



MISSION COUNCIL
23 - 25 March 2001

MINUTES

FRIDAY 23RD MARCH 2001

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Paul Bedford. This included a Bible study led by the Moderator, the Revd Bill Mahood.

01/ 16 Attendance

There were 68 members present with 20 staff and others in attendance. Apologies for absence were received from the Revd John Waller (Deputy General Secretary), the Revd Arnold Harrison (Yorkshire Synod), the Revd Peter Poulter (Northern Synod), Mrs Roberta Wood (Northern Synod), the Revd Kristin Ofstad (Wales Synod), the Revd Dawn Mather (Southern Synod), Mrs Christine Meekison (Southern Synod), the Revd Roy Lowes (South Western Synod), Stephen Summers (CRCW Development Worker), the Revd John Arthur (Synod of Scotland), Ms Lucy Hartwell (FURY Council), the Revd Victor Ridgewell (Eastern Synod), the Revd David Lawrence (Reform), Dr Andrew Bradstock (Church and Society), Ms Leslie Anne Di Marco (Youth Work), Mr Hilary Gunn (Office & Personnel Manager), the Revd Christine Craven (Ministries) and Mrs Barbara Hedgecock (Minute Secretary).

01/ 17 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone, mentioning in particular Mr John Seager (deputising for the Revd Arnold Harrison, Yorkshire Synod), the Revd Peter Rand (deputising for the Revd Peter Poulter, Northern Synod), Mrs Susan Rand (deputising for Mrs Roberta Wood, Northern Synod), Mrs Jean Sylvan Evans (deputising for the Revd Kristin Ofstad, Wales Synod), the Revd Roz Harrison (deputising for the Revd Roy Lowes, South Western Synod), Miss Catriona Smith (Synod of Scotland), the Revd John Reardon (convener of the Edmonton Commission and present for Friday only), the Revd Brenda Stephenson (task group on the grouping of churches and present for Friday only), the Revd Angus Duncan (Grants and Loans Group), Mrs Erica Young (Resource Planning Advisory Group), the Revd Flora Winfield (Chaplain to Moderator-elect) and Fr. Bernard Longley (Theological Reflector).

01/ 18 Minutes of Mission Council 20th January 2001

The Clerk presented the minutes of the meeting of 20th January 2001, with the addition of the following paragraph (the existing paragraph 01/14 to be renumbered as 01/15):

01/ 14 Youth and Children's Work

The Revd Derek Lindfield, Convener, reported that the committee had decided to conduct a review of all youth and children's work, including the work of the Youth and Children's Work Committee, its officers and Yardley Hastings. The committee was co-operating with the Training Committee and had been invited to include the Youth and Children's Work Trainers in the review. The membership of the review team was yet to be determined. It would report to the Youth and Children's Work Committee who would in turn report to Mission Council, with a view to bringing resolutions as appropriate to the General Assembly.

In response to questions, Mr Lindfield said that it was hoped that a report would be received within one year, although it might be an interim report, and that the Department of Education and Employment would be consulted in relation to the Social Exclusion Project.

With this addition the minutes were approved and signed.

01/19 Minute Secretary

Mission Council appointed the Revd Ken Forbes as Minute Secretary for the meeting.

01/20 Matters Arising

00/56 Review of the post of Deputy General Secretary (Paper C)

The Revd Graham Cook presented the report of the Review Group, asking Mission Council to note that the closing date for nominations would be the end of July, not August as in the paper. He outlined the broad responsibilities of the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, and explained the proposed appointment process. It was further noted that the group to be appointed to accept the nominations and interview was a nominating not an appointing group. After questions and clarifications, the Revd Elizabeth Welch outlined a proposed calendar of meetings for the Nominating Group as follows: 12th or 24th September; 19th November for interviews.

00/61 Commission on Edmonton secession petition (Paper I)

The convener of the Commission, the Revd John Reardon, reported. He explained the current situation in the church and advised resistance to the petition. Mission Council accepted the report and its recommendations and would therefore advise the General Assembly to reject the petition from the Edmonton church.

01/11 Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) membership

The General Secretary advised Mission Council that Mr Roger Pickering had accepted appointment to RPAG for a four year period to 2005.

01/14 Review of Youth and Children's Work

The Rev Derek Lindfield, Convener of the Youth and Children's Work Committee, reported on the progress of the review. The following had agreed to serve on the review group:

the Revd Elizabeth Caswell (who would convene the group), Mr Graham Stacy (Treasurer), Mr John Marshall (Secretary, FURY Council), the Revd Kathryn Price (Youth and Children's Work Committee), Mrs Anthea Coates (Training Committee) and Mr Colin Ride (the Methodist Church).

Mr Lindfield outlined plans for the review stating that he hoped that a provisional report would be made to Mission Council in March 2002, with a view to reporting to the General Assembly later that year. In response to a question Mr Lindfield confirmed that in the first instance the review group would report to both the Youth and Children's Work and Training Committees. The General Secretary reported on behalf of the Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) and RPAG expressing concern about the budgeting for Yardley Hastings and the implications for the appointment of Youth and Children's Work Training Officers (YCWTs) during the period of the review. Whilst acknowledging that the review should not

be rushed, MCAG had expressed the hope that a report might be made in January 2002.

After questions and responses, the convener of the review group, the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, stressed the importance of this exercise and urged synods and districts to co-operate fully when requested to do so.

Confidential minute from October 2000 - United Reformed Church Insurance Company

The General Secretary reported that the sale of the URC Insurance Company had been completed; this would be reported to the General Assembly. Mission Council asked the General Secretary to write expressing thanks to the former directors of the company and also commended the Treasurer, Mr Graham Stacy, for his work in effecting the sale.

01/21 Changes to the Section O Process (Paper L)

The General Secretary proposed that Mission Council ask three of its members to examine the proposed changes to Section O with the Legal Adviser and advise the meeting. This was agreed and Mrs Val Morrison, and the Revds Ken Forbes and Richard Mortimer agreed to serve in this way. *See Minute 01/47*

01/22 Elections

The Clerk explained the procedures for appointing the Mission Council representatives to the Deputy General Secretary Nominating Group, for electing a member of the Staffing Advisory Group (SAG) and for electing a Committee Convener to be a member of MCAG. In the first case, Mission Council asked the Revds Graham Cook, Malcolm Hanson and Peter McIntosh to receive nominations and advise Mission Council. On the nomination of MCAG Mission Council agreed to the reappointment of Miss Jean Thomson as secretary of the Grants and Loans Group (GLG). *See Minutes 01/42 and 01/49*

01/23 Foot and Mouth Disease Crisis

The Moderator invited the Rural Consultant, Mrs Jenny Carpenter, to speak. Mrs. Carpenter reported on the current crisis in rural communities and outlined the ways in which she and her colleagues at the Arthur Rank Centre were trying to help.

01/24 Mission Resources (Paper B of January 2001 – 01/08)

The West Midlands and Eastern Synods reported on their use of mission resources. *See Minute 01/27*

01/25 Small Churches Task Group (Paper E)

The Moderator welcomed the Revds Graham Robson and Stuart Scott who were present representing the Small Churches Task Group. Mr Robson introduced the report.

In response to a question, Mr Robson clarified that the report was based on a definition of a small church as one having 50 or fewer worshippers. *See Minute 01/28.*

01/26 Grouping of Churches (Paper H)

The Revd Brenda Stephenson presented the report, indicating the additions to and alterations of the previous draft which had been made following response from district councils. She also asked Mission Council to note that the following words had been

omitted in error from the end of page 20: "calling a minister. Mission Council needs to decide which, if either, version to offer to the General Assembly."

See Minute 01/29.

Mission Council divided into groups to discuss the above two reports.

01/27 Mission Resources (Paper B of January 2001 – 01/08) Continued from Minute 01/24

The East Midlands and South Western Synods reported on their use of mission resources. *See Minute 01/30*

01/28 Small Churches Task Group (Paper E) Continued from Minute 01/25

Representatives of the groups which had discussed the report outlined the views which had been expressed, and there followed general discussion. The Revd Stuart Scott responded. It was clear that Mission Council did not consider it appropriate to submit the report to the General Assembly, and it was agreed that the discussion about the way forward be deferred until later in the meeting. The Moderator thanked the Revds Graham Robson and Stuart Scott for their work. *See Minute 01/40*

01/29 Grouping of Churches (Paper H) Continued from Minute 01/26

The Moderator invited reports from the groups which had discussed the paper, and general discussion followed.

After discussion, Mission Council decided to accept the report, edited slightly in the light of the comments made and renamed "The Grouping of Churches", for use as a resource for district councils. It would not be presented to the Assembly. To assist in the editing, those who had made comments were asked to send them in writing to the Deputy General Secretary. Consideration of the second resolution which concerned proposed changes to the Structure was deferred. *See Minute 01/41*

The Chaplain led worship and Mission Council adjourned.

SATURDAY, 24TH MARCH 2001

Mission Council joined in worship led by the Chaplain.

The Moderator welcomed members who had arrived since the start of the Mission Council and the General Secretary announced that the Moderator elect would meet committee conveners during the afternoon.

01/30 Mission Resources (Paper B of January 2001 – 01/08) Continued from Minute 01/27

The Northern, Yorkshire and Wessex Synods reported on their use of mission resources. *See Minute 01/33*

01/31 Grants and Loans Group (Paper K)

The Revd Angus Duncan, convener, presented the report of the Grants and Loans Group and drew attention to some issues including the funding of CRCW expenses, grants from the Church Buildings Fund towards the provision of facilities for disabled people and the outcome of financial "pump priming".

There was discussion about the implications for church buildings of legislation requiring access for disabled people, the on-going funding of posts like chaplaincies and the funding of CRCW expenses. In response to a question, the General Secretary outlined the purpose of the Church Buildings Fund and suggested that responsibility for provision of disability access rested primarily with the local church and secondarily with synods.

Mission Council instructed the Grants and Loans Group to examine the issues further in consultation with synods and the relevant committees of General Assembly and to return to Mission Council with a proposed policy.

01/32 Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) and Budget (Paper F)

The Treasurer, Mr Graham Stacy, and the convener of RPAG, the Revd Duncan Wilson, presented the draft budget for 2002.

Mr Stacy presented the budget and the Revd Duncan Wilson spoke about Ministry and Mission contributions, and explored means of reducing or eliminating shortfalls. RPAG suggests that synods be asked to increase their contributions according to their past performance. Those which had failed to meet past increases would be asked to increase by more than those which had met previous increases.

After discussion, Mission Council accepted the report and the resolution:

Mission Council approves the draft budget for 2002 and commends it for presentation to General Assembly.

01/33 Mission Resources *Continued from Minute 01/30*

The Mersey and Thames North Synods reported on their use of mission resources.
See Minute 01/36

01/34 The Rôle and Recognition of Evangelists (Papers M and M Resolutions)

The Convener of the Life and Witness Committee, the Revd Frank Beattie, presented the report and resolutions (Papers M) on The Rôle and Recognition of Evangelists.
See Minute 01/37

01/35 Assembly Resolutions (Paper ASS)

The General Secretary introduced the Paper ASS, General Assembly Resolutions, and outlined the Synod Resolutions which had been received to date.

Mission Council met in groups to discuss Papers M and ASS.
See Minutes 01/37 and 01/38 respectively

01/36 Mission Resources *Continued from Minute 01/33*

The Scotland and Wales Synods reported on their use of mission resources.
See Minute 01/39

01/37 The Rôle and Recognition of Evangelists *Continued from Minute 01/34*

Each of the groups reported and general discussion followed during which it was noted that the Ministries Committee's working group on future patterns of ministry, which was about to begin work, would be able to address some of the issues raised. The Convener of the Life and Witness Committee, the Revd Frank Beattie, responded and thanked Mission Council for the comments which he requested in writing. The Committee would

take the Mission Council debate into consideration when reporting to the General Assembly.

01/38 Assembly Resolutions (Paper ASS) *Continued from Minute 01/35*

Comments arising from the group discussions were reported for the guidance of Committee Conveners. In response to a question the Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, the Revd Alasdair Pratt, confirmed that those Committees which would not be reporting to General Assembly in a given year would report neither in writing nor orally. They were, however, encouraged to use other means of communicating including fringe meetings and displays.

01/39 Mission Resources (Paper B from January 2001) *Continued from Minute 01/36*

The North Western and Southern Synods reported on their use of mission resources.

Mission Council having heard reports from all the synods the Moderator expressed on behalf of the members gratitude to those who had made presentations and a sense of encouragement which had been created by them. He briefly reviewed the earlier process and documents on the subject and then Mission Council discussed it in small groups. On the resumption of the plenary session the groups reported and there was considerable discussion.

It was agreed that discussion on the issues should be encouraged at Assembly through the four synod presentations, and that space should be provided so that all synods could display their materials to encourage exchange of ideas and good practice.

01/40 Small Churches Task Group (Paper E) *Continued from Minute 01/28*

The General Secretary reminded members of Mission Council that they had yet to decide on how the material in this paper could be used. Following further discussion Mission Council agreed to inform General Assembly that the report had been received by Mission Council, to publish an edited version separately, and to ask the editor if he could include a short synopsis in Reform.

01/41 Grouping of Churches (Paper H) *Continued from Minute 01/29*

The General Secretary reminded members of Mission Council that they had already agreed that the paper would not be presented to the General Assembly, and that therefore the first resolution on page 19 was irrelevant. Mission Council agreed to take the second draft resolution including all the words printed in italics to the General Assembly.

The following resolution was proposed by the Revd Roberta Rominger, seconded by the Revd Elizabeth Welch:

Mission Council agrees to bring to General Assembly a resolution which would effect the necessary changes to the structure so that synods would no longer be required to decide matters regarding the grouping of churches.

After discussion the Moderator called for a vote, and the resolution fell.

01/42 Deputy General Secretary Nominating Group *Continued from Minutes 01/20 and 01/22*

The General Secretary informed Mission Council that two of those originally appointed to receive nominations for this group and advise Mission Council were not able to serve. It was agreed that the Revd Malcolm Hanson, the Revd Bob Andrews, and Mrs Delyth Rees be asked to carry out the task. *See Minute 01/52*

01/43 Churches' Commission on Ministry

The General Secretary appealed for nominations for a treasurer for this body which was a part of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland; it was the United Reformed Church's turn to fill this post.

01/44 Staffing Advisory Group (SAG)

The General Secretary announced that the Revd Lesley Husselbee, currently Secretary for Training, would shortly be resigning from that post in order to become a tutor at Northern College. The normal procedure in such a case would be that SAG would consider the post and report to RPAG which would then report to Mission Council in October. If at that time there was a decision to re-appoint, it would be well into 2002 before the post could be filled. Mission Council therefore authorised the officers of General Assembly to act on its behalf in the matter of this appointment provided there was a clear recommendation from SAG and RPAG.

01/45 Training for Learning and Serving (TLS)

The Revd John Proctor informed Mission Council on the position regarding the TLS course. He reported that it was expected that the purchase of TLS would be completed soon, and that the material, following editing, would be published in time for the start of the new academic year. The programme would therefore continue in a recognisable form. Initial negotiations had taken place with the University of Wales Bangor about validation. The Training Committee had strengthened the rôle of the TLS Management Committee which would be convened by the Revd Carole Ellefsen-Jones for four years from January 2001. The Revd David A L Jenkins had been reappointed to continue as programme co-ordinator for a further period of three years from summer 2001.

01/46 Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) (Paper G)

The General Secretary presented the report of MCAG. Paragraph 1 had been referred to earlier in the meeting and paragraph 2 had already been dealt with.

Paragraph 3 Mission Council agreed that the Methodist /URC Healing Development Group continue for a further year or until the Churches Together in England (CTE) group began its life if that was sooner. Since the proposed new group would relate only to England, the question was raised of what would happen in Scotland and Wales. The General Secretary responded that he would raise this question with the group.

Paragraphs 4 and 5 were self-explanatory.

Paragraph 6 Mission Council agreed to the following meeting dates and (provisional) venues for 2004, in addition to those previously decided:

Saturday	24 January	Arthur Rank Centre
Fri-Sun	19-21 March	Swanwick
Tue-Thur	5-7 October	High Leigh, Hoddesdon

(N.B. These dates differ slightly from those in Paper G)

Paragraph 7 This paragraph had been included for information. The following corrections were noted:
delete 'sub-committees or' from the penultimate line of the penultimate paragraph.
final paragraph – replace 'paper' with 'paragraph'.

01/47 Changes to the Section O Process (Paper L) *continued from Minute 01/21*

The General Secretary presented Paper L. He outlined the background to this paper, and reported that the Section O process was not in need of major change. Paper L contained a number of minor alterations to Part I which had been examined in detail by a small group of Mission Council members, and which the General Secretary outlined to Mission Council. Corresponding changes to Part II would be presented in 2002, Existing guidelines were being updated and additional sets prepared to assist those involved in the Process.

