



MISSION COUNCIL *22nd January 2005*

MINUTES

Session 1

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Alistair Smeaton.

05/01 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioning those members who were present at their first Mission Council: Miss Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland); the Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland).

05/02 Attendance

There were 61 members present with 12 staff and others in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from:

The Revd Chris Vermeulen (North Western Synod); Mrs Val Morrison (Yorkshire Synod); Mrs Ann Ball (East Midlands Synod); Mrs Glenis Massey (Wessex Synod); Mr Stuart Jones (Synod of Wales); the Revd John Arthur (Synod of Scotland); the Revd Peter Noble (Synod of Wales); Mr Eric Chilton (Treasurer); Miss Fleur James (FURY Council); the Revd Julian Macro (RPAG); the Revd Dr John Parry (Inter-Faith Relations); the Revd Dr David Peel (Moderator Elect); the Revd Andrew Prasad (Racial Justice and Multi-cultural Ministry); the Revd Kathryn Price (Youth and Children's Work); Dr Brian Woodhall (Grants and Loans Group); the Revd Bill Wright (RPAG); Ms Suzanne Adofo, Mrs Karen Bulley, Miss Michele Marcano, Ms Avis Reaney, Mr Stephen Summers (Staff).

05/03 Notification of Additional Business

The Revd Lesley Charlton called for a review of the status of staff members at meetings of Mission Council. It seemed to her inappropriate that staff should be expected to attend but were not given the opportunity to speak. The Moderator said that this would be considered by the Mission Council Advisory Group.

05/04 Minutes of Mission Council 5th-7th October 2004

Minutes of the meeting of 5th-7th October were approved.

05/05 Solidarity Visit to Palestinian Christian community in Israel/Palestine (Paper A)

The Deputy General Secretary reported on the visit to Israel/Palestine by a group sent by the United Reformed Church 11th-21st October 2004. He noted that the political situation in Israel/Palestine is in a state of constant rapid change, and that the report and presentation could only draw a picture of the way things were in October 2004.

He used slides to highlight particular aspects of the four-centre visit (Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Qalqilya), and drew Mission Council's attention to

ways in which the United Reformed Church and its members could offer support to Palestinian Christians (Paper A, page 4).

In discussion, members commended the report, and urged that its acceptance should indicate a willingness to take it seriously and to implement its suggestions; the possibility of an ecumenical statement was raised. The Revd Philip Woods responded on behalf of the Ecumenical Committee, highlighting some of the initiatives that have taken place throughout the URC and describing the Ecumenical Committee's current thinking on this matter.

05/06 Report by the Moderator

The Moderator reported on the Israel/Palestine aspect of her visit to partner churches in the United States of America (Paper H). She spoke of the Presbyterian Church in the USA's response, and noted that attitudes and sensitivities are very different in the USA from the UK. In general there is a much closer relationship between church and synagogue in the USA; this produces obvious and significant differences of approach to the politics of Israel/Palestine.

05/07 Resource Planning Advisory Group (Paper C)

The Deputy General Secretary presented Paper C on behalf of RPAG. The paper had been produced to clarify those parts of the RPAG's remit which would be undertaken by other groups and committees following Mission Council's October 2004 decision to suspend RPAG.

Following brief discussion of the concerns raised in the paper as follows,

- Life and Witness Committee is responsible for stewardship;
- membership of Finance Committee may need to be more broadly based;
- strategic planning must be integrated into the central organisation of the church;
- the annual Book of Reports is an important document that should be circulated to all ministers and local churches.

Mission Council accepted the paper with thanks. (*see Resolution at 05/13 below*)

05/08 The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church (Papers D and B)

The Revd Richard Mortimer introduced the papers, and the Revds Elizabeth Welch and Clive Sutcliffe made a response.

Several concerns were raised:

- a Christological over-emphasis; and lack of Trinitarian emphasis;
- unbalanced use of creeds;
- the document adds nothing to discussion about structures;
- inconsistent use of tradition.

It was suggested that more needed to be done, and that if further work is to be undertaken, consultation with local churches may be appropriate.

The following questions were also asked:

- where does this leave ecumenical projects?
- where is the 'bottom line' of where the URC is?
- should there be an ecclesiology of LEP's?
- if we rely on ordained ministry, what about churches where no ministry is available?

In discussion the following was raised:

- the document does provide an outline of the URC, but perhaps needs tweaking;
- there is nothing about CRCWs;
- should we say why we ordain elders but not CRCWs?
- 7.2 seems to compartmentalise evangelism and social action;
- The paper does not recognise how much things have changed; it is God's mission that calls the church into being; this is a good reference document, but there should be another that says something more exciting about mission and the contemporary church;
- Should this statement be a summary of the Basis of Union?; should it be a statement of vision? Is it a defining document or a commentary?
- The paper in 1.3.3 draws attention to the fact that differences had not been reconciled at the time of union; the paper shows that we are still on a journey, doing our thinking as we go. There are two issues that are unclear: the whole question of eldership and the relation of ordination to eldership; and the church's practice in presidency of communion; not sure if the paper describes present practice;
- Could the committee clarify what status they would wish this document to have? There needs to be some serious discussion of discipline;
- There is very little reference to the function of church members. We should resist the temptation to become constrained by history;
- Who is this paper for? What is the essence of our church and what is the particularity of our church? If you want to point only to our distinctiveness, you will find that in the Nature Faith and Order.

The Revd Richard Mortimer thanked members for their comments. The Revd John Young (Convener - Doctrine, Prayer and Worship) sought Mission Council's guidance on the nature of the document required: whether one document is called for, or several. Mission Council asked the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee to continue its work on the document having taken account of the debate.

05/09 Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

The Revd Stuart Jackson moved adoption of the resolution (Paper E):

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorses the decision of the Synod of Wales to approve the text of the Declaration from the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales.

The resolution was carried *nem con.*

05/10 MCAG

The Deputy General Secretary presented the report of the Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper E).

05/11 Training Review

The Revd John Humphreys reported on the training review. He noted that General Assembly had emphasised the need for training for the whole people of God. The report (when completed) would present resolutions in 6 areas:

- underlying principles;
- partnership for learning;
- consultation with partners;
- the nature of the training committee;
- affirm partnership with Anglican and Methodist Churches, noting the need for both ecumenical and denominational training;
- future use of training institutions.

The Revd Roy Lowes updated Mission Council on the ongoing implementation of the Hind Report.

05/12 Prayers

The Chaplain led Mission Council in prayers of Intercession.

Session 2

05/13 RPAG

The Deputy General Secretary moved the following resolution:

Mission Council thanks the Resource Planning Advisory Group for its work, and formally discharges it.

The Resolution was carried.

05/14 Youth and Children's Work

Mr John Brown and Mrs Rosemary Johnston reported on the work and future plans of the Youth and Children's Work Committee.

The Committee is concentrating for the current year on the theme of 'Belonging', and several initiatives based on this theme were described. 'Belonging' also the theme of the current Pilots worship pack. A number of themed events for young people would be held during the year. Members of Mission Council were urged to keep informed about the work of the Youth and Children's Work Committee, and to encourage others in local churches to do the same.

05/15 Catch the Vision

Using a *Powerpoint* presentation, the General Secretary reported on the progress of the *Catch the Vision* process. He described some of the positive changes that were taking place in local churches and spoke of the need to hear and respond to God. We are discovering new ways of being church. 'Pilots' has shown that we are not just church on Sunday; many churches are re-connecting with their communities.

He spoke about communication, and noted that every other charity and organisation with a membership communicates directly with its members. The two most successful pieces of work in the United Reformed Church, 'Pilots' and 'Commitment for Life', are activist network-based. There is a need to look at the United Reformed Church's structures and communication channels; it may be that direct communication is called for.

The world is not unsympathetic, merely uncomprehending. A church that engages with the world has to know its faith with confidence; we need to be a consciously learning church - a worldwide, and therefore many-cultured, church. A new more meaningful way of expressing our belonging and our dependence upon one another is needed, and will perhaps come out of the Synod Clerks' group, which is currently working on this matter. Work has begun to look at more efficient governance. As we move forward in pilgrimage, we will do so committed to unity.

Discussion centred round two areas - communication, and staff concerns about the future. Ideas were floated about the feasibility of direct communication with every URC member.

It was noted that Church House staff may be anxious and uncertain during this period of review.

The General Secretary responded to the discussion by outlining some of the thinking that had taken place about communication, and noting the difficulty and expense of implementing a comprehensive electronic communication network.

He assured Mission Council that staff concerns were being taken seriously and dealt with sensitively at this time of review when staff will inevitably feel vulnerable and insecure.

The Deputy General Secretary asked what would be helpful for General Assembly to know about *Catch the Vision* at this stage. The issues of new ways of being church, deeper engagement in mission and 'spirituality' and communication were suggested; might it be appropriate to have presentations on 'envisioning' at General Assembly; this would link with the agenda for the March Mission Council.

Consideration would need to be given to *how* these discussions should take place in Assembly.

05/16 Section O Advisory Group (Paper G)

The Clerk reported.

05/16 Nominations (Paper E)

The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard reported.

05/17 Church and Society (Paper F)

The Revd Martin Camroux reported on the ethical difficulties in accepting Lottery-generated funds for church purposes and noted that, in the future, all money available to churches from English Heritage will be Lottery-generated. What advice ought to be offered to local churches?

In discussion the following points were raised:

- could the church challenge the policy of English Heritage?
- we need to give clear leadership;
- there is a gambling bill before the House of Commons, and the churches have exerted some influence upon it; any comment on gambling may interfere with or weaken this element of the church's work; note also that the 1995 Assembly Resolution says 'urges' not 'requires';

The feeling of the meeting was there seemed no need at this time to alter the church's 1995 policy.

05/18 Church and Society Committee Secretary

The Revd Martin Camroux outlined the committee's intentions to cover the work of the Committee Secretary following the departure of Andrew Bradstock; there was a particular need to ensure proper involvement in the 'MakePovertyHistory' campaign especially during the first half of 2005.

The Deputy General Secretary proposed the appointment of a 'MakePovertyHistory' campaign manager on a six-month contract.

Mission Council agreed to the appointment as proposed.

05/19 Announcements

The Deputy General Secretary noted that the Theological Reflector in March would be Ms Francis Brienan, Mission Enabler to the European Region of the Council for World Mission.

05/20 Reflections on the Church in Society

Dr Andrew Bradstock, outgoing Secretary of the Church and Society Committee, reflected on his 4½ years in post. He thanked Wendy Cooper, Martin Camroux, and Church House colleagues for their support and friendship.

Managing the work and resourcing the church had been the main challenges. The workload was unpredictable and heavy; there may be a lack of ownership of Church and Society among local churches and Synods.

There were serious problems about the committee; some of this was to do with structures, but the main criterion for membership on Church and Society was an interest in the committee's work; erratic attendance was also a problem.

There had been highlights: the Jobcentre survey; the End of Life pack; 'Assets for Life'; the 'hotline' as a means of communication; Commitment for Life; the Jubilee Debt Campaign; Trade Justice; MakePovertyHistory.

Dr Bradstock reminded Mission Council of Clare Short's challenge to Assembly in Portsmouth, 'Don't just do more of what you are doing.' Should concern for social justice come before concern about the institution and structures of the Church?

There were opportunities for churches to make a difference to society. Churches can influence national policy. The challenge for all of us is to keep the vision of the reign of God ahead of us .

Mission Council received Dr Bradstock's reflections warmly, and wished him well in his new post.

05/21 Moderator's Visit to the USA (Paper H)

The Moderator highlighted points of particular interest:

- adult Sunday Schools;
- Interim Ministers, who serve for up to two years in various circumstances;
- 'up-front' discussion; in the UK, we don't proclaim our political allegiances - but is our apathy any better; church may have an 'issues' group to bring rival politics together;
- energy, a sense of 'can do'

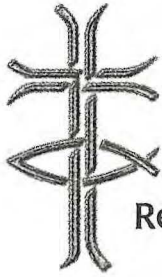
There are things that churches in the US might learn from the UK

- the welfare state
- our help for others often takes the form of empowerment/enabling
- access to government
- equality of partnership, mutual giving and receiving (CWM etc)
- the URC's central payroll

05/22 Close

The Moderator invited Mrs Jenny Carpenter to convey Mission Council's thanks to the Arthur Rank Centre for providing the venue and thanked the churches in Kenilworth and Leamington Spa for providing tea and coffee.

The Chaplain led worship and the meeting closed with the Blessing at 16.30.



The
United
Reformed
Church

The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT, United Kingdom
Deputy General Secretary: The Revd Raymond Adams

To: Members of Mission Council and staff in attendance

Mission Council: Saturday 22nd January 2005
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire
Telephone 024 7685 3060

12th January 2005

Dear Colleague,

Enclosed is the second mailing for the one-day meeting of Mission Council at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh Park.

