

P.S.

The Committee decided, at its meeting on March 4, not to include any reference to the repeal of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 in the main report to Assembly. The view of the Committee has been minuted and the Convener may draw on that minute if challenged.

ECUMENICAL

Resolution

Change of Name of Overseas Exchange Sub-Committee to International Exchange Sub-Committee

That the Overseas Exchange Sub-Committee of the Ecumenical Committee be re-named the International Exchange Sub-Committee.

Why the change? Firstly, for some time the members of the Overseas Exchange Sub-Committee had expressed disquiet at its name. Recognising that the work of the committee involved both the sending and receiving of people – mission partners, volunteers, scholarship holders and others – it was felt that the name should reflect this. Rather than have a 'Brit-centric' tone it should more clearly convey the all-embracing global character of our work.

Secondly, with the advent of the *Belonging to the World Church* programme it was felt that using terms such as 'overseas' in this context (with its connotation of 'over there') expressed our separation more than our belonging.

Hence, the desire to change 'overseas' to 'international' and so express more clearly the nature and understanding of our work.