Mission Council agreed that the following resolution be put to General Assembly:

“General Assembly agrees to make the changes to Part I of the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline included in Paper L :-

01/48 Changes to the Structure (Paper O)

The General Secretary presented Paper O which contained draft changes to the Structure and the Rules of Procedure which would modify the process for dealing with appeals. After discussion, Mission Council agreed to defer a decision to allow time for further consultation. *See Minute 01/50*

The Moderator thanked the Revd Peter McIntosh, immediate past Moderator, as he left Mission Council. The Chaplain led worship and Mission Council adjourned.

SUNDAY 25TH MARCH

Mission Council, led by the Moderator and the Chaplain, met for worship which included the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

01/49 Elections *Continued from Minute 01/22*

The Clerk explained the procedure for voting for members of MCAG and SAG. Ballot papers were distributed and the votes were cast. *See Minute 01/54*

01/50 Changes to the Structure concerning appeals (Paper O) *Continued from 01/48*

The Clerk reported that she had consulted the Legal Adviser and the General Secretary and that Mission Council was being invited to accept the paper as it stood.

Mission Council agreed that the resolution which proposed changes to paragraph 5(2) of the Structure which was printed in Paper O should go to General Assembly.

01/51 Nominations Committee Report (paper N)

The Convener, the Revd Glyn Jenkins, presented the report.

- Paragraph 1.1 Mission Council was asked to note that the Revd Kathryn Price had accepted nomination as Convener elect of the Youth and Children's Work Committee; she would become Convener in 2002.
- Paragraph 1.2 Mission Council members were asked to consider nominations for Clerk-elect and Treasurer-elect.
- Paragraph 2.1 On behalf of the nominating group, the Revd Peter Brain reported that interviews would take place shortly. He asked that, should the group make a clear recommendation, the officers of the Assembly be authorised to appoint. This was agreed.

- Paragraph 2.2 Mission Council confirmed the Revd Raymond Singh as Convener of the Racial Justice Committee.
- Paragraph 3 Mission Council noted that General Assembly would be invited to appoint Mrs Helen Brown as Convener and Mr Brian Evans as Secretary of the Section O Commission Panel.

Acting on behalf of the General Assembly Mission Council agreed to invite the Cambridge District Council to induct the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard as Principal of Westminster College and instructed the General Secretary to ensure that appropriate representatives of General Assembly would be present.

01/52 Deputy General Secretary Nominating Group *Continued from Minute 01/42*

The Clerk reported that the four names nominated to serve on the Deputy General Secretary nominating group were: the Revd Nanette Lewis Head (Wales Synod) and Mrs Daphne Beale (East Midlands Synod), Conveners, Mrs Helen Mee (Synod of Scotland) and Dr Peter Clarke (Northern Synod). Mission Council appointed these to serve on its behalf along with the Revd Glyn Jenkins (West Midlands Synod) and Ms Lucy Hartwell (South Western Synod), ex officio appointments.

01/53 Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee (Paper J)

The Convener, the Revd Dr Colin Thompson, introduced Paper J: 'Responsibility and Accountability of Ministries in the United Reformed Church'.

Mission Council considered the paper in small groups following which there was plenary discussion. Some concern was expressed that there was evidence that several committees might be working on the same issues simultaneously. The General Secretary urged members of Mission Council to be ready to advise the Assembly when areas of new work were being proposed in the light of the over view which Mission Council had. Members of Mission Council had a critical ministry as well as a supportive one.

Dr Thompson responded to the discussion on the paper, stressing that the church was different from secular organisations, and that it was inappropriate to use secular terms and processes without carefully adapting them to the life of the church. He suggested that the paper be passed to committees within whose remit the subject fell.

Mission Council received the report with thanks to the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee, with the expectation that other committees would consider the questions raised as appropriate.

01/54 Election Results *Continued from minutes 01/22 and 01/49*

The Clerk announced the election results:

The Revd Ken Forbes was appointed to the Staffing Advisory Group.

Mission Council agreed to ask the Revd John Rees to serve on the Mission Council Advisory Group. Should he be unable to serve, the General Secretary was authorised to approach one of the other nominees.

The Clerk asked those synods who were not represented on the Deputy General Secretary nominating group following the earlier appointments by Mission Council (i.e.

North Western, Mersey, Yorkshire, Eastern, Wessex, Thames North, and Southern Synods) to submit nominations to the Revd Dr David Cornick at Westminster College.

01/55 Close

The Moderator thanked all present for their contribution to the meeting. On behalf of Mission Council he congratulated the Revd David Helyar on his appointment as an Ecumenical Honorary Canon of Rochester Cathedral. The Moderator thanked all those who were attending their last meeting of Mission Council, mentioning in particular the Revd Dr Colin Thompson (Convener of the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee), the Revd Bob Andrews (Convener of the Ecumenical Committee), Mr Desmond Curry (Secretary of the Nominations Committee), the Revd David Helyar (Moderator of the Southern Synod), the Revd John Humphreys (Moderator of the Wales Synod), Mr Hartley Oldham (Legal Adviser), the Revd Duncan Wilson (Convener of RPAG), the Revd Paul Bedford (Moderator's Chaplain) and the Revd Tony Burnham (General Secretary). Mr Burnham responded, thanked the Moderator for his leadership during the past year, and spoke of his gratitude for the fellowship, worship and support which he had experienced during the meetings of Mission Council.

Closing worship was led by the Chaplain.

MINUTES OF MISSION COUNCIL JANUARY 2001

ADDITIONAL PARAGRAPH – to be inserted as 01/14, with the subsequent paragraph renumbered 01/15.

01/14 Youth and Children's Work

The Revd Derek Lindfield, Convener, reported that the committee had decided to conduct a review of all youth and children's work, including the work of the Youth and Children's' Work Committee, its officers and Yardley Hastings. The committee was co-operating with the Training Committee and had been invited to include the Youth and Children's Work Trainers in the review. The membership of the review team was yet to be determined. It would report to the Youth and Children's' Work Committee who would in turn report to Mission Council, with a view to bringing resolutions as appropriate to the General Assembly.

In response to questions, Mr Lindfield said that it was hoped that a report would be received within one year, although it might be an interim report, and that the Department of Education and Employment would be consulted in relation to the Social Exclusion Project.

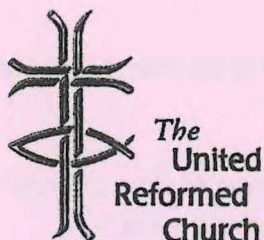


MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2001

PAPERS

A	lilac	Election of advisory groups
B jan	salmon	Mission resources
C	bright green	DGS post
D jan	yellow	Diaconal ministry
E jan	bright green	Task group on small churches
F	gold	Report from RPAG & budget
G	pink	MCAG report
H	canary	Revised report on Grouping of Churches
I	gold	Edmonton secession
J	blue	Accountability of ministries
K	salmon	Report from Grants & Loans Group
L	lilac	
M jan	bright green	The ministry of evangelists & resolutions
N	pink	Nominations
O	blue	Draft resolutions for Assembly 2001
P	salmon	Pension Fund - for information
ASS	white	



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2001

A

Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council

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

1. Mission Council Advisory Group

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

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

(Deputy General Secretary in attendance).

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

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

2. Resource Planning Advisory Group

Within the context of the United Reformed Church's mission, the group will advise Mission Council on

- 1. long-term strategic planning;*
- 2. priorities in the use of human and material resources;*
- 3. the use of ministry, by*
 - 3.1 liaising with the Ministries Committee and the synods in matters of the deployment of stipendiary ministry;*
 - 3.2 liaising with the Ministries Committee to facilitate the development of new forms of ministry;*

4. *Assembly appointed posts, having received reports from the Staffing Advisory Group;*
5. *financial planning, by*
 - 5.1 *overseeing the budget process, and by its presentation to the church;*
 - 5.2 *seeking to educate the whole church and advocate the needs of mission, liaising with the Stewardship Sub-committee of the Life and Witness Committee;*
 - 5.3 *liaising with the Resources Sharing Task Group over the management of the financial resources of the whole church.*

The group will undertake such other tasks as Mission Council gives to it.

Convener	Duncan Wilson	2001
Convener-elect	Julian Macro	2005
Secretary	Erica Young	2005
Synod moderator	Peter Brain	2005
Member	David Thompson	2002
Member	Bill Mahood	2002
Member	Roger Pickering	2005
Convener Staffing Advisory Group	Donald South	2003
General Secretary	Tony Burnham	2001
General Secretary-elect	David Cornick	2008
Treasurer	Graham Stacy	2002

In attendance:

Secretary for Ministries	Christine Craven
Secretary for Finance	Avis Reaney
Secretary for Life and Witness	John Steele
Representative of Resource Sharing task group	?

The convener and secretary, if not members of Mission Council, will be invited to attend. Members may or may not be members of Mission Council but they should have experience of synod or district council work. Elected officers and members will serve for four years, although the convener will normally serve a preliminary year as convener-elect.

3. Staffing Advisory Group

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

3 members	Angela Hughes	2001
	Christine Meekison	2002
Convener	Donald South	2003
	Val Morrison	2004
General Secretary		

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

4. Grants and Loans Group

The group considers all grant and loan applications from local churches and local church projects. This includes the grants previously on the agenda of the Advisory Group on Grants and Loans, grants and loans from the Church Buildings Fund, and the consideration of grant applications to the CWM self-support fund. It also stimulates reflection on the theology and practice of mission in the light of its experience.

Convener	Angus Duncan	2004
Secretary	Jean Thompson	2001
One representative from each synod.		

Plus as consultants:

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

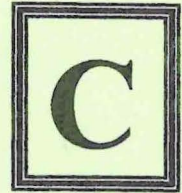
The convener must be a member of Mission Council, or be invited to attend, and will serve for 4 years. The secretary may or may not be a member of Mission Council and serves for 4 years.

At March 2001 Mission Council will need to elect:

- A committee convener to MCAG**
- A member of the Staffing Advisory Group**
- A Secretary for the Grants and Loans Group**



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001



DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY REPORT OF REVIEW GROUP

THE BRIEF

The Review Group was set up by the October 2000 Mission Council. Its members were Graham Cook (Convener), David Cornick (General Secretary elect), Elizabeth Nash, John Ellis and Simon Rowntree.

Their brief was: a) to review the post and its job description;
b) to consider a suitable method of appointment.

THE REPORT

1. INTRODUCTION

When the group charged with nominating the new General Secretary went about their work, it was clear that they envisaged the post as complementary to that of the Deputy General Secretary. They were clear that the General Secretary is 'the senior full-time officer' of the General Assembly and that they expected those executive responsibilities to be shared with the Deputy General Secretary, according to the differing gifts and experiences of the post holders.

There is therefore a degree of provisionality about the following job description because the detailed division of responsibility will clearly be subject to negotiation between the two post holders. However, the broad principle which the Review Group has adhered to is that the General Secretary will be responsible for 'external relations' while the Deputy General Secretary will concentrate on internal matters.

The Deputy General Secretary is a Minister of Word and Sacraments, and as such will be expected to contribute to the theological and pastoral leadership of the church, particularly in collaboration with the General Secretary.

2. THE JOB DESCRIPTION

The Deputy General Secretary will work in collaboration with the General Secretary, deputising in the latter's absence. The Deputy General Secretary is accountable to the General Secretary and the General Assembly.

A: MAIN TASKS

In collegiality with the General Secretary the Deputy General Secretary will:

- i) service the meetings of the General Assembly and Mission Council;

- ii) exercise oversight and support of Assembly appointed staff in London and elsewhere;
- iii) act as the line manager for Assembly appointed staff in Church House, Windermere and Yardley Hastings
- iv) help the Synods and Assembly Committees to link their work to agreed national priorities.

B: MISSION COUNCIL AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The Deputy General Secretary is a member of Mission Council and its Advisory Group and is responsible for the co-ordination of its business. The Deputy General Secretary will share with the General Secretary in the detailed preparation and implementation of business, and will share as appropriate in carrying proposals through to General Assembly.

C: ASSEMBLY PASTORAL REFERENCE COMMITTEE

The Deputy General Secretary will be Secretary of the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee. This may require interviews with ministers, and consultation about their future service. It will entail receiving notification of pastoral problems referred by Synod Moderators or District Councils and introducing material to the committee, with appropriate follow-up. The work will be shared with the Convenor and other members of that committee and is confidential.

D: ASSEMBLY AND REPRESENTATIVE COMMITTEES

The Deputy General Secretary and the General Secretary will arrange between them a system for attending Assembly Committees and other groups established by Assembly or Mission Council, where appropriate undertaking secretarial duties and otherwise being the staff link person. Likewise they shall make similar arrangements for representation of the United Reformed Church in the wider church.

E: VISITS

The Deputy General Secretary is encouraged to accept, as may be appropriate and practicable, invitations from local churches, District Councils, Synods and others.

F: ADMINISTRATION

The Deputy General Secretary will:

- i) be the budget holder for Mission Council, Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee and such other committees as he/she is designated as secretary;
- ii) be responsible for the general management of Church House, delegating to the Office and Personnel Manager wherever possible.

G: PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Deputy General Secretary

- i) will participate in the Church House Staff Development Programme, including an annual appraisal discussion with the General Secretary;

- ii) will be encouraged to develop any particular interests or gifts so as to bring a distinctive personal dimension to the period of office;
- iii) may, as a personal initiative, create a support group if other networks do not fulfil this need.

H: JOB EVOLUTION

The Deputy General Secretary will be expected to remain open to new styles of work and changed responsibilities as implied by decisions of the General Assembly or Mission Council.

3. THE PERSON PROFILE

The Deputy General Secretary shall be an ordained Minister of the United Reformed Church and included in the qualities and skills sought will be:

- Christian commitment expressed in a lively faith coupled with an enthusiasm for personal discipleship
- wide experience of, and respect for, the diversity of the United Reformed Church
- leadership qualities including the ability to link details with overall vision
- skills of management and administration, including the ability to handle a heavy workload
- ability to work collaboratively and in committees and councils
- pastoral and listening skills, including the ability to manage people and situations
- experience in handling conflict and change creatively
- good communications skills
- social and political awareness

Ideally, the person appointed will have some awareness and experience of the following areas, or will be willing to develop them:

- relations with and work in the media
- information technology
- employment law

The person appointed will have a deep personal faith, patience, adaptability, resilience and a good sense of humour.

4. PROCESS OF APPOINTMENT

A: LENGTH OF APPOINTMENT

We recommend that the appointment be for 7 years in the first instance with the possibility of renewal for a similar period.

B: THE APPOINTING GROUP

We recommend that the appointing group should be:

- The incoming Moderator of General Assembly (Convenor)
- The incoming General Secretary (Secretary)

Six people appointed by Mission Council (preferably from different Synods)
(Including: the Convenor of Nominations; two other Committee
Convenors; the Chair of FURY; two others)

One representative from each Synod not otherwise represented via the Mission
Council appointments.

C: THE PROCESS

We recommend

- that an advertisement be placed in REFORM inviting nominations, each nomination to be accompanied by a statement of not more than 150 words justifying the nomination. The same consideration will be given to those nominating themselves as to those nominated by others.
- That letters be sent, along with the job description and the person profile to Synod Clerks, Synod Moderators, and District Secretaries inviting nominations. Each nomination to be accompanied by a one paragraph statement justifying the nomination.
- That nominations be sent to the incoming Moderator of General Assembly c/o the General Secretary's office at Church House.
- That further details and references be taken once a short list has been arrived at.
- That the appointing group be given powers to short list, interview and make a recommendation to Mission Council.
- That the formal appointment be made by Mission Council

D. THE TIMETABLE

We recommend

- that the advertisement/notice be placed in the May issue of REFORM and a letter be sent by the beginning of May to all Synod Moderators, Synod Clerks, and District Secretaries with copies of the Job Description and Person Profile. In all cases the deadline for receiving nominations would be given as the end of August 2001.
- that the process of setting up the appointing group be put in hand to come into being following General Assembly 2001.
- That the appointing group has its first meeting to consider the nominations in September 2001.
- That shortlisting be completed in October 2001
- That interviews take place November/December 2001
- That a recommendation be made and, if this is accepted, an appointment take place at the January 2002 Mission Council

5. NOTES

- 5.1. The Mission Council of March 1996 agreed that the post of Deputy General Secretary should be restricted to ministers of the United Reformed Church
- 5.2. In recommending that the period of appointment be seven years, renewable for a similar period, we are conscious that if both serve their full term in office the appointments/re-appointments of General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, will once again come within a year of each other. We considered this

- carefully and came to the conclusion that to make any other recommendation would be a to downgrade the post which we did not think was justified.
- 5.3. If this job description is accepted by Mission Council then a consequent adjustment would need to be made to the job description of the Office and Personnel Manager, making that post accountable to the Deputy General Secretary rather than as at present to the General Secretary.
- 5.4. A suggested wording for the advertisement/notice in REFORM is:

*The United Reformed Church
is seeking one of its ministers
to be*

DEPUTY GENERAL SECRETARY

as from August 2002 when John Waller retires.

If any reader would like to suggest the names of any suitable candidates please do so either via your District Secretary, Synod Clerk or Synod Moderator, or direct to the Assembly Moderator c/o Church House.

We would particularly welcome nominations of others but the same consideration will be given to ministers nominating themselves.

All nominations should be in writing and accompanied by not more than 150 words justifying the nomination. (Full details will be sought when short listing has been completed). All names need to be with the Moderator by the end of August 2001.

If you would like more idea of what the post entails, the Job Description and the Personal Profile are available from your District Secretary or Synod Clerk.

Diaconal ministry and the diaconate

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The wider ecumenical and contemporary scene

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. **The Church of Scotland**

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

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

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

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

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

17. **The Methodist Church**

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

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

18. **The Church of England**

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

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

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

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

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

"CONTEXT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The current situation in the United Reformed Church

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

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

The Ministry of a diaconate in the United Reformed Church

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

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

Where do we go from here?

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

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

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

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

Who should take the next steps, if any?

October 2000

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
SMALL CHURCHES TASK GROUP

REPORT

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I The resolution

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

II Introduction

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

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

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

III Numbers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV Statistics

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

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

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

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

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

V Questionnaire responses

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

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

District responses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Church responses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI The small church in its context

Affirming and developing the small church

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They are not self-conscious about their relationships and are bound together more by sentimental ties than by contractual agreements. They have a solidarity, a feeling of belonging, nourished by experiences and personal need.¹ There is a danger that such small, intimate communities may become self-centred and closed, repelling rather than attracting others. Smallness is not always a strength but can lead to incestuousness, the club mentality, feeding on itself and producing unhealthy exclusiveness. The development of such a religious club is not church as most would understand it.

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

1 See unpublished thesis, 1998 Leeds University
4 Carl Dudley

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

3 Ibid. pg. 186

The rural context

Opportunities

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

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

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

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

Challenges

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

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

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

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

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

Difficulties

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

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

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

The ecumenical context - Christians meeting together

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

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

Opportunities

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

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

but

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

The 'dividends' will include:

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

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

Challenges

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

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

Greater sharing will call for

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

Difficulties

However there are several hurdles to face:

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

A meditation - History has a lot to answer for!

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

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

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

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

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

VII Resourcing from within the small URC congregation

Marks of viability

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

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

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

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

Scenario A

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

Such congregations might be encouraged to consider the following steps:

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

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

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

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

Scenario B

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

Scenario C

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

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

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

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

Discerning priorities

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

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

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

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

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

VIII Resourcing from within the structure

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

Role of District Councils

The recognition of small churches

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

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

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

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

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

Appropriate strategies

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

1) examining financial and administrative procedures required by the District/ Synod, to assess their suitability and practicability for small churches possibly with limited leadership and to see how form-filling and systems in general could be simplified. Communication of relevant information in appropriate ways is particularly important. The vision and direction of the small church needs to be supported by District and Synod or guidelines and good practice may be ignored. Particularly where there is a diversity of approach and theology, understanding and support are necessary to further the growth of the church

2) providing people with particular skills which are lacking in small churches, perhaps on a short-term basis. (For example, small congregations could be advised on specific financial concerns, and guidance given in applying for funds.)

3) giving consideration to the grouping of small churches, in areas of shared ministry or clusters for example, to ensure that, where possible, skills and other resources are pooled. One key to the health and well-being of the small church is the availability of leaders who can offer encouragement and resources to the congregation and act as links themselves to the wider church and community. The same demands are often made of small churches with inadequate leadership as of larger churches with a number of leaders with varied skills. In the particular case of consultations and surveys of buildings but also in other ways, following consultation between District officers and the officers of the church, people with appropriate skills could be asked to assist smaller congregations in effective action.

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

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

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

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

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

Denominational communication and support for small churches

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

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

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

XI Conclusion

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

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

Opportunities for

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

Challenges to

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

Difficulties in

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

Outline proposals

We encourage the small church to

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

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

We encourage District Councils to

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

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

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

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

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



The
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DRAFT BUDGET 2002

The draft budget for 2002 is attached to this paper. It shows, for comparison, the budget for 2001 and the changes between the two years' budgets.

Also circulated with the Mission Council papers is a budget commentary which attempts to explain the main features of the budget and the reasons for the changes in expenditure. This commentary is an experiment aimed at improving the understanding of the URC budget and it is intended to give it as wide a circulation as possible. At this stage it is still regarded as a draft as there are some minor items to be added.

Ministry and Mission contributions

The draft budget and commentary were discussed at the District and Synod Treasurers consultation at Swanwick on 27/28 February. A matter which caused the great concern was the fact that the Ministry & Mission contributions for 2001 are falling short of the target set in the budget by over £250,000 (about 1.5%). The result of this is that the target for 2002 which has been set at 3% higher than the target for 2001 is, in fact, nearly 4.5% up on the actual amounts being contributed in 2001.

There was general agreement that the 2002 targets for individual synods should be set at 3% up on their individual targets for 2001. In this way, synods that achieved their target for 2001 would only have to increase their current contributions by 3% but those with a shortfall in 2001 would have to increase by a higher percentage (in some cases by over 6%).

If membership continues to decline at around 3%, (similar to the rate experienced over many years) the impact of the above increases in terms of the amount per member is, of course, 3% higher.

Policy on number of stipendiary ministers

In 1999 Mission Council adopted a policy of aiming for minister numbers to track membership numbers at half the rate of membership changes. Not surprisingly, this policy gave rise to contrasting views at the Treasurers' Consultation and the Deployment Consultation which took place at Swanwick a week earlier.

The Deployment Consultation was concerned with the problems of coping with a reduction in the number of stipendiary ministers over the next five years of 7½%, or nearly fifty ministers. The Treasurers' Consultation was concerned with the financial impact of this policy which results in the cost of ministry expressed as an amount per member rising by 1½% per annum faster than the actual increase in stipends.

The Treasurers recognised that, over the first 25 years of the life of the URC, minister numbers had changed in relation to membership broadly in line with the policy now adopted and the cost had been successfully met by M&M contributions. However, the current situation may not be the same for two reasons. First, the proportion of the URC membership in retirement and relying on relatively fixed incomes is higher; and second, the burden of maintaining buildings (the number of which has not declined as fast as membership) falls on fewer members making the task of increasing M&M contributions harder.

The current policy presents a challenge both to those concerned with deployment and to the URC membership who have to increase M&M contributions at a rate per member significantly higher than the increase in the RPI.

In adopting the proposed budget for 2002 the church has to face up to both of these challenges.

Resolution

Mission Council approves the draft budget for 2002 and commends it for presentation to General Assembly.

URC 2002 DRAFT BUDGET

	Budget 2001	Budget 2002	increase/(decrease) amount	%
(see note below)				
EXPENDITURE				
MINISTRY				
Local and special ministries and CRCWs	14,225	14,716	491	3.5%
Synod moderators - stipends and expenses	490	498	8	1.6%
Ministries committee	221	232	11	5.0%
	14,936	15,446	510	3.4%
TRAINING				
College training for stipendiary ministers	1,074	1,150	76	7.1%
Other training for stipendiary ministry	180	187	7	3.9%
Training for non-stipendiary ministry	94	95	1	1.1%
Central cost of Youth and Children's Work trainers	249	259	10	4.0%
Lay training costs	96	100	4	4.2%
Training committee	122	126	4	3.3%
	1,815	1,917	102	5.6%
OTHER MISSION ACTIVITIES				
Grants	303	308	5	1.7%
Ecumenical committee and international	310	307	(3)	-1.0%
Council for World mission	50	50	0	0.0%
Church and Society Committee	93	96	3	3.2%
Racial Justice programme	30	61	31	103.3%
Life and Witness committee	99	103	4	4.0%
Windermere Centre	43	45	2	4.7%
Youth and children's work committee	210	181	(29)	-13.8%
Yardley Hastings	106	106	0	0.0%
Pilots Development	66	70	4	6.1%
Other committees	14	11	(3)	-21.4%
	1,324	1,338	14	1.1%
SUPPORT ACTIVITIES				
General Assembly and Mission Council	199	233	34	17.1%
Communication and Editorial	289	303	14	4.8%
Finance office	288	295	7	2.4%
Central secretariat	196	202	6	3.1%
Professional fees	78	81	3	3.8%
Computer network	41	48	7	17.1%
URC House costs	217	216	(1)	-0.5%
General church costs	125	136	11	8.8%
	1,433	1,514	81	5.7%
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	19,508	20,215	707	3.6%

Note

The 2001 budget amounts for (i) cost of local and special ministries and CRCWs and (ii) income from Ministry & Mission contributions have each been increased by 490 to include the estimated amounts attributable to former Congregational Union of Scotland ministers and churches.

URC 2002 DRAFT BUDGET

	Budget 2001	Budget 2002	increase/(decrease) amount	%
(see note on previous page)				
INCOME				
MINISTRY AND MISSION CONTRIBUTIONS	18,207	18,750	543	3.0%
INVESTMENT INCOME				
Dividends	269	280	11	4.1%
Interest	306	260	(46)	-15.0%
	575	540	(35)	-6.1%
GRANTS RECEIVED				
Memorial Hall Trust	320	350	30	9.4%
New College Trust	273	280	7	2.6%
URC Insurance Company Limited	50		(50)	-100.0%
	643	630	(13)	-2.0%
LEGACIES AND MAJOR DONATIONS	50	50	0	0.0%
SUNDRY INCOME				
CWM Mission Support programme	126	0	(126)	-100.0%
Other	4	8	4	100.0%
	130	8	(122)	-93.8%
TOTAL INCOME	19,605	19,978	373	1.9%
NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCE	97	(237)	(334)	



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MISSION COUNCIL ADVISORY GROUP

- 1. Foot and mouth disease.** On the day of the MCAG meeting, 1st March, the General Secretary had been asked whether the United Reformed Church would support a day of prayer and an appeal initiated by the Arthur Rank Centre in response to the outbreak of the disease. It was agreed that it was right to give support, and prayers and supporting information were posted on the URC website.
- 2. Grants and Loans Group.** MCAG would like to nominate Jean Thompson to do a further 3-year period as Secretary of this group. Jean was only able to commit herself for a year when first appointed but she is now willing to serve a further term, and MCAG believes it will help the development of this relatively new group if her term is extended.
- 3. Methodist/URC Healing Development Group.** This group was set up by Assembly in 1996 with an initial life of 5 years. In October Mission Council decided to delay decision about the future because it was possible that a wider ecumenical body concerned with healing would be set up. In the event, whilst discussions about the wider body are going well, there will be no final decision before the time of Assembly. MCAG suggests that Mission Council advises Assembly to continue the Methodist/URC Healing Development Group in being at least until a decision on whether to join the wider grouping can be made.
- 4. Unifying Assembly resolution on Women's Work.** The Life and Witness committee have prepared a position paper following the resolution. MCAG felt that some re-shaping of the paper was needed before it could helpfully be discussed by Mission Council.
- 5. IT task group.** A letter has been received from Steve Wood, indicating that he can no longer continue his role as Mission Council representative on this task group, as he is no longer a member of Mission Council. MCAG is looking again at the role of this task group before suggesting another name.
- 6. Dates of future meetings.** Mission Council has already agreed to the following dates and venues:

2001	Tuesday-Thursday	2-4 October	Swanwick
2002	Saturday	26 January	Arthur Rank Centre
	Friday - Sunday	22-24 March	Ushaw College, Durham
	Tuesday-Thursday	1-3 October	High Leigh, Hoddesdon
2003	Saturday	25 January	Arthur Rank Centre
	Tuesday-Thursday	25-27 March	Swanwick
	Friday-Sunday	3-5 October	Ushaw College, Durham

MCAG now asks that the following dates and (if available) venues are confirmed:

2004 Saturday	24 January	Arthur Rank Centre
Friday-Sunday	19-21 March	Swanwick
Tuesday-Thursday	4-6 October	High Leigh, Hoddesdon

7. Membership of committees.

The question has been asked in a couple of places recently as to whether *ex-officio* and *co-opted* members of committees have the right to speak and vote. MCAG offers the following as advice:

Those who are members of committees or councils *ex-officio* have full voting and speaking rights.

It is clear that where a committee has been given the right by its appointing body to *co-opt* members, those co-opted have full voting and speaking rights. However, if a committee decides itself to invite someone to attend (perhaps because of their particular expertise) that person does not have a vote. When a committee's constitution includes representation from other committees, those representatives are voting members.

Unless it is stated otherwise, the convener and secretary of a committee are voting members.

Staff or consultants who may attend a committee do not have a vote and may only speak by invitation. The only exception to this is when they are members by another route - for example, a staff member who is a committee secretary, or a consultant who is made a committee member.

The above relates to Assembly standing committees, that is the committees whose members are appointed by the Assembly and which are listed each year in the Nominations Committee report to Assembly. From time to time standing committees may appoint their own sub-committees or task groups: in such circumstances the standing committee decides the membership.

The principles contained in this paper have a general application throughout the church.

John Waller
March 2001



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23-25 March 2001



The United Reformed Church

Towards a Policy on the Grouping of Churches

March 2001

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- E Achieving effective Groupings**
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A

Introduction

The Process

In 1998 Mission Council set up a task group on the Grouping of Churches. The cause of this initiative was a problem that had occurred in a particular Group but Mission Council decided that the focus of the task group's work should be the mission opportunities presented by Grouping. By setting down possibilities and indicating best practice it was also hoped that some problems might be avoided in future.

The members of the task group were: Mrs Jean Bull, the Revd Arnold Harrison, Mr Simon Loveitt, the late Revd Dr Catherine Middleton, the Revd Brenda Stephenson, Mrs Mary Wetherall, and the Revd Christopher White. All had experience of the subject from different angles, while Mary Wetherall, a Methodist, was able to comment from the viewpoint of the Methodist circuit system.

The task group reported to Mission Council in March 2000. There it was decided to make a number of changes and then to send the amended report to all District and Area councils for comment. The consultation period lasted from May to December 2000. 28 District Councils and a few others discussed the report and sent comments by the due date.

Mission Council had already asked Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith, the Revd Brenda Stephenson and the Revd John Waller to consider the submissions and to amend the report as necessary. The amended report was considered by Mission Council in March 2001 and is now offered to Assembly with two resolutions.

The variety of mission and ministry.

The Assembly is not being advised to adopt Grouping as the only, or necessarily the best, strategy for local mission in the United Reformed Church. It is clear from many of the responses received that there are other effective models in use. However, the fact is that Grouping is a widespread feature of life in the United Reformed Church: this report is intended to encourage those who use this strategy to do so in a positive spirit and with the benefit of the good experience of others. It may be that work will be done on other models at some time in the future.

Presuppositions

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

The Reality

This assumption is surprising given the fact that in reality many churches are not single minister pastorates. 356 United Reformed Churches are in LEPs.

There are 101 recognised Groups made up of 335 churches¹. Many of the LEPs involve the Methodist Church and therefore also require Circuit involvement. Joint Pastorates also exist in large numbers. It is slightly more difficult to determine the exact numbers of truly single pastorates but there is some evidence that only between 10 and 15%² of our 1700 churches can be defined in that way.

Grouping can be seen as an opportunity

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

Whilst many Groups have been created merely to accommodate the deployment of ordained ministry, others have been formed out of the recognition that grouping has positive value and can contribute to the wellbeing of the churches involved. The rationale for such a claim lies in the belief and experience that no one church can encompass all the skill and gifts necessary for mission nor indeed could any one Grouping claim such omnicompetence. However there is a greater likelihood of a wider range of skills being discovered and shared when churches are willing to work together in a concrete way. Groupings are by no means the only option, but have to be treated as a viable and realistic option alongside single pastorates.

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

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

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

B – Definitions

Within this report the following definitions will apply:

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

References in this Report to “**The Structure**” refers to the Structure of the United Reformed Church, as agreed by the General Assembly and as contained in Section B of the Manual of the United Reformed Church. The Manual is available from the bookshop.

References to District Councils also refer to Area Councils in Scotland

C

The case for coming together

1. The case for Groupings as a focus for mission

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

2. Sharing resources

Groups in particular offer enrichment to the individual congregations concerned. Resources of leadership, skills and finance, in one congregation can be shared with the others in the Group. The pooling of such resources makes possible interest groups, FURY groups, and training groups, all of which can have a mission potential. Small congregations may not have viable numbers for this to happen. There is also a value in the increased opportunity for social contact.