Directions: As you arrive at the main entrance and go straight along Avenue M, take the fourth turning on the right into 6th Street, just past the *Farmers' Weekly* building. A few yards further on, the Arthur Rank Centre is on the right. Just before you reach the centre, a right turn leads into a car park. Those who are unable to walk far may alight at the main door of the Centre, and there is room for a few cars to park around the building, but it would be best if the majority used the designated car park.

May I remind you to bring all the enclosed papers with you as well as the **Minutes** of the October 2004 Mission Council, and **Paper A** (sent out with the first mailing).

Enclosed please find:

The Agenda

Paper B: Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee's introduction to the ecclesiology document (Paper D).

Paper C: Report of the Resource Planning Advisory Group

Paper D: Paper on the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church

Paper E: Reports and Resolutions

Paper F: The National Lottery and Grade II Listed Buildings (Church and Society)

Paper G: Section O Advisory Group

Paper H: Report on Moderator's visit to the United States

The two main issues to be discussed at this meeting of Mission Council (in terms of time allocation) are the progress of the paper on the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church; and how best to use March Mission Council and General Assembly to promote and develop the 'Catch the Vision' process in the life of the Church. Other items will include a report

of the Moderator's visit to partner churches in the United States; a report of the solidarity visit to Israel Palestine in October; and a valedictory reflection by Dr Andrew Bradstock as he relinquishes his post as Secretary for Church and Society.

If you have any difficulties or queries about arrangements, please contact Krystyna Bilogan (e-mail: krystyna.bilogan@urc.org.uk; tel: 020 7916 8646).

Aware of the long journeys people have for a one-day meeting, we are making every effort to use the time profitably and well, while offering people opportunities to think creatively about the future mission of the Church.

With good wishes for the New Year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Adams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a period at the end.

The Revd Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary



The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT, United Kingdom
Deputy General Secretary: The Revd Raymond Adams

To: Members of Mission Council
and staff in attendance

14th December 2004

Mission Council: Saturday 22nd January 2005
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire

Dear Colleague,

In these few days leading up to Christmas I am fairly sure a letter about Mission Council will not be at the top of your priority list, but it has reached the top of mine. I am writing to give notice of the one-day meeting of Mission Council on Saturday 22nd January 2005 at the Arthur Rank Centre, which is within the grounds of the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire.

Arrivals should be timed from 9.30 a.m. with time for coffee before the first session which starts at 10 a.m. A buffet lunch and a mid-afternoon cup of tea will be provided. The meeting is scheduled to conclude by 4.45 p.m. at the latest.

Please find enclosed with this letter:

- A map giving directions to the Centre
- A list of members (to enable you to arrange to travel together)
- An expenses slip (to be completed and left in the box provided on the day)
- A form to be returned (or information to be e-mailed) to Krystyna Bilogan (krystyna.bilogan@urc.org.uk) (tel: 020 7916 8646) by Friday 7th January 2005, please.
- **Paper A:** Report of the United Reformed Church's solidarity visit to the Palestinian Christian community.

Other items of business for Mission Council will include

- Consideration of the 'Catch the Vision' process – particularly the content of the March Mission Council and 2005 General Assembly.
- The 2006 budget
- A paper on the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church
- A presentation on 'the Church in society' by Dr Andrew Bradstock.
- A report of the Moderator's visit to partner churches in the U.S.A.

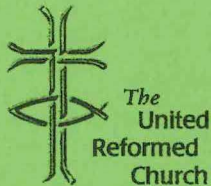
Please bring with you the minutes of the October 2004 meeting in London Colney. A second mailing with other papers and the agenda will be sent out in mid January.

In the meantime, I wish you a very happy Christmas and a peaceful new year.

Yours sincerely,

Ray Adams

The Revd Raymond Adams
Deputy General Secretary



MISSION COUNCIL

22nd January 2005

MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

The Moderator
General Secretary
Deputy General Secretary
Clerk

Revd Sheila Maxey
Revd Dr David Cornick
Revd Ray Adams
Revd James Breslin

Past Moderator
Moderator Elect
Treasurer
Legal Adviser

Revd Alasdair Pratt
Revd Dr David Peel
Mr Eric Chilton
Mrs Janet Knott

Assembly Standing Committees

Doctrine Prayer & Worship
Life & Witness
Church & Society
Youth & Children's Work
Ecumenical
Ministries
Training
Finance
Communications & Editorial
Nominations
Assembly Arrangements
Equal Opportunities
Inter-Faith Relations
Racial Justice

Revd John A Young
Revd Brian Jolly
Revd Martin Camroux
Revd Kathryn Price
Revd Elizabeth Nash
Mr John Ellis
Revd John Humphreys
Mr Eric Chilton
Revd Martin Hazell
Revd Dr Stephen Orchard
Mr William McVey
Revd Wilf Bahadur
Revd Dr John Parry
Revd Andrew Prasad

Fury Council

Ms Amanda Wade
Miss Fleur James

13 synod Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each synod

1 N	Revd Peter Poulter	Revd Colin Offor, Revd John Durell, Mrs Susan Rand
2 N.W	Revd Peter Brain	Revd Chris Vermeulen, Miss Kathleen Cross, Mrs Janet Eccles
3 Mer	Revd Howard Sharp	Mr Donald Swift, Revd Martin Hardy, Mrs Wilma Prentice
4 York	Revd Arnold Harrison	Revd Pauline Loosemore, Mr Roderick Garthwaite, Mrs Val Morrison
5 E.M	Revd Terry Oakley	Mrs Ann Ball, Mrs Barbara Turner, Mrs Irene Wren
6 W.M	Revd Elizabeth Welch	Mrs Melanie Frew, Revd Anthony Howells, Mr Bill Robson
7 E	Revd Elizabeth Caswell	Revd Victor Ridgewell, Mr Mick Barnes, Mrs Joan Turner
8 S.W	Revd David Grosch-Miller	Revd Roz Harrison, Mrs Janet Gray, Revd Richard Pope
9 Wex	Revd Adrian Bulley	Revd Clive Sutcliffe, Mrs Glennis Massey, Revd David Bedford
10 Th.N	Revd Roberta Rominger	Revd Dr Roger Scopes, Revd Jane Wade, Vacancy <i>Revd John Macavlan</i>
11 S	Revd Nigel Uden	Dr Graham Campling, Revd Lesley Charlton, Mr David Howell
12 Wal	Revd Peter Noble	Mrs Janet Gray, Mr W Stuart Jones, Revd Stuart Jackson
13 Scot	Revd John Arthur	Revd Alan Paterson, Miss Irene Hudson, Vacancy

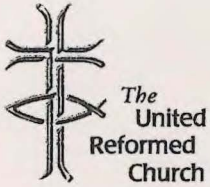
In attendance

Minute Secretary
Moderator's Chaplain
Reform Editor
Training
International Church Relations
Ministries
Finance
Youth Work
Life & Witness
HR & Facilities Manager
Church Related Community
Work Development Workers

Revd Ken Forbes
Revd Alistair Smeaton
Revd David Lawrence
Revd Roy Lowes
Revd Philip Woods
Revd Christine Craven
Ms Avis Reaney
Mr John Brown
Revd John Steele
Miss Michelle Marcano
Mrs Suzanne Adofo/
Mr Stephen Summers

Rural Consultant
Grants & Loans Conv.
Church & Society
Pilots Dev'tment Officer
Ecumenical Relations
Windermere Cntr Dir.
Communications
Children's Advocate
Convener RPAG
Secretary RPAG
Racial Justice

Mrs Jenny Carpenter
Dr Brian Woodhall
Dr Andrew Bradstock
Mrs Karen Bulley
Revd Richard Mortimer
Mr Lawrence Moore
Mrs Carol Rogers
Mrs Rosemary Johnston
Revd Julian Macro
Revd Bill Wright
Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

**AGENDA AND
TIMETABLE**

The General Assembly has agreed that every agenda should be headed with the question, what are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?

9.30am Arrivals and coffee

Session 1: 10.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

Opening Worship

Welcome and apologies for absence

Notification of additional business

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 5-7 October 2004

Matters arising

Report on the solidarity visit to Palestinian Christian community in Israel/Palestine
(Paper A)

Report by the Moderator on the Israel/Palestine aspect of her visit to partner churches in the U.S.

Report of the Resource Planning Advisory Group (Paper C)

The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church (Papers B and D)

Declaration of Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales (Paper E)

Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper E)

Interim Report on the Training review

Notices and lunchtime arrangements

Prayer and the Doxology

12.30 - 1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 - 3.15 p.m.

'Belonging': a progress report from the Youth and Children's Work Committee

Catch the Vision: planning the process for March Mission Council and General Assembly

Report of the Assembly Arrangements Committee

Report of the Section O Advisory Group (Paper G)

Report of the Nominations Committee (Paper E)

Report of the Church and Society Committee

(Paper F)

Other matters for report

3.15 - 3.45 pm: Break for Tea

Session 3: 3.45 – 4.45 p.m.

Reflections on the Church in Society

Dr Andrew Bradstock

Report on the Assembly Moderator's visit to the U.S.A.

(Paper H)

Closing Worship



MISSION COUNCIL 22 January 2005

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

The General Assembly has agreed that every agenda should be headed with the question, what are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?

ANNOTATED AGENDA

9.30am Arrivals and coffee

Session 1: 10.00 a.m. - 12.30 p.m.

10- 10.30

Opening Worship

Moderator and Chaplain

10.30- 10.40

Welcome and apologies for absence

The Moderator welcomes the following synod representatives to their first Mission Council:

The Revd John Macaulay (Thames North) - *(absent)*

Miss Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland)

The Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland)

...and welcomes those who are deputising for a synod representative today:

(none)

(Please ask if any others are present for the first time)

The Deputy General Secretary presents apologies for absence from:

- Synod representatives
 - The Revd Chris Vermeulen (North Western)
 - Mrs Val Morrison (Yorkshire)
 - Mrs Ann Ball (East Midlands)
 - Mrs Glenis Massey (Wessex)
 - Mr Stuart Jones (Wales)
- Synod Moderators
 - The Revd John Arthur (Synod of Scotland);
 - The Revd Peter Noble (Synod of Wales);
- Assembly Officers, Committee Conveners and other Representatives
 - Mr Eric Chilton (Treasurer)
 - Miss Fleur James (FURY Council)
 - The Revd Julian Macro (RPAG)
 - The Revd Dr John Parry (Inter-Faith Relations);
 - The Revd Dr David Peel (Moderator-elect)
 - The Revd Andrew Prasad (Racial Justice and Multi-Cultural Ministry)
 - The Revd Kathryn Price (Youth and Children's Work)
 - Dr Brian Woodhall (Grants and Loans Group)
 - The Revd Bill Wright (RPAG)
- Staff Secretaries:
 - Ms Suzanne Adofo
 - Mrs Karen Bulley
 - Miss Michelle Marcano
 - Ms Avis Reaney
 - Mr Stephen Summers

Notification of additional business:

Deputy General Secretary to lead *(none)*

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 5-7 October 2004

Moderator signs minutes

Matters arising:

Deputy General Secretary to lead

04/65 Resource Planning Advisory Group – (item to be taken later in agenda)

Mission Council agrees that the work of the Resource Planning Advisory Group should be suspended, pending the submission of a paper to MCAG on the reallocation of responsibilities in RPAG's remit, which could lead to the group being disbanded.

04/82 Rural Officer/Consultant

The Deputy General Secretary reported that a review of the post of Rural Consultant will take place in the light of the forthcoming retirement of Mrs Jenny Carpenter. – (Review underway)

10.40 – 11.00 Report on Solidarity visit to Palestinian Christian community in Israel/Palestine **The Deputy General Secretary (Paper A)**

11.00 – 11.10 Report by the Moderator on the Israel/Palestine aspect of her visit to the partner churches in the U.S. **The Moderator**
followed by opportunity for reactions, comments

11.10 – 11.15 Resource Planning Advisory Group **Deputy General Secretary (Paper C)**

October Minutes 04/65 – Mission Council agrees that the work of the Resource Planning Advisory Group should be suspended, pending the submission of a paper to MCAG on the reallocation of responsibilities in RPAG's remit, which could lead to the group being disbanded.

11.15 – 11.50 The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church
Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith and Order (Papers B and D)
with input from Elizabeth Welch and Clive Sutcliffe

11.50- 12.00 Declaration of Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales
Stuart Jackson – Ecumenical Officer for Synod of Wales (Paper E)

12.00-12.05 Mission Council Advisory Group **Deputy General Secretary (Paper E)**

12.05- 12.20 Report on Training review **Convener of Training Committee (John Humphreys)**

(Insert Nominations if time)

12.25 Notices and lunchtime arrangements **Deputy General Secretary**

1. Sign in blue book your attendance and expenses to be put in the box on 1st floor landing.
2. Over 0.33 addressees did not respond by 7th January (sent out 15/12) – can respond by phone/e-mail;
3. Those wishing to share/order taxis – please sign sheet in Reception – during lunch break.
4. Lunch arrangements:
 - A finger buffet lunch will be provided at two locations- in neighbouring room (1-way flow of traffic, returning with plate to this room); and downstairs in the entrance hall (another room downstairs to sit to which people will be directed). Important that those requiring special diets collect food from downstairs – plenty of ordinary diet food as well so (RH people of hall go downstairs).
 - In view of comparative short time, please keep moving when collecting food – room to talk clear of table areas).
 - Toilets on this floor and downstairs.
 - During lunch break, open windows.
 - Locked rooms are clearly out of bounds, Jenny Carpenter happy to show people around and describe work in Arthur Rank Centre.
 - Make sure plates, cups, etc cleared from this room before start of afternoon session.
 - Resume meeting promptly at 1.15 p.m.

12.28 Prayer and the Doxology

Moderator and Chaplain

12.30 -1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 – 3.15 p.m.

- 13.15 – 13.35 **'Belonging': a progress report from the Youth and Children's work committee** Secretaries for Youth and Children's work
- 13.35 - 14.20 **Catch the Vision: planning the process for March Mission Council and General Assembly** The General Secretary
- 14.20 –14.30 **Assembly Arrangements** Convener (William McVey)
- 14.30 –14.35 **Report of Section O Advisory Group** Clerk (James Breslin) (Paper G)
- (14.35 – 14.40 **Nominations** – if not previously taken) Convener (Stephen Orchard) (Paper E)
- 14.40 – 15.15 **Church and Society Committee** Convener (Martin Camroux) (Paper F)
(if time - **other matters for report**)
- a) Report and seek endorsement of plan for a temporary post of MPH Campaign Officer.
 - b) Theological Reflector at March Mission Council will be Francis Brienan (Mission Enabler for CWM Europe)

3.15 - 3.45 pm: Break for Tea

Session 3: 3.45 – 4.45 p.m.

- 15.45- 16.15 **Reflections on the Church in Society** Secretary for Church and Society (Andrew Bradstock)
- 16.15 – 16.30 **Report on the Assembly Moderator's visit to the U.S.A.** Moderator (Paper H)
- The Moderator:** should mention those who have completed their term of service on Mission Council or are attending Mission Council for the last time (none)
- Thank:
Leamington Spa and Kenilworth URCs for providing coffee and tea
Ask **Mrs Jenny Carpenter** to thank the staff at Arthur Rank Centre for hospitality today.
Thank and farewell **Dr Andrew Bradstock.**
- 16.30- 16.45 **Closing Worship** Chaplain



MISSION COUNCIL 22 January 2005

A

Report of the Group sent by the United Reformed Church on a solidarity visit to the Palestinian Christian Community 11th to 21st October 2004

The group consisted of Ray Adams, Tim Clarke, Graham Cook, Jonathan Dean, Brian Jolly, Anne Martin and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams.

Summary

This ten-day Solidarity Visit to the Palestinian Christian Community was organised principally through the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and based at St George's Cathedral Guest House in Jerusalem. It took the group to the West Bank towns of Ramallah, Qalqilya and Bethlehem, as well as the suburbs of East Jerusalem. Christian communities were visited in churches and projects within the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (Ramallah and Jerusalem), the Lutheran Church (Bethlehem), and the Church of Scotland (Jerusalem and Tiberias).

There were opportunities to visit the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committee's centre in Qalqilya; a Peace Centre in the Shu'fat refugee camp; the 'Dar Annadwa Addawliyya' ('House of Worldwide Encounter') project at the Lutheran Church's International Centre in Bethlehem; the Arab Evangelical Episcopal School in Ramallah and the Da al-Kalima (Lutheran) School in Bethlehem where valuable and challenging discussions took place with 14-16 year old students. The group shared in the conduct of worship with the congregation of St Andrew's Episcopal Church in Ramallah, visited its housing project for young families, and its Technological and Vocational Training Centre (working principally with children and young people). There were also opportunities to meet a number of Palestinian leaders, among whom were

- o President Arafat (barely four weeks before his death);
- o Zuhair Manasra, the Palestinian Authority's Governor of Bethlehem;
- o The Right Revd Riah Abu el Assal, the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem;
- o Canon Suheil Dawani (General Secretary of the Diocese of Jerusalem);
- o Mr Salim Shawamreh from the Beit Arabiya Centre for Peace
- o Mr Khalil F. Abdinnour, a prominent lay-member of the Palestinian congregation at St George's Cathedral
- o Dr Abdul-Latif Khaled, Director of the Palestinian Hydrology Group.

Angela Godfrey-Goldstein – an Israeli peace activist with ICAHD (the Israeli Committee against House Demolition) showed us examples of the blight on the daily existence of Palestinian people caused by systematic house demolitions, the constant insecurity of living in 'illegal' buildings which could be demolished at any time because planning permission for building on their own land was routinely denied; and the effects of the Palestinians' imprisonment behind the Separation Wall. We saw the wall not only separating Israeli and Palestinian communities, but also cutting through existing Palestinian towns, suburbs and farm land.

Larry Fata - an American Roman Catholic - is the Communications Director of E.A.P.P.I. (the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel, sponsored by the World Council of Churches, and supported by *Commitment for Life*). He outlined to us the emphasis of the programme was on the Separation Wall; Settler violence: solidarity with Palestinians;

care of refugees; access to healthcare; working with Israeli Peace Activists; and supporting the people of Gaza. One example of E.A.P.I.'s work is of a volunteer accompanying Palestinian children to school from home because of the risk of stoning by Israeli Settlers. The army is unable to guarantee the children's safety, and who therefore need to be accompanied to school.

Though it was disappointing that Gaza was closed to foreign visitors, and checkpoint restrictions prevented the group from entering Nablus, the visit was strengthened by the opportunity of speaking to a wide range of people: political and church leaders, various Christian lay people, young university graduates, secondary school students and children. It was evident from the reaction of our hosts that our visit was appreciated.

The group was united in its shock and anger at the encroachment of the Separation Wall and the effect of the burgeoning number of Israeli settlements on the lives of the Palestinian people. Settlements with their accompanying infrastructure have spread in such a way as to split the remaining Palestinian areas of the West Bank into 400 enclaves.

Our visit to Qalqilya in the Palestinian West Bank helped us experience for ourselves a town totally surrounded by the wall, with one checkpoint in and out. The gates to surrounding agricultural land is open only three times a day, (at 7.am, noon, and 5.pm). This 'City of peace' (Qalqilya) is fenced in, situated on very desirable fertile land near the Green Line between West Bank and Israel. Water and land have been seized. We were assured by a hydrologist that there is no scarcity of water in the West Bank: indeed there is enough for the next 200 years; yet, since 1967, Israel has forbidden new drilling of Palestinian wells, so people are dependent on the same output of water as the 1960s, while the population has doubled.

PARC projects (supported by outside agencies including the United Reformed Church through Christian Aid) have been destroyed. We saw for ourselves a tunnel built by Israelis so that farmers could travel the 500 metres from their homes to their own farmland on the other side of the wall: but it was closed. The farmers would therefore have to make a 35 kilometre detour.

The breakdown of peace talks has enabled the Israeli government to pursue further a policy of illegal expansion under the pretext of a protective wall. One lay leader admitted that the image of Palestinians abroad has become extremely distorted, and they have lost the sympathy of the outside world because of extremist groups and terrorist action. Yet the Palestinian population continues to suffer 'collective punishment', while Israeli action against terrorism gives cover to their government's violation of human rights. Confronted by a very strong occupation, Palestinian people are under immense stress while the Israelis are not held to account and remained unsupervised.

In the absence of U.N. observers, it was clear to the group that the WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme provides a crucial presence, offering solidarity, and a measure of international supervision, which goes some way towards keeping the Palestinian profile before international partners and government agencies.

The group also endorses the sense of outrage and challenge contained in the statement on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict by the Anglican Peace and Justice Network, *Give Sight to the Blind and Freedom to the Captives* (appended to this report); and commends it as one appropriate response of the United Reformed Church to the present situation. The report's final paragraph calls on all faith communities

"... to a time of focused and intentional prayer and advocacy for peace in the Holy Land. ... (and the) leadership of the Abrahamic Faiths from around the world to

exercise their authority and influence on the political leadership among the several nations who carry the responsibility for making a just peace ”.

Solidarity and Support

The Group struggled long and hard to consider what an appropriate response by the United Reformed Church might be, recognising the body of existing connections with the Palestinian community. The United Reformed Church through its *Commitment for Life Programme* offers sustained and committed support through Christian Aid to the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Programme, and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme (E.A.P.P.I.) The value of this connection both to PARC and the United Reformed Church must not be underestimated. Yet we identified the need for the indigenous Palestine Church to have stronger direct support from the wider Christian family, and tried clarify what role the United Reformed Church might have in this. Wherever we went, we heard the small Palestinian Christian community (about 1% of the population) ask us why the international Christian community does nothing to help fellow Christians remain in the Land of the Holy One.

A Christian layman, concerned about the increasing distance between Christians and their leaders, advocated a network that would connect people across cultures at the grassroots. He insisted that the indigenous Church (despite its formal divisions) was united in the same pain and pressure of daily life. He also believed the Christian community played a crucial political role – as a moderating presence, and providing inclusive education for Christians and Muslims. He proposed ways of keeping the local infrastructure alive through empowerment, sustainable development and peacemaking - in practical programmes.

The Palestinian Authority's Governor of Bethlehem (Zuhair Manasra) echoed this, asking for the Church's good influence in four areas: i) helping young Christians and Muslims to build good relationships even though they live under severe conditions; ii) helping families, possibly by creating jobs or providing affordable housing; iii) encouraging people to visit Bethlehem and overcome the negative press which says it is too dangerous; and iv) raising political awareness, so that Palestinians receive fair treatment.

It became apparent from this visit, but also from the wide experience represented in the Group (Commitment for Life, Race Relations and Inter faith concerns, existing local church links, representation on the Middle Eastern Forum of CCOM, and Mission Council) that solidarity could be expressed appropriately in a range of responses.

All the Christians and Muslims we met were at pains to emphasize their condemnation of Israeli government policy and practice, but set their face against charges of anti-Semitism. We recognise that in criticising Israeli government policy and practice we too may be challenged by some as being anti-semitic – which must be refuted absolutely. We are very conscious of the importance of the Church opposing any explicit or implied demonization of those it criticizes; and that our language needs to be both sensitive and precise, so as not to justify or condone the anti-semitic attitudes and behaviour of others.

It is in this context that the following areas should be considered in support of the Palestinian community:

- Consider how to engage with and inform the political process: possibly by writing to and meeting M.P.s and MEPs. The experience of this and other visits should be used to 'tell the story' in a wider forum than the Church.
- Investigate what can be done ecumenically in association with Church partners in the U.K. and the U.S. Divestment and/or boycott of Israeli goods may be one response, if appropriate.

- Support and publicise more widely the work of *Commitment for Life*: particularly its support of PARC; the 'Moving Stories' resource; and the E.A.P.P.I. programme.
- Consider whether and how the United Reformed Church could support projects directed at enabling and encouraging the particular mission of the church in the Palestinian territories (Anglican and Lutheran).
- Encourage tourism- on which the economy depends, and especially to encourage church members to visit the indigenous Palestine Church.
- Support identified projects, e.g. the International Centre (especially the children's programme) in Bethlehem, housing projects in Ramallah, and other 'grassroots' initiatives.
- Develop programmes of exchange visits for young people (as requested by the churches and schools in Ramallah and Bethlehem).
- Gather and circulate website addresses to increase awareness and provide information about the range of publications and papers available on Israel/Palestine issues.

Some of this work may be new; other parts are well established. There is already sustained support by individuals, churches and schools, built up over a number of years, as an extremely effective means of solidarity with the Christian community. It was very obvious to members of the group who had visited Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho and Galilee as recently as four years ago, that the level of tourism had seriously declined, to the economic and social detriment of Palestinian people, increasing their sense of isolation.

It is, therefore, the strong recommendation of the group to the Ecumenical Committee that individuals, local churches, action groups, and the wider councils of the Church find appropriate ways of responding to the cries of the whole Palestinian community for peace and a just settlement with the wider state of Israel, and stand with them in solidarity. A mapping exercise, to gauge the number and range of existing contacts between the United Reformed Church and the Palestinian community, would be a valuable.

Appended: Anglican Peace and Justice Network Statement on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict: *Give Sight to the Blind and Freedom to the Captives* – September 22nd 2004

Available on request: a detailed diary record of the solidarity visit by Ray Adams, which includes notes of the meeting with Yasser Arafat, interviews with church and other leaders, and comments by Palestinians of all ages about their hopes and fears for the future. (e-mail ray.adams@urc.org.uk). An extensive photographic record exists, from which selected photographs could be supplied electronically.

Statement on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

Give Sight to the Blind and Freedom to the Captives

We, as members of the Anglican Peace and Justice Network, representing 23 Provinces of the worldwide 75,000,000 member Anglican Communion, have visited the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem over these last 8 days, and during that time have been inspired by the faith of the people in the diocese, while also being exposed to the draconian conditions of the continuing Occupation under which so many Palestinians live. We have heard from Israeli Jewish voices, and from Palestinians, both those who reside in Israel and those who live under Occupation. We note the continuing policies of illegal home demolitions, detentions, checkpoints, identity card systems and the presence of the Israeli military that make any kind of normal life impossible. We have seen and heard the effects of the overwhelming presence of settlements or colonies in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza, and the bypass roads and highways that connect them while disconnecting Palestinian villages, one from another. We have seen the destruction of precious arable lands and restrictions on precious water resources. Finally, and shockingly, we have been exposed to the separation wall that violates international boundaries, causing mayhem in Palestinian daily life and further defines Israeli intentions to appropriate land from the Palestinians.

We conclude from our experience that there is little will on behalf of the Israeli government to recognize the rights of the Palestinians to a sovereign state to be created in the West Bank - which includes East Jerusalem - and Gaza. Israel, with the complicity of the United States, seems determined to flaunt international laws, whether they are the Geneva Conventions, United Nations resolutions or the most recent decision of the International Court of Justice in declaring the separation wall illegal. In fact, we note that this latter decision is based on building the wall on Palestinian territory, which once again demonstrates the illegality of the Occupation itself.

We deeply respect and honor those Israelis who are prepared to end this miserable Occupation and recognize a Palestinian State, people courageously committed to justice and who work against home demolitions, who promote human rights and oppose settlements, bypass roads and the separation wall. And we pay tribute to the courage, endurance and hope of the Palestinian people who suffer the dreadful injustice of the Occupation.

We deplore the unwillingness of the Israeli government to implement United Nations resolutions 242 and 338. At the same time, we want to assure the Israeli Jewish community of our concern for their security and safety, to be able live without fear. We deplore the unbroken cycle of violence, which has claimed too many innocent lives on both sides. We condemn violence whatever the source. We reach out to Palestinians and Israelis of good will, assuring both of them of our love and support in ending this long and troubled conflict. We embrace all those who have lost loved ones in the violence and extend our deepest sympathies.

We offer not only our solidarity for a just peace, but also our observation that it is the Occupation in its many facets that foments the violence and fuels the conflict. Collective punishment of the Palestinian people must be brought to an end.

We therefore urge the following steps in order to achieve a sovereign and independent Palestine living alongside a secure Israel recognized by and at peace with her neighbours:

- * The withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from all occupied areas in accordance with 1967 borders and a complete halt to settlement building, both new or expanded, to be followed by a process of phasing out settlements altogether
- * The immediate dismantling of the separation wall in compliance with the ruling of the International Court of Justice wherever the wall violates West Bank land
- * The introduction of an international peacekeeping force under the auspices of the United Nations into the Occupied Territories charged with maintaining security so that both sides may be free from further attacks
- * A humanitarian effort led by the United Nations to provide relief to the suffering Palestinian people
- * The immediate resumption of negotiations involving Israel and the Palestinian Authority under the umbrella of the United Nations, European Union, Russia, the United States and the Arab League (while we support a total withdrawal from Gaza, we urge it to be part of an overall resolution of the conflict).
- * That negotiations be based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338 that results in a viable and sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital as well as the capital of Israel, and assures the right of return for Palestinian refugees

The unconditional recognition of the state of Palestine must be implemented if peace is to prevail in the Middle East.

As an aside, we are deeply troubled by the use of United States made weapons and aircraft provided to Israel and being used for attacks on civilian targets, which occur with increasing frequency. We urge a moratorium on the use of such weapons, which violate U.S. law.

And we address a word to the wider conflict in the Middle East. The war in Iraq further fuels anger and hatred during these already volatile times. We urge the withdrawal of U.S. forces to be replaced with an international presence led by the United Nations. Further, we believe that a much more constructive course would be for President Bush and Prime Minister Blair to intervene and resuscitate the peace process as a direct action of healing and reconciliation for the global community.

Finally, we call upon the faith communities, and especially the Anglican Communion, to a time of focused and intentional prayer and advocacy for peace in the Holy Land. We call on the leadership of the Abrahamic Faiths from around the world to exercise their authority and influence on the political leadership among the several nations who carry the responsibility for making a just peace.

Anglican Peace & Justice Network
SEPTEMBER 14-23, 2004, JERUSALEM

Australia	The Rev. Canon Chris Jones
Brazil	The Rt. Rev. Luiz Osorio Prado
Burundi	The Rt. Rev. Pie Ntukamazina
Canada	Ms. Cynthia Patterson
Central America	Ms. Lisbeth Barahona
Congo	The Rev. Beni Bezaleri Bataaga
England	Dr. Charles Reed
Japan	The Rt. Rev. Nathaniel Makoto Uematso
	The Rev. Sam Koshiishi
Kenya	The Rt. Rev. Gideon Ileri
Korea	Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Guen Seok Yang
Myanmar	The Rt. Rev. Saw Wilme
New Zealand	Dr. Jenny Te Paa
North India	Mr. Prem Masih
Philippines	Dr. Andrew A. Tauli
Rwanda	Mr. Geoffrey Kayigi
Scotland	The Rev. Alison Simpson
South India	Dr. Mrs. Pauline Sathiamurthy
Southern Africa	Ms. Delene M. Mark
Sri Lanka	The Rt. Rev. Kumara Illangasighe
Tanzania	Mr. Kuwayawaya S. Kuwayawaya
Uganda	Ms. Jessica Nalwoga
United States	The Rev. Canon Brian J. Grieves
Anglican Observer at the UN	Archdeacon Taimalelagi F. Tuatagaloa-Matalavea
APJN Advisor	The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek
Liaison to the ACC for the Anglican Women's Network	Ms. Jolly Babirukamu
The Witness Magazine	Mr. Ethan Flad
Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem	The Rt. Rev. Riah Abu El Assal
	The Rev. Canon Suheil Dawani
	Ms. Nancy Dinsmore
	Mrs. Eliane Abdelnoor
	Ms. Susan Khayo



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

B

Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee

The secretary writes: '**Paper D** in Mission Council papers contains a significant statement on the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church for Mission Council's consideration and hopeful approval.

This subject has been before Mission Council previously. Our Committee was invited by Mission Council to respond to section C, on Ecclesiology, of the paper on Personal and Conciliar Leadership and Authority, which was submitted to Mission Council first in October 2002 as part of the work decided on at the conclusion of the Human Sexuality working party process. A small working party from the Doctrine Prayer and Worship was deputed to consider the matter in detail, met and produced the statement which we bring. It is our hope that it will ultimately become the first major systematic commentary on the Basis of Union as a working document since the inauguration of the United Reformed Church.

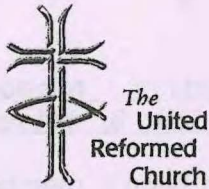
The document has been sent to the appropriate Committees of the Church of England and the Methodist Church for their consideration. The Methodists have already responded and the Anglicans will do in the very near future (and would have done so already had the Windsor and Rochester reports not appeared in October and November of last year). However there are problems of timing connected with waiting for it.

This document has been ready for nearly a year. It deserves consideration and has had to wait for a "slot" to become available on a Mission Council agenda. If it is not considered now it will have to wait at least until October, as the March Mission Council agenda is rightly and inevitably dominated by General Assembly 2005 and the Catch the Vision process. Equally there is a conundrum over when a document like this is ready. It is deeply counter-productive when something keeps being referred back to appear subsequently in new drafts, not least because with the constant turnover of Mission Council personnel it can be hard to keep track of the memory of why something was originally deemed important. Yet only by being presented and tested can a statement come to reflect the discerned mind of a conciliar church.

We are aware that some are unhappy with the lack of a uniform style, defended by the authors on the grounds that extensive use is made of diverse sources and quotations. We are also aware of a debate over 5.2.9. Many of us would want to invite all who love the Lord to share the communion elements. Some of us see the Lord's Supper as a "converting ordinance". But how can we phrase such things when we hold together a variety of sincerely held views on the admission of children to communion?

We hope the document commends itself to you'.

Richard Mortimer



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

C

Resource Planning Advisory Group

Mission Council meeting in October 2004 agreed

" that the work of the Resource Planning Advisory Group should be suspended, pending the submission of a paper to MCAG on the reallocation of responsibilities in RPAG's remit, which could lead to the Group being disbanded".

The Group's original remit was to undertake 'long term strategic planning' and decide "priorities in the use of human and material resources." Much of this is now within the remit of the 'Catch the Vision' process and new patterns of financial planning which for which the Finance Committee has taken responsibility.

Mission Council, prior to agreeing the disbanding of RPAG, asked for details of the way RPAG saw its remit being covered in future.

1 & 2 "Long term strategic planning" and "priorities in the use of human and material resources"

As noted in Paper B (October 2004 Mission Council), the *Catch the Vision* process is actively engaged in such matters and *Equipping the Saints* and the *Training Review* are also addressing such areas as are within their remit.

3. "The use of ministry"

It has been helpful that the Secretary for Ministries has been a member of RPAG but there has been no cross representation from RPAG to Ministries. The increased liaison between Ministries and Finance has proved most beneficial, but there is no need for an intermediary like RPAG.

4. "Assembly-appointed posts"

In theory the Staffing Advisory Group reports through RPAG but when SAG has done thorough, detailed work on a specific post RPAG is in no position to challenge it. Where RPAG has had a role has been in taking an overview of the relationship of posts with each other – that work is currently being undertaken by others as noted under 1. and 2.

5. "Financial Planning"

5.1 "Budget process"

This area was addressed in Paper B.

If the Finance Committee is to be the only Assembly committee dealing with financial issues it may be appropriate for its membership to be more broadly based so that it includes people with financial expertise, district and synod experience and those who can offer expertise in strategic planning and policy making.

5.2 "Seeking to educate the whole church and advocate the needs of mission, liaising with the Stewardship Sub-Committee of the Life & Witness Committee"

It has been helpful that the Secretary for Life & Witness has been a member of RPAG but the Stewardship Sub-Committee has not otherwise been represented and there has been no cross representation from RPAG to Life & Witness or the Stewardship Sub-Committee. Furthermore RPAG has, at least in recent years, not been active in the field of Advocacy which does not seem to be currently on the brief of any Assembly Committee or Group. This is a serious omission.

5.3 "Liaising with the Resource Sharing Task Group"

The Secretary of that group has attended meetings of RPAG but there has been no cross-representation and no apparent need to liaise. Again RPAG is not needed as either a filter or a post-box.

Areas of continuing concern

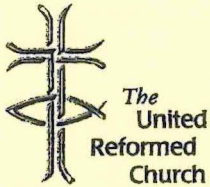
In whatever new structures are accepted for the United Reformed Church, there should be a group charged with giving an overview of strategic planning and use of resources. I doubt whether such a group can be effective if it is at best semi-detached from the central organisation of the Church in the way that RPAG has been, meeting some three times a year without the in-touch experience needed to make valid comments on operational issues. Nor can a body as large as the present Mission Council give such an overview. It has been very strange for me to be asked to give some leadership to RPAG without being a member of Mission Council to whom we report – indeed I was required to leave Mission Council when the Staffing Advisory Group presented a report on the future of the Office & Personnel Manager post even though the background paper for Mission Council noted that SAG reported through RPAG; further, I was sent an invoice for the Book of Reports to General Assembly as, although I was able to be present "in attendance", I was not a member of Assembly and so was not entitled to receive a Book of Reports. On my challenging this, the invoice was cancelled but the fact that it was quite properly sent was hardly an affirmation of RPAG's role.

Any successor group to RPAG needs to be in close contact with the issues on which it is called to advise and its Convener needs to have a right of audience.

Specific areas above that need to be addressed are:

- o The membership of the Finance Committee
- o The need for Advocacy to be included in a committee's remit and to be adequately resourced.

Julian Macro
01 December 2004



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

E

Reports and Resolutions

1. Mission Council Advisory Group

a) 'Catch the Vision': MCAG identified the need to plan how 'Catch the Vision' and other business will be conducted through the January and March Mission Councils. The Group concluded that some of January Mission Council's time should be spent discussing the content of the March meeting, as this was likely to affect the shape of General Assembly. The Moderator, the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary will bring some suggestions to the January Mission Council for consideration. The General Secretary will also give a progress report of the 'Catch the Vision' working group.

b) 'Time for Action': progress of work done by the small appointed group set up by the October 04 Mission Council is such that the statement ('charter') and accompanying material will be presented for approval at the March Council.

c) Risk Management and governance: MCAG, as charity trustee of the United Reformed Church is reviewing its risk management strategy. The Revd Michael Davies is helping the trustees monitor and manage risk within the Assembly operation. All Assembly committee conveners and secretaries have been consulted and are being asked to respond by 31st January 2005.

There is a continuing discussion about the role of Charity trustees, to fulfil current legal requirements. It is envisaged that the 'Catch the Vision' process will consider more carefully the trustee structure of the Church. In the meantime, MCAG will continue to act as the Church's trustees: agendas and minutes of meetings shall be sent to the legal advisor as a matter of course; and the secretary and legal adviser will consult before each meeting to determine whether the agenda required the latter's attendance.

d) Personalia:

Moderator -elect: The Revd Dr David Peel has recently undergone surgery. It is suggested that the Moderator should convey the greetings of Mission Council to Dr Peel, and prayers that he soon be restored to full health and strength.

Dr Andrew Bradstock has been appointed as Director of the Christian Socialist Movement, and has resigned as Secretary for Church and Society. Andrew will complete his service in his present post by the end of February 2005.

Mrs Sheila Andrews (Personal Assistant to the General Secretary) is on a period of extended sick leave. During her absence, Miss Krystyna Bilogan (PA to the Deputy General Secretary) is acting as P.A. to both the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary.

2. Nominations Committee

The following have accepted an invitation to serve:

Conveners elect 2005 (in office 2006/10):

Church and Society:	Mr Simon Loveitt
Equal Opportunities:	Ms Morag McLintock
Life and Witness:	The Revd Peter Ball
Ministries:	The Revd Peter Poulter
Nominations:	The Revd Malcolm Hanson
Youth and Children's Work:	The Revd Neil Thorogood

Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators

M/O	The Revd Craig Bowman, The Revd Raymond Singh, The Revd Cecil White
F/O	The Revd Mary Buchanan, The Revd Lesley Charlton, The Revd Dr Susan Durber, The Revd Nanette Lewis-Head
M/L	Dr Graham Campling, Mr Alun Jones, Mr John Lumsden, Mr Okeke Azu Okeke, Mr Simon Rowntree, Mr Ron Todd,
F/L	Mrs Sally Abbott, Mrs Helen Brown, Dr Jean Silvan Evans, Mrs Janet Gray, Mrs Irene Wren

3. Synod of Wales

Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

Mission Council is asked, on behalf of General Assembly, to endorse the Synod of Wales' approval of the Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales (30th March 2004).

The five covenanted partner Churches are invited to reaffirm their commitment to one other and adopt a six-year programme which will further develop their joint work throughout Wales.

The Declaration:

We reaffirm our commitment to journeying together in covenant relationship.

In the consultation process of 2003-4 we have heard and understood each other better.

We remain committed to the goal of the journey being the visible unity of the Church in the way that Christ wills.

As covenanted partners, within the family of CYTUN. We commit ourselves during the six-year period 2005-2011 to:

- A fuller sharing in one another's ministries, making the best possible use of the provisions of each church;
- Always undertaking new work jointly except where in conscience we must do so separately;
- Pooling resources in order to provide a united witness to Wales;
and
- Listening to what the nation is saying to the Church.

Resolution: Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorses the decision of the Synod of Wales to approve the text of the Declaration from the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales.

For Information:

The Windermere Centre

Members of Mission Council may recall that Resolution 26 [The Windermere Centre Appeal] was withdrawn from the business of the 2004 General Assembly so that various Trust matters could be resolved. Discussions are ongoing , and it is hoped that a fuller report will be available for the March Mission Council.

David Cornick
General Secretary

Jan 05 MC
PAPERS

Cc: David Cornick
Subject: RE: Mission Council Paper E

Dear James

Your point is understood. My background papers on the Synod of Wales' resolution indicate that a formal re-launch of the Covenant is planned in Wales on 29th May 2005. I have also been told (but can't find any written evidence to back this up) that all the other denominations involved have already formally authorised the declaration, and that the URC is the only one which has not. The original Declaration was agreed by ENFYS on 30th March 2004 - so there does seem to be some urgency to complete the ratification process before our 2005 Assembly. I would guess the reason last year's General Assembly did not touch it was because the synod of Wales should first formally express its support. This was done on 9th October.

With good wishes

Ray

From: James Breslin [mailto:breslin@newcastleurc.freereserve.co.uk]
Sent: 17 January 2005 10:16
To: David Cornick; Ray Adams
Subject: Mission Council Paper E

David/Ray,

I would have liked to have spoken to you about the resolution from the Synod of Wales coming to this Mission Council. While I have no problems with the content of the Resolution I do have to ask if this is really Mission Council business. The rule about Mission Council acting on behalf of the Assembly states that General Assembly appoints "a Mission Council with power to act in its name *in matters of urgency* between meetings of the General Assembly" (My italics)

I therefore have to ask. Where is the urgency in this matter? I will try and speak to you this afternoon.
James

Jan 05 MC ~~Adams~~
Papers



www.urcwales.org.uk

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
NATIONAL SYNOD OF WALES
EGLWYS DDIWYGIEDIG UNEDIG
SYNOD CENEDLAETHOL CYMRU

Synod Office
Minster Road, Roath, Cardiff. CF23 5AS
☎ 029 2019 5728 & 029 2019 5729 ✉ admin@urcwales.org.uk

Revd. Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary
United Reformed Church
86 Tavistock Place
LONDON
WC1H 9RT

12 October 2004

Dear Ray

The United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales meeting at Rhayader on the 9th October approved a Resolution affirming the Declaration of the Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales to work together within the ageist of CYTUN. I include a copy of the Resolution and the Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches to which it makes reference. I hope that Mission Council meeting in January will concur with this decision.

Yours sincerely

David Fox
Synod Clerk

Moderator
Synod Clerk
Treasurer
Moderator's PA
Administrative Officer

Revd Peter C Noble
Revd David Fox
Patrick Hickey
Helen Stenson
Suzanne Cole

Re-imagining the Future
Being Church Differently

Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

At a meeting of the Commission of the Covenanting Churches in Wales held in Shrewsbury on 30th March 2004, it was agreed unanimously to invite the five Covenanted partners to reaffirm their commitment to one another, and to adopt a six year programme which would further develop their joint work together throughout Wales.

The Commission invites the partner churches to adopt the following Declaration for the next stage of their journey together.

We reaffirm our commitment to journeying together in covenant relationship.

In the consultation process of 2003-4 we have heard and understood each other better.

We remain committed to the goal of the journey being the visible unity of the Church in the way that Christ wills.

As covenanted partners, within the family of Cytûn, we commit ourselves during the six year period 2005 to 2011 to :

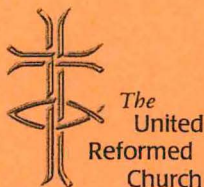
A fuller sharing of one another's ministries, making the best possible use of the provisions of each church:

Always undertaking new work jointly except where in conscience we must do so separately;

Pooling resources in order to provide a united witness to Wales; and

Listening to what the nation is saying to the Church

- 3. Synod approves the text of the Declaration from the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales held in Shrewsbury on 30th March 2004 as set out in Appendix A.**



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

F

Church and Society Committee

The National Lottery and Grade II listed buildings

General Assembly passed the following resolution in **1995**

National Lottery

Assembly urges the members and councils of the church to disassociate themselves from the Lottery:

a) by refusing to buy tickets; and

b) by declining to apply for Lottery-generated funds for church purposes.

The following paragraph was included in the Church and Society Report to General Assembly in **1997** and was unchallenged. This was therefore regarded as the de facto interpretation of the current situation:

Since the 1995 resolution, several local churches have become involved in applications for Lottery funding. Church and Society was asked by some to interpret the Assembly resolution (or to give absolution!). Our provisional response has been that, where the application is more broadly based than from a single church and where it seeks funding for projects to benefit the whole community and not merely or primarily the church and its organisations, this does not breach the spirit of what Assembly determined.

On 24 June 2004 the Moderators received a letter from the Assembly Listed Buildings Advisory Committee with an enclosure from English Heritage headed 'Repair grants for places of worship'. This enclosure included a comment to the effect that, as the funding for Grade II comes entirely from the Heritage Lottery Fund, applicants will need to be content to receive Lottery funds.

English Heritage's position, as outlined in this document, would appear to be forcing a change to the Assembly ruling about receipt of Lottery funding in the case of churches meeting in Grade II listed buildings who seek funding which would benefit 'primarily the church and its organisations'.

The Church and Society Committee was asked by the Moderators to consider this development, which it did at its meeting on 3 November 2004. Noting that the decision of English Heritage gives us little room for manoeuvre and that the original 1995 Resolution did no more than 'urge' the church to disassociate itself from the Lottery, the Church and Society Committee felt that it may be time for the Resolution to be rescinded, albeit after a protest had been lodged with English Heritage. It was, however, for General Assembly to make the final decision following advice from Mission Council.



MISSION COUNCIL
22 January 2005

G

Ministerial Discipline (Section O Process)

Procedures for Changing Section O
A report to Mission Council from the Section O Advisory Group

Summary In 1996 the General Assembly resolved to create a new disciplinary process, subject to decisions by the synods, which would take effect following further Assembly decisions in 1997. The Process has been kept under continuous review and experience of its working has led to changes being made at almost every Assembly since then. However it is now apparent that the methods originally agreed to make any changes are proving too slow and are wasteful of the time of the Assembly and the synods. This proposal suggests a way of shortening the time taken to make some changes, while maintaining the control of the Assembly over the process.

1. Present Procedure Section O is divided into two parts. Part I sets out the substantive provisions and to change any part of this requires an Assembly to agree the changes by a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass. This follows the procedures for Constitutional Amendments (see Structure paragraph 3). If this is passed then the decision is referred to synods and, provided certain conditions are met (see Structure paragraph 3 (d – f) it comes before the next Assembly and requires a simple majority to pass and take effect. **Exception:** In 2004 (Resolution 10) the Assembly ratified a decision to allow immediate changes to be made to Part I by the Mission Council when a change in the law of the land required this. Part 2 contains the Rules of Procedure and these may be changed by decision of one General Assembly.

2. In practice this can mean that when the Mission Council's Advisory Group on Section O realises from something arising in a particular case, that a change is required affecting Part I, and most changes affect both Parts, it can take as much as two years before the change can be made.

3. Proposal A The Advisory Group has identified six paragraphs in Part I which it recommends ought to remain subject to the two year procedure. These are: 1 (explaining that this is a special process dedicated to ministerial discipline and independent of other church procedures); 2 (stating that the Process is under the jurisdiction of the Assembly and that decisions are final and binding); 8 (validating the procedural rules contained in Part II); 9 (relating Section O to the Basis, Schedule E); 11 (referring to an essential element, the Appeals procedure) and 21 (stating the constitutional position governing Part I as explained in Paragraph 1 above). These should be the sole paragraphs retained in Part I and the rest (apart from 5 and 19 which can be dispensed with) can be transferred to Part II. (See Appendix)

4. Proposal B To accommodate Proposal A, further minor changes of detail may also be required.

5. Proposal C Mission Council should also be aware that in the event of a decision to recommend a quite separate Unfitness Procedure, there are likely to be other changes, possibly to both Parts I and II.

6. Part II No change in the procedure to alter Part II is proposed.

APPENDIX

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20.	Move to Part II, Para. H.5
21.	Keep as Part I, Para. 6. In sub-para. 2, the reference to 'changes to Part I' should be replaced by 'changes to any part of Section O'.

November 2004



MISSION COUNCIL 22 January 2005

H

Report of the Assembly Moderator's visit to three partner churches in the U.S.A.

(25 October - 12 November 2004)

Introduction

The visit was made to the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples). I was accompanied by my husband, Kees, who kept a photographic record in addition to taking a full part in meetings, discussions and services. We visited the three national offices in Louisville, Kentucky (PCUSA), in Indianapolis (the Disciples), and in Cleveland, Ohio (UCC), where we met with senior staff members working in many different areas. Their names and contact addresses are on a separate sheet with comments on potentially useful communication.

Our theme

The visit had a very ambitious theme: *The role of the US and the UK in the world today and the response of the churches*. It was not easy to find opportunities to address the theme directly. Although we were welcomed most warmly and hosted most generously, I was repeatedly asked why we had come. I gradually began to formulate a response which could be seen as a more modest version of the theme. I suggested that when the churches of the US or the UK talked about international partners, global partners, they usually meant those churches of the South who were the fruit of earlier missions. Those relationships were very important but economically unequal. It was also important for churches like ours in the wealthy North, situated in democratic countries with much culture and history in common, to both support and challenge each other.

The PCUSA Peacemaking Programme

While staying at the Louisville Theological Seminary we were able to participate in a teach-in entitled *To live peace in our culture of violence* and where we were asked to be on the panel of a discussion on how others see the US today. We also, by chance, met with the members of the PCUSA Peacemakers Programme – 13 people from international partners who had spent a month travelling round presbyteries telling about their peacemaking efforts in their own countries. One of them, Revd Paul Neshwange from Zimbabwe, had been part of the URC hosting group in Zimbabwe last April and was going on from the US to be part of the return visit to the URC. Another, Labib Nasr from Jerusalem, greeted me enthusiastically because his mother, Abla Nasr, was currently visiting the URC as part of the PARC delegation. We are, indeed, a world church family.

The presidential election and the churches

We were there for the presidential election and it was clear that the leadership of all our partner churches was almost uniformly opposed to the re-election of President Bush. The same was true when, at the end of our stay, we attended the annual meeting of the National Council of the Churches of Christ (equivalent to CTBI). The concern of the local pastors we met was how to pastor their divided (sometimes bitterly divided) congregations. A related concern locally was how to compete with the fast growing mega-churches, and with the vocal Christian Right. Clifton Kirkpatrick, the PCUSA Stated Clerk (equivalent to our General Secretary) saw the question of how to deal with false Christianity as their challenge, rather than the secularism which he presumed was our challenge.

Israel/Palestine and the churches

Israel/Palestine was a hot issue in the PCUSA because their General Assembly had decided to dis-invest from those US companies which were supplying Israeli companies involved in building the wall or bull-dozing Palestinian homes. There had been an outcry both from the Jewish community (which is strong in the US) and from leading PCUSA members, including congressmen. The Presbyterians and the Jews have enjoyed a very close and fruitful relationship which David Wasserman, the General Presbyter of Grace Presbytery, explained to us in the following terms. Presbyterians had strongly supported the creation of Israel as a matter of justice, many of their peers in those days being holocaust survivors. During the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, Presbyterians, Jews and Blacks struggled together for justice. Leaders in both communities tend to have a similar intellectual, rational approach to religion. At the 'teach-in' in Louisville we heard a local pastor tell of his congregation's close relations with the synagogue - shared building, shared discussion groups, even inviting the rabbi to preach on Good Friday because it had historically so often been the day for violent anti-semitism. This relationship was now severely tested by the PCUSA's dis-investment decision. But the decision represents a growing concern, at least among the church leadership, both for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Christians. This is linked to a conviction that concern for world peace, including peace in Iraq, finds its focus in what happens in Israel/Palestine.

Peter Makari, the Middle East and Europe Executive Secretary of Global Ministries (the Disciples and UCC united body for all their international partnerships and mission) expressed a great desire for the UK and the US churches to work together on the Middle East. Although this was not raised directly with Clifton Kirkpatrick, he had greatly valued the time our Prime Minister had given to representatives of the US and the UK churches just before the Iraq War – when his own government would not meet them. Will Browne, the PCUSA associate director of the Board of World Wide Ministries was eager to know about URC support for the Palestinian Christians. Later in the visit, I suggested to Peter Makari that co-operation between the Reformed churches in Britain and Ireland and the PCUSA, UCC and Disciples could be very fruitful both in co-ordinating our support for the Palestinian Christians and all people in that land, and in supporting each other in our peace-making efforts in relation to the governments involved. A shared approach would be harder but perhaps more nuanced. The US churches bring an understanding of and sympathy with the Jews and even with the Israelis which few in our churches have. We need to hear that voice too. I met with enthusiasm for such an approach from David Wasserman from Grace Presbytery (whose father was Jewish) and from Revd Dr Fahed Abu-Akel, a former Moderator of the PCUSA and a Palestinian with family still living in Nazareth, who has started trying to build up a network of support for Palestine in the PCUSA churches. Peter Makari will be in London in December attending the CTBI Middle East Forum and the International Affairs Group with Philip Woods and taking these discussions further. Peter also has good contacts with the Church of Scotland.

The war in Iraq

We did not have many conversations directly about the war in Iraq. We gathered that many in our partner churches were against the war, some having demonstrated. However, local pastors felt the tension in pastoring families who had sons and daughters in Iraq. At the NCCC meeting we met a woman naval chaplain, from the Reformed Church of America, who was very clear that whatever our views on the rightness of wrongness of the war, we were now in it and must act responsibly in this present situation, for example by caring for the troops and helping them to carry out their duties as honourably as possible. However, shortly before 11 September 2001, she herself had given a marine who became a conscientious objector on board ship to the Gulf and who was confined in solitary for 3 months books supporting his position in order to help him to think it all through. Those at the NCCC meeting with family members or friends or church members serving in Iraq were asked to stand – and almost half the gathering stood. We heard from an elderly woman, a highly-respected peace

activist (and had it confirmed by a Roman Catholic leader) that for the last 3 years it has been legal for the military to have access to the files of school children from 16 upwards for recruiting purposes. They tend to target the poorer schools in areas where unemployment is high.

Inter-faith Relations

Following September 11th 2001 there was an increase in interest in understanding Islam and Peter Makari of the UCC and the Disciples had many requests for resources and help. Since the start of the Iraq War he has had virtually none. We found that inter-faith relations often meant Christian – Jewish relations. In St Louis it seemed to mean Protestant – Catholic – Jewish – Muslim – Bahai. The PCUSA Board of World Wide Ministries has a programme by which they bring one of their missionaries home with one of his or her Muslim friends and they tour local churches for a month together. However, Will Browne of the PCUSA, was very impressed by our local initiatives, for example through our CNI mission partner's work in Luton or the inter-faith Resources Centre in Nelson. The Peace Resource Centre in Dallas does not belong to any church and seems to do similar work. I had the impression that the majority of immigrants to the US are Christian, and mainly come from Central and South America and the Caribbean. However, of those who are granted asylum by interview in their home country (mainly Africans) the majority are Muslim.

Shrinking and growing

Our three partner churches are, of course, much larger than we are. The PCUSA is the largest, then the UCC and then the Disciples. In all three the ministers are paid by the local church and the escalating costs of the minister's (and his family's) health insurance are an increasing burden. The US stock market is not bringing in the dividends it used to and we saw empty offices in the Disciples' national office and were told of the pain of redundancies in the UCC national office. There is much talk of decline among the main-stream churches while the Southern Baptists and the independent mega-churches thrive. There is a great concern with growth and church planting: it is assumed that is what the church should be about. But they are also clear that there needs to be some church closing in order to release resources and energy for church planting in new places. The new immigrant churches, mainly but not only Hispanic, which are choosing to join the mainstream churches are seen as an important growth area but it will be a long time before the wider church begins to feel their influence or receive their gifts, spiritual or material. We met a delightful free-lance consultant on church planting, who hoped to move from part-time to full-time employment through churches such as our partner churches.

'God is still speaking'

The UCC's response to decline and the challenge both of the Christian Right and the growing number of those who have given up on the Church has been to employ a sympathetic advertising agency to help them identify who they are and how they should be promoting themselves. This is a brave but expensive move, but it has caught the imagination (and the money) of a third of their churches already. They started from the great assertion of John Robinson in 1620 "God has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word." They put it in a modern form "Never put a period where God has put a comma." Their slogan is "God is still speaking." They will have a 30 second advert on TV during December and many other resources. Their emphasis is on inclusivity – their advertisement ends with "Jesus never turned anyone away." We felt at home with this approach. For the last 30 years the UCC has officially agreed to the ordination of gay and lesbian people, and over the past 20 years one third of its congregations have declared themselves "open and affirming." The PCUSA is currently sharply divided over this issue, partly but not only because a General Assembly decision in a Presbyterian church is more significant than in a Congregational one.

The multi-ethnic church

The US is much more multi-ethnic than the UK. The African-American population alone makes up 10% of the population. The overwhelming of the Native American people, the terrible legacy of slavery and the bitter divisions of the Civil War have made our three partners very aware of the importance not only of integration but of honouring the gifts and the voice of the minority. The Disciples are actually a 40 year old union of a black church and a white church and they are the most intentional in their determination to hear the African American and also the Pacific Asian and Hispanic voices. Not only are many of the central staff from these minorities but they have recently decided to increase the proportion from 20% to 30% on all their boards. At the NCCC both the African American Churches and the minority ethnic members from the majority white churches played a very significant leadership role. That may be part of the reason why that gathering had so much more life, imagination, energy and sheer good humour than many of such ecumenical gatherings here. We have much to learn in this respect.

Framingham UCC, near Boston, Mass.

We spent the two weekends in local churches. The first was spent in a large (by our standards – 450 members) UCC church in Framingham, near Boston where we met many people informally and formally, were given a tour of the area to better understand the social context, and shared in Sunday worship. Their commitment to the poor in their (wealthy) town was impressive – in terms of food for the hungry, clothes for the needy, doing up houses for the homeless, and raising money for all of these. I became very aware that we are blessed with a welfare state and that our approach to social need, as encapsulated in 'Assets for Life,' is very different. Their senior minister ran an annual 8 week course on the Christian faith: he felt it vital for the people to be better grounded in the faith and was also very clear that people (at least those people!) wanted to be stretched and not have the faith 'dumbed down'. Many expressed their appreciation of the course. They had newly inducted a young associate minister who was openly gay. Although some expressed concern about their age profile, and there were many active retired people in evidence, it seemed to us there were many men and women of working age at the heart of the church's life, and also many children.

Grace Presbytery, Texas.

The second was spent in Grace Presbytery in Texas where we visited four churches and the presbytery office in Dallas. In one church we met a keen group of peace activists whose commitment ranged from being a local councillor to going on demonstrations against profiteering from the Iraq war, from inter-faith relations to care for Central and South American victims of torture. We worshipped on Saturday evening in a new church plant in a house, on Sunday morning in a thriving, lively church which was planted 18 years ago, and on Sunday afternoon with an East African congregation which belongs to the presbytery and meets in the 'little' chapel of the richest church in the presbytery, Highland Park, Dallas which has 4,000 members and 6 ministers. The presbytery has 185 churches of which 27 are 'racial ethnic congregations', 42 have less than 50 members and nearly one third of the total membership is in just seven churches. We met with the presbytery staff and had such a sense of energy and purpose and pastoral care, perhaps especially in the wide-ranging youth work.

Conclusion

The US churches are used to partnerships in which they are the helpers and givers and they are very generous. I suspect we are the same which is why we don't find the CWM approach very easy, and why our European partnerships also do not get huge support. I think we need church-to-church relationships where we face similar social and political issues, similar theological and ecclesiological issues, and can debate, challenge, encourage one another.

A suggestion

I would like to suggest a synod to presbytery relationship, for example between the Grace Presbytery and perhaps the Thames North Synod. When I suggested this to the Grace Presbytery staff meeting, I listed some of the issues we have in common as:-

- the care of and the closing of ageing and small churches (David Wasserman's wife, as interim minister, had worked for 18 months with such a church who reached the point of rejoicing and having some say in the kind of new life the money from their building would be making possible)
- multi-cultural and single ethnic congregations and their welcome into the denomination (the Grace Presbytery has a step-by-step guide for how such a congregation becomes fully part of the PCUSA)
- Christian – Muslim relations, and Christian –Jewish relations (and, in our setting, many other faiths).
- Planting new churches in new housing areas
- Studying the Bible and talking about our faith together, especially with those in our churches who seem to have a different theological perspective. (neither we nor they are very good at this)

They responded cautiously. One suggested electronic contact: another that a congregation – congregation link would be better: another said it should be considered first in the national office: another that their model of youth work might help us a great deal.

But the response which gathered most enthusiasm was the idea that ministers, using their CME grants, should pay a group visit to the other church, with particular things, perhaps from the above list, to study and share.

We were greatly privileged to have this rich and varied experience and thank the United Reformed Church for the opportunity.

Sheila and Kees Maxey.

Catch the vision...

An update for the January 2005 Mission Council

Where are we heading?

- Towards new ways of being church
- Towards deeper engagement in mission
- Towards a new spirituality for the 21st century
- Towards a slimmer, more rigorous organisation
- Towards renewed ecumenical commitment

New ways of being church....

- Moving beyond Sunday
- Re-discovering how to serve our communities
- experimenting with new ways of community
- let's cut out the 'middle(wo)man and become a direct contact church, energised, enthused and networked

Deeper engagement in mission..

- More Heineken ministry in the 'unchurched' gap
- Let's find ways of making dead bones live

A new spirituality....

- Become a 'learning church'.
- Celebrate being part of God's world-wide difference makers'
- Rejoice delightedly in our cultural and theological diversity, reflecting the rainbow God.
- Commit ourselves to create conversations and programmes that will bring this about.

A slimmer organisation...

- One level of council between Assembly and the local church
- but how many of them should there be - many or few?
- A smaller and less frequent Assembly...
- Discovering a new world of short term working groups and activist networks rather than standing committees?

And more efficient governance

- Which will allow us to meet the requirements of charity law
- get routine business done efficiently

- give space for the creative consideration of policy in mission and development
- but that might mean doing things rather differently...

Renewed ecumenical commitment...

- Challenging the churches to further local ecumenical engagement
- making sure our new boundaries make ecumenical sense
- doing as much together with the Methodist Church as we can, whilst accepting that the time is not ripe for unity talks

Next Steps

- Decide how to use the March Mission Council?
- Be clear that we can't do it all to-morrow
- Commit ourselves to the journey
- Be quietly confident in the God who leads his people from slavery to freedom



The United Reformed Church

*86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT, United Kingdom
Convener Section O Advisory Group Reverend Anthony Burnham
Secretary Section O Advisory Group Mr Hartley Oldham*

14 December 2004

Revd. W.R.P.Adams
Deputy General Secretary
United Reformed Church
86 Tavistock Place
LONDON
WC1H 9RT

Dear Ray

Proposed changes to the Section O Process

The Advisory Group has for some time considered it to be unsatisfactory that the whole of Part I is subject to the constitutional rule requiring changes passed at one Assembly to be referred back to Synods and then to come before the following Assembly for ratification. Whilst this is appropriate for the fundamental provisions which place the Process under the authority of Assembly, ensure that it operates separately from the other procedures of the Church and provide the yardstick linking the exercise of ministry to the promises given at ordination, the Group believes that, as regards most of the other paragraphs of Part I, the 'reference back' procedure simply creates complications and, most importantly, delays the implementation of necessary changes.

With this in mind the Group has prepared a paper, a copy of which I enclose, setting out major changes which it wishes to suggest, the effect of which will to move all but six of the present paragraphs out of Part I. With minor changes elsewhere two paragraphs can be removed altogether and the remainder can be relocated in Part II.

The text of the paper explains the reasoning behind the proposals and the Appendix sets out, paragraph by paragraph, how it is proposed to deal with each provision of Part I.

The Group has asked that this paper be tabled at the January meeting of Mission Council. James Breslin will introduce it. If approved, the Group will include the changes in a resolution for Assembly to consider in July.

The Group is working on other, probably substantial, changes to Section O, arising in the main from two sources, first the interaction between Section O and the proposed 'Unfitness' procedure and secondly the paper concerning Mandated Groups which I sent to you for consideration by the MCAG Monitoring Group. As we will be starting work on these in the early New Year, I will assume, unless I hear to the contrary, that the Monitoring Group has no comments or suggestions to offer on our paper.

The Group has been asked to try to complete the work in time for the March Mission Council. This will be a difficult task and I will liaise with you in late February as to whether you will need to provide time in your March Agenda, both for Section O and the Unfitness Procedure.

If we are successful in achieving this target, the aim would be to bring all the changes, including the new 'Unfitness' procedure, to Assembly in 2005.


Meanwhile, in view of the importance of the enclosed paper, our Group wishes it to 'stand alone' and to be dealt with at your January meeting.

With all best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Yours sincerely



Secretary of the Advisory Group



Copies to Revd Tony Burnham, Convener of the Group
Revd David Cornick, General Secretary
Revd James Breslin, Clerk to Assembly

The United Reformed Church

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November 2004

Ray Adams

From: Eric Chilton [ericchilton@UKonline.co.uk]
Sent: 15 January 2005 11:21
To: Ray Adams
Cc: David Cornick
Subject: Mission Council

Dear Ray

Thank you for the agenda and papers received this morning.

First of all, please give my apologies to the meeting as I will be on holiday.

Secondly, I thought you would appreciate some comments on the papers.

Paper A - a moving report on a very difficult situation. I fully support the recommendation as I feel we must be more active. Only this morning we learn of Israel making the task of the incoming President potentially even more impossible.

Papers B and D - we ought to discuss and come to a mind.

Paper C - I fully support. The 2 areas to be addressed are being followed up.

Paper E - I support the resolution.

Paper F - I believe it is time to rescind the resolution. Lottery monies are now being spread around in funding all sorts of projects. It is now almost impossible to disassociate oneself from being a beneficiary.

Furthermore in the future, if I have captured the possibilities foreseen in Catch the Vision correctly, our buildings will not be so dedicated to just worship and "church" anyway.

Eric



MISSION COUNCIL

22nd January 2005

MINUTES

Session 1

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Alistair Smeaton.

05/01 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioning those members who were present at their first Mission Council: Miss Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland); the Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland).

05/02 Attendance

There were 59 members present with 15 staff and others in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from:

The Revd Chris Vermeulen (North Western Synod); Mrs Val Morrison (Yorkshire Synod); Mrs Ann Ball (East Midlands Synod); Mrs Glenis Massey (Wessex Synod); Mr Stuart Jones (Synod of Wales); the Revd John Arthur (Synod of Scotland); the Revd Peter Noble (Synod of Wales); Mr Eric Chilton (Treasurer); Miss Fleur James (FURY Council); the Revd Julian Macro (RPAG); the Revd Dr John Parry (Inter-Faith Relations); the Revd Dr David Peel (Moderator Elect); the Revd Andrew Prasad (Racial Justice and Multi-cultural Ministry); the Revd Kathryn Price (Youth and Children's Work); Dr Brian Woodhall (Grants and Loans Group); the Revd Bill Wright (RPAG); Ms Suzanne Adofo, Mrs Karen Bulley, Miss Michele Marcano, Ms Avis Reaney, Mr Stephen Summers (Staff).

05/03 Notification of Additional Business

The Revd Lesley Charlton called for a review of the status of staff members at meetings of Mission Council. It seemed to her inappropriate that staff should be expected to attend but were not given the opportunity to speak. The Moderator said that this would be considered by the Mission Council Advisory Group.

05/04 Minutes of Mission Council 5th-7th October 2004

Minutes of the meeting of 5th-7th October were approved.

05/05 Solidarity Visit to Palestinian Christian community in Israel/Palestine (Paper A)

The Deputy General Secretary reported on the visit to Israel/Palestine by a group sent by the United Reformed Church 11th-21st October 2004. He noted that the political situation in Israel/Palestine is in a state of constant rapid change, and that the report and presentation could only draw a picture of the way things were in October 2004.

He used slides to highlight particular aspects of the four-centre visit (Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem and Qalqilya), and drew Mission Council's attention to

ways in which the United Reformed Church and its members could offer support to Palestinian Christians (Paper A, page 4).

In discussion, members commended the report, and urged that its acceptance should indicate a willingness to take it seriously and to implement its suggestions; the possibility of an ecumenical statement was raised. The Revd Philip Woods responded on behalf of the Ecumenical Committee, highlighting some of the initiatives that have taken place throughout the URC and describing the Ecumenical Committee's current thinking on this matter.

05/06 Report by the Moderator

The Moderator reported on the Israel/Palestine aspect of her visit to partner churches in the United States of America (Paper H). She spoke of the Presbyterian Church in the USA's response, and noted that attitudes and sensitivities are very different in the USA from the UK. In general there is a much closer relationship between church and synagogue in the USA; this produces obvious and significant differences of approach to the politics of Israel/Palestine.

05/07 Resource Planning Advisory Group (Paper C)

The Deputy General Secretary presented Paper C on behalf of RPAG. The paper had been produced to clarify those parts of the RPAG's remit which would be undertaken by other groups and committees following Mission Council's October 2004 decision to suspend RPAG.

Following brief discussion of the concerns raised in the paper as follows,

- Life and Witness Committee is responsible for stewardship;
- membership of Finance Committee may need to be more broadly based;
- strategic planning must be integrated into the central organisation of the church;
- the annual Book of Reports is an important document that should be circulated to all ministers and local churches.

Mission Council accepted the paper with thanks. (*see Resolution at 05/13 below*)

05/08 The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church (Papers D and B)

The Revd Richard Mortimer introduced the papers, and the Revds Elizabeth Welch and Clive Sutcliffe made a response.

Several concerns were raised:

- a Christological over-emphasis; and lack of Trinitarian emphasis;
- unbalanced use of creeds;
- the document adds nothing to discussion about structures;
- inconsistent use of tradition.

It was suggested that more needed to be done, and that if further work is to be undertaken, consultation with local churches may be appropriate.

The following questions were also asked:

- where does this leave ecumenical projects?
- where is the 'bottom line' of where the URC is?
- should there be an ecclesiology of LEP's?
- if we rely on ordained ministry, what about churches where no ministry is available?

In discussion the following was raised:

- the document does provide an outline of the URC, but perhaps needs tweaking;
- there is nothing about CRCWs;
- should we say why we ordain elders but not CRCWs?
- 7.2 seems to compartmentalise evangelism and social action;
- The paper does not recognise how much things have changed; it is God's mission that calls the church into being; this is a good reference document, but there should be another that says something more exciting about mission and the contemporary church;
- Should this statement be a summary of the Basis of Union?; should it be a statement of vision? Is it a defining document or a commentary?
- The paper in 1.3.3 draws attention to the fact that differences had not been reconciled at the time of union; the paper shows that we are still on a journey, doing our thinking as we go. There are two issues that are unclear: the whole question of eldership and the relation of ordination to eldership; and the church's practice in presidency of communion; not sure if the paper describes present practice;
- Could the committee clarify what status they would wish this document to have? There needs to be some serious discussion of discipline;
- There is very little reference to the function of church members. We should resist the temptation to become constrained by history;
- Who is this paper for? What is the essence of our church and what is the particularity of our church? If you want to point only to our distinctiveness, you will find that in the Nature Faith and Order.

The Revd Richard Mortimer thanked members for their comments. The Revd John Young (Convener - Doctrine, Prayer and Worship) sought Mission Council's guidance on the nature of the document required: whether one document is called for, or several. Mission Council asked the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee to continue its work on the document having taken account of the debate.

05/09 Declaration of the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales

The Revd Stuart Jackson moved adoption of the resolution (Paper E):

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorses the decision of the Synod of Wales to approve the text of the Declaration from the Commission of the Covenanted Churches in Wales.

The resolution was carried *nem con*.

05/10 MCAG

The Deputy General Secretary presented the report of the Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper E).

05/11 Training Review

The Revd John Humphreys reported on the training review. He noted that General Assembly had emphasised the need for training for the whole people of God. The report (when completed) would present resolutions in 6 areas:

- underlying principles;
- partnership for learning;
- consultation with partners;
- the nature of the training committee;
- affirm partnership with Anglican and Methodist Churches, noting the need for both ecumenical and denominational training;
- future use of training institutions.

The Revd Roy Lowes updated Mission Council on the ongoing implementation of the Hind Report.

05/12 Prayers

The Chaplain led Mission Council in prayers of Intercession.

Session 2

05/13 RPAG

The Deputy General Secretary moved the following resolution:

Mission Council thanks the Resource Planning Advisory Group for its work, and formally discharges it.

The Resolution was carried.

05/14 Youth and Children's Work

Mr John Brown and Mrs Rosemary Johnston reported on the work and future plans of the Youth and Children's Work Committee.

The Committee is concentrating for the current year on the theme of 'Belonging', and several initiatives based on this theme were described. 'Belonging' also the theme of the current Pilots worship pack. A number of themed events for young people would be held during the year. Members of Mission Council were urged to keep informed about the work of the Youth and Children's Work Committee, and to encourage others in local churches to do the same.

05/15 Catch the Vision

Using a *Powerpoint* presentation, the General Secretary reported on the progress of the *Catch the Vision* process. He described some of the positive changes that were taking place in local churches and spoke of the need to hear and respond to God. We are discovering new ways of being church. 'Pilots' has shown that we are not just church on Sunday; many churches are re-connecting with their communities.

He spoke about communication, and noted that every other charity and organisation with a membership communicates directly with its members. The two most successful pieces of work in the United Reformed Church, 'Pilots' and 'Commitment for Life', are activist network-based. There is a need to look at the United Reformed Church's structures and communication channels; it may be that direct communication is called for.

The world is not unsympathetic, merely uncomprehending. A church that engages with the world has to know its faith with confidence; we need to be a consciously learning church - a worldwide, and therefore many-cultured, church. A new more meaningful way of expressing our belonging and our dependence upon one another is needed, and will perhaps come out of the Synod Clerks' group, which is currently working on this matter. Work has begun to look at more efficient governance. As we move forward in pilgrimage, we will do so committed to unity.

Discussion centred round two areas - communication, and staff concerns about the future. Ideas were floated about the feasibility of direct communication with every URC member.

It was noted that Church House staff may be anxious and uncertain during this period of review.

The General Secretary responded to the discussion by outlining some of the thinking that had taken place about communication, and noting the difficulty and expense of implementing a comprehensive electronic communication network.

He assured Mission Council that staff concerns were being taken seriously and dealt with sensitively at this time of review when staff will inevitably feel vulnerable and insecure.

The Deputy General Secretary asked what would be helpful for General Assembly to know about *Catch the Vision* at this stage. The issues of new ways of being church, deeper engagement in mission and 'spirituality' and communication were suggested; might it be appropriate to have presentations on 'envisioning' at General Assembly; this would link with the agenda for the March Mission Council.

Consideration would need to be given to *how* these discussions should take place in Assembly.

05/16 Section O Advisory Group (Paper G)

The Clerk reported.

05/16 Nominations (Paper E)

The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard reported.

05/17 Church and Society (Paper F)

The Revd Martin Camroux reported on the ethical difficulties in accepting Lottery-generated funds for church purposes and noted that, in the future, all money available to churches from English Heritage will be Lottery-generated. What advice ought to be offered to local churches?

In discussion the following points were raised:

- could the church challenge the policy of English Heritage?
- we need to give clear leadership;
- there is a gambling bill before the House of Commons, and the churches have exerted some influence upon it; any comment on gambling may interfere with or weaken this element of the church's work; note also that the 1995 Assembly Resolution says 'urges' not 'requires';

The feeling of the meeting was there seemed no need at this time to alter the church's 1995 policy.

05/18 Church and Society Committee Secretary

The Revd Martin Camroux outlined the committee's intentions to cover the work of the Committee Secretary following the departure of Andrew Bradstock; there was a particular need to ensure proper involvement in the 'MakePovertyHistory' campaign especially during the first half of 2005.

The Deputy General Secretary proposed the appointment of a 'MakePovertyHistory' campaign manager on a six-month contract.

Mission Council agreed to the appointment as proposed.

05/19 Announcements

The Deputy General Secretary noted that the Theological Reflector in March would be Ms Francis Brienan, Mission Enabler to the European Region of the Council for World Mission.

05/20 Reflections on the Church in Society

Dr Andrew Bradstock, outgoing Secretary of the Church and Society Committee, reflected on his 4½ years in post. He thanked Wendy Cooper, Martin Camroux, and Church House colleagues for their support and friendship.

Managing the work and resourcing the church had been the main challenges. The workload was unpredictable and heavy; there may be a lack of ownership of Church and Society among local churches and Synods.

There were serious problems about the committee; some of this was to do with structures, but the main criterion for membership on Church and Society was an interest in the committee's work; erratic attendance was also a problem.

There had been highlights: the Jobcentre survey; the End of Life pack; 'Assets for Life'; the 'hotline' as a means of communication; Commitment for Life; the Jubilee Debt Campaign; Trade Justice; MakePovertyHistory.

Dr Bradstock reminded Mission Council of Clare Short's challenge to Assembly in Portsmouth, 'Don't just do more of what you are doing.' Should concern for social justice come before concern about the institution and structures of the Church?

There were opportunities for churches to make a difference to society. Churches can influence national policy. The challenge for all of us is to keep the vision of the reign of God ahead of us .

Mission Council received Dr Bradstock's reflections warmly, and wished him well in his new post.

05/21 Moderator's Visit to the USA (Paper H)

The Moderator highlighted points of particular interest:

- adult Sunday Schools;
- Interim Ministers, who serve for up to two years in various circumstances;
- 'up-front' discussion; in the UK, we don't proclaim our political allegiances - but is our apathy any better; church may have an 'issues' group to bring rival politics together;
- energy, a sense of 'can do'

There are things that churches in the US might learn from the UK

- the welfare state
- our help for others often takes the form of empowerment/enabling
- access to government
- equality of partnership, mutual giving and receiving (CWM etc)
- the URC's central payroll

05/22 Close

The Moderator invited Mrs Jenny Carpenter to convey Mission Council's thanks to the Arthur Rank Centre for providing the venue and thanked the churches in Kenilworth and Leamington Spa for providing tea and coffee.

The Chaplain led worship and the meeting closed with the Blessing at 16.30.



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

From The Minister of State

24 January 2005

The Revd Dr David Cornick
General Secretary
The United Reformed Church
86 Tavistock Place
London
WC1H 9RT

26 JAN 2005

M.C. file
Jan 2005

Our reference: 5558

Dear Revd Dr. Cornick,

Thank you for your letter of 17 December to the Prime Minister about the situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories. I am replying as Minister responsible for our relations with the Middle East at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I share your concern about settlement activity and the impact of the barrier. We are aware of the particular problems facing the community of Jayyous. Our staff in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv are monitoring the situation in Jayyous and other villages and towns on the barrier's route. We deplore the demolition and confiscation of Palestinian land associated with the construction of the barrier, which is unlawful and creates a physical obstacle to the two-state solution. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and I have repeatedly expressed our concerns about the impact of the barrier and settlements with Israeli Ministers.

A solution to this conflict is crucial both for Israelis and Palestinians, and for broader prospects for long-term peace in the region. The obstacles to progress are clear for all to see. However, I believe we now have an opportunity to push forward. Several factors contribute to this: the election of Abu Mazen on 9 January as Palestinian president, Israel's disengagement plan, and President Bush's explicit commitment to use America's political capital to achieve progress.

On 22 December the Prime Minister visited the region and had positive meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. He found a real recognition on both sides that they share responsibility for progress and an appreciation for the UK's efforts to assist the peace process. During joint press conferences with Prime Minister Sharon and Abu Mazen, the Prime Minister reiterated the five steps which the Prime Minister and President Bush had set out in Washington on 11-12 November. These steps outline what is needed to inject new momentum into the peace process. They include support for Palestinian Presidential elections and for improving Palestinian infrastructure, support for Prime Minister Sharon's disengagement plan, and work towards negotiations on a final settlement for a two-state solution in the context of the Roadmap.



We welcome the election of Abu Mazen as the new Palestinian leader through a well run democratic process. The next step is to build up Palestinian institutions to prepare for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and part of the northern West Bank, to provide infrastructure to underpin a future viable Palestinian State, and to build confidence. This is why the Prime Minister announced on 22 December plans to hold a meeting in London in March, to help to strengthen the Palestinian Authority's political, economic and security infrastructure. As the Prime Minister said at the time, the purpose of the meeting is to ensure that "...we have in place a proper and viable plan in order to make sure that disengagement can indeed then lead back into the Roadmap."

The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and I believe that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority can overcome the current difficulties, implement the Roadmap and realise the vision of a two-state solution. I welcome the renewed sense of hope that we can now move forward. Working to achieve this will continue to be one of the highest foreign policy priorities for this government.

*Yours sincerely,
Elizabeth Symons*

Baroness Symons

Janos

Eccles.

MC 050

papers file

Richard Mortimer

From: Elizabeth Welch [moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk]
Sent: 21 December 2004 09:58
To: Richard Mortimer; Richard Mortimer (home)
Subject: Ecclesiology Paper - Mission Council



04-12-Ecclesiology
Paper.doc (...)

Dear Richard,

Thanks for your email about the ecclesiology paper. This paper was in fact next in my list of things to work on! I'm attaching some comments (only a few out of the many I could have made!) as outlined to you when we met in your office.

I'd be happy to make a response at Mission Council. However, I do think that we work in an interesting way in the United Reformed Church when a document that is critical to our self-understanding is given half an hour on an agenda and three speakers a total of 8 minutes altogether! I think that this illustrates for me the way in which we view certain aspects of theology as a kind of minority special interest.

Could you clarify for me the aim of the discussion at Mission Council - e.g. is it part of a re-writing process? is it to send the paper on its way elsewhere for further re-writing? will it come back again to Mission Council for further discussion? I think that I want to say that I'm not in favour of this paper in its present form going to General Assembly - so you may wish to re-consider asking me to speak!

If you want to continue inviting me to speak, I think in the approximately 2 minutes I would have to speak, I would want to say something about why ecclesiology is important for the United Reformed Church and why we should give more time and attention to this area. Could you let me know if I should speak for less than two minutes - I'm assuming you will speak for slightly longer as the person introducing the paper.

By the way, I am aware that I feel in a minority both in taking the interest in ecclesiology I do and also in the way I think about ecclesiology. But I do so out of a conviction that if we don't do further work on this area, across the whole church, we will continue to struggle with questions of our identity and purpose, and at the end of the day not have a clear sense of direction about where God is leading us at present.

Revd Elizabeth A Welch
Moderator, URC West Midlands Synod

ECCLESIOLOGY PAPER
Comments from Elizabeth Welch
December 2004

I think that this paper is an important contribution to the discussion about United Reformed Church identity and purpose at the beginning of the third millennium.

However it does raise for me certain aspects of the way we think about the nature of the church.

I would welcome an introduction which outlines why we're undertaking this exercise at this particular time, together with a note of those who've been involved in the preparation of the document thus far, and the aim of the document as a whole.

I'm interested in the use of the four characteristics of the church (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) as the basis for definition of the nature of the church. I think it would be helpful to explain why these are being used as the starting point – presumably because of a desire for an ecumenical starting point? I was also interested to see the imbalance in the amount of unpacking given to these four marks – several sections on the first one, and then brief summaries on the next three. While this might illustrate the importance that the United Reformed Church gives to unity above all else, it feels like it sits lightly to other aspects e.g. mission (in the brevity of the section on being apostolic) (was thought given to different starting points for ecclesiology? E.g. that the church is instituted by Christ, constituted by the Spirit and a foretaste of the Kingdom or other formulations that have historically been developed?)

The document helpfully reflects the Basis of Union. However, in doing so, it also reflects the different age in which the Basis of Union was written – and thus has a stronger Christological rather than Trinitarian stance. E.g 1.1 'the oneness of the Church is rooted in the sole Lordship of Christ', rather than a line of thought that begins with the unity of the church springing out of the relational nature of the Holy Trinity.

Intertwined throughout the document are comments relating to four different areas: theology, history, practice, current issues and the structure of the United Reformed Church. It would be helpful if these areas could be tackled more distinctly, in order to have more of a feel of what the immediate issues of the moment are and what the underlying theological directions of the church are. It would also be helpful to have more cross-referencing to ecumenical documents so that we can see where we are in relation to other discussions about the nature of the church.

The following are illustrations of some of these points:

1.2.1 the document moves here from ecclesiology to the implementation and consequences of ecclesiology – I would find it helpful if the consequences are drawn out later on in the document after the theological argument has been made

1.3 'no single pattern of Church life was taken to be normative.' I don't think that this statement is quite as straightforward as this. I think that there is a limited diversity to our patterns of church life e.g. Elders and church meetings form the core of our life and seem to be normative.

Most of 1.2 – 1.7 contains a mixture of ecclesiology and history and practice. I think that the ecclesiology could helpfully be strengthened and the history and practice be more clearly spelt out as the outworking of our ecclesiology.

There are some interesting points with regard to ecumenical partners e.g. 1.3.5: 'the structures of all partners in ecumenical dialogue will then be equally open to reform and renewal'. I think we

can express hopes for what we expect from ecumenical dialogue. I'm not so persuaded that we can express these as categorical imperatives laid upon our partners – to do so already forecloses the dialogue.

1.4 This is undoubtedly true, but in describing steps towards union, I'm not sure it's part of a description of the nature of the church. I think that by making the points about doctrine, worship service and mission as part of a section on steps towards union, the fundamental connection between the nature of the church and doctrine, worship, service and mission is reduced. A whole variety of different kinds of points are then being made, without a sufficient foundation e.g.

- is worship foundational to the being of the church?
- 1.4.2 mentions the divisions at the Eucharist – this isn't part of the nature of the United Reformed Church, but a comment on the practice of other traditions. It seems unhelpful to have critical comments about partners mixed in with our own self-understanding
- 1.4.4.2 it would be helpful to have a further explication of the role of the grace of God, the way in which it relates to worship, and the way it is effective through Jesus Christ
- 1.4.3.1 This section draws together desire and reality. If desire and reality are seen as continually intertwined and part of the way in which we understand the nature of the church, it would be helpful to spell out the interplay between the two as part of the basic hermeneutic of this paper

1.5 It would be helpful to outline the ways in which we understand the Holy Spirit to be at work, rather than just putting in a one line quote

1.6 It would be helpful to make clear that this is a different section on unity and diversity. This is a critical area in front of the church and it would be helpful to have a further outline of the ways in which both unity and diversity are fundamental to the nature of the church (flowing out of the life of the Holy Trinity, who mirror unity in diversity in a relationship of love).

At present this paragraph describes the natural diversity of the United Reformed Church without giving sufficient attention either to the bonds of unity or the grounds for diversity.

THE CHURCH IS HOLY

I would find it helpful here to have some more work done on the grounding of the holy people of God in the life of the Holy Spirit, as well as focussing on the relationship with Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC

I find it interesting that here no mention is made of the various partnerships in which we share internationally or to the catholicity of understanding of the Gospel and the way in which we interpret this in the United Reformed Church.

4.1 I think that the way we understand apostolic succession is one of the key points of difference between us and other traditions of the church. It would be helpful to enlarge upon our particular understanding of the transmission of the Gospel from one generation to the next, which I take to be through the councils of the church, rather than through particular individuals.

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH

I'm interested that the 'marks of the church' include paragraphs on the structures of the church. I think that there is a debate to be had about the marks of the church and their relationship to the structures, especially as to whether any particular structures are normative or incidental and can be changed. It seems to me that e.g. the marks of the church in scripture and the sacraments are unchanging and are shared with ecumenical partners (to a greater or lesser extent) while the structures of the church are changing and manifest in a variety of ways. This section includes

material which is about the way we currently organise ourselves and could helpfully be put in a separate section.

THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

I'm interested that this section comes at the end. It seems to me that one of the key issues in front of the church is the way in which we understand the nature of the church to include mission, rather than mission being something which the church does (or does not do, depending on local choice and circumstance)

The definition of mission quoted in 7 highlights a particular aspect of mission – corporate and international. It seems to me that the starting point for our thinking about mission is that we are God's sent people, sharing in God's outflowing love for all people, personally and in communities, large and small.

As I started by saying, I would rather see a separation out of 4 strands:

- our theological understanding of the church,
- our particular history and the way that has developed insights from and into our theological understanding,
- practice – what we do and why we do it
- the present way we're structured and how this has arisen from our history and theology,
- the issues that we need to work on today.

I feel that we have a valuable contribution to make, both in our own self-understanding in order to shape our particular witness, and in the ecumenical contribution we can make to the life of the church in these islands. I welcome this paper, but look for its further development.