

MISSION COUNCIL MARCH 23-25 2007

MINUTES

Mission Council met at High Leigh, Hoddesdon from Friday 23rd March to Sunday 25th March 2007. Present with the Moderator were 65 voting members and 17 others in attendance.

Session One

Mission Council was convened by the Moderator, the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, who invited the Chaplain, the Revd Neil Thorogood, to lead opening worship.

07/23 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone present and offered a special welcome to those attending for the first time or in a new capacity: Mrs Margaret Ward (West Midlands Synod); Mr Graham Morris (Mersey Synod); the Revd Lucy Brierley (Chaplain to the Moderator-elect); the Revd Bill Mahood (Convener of the London Synod Task Group) attending to present the report of the Task Group.

07/24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: The Revd Dr David Peel (Past Moderator); The Revds Anthony Howells (West Midlands); Pauline Loosemore (Yorkshire); Stephen Newell (South Western); Cecil White (Eastern); Alan Wickens (North Western); John Macauley (Thames North); Kirsty Thorpe (Convener of Communications and Editorial); Miss Elaine Colechin (Northern); Messrs Andrew Littlejohn (FURY Moderator); Donald Swift (Mersey); Lawrence Moore (staff); Steve Summers (staff); Ms Michelle Marcano (staff).

07/25 Minutes

The minutes of the January meeting were adopted as a true record.

07/26 Matters Arising

The Deputy General Secretary announced the composition of the Resolution 40 (Safe Church) Task Group. Mrs Rosemary Johnston (Convener) Mrs Barbara Shapland, Ms Sara Paton, Revds Lesley Charlton, Lance Stone.

The Deputy General Secretary reported on a meeting of the General Secretary's Review Group.

07/27 Additional Business

The Deputy General Secretary introduced the agenda, drawing attention to additional papers

07/28 MCAG Report (Paper A)

The Deputy General Secretary reported that MCAG had approved the appointment of an editor for the church's main journal/periodical.

07/29 Election of advisory groups (Paper A2)

The Deputy General Secretary outlined the procedure for electing members to advisory groups, indicating that an additional place on MCAG would have to be filled (on appointment by Mission Council) by an Assembly Committee Convener.

07/30 Advisory Group Reports

Mission Council received the report of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group. The Deputy General Secretary called for a small group of Mission Council members to look at Paper ADD during the course of the meeting. William McVey & Roderick Garthwaite volunteered.

Inter-Synod resource sharing (Paper A5) was received by Mission Council.

Mission Council received the report of the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (Paper A6)

07/31 London Synod

The Revd Bill Mahood presented the report of the London Synod Commission (Paper A7). In doing so, he thanked the secretary and members of the commission for their work. Mr Mahood reminded Mission Council that the proposal for a London Synod arose out of the 'Catch the Vision' process. The Commission was set up by decision of General Assembly in 2005.

He suggested that if the URC were coming into being today, there would almost certainly be a London Synod, and urged that the basis for any decision should not be a financial one.

The commission as a whole is agreed that a London Synod would be a very good thing, but there were reservations about the difficulty and cost of establishing one.

Mr Mahood clarified the following in response to questions:

- this would not be a 14th synod;
- the proposal had not been costed, but the commission believed that the cost 'would not be enormous'.

The Moderator reminded Mission Council that the purpose of this debate was to decide whether the Commission's report and resolutions should be put before General Assembly. In discussion the following points were addressed:

- there was a feeling among some London Districts that consultation had been inadequate and that local views and preferences had been ignored;
- Southern Synod had chosen to wait for this report before discussing the proposals - there would be a Synod meeting on 30th June for the purpose of discussing the issue before General Assembly. It was important that General Assembly should be aware of the views of the synods involved. What was the status of the views of the synods most affected as opposed to the views of other synods? Thames North synod had discussed the issue but had not reached consensus; a majority was against the formation of a London synod.
- perhaps the wording of the resolution was too definite
- had black and ethnic minority congregations been consulted?

The General Secretary suggested that it might be possible to take more time over this. There was, he said, no reason to rush. The commission could report to General

Assembly and seek more time to take the matter further in consultation with the synods involved.

The Revd David Grosch-Miller moved that the matter be deferred to the 2008 General Assembly. This was seconded by Mr David Eldridge.

The Resolution fell

Discussion resumed:

- Mission Council needed to ensure that General Assembly heard the views of the synods concerned, but General Assembly did have the right to make such decisions;
- it was questioned whether General Assembly would have enough information about costs and resources involved in order to make an informed decision;

It was agreed to revisit the question at a later point in the meeting with the purpose of exploring the possibility of asking General Assembly to give its support in principle to the formation of a London synod. The Moderator, on behalf of Mission Council, thanked the commission for its work.

The Revd Terry Oakley proposed that Mission Council ask Thames North Synod to meet to discuss the matter. This was seconded by the Revd Dr Susan Durber

The Resolution was carried. (Note: At a later point in the meeting this resolution was rescinded)

07/32 Consensus Decision-Making (Paper A8 and A8i)

The Revd Elizabeth Nash presented the paper. She noted the process's emphasis on listening, and the opportunity it provided for minority voices to be heard. She noted that some things might take longer to do, while others may be quicker.

In discussion:

- this should not apply in its present form to Committees, where the convener's function was not that of a Moderator;
- such decision-making process was used by the WCC and the WARC, as well as in Australia and New Zealand;
- the paper used the term 'council' as a more general term than General Assembly specifically;
- an additional set of standing orders would be used; it would always be possible to resume the previous standing orders and decide by majority vote.

Mission Council agreed that the Resolutions in a slightly modified form be put before General Assembly

07/33 Section O Advisory Group

The Deputy General Secretary presented paper A9, Section O Advisory Group, and sought Mission Council's approval to put the resolution before General Assembly.

Mission Council agreed

The Deputy General Secretary sought Mission Council's agreement to the appointment of Mr Hartley Oldham to the Section O Advisory Group.
Mission Council agreed.

The Deputy General Secretary sought two members of Council to work with the Clerk and legal adviser on Section O Papers A9i, A9ii, and A9iii - Revds Roberta Rominger and Terry Oakley volunteered .

07/34 Assembly Arrangements Committee

The Convener of the Assembly arrangements Committee presented Paper S.

Session Two

07/35 Mission Council and Assembly (Paper A1)

The Assembly Clerk presented Paper A1, highlighting part 3, Conclusions and Recommendations. He noted that, with a biennial Assembly, Mission Council would be required to make decisions on Assembly's behalf more frequently. A process was suggested to allow constitutional changes to be made without unreasonable delay. Some questions were raised:

- would consideration be given to the composition of Mission Council?
- should the name 'Mission Council' be changed?
- who would set the overall policies and priorities of the URC?

It was recommended that every committee should report briefly to every Assembly, and that the main annual report of the Nominations Committee be dealt with by Mission Council.

07/36 Catch the Vision Steering Group Report (Paper B, Paper ASS)

The General Secretary presented, and invited the Clerk to explain paper ASS, 'Changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church'. The Clerk indicated that the advice received from our legal advisors was that unless we wished to go to the expense of and delay consequent upon obtaining a Statutory Instrument to amend the schedules to the URC Acts, District Councils in some form must be retained for the purpose of fulfilling the requirement of the Acts. These District Councils could however be considerably limited in their functions and membership.

In response to a question, the Clerk suggested that it would be possible for there to be a single District Council in a synod.

It would be for the synods to decide what they wanted District/Area Councils to do in addition to the requirements of the Act - if anything.

Synods would be informed of the legally-required duties of District/Area Councils.

Some unease was expressed that this was a reversal of decisions already taken, but the point was made by the legal adviser that very little work would be required of District/Area Councils and that it seemed very likely that it would be possible for synod and district/area to be co-terminous.

The General Secretary presented paper B, seeking Mission Council's advice on future management of Catch the Vision, the future of Church House and the paragraph on worship. Comments in response were:

- endorsement of the paragraph on worship;
- a 'think tank' might not realise its full potential if its membership was changed as frequently as suggested;
- the quality of worship in the URC is variable, and exploration of worship was to be encouraged;
- there was encouragement also for ecumenical working at a national level;

Comments were invited on Para 2. Clarification was asked on the policy on the election of Lay people as Assembly Moderators. It was noted that past Moderators have always been either ministers of Word and Sacrament or Elders.

07/37 General Secretary

The General Secretary addressed Mission Council on Reformed Spirituality and Art.

Session Three

Worship was led by the Chaplain and the Moderator.

07/38 Youth and Children's Work Committee (Paper C)

The paper was presented by the Revd Neil Thorogood. He emphasised the importance of the place of children in worship and invited members to comment:

- it was noted that there is more to the matter than worship styles, as churches of varying styles seem able to sustain numbers of children;
- numbers were important; a core of children do attract more;
- there were questions of relationships with young people, who may not be able to attend Sunday worship;
- even a small number of children could be cherished as part of the church community;
- children had their own needs as individuals;
- we must try to look at worship through children's eyes;
- the key was integration; adults could learn from children's spirituality;

Jo Williams (Children's Work Development Officer) addressed Mission Council, giving details of the upcoming Children's Assembly, which will run parallel to General Assembly.

Mrs Val Morrison, on behalf on the Staffing Advisory Group, moved Resolution 3 on Paper A11, noting that the date in clause (c) should be altered to January 2008 and not October 2007

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agreed to the Staffing Advisory Group recommendations relating to the Children's Work Development Officer post:

- a. an extension of the Children's Work Development Officer post to (at the latest) December 2009.
- b. by May 2009 Mission Council should receive recommendations regarding the future resources required for the support of children's work in the United Reformed Church.
- c. a programme setting objectives, milestones and expected progress towards achieving the above be produced by January 2008

The Resolution was carried.

07/39 Global Warming/Climate Change (paper D)

Mrs Melanie Frew presented the paper. In discussion it was noted:

- we have to be more robust in the way this is presented to General Assembly;
- a list of possible courses of action for people would be helpful;
- personal commitment comes ahead of an Assembly decision;
- information about carbon offset and more specific advice would be helpful;

At the Deputy General Secretary's suggestion, it was agreed that the resolution be taken later in the meeting after the wording had been altered to take account of the feeling of the meeting.

07/40 URC Ministers' Pension Fund Board Membership (Paper E1)

The Honorary Treasurer, Mr Eric Chilton, presented the paper. In doing so, he sought Mission Council's agreement to the revised composition of the Board, and revised arrangements for nominating directors.

Mission Council agreed.

07/41 Treasurer's Report (Paper E)

Mr Eric Chilton noted that, at Assembly 2007, he would be reporting that the Assembly accounts were in surplus. He presented a revised remit for the Finance Committee which reflected more accurately the work actually undertaken by the committee. In the first paragraph of the revised remit, the word 'agreement' should be changed to 'consultation'.