3. Groupings for everyone?

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

4. Teams

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

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

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

5. Why a Grouping?

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

- To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth

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

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

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

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

D

The options open to us

Just as Grouping is one of a number of mission strategies to be considered, so Grouping itself can take a variety of forms. Some will be more familiar than others. It is essential to consider what will best meet the opportunities and needs of the particular situation and to be absolutely clear what is the nature of the Grouping in each case. It is all too easy for different parties to an agreement to have very different ideas of what the agreement is about.

Different Models

6.1. The Forgotten Option.

When the United Reformed Church was first formed in 1972, it was recognised that there would be some small local churches unable to provide the leadership and resources necessary for the mission of the church. Therefore it was provided in the Structure that "such congregations shall consult with the district council to formulate an acceptable scheme for joining together with a single membership, a common church meeting and elders' meeting, representative of all the constituent congregations, and a shared ministry." This model of one church in several places has been tried successfully, but only in very few instances. It has the merit of simplifying structures and enabling the full sharing of resources. It requires a fair degree of commonality in the life and mission of the churches joining together, as well as good relationships between them.

6.2. The Ecumenical dimension

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

6.3. Minister Based Groupings

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

6.4. Geographically Based Groupings

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

6.5. Other links

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

6.6. Clusters

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

Clusters have an increasingly important role where they are part of a mission strategy. The challenge is to find ways of defining them so that they fit within our present church order, yet at the same time freeing them from unrealistic constraints to enable them in their mission.

7. Team Ministries relating to Groups and Pastorates

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

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

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

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

E

Achieving effective groupings

8.

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

8.1. Role of District Councils and Synods

The Structure of the United Reformed Church provides for Synods to “receive and decide upon recommendations from the district councils on all matters regarding the grouping..... of local churches....” [Structure 2(4)(A)(iv)], and for District Councils to make those recommendations [Structure 2(3)(A)(xii)]

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

9. Consultation – Consultation – Consultation

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

9.1. Local Consultations

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

Open and honest discussion is a very necessary ingredient. Agreement or differences in theological understanding and mission strategy need to be recognised. It may be possible to accommodate or build upon differences, as well as benefit from agreement - but only if the realities are acknowledged and accepted. It is also important that any discussion is not only inwards towards the churches but also outwards towards the communities of the area in which they are set. This last point, together with the ecumenical setting, may be the best basis on which to decide whether or not to consider Grouping, and if so in what form.

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

9.2. Ecumenical Consultations

There is good reason for maintaining that Ecumenical consultations ought to be given priority before moving on to exclusively United Reformed Church considerations. (see 6.2 above)

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

This has three elements to it.

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

Second, that churches have different authorities and structures all of which impact upon where and how decisions are taken. In the same way there are issues surrounding the mutual recognition of ordained ministry.

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

The Assembly Ecumenical Committee and Secretary for Ecumenical Relations are available for consultation, as are Synod Committees and Secretaries and local ecumenical officers.

9.3. What sort of co-operation?

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

10. The need for a Constitution

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

It is not possible to set out here model documents, as circumstances vary so much. However examples are available and Synod Offices will have copies of those operating in their area. Likewise draft constitutions are available for most ecumenical situations.

A Group Constitution must cover some essential elements

- basic principles / mission statement/ aims and objectives
- membership of the Group
- decision making
- financial and legal accountability
- appointment of Group Officers
- how Churches join or leave.
- how the Group is to be funded
- how Leaders are to be called (see paragraph 12))
- the provision and upkeep of buildings
- how grievances are to be handled
- review procedures

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

11. Issues of Leadership

People need to know who are in leadership roles, what those roles are and how the members of the Team relate to one another.

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

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

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

11.2. Equal Opportunities Policy (EOP)

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

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

12. The Calling of Ministers

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

Whilst what follows deals with procedures, there is a lot of evidence that one preliminary is particularly important in Grouping situations - the settlement agreement. This deals with the terms under which a ministry will operate. Because the new minister will have to relate to a number of councils and committees, which may not have a common understanding or agenda, it is vital to have a written agreement of the terms on which the ministry will operate and be supported. This must be done before any candidate is seen.

If this report is accepted by Assembly and consequent changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church are made there will be two options before a Group or Joint Pastorate in relation to the calling of a minister. These are set out below in parallel columns.

Present system	Proposed optional alternative
<p>12.1 A Vacancy Committee</p> <p>A vacancy committee is almost always the best way to deal with the selection and introduction of a candidate. A combined meeting of all the Elders (or their equivalent) will almost always prove too large. The procedure for meeting, interviewing and recommending a candidate to the church needs to be agreed and laid out in advance. It should then be for the Vacancy Committee to determine whether a candidate should visit with a view.</p>	<p>12.1 A Vacancy Committee</p> <p>A vacancy committee is almost always the best way to deal with the selection and introduction of a candidate. A combined meeting of all the Elders (or their equivalent) will almost always prove too large. The procedure for meeting, interviewing and recommending a candidate to the Group or Joint Pastorate needs to be agreed and laid out in advance. It should then be for the Vacancy Committee to determine whether a candidate should visit with a view.</p>
<p>12.2 Role of the Church Meetings</p> <p>The principal and 'official' route for the introduction of ministers to local pastorates in the United Reformed Church is through the corporate leadership of the synod moderators. Long-standing policy and practice has been that the calling of ministers rests in the hands of Church Meetings. Only if churches worshipping at different locations have constituted themselves with one membership, one Elders' Meeting and one Church Meeting which governs all church life (as already provided for in the Structure 1.1) can they vote as a single body. This limitation has not always been realised and so has not been observed in many instances.</p> <p>In every other situation each and every member church in a Group or Joint Pastorate MUST hold its own meeting, cast and count its own votes, and reach the required majority in order for the call to be issued. It is not possible to hold one joint Church Meeting and have a single combined vote. (This report does not seek to invalidate the calls that may have been</p>	<p>12.2 Role of the Group or Joint Pastorate Meeting</p> <p>The principal and 'official' route for the introduction of ministers to local pastorates in the United Reformed Church is through the corporate leadership of the synod moderators. Long-standing policy and practice has been that the calling of ministers rests in the hands of Church Meetings.</p> <p>It is possible to hold a single Church Meeting, but only when the meeting is held to consider a call to a minister can a formal vote be recorded as valid. In this case votes will be cast and counted together, and if the predetermined majority has been achieved or exceeded, a call can be extended to the minister and District Council concurrence can be sought.</p> <p>It would be wise to report and record the outcome of the meeting in the minutes of the following Church Meetings of the separate churches.</p>

<p>made on this basis, or the ministry that has followed, on any past occasion. Such ministries will have been validated by their fruits. However, in future the option can be given of calling church by church, or by a joint meeting.)</p>	
<p>12.3 Voting procedures</p> <p>It is perfectly in order to hold a combined Church Meeting of all the Churches, on the same day, at the same time and in the same place. But when the voting takes place it MUST be church by church and each of the churches must achieve the agreed percentage. That may be achieved by a show of hands, church by church, or by dividing into separate meetings, or by using identifiable ballot papers.</p> <p>The voting must be recorded and declared church by church and the District advised of the figures. The candidate should also be made aware of the voting figures.</p>	<p>12.3 Voting procedures</p> <p>The joint meeting will need to decide the standing orders under which it will be conducted and in particular the method by which voting is to take place. If this option is followed, it may be better to take steps to ensure that it is not possible to discern how the separate churches would have voted. The joint meeting must achieve the agreed percentage for a call to be issued.</p> <p>The voting will be recorded and declared as one vote and the District advised of the figures. The candidate should also be made aware of the voting figures.</p>
<p>12.4 Percentages Required</p> <p>The percentage required for a call to be issued is not laid down in the Structure and already varies from pastorate to pastorate. It must be for the Church Meetings to determine what that figure shall be for them. The only common and essential factor is that such a percentage MUST be agreed before the vacancy procedure is begun so that all concerned know, at the outset of the process, what will be required for a successful call to be issued.</p> <p>If the required percentage is in favour, then a call can be issued. If the call is accepted by the Minister then the decision is referred to both the receiving and sending District Councils for concurrence.</p>	<p>12.4 Percentages Required</p> <p>The percentage required for a call to be issued is not laid down in the Structure and already varies from pastorate to pastorate. It must be for the Group or Joint Pastorate Church Meeting to determine what that figure shall be for them. The only common and essential factor is that such a percentage MUST be agreed before the vacancy procedure is begun so that all concerned know, at the outset of the process, what will be required for a successful call to be issued.</p> <p>If the required percentage is in favour, then a Call can be issued. If the Call is accepted by the Minister then the decision is referred to both the receiving and sending District Councils for concurrence.</p>
<p>12.5 Balance between member churches of a Group or Joint Pastorate in respect of their membership numbers</p> <p>One of the issues that such separate voting raises is that it gives equal weight to the voting of each church irrespective of the membership. This means that in issuing a call the voting of a Church of 20 members has the same impact as a church of 200 members in the same Grouping.</p> <p>There will be different views on the wisdom of this situation.</p>	

The matter may be academic if a call is being issued with the support of all the churches. However, if a call is not issued, then it may lead to dissatisfaction and even resentment, particularly if the failure to call rests on one or two votes.

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

13. Effecting Change

13.1. How to restructure or dissolve

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

The written agreement must provide for a process of change in the structure and membership of the Grouping, as well as dissolution, when the arrangement no longer serves the mission of the church.

13.2. Regular review

Regular reviews are already a part of much of church life. All agreements should provide for this process. This should include internally and externally held reviews.

14. The Status of the Church Meeting

Many people find rules and structures restricting, and prefer to do whatever seems right at the time. Church Meetings will frequently operate in that way. However, some decisions have far-reaching legal or personal consequences and in such situations keeping the rules becomes a necessary protection for all concerned. For this reason it is important to remember what is the status of a Church Meeting. In the Structure of the United Reformed Church, certain authority is given to both the Church Meeting and the Elders' Meeting of each local church. Also in the United Reformed Church Acts certain authority is given to the Church Meeting. For legal and constitutional reasons, these authorities cannot be ceded to a Group Meeting. Therefore, whilst such meetings may be useful for the purpose of effective communication, discussion and resource sharing, apart from the authority to issue a call to a minister which we are proposing that General Assembly should give to them, such meetings may only formulate proposals. It is essential that all other decisions are taken by the separate Elders' and Church Meetings and recorded in their minutes. The status of the Church Meeting as a council of the United Reformed Church is not altered by the creation of a Grouping.

It may be in some circumstances that the local situation would be better served by giving more significance to Group Meetings, and in

such case it would be worth considering using the model defined in paragraph 1.1 of the Structure and referred to in paragraph 6.1 above.

Anyone contemplating the formation of a Group must ensure that that they do not inadvertently include wording in their Constitution which might conflict with the Structure and the United Reformed Church Acts.

F

Other issues

15. Ecumenical Considerations

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

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

It is recognised that the Ecumenical Committee is already aware of this problem.

16. Councils of the Church

16.1. Ministers of Groups and Joint Pastorates

In 1985 the Assembly passed the following resolution:

“Assembly, taking note of the fact that ministers inducted to United Reformed Church pastorates are on the one hand under the oversight not of the local church but of the District Council and that on the other hand they are in full fellowship with the local church(es) to which they minister,

Affirms that the names of such ministers should be recorded on the roll of members of the church(es) to which they minister. Where the pastorate includes more than one local church each with its own roll, the name of the minister(s) shall appear on one such roll to be reckoned for statistical purposes, and on the other rolls the name shall appear with the note – “The Revd A.N. is a member in full fellowship of this church but for statistical purposes only his/her membership is reckoned at the “X” United Reformed Church in this pastorate “

16.2. Relating to other councils

A second major area of concern for Groupings is the added burden that comes when another tier of organisation is inevitably inserted between local church structures and those of the District and Synod. The problem is further compounded when the Grouping has an ecumenical component and more than one denomination requires participation in wider Councils.

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

16.3. Representation at District Council and Synod

The question was considered as to whether churches within a Group should no longer be required to be represented individually at District and Synod, but be allowed Group representation. Group representation would have the advantage of releasing some members from additional meetings. However it would have the disadvantage of reducing the number of District Council and Synod members and depriving the councils of working members, or the breadth of consultation, because

experience indicates that some churches do not send representatives anyway.

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

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

A result of the consultation was to make clear that there is little enthusiasm for allowing Group representation at the moment.

17. Training

17.1. Initial Ministerial Training

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

17.2. Continuing Ministerial Education

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

Continuing Ministerial Education (CME) is intended (among other things) to develop skills needed and to augment those already available. In this way a Team can become a genuine resource across the whole spectrum of the life of a pastorate, enabling it to have available a far greater range of expertise. Details of courses on subjects like team building and ministry in LEPs can be obtained from the CME office.

17.3 Training for Elders

Working in any kind of Grouping often requires a different approach and new skills from elders. Because so many practical arrangements need to be made, it is easy to overlook the need to think things through. If it is not practicable to do training within the Grouping (perhaps using an outside resource person), churches may look to District Councils, Synods or the Windermere Centre for their elders' training.

18. Issues for others

During the long period of the preparation, discussion and revision of this report certain issues arose which have an application not limited to the Grouping of Churches. They are recorded here, with a suggestion as to who might look at them.

18.1 Training

Some totally opposing views were expressed as to whether or not ministers are prepared for collaborative working or team ministry! The United Reformed Church's understanding of the ministry of the whole

people of God requires collaboration in all settings for both ministers and elders. A "body theology" requires an understanding of human relationships. This may be an area into which the **Training Committee** can look further.

18.2 Structure

The Structure of the United Reformed Church was basically fixed 30 years ago, although there have been changes since. It was a more settled church in those days, and possibly more uniform. It may soon be time for **Mission Council** to set up a task group to consider whether the Structure (a model at the time) needs to be changed to reflect a more dynamic and pluriform - if uncertain - church.

18.3 Other models

As said in the Introduction, there are other models of mission and ministry existing and developing in the United Reformed Church. It may be that they need the attention that has been given to Grouping. There is also a case for examining whether the policies and practices of the Assembly and its committees give proper support and encouragement to the variety. This might be a task for the **Life and Witness Committee**, or there could be a case for **an inter-committee or ad hoc group** to be set up.

18.4 Ecumenical issues

There is much agreement that local and ecumenical grouping is the best option if the needs of communities are a major consideration. Yet in many cases this turns out to be the least feasible option. There are some factors, such as theological differences or personality clashes, which may not be able to be resolved. The **Ecumenical Committee** is encouraged to continue working on some of the others, including convergence on matters of church order and (just possibly!) some flexibility in the operation of boundaries.

18.5 Settlement agreements. Reference was made to these in paragraph 12. However, the Assembly decided years ago that there should be a settlement agreement made before the start of every ministry. The consultation process has revealed a patchy observance of the practice. **District Councils and the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee** should give attention to this matter.

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

1. General Assembly commends the report Towards a Policy on Grouping of Churches to district councils and local churches for consideration and use whenever Groupings are being considered.
2. General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure (See the procedure for constitutional amendment set out in paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.):

Paragraph 1(1)

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

1(1)(b) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the district council, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share resources and ordained ministry, they may, on the recommendation of the district

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

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

Paragraph 2(1)(vii)

Add the following:

(Where two or more churches have formed a group or joint pastorate in accordance with paragraph 1(1)(b) or (c) above on the decision of synod under its function 2(4)(A)(iv), the church meetings of each church may, with the agreement of the synod on the advice of the district council and so long as the group constitution or the statement of intent as appropriate shall so provide, join together as a group or joint pastorate church meeting for the purpose of calling a minister, in which case this function shall be exercised by the group or joint pastorate church meeting.)

Paragraph 2(3)(c)

Change the words in brackets by amending "the second sentence of para.1(1)" so that it reads "para. 1(1)(a)".

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(ii)

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

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(iv)

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

Paragraph 2(4)(c)

Change the words in brackets by amending "the second sentence of para.1(1)" so that it reads "para. 1(1)(a)".

NOTE

Resolution 2 without the words in italics would recognise Groups and Joint Pastorates in the Structure. The addition of the words in italics would make provision for either of these to constitute a single meeting for the purpose of

G Resources

The Manual	The United Reformed Church	
How to Make it work	A pack of advice for locally united Methodist and United Reformed Churches Methodist/URC Liaison Committee	
This Growing Unity Roger Nunn	Handbook on ecumenical developments	CTE
Under the same roof	Guidelines to the Sharing Of Church Buildings Act 1969	CTBI
Travelling together Welch & Winfield	A Handbook on Local Ecumenical Partnerships	CTE
Getting to know you	Information pack for local Methodist & United Reformed Churches Methodist/URC	
Together Locally Jenny Carpenter	A Handbook for local churches seeking to work together	CTE
Constitutional Guidelines for Local Ecumenical Partnerships		CTE
Constitution of a United Area in Wiltshire and of an Oversight Group		
Guidelines for Local Co-operation – produced between the Presbyterian Church Standing Advisory Committee for Wales and the United Reformed Church Liaison Committee		
Are we better together?	Stories from eight clusters, groups and team ministries in the Southern synod	

H

SIX STORIES

One *(An example of growing together)*

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The main activities of the Group are:

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

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



Three *(An illustration of flexibility)*

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

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

Phase 2 Two new colleagues, of similar age were called. One with excellent pastoral skills (A) and the other with organisational gifts (B). They took two churches each on a permanent basis. (A) took the two larger churches and (B) the two smaller ones, allowing the latter to also have time to develop community projects and, in theory, build up the smaller churches. After 10 successful years (A) moved on and (B) decided to change the system as he felt out of touch with the two larger churches. The Group did hold joint events where both ministers took part.

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

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



Four *(One church in three places)*

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

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

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

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

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

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



Five (*Grouping over a wider area*)

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

It established five criteria.

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

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

The arrangement was not without its problems.

The Groups/District observe –

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

- The NSM provision was unsatisfactory because of the uncertainty of their availability.
- Grouping is only part of the answer.
- The establishment of one church as provided for in para 1(1) of the Structure. is one way forward.
- In this case, however, the widely varying locations make full integration difficult.
- Lay members need to take on more responsibility for management and administrative roles in Groups.



Six (*Five city churches*)

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

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

In the early days of the Group, the ministers preached in all the churches on a rota basis. All the churches had two services each Sunday, staggered to accommodate the ministerial team. Some of the ministers took four services in a day!

In recent years the policy has changed. The ministers now have pastoral oversight of named churches and will usually preach in those churches, enabling them to get to know the congregations better.

The strengths of having a Group have been:

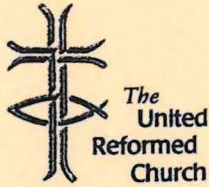
- Strong mutual support (especially for those in 'difficult' areas)
- Belonging together
- Financial support for ministry
- Sharing of skills and experience (e.g. music)
- Group magazine
- Diverse membership
- All age groups represented within the Group

The weaknesses are:

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

Concerns are:

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



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001

I

REPORT BY THE COMMISSION
TO CONSIDER AND ADVISE MISSION COUNCIL
ON THE PETITION OF EDMONTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
TO SECEDE

1. Background

1.1. In June 1998 the Church Meeting of Edmonton United Reformed Church passed a resolution requesting the General Assembly to allow the church to secede. After the appointment and work of commissions, first by the Lea Valley District Council and then by the Thames North Synod, and the subsequent inability of these Councils of the Church to achieve reconciliation with the Edmonton United Reformed Church, the petition to secede was referred to the Mission Council. Mission Council decided to appoint a commission to consider the petition and to advise on action to be taken.

1.2. The members of the Commission appointed by the Mission Council were: Revd John Reardon (Convener), Mrs Val Morrison, Mrs Delyth Rees, Revd John Rees, and Revd John Proctor who was unable to serve because of illness.

2. The Process

2.1. The Commission met on two occasions in January and February 2001. Prior to its first meeting the papers supporting the petition from the church at Edmonton were circulated to the Commission members. At the first meeting these papers were considered and questions were formulated to provide a basis for the visit to Edmonton which took place later the same day. At that time, up to and including the visit to Edmonton, the Commission members agreed not to receive or read any papers from the District Council or the Synod. They wanted to meet the members of the church at Edmonton without being influenced in any way by those who had earlier considered the petition to secede. After the meeting with the church the members of the Commission dispersed without discussing their reactions to the meeting which, in any case, did not end until 10.20 p.m.

2.2. Prior to the second meeting the papers from the Synod and District Council were sent to the Commission members and at that meeting the first brief session was spent in considering questions arising from these papers to be put to the representatives of the District Council and the Synod. The second and third sessions of that meeting were devoted to two hour-long conversations with first the four representatives of the District Council (Revds Steven Faber, Dr Laurence Dixon & Dr Roger Scopes and Mr Adrian West) and then the three representatives of the Synod (the Revds Adrian Bulley, Dr Philip Morgan & Michael Playdon). The fourth and final session of that meeting was spent in considering the petition and the Commission's response to it, including the formulation of advice to be presented to the Mission Council at its meeting in March 2001. The convener agreed to prepare a report to be circulated for comment to the other members of the Commission prior to any amendment and then submission to the Deputy General Secretary in time for the mailing to the Mission Council.

3. The Petition

3.1. At its Church Meeting on 25th June 1998 the Edmonton United Reformed Church passed the following resolution with 19 votes in favour and 4 against:

The Church Meeting of Edmonton United Reformed Church agrees to separate from the United Reformed Church and requests the General Assembly to allow this church to secede.

The 1999 Year Book of the United Reformed Church indicated that there were 34 members of the church.

3.2. In the paper setting out this petition it was explained that following disquiet in the church about the General Assembly's Resolution 19 in 1997 an attempt was made to remove that disquiet by presenting a resolution at the District Council about the implementation of Resolution 19 but its resolution was defeated on 23rd April 1998 with 13 voting for it and 19 against, with 1 abstention.

3.3. The reasons for the petition for secession were given as:

1. conformity to the word of God, which makes clear that the practice of homosexuality is an abomination;
2. the URC has obscured sin by passing Resolution 19;
3. inter church relations have been strained by the passing of the Resolution but improved by the decision to secede;
4. the faith and intentions of generations past concerning the property of the church are best served by secession;
5. the Basis of the URC has been so changed that it can no longer hold a wide diversity of style and understanding, and by narrowing its base has made it impossible for conservative evangelical believers to feel at home;
6. the mission of Edmonton church has repentance at its cutting edge and the preaching of the Gospel will be at odds with the practice of ministers of the same denomination (fornicators must leave their life of sin and turn to Christ);
7. the vision of the church at Edmonton (a church in Spiritual Revival) is at odds with the direction of the denomination which has changed the rules in a way that God never does.

3.4. Following the debates and resolutions of General Assembly after 1997 the church observed:

All our reasons for secession will stand even if Res 19 of 1997 does not. For this not to be the case, the church, having opened the door wide to this perversion must close it firmly shut in repentance AND CLEANSE ITS HOUSE. Res 19 was just one symptom of a much deeper problem. Edmonton U.R.C.'s decision to secede was not a reaction to one resolution but a response to the leading of God after much heartache over the way the denomination had moved from scripture and its founding principles. The report (*on human sexuality*) and resolutions reveal the same Godless shift toward the world and the worlds ways. The report changes little.

3.5. In December 2000, following the General Assembly debate and resolutions in July 2000, the Church Meeting at Edmonton unanimously (no voting figures stated) repeated its petition to secede, claiming, "the denomination has left the traditional understanding of the church, denies the clear biblical teaching on the subject and leaves the door open for ministry by practising homosexuals". It also observed that the URC's "position has evidently changed from what used to be a natural christian (*sic*) assumption that practising homosexuality was not welcomed".

4. The Commission meeting with the Edmonton church

4.1 The meeting with the church at Edmonton was arranged by the Deputy General Secretary (who accompanied the Commission) and Mrs Sheila Goddard, the Church Secretary. The Commission members arrived at the church to find the congregation already engaged in worship. The worship continued for a further twenty minutes before any welcome was given or introduction made. Consideration of the petition then began. There followed a series of contributions, in response to the Commission's invitation and questions, from seventeen people, including the minister, the Revd Richard Goddard. In the course of the exchanges the Commission learnt that:

- a. with only one exception, everyone who spoke supported the petition to secede;
- b. change in the ethos of the church came with the arrival of the present minister and his wife;
- c. many people (possibly more than twenty) left the church because they did not agree with the direction in which it was going;
- d. by even agreeing to discuss homosexuality the URC had shown its apostasy because there can be no discussion about matters on which the Bible is clear;
- e. the Bible is the inerrant word of God and the URC has changed its Basis of Union in its disregard for the word of God;
- f. the Councils of the church are regarded with suspicion and hostility and are not representative of local churches;
- g. the church believes that it has received a clear word from the Lord that they should "come out from among them" and should, like the Israelites in Egypt, be allowed to take their wealth (i.e. property) with them;
- h. the church has removed virtually all signs that refer to the United Reformed Church from its premises and is ashamed to own that it belongs to the denomination (the church sign outside the building reads "Faith House").

5. The Commission meeting with District and Synod representatives

5.1. After reading through the documentation supplied by the District Council and the Thames North Synod, the Commission met representatives of the two separately to learn more of the background to the petition and the measures taken to try to achieve reconciliation. Both the Lea Valley District Council and subsequently the Thames North Synod appointed groups to meet with representatives of the elders and church

members at Edmonton. The representatives meeting the Commission included some members of these groups and their reports were included in the documentation.

5.2. The Lea Valley District Council appointed a group of four people (two from the District and two from outside) to consider the petition, with a view to seeking reconciliation. They met with the minister and elders, then with eight past members who had left the church in recent years because of the changes in the direction of its life and finally with the Church Meeting at which there were twenty-eight members present, in February, March and April respectively, in 1999. Their report and the Commission's discussion with the representatives of the District Council confirmed that Edmonton saw Resolution 19 as symptomatic of the URC and that the church would want to secede even if Resolution 19 was revoked because it believed that the URC had moved from the Bible as the basis of faith. In the view of Edmonton the URC is "not united, not reformed and not recognised by Jesus". The District group sought to investigate and discuss with the church the grievances it had raised about the lack of replies to correspondence with Assembly officers and the conduct of meetings considering human sexuality.

5.3. The District Council was unable to find a way to reconcile Edmonton URC with the denomination as a whole and referred the matter to the Thames North Synod. The Synod appointed a Commission of three persons to consider the petition to secede. The Synod Commission members, between them, met with the minister, church members and some former church members on five occasions, two of which involved sharing in Sunday worship. Included in this programme was a specially convened Church Meeting on 3rd February 2000. The call to church members and "all who worship at faith house (*sic*)" was issued on notepaper headed Faith House, Christian Revival Centre.

5.4. The Synod Commission expressed some sympathy with the grievances of the church about correspondence not having been answered and about the conduct of the Provincial Synod meeting at which human sexuality had been debated, but "expressed the view to the Church Meeting that their Petition was unlikely to be accepted". The church repeated its assertion that the URC had departed from its position on biblical authority and could only rectify this by repentance and affirmation of the absolute authority of the Bible as the inerrant word of God. The church reiterated its conviction that God required them to leave the URC and that God had promised that they would leave with their "property and much besides" (a promise outlined in the letter giving notice of the Church Meeting).

5.5. The Synod Commission reported to the Synod Executive that no resolution of the problem had been possible. It expressed the view that in its theology and style of worship, the Edmonton Church was within the range of belief accommodated within the URC. It commended the zeal and commitment of the members but expressed concern about the style of leadership which it saw as extremely authoritarian. After hearing the report the Synod Executive brought the following resolution to its Synod in March 2000:

Thames North Synod, having failed to effect a reconciliation of differences with Edmonton United Reformed Church, refers the petition to secede to General Assembly through Mission Council.

That resolution was agreed.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. The Commission heard the story of Edmonton United Reformed Church through its present members, through the reports of conversations and correspondence with former members, through the work of the commissions set up by both the District Council and the Synod and through the representatives of those two Councils of the Church. It was a story of a relatively short period in the life of a church which, according to the URC Year Book, was established in 1789. During the four years leading up to the decision to petition for secession the membership of the church changed radically with a large proportion of the members there at the beginning having left because of the change in the ethos of the church. A similar or greater number joined the church during that period, attracted by the new ethos. During that period the church began to distance itself from the URC. The decision of the General Assembly in 1997 to agree to Resolution 19 in the debate about human sexuality and the church's subsequent failure to influence the District Council to accept its own point of view on the implementation of that Resolution led to the petition to secede.

6.2. The Commission believes that the two groups appointed by the District Council and the Synod were right to consult with past as well as present members of the church because many of them remain members of the URC, albeit in other local churches. During the period of change within the local church at Edmonton, the URC, through its General Assembly and through the other Councils of the Church, has wrestled with the biblical, theological, pastoral and practical questions posed by human sexuality, and, in particular, homosexuality. That process of debate over several years has revealed the breadth of theological opinion within the Church. The Edmonton church, however, is only prepared to countenance its own biblical and theological position and accuses the URC of having moved from its Basis of Union. The Basis of Union states that the word of God in the Old and New Testaments is to be discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The mechanism for such discernment is the provision within the Structure of the URC of the various Councils of the Church. This understanding of authority and the ways in which it can be tested and affirmed remain central to the URC and the recent debates have all been conducted within that understanding. It is not the URC which has changed but the Edmonton church. Because of the widely held belief about the URC among the present membership of the church at Edmonton we have to question whether when they were received into membership they understood the nature of the URC. There is evidence that those who disagreed with the direction the church was taking were given little option but to resign their membership or, indeed, were deleted, without consultation, from the membership roll.

6.3. The church at Edmonton has not handled divisions within its own membership with pastoral sensitivity or Christian charity but has, within a relatively short period, developed a membership which is antagonistic to the United Reformed Church and has

maintained that stance in defiance of the Basis of Union through its style of leadership and its disregard for the wider Councils of the Church.

6.4. It is commonly understood that members of the church are always free to leave if they find that they no longer have sympathy with the direction the church is taking. The members at Edmonton have every opportunity to exercise that right if they so wish. However, they wish to secede as a whole church, taking property and financial resources with them out of the URC. The Commission unanimously advises Mission Council to resist the petition and to advise General Assembly to reject it.

6.5. Finally, the Commission believes that the District Council and Synod will need the support of the whole Church in dealing with the aftermath of the petition, whatever decision is made.

John Reardon
Convener

28th February 2001



The
United
Reformed
Church

MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001

J

Responsibility and Accountability of Ministries in the United Reformed Church.

1. Mission Council at its meeting on the 5th to the 7th October 1998 considered a paper on The Theology of Ministry first prepared by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee in October 1997. (Minute 97/67) The Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee were then asked to prepare a detailed statement of the responsibility and accountability of:-

- a) ordained and non-ordained ministry;
- b) stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry;
- c) elders and lay preachers;
- d) diakonia.

This paper attempts to respond to that request.

2. A small working group of Colin Ferguson (Convener), Revd Michael Playdon and Revd Dr. Janet Tollington met to consider the issues and they reported to the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee. This paper has been revised as a result of discussion in the Committee.
3. The Basis of Union (para. 19) implies that both responsibility and accountability in the United Reformed Church must recognise the calling of all members of the church to confess their *faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to promise to be faithful in worship, to live in fellowship, and to share in the work of the church as God enables them.* It also declares *the Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service, and equipped by him for it.* Equally, all are responsible for one another, and accountable to one another, within the body of Christ. The conciliar nature of the United Reformed Church requires members to be accountable to one another for what is done in the Church.
4. The United Reformed Church recognises that *for the equipment of his people for this total ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church.* (Basis of Union para.20.) Some are called to be Ministers of Word and Sacraments and some are called to be Elders who share with them in the *total caring oversight by which his (Christ's) people may grow in faith and love. Those who enter upon such ministries commit themselves to them.* The Church recognises such calls and sets people apart *for as long as God wills* by the act of ordination. (Basis of Union para. 20). Following ordination the norm is for the Minister to be inducted to a pastoral charge and the Elder to the office of Elder in a local church. Ordination itself cannot be revoked by either the Church or the individual. Through a disciplinary process Ministers can be removed from office and from the Roll of Ministers (Section O of Manual). Church Meeting can suspend an Elder from the Elders' Meeting.

5. Those who wish to offer themselves as candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments have their call tested by the congregation to which they belong, the District Council, an Assessment Conference and finally by the Synod. During this process it is the Church Meeting which is responsible for the candidate. Once the candidate has been accepted for training the Synod becomes responsible and in turn the candidate is accountable to the Synod. Once a leaving certificate has been issued it is the Synod which, in the Structure of the United Reformed Church, has the responsibility of giving permission for ordination. The responsibilities and roles of the local church, District Council, Synod and Training College or course during the period of training seem unclear and need clarification.

Is it realistic for the sending synod to have the responsibility of deciding whether or not a candidate is ready for ordination? If it is, how should the decision be made? If not, who should make the decision?

To whom is a student accountable during training? Is it clear what are the roles of the various responsible bodies during the training period?

6. The ordinand is called to a local pastorate or appointed by a District Council to some other form of ministry recognised by the District Council. The District Council responsible for the local pastorate or appointment concurs with the call and arranges for the ordination of the new minister under its authority. The United Reformed Church believes that the ordination is to the ministry of the whole Church of Jesus Christ. Ministers are accountable to the District Council by which they have been inducted and to those among whom they are called to serve. How this occurs in reality is not always clear. The responsibilities in their broadest sense are covered in the affirmations made at ordination and/or induction to a pastorate.

How is a minister's accountability to her/his District Council expressed? Would it be helpful to make it specific rather than general? If so, how?

7. An ordained minister may in due course, be called to a new pastorate, district appointment, Assembly appointment or ministry in secular employment. In the case of calls to pastorates and district appointments both the former District and the District within which the new ministry is situated must give concurrence to this call before any induction takes place. Care needs to be taken to ensure that all those on the Roll of Ministers are properly linked with Districts, including those who are working in secular employment. This would normally be through a link to the District Council covering the area in which they live or work. The only accountability of those in secular employment to the District Council would be for any particular office in the Church to which they may be appointed and for their observance of the affirmations made at ordination.

Do District Councils take their responsibility for ministers in secular employment seriously? Does the responsibility of both District Councils and ministers in this situation need clearer definition?

8. Elders are elected by the Church Meeting and their ordination is recognised throughout the United Reformed Church. They are inducted to serve on the Elders' Meeting, usually for a fixed period, which may be renewed by the Church Meeting for a further period. There is no prescribed preparation for Elders. The

responsibilities of Elders are corporate and laid out in the Structure. Elders are accountable to the Church Meeting. Individual Elders may be called to serve in the wider councils of the Church to which they are then also accountable.

Should there be a prescribed pre-ordination training for elders?

9. No distinction is made between the responsibility and accountability of stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministers where they are called to a pastoral ministry through the processes of the District Council. In that respect their accountability should be seen as being to District Council, and their responsibility as being for the local situation to which they have been called. Ministers on the Roll of the United Reformed Church who are working in secular employment have their main responsibility and accountability to their employer.
10. It is unclear to what the term 'non-ordained ministry' refers. Local Church Leaders may fit this category, in which case reference should be made to the guidelines already approved by General Assembly 1998.
11. There are people appointed to a wide variety of posts within the Church who do not need to be members of the United Reformed Church. In such cases there are legal and contractual responsibilities on both employee and employer. Such employees are accountable to their employing body.
12. The question of diaconal ministry has been explored by a separate group. Church Related Community Workers may fall into this category. Church Related Community Workers are sent for appropriate education and training through an assessment procedure similar to that for candidates for Ministry of Word and Sacraments. They are commissioned in the name of the United Reformed Church by a District Council and appointed by that Council to a particular responsibility. They remain primarily accountable to the District Council as well as having a responsibility to the project with which they are working.

How is a CRCW's accountability to her/his District Council expressed? Is it clear what are her/his responsibilities to the District Council, local pastorate, CRCW project? What happens if there is a conflict of interest?

13. Lay Preachers may, but need not, be Elders. There are three ways in which people act as preachers.
 - a) Nationally accredited preachers have satisfactorily completed an approved course of study. They are recommended by their District Council and once accredited they are commissioned by the District Council. They then lead worship wherever they are invited. District Councils should appoint a Lay Preachers' Commissioner who is thus accountable to District Council. Lay Preachers should be accountable to the District which commissioned them, or in which they are now preaching, but not specifically to the Lay Preachers' Commissioner. Only the District has power to remove names from the list of preachers recommended by District Council. Names could be removed from the list of nationally accredited preachers at the request of a District Council, with the approval of the Accreditation sub-committee of the Ministries Committee.

b) There are preachers who may never have completed any approved course of study. Some have been preaching for a number of years and have gained unofficial recognition which is sustained by their regular use. Others are recognised by the District Council or by the local Lay Preachers Association and take part in training opportunities provided. Guidelines for District recognition have been prepared but there is still some need to reflect further on the formal accountability of such preachers.

c) There are also Church Members who lead worship in their own pastorate. This is a practice which is growing and not all those involved would wish to become preachers outside their own pastorate. Their responsibility and accountability lie within that pastorate but District Councils may wish to provide education, training and support opportunities to help prepare them for the leading of worship and the preaching of the Gospel.

How should nationally - accredited lay preachers' responsibility to their District Council be expressed? Would it be helpful to make it specific rather than general? If so, how?

Does more need to be done to define the accountability of lay preachers who are not nationally accredited?

14. District Councils carry the main responsibility for ensuring that ministers who have been called to serve in the District exercise their ministry in an accountable manner. This is normally done by patterns of open care, i.e. systems such as the periodic visiting of congregations by a group representing the District Council. Church Meetings also have a responsibility to and for their minister, usually exercised through the Elders' Meeting. Some ministers have a local support group. It is important that these groups are clearly separated from the oversight functions of the Elders' Meeting.
15. The conciliar nature of the United Reformed Church means that it does not have a clear line of management but a pattern of relationships which in normal circumstances have great strength and help to sustain our church order.
16. When things go wrong and relationships cannot be healed within the congregation, the District must exercise responsibility. This would normally be handled by the District Pastoral Committee, or its equivalent, because the issues are seen as primarily a question of pastoral relationships.
17. Should a matter of discipline arise the District maintains pastoral support for the Minister while the matter is investigated by the process laid down in Section O of the Manual.

Where there is a breakdown in pastoral relationships, or a breach in discipline, is it clear where responsibility and accountability lie? If not, where are the gaps?

ASSEMBLY MISSION COUNCIL - GRANTS AND LOANS GROUP (GLG)

Annual Report to Mission Council - for March, 2001

1. The newly formed GLG began its work in April, 2000, in bringing together the work of three groups: CWM Self-Support Fund, AGOGAL and the Church Buildings Fund. These funds make financial resources available to our churches for enabling their mission.

2. Representation on the GLG consists mainly of the thirteen Synod appointees, who have a good working knowledge of the needs of the churches in their Synod. Invited to attend the meetings are seven of the Executive Secretaries in Church House with the Deputy General Secretary as Budget Holder.

The Synod representatives are key to ensuring that applications are thoroughly scrutinised and tested before coming to the GLG. They are the main source of communication between the local church, Synod and GLG. At a meeting of GLG a Synod rep. is invited to answer questions of information about an application he/she has brought, but not to comment on its merit. A large responsibility rests on the shoulders of the Synod representatives and with change of personnel from time to time GLG realises that it is important for experiences to be shared. GLG works hard for a pattern of consistency and fairness.

3. **The Three Funds:**

a) **CWM Self-support Fund** - its purpose is to give money and advice to CWM churches to set up projects that will create income. These projects should enable "your church to move from financial dependency towards financial independence". CWM receives such applications forwarded by the GLG to the CWM Executive. We are pleased to report that seven applications made in the first round have been endorsed by the GLG and have been forwarded to CWM. Four have received CWM Executive approval and three will be submitted to the CWM Executive in June, 2001.

CWM has allocated the URC some £366,000 and it is likely that all of this money will be taken up if our applications are successful. It is not yet known whether there will be any future similar funding from CWM. *(Details in the Appendix)*

b) **The former AGOGAL** now covers Mission projects under the following headings - New Enterprise in Mission (NEM), Mission Expenses in the UK (MEUK), Mission in Ecumenical Situations (MES), and Social Action (SA). The 2001 budget is £103,000, with a flexibility to go up to £120,000. In the year 2000 some £100,899 was allocated out of a budget of £101,000. *(Details in the Appendix)*

As time goes on, we notice that a significant number of MEUK applications are to meet the expenses of CRCWs, some of which are repeat applications after an initial five years. If the "Mission Fund" continues to try to meet this expanding work of ministry in the URC (a potential of 30 CRCW posts in the URC), then the annual budget figure will be mainly used up on these CRCW applications leaving little or none for the other three categories mentioned above. *It is necessary for Mission Council to judge whether the funding of CRCW expenses should be met from this fund or in another way in order to resolve this dilemma.*

Because of the way applications are linked to periods of up to five years, and that there can be a substantial time-lag between the date of application and start of the post/work, particularly in respect to the appointment of CRCWs, we need to ensure that the allocated funds for Mission Projects are used effectively and that most of the money is "working for most of the time". Allocated funds not taken up for prolonged periods ties up money unnecessarily.

c) **The Church Buildings Fund** provides grants and loans to churches for feasibility studies, funding of facilities for the disabled, renovation and refurbishment of buildings.

The Fund has had a chequered history. Some years ago funds were limited and were sparingly used. With time the fund increased and a surplus was used to purchase property for the URC - Church House Staff Manses, Yardley Hastings Manse and other shared purchases. At the beginning of 1999 the Fund was valued at some £3.667m. During 1999 churches were greatly encouraged to apply for grants and loans and some 102 did. By the end of 1999 grants and loans of over £900,000 were approved and by April, 2000, a further £480,000 had been allocated.

Meanwhile churches were being made aware of the legislation coming into force by 2004 for the provision of facilities for the Disabled. In September, 2000, the GLG decided it was necessary to estimate the number of churches likely to be applying for a Disability Grant. (These had averaged at £5000 per application in the previous 18 months.) The outcome of the survey in the thirteen Synods indicated that some 620+ could apply. It was clear that the Church Buildings Fund could not meet such a potential demand at the funding level in force (50% of the cost up to £10,000 maximum).

In the autumn the Secretary for Finance reported to the Convener of the GLG that the Church Buildings Fund was being rapidly run down and the then level of grants was unsustainable. The Secretary for Finance reported to the GLG at its meeting in November, 2000, and GLG endorsed the action of its officers in putting a "freeze" on the allocation of Grants and Loans from the Church Buildings Fund. It also agreed reluctantly to extend the "freeze" for a further six months to the end of May, 2001. This was to give time for a thorough financial review. It is realised that this "freeze" has caused a major disappointment to churches which have been planning for building improvements on the basis of finance being available from the Church Buildings Fund. Our aim is to be able to continue to assist churches, albeit at a reduced level.

The GLG will also consider how to prioritise projects, difficult though this will be. The weighing of applications against the mission objectives will be necessary. It will also be inevitable that some kind of "means testing" will be introduced so that assistance is given only to churches/districts/synods which cannot afford to undertake the work themselves. To be equitable some form of "rationing" will be considered.

4. **FUNDING:** GLG recognises the importance of having more accurate information regarding the funds available from both URC and CWM sources, so that realistic budgeting can be put into effect for the next three/five years. Following a request from GLG the Mission Council RPAG has arranged the transfer of funds held in URC property to the Church Buildings Fund amounting to £1.85m. Taking into account commitments already given the net extra amount available is about £1.35m.

In the light of last years experience and for better future planning there will be a revision of the threshold and ceiling figures in regard to the Church Buildings Fund monies available and anticipated demand.

At its meeting on 15th. February, 2001, the Grants and Loans Group came to the following conclusions and asks that the Mission Council supports these decisions as being necessary, prudent and positive.

- 1. That for the foreseeable future only the interest of the Capital available to the Church Buildings Fund (CBF) will be used for Grants.*
- 2. The present six months moratorium on Grants and Loans from the CBF ends on 1st. June. However the moratorium on Loans will be extended until a review of the financial situation takes place in 2002. Revised figures for Grants will be made known after the present six month moratorium.*
- 3. In the future Grants will be given to less well-off Synods, and less well-off Churches within those Synods. This will be worked out following consultation with the Resource Sharing Task Group.*

4. The Grants and Loans Group intend to continue from June 2001 the provision of Grants for Disabled Facilities and Feasibility Studies, albeit at a much reduced level. When the legislation for Disabled Facilities comes into force in 2004, the GLG will review the financial situation and the use of the Church Buildings Fund.

5. Churches should be encouraged to apply to Local Authorities and Charities for financial help with Disabled Facilities.

A further matter causing concern to the GLG is the number of re-applications arriving from projects/programmes requesting a further period of funding. If a project has already received five or more years of funding, there will come a time when that funding should come to an end, say after 8 or 10 years, so that new projects can be assisted. Otherwise the annual budget figure is designated more and more for projects already underway. The problem arises concerning the viability of projects if and when GLG ceases to give financial help. Mission Council may want to suggest guidelines/criteria for a policy on this matter. We need to decide whether our purpose is short term "pump priming" or long-term commitment.

GLG will rely on information coming from its Synod representatives about the forecasting of applications from churches concerning the number and scope of projects seeking assistance. This highlights the importance of the paper "Millstone or Keystone" in making the best use of limited resources. Some hard questions need to be asked about where money is invested in church buildings in relation to the mission potential as identified by Synods and Districts.

5. OUTCOME OF FINANCIAL "PUMP PRIMING"

GLG will expect through its Synod Representatives that a brief report-back from churches of the outcome of the project is provided twelve months on from funding being given. At the moment there is little happening in this respect and the GLG do not wish to place unnecessary loads on project leaders. In a number of cases reports may already be required by other bodies (local authority etc.) and to send a copy of the project's annual report to GLG may be all that is necessary. It is important to know how effectively the money provided is being used.

6. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

A case for Biblical reflection may be found in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:11-27) - a form of "pump priming" - looking at the role of the Master and the three servants.

The three servants would know what was expected of them and in our situation the URC has given "The five Marks of Mission" as a clear guideline. Two servants got on with the job the third didn't. The master praised the two faithful servants and "sacked" the lazy unfaithful third, giving that share to the two who had shown initiative.

It's a story about stewardship and accountability with its obvious challenge to all who have responsibility in managing God-given resources in the Church both in the URC and the wider ecumenical scene.

Angus W. Duncan
27th. February, 2001.

APPENDIX

SUMMARY OF GRANTS AGREED FOR FACILITIES FOR THE DISABLED, FEASIBILITY STUDIES, LOANS AND OTHER GRANTS

	Disabled/No.	Feasibility/No.	Loans/No.	Other Grants/No.	TOTALS
Total for 1999	£363,394/68	£32,473/24	£375,320/10	£158,500/3	£929,687
March 2000	200,962/32	9,481/6	2,959/1	269,000/4	482,402
April -October 2000	170,526/31	21,125/14	17,208/3	nil	208,859
Total for 2000 (10 months)-	371,488	30,606	20,167	269,000	691,261
					TOTAL £1,620,948

Note: not all Grants and Loans are taken up at the time agreement is given by GLG.

SUMMARY OF "MISSION" GRANTS - APRIL/ DECEMBER 2000

NEW ENTERPRISE IN MISSION (NEM)

- £ 1,250 one-off grant towards expenses to establish an ecumenical church, Cambourne, Cambridge (Eastern)
- £3,000 pa for 3 years for pastoral worker, Westborough, Guildford (Wessex)
- £ 1 5,000 over 3 years for Youth & Community Worker, Newquay, when appointed (South Western)
- £13,750 over 5 years for Youth & Schools Worker for Groby Extend Project (repeat application) (East Midlands)

MISSION EXPENSES IN THE UK (MEUK)

- £2,000 pa for 5 years towards expenses of Inner City Minister/Research Fellow, Toxteth, Liverpool, when appointed (Mersey)
- £2 1,000 over 5 years towards expenses of CRCW, South Wigston & Saffron Lane, South Leicestershire, when appointed (East Midlands)
- £26,250 over 5 years for housing allowance for CRCW, Christ Church, Peterborough (repeat application) (East Midlands)
- £ 1 5,000 over 5 years towards expenses of CRCW, Seacombe, Wallasey, when appointed (Mersey)
- £19,340 over 5 years towards expenses of CRCW, Park Llanelli, appointed February, 2001 (Wales)

MISSION IN ECUMENICAL SITUATIONS (MES)

- £5,500 over 3 years for CONTRAST, Derby (East Midlands)
- £17,331 over 5 years towards stipend, housing etc. for ecumenical ministry of a new church at Cambourne, Cambridge (Eastern)
- £5,000 pa for 2 years, for support costs of Methodist Diaconal Worker, Locking Castle LEP, Bristol (repeat application) (South Western)
- £14,400 over 3 years for expenses of Partnership Minister, Drumchapel Churches Partnership, Glasgow, when appointed (Scotland)

SOCIAL ACTION (SA)

- £2,000 one-off grant for renovation etc. of furniture for people in crisis, Darwen Ecumenical Partnership (North Western)
- £4,000 grant for first year to Penn Fields Community Project, Wolverhampton (West Midlands)
- £600 pa for 2 years for expenses of chaplain to Brooklands Avenue Medical Centre, Cambridge (Eastern)
- £2,000 one-off grant for extension to Credit Union Scheme, Zion, Llanidloes (Wales)

SUMMARY OF APPLICATIONS MADE TO CWM SELF-SUPPORT FUND

Part-time Resource Manager, Mersey Synod Resource Centre	£7,500
Community of Grace, Leicester, East Midlands	40,000
Glenorchy Centre, Wirksworth, East Midlands	75,000
Chapel Retreat House, Penally, Pembrokeshire, Wales	100,000
Christ Church Centre, Henley-on-Thames, Wessex	36,000
Clapton Park, Caf.é.five, Thames North	77,400
Community Development Director and Catering Supervisor, Emmanuel, Cambridge, Eastern	<u>30,100</u>
	<u>366,000</u>



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001

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The Section O Process

Report to Mission Council - March 2001

Since General Assembly in July 2000, the Working Group has met several times. It wishes to bring to General Assembly in July 2001 some changes to Part I which, if approved, would be referred back through the constitutional process and come to Assembly in 2002 for ratification. It is not proposed to bring to this Assembly any amendments to the Part II Rules of Procedure. The rule changes will be introduced when the amendments to Part I come back to the 2002 General Assembly. The Group is also working on revisions of the existing Guidelines, which it hopes to produce shortly.

The Group does not see any of the proposed changes to Part I as fundamental. Therefore, to save Mission Council's time, it is suggested that, following procedure adopted previously, three members of Mission Council might be asked to meet with the legal adviser informally to consider the proposed changes and then to report back to the plenary session. (The current text will be found in the Manual of 2000)

Mission Council is asked to agree that the following Resolution be put to General Assembly in July 2001 :-

“General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to Part I of the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline :-

Paragraph 1

Delete the existing Paragraph 1 and substitute the following :-

- “1.1 Under the provisions of this Section O an Assembly Commission (as defined in Paragraph 3) shall operate under the authority of the General Assembly for the purpose of deciding (in cases properly referred to it) the questions as to whether a Minister has committed a breach of discipline and, if the Assembly Commission should so decide, whether on that account his/her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers or alternatively whether a written warning should be issued to

him/her. Under the Section O Process the Assembly Commission is also able to make recommendations and offer guidance but only within the scope of Paragraphs 10 and 16 of this Part I.

- 1.2 Once the case of any Minister is being dealt with under the Section O Process, it shall be conducted and concluded entirely in accordance with that Process and not through any other procedure of the Church”

Paragraph 2

Delete the words “the Process set out in this Section O” and substitute the words “the Section O Process”.

Delete the words “of the United Reformed Church” after the word “Structure”.

Delete the words “this Section O” and substitute “the Section O Process”.

Paragraph 3

Delete Paragraph 3 and its sub-paragraphs and substitute the following :-

- “3 For the purpose of this Section O, the following words and expressions carry the following meanings :-
 - 3.1 “**Appeals Commission**” shall mean the Commission constituted for the hearing of each Appeal in accordance with Paragraph 12.
 - 3.2 “**Appointers**” shall mean the persons responsible under Paragraph 6 for the appointment of the Assembly Commission.
 - 3.3 “**Assembly Commission**” shall mean a Commission consisting of five (5) persons selected from the Commission Panel for the purpose of hearing and deciding each case dealt with under the Section O Process.
 - 3.4 “**Basis of Union**” shall mean the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church.
 - 3.5 “**Commission Panel**” shall mean a Panel consisting of a maximum of fifty (50) members of the United Reformed Church from whom shall be chosen the persons to form the Assembly Commission to hear each case being dealt with under the Section O Process.
 - 3.6 “**Commission Stage**” shall mean that part of the Section O Process initiated in accordance with Paragraph 5.
 - 3.7 “**Council**” shall mean the council of the Church whose Mandated Group issues the Referral Notice.
 - 3.8 “**Deletion**” and “**to delete**” shall mean the removal of/to remove the name

of a Minister from the Roll of Ministers other than at the request of the Minister concerned or by the acceptance of his/her resignation or by his/her death.

- 3.9 **“District Council”** shall mean that District Council which in relation to any Minister exercises oversight of that Minister in accordance with its function under Paragraph 2 (3)(i) of the Structure and references to District Council shall be understood to include area councils in Scotland such area councils being in every respect identical with district councils and wherever the words **“district council”** or **“district”** appear they shall as regards Scotland be read as meaning **“area council”** or **“area”**.
- 3.10 **“Hearing”** shall mean the Hearing conducted by the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission under Section E or Section G of the Rules of Procedure.
- 3.11 **“Investigation”** shall mean the process of investigation carried out by the Mandated Group as set out in Section D of the Rules of Procedure.
- 3.12 **“Mandated Group”** shall mean the group mandated to act in the name of a District Council under Section B of the Rules of Procedure and in any case where the Referral Notice has been issued in the name of a council other than the District Council the expression **“Mandated Group”** shall where the context so permits be construed as a reference to the member or members (not exceeding three) of any corresponding group of such other council.
- 3.13 **“Minister”** shall mean a person whose name is on the Roll of Ministers and who is under consideration within the Section O Process.
- 3.14 **“Notice of Appeal”** shall mean a Notice specified in the Rules of Procedure whereby either of the parties in any case indicates his/her/its intention to appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission.
- 3.15 **“Notice of Reference back”** shall mean a Notice from the Appeals Commission of any reference back for re-hearing by the Assembly Commission under Paragraph 14.7.
- 3.16 **“Parties”** shall mean (i) the Council, which for the purpose of the Section O Process shall act solely and exclusively through its Mandated Group, and (ii) the Minister.
- 3.17 **“Referral Notice”** shall mean a Notice specified in the Rules of Procedure whereby a case concerning Ministerial Discipline is referred into the Commission Stage and shall include any statement of reasons for such referral which may be appended to it.
- 3.18 **“Roll of Ministers”** shall have the meaning given to it in Paragraph 1 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union.

- 3.19 **“Rules of Procedure”** shall mean the Rules of Procedure governing the system of ministerial discipline commencing with the exercise by the District Council, Synod or General Assembly of its function as set out in Paragraph 2(3)(xviii), Paragraph 2(4)(xv) or Paragraph 2(5)(xxiii) of the Structure as the case may be and continuing throughout the Section O Process such Rules being contained in Part II of Section O.
- 3.20 **“Secretary of the Assembly Commission”** shall mean the person appointed by the General Assembly on the advice of the Nominations Committee to be responsible for all secretarial and procedural matters laid upon him/her by virtue of the Section O Process, and the period and terms of office of that person shall be such as the General Assembly shall decide.
- 3.21 **“Section O Process”** shall mean the whole Process set out in this Section O (subject to such variations as shall from time to time be made)
- 3.22 **“Structure”** shall mean the Structure of the United Reformed Church.
- 3.23 **“Suspension”** and **“to suspend”** shall have the meanings assigned to them in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union.
- 3.24 **“Synod Panel”** shall mean the Panel to be set up by each Synod from which the Mandated Group shall be appointed as set out in Section B of the Rules of Procedure. ”

Paragraph 4

After the words “Nominations Committee” insert the words “(or such other committee as may in the future perform the functions of the existing Nominations Committee)”.

Paragraph 5

Delete Paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 and substitute the following :-

- “5 The Commission Stage shall be initiated in every case by the service upon the Secretary of the Assembly Commission of a Referral Notice in the name of the District Council, the Synod or the General Assembly (or Mission Council acting on its behalf) in pursuance of their respective functions as contained in the Structure and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.”

Paragraph 7

In Paragraph 7.2 delete the words “a Minister, or the council lodging the Referral Notice” and substitute the words “either of the parties”.

Paragraph 11

In Paragraph 11.2 delete the opening words “The council of the Church which lodged the Referral Notice in any case may” and substitute the words; “ The Mandated Group of the Council which

lodged the Referral Notice in any case may in the name of that Council”.

Delete the word “concerned” after the word “Minister”.

Also add the following sentence at the end of Paragraph 11.2 :-

“In any case where no written warning is attached to the decision not to delete, the Notice may state, if the Mandated Group so desires, that the appeal is limited to the question of the issue of a written warning to the Minister.”

Paragraph 12

In Paragraph 12 delete the first sentence and substitute the following :-

“The Appeals Commission for the Hearing of each Appeal shall consist of five (5) persons and shall include the Moderator of the General Assembly (subject to the provisions of Paragraphs 7.1.1 and 7.1.2).”

Paragraph 14

In Paragraph 14.7, after the words “of the information before it” insert the words “or of any aspect of the Section O Process itself”.

Paragraph 16

In Paragraph 16.1.3, after the word “Roll” insert the word “of Ministers”.

Paragraph 17

In Paragraph 17.2 add the following words at the end :-

“ , provided that, where the Mandated Group has formally signified to the Assembly Commission that it does not intend to press the case for any disciplinary action to be taken against the Minister and provided that the Assembly Commission decides not to issue a written warning, the Assembly Commission may as an appendage to its decision not to delete state that the Minister’s suspension shall terminate with immediate effect.”

Paragraphs 19 and 20

In both paragraphs, delete the word “concerned”.

Paragraph 21

In Paragraph 21 after the words “applying for training” in the final sentence insert the words “for the ministry” and delete the bracketed words “(local church, district, national assessment, synod)”.

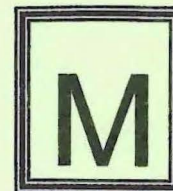
Paragraph 22

In Paragraph 22 delete the words “of the United Reformed Church”.



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2001



Resolutions

These are the revised resolutions which replace those attached to Paper M on 'The Role and Recognition of Evangelists' circulated at the January Mission Council.

This paper and its resolutions will appear on the Agenda of this year's General Assembly.

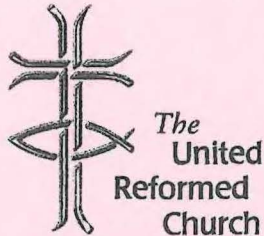
General Assembly

1. recognising the urgent missionary challenge facing the church at the start of the 21st century,
and affirming the importance of evangelism for the church and its ministry at every level

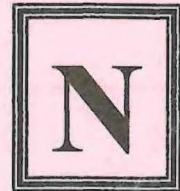
acknowledges the need to identify those in lay and ordained ministry who have the gift of evangelism.

General Assembly

2. directs the Life and Witness Committee, in consultation with Mission Council, to explore ways of appointing men and women as evangelists, and to suggest ways of supporting them in their ministry.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001



Nominations Committee
Report to Mission Council - March 2001

1. Conveners Elect

1.1 Mission Council is asked to note that Revd Kathryn Price has accepted nomination as Convener Elect of the Youth and Children's Work Committee and become Convener 2002-6.

1.2 We hope that by our meeting on 15th May that the nominating groups for Clerk-Elect and Treasurer-Elect will have names for our confirmation.

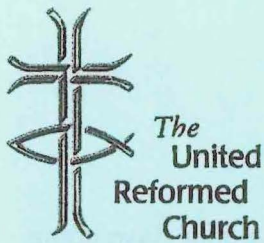
2. Racial Justice

2.1 Revd Peter Brain [Convener] will report on the progress of the Appointment Group for the Secretary for Racial Justice.

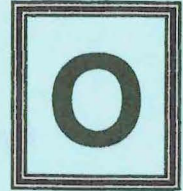
2.2 We hope to be able to report an acceptance for the Convener of the Racial Justice Committee, which we would ask Mission Council to confirm : it will then be possible for preparatory work to be done before General Assembly. We are in process of confirming membership of the Committee and it is essential that the Terms of Reference are agreed as soon as possible.

3. Disciplinary Process

Revs Donald Hilton & Alasdair Walker have indicated that they wish to retire in 2002 as Convener and Secretary respectively of the Commission Panel. Accordingly we are proposing that Mrs Helen Brown [currently Deputy Convener] and Mr Brian Evans be appointed to succeed them by General Assembly: they have both indicated their willingness to do so for periods of three years [i.e. 2002-5] . We are seeking a future Deputy Convener.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2001



DRAFT RESOLUTION FOR THE 2001 ASSEMBLY – Structure

General Assembly agrees to replace the current paragraph 5(2) of the Structure with the following:-

5(2) References and appeals falling outside paragraph 5(1) shall be dealt with as follows:-

(A) A local church (either through its church meeting or its elders' meeting)

- (i) A local church may appeal to the district council upon which it is entitled to be represented for the resolution of any dispute or difference.
- (ii) A local church may appeal to the synod against any decision of the district council by which it is affected.
- (iii) A local church may appeal to the General Assembly against any decision of the synod (whether or not as the result of an appeal) by which it is affected.

(B) An individual member of a local church (expressed below as a church member)

- (i) Subject to (iv) below, a church member may appeal to the district council upon which the local church of which s/he is a member is entitled to be represented for the resolution of any dispute or difference between the church member and that local church.
- (ii) Subject to (iv) below, a church member may appeal to the synod against any decision of the district council (whether or not as the result of an appeal) by which s/he is affected.
- (iii) Subject to (iv) below, a church member may appeal to the General Assembly against any decision of the synod (whether or not as the result of an appeal) by which s/he is affected.
- (iv) In the case of a church member, no right of appeal exists under B(i), (ii) or (iii) above unless the subject matter of the appeal is such that it directly touches and concerns the church member in his/her individual relationship with the local church of which s/he is member as distinct from some other aspect of the life of the church with which the church member may disagree.

(C) District council

A district council may refer any dispute or difference, whether or not the same shall have come before it on appeal, to the synod on which it is entitled to be represented and may appeal from any decision of the synod by which it is affected, whether or not made on such a reference, to the General Assembly.

(D) Synod

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

(E) General Assembly

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

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

DRAFT RESOLUTION FOR THE 2002 ASSEMBLY RULES OF PROCEDURE

(Although this would not go before the Assembly until 2002, it might be sensible to include it in the Reports to the 2001 Assembly so that members can see the whole package of changes.)

General Assembly agrees to amend the Rules of Procedure as follows:

1. replace the current paragraph 8(1) with the following: "8(1) When a local church, district council, synod or church member appeals in accordance with paragraph 5(2) of the Structure, the rules of procedure set out below shall apply."
2. in paragraph 8(2) delete the words "*Any church or church member wishing to appeal against a decision of any council shall within ten days*" and replace with: "The council or church member wishing to appeal shall within ten days"
3. add at the end of paragraph 8(3) the words: "(however see 8(9) below.)"
4. replace the current paragraph 8(9) with the following: "8(9) Any such difference or dispute may with the consent of both parties concerned be referred to a committee of the synod for decision. In the case of an appeal to the General Assembly, a Commission of Assembly may, with the consent of both parties, be appointed by the officers of the Assembly to hear the case and reach a decision in the name of the Assembly. Such a Commission shall have five members, all of whom shall be members of Assembly, and shall be convened by either the Moderator of General Assembly or a former Moderator. In the event of the inability of some members to attend, it shall be in order for the Commission to hear the appeal with a minimum of three members present. In the event of the number being reduced to four, the Moderator shall have a casting vote."
5. in paragraph 8(10) insert the words: "or a Commission of Assembly" after "decisions of the General Assembly".
6. renumber the existing paragraph 8(11) as 8(12) and insert a new paragraph 8(11) as follows: "8(11) If at any point in the process a reply has not been received from the appellant by the officer charged by the council hearing the appeal to deal with the procedural aspects, then that officer may give notice that if a reply is not received within 28 days the appeal will be deemed to have lapsed."

accordance with Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and not under Paragraph 5(2) below.

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

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

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

A district council may refer any dispute or difference, whether or not the same shall have come before it on appeal, to the synod on which it is entitled to be represented and may appeal from any decision of the synod by which it is affected, whether or not made on such a reference, to the General Assembly.

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

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

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

8. APPEALS

8.1 If any church or church member wishes to appeal against a decision of any council in accordance with paragraph 5(2) of the Structure the rules of procedure set out below shall apply.

8.2 Any church or church member wishing to appeal against a decision of any council shall within ten days of the making of the decision request in writing the secretary of that council to supply a written copy of the minute of the decision. This copy shall be supplied within ten days and within ten days of the receipt of such minute the appellant shall notify in writing the secretary of the body concerned of such desire to appeal.

8.3 Where an appeal is against the decision of any council, its effect shall be to stay the action of the council concerned pending consideration of the matter by the wider council to which it is referred and the decision of that council upon it.

8.4 An appellant shall have the right and may be required to appear at a meeting of the wider council when the matter is under review.

8.5 The council against whose decision there is appeal shall also be represented in support of its decision.

8.6 All appeals shall be accompanied by all relevant records and papers.

8.7 Appellants shall be entitled to see such papers as they deem necessary in order to bring the subject of their appeal before the wider council.

8.8 Councils hearing appeals proceed in the matter in the following order:

8.8.1 call for and read minutes and papers relevant to the case

8.8.2 hear the parties to the difference or dispute, viz.

(a) every appellant,

(b) the appointed representatives of the council whose actions are under question.

8.8.3 give members of the council hearing the appeal an opportunity of putting questions to the parties through the presiding officer.

8.8.4 consider and decide upon the matter in the absence of the parties

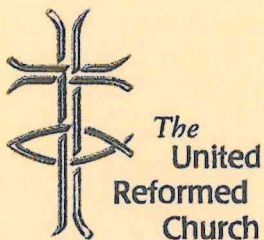
8.8.5 the parties being recalled, intimate the decision to them by the presiding officer who asks them whether they acquiesce

8.8.6 through the clerk/secretary supply copies of the decision in writing to the parties.

8.9 Any such difference or dispute may with the consent of all parties concerned be referred to a committee or to the moderator of the synod for decision but if any of the parties refuse to accept such a reference the case must be heard by the full council.

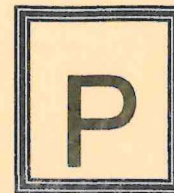
8.10 There can be no appeal arising from decisions of the General Assembly whose decisions are final and binding upon the members and councils of the United Reformed Church.

8.11 The provisions of this Section headed "Appeals" shall not apply to cases which are being determined by the Assembly Commission under the Disciplinary Process set out in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church.



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2001



For Information

PENSION FUND – FLEXIBILITY FOR ADDITIONAL VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTIONS

The rules of the URC Ministers Pension Fund currently provide that the benefits secured by additional voluntary contributions (“AVCs”) into the fund must be calculated and taken at the time of retirement.

This rule was drawn up originally to comply with Inland Revenue practice at the time. However, recent relaxations in Revenue practice allow flexibility in the timing of drawing AVC benefits. In the light of this change the Pension Fund Trustees have resolved that the rules of the fund should be changed to allow ministers to defer the drawing of AVC benefits up to the age of 75 (the limit permitted by the Revenue) if they so wish.

The Pension Fund Trustees can implement the change of practice immediately, in advance of changing the rules, but to comply with the law it is necessary to issue an announcement to all members and to make the appropriate change to the rules within two years.

The announcement to members will be issued shortly. As the rule change will, in due course, require approval by General Assembly the Pensions Executive considered that, as a matter of courtesy, Mission Council should be advised of this matter prior to the announcement going to members.

The Treasurer and Financial Secretary will be pleased to answer questions from individuals but is not expected that Mission Council will wish to discuss this paper in plenary session.



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2001

ASS

- ASSEMBLY PASTORAL REFERENCE COMMITTEE
- CHURCH & SOCIETY
- YOUTH & CHILDREN'S WORK
- INTERFAITH RELATIONS COMMITTEE
- ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE
- ECUMENICAL COMMITTEE

Assembly confirms that its resolution 58 of 1999 concerning the revised terms of reference of the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee applies to all the sections (1-6) on page 122 in the Book of Reports, and not only to section 1.

This resolution has become necessary because it has been pointed out that section 1 on page 122 is headed "Terms of Reference" and it could be argued that the 1999 resolution only applies to that section. The way that the page is set out makes it extremely unlikely that the Assembly viewed it in that way and the minutes indicate that discussion took place on at least one other section. However, because this committee deals with very sensitive matters, it is felt that Assembly should make the situation absolutely clear. Sections 2-6 deal with limitation on powers, confidentiality, composition, attendance and relationship to structure. Those wishing to look at the text will also find it on pages H1 and H2 of the Manual.

Assembly agrees to the following amendments to the terms of reference of the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee:

Add to paragraph 1d: This authority may be exercised in respect of those who were on the roll of ministers but who have now left it, but only for up to three months after the date of leaving.

Delete the words "each year" from the first sentence of paragraph 6.

The first amendment recognises that those who have left the roll of ministers, whether by their own decision or that of the church, can face acute financial difficulty following the loss of stipend and manse. This can be particularly hard on their families. The amendment allows help to be given for a limited period where pastoral care for those involved makes this an appropriate response. The second amendment will make it possible for the committee to report to Assembly every other year, as other committees are now doing.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY RESOLUTION FOR GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2001

“General Assembly notes with concern that surveys of Jobcentres undertaken by local churches show that significant proportions of jobs available to unemployed people around the country pay below the National Insurance Lower Earnings Level, below the Income Support rate for a couple with two young children, and below the threshold for access to a Stakeholder Pension.

Assembly affirms:

- (a) the concept of social insurance as an important mechanism for providing people with security in unemployment, illness and old age and as a means of expressing our commitment to ‘the common good’;
- (b) the view of the Churches’ Enquiry on Unemployment and the Future of Work that it is possible to provide "enough good work for all" and that government should make this a key policy aim.

Assembly calls upon local churches to work with the Church and Society Committee to raise these issues at local and national level.”

01/02 114	<p>Youth Worker Motion Kath Lonsdale brought the re-worked resolution to the Committee. After some discussion the final motion was agreed as follows:</p> <p>PREAMBLE <i>As a result of the "Growing Up" report, a resolution was brought to FURY Assembly 2000, asking FURY to encourage the URC to look to the role of paid Youth Workers within the church. This resolution was passed unanimously and wholly supported by the Youth & Children's Work Committee in June 2000. Many churches, districts and synods are working effectively with young people through volunteers assisted by Youth & Children's Work Trainers and Officers. However, many churches find this a challenging area and do not feel they possess adequate skills. We believe that the employment of professional paid Youth Workers to work alongside volunteers would enable and encourage local congregations in their mission to tell, teach, tend, transform and treasure. Inspiring examples of this happening successfully have been shared with FURY Assembly.</i></p> <p><i>Whilst recognising the cost implications to local churches, this problem could be overcome by working together in districts or on an ecumenical basis.</i></p> <p>RESOLUTION <i>General Assembly recommends that local churches employ a Qualified* Youth Worker to enable the development of their Youth Work in both church and community. Churches are encouraged to seek ecumenical co-operation in the recruitment and deployment of this specialised ministry. The ministry of a Youth Worker is affirmed by the churches as a vocation and that the appropriate Committee ensures that initial and in-service training opportunities are identified and shared.</i></p> <p><i>*JNC (or equivalent) National Qualification for full time posts JNC (or equivalent) Locally for part time posts</i></p> <p>Information re this resolution will go to Mission Council and then forwarded to the Assembly Arrangements Committee. (Action: DL)</p>
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The Interfaith Relations Committee would like the following Resolution to be brought to General Assembly this year

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY – JANUARY 27th

We urge all churches to observe this day and commend the excellent material available through Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and the Council for Christians and Jews.

ASSEMBLY ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

1. Assembly 2003

The committee brings a resolution that the Assembly in 2003 should be held at the Guildhall, Portsmouth, from Saturday July 5th to Tuesday July 8th.

The facilities of Portsmouth University, halls of residence and other meeting places, are located immediately around the Guildhall in the city centre.

2. The business of Assembly

This year sees the introduction of the format approved in 2000, whereby most committees will report in alternate years. With the agreement of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, committees who would not normally be reporting may - if urgency requires it - bring resolutions. Otherwise, the revised format allows non-reporting committees the opportunity to arrange 'fringe meetings' - for information, for promotion of their work and for informal discussion about policy and programmes. It is hoped that members of Assembly will welcome the flexibility now built into the programme and feel they can be more involved in current thinking and practice.

3. Future patterns of Assembly

3.1 In 1998, at the Nottingham Assembly, the committee was asked to consider possible alternative arrangements affecting the frequency of meetings and the conduct of business at General Assembly. A full review has been carried out. Consultations involved Assembly committees, synods and districts who were asked to respond to questions about:

i) whether Assembly should meet annually or biennially;

ii) the size of Assembly;

iii) the relationships between Assembly and other councils, particularly, local churches.

Initial responses helpfully identified a number of aspects in our present arrangements that cause concern. They also widened the debate, which finds its focus not only in matters of organisation but also the extent to which the business of Assembly is relevant to congregational life.

3.2 Frequency

3.2.1 Because of the widely expressed wish for Assembly a) to have more time, b) to allow other councils longer to consider issues and, particularly, c) to enable committees more freedom to develop their work, Assembly agreed last year, as stated above, that they would report in alternate years.

3.2.2 This apparently simple change will require at least two Assemblies, possibly four, to show how the new procedures are working. The committee believes, therefore, that it would be inappropriate, at this point, to proceed with proposals about the frequency or duration of Assemblies.

3.3 Size

With regard to the size of Assembly, attempts have been made in the past to allow every congregation to be represented. This has never been accepted and the arguments against the proposal remain formidable. Indeed, a strong case can be made for a much more radical change that would reduce the size of Assembly significantly. However, there is a separate working party looking at the Authority of General

Assembly and other councils. This is a detailed review with important theological and ecclesiological implications. Until that group has completed its work, we do not feel that it would be right to bring any proposal about the size of Assembly.

3.4 Relationships

3.4.1 As we have considered the practical issues, we have also asked what Assembly is for. The basis of our reformed polity is a theological understanding of the conciliar nature of the church and how the different parts interact. This creates and affects the ethos, the sense of community and the fellowship – in a word, the *koinonia* – that gives our denomination its sense of identity and belonging. We have tried to assess the impact Assembly makes on synods, districts and, particularly, on local churches. This is where issues of relationships are especially pertinent.

3.4.2 There is evidence of widespread concern at the gap between Assembly and the local church. There is also a perceived lack of relevance between the deliberations of the one and the day-to-day life of the other. It is worth noting, however, that this view from the local church is also often expressed with regard to the synod and the district council. The feeling that 'they' do not understand 'our' world is a phenomenon common in many walks of life, not just the church. To counter it, we believe that communication can be improved in various ways.

3.5 Improving communication.

3.5.1 Firstly, synods and districts may need to consider if their agenda do, in reality, relate to the concerns of local congregations. Secondly, we urge all districts and synods to review the way representatives prepare for Assembly. At least one synod offers a choice of two dates for representatives to meet to consider the Book of Reports. It is precisely to enable such preparation to happen that this book is published two months in advance of Assembly

3.5.2 Encouragement might also be taken from FURY representatives who often appear to be the best-prepared, having studied the Book of Reports together immediately before Assembly meets.

3.5.3 At this Assembly, through the use of the internet, ways are being sought to make the business more accessible to people at home. A web-page will be regularly updated while Assembly is meeting. Fuller details will appear in Reform. This will give opportunity to those not at York to respond with comments and questions. It will be interesting to see how widely this opportunity is taken up.

3.6 Conclusion.

General Assembly is the gathering point for the prayers, discussions and deliberations of the whole of the URC. When, through its decision-making processes, Assembly says 'it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us' (Acts 15:28) such a conclusion arises out of the willingness to listen for God's will, expressed through all the councils of the church. It is, therefore, authoritative because of its listening to God – through the life of the church, and as the council where the whole church is most fully represented. It is truly representative of the whole church as it listens and speaks to the life of the church at every level.

Resolution: General Assembly agrees that General Assembly in 2003 will meet at the Guildhall, Portsmouth from July 5th – 8th.

For Mission Council March 2001

The Ecumenical Committee will be bringing the attached paper
Mission and Unity: three ecumenical resolutions for the United Reformed Church
- with its attendant resolutions.

Mission and Unity

– Three Ecumenical Resolutions for the United Reformed Church

The background

Who we are

The United Reformed Church, as a united and uniting church, must always live with provisionality, open to new ways. As a Reformation church it must also take seriously the particular rock from which it was hewn. But it is, first of all, a church whose purpose, within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, is:

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

1972 Basis of Union, para. 11

Our commitment to Christian unity – restated in 1996

That same Basis of Union, 1972, states that 'as a united church (we) will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people'

At the 1996 General Assembly, that commitment was reaffirmed and its implications for the life of the United Reformed Church at that time were then spelled out. It was agreed that the commitment would be expressed through:

- a. resource sharing of theological insights, people, buildings and money
- b. identifying and offering the rich insights of our tradition to others and being open to receive theirs
- c. active involvement in ecumenical bodies locally, regionally, nationally and internationally
- d. the development of and support for Local Ecumenical Partnerships and United Areas
- e. active participation in initiatives leading towards organic union

But 'ecumenical' means.....

The word 'ecumenical' comes from the Greek *oikumene* meaning 'the whole inhabited earth'. *Oikumene* in turn is related to the Greek for household, *oikos*. So the ecumenical vision is of the whole human family living together in love and peace. Pursuing that vision goes far beyond inter-church relations and is the business of the whole church.

However, the Ecumenical Committee has a particular responsibility. Its remit states:

"The committee will seek to ensure that wherever the United Reformed Church meets locally or nationally (*sic*), in worship, council or committee, it is working in partnership with Christians in the locality, the World Church and the whole human family."

Three ecumenical resolutions for a missionary church in today's world

<p>A. To expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community</p>

What might this mean?

1. Developing relationships with new partners, some reflecting our increasingly multi-cultural society – e.g. house churches, the African and Caribbean churches, pentecostal and independent churches, the Orthodox churches, the Reformed groups not worshipping in English (Korean, Ghanaian, Pakistani, Hungarian, German) etc. – and including the spiritual explorers outside the Church.
2. Pressing for deeper relations with old partners, often already expressed through formal Local Ecumenical Partnerships, and shared witness and service – the Anglican churches in the three nations, the Methodists and Baptists, the Moravians, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the Congregational Federation, the Roman Catholic Church

How might this be enabled?

3. Strengthening the support for and widening the role of the District and Synod ecumenical officers.
4. Raising this wider ecumenical profile in District visitations and in deployment and clustering discussions.
5. Listening to the concerns of local churches and Local Ecumenical Partnerships and strengthening the central church– to–church work on obstacles to greater local shared life and witness. This work is already being done in, for example, the Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee and CTE's Group for Local Unity.

B. To proclaim more clearly, in word and deed, that in Christ we are one World Church family living in a world which God loves, and to celebrate the rich diversity of cultures, languages, church traditions and religious faiths within each local community and world-wide

What might this mean?

1. Welcoming into our local communities new immigrants, international students/workers and asylum seekers and thus receiving their God-given gifts.
2. Taking advantage of the *Belonging to the World Church* programme which offers local experience of the World Church and wider world, through visits, sabbaticals, study fellowships etc.
3. Making connections between congregational and town twinning and our existing church-to-church partnerships, which may also be a particular synod's partnership. (e.g. the German churches of the Pfalz and of Lippe, the Reformed Church of Hungary, the Church of the Czech Brethren, the Waldensian Church)
4. Establishing special local links with groups of Christians living in this country who come from partner churches either in CWM or in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (e.g. Ghanaian, Pakistani and Taiwanese Presbyterians)

How might this be enabled?

5. Through a new audit of local church, synod and town links, including ecumenical links such as that between Churches Together in Derby and a diocese of the Church of North India.
6. By networking those local churches which are building relationships with Christians of other cultures and languages and those new to this country.
7. By using the programme for receiving mission partners through the Council for World Mission more flexibly.

C. To persevere in the search for the visible and organic unity of the Church through church-to-church conversations on matters of faith and church order so that sinful, and sometimes death-dealing, divisions may be healed and the Christian message of reconciliation be proclaimed with integrity

What might this mean?

1. Knowing who we are, whilst recognising that in the different nations and with different partners there will be different emphases: and remembering that provisionality is part of our identity.
2. Refusing some conversations and initiating others, including those that cross class and cultural barriers as well as doctrinal ones: no longer being so reactive.

How might this be enabled?

3. Engaging ordained and lay, young and old, Assembly committees and local churches, in open and informed debate about the nature and purpose of the Church in order to articulate afresh in this generation who we are, in all our diversity, and to what new purpose God is calling us.
4. Offering criteria through, for example, synod ecumenical strategies and through the leaflet *Reformed Expectations for the United Reformed Church in LEPs*, to assist the local in deciding when to accept and when to refuse an invitation to be part of a new Local Ecumenical Partnership.
5. Persevering in ecumenical prayer and worship.

An invitation from the Ecumenical Committee

These three ecumenical resolutions for a missionary church calls on the United Reformed Church *to expand, to deepen, to persevere, to celebrate and to proclaim*. The Ecumenical Committee invites the whole church to identify with these ecumenical resolutions and then work out what they might mean in practice in the particular place or situation.

Resolution

1. The General Assembly welcomes the three ecumenical resolutions offered by the Ecumenical Committee as providing a framework for the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitment locally, nationally and internationally for the coming five years.
2. The General Assembly encourages synods, district councils and local churches to consider how they might use them in practice and to that end invites the Ecumenical Committee to distribute the ecumenical resolutions and their supporting material in an attractive form throughout the church.

Feb 01