After discussion, it was agreed that the final paragraph be included in presenting the remit to General Assembly, even if it were not part of the remit. Mission Council agreed that this should go to General Assembly.

Session Four

07/42 Introduction of Papers F, G and H

The Revd Dr Susan Durber presented Paper F, following which the following points were raised:

- how could we bring alive the contents of the paper?; the challenge was not just to receive the paper, but to find ways of enabling local congregations to engage with it;

- Was this a time of ‘new reformation’?; how was the Church coming to terms with its future?; in a conciliar church we are good at papers, but it would be good to ask General Assembly to offer this one to local churches for discussion;

The Revd Peter Ball presented Paper G.

The Revd Andrew Prasad presented Papers H and H1

Mission Council met in groups to discuss:

- Paper F, by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee on Ecclesiology;
- Paper G, by the Life and Witness Committee on Covenant Membership and Mission;
- Paper H, by the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, an Audit of Church Structures, Policies, Procedures and Practices for barriers to full Participation of Minority Ethnic People.

Session Five

07/45 Charities Act 2006

Mission Council received, and briefly discussed, the report on paper ADD. Mission Council confirmed the intention of the Task Group to circulate an advice note to Church Secretaries with the spring mailing from Tavistock Place.

07/46 Group Reports (07/42).

Paper F, The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary

Dr Durber agreed that the document could be amended in the light of the group’s response.

Mission Council agreed that the report should be published and distributed among churches as a Doctrine, Prayer and Worship discussion document.

Paper G, Covenant Membership and Mission

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary.

Paper H/H1

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary.

Mission Council addressed the Resolutions (paper H, p7)

Resolution (a):

Mission Council authorises the Secretaries for Communication & Editorial and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to draft an ethnic monitoring form to be included in the United Reformed Church annual returns.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (b):

Mission Council encourages all synods to support and enable the URC Minority Ethnic Conferences which not only affirm the gifts black and minority ethnic members bring to the life of the URC, but also help develop BME leadership for the life of the church now and into the future.

The Resolution was carried with a number of abstentions.

Resolution (c):

Mission Council urges synods and Local Churches to promote the use of the 'Multicultural Ministry Toolkit' and 'We Belong' training pack to help local church members and groups become cross-culturally aware and literate.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (d):

Mission Council affirms the Training Committee in its commitment to developing learning centres that are culturally sensitive and aware, and encourages the committee to ensure that all lay training materials it is responsible for developing are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

The Resolution was carried.

Resolution (e) was withdrawn

Resolution (f) as amended:

Mission Council encourages synods and Local Churches to be culturally sensitive during the process of seeking representation to synod meetings, Mission Council and General Assembly, and to use the provision for alternate representatives and the possibility of additional visitors as an opportunity to involve BME participation.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (g):

Mission Council encourages those in leadership at all levels of the Church's life to be intentional in promoting multicultural inclusiveness influencing and inspiring people to make the needed changes.

The Resolution was carried.

Session Six

07/47 Global Warming/Climate Change (Paper D)

Melanie Frew presented an amended resolution which after discussion was finalised as follows:

General Assembly

- i) notes with approval the work already underway on climate change, and reaffirms the need to build this into the whole life of the Local Church;**
- ii) recognises that all society, including the United Reformed Church, must shrink its carbon footprint;**
- iii) calls upon the Church and Society Committee**
 - (a) to determine how carbon emissions can best be monitored across the church;**
 - (b) to develop plans in consultation with the relevant agents of the church to implement year on year cuts in carbon emissions using the expertise of such groups as Eco-Congregations, Operation Noah, Creation Challenge and the Joint Public Issues Team;**
 - (c) to roll this out across the church, and**
 - (d) to report annually to the Trustees;**
- iv) calls upon Local Churches to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.**

Mission Council agreed that the resolution in this form should be put before General Assembly.

07/48 Post-Moratorium Task Group (Paper A10)

The Revd Malcolm Hanson reported.

- 1) This report could only provide a context in which to discuss; it could not further the debate.
- 2) Most members might feel this was a positive way forward, but we needed to acknowledge that it would not be easy even to make such a commitment as outlined here. For many, this path might already concede too much or take them in an unwelcome direction.
- 3) The Church was deeply divided on the issue, but united in faith in Christ. How could we handle unity and diversity? The answer might lie in the nature of the Church. This debate might not be primarily about sexuality, but was about the nature of the Church, what we believed the Church to be. It was about how we live together in unity and diversity. There was a powerful and painful tension between our perceptions of unity and of truth.
- 4) The tension between having deadlines and not having deadlines. The group did not believe there should be a deadline for final policy decisions, but acknowledged that such decisions would have to be made.

In summary, the Church had to face the reality of the kind of Church we are and to explore ways of living with diversity; So far we had been unable to find a unified

policy on Human Sexuality, and the group could see no way of finding one in the future. This meant that it was important to address means of living with diversity. We perhaps needed to let go of our need for deadlines or even a definite answer. The report contained a number of questions for Mission Council's consideration.

In Discussion:

- we need to be careful in use of terms such as 'the sexuality issue';
- some of the report (e.g. para 2.2) seems unduly negative;
- the report contains a clear representation of the different voices and opinions within the Church;

Following discussion, clause 2.2 was amended to read : 'Within the church, as people have honoured the moratorium, opinions and attitudes are hard to assess. However, the church has not taken the opportunity...'

Mission Council accepted the report, and agreed that it should be put before General Assembly.

The Revd Peter Ball proposed that Resolution 4 be deleted, seconded by the Revd Elizabeth Nash. **Mission Council agreed.**

The Revd Peter Brain proposed the insertion of the words 'across the whole church' after 'to enable discussions', seconded by the Revd Neil Thorogood. The Revd Malcolm Hanson noted that the intention of the resolution was to provide leadership, and that the discussion needs to happen initially in a small group. The amendment fell.

Proposed to add word 'generally after 'discussions have not...' in Resolution 5.

It was agreed to return to the matter at a later point in the meeting.

07/49 Ministries Report, Housing of Non-Stipendiary Ministers (Paper J)
The Revd Peter Poulter presented the report and recommendations.

In discussion:

- the policy described might be a disincentive to churches to participate in synod manse schemes;
- there might be pressure on synods to buy manses for non-stipendiary ministers;
- if 'house for duty' became available to NSMs, should it not also be available to local church leaders;
- clarification of the difference between manse provision and retired ministers' housing;
- noted that this was permissive legislation with nothing mandatory about it;

Mission Council accepted the report and affirmed the recommendations.

07/50 Ministries Committee (Paper K)

The Revd Peter Poulter presented Resolution (M1). Mission C agreed that M1 should be put before General Assembly

Revd P Poulter presented Resolution M2. Mission Council agreed that M2 should be put before General Assembly.

Mr Poulter presented Resolution M3 and the proposed selection process for candidates for ministry. Mission Council agreed that M3 and the proposed selection process be put before General Assembly

07/51 Abolition of the Slave Trade Bicentenary 2007 (Paper L)

The Revd Andrew Prasad presented.

Session Seven

07/52 Human Sexuality (Paper A10) (07/48)

The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the revised resolutions:

- 1. General Assembly welcomes and accepts Mission Council's guidance concerning the ending of the moratorium on policy decisions on matters of human sexuality.**
- 2. General Assembly agrees to the wording of the Commitment on Human Sexuality.**
- 3. General Assembly adopts the Commitment on Human Sexuality on behalf of the church.**
- 4. General Assembly calls for further detailed discussions on aspects of human sexuality to be initiated in the light of the Catch the Vision process, with guidance from Mission Council and in the spirit of the Commitment.**
- 5. Acknowledging the value of earlier work on human sexuality, and recognising that there has been some confusion about the implications of the moratorium, General Assembly regrets that the extent of "reflection, prayer and sharing" has been limited over the past seven years and encourages the continuing use of that earlier material.**
- 6. General Assembly asks Mission Council to set up a task group to oversee the process of addressing issues of human sexuality, particularly those set out in the report, and to enable the process of widening discussions to involve the whole church.**
- 7. General Assembly urges members of councils and local churches not to press for policy decisions on these matters during this process, but to join in discussions that might help to increase understanding and unity.**

Mission Council accepted the amended resolutions and agreed that the resolutions should be put to General Assembly.

07/53 Joint Public Issues Team (Paper M)

Mr Simon Loveitt presented paper M. He outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Team Management Group and presented the resolution.

Mission Council accepted the report and carried the Resolution.

07/54 Staffing Advisory Group (Paper A11)

Mrs Val Morrison moved adoption of resolution 2, Continuation of the post of Secretary for Church and Society.

The Resolution was carried

Mrs Morrison moved adoption of resolution 1, appointment of an editor of the United Reformed Church's national journal/periodical.

The Resolution was carried

07/55 Assisted Dying (Paper N)

Mr Simon Loveitt presented the paper, noting the church's enthusiasm for debating the issue. It was intended to present the paper in booklet form for General Assembly, and hoped to be able to make it available free of charge.

Mission Council discussed the issue in small informal groups, and in the plenary session the following questions and comments were raised:

- has the Committee considered the matter of 'care for the primary carer'?
- in any group discussion at Assembly, people will be sharing personal, and probably painful stories;
- concern that there may be a danger of closing down discussion if resolutions are presented to Assembly;
- there is room for more about relating faith to practice;
- concern whether the resolutions could represent the view of the whole United Reformed Church.

The Revd Peter Poulter moved the deletion of the words 'to be an accurate expression of the mind of the United Reformed Church'.

Seconded by Peter Brain

Mr Loveitt accepted the amendment, and responded to the questions raised.

The Chaplain led Mission Council in prayer.

07/56 Nominations Committee (Paper Q)

1. The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the report of the nominations Committee and moved the Resolution with, on the advice of the Clerk, insertion of the words 'recommends to the Moderator that'. The Moderator thereafter announced that the Tellers for the election of the Moderator would be Mr Peter Pay (Convener), Dr Graham Campling and Dr Jim Merrilees.

It was noted that Simon Rowntree had withdrawn from nomination as Convener of Assembly Arrangements Committee. It would be helpful for Nominations committee to have some names.

On the recommendation of the Nominations Committee,
Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agreed to the appointment of the Revd Roy Lowes for a further period as Secretary for Education and Learning from 1st August 2007 until 31st July 2012.

Session Eight

07/57 Catch the Vision (Paper O)

The General Secretary presented Paper O, 'Outline Plan for Mission Policy and Theology Department', highlighting various models of networking. He noted the concern of MCAG about elements of the paper.

In discussion:

- concerns about the future of committees (e.g. Equal Ops)
- 3.3 - who will implement programmes?
- concern about the strength and reliability of networks;
- relationship between MPT and the synods; is there a danger of churches being overburdened by material from both synods and MPT;
- how do we stand in the middle ground between secular and religious fundamentalism; how do we address questions of our overall priorities?
- how might we act justly and inclusively as well as informally?
- should the Advisory Group on Faith and Order become a representative group?
- it would be good to have a strong emphasis on worship;
- emphasis needed on collaborative prioritisation;

The General Secretary and the Revd Philip Woods responded.
Concern was expressed about the future composition and remit of Mission Council.

Mission Council agreed that the three resolutions be put before General Assembly, with appropriate amendments

07/58 Staffing Advisory Group

Mrs Val Morrison moved adoption of a resolution approving the post of Mission Secretary. **Mission Council agreed.**

07/59 Trustees Report (Papers P, P1, P2, P3)

The Treasurer, Mr Eric Chilton presented the papers, drawing attention to certain details and noting that the Honorary Treasurer must be a nominated trustee as follows:

'The Honorary Treasurer shall be appointed by Mission Council as the nominated Trustee and he or she shall hold office for 4 years.' (P1, page 3)

Mr Chilton responded to a number of questions:

- the grouping of synods is a problem; we should ask Assembly to nominate trustees and may be able to achieve our ends without being too prescriptive; there is also the need to make the final document acceptable to the Charities Commission;
- trustees have a duty to ensure that the church acts within the law;
- concern about synod groups, and suggestion that the paper should merely refer to 'synods';
- it may be helpful if all trustees were members of General Assembly;

Mission Council agreed that the vote required for amendments p1, 5 be amended to accord with the Church's normal procedures for constitutional change.

The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented paper P3 and its resolution:

Mission Council authorises the Nominations Committee, in consultation with the Board of Trustees, if possible to bring directly to General Assembly the names of suitable people to fill the remaining vacancies on the list of Trustees.

The Resolution was carried

The two Resolutions on P3i were put:

Mission Council agrees to forward, for appointment by General Assembly, the list of those nominated to serve as Trustees of the United Reformed Church from Assembly 2007 for the appropriate terms.

The Resolution was carried

Mission Council agrees to the co-option of the Revd Michael Davies as a Trustee until Assembly 2010.

The Resolution was carried

Session Nine

07/60 London Synod (07/31)

The Deputy General Secretary presented a revised resolution, proposed by the Revd Nigel Uden, seconded by the Revd Roberta Rominger:

Mission Council, noting the majority view of the London Synod Commission that the creation of a London Synod would be "visionary and timely" and the consequences and costs of change "acceptable", in preparation for future proposals to General Assembly asks the London Synod Commission or such other group as MCAG shall appoint

- a) to facilitate and consider reports on (amongst other things)**
- the mission justification
 - synod boundaries, in consultation with the synods affected
 - the division of resources

- o financial and staffing implications
- o synod offices
- o Trusts

b) to consult with Thames North and Southern Synods

i) by co-opting two representatives of each synod to the Commission or group

ii) by bringing initial proposals to their Spring meetings in 2009, and firm proposals in Autumn 2009

c) to bring these firm proposals to Mission Council in March 2010 and, if accepted, to General Assembly 2010 so that, if approved, a London Synod be fully operative, with all structural arrangements in place with effect from General Assembly in 2012

d) in the meantime to bring regular progress reports to the Thames North Synod Executive Committee, the Southern Synod Mission and Strategy Group, and Mission Council.

Discussion:

- there seemed to be insufficient motivation within the paper, and insufficient interest within the Thames North and Southern synods for the process to continue in its present form; the options were to halt the process or continue in a different way. The present proposal offered a means of continuing the process.
- suggested that the Black and Minority Ethnic voice was not being heard;

The Resolution was carried

07/61 The Nature of the Church's Ecumenical Engagement (Paper R)

The Revd Richard Mortimer presented the paper.

- some debate on the definition of 'space';

Mission Council agreed that Paper A7 be made available as a resource for future discussion.

07/62 London Synod (07/60; 07/31)

In the light of Mission Council's decision on the London Synod (07/60), the earlier resolution asking Thames North to meet (above 07/31) was **withdrawn**.

07/63 Nominations

The Clerk and Deputy General Secretary reported that the following nominations had been received for members of MCAG:

Committee Convener:	Mr Simon Loveitt
Mission Council Members:	Revd David Grosch-Miller
	Revd Rachel Poolman
	Revd Peter Colwell

Membership of Church House Management Group:
Mr Graham Morris

Mission Council agreed

07/64 Section O (Papers A9, A9i, A9ii)

The Clerk presented, notifying Mission Council of minor amendments to the papers

A9i, page 5 para 2, add full stop after commissioning and delete the rest of the sentence.

A91 page B.3.1 add 'and the Deputy General Secretary'

Mission Council approved the amendments.

07/65 Listed Buildings (Paper ADD)

Mr William McVey presented

- the Group's view was sought on the increased powers granted to English Heritage; no-one present was qualified to respond, but an answer would be sought and appended to the minutes.

07/66 District Closure Resolution

The latest legal advice being that Districts must remain, it was recommended that Districts put themselves into temporary suspension until General Assembly has progressed the matter to a conclusion, using the following wording:

..... District Council resolves that from (Date Month Year), all district powers and responsibilities be devolved to the Synod or to its committees and that the Synod meeting or duly authorised committees thereof will, until further determination of General Assembly, act as District Council.

07/67 Assembly Arrangements (Paper S)

Mr William McVey outlined plans for General Assembly 2007, and thanked Mission Council for the guidance offered at the present meeting. At the moment there are about 40 resolutions (11 attached to section O); it might be possible to deal with more than one resolution at a time, particularly for resolutions which were unlikely to require lengthy or detailed discussion, and always with the safeguard that a single resolution could still be debated.

Mr McVey responded to a number of questions.

07/68 Thanks

The Moderator thanked those members of Mission Council who were attending for the final time in their present capacities:

The Revd Dr David Peel; Mr Eric Chilton; The Revd John Humphreys (in his capacity as Convener of the Training Committee); The Revd Andrew Prasad; The Revd Peter Brain; The Revd Richard Pope; Mrs Wilma Prentice

The Moderator thanked Martin Hazell, Ken Forbes, Morag McLintock, Nigel Uden, James Breslin, David Cornick and Ray Adams.

The General Secretary thanked the Moderator for her leadership over the past year, and the Revd Neil Thorogood for his worship and pastoral skills.

The meeting closed with worship led by the Chaplain.

Appendix to the Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 23-25 March 2007

Extract from the Minutes:

07/65 Listed Buildings (Paper ADD)

The Group's view was sought on the increased powers granted to English Heritage; no-one present was qualified to respond, but an answer would be sought and appended to the minutes.

The following statement was subsequently received from the David Figures, secretary of the Group:

'Concern had been expressed to the Department of Culture Media and Sport by all the churches, including the United Reformed Church, regarding the enhanced powers of English Heritage, after they had been given responsibility for managing the List. Not only were they to be adviser, and to be formally consulted under the Ecclesiastical Exemption arrangements but additionally to have regulatory responsibility for their operation.

However, these initial anxieties have to a large extent been allayed by the commitment now being shown by English Heritage to involve the Churches fully in its policies. For example they invited churches to discuss their proposed document on conservation principles. There are greatly improved consultation procedures regarding the listing of buildings set out in the recent White Paper. In particular, English Heritage have established the Places of Worship Forum, on which all the churches, including the United Reformed Church, are represented, to discuss issues of concern with them.

The Listed Buildings Advisory Group continues to monitor the situation.'

MISSION COUNCIL MARCH 23-25 2007

MINUTES

Mission Council met at High Leigh, Hoddesdon from Friday 23rd March to Sunday 25th March 2007. Present with the Moderator were 65 voting members and 17 others in attendance.

Session One

Mission Council was convened by the Moderator, the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, who invited the Chaplain, the Revd Neil Thorogood, to lead opening worship.

07/23 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone present and offered a special welcome to those attending for the first time or in a new capacity: Mrs Margaret Ward (West Midlands Synod); Mr Graham Morris (Mersey Synod); the Revd Lucy Brierley (Chaplain to the Moderator-elect); the Revd Bill Mahood (Convener of the London Synod Task Group) attending to present the report of the Task Group.

07/24 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from: The Revd Dr David Peel (Past Moderator); The Revds Anthony Howells (West Midlands); Pauline Loosemore (Yorkshire); Stephen Newell (South Western); Cecil White (Eastern); Alan Wickens (North Western); John Macauley (Thames North); Kirsty Thorpe (Convener of Communications and Editorial); Miss Elaine Colechin (Northern); Messrs Andrew Littlejohn (FURY Moderator); Donald Swift (Mersey); Lawrence Moore (staff); Steve Summers (staff); Ms Michelle Marcano (staff).

07/25 Minutes

The minutes of the January meeting were adopted as a true record.

07/26 Matters Arising

The Deputy General Secretary announced the composition of the Resolution 40 (Safe Church) Task Group. Mrs Rosemary Johnston (Convener) Mrs Barbara Shapland, Ms Sara Paton, Revds Lesley Charlton, Lance Stone.

The Deputy General Secretary reported on a meeting of the General Secretary's Review Group.

07/27 Additional Business

The Deputy General Secretary introduced the agenda, drawing attention to additional papers

07/28 MCAG Report (Paper A)

The Deputy General Secretary reported that MCAG had approved the appointment of an editor for the church's main journal/periodical.

07/29 Election of advisory groups (Paper A2)

The Deputy General Secretary outlined the procedure for electing members to advisory groups, indicating that an additional place on MCAG would have to be filled (on appointment by Mission Council) by an Assembly Committee Convener.

07/30 Advisory Group Reports

Mission Council received the report of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group. The Deputy General Secretary called for a small group of Mission Council members to look at Paper ADD during the course of the meeting. William McVey & Roderick Garthwaite volunteered.

Inter-Synod resource sharing (Paper A5) was received by Mission Council.

Mission Council received the report of the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (Paper A6)

07/31 London Synod

The Revd Bill Mahood presented the report of the London Synod Commission (Paper A7). In doing so, he thanked the secretary and members of the commission for their work. Mr Mahood reminded Mission Council that the proposal for a London Synod arose out of the 'Catch the Vision' process. The Commission was set up by decision of General Assembly in 2005.

He suggested that if the URC were coming into being today, there would almost certainly be a London Synod, and urged that the basis for any decision should not be a financial one.

The commission as a whole is agreed that a London Synod would be a very good thing, but there were reservations about the difficulty and cost of establishing one.

Mr Mahood clarified the following in response to questions:

- this would not be a 14th synod;
- the proposal had not been costed, but the commission believed that the cost 'would not be enormous'.

The Moderator reminded Mission Council that the purpose of this debate was to decide whether the Commission's report and resolutions should be put before General Assembly. In discussion the following points were addressed:

- there was a feeling among some London Districts that consultation had been inadequate and that local views and preferences had been ignored;
- Southern Synod had chosen to wait for this report before discussing the proposals - there would be a Synod meeting on 30th June for the purpose of discussing the issue before General Assembly. It was important that General Assembly should be aware of the views of the synods involved. What was the status of the views of the synods most affected as opposed to the views of other synods? Thames North synod had discussed the issue but had not reached consensus; a majority was against the formation of a London synod.
- perhaps the wording of the resolution was too definite
- had black and ethnic minority congregations been consulted?

The General Secretary suggested that it might be possible to take more time over this. There was, he said, no reason to rush. The commission could report to General

Assembly and seek more time to take the matter further in consultation with the synods involved.

The Revd David Grosch-Miller moved that the matter be deferred to the 2008 General Assembly. This was seconded by Mr David Eldridge.

The Resolution fell

Discussion resumed:

- Mission Council needed to ensure that General Assembly heard the views of the synods concerned, but General Assembly did have the right to make such decisions;
- it was questioned whether General Assembly would have enough information about costs and resources involved in order to make an informed decision;

It was agreed to revisit the question at a later point in the meeting with the purpose of exploring the possibility of asking General Assembly to give its support in principle to the formation of a London synod. The Moderator, on behalf of Mission Council, thanked the commission for its work.

The Revd Terry Oakley proposed that Mission Council ask Thames North Synod to meet to discuss the matter. This was seconded by the Revd Dr Susan Durber

The Resolution was carried. (Note: At a later point in the meeting this resolution was rescinded)

07/32 Consensus Decision-Making (Paper A8 and A8i)

The Revd Elizabeth Nash presented the paper. She noted the process's emphasis on listening, and the opportunity it provided for minority voices to be heard. She noted that some things might take longer to do, while others may be quicker.

In discussion:

- this should not apply in its present form to Committees, where the convener's function was not that of a Moderator;
- such decision-making process was used by the WCC and the WARC, as well as in Australia and New Zealand;
- the paper used the term 'council' as a more general term than General Assembly specifically;
- an additional set of standing orders would be used; it would always be possible to resume the previous standing orders and decide by majority vote.

Mission Council agreed that the Resolutions in a slightly modified form be put before General Assembly

07/33 Section O Advisory Group

The Deputy General Secretary presented paper A9, Section O Advisory Group, and sought Mission Council's approval to put the resolution before General Assembly.

Mission Council agreed

The Deputy General Secretary sought Mission Council's agreement to the appointment of Mr Hartley Oldham to the Section O Advisory Group.

Mission Council agreed.

The Deputy General Secretary sought two members of Council to work with the Clerk and legal adviser on Section O Papers A9i, A9ii, and A9iii - Revds Roberta Rominger and Terry Oakley volunteered .

07/34 Assembly Arrangements Committee

The Convener of the Assembly arrangements Committee presented Paper S.

Session Two

07/35 Mission Council and Assembly (Paper A1)

The Assembly Clerk presented Paper A1, highlighting part 3, Conclusions and Recommendations. He noted that, with a biennial Assembly, Mission Council would be required to make decisions on Assembly's behalf more frequently. A process was suggested to allow constitutional changes to be made without unreasonable delay. Some questions were raised:

- would consideration be given to the composition of Mission Council?
- should the name 'Mission Council' be changed?
- who would set the overall policies and priorities of the URC?

It was recommended that every committee should report briefly to every Assembly, and that the main annual report of the Nominations Committee be dealt with by Mission Council.

07/36 Catch the Vision Steering Group Report (Paper B, Paper ASS)

The General Secretary presented, and invited the Clerk to explain paper ASS, 'Changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church'. The Clerk indicated that the advice received from our legal advisors was that unless we wished to go to the expense of and delay consequent upon obtaining a Statutory Instrument to amend the schedules to the URC Acts, District Councils in some form must be retained for the purpose of fulfilling the requirement of the Acts. These District Councils could however be considerably limited in their functions and membership.

In response to a question, the Clerk suggested that it would be possible for there to be a single District Council in a synod.

It would be for the synods to decide what they wanted District/Area Councils to do in addition to the requirements of the Act - if anything.

Synods would be informed of the legally-required duties of District/Area Councils.

Some unease was expressed that this was a reversal of decisions already taken, but the point was made by the legal adviser that very little work would be required of District/Area Councils and that it seemed very likely that it would be possible for synod and district/area to be co-terminous.

The General Secretary presented paper B, seeking Mission Council's advice on future management of Catch the Vision, the future of Church House and the paragraph on worship. Comments in response were:

- endorsement of the paragraph on worship;
- a 'think tank' might not realise its full potential if its membership was changed as frequently as suggested;
- the quality of worship in the URC is variable, and exploration of worship was to be encouraged;
- there was encouragement also for ecumenical working at a national level;

Comments were invited on Para 2. Clarification was asked on the policy on the election of Lay people as Assembly Moderators. It was noted that past Moderators have always been either ministers of Word and Sacrament or Elders.

07/37 General Secretary

The General Secretary addressed Mission Council on Reformed Spirituality and Art.

Session Three

Worship was led by the Chaplain and the Moderator.

07/38 Youth and Children's Work Committee (Paper C)

The paper was presented by the Revd Neil Thorogood. He emphasised the importance of the place of children in worship and invited members to comment:

- it was noted that there is more to the matter than worship styles, as churches of varying styles seem able to sustain numbers of children;
- numbers were important; a core of children do attract more;
- there were questions of relationships with young people, who may not be able to attend Sunday worship;
- even a small number of children could be cherished as part of the church community;
- children had their own needs as individuals;
- we must try to look at worship through children's eyes;
- the key was integration; adults could learn from children's spirituality;

Jo Williams (Children's Work Development Officer) addressed Mission Council, giving details of the upcoming Children's Assembly, which will run parallel to General Assembly.

Mrs Val Morrison, on behalf on the Staffing Advisory Group, moved Resolution 3 on Paper A11, noting that the date in clause (c) should be altered to January 2008 and not October 2007

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agreed to the Staffing Advisory Group recommendations relating to the Children's Work Development Officer post:

- a. an extension of the Children's Work Development Officer post to (at the latest) December 2009.
- b. by May 2009 Mission Council should receive recommendations regarding the future resources required for the support of children's work in the United Reformed Church.
- c. a programme setting objectives, milestones and expected progress towards achieving the above be produced by January 2008

The Resolution was carried.

07/39 Global Warming/Climate Change (paper D)

Mrs Melanie Frew presented the paper. In discussion it was noted:

- we have to be more robust in the way this is presented to General Assembly;
- a list of possible courses of action for people would be helpful;
- personal commitment comes ahead of an Assembly decision;
- information about carbon offset and more specific advice would be helpful;

At the Deputy General Secretary's suggestion, it was agreed that the resolution be taken later in the meeting after the wording had been altered to take account of the feeling of the meeting.

07/40 URC Ministers' Pension Fund Board Membership (Paper E1)

The Honorary Treasurer, Mr Eric Chilton, presented the paper. In doing so, he sought Mission Council's agreement to the revised composition of the Board, and revised arrangements for nominating directors.

Mission Council agreed.

07/41 Treasurer's Report (Paper E)

Mr Eric Chilton noted that, at Assembly 2007, he would be reporting that the Assembly accounts were in surplus. He presented a revised remit for the Finance Committee which reflected more accurately the work actually undertaken by the committee. In the first paragraph of the revised remit, the word 'agreement' should be changed to 'consultation'.

After discussion, it was agreed that the final paragraph be included in presenting the remit to General Assembly, even if it were not part of the remit. Mission Council agreed that this should go to General Assembly.

Session Four

07/42 Introduction of Papers F, G and H

The Revd Dr Susan Durber presented Paper F, following which the following points were raised:

- how could we bring alive the contents of the paper?; the challenge was not just to receive the paper, but to find ways of enabling local congregations to engage with it;

- Was this a time of ‘new reformation’?; how was the Church coming to terms with its future?; in a conciliar church we are good at papers, but it would be good to ask General Assembly to offer this one to local churches for discussion;

The Revd Peter Ball presented Paper G.

The Revd Andrew Prasad presented Papers H and H1

Mission Council met in groups to discuss:

- Paper F, by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee on Ecclesiology;
- Paper G, by the Life and Witness Committee on Covenant Membership and Mission;
- Paper H, by the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, an Audit of Church Structures, Policies, Procedures and Practices for barriers to full Participation of Minority Ethnic People.

Session Five

07/45 Charities Act 2006

Mission Council received, and briefly discussed, the report on paper ADD. Mission Council confirmed the intention of the Task Group to circulate an advice note to Church Secretaries with the spring mailing from Tavistock Place.

07/46 Group Reports (07/42).

Paper F, The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary

Dr Durber agreed that the document could be amended in the light of the group’s response.

Mission Council agreed that the report should be published and distributed among churches as a Doctrine, Prayer and Worship discussion document.

Paper G, Covenant Membership and Mission

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary.

Paper H/H1

The groups charged with examining this paper reported briefly and submitted written comments to the Deputy General Secretary.

Mission Council addressed the Resolutions (paper H, p7)

Resolution (a):

Mission Council authorises the Secretaries for Communication & Editorial and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to draft an ethnic monitoring form to be included in the United Reformed Church annual returns.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (b):

Mission Council encourages all synods to support and enable the URC Minority Ethnic Conferences which not only affirm the gifts black and minority ethnic members bring to the life of the URC, but also help develop BME leadership for the life of the church now and into the future.

The Resolution was carried with a number of abstentions.

Resolution (c):

Mission Council urges synods and Local Churches to promote the use of the 'Multicultural Ministry Toolkit' and 'We Belong' training pack to help local church members and groups become cross-culturally aware and literate.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (d):

Mission Council affirms the Training Committee in its commitment to developing learning centres that are culturally sensitive and aware, and encourages the committee to ensure that all lay training materials it is responsible for developing are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

The Resolution was carried.

Resolution (e) was withdrawn

Resolution (f) as amended:

Mission Council encourages synods and Local Churches to be culturally sensitive during the process of seeking representation to synod meetings, Mission Council and General Assembly, and to use the provision for alternate representatives and the possibility of additional visitors as an opportunity to involve BME participation.

The Resolution was carried

Resolution (g):

Mission Council encourages those in leadership at all levels of the Church's life to be intentional in promoting multicultural inclusiveness influencing and inspiring people to make the needed changes.

The Resolution was carried.

Session Six

07/47 Global Warming/Climate Change (Paper D)

Melanie Frew presented an amended resolution which after discussion was finalised as follows:

General Assembly

- i) notes with approval the work already underway on climate change, and reaffirms the need to build this into the whole life of the Local Church;**
- ii) recognises that all society, including the United Reformed Church, must shrink its carbon footprint;**
- iii) calls upon the Church and Society Committee**
 - (a) to determine how carbon emissions can best be monitored across the church;**
 - (b) to develop plans in consultation with the relevant agents of the church to implement year on year cuts in carbon emissions using the expertise of such groups as Eco-Congregations, Operation Noah, Creation Challenge and the Joint Public Issues Team;**
 - (c) to roll this out across the church, and**
 - (d) to report annually to the Trustees;**
- iv) calls upon Local Churches to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.**

Mission Council agreed that the resolution in this form should be put before General Assembly.

07/48 Post-Moratorium Task Group (Paper A10)

The Revd Malcolm Hanson reported.

- 1) This report could only provide a context in which to discuss; it could not further the debate.
- 2) Most members might feel this was a positive way forward, but we needed to acknowledge that it would not be easy even to make such a commitment as outlined here. For many, this path might already concede too much or take them in an unwelcome direction.
- 3) The Church was deeply divided on the issue, but united in faith in Christ. How could we handle unity and diversity? The answer might lie in the nature of the Church. This debate might not be primarily about sexuality, but was about the nature of the Church, what we believed the Church to be. It was about how we live together in unity and diversity. There was a powerful and painful tension between our perceptions of unity and of truth.
- 4) The tension between having deadlines and not having deadlines. The group did not believe there should be a deadline for final policy decisions, but acknowledged that such decisions would have to be made.

In summary, the Church had to face the reality of the kind of Church we are and to explore ways of living with diversity; So far we had been unable to find a unified

policy on Human Sexuality, and the group could see no way of finding one in the future. This meant that it was important to address means of living with diversity. We perhaps needed to let go of our need for deadlines or even a definite answer. The report contained a number of questions for Mission Council's consideration.

In Discussion:

- we need to be careful in use of terms such as 'the sexuality issue';
- some of the report (e.g. para 2.2) seems unduly negative;
- the report contains a clear representation of the different voices and opinions within the Church;

Following discussion, clause 2.2 was amended to read : 'Within the church, as people have honoured the moratorium, opinions and attitudes are hard to assess. However, the church has not taken the opportunity...'

Mission Council accepted the report, and agreed that it should be put before General Assembly.

The Revd Peter Ball proposed that Resolution 4 be deleted, seconded by the Revd Elizabeth Nash. **Mission Council agreed.**

The Revd Peter Brain proposed the insertion of the words 'across the whole church' after 'to enable discussions', seconded by the Revd Neil Thorogood. The Revd Malcolm Hanson noted that the intention of the resolution was to provide leadership, and that the discussion needs to happen initially in a small group. The amendment fell.

Proposed to add word 'generally after 'discussions have not...'' in Resolution 5.

It was agreed to return to the matter at a later point in the meeting.

07/49 Ministries Report, Housing of Non-Stipendiary Ministers (Paper J)

The Revd Peter Poulter presented the report and recommendations.

In discussion:

- the policy described might be a disincentive to churches to participate in synod manse schemes;
- there might be pressure on synods to buy manses for non-stipendiary ministers;
- if 'house for duty' became available to NSMs, should it not also be available to local church leaders;
- clarification of the difference between manse provision and retired ministers' housing;
- noted that this was permissive legislation with nothing mandatory about it;

Mission Council accepted the report and affirmed the recommendations.

07/50 Ministries Committee (Paper K)

The Revd Peter Poulter presented Resolution (M1). Mission C agreed that M1 should be put before General Assembly

Revd P Poulter presented Resolution M2. Mission Council agreed that M2 should be put before General Assembly.

Mr Poulter presented Resolution M3 and the proposed selection process for candidates for ministry. Mission Council agreed that M3 and the proposed selection process be put before General Assembly

07/51 Abolition of the Slave Trade Bicentenary 2007 (Paper L)

The Revd Andrew Prasad presented.

Session Seven

07/52 Human Sexuality (Paper A10) (07/48)

The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the revised resolutions:

- 1. General Assembly welcomes and accepts Mission Council's guidance concerning the ending of the moratorium on policy decisions on matters of human sexuality.**
- 2. General Assembly agrees to the wording of the Commitment on Human Sexuality.**
- 3. General Assembly adopts the Commitment on Human Sexuality on behalf of the church.**
- 4. General Assembly calls for further detailed discussions on aspects of human sexuality to be initiated in the light of the Catch the Vision process, with guidance from Mission Council and in the spirit of the Commitment.**
- 5. Acknowledging the value of earlier work on human sexuality, and recognising that there has been some confusion about the implications of the moratorium, General Assembly regrets that the extent of "reflection, prayer and sharing" has been limited over the past seven years and encourages the continuing use of that earlier material.**
- 6. General Assembly asks Mission Council to set up a task group to oversee the process of addressing issues of human sexuality, particularly those set out in the report, and to enable the process of widening discussions to involve the whole church.**
- 7. General Assembly urges members of councils and local churches not to press for policy decisions on these matters during this process, but to join in discussions that might help to increase understanding and unity.**

Mission Council accepted the amended resolutions and agreed that the resolutions should be put to General Assembly.

07/53 Joint Public Issues Team (Paper M)

Mr Simon Loveitt presented paper M. He outlined some of the strengths and weaknesses of the Team Management Group and presented the resolution.

Mission Council accepted the report and carried the Resolution.

07/54 Staffing Advisory Group (Paper A11)

Mrs Val Morrison moved adoption of resolution 2, Continuation of the post of Secretary for Church and Society.

The Resolution was carried

Mrs Morrison moved adoption of resolution 1, appointment of an editor of the United Reformed Church's national journal/periodical.

The Resolution was carried

07/55 Assisted Dying (Paper N)

Mr Simon Loveitt presented the paper, noting the church's enthusiasm for debating the issue. It was intended to present the paper in booklet form for General Assembly, and hoped to be able to make it available free of charge.

Mission Council discussed the issue in small informal groups, and in the plenary session the following questions and comments were raised:

- has the Committee considered the matter of 'care for the primary carer'?
- in any group discussion at Assembly, people will be sharing personal, and probably painful stories;
- concern that there may be a danger of closing down discussion if resolutions are presented to Assembly;
- there is room for more about relating faith to practice;
- concern whether the resolutions could represent the view of the whole United Reformed Church.

The Revd Peter Poulter moved the deletion of the words 'to be an accurate expression of the mind of the United Reformed Church'.

Seconded by Peter Brain

Mr Loveitt accepted the amendment, and responded to the questions raised.

The Chaplain led Mission Council in prayer.

07/56 Nominations Committee (Paper Q)

1. The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the report of the nominations Committee and moved the Resolution with, on the advice of the Clerk, insertion of the words 'recommends to the Moderator that'. The Moderator thereafter announced that the Tellers for the election of the Moderator would be Mr Peter Pay (Convener), Dr Graham Campling and Dr Jim Merrilees.

It was noted that Simon Rowntree had withdrawn from nomination as Convener of Assembly Arrangements Committee. It would be helpful for Nominations committee to have some names.

On the recommendation of the Nominations Committee,
Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agreed to the appointment of the Revd Roy Lowes for a further period as Secretary for Education and Learning from 1st August 2007 until 31st July 2012.

Session Eight

07/57 Catch the Vision (Paper O)

The General Secretary presented Paper O, 'Outline Plan for Mission Policy and Theology Department', highlighting various models of networking. He noted the concern of MCAG about elements of the paper.

In discussion:

- concerns about the future of committees (e.g. Equal Ops)
- 3.3 - who will implement programmes?
- concern about the strength and reliability of networks;
- relationship between MPT and the synods; is there a danger of churches being overburdened by material from both synods and MPT;
- how do we stand in the middle ground between secular and religious fundamentalism; how do we address questions of our overall priorities?
- how might we act justly and inclusively as well as informally?
- should the Advisory Group on Faith and Order become a representative group?
- it would be good to have a strong emphasis on worship;
- emphasis needed on collaborative prioritisation;

The General Secretary and the Revd Philip Woods responded.
Concern was expressed about the future composition and remit of Mission Council.

Mission Council agreed that the three resolutions be put before General Assembly, with appropriate amendments

07/58 Staffing Advisory Group

Mrs Val Morrison moved adoption of a resolution approving the post of Mission Secretary. **Mission Council agreed.**

07/59 Trustees Report (Papers P, P1, P2, P3)

The Treasurer, Mr Eric Chilton presented the papers, drawing attention to certain details and noting that the Honorary Treasurer must be a nominated trustee as follows:

'The Honorary Treasurer shall be appointed by Mission Council as the nominated Trustee and he or she shall hold office for 4 years.' (P1, page 3)

Mr Chilton responded to a number of questions:

- the grouping of synods is a problem; we should ask Assembly to nominate trustees and may be able to achieve our ends without being too prescriptive; there is also the need to make the final document acceptable to the Charities Commission;
- trustees have a duty to ensure that the church acts within the law;
- concern about synod groups, and suggestion that the paper should merely refer to ‘synods’;
- it may be helpful if all trustees were members of General Assembly;

Mission Council agreed that the vote required for amendments p1, 5 be amended to accord with the Church’s normal procedures for constitutional change.

The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented paper P3 and its resolution:

Mission Council authorises the Nominations Committee, in consultation with the Board of Trustees, if possible to bring directly to General Assembly the names of suitable people to fill the remaining vacancies on the list of Trustees.

The Resolution was carried

The two Resolutions on P3i were put:

Mission Council agrees to forward, for appointment by General Assembly, the list of those nominated to serve as Trustees of the United Reformed Church from Assembly 2007 for the appropriate terms.

The Resolution was carried

Mission Council agrees to the co-option of the Revd Michael Davies as a Trustee until Assembly 2010.

The Resolution was carried

Session Nine

07/60 London Synod (07/31)

The Deputy General Secretary presented a revised resolution, proposed by the Revd Nigel Uden, seconded by the Revd Roberta Rominger:

Mission Council, noting the majority view of the London Synod Commission that the creation of a London Synod would be “visionary and timely” and the consequences and costs of change “acceptable”, in preparation for future proposals to General Assembly asks the London Synod Commission or such other group as MCAG shall appoint

- a) to facilitate and consider reports on (amongst other things)**
- **the mission justification**
 - **synod boundaries, in consultation with the synods affected**
 - **the division of resources**

- **financial and staffing implications**
- **synod offices**
- **Trusts**

b) to consult with Thames North and Southern Synods

i) by co-opting two representatives of each synod to the Commission or group

ii) by bringing initial proposals to their Spring meetings in 2009, and firm proposals in Autumn 2009

c) to bring these firm proposals to Mission Council in March 2010 and, if accepted, to General Assembly 2010 so that, if approved, a London Synod be fully operative, with all structural arrangements in place with effect from General Assembly in 2012

d) in the meantime to bring regular progress reports to the Thames North Synod Executive Committee, the Southern Synod Mission and Strategy Group, and Mission Council.

Discussion:

- there seemed to be insufficient motivation within the paper, and insufficient interest within the Thames North and Southern synods for the process to continue in its present form; the options were to halt the process or continue in a different way. The present proposal offered a means of continuing the process.
- suggested that the Black and Minority Ethnic voice was not being heard;

The Resolution was carried

07/61 The Nature of the Church's Ecumenical Engagement (Paper R)

The Revd Richard Mortimer presented the paper.

- some debate on the definition of 'space';

Mission Council agreed that Paper A7 be made available as a resource for future discussion.

07/62 London Synod (07/60; 07/31)

In the light of Mission Council's decision on the London Synod (07/60), the earlier resolution asking Thames North to meet (above 07/31) was **withdrawn**.

07/63 Nominations

The Clerk and Deputy General Secretary reported that the following nominations had been received for members of MCAG:

Committee Convener:	Mr Simon Loveitt
Mission Council Members:	Revd David Grosch-Miller
	Revd Rachel Poolman
	Revd Peter Colwell

Membership of Church House Management Group:
Mr Graham Morris

Mission Council agreed

07/64 Section O (Papers A9, A9i, A9ii)

The Clerk presented, notifying Mission Council of minor amendments to the papers

A9i, page 5 para 2, add full stop after commissioning and delete the rest of the sentence.

A91 page B.3.1 add 'and the Deputy General Secretary'

Mission Council approved the amendments.

07/65 Listed Buildings (Paper ADD)

Mr William McVey presented

- the Group's view was sought on the increased powers granted to English Heritage; no-one present was qualified to respond, but an answer would be sought and appended to the minutes.

07/66 District Closure Resolution

The latest legal advice being that Districts must remain, it was recommended that Districts put themselves into temporary suspension until General Assembly has progressed the matter to a conclusion, using the following wording:

..... District Council resolves that from (Date Month Year), all district powers and responsibilities be devolved to the Synod or to its committees and that the Synod meeting or duly authorised committees thereof will, until further determination of General Assembly, act as District Council.

07/67 Assembly Arrangements (Paper S)

Mr William McVey outlined plans for General Assembly 2007, and thanked Mission Council for the guidance offered at the present meeting. At the moment there are about 40 resolutions (11 attached to section O); it might be possible to deal with more than one resolution at a time, particularly for resolutions which were unlikely to require lengthy or detailed discussion, and always with the safeguard that a single resolution could still be debated.

Mr McVey responded to a number of questions.

07/68 Thanks

The Moderator thanked those members of Mission Council who were attending for the final time in their present capacities:

The Revd Dr David Peel; Mr Eric Chilton; The Revd John Humphreys (in his capacity as Convener of the Training Committee); The Revd Andrew Prasad; The Revd Peter Brain; The Revd Richard Pope; Mrs Wilma Prentice

The Moderator thanked Martin Hazell, Ken Forbes, Morag McLintock, Nigel Uden, James Breslin, David Cornick and Ray Adams.

The General Secretary thanked the Moderator for her leadership over the past year, and the Revd Neil Thorogood for his worship and pastoral skills.

The meeting closed with worship led by the Chaplain.



The United Reformed Church

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

To: Members of Mission Council
and staff in attendance

13th March 2007

THIS LETTER CONTAINS SOME IMPORTANT INFORMATION. PLEASE READ IT ALL
FIRST BEFORE LOOKING AT THE ENCLOSED PAPERS

Mission Council: Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th March 2007
High Leigh Conference Centre
Lord Street, Hoddesdon, Herts EN11 8SG
Telephone 01992 463016 : Fax 01992 446594

Dear Colleague,

This second mailing of Mission Council papers reflects a wide range of issues in which many people have been involved in preparation for General Assembly. It also reflects a great deal of careful and thoughtful work which Mission Council is asked (in its various roles) to note, to authorise or to advise upon.

Although the quantity of paper looks daunting, I want to assure you that not all the papers are long, and not all require detailed discussion.

Guidance for those who are pressed for time:

i) May I suggest that you look first at the end of each paper to see if there is a resolution to be considered, and whether it is a resolution for Mission Council or for General Assembly.

ii) The '**A**'- **designated papers** refer to Advisory Groups which are required to make annual reports to Mission Council. These can only report to Assembly through Mission Council, and therefore most of them are for information. Some have proposals which the Council will have to decide upon. Paper A9 and its offspring (Section O) will be considered by an ad hoc group of volunteers appointed at the meeting to consider the detail during the weekend, and to report back. It is not necessary therefore for you to wade through all the appendices unless that is the kind of thing you enjoy doing. The Listed Buildings resolutions in Paper ADD should probably be given the same treatment.

iii) The papers which will require Mission Council resolutions include
ADD, A1, A2, A7, A8, A9, A10, A11, C, D, E, E1, F, M, O, P, P3, Q, S

iv) Some of the papers with resolutions come from Assembly committees. These require Mission Council's scrutiny and advice, but do not require us to agree final resolutions. The committee listens to our advice but has authority to decide its own final report and resolutions for General Assembly.

This will apply to Papers **G, H, J, K, N, R, (S)**.

Naturally, it would be extremely helpful if you could read as many of the papers as possible. The agenda shows the status of each paper, and what we shall be asked to do with it (e.g. whether it is for information, discussion, or resolution).

v) Because of a necessarily tight timetable, Groups will have to look at the detail of some reports on behalf of the whole Council (See Session 4 - Saturday morning). You might like therefore to check which group you are in, and read the report for which your Group will be responsible, before looking at the other reports.

Groups A B C will concentrate on Paper F – Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church

Groups D E F will consider Paper G – Covenant Membership and Mission

Groups G and H will consider Paper H – Audit of ethnic minorities in the Church

vi) You should find the following papers enclosed with this letter, unless otherwise indicated:

The Agenda

List of Groups, indicating leaders and reporters

- A1 Mission Council and Assembly (*Paper issued at the January Mission Council – but sent out with first mailing to those who were not there*)
- A2 Mission Council Task Groups – vacancies (*sent out with first mailing*)
- A3 Grants and Loans Group Report (*sent out with first mailing*)
- A4 Listed Buildings Advisory Group Report (*sent out with first mailing*)
- A5 Inter-synod Resource Sharing
- A6 Ethical Investment Advisory Group
- A7 London Synod Task Group Report
- A8 Consensus Voting Task Group
- A9 Section O Advisory Group (Ministerial Discipline)
- A9i Section O: Resolutions for Assembly
- A9ii Section O: Appendix - Text related to Resolution C
- A9iii Section O: Appendix – Text related to Resolution E
- A10 Moratorium on Human Sexuality Task Group
- A11 Staffing Advisory Group (*to be tabled at Mission Council*)
- ADD Additional Business
- A Mission Council Advisory Group Report
- B Report of the 'Catch the Vision' Task Group
- C Children's Work Development (Youth and Children's Work Committee)
- D Climate Change (A joint report and proposals from Church and Society, Commitment for Life and Ecumenical)
- E Remit of the Finance Committee
- E1 URC Retired Ministers' Pension Fund Board Membership

- F The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church (Doctrine, Prayer and Worship)
- G Life and Witness Committee's report 'Covenant Membership and Mission'
- H Ethnic minority audit (Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry)
- J Housing of ministers in non-stipendiary service
- K Ministries Committee Resolutions (for General Assembly)
- L Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act
- M Joint Public Issues Team
- N Assisted Dying (Church and Society)
- O Catch the Vision -2 : Restructuring Proposals about a Mission policy and Theology Department
- P Governance: Introduction
- P1 Governing Document
- P2 Relationship between Church and Trustees
- P3 Appointment of Trustees
- Q Nominations Committee
- R The Nature of the United Reformed Church's Ecumenical Engagement
- S Assembly Arrangements

vii General Information

a) Please remember to bring with you

- o All the agenda papers (both in this pack and sent in the first mailing)
- o Minutes of the October 2006 and January 2007 meetings
- o A Bible.
- o A copy of 'Rejoice and Sing'

b) Accommodation will be in single occupancy rooms at the High Leigh Conference Centre. **All rooms have en-suite facilities, with soap and towels provided.**

I look forward to seeing you at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts (just off the A10).

With good wishes

Yours sincerely



The Revd Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary



The
United
Reformed
Church

The United Reformed Church

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

To: Members of Mission Council
and staff in attendance

19th February 2007

Dear Colleague,

Mission Council: Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th March 2007
High Leigh Conference Centre
Lord Street, Hoddesdon, Herts EN11 8SG
Telephone 01992 463016 : Fax 01992 446594

This letter is to remind you that the March Mission Council is in sight and I make my usual request that you respond as soon as possible with details of your requirements for accommodation and meals.

After the January Council which provided an interesting and diverse agenda, the March Mission Council gives the opportunity to its advisory groups and Assembly committees to shape the resolutions and reports they may wish to bring to General Assembly.

Mission Council will begin at 4 p.m. It will be possible to check in from 2.30p.m., although rooms might not be available until 3.30 p.m. when tea will be served. We shall finish our meeting at lunchtime on Sunday.

There are enclosed four (or five*) agenda papers:

Paper A1* (yellow) - is enclosed only for those who were not present at January Mission Council. Other members received it there, and are asked to bring it to the March Council meeting.

Paper A2 - gives notice of elections to Mission Council advisory groups

Paper A3 - the report of the Grants and Loans Group

Paper A4 - the report of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Paper A5 - the report of the Resource Sharing Task Group

Other papers are about practical arrangements:

- directions for getting to High Leigh
- a list of members (to help people think about sharing transport)
- an expense slip (to be completed and handed in at the meeting)
- a form giving your accommodation and meal requirements, and certain other information.

There will be a further mailing of papers in about two weeks' time.

Please EITHER return this form as quickly as possible, and by Monday 5th March,

OR email your requirements to krystyna.pullen@urc.org.uk.

OR telephone 020 7916 8646

OR fax to 020 7916 2021

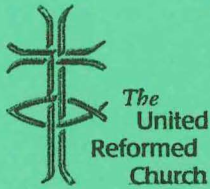
If you have any questions about the meeting, accommodation or the agenda, please don't hesitate to contact my office. I look forward to seeing you at High Leigh.

With good wishes

Yours sincerely

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

The Revd Raymond Adams
Deputy General Secretary



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 MARCH 2007

MEMBERS & REPRESENTATIVES

The Moderator
General Secretary
Deputy General Secretary
Clerk

Revd Elizabeth Caswell
Revd Dr David Cornick
Revd Ray Adams
Revd James Breslin

Past Moderator
Moderator Elect
Treasurer
Legal Adviser
Revd Dr David Peel
Revd Prof Stephen Orchard
Mr Eric Chilton
Mrs Janet Knott

Assembly Standing Committees

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

Revd Dr Susan Durber
Revd Peter Ball
Mr Simon Loveitt
Revd Neil Thorogood
Revd Elizabeth Nash
Revd Peter Poulter
Revd John Humphreys
Mr Eric Chilton
Revd Kirsty Thorpe
Revd Malcolm Hanson
Mr William McVey
Ms Morag McLintock
Revd Peter Colwell
Revd Andrew Prasad

Fury Council

Mr Andrew Littlejohns (Moderator)
Miss Sara Paton

13 synod Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each synod

1 N	Revd Rowena Francis	Miss Elaine Colechin, Revd John Durell, Mr Michael Louis
2 N.W	Revd Peter Brain	Miss Kathleen Cross, Revd Rachel Poolman, Revd Alan Wickens
3 Mer	Revd Howard Sharp	Revd Jenny Morgan, Mrs Wilma Prentice, Mr Donald Swift
4 York	Revd Arnold Harrison	Mr Roderick Garthwaite, Revd Pauline Loosemore, Mrs Val Morrison
5 E.M	Revd Terry Oakley	Revd Jane Campbell, Mrs Margaret Gateley, Mrs Irene Wren
6 W.M	Revd Elizabeth Welch	Mrs Melanie Frew, Revd Anthony Howells, Mr Bill Robson (Dr Tony Jeans - alt)
7 E	Revd Elizabeth Caswell	Mr Mick Barnes, Mrs Joan Turner, Revd Cecil White
8 S.W	Revd David Grosch-Miller	Mrs Janet Gray, Revd Roz Harrison, Revd Stephen Newell
9 Wex	Revd Adrian Bulley	Mrs Glenis Massey, Mr Peter Pay, Revd Ruth Whitehead
10 Th.N	Revd Roberta Rominger	Mr David Eldridge, Revd John Macaulay, Revd David Varcoe
11 S	Revd Nigel Uden	Dr Graham Campling, Mrs Maureen Lawrence, Mr Nigel Macdonald
12 Wal	Revd Peter Noble	Revd Stuart Jackson, Mrs Barbara Shapland, Mrs Liz Tadd
13 Scot	Revd John Humphreys	Miss Irene Hudson, Revd Alan Paterson, Mr Patrick Smyth

In attendance

Minute Secretary

Revd Ken Forbes

Moderator's Chaplain

Revd Neil Thorogood

Ministries

Revd Christine Craven

Training

Revd Roy Lowes

Youth Work

Mr John Brown

Children's Work Dev't Officer

Miss Jo Williams

Pilots Development Officer

Mrs Karen Bulley

Church & Society

Mr Stuart Dew

Ecumenical Relations

Revd Richard Mortimer

International Church Rel's

Revd Philip Woods

Church Related Community
Work

Mrs Suzanne Adofol

Mr Stephen Summers

Grants & Loans Convener

Dr Brian Woodhall

Rural Consultant

Revd Graham Jones

Racial Justice

Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

HR & Facilities Manager

Ms Michelle Marcano

Windermere Centre

Mr Lawrence Moore

Communications

Revd Martin Hazell

Reform

Life & Witness



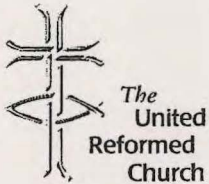
MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 MARCH 2007

MISSION COUNCIL: 23 - 25 MARCH 2007

GROUPS

The first named person is asked to act as group leader and the second named person in each group as reporter

<p>A</p> <p>Elizabeth Nash Leader Peter Brain Reporter</p> <p>Ray Adams Mick Barnes John Macaulay Patrick Smyth Katalina Tahaafe Williams Kirsty Thorpe Neil Thorogood Elizabeth Welch</p>	<p>B</p> <p>Wilma Prentice Leader John Brown Reporter</p> <p>Adrian Bulley Rowena Francis Maureen Lawrence Simon Loveitt Alan Paterson Sara Paton Brian Woodhall Philip Woods</p>
<p>C</p> <p>Morag McLintock David Peel Jane Campbell Eric Chilton Ros Harrison Martin Hazell Michael Louis Andrew Prasad Liz Tadd Nigel Uden</p>	<p>D</p> <p>David Grosch-Miller Glenis Massey Karen Bulley Peter Colwell Stuart Dew Margaret Gateley Nigel Macdonald Richard Mortimer Peter Noble Stephen Orchard</p>
<p>E</p> <p>Howard Sharp Val Morrison Lucy Brierley Elizabeth Caswell John Humphreys Lawrence Moore Peter Poulter Bill Robson Joan Turner Alan Wickens</p>	<p>F</p> <p>Graham Campling Roberta Rominger Christine Craven Janet Gray Arnold Harrison Graham Jones Janet Knott Jennifer Morgan Peter Pay</p>
<p>G</p> <p>David Eldridge Ruth Whitehead Suzanne Adofo Peter Ball Kathleen Cross Melanie Frew Roy Lowes Terry Oakley Barbara Shapland David Varcoe</p>	<p>H</p> <p>Susan Durber John Durell James Breslin Roderick Garthwaite Irene Hudson Stuart Jackson William McVey Rachel Poolman Jo Williams Irene Wren</p>



MISSION COUNCIL
23 - 25 March 2007

**AGENDA AND
TIMETABLE**

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

A code has been used where possible to indicate which agenda items are being presented for information (I); discussion (D); or resolution (R)

FRIDAY

2.30p.m. onwards *Check in*

3.30p.m. *Tea*

4.00p.m.

Session 1

Opening Worship and bible study

Welcome and apologies

Minutes of 27th January Mission Council

Matters Arising

Introduction to the Agenda

MCAG Report

PAPER A (I)

Notification of nominations of those to serve on

Mission Council task and advisory groups

PAPER A2 (I)

Advisory Group Reports (*to be included in Mission Council's Report to Assembly*)

Grants and Loans Group

PAPER A3 (I)

Listed Buildings Advisory Group

PAPER A4 (I)

Listed Buildings Advisory Group Resolution

PAPER ADD

(Group - pending R)

Inter-synod resource sharing

PAPER A5 (I)

Ethical Investment Advisory Group

PAPER A6 (I)

London Synod

PAPER A7 (R)

Consensus Voting

PAPER A8 (R)

Section O Advisory

PAPER A9 (R&I)

PAPERS A9i, A9ii, A9iii

(Group - pending R)

Assembly Arrangements Committee - 1

PAPER S

(I pending R)

Notices

7.00p.m.

Dinner

8.00p.m.

Session 2

Mission Council and General Assembly

PAPER A1 (R)

Catch the Vision - 1

PAPER B (D)

9.15p.m. Evening Prayers

SATURDAY

8.30a.m. *Breakfast*

9.15a.m. *Session 3*
Morning Worship and Bible Study
Report of Youth and Children's Work Committee PAPER C (R)
Proposals on Climate Change PAPER D (R)
Pension Fund Board Membership PAPER E1 (R)

10.30a.m. *Coffee*

11.00a.m. *Session 4*
Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church PAPER F (Introduction)
Covenant Membership and Mission PAPER G (Introduction)
Audit of Ethnic Minorities in the Church PAPER H (Introduction)

11.45a.m. *Groups* (D)

1.00p.m. *Lunch*

2.30 p.m. *Session 5*
Plenary discussion and resolutions (D&R)

3.30p.m. *Tea*

4. 00p.m. *Session 6*
Treasurer's Report PAPER E (I & R)
Charity Registration and local churches PAPER ADD (I)
Task Group on Human Sexuality Moratorium PAPER A10 (R)
Ministries Report:
a) Housing of NSMs (Assembly Resolution 2) PAPER J (D)
b) Assembly Resolutions on removal of age limit for transfer between
non-stipendiary and stipendiary service. PAPER K (D)
c) Resolution on the extension of stipendiary service to 65 and 6months.
d) Resolution on the Assessment procedure post July 2007.

Report on Commemoration of Abolition of Slave
Trade Act Bicentenary 2007 PAPER L (I)

7.00p.m. *Dinner*

8.00p.m. *Session 7*
Staffing Advisory Group PAPER A11 (R)
Joint Public Issues Team PAPER M (R)
Church and Society's Report on Assisted Dying PAPER N (D)

9.00p.m. *Evening Prayers*

SUNDAY *(British Summer Time begins: clocks and watches should be put forward one hour)*

7.45 a.m. *Service of Holy Communion*

8.30a.m. *Breakfast*

9.15 a.m. *Session 8*
Catch the Vision: Mission Department proposals PAPER O (R)
Trustees Report:
a) Governance PAPER P (R)
b) Governing Document PAPER P1 (I)
c) Relationship of Church to Trustees PAPER P2 (I)
Nominations Report: appointment of Trustees PAPER P3 (R)
Appointment of Tellers PAPER Q (R)

10.30a.m. *Coffee*

11.00a.m. *Session 9*
Nature of the Church's Ecumenical Engagement PAPER R (R)
Mission Council task and advisory groups PAPER A2 (R)
Section O Advisory (Report of ad hoc group and decision)
PAPER A9i-iii; (R)
Listed Buildings Resolutions (Report of ad hoc group and decision)
PAPER ADD (R)
Assembly Arrangements -2 PAPER S (R)
Thanks

12.30p.m. *Closing Worship*

1.00p.m. *Lunch*

Depart



MISSION COUNCIL
23 - 25 March 2007

**AGENDA AND
TIMETABLE**

ANNOTATED AGENDA FOR MODERATOR AND SUPPORTERS

A code has been used where possible to indicate which agenda items are being presented for information (I); discussion (D); or resolution (R)

Suggested timings in red

FRIDAY

2.30p.m. onwards *Check in*

3.30p.m. *Tea*

4.00p.m. Session 1
Opening Worship and bible study

Chaplain/Moderator

4.45p.m. Welcome and apologies

The Moderator should welcome:

Mrs Margaret Marshall (deputising and representing West Midlands)

Mr James Wickens (deputising and representing FURY)

Mr Graham Morris (deputising and representing Mersey)

Revd Lucy Brierley (Chaplain to the Moderator-elect)

Revd Bill Mahood (Convener of the Task Group on the London Synod) - present for this session

The DepGenSec will read out the list of apologies:

The Revd Dr David Peel (Past Moderator); The Revds Anthony Howells (West Midlands); Pauline Loosemore (Yorkshire); Stephen Newell (South Western); Cecil White (Eastern); Alan Wickens (North Western); Miss Elaine Colechin (Northern); Messrs Andrew Littlejohns (FURY Moderator) The Revd Kirsty Thorpe (Convener of Communications and Editorial); Donald Swift (Mersey); Ms Michelle Marciano; Messrs Lawrence Moore and Mr Steve Summers (staff). (The Revd Roy Lowes present on Sunday).

Minutes of 27th January Mission Council

Matters Arising:

Resolution 40 Task Group: *The following have agreed to serve: Mrs Rosemary Johnston (Convener); Mrs Barbara Shapland; Ms Sara Paton (FURY); The Revds Lesley Charlton, Lance Stone and Russell Furley Smith*

Review of Gen Sec: *The Revd John Humphreys has replaced Elizabeth Welch on the group; FURY Moderator - Andy Littlejohns - has been invited to serve or send an alternate. First meeting was held earlier today: anything else to report?*

Introduction to the Agenda

DepGenSec

- Additional paper(s)
A11 (SAG);
A8i - corrections to Paper A8
H1 (Addendum to Paper H - RJ&MM Audit);

P3i: Second part of Nominations of Trustees Paper (daughter of P3); **ASS** Paper from the Clerk on Changes in Structure to simplify governance of United Reformed Church. (this item to be taken during this evening's session)

Questions to Groups - white paper - for tomorrow morning's discussions

- Letter with second mailing of papers attempted to show which papers were for decision, etc. may not be 100% accurate but broadly correct.
- Have sought to use time to best advantage - will require Groups to scrutinise reports on behalf of everyone.
- There is enough time on the agenda if we are disciplined with the business. There is still flexibility in timetable if we need it.

4.55: MCAG Report PAPER A (I) DepGenSec

Notification of nominations of those to serve on Mission Council task and advisory groups

PAPER A2 (I) DepGenSec

i) Omission in this paper: Andrew Prasad completes his term of service as Convener of RJ&MM Committee, therefore there is an additional vacancy for a convener on MCAG.

ii) A nomination already received to fill the vacancy on CHMG:

Graham Morris (Mersey) (proposed: Donald Swift seconded: Howard Sharp). Other nominations may be received during this meeting.

Nominations should be in the hands of the Clerk by close of business on Saturday evening.

Advisory Group Reports (to be included in Mission Council's Report to Assembly)

5.05

Grants and Loans Group: PAPER A3 (I)

Brian Woodhall

Listed Buildings Advisory Group PAPER A4 (I)

DepGenSec

Listed Buildings Advisory Group Resolution

PAPER ADD

DepGenSec

(Group - pending R)

Inter-synod resource sharing

PAPER A5 (I)

DepGenSec

Ethical Investment A.G.

PAPER A6 (I)

DepGenSec/

Stuart Dew

5.10

London Synod

PAPER A7 (R)

Bill Mahood

(Depending how this goes, we could come back to it if people are unable to make a decision during the first session. It would mean recasting the agenda during the meeting, but this is possible.)

5.50

Consensus Voting

PAPER A8 (R)

Elizabeth Nash

5.55

Section O Advisory

PAPER A9 (R&I)

DepGenSec/Clerk

PAPERS A9i,A9ii,A9iii (Group - pending R)

6.00

Assembly Arrangements -1

PAPER S (I pending R) William McVey

(This session could take additionally - if time -

- Treasurer's Report - Paper E Treasurer
- Pension Fund Board Membership - E1 Treasurer
- Mission Council and Assembly - Paper A1- Introduction - resume after dinner (Clerk)

Any Notices

DepGenSec

1. Make sure attendance register has been signed, and expenses given in.
2. Any other essential notices

(Aim to end first session no later than 6.30 p.m.)

7.00p.m.	Dinner		
8.00p.m.	Session 2		
	Mission Council and General Assembly	PAPER A1 (R)	Clerk
	Paper ASS - Changes to structure		Clerk
8.30 p.m. - latest	Catch the Vision - 1	PAPER B (D)	GenSec
9.15p.m.	Evening Prayers		Chaplain

SATURDAY

8.30a.m.	Breakfast		
9.15a.m.	Session 3		
	Morning Worship and Bible Study		Chaplain/Moderator
09.35	Youth and Children's Work Cttee	PAPER C (R)	Neil Thorogood
10.00	Proposals on Climate Change	SAG- All PAPER D (R)	Melanie Frew (Convener of Commitment for Life)
10.25	Pension Fund Board Membership	PAPER E1 (R)	Treasurer
	(If time, it may be possible to take "Charity Registration and local churches" Grimwade: it depends how much discussion it generates)	PAPER ADD (I - Andrew Grimwade)	
	Notices		DepGenSec
10.30a.m.	Coffee		

11.00a.m. Session 4

The Moderator explains that we shall hear the presentation of three papers by the conveners of the three committees which have produced them.

- There will be the opportunity to ask questions for clarification. Then Mission Council will go into groups, discussing the papers already allocated to them (see letter with second mailing).
- A paper with Questions to be considered by the Groups has been tabled.
- If Groups wish to discuss any of the other two papers they may do so.
- Notes should be given to the DepGenSec during the lunch hour, so that the main points can be collated before the afternoon session when papers will be discussed in plenary and decisions made.

a) Paper F - is the fruit of an extended piece of work going back to 2005. Mission Council asked the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee to produce a paper on Ecclesiology. It is a report to Mission Council, which it is now time to decide whether formally to commend to General Assembly. (Note for clerk: needs a resolution).

b) Paper G is a report of the Life and Witness Committee to Assembly and therefore Mission Council is asked to comment on its content and resolutions: to say whether the report is ready to be presented to Assembly in its present form (and observations and comments) for the L&W committee to consider.

c) Paper H :

(Background for Moderator: The 2005 Assembly authorised the RJ&MM Committee

"to conduct an audit of church structures, policies, procedures and practices for the presence of barriers to full participation of minority ethnic people, and to report with recommendations to Mission Council no later than October 2006". Additionally it instructed "the Secretaries for Training, Ministries and RJ&MM to evaluate the accessibility to minority ethnic people to the systems of candidacy and training for Ministers, CRCWs, lay preachers and lay leaders, and to report recommendations to MC no later than March 2006". The March 2006 MC agreed that the two resolutions be taken together in the audit process. The Committee brought an interim report to October 2006 MC, and now asks Mission Council to agree seven resolutions (Para 7.2) (These -if agreed- will [presumably] be included in the Mission Council Report to the 2007 General Assembly).

- 11.05** Ecclesiology of the URC PAPER F (Introduction)
Susan Durber
- 11.20** Covenant Membership and Mission PAPER G (Introduction)
Peter Ball

- 11.30** Audit of Ethnic Minorities in the Church PAPER H (Introduction)
- see also PAPER H1 (tabled) Addendum
- Moderator may wish to mention Mr Delbert Sandiford (Executive Officer for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns in Diocese of Southwark) who has convened the audit on behalf of the RJ&MM committee - but is unable to be present
Andrew Prasad

DepGenSec to give directions to rooms where Groups will meet:

Alterations to Groups: Group C: need to appoint a reporter (replace David Peel)
Group F: Add Graham Morris

11.45a.m. Groups

1.00p.m. Lunch

2.30 p.m. Session 5
Plenary discussion and resolutions

It is quite possible that we will not have dealt with all the issues and resolutions in one hour (so I hope we can take some of Session 6's agenda items* earlier in Mission Council)

3.30p.m. Tea

4.00p.m. Session 6

(If the asterisked items below* are taken earlier in Mission Council, it would allow another 30 - 40 minutes of overspill from the previous session)

taken Sat a.m. - (Climate Change) (*Treasurer's Report PAPER E (I & R) Treasurer
*Charity Registration and local churches PAPER ADD (I) (Andrew Grimwade)
(This has to be taken on Saturday - Andrew Grimwade is only here for the day)

4.30 Task Group on Human Sexuality Moratorium
PAPER A10 (R) Malcolm Hanson

5.30 (can be later) Ministries Report
Peter Poulter
a) Housing of NSMs (Assembly Resolution 2) PAPER J (D)
b) Assembly Resolutions on removal of age limit for transfer between

- non-stipendiary and stipendiary service. PAPER K (D)
- c) Resolution on the extension of stipendiary service to 65 and 6 months.
- d) Resolution on the Assessment procedure post July 2007.

5.50 p.m.

Report on Commemoration of Abolition of
Slave Trade Act Bicentenary 2007

PAPER L (I)
Andrew Prasad

[Levinde Change?]

Notices: - include

Kundan S. Singh?

- Nominations for Advisory Groups (PAPER A2) to be with the Clerk by the end of this evening's session
- Quiz organised by Morag McIntock after the end of this evening's session (9.45 p.m.)

(Aim to finish by about 6.15 p.m. - to give people a break)

7.00p.m.

Dinner

8.00p.m.

Session 7

Staffing Advisory Group

PAPER A11 (R)

Val Morrison

8.15 p.m.

Joint Public Issues Team

PAPER M (R)

Simon Loveitt

8.25 p.m.

Church and Society's Report on Assisted Dying

PAPER N (D)

Simon Loveitt

✓ Hum Sex - Res 5.

After Simon's presentation there is time for a reflective discussion in buzz groups and then together on the report - followed by any comments for the committee in bringing this report to General Assembly.

9.00p.m.

Evening Prayers

Notices (DepGenSec): The Moderator may decide that these are best taken after evening prayers, depending on the nature of the discussion before. There will be things to be said about tomorrow morning's arrangements, timings, etc.

SUNDAY

(British Summer Time begins: clocks and watches should be put forward one hour)

7.45 a.m.

Service of Holy Communion

Chaplain/Moderator

8.30a.m.

Breakfast

9.15 a.m.

Session 8

Catch the Vision: Mission Department proposals

PAPER O (R)

GenSec

There are also MCAG's recommendations to be considered (PAPER A)

10.00

Trustees Report:

Treasurer

a) Governance

PAPER P (R)

b) Governing Document

PAPER P1 (I)

c) Relationship of Church to Trustees

PAPER P2 (I)

10.15

Nominations Report:

Malcolm Hanson

Appointment of Trustees

PAPER P3 (R)

Election?

See also PAPER P3i (tabled) - report part 2

(taken Appointment of Tellers PAPER Q (R)
Sat pm)

10.30a.m.

Coffee

11.00a.m.

Session 9

Chae Doc

Nature of the Church's Ecumenical Engagement

Eliz Nash asks

Clerk's business () PAPER R (R)

~~Susan Durber~~

11.30

[London Synod
revised resolut.]

Mission Council task and advisory groups

PAPER A2 (R)

DepGenSec

Section O Advisory (Report of ad hoc group and decision)

Clerk

PAPER A9i-iii; (R)

Listed Buildings Resolutions (Report of ad hoc group and decision)

PAPER ADD (R)

Clerk

Assembly Arrangements -2 PAPER S (R) William McVey

Thanks

The Moderator may wish to thank those attending Mission Council for the last time in their present capacity:

- (in his absence) David Peel - last MC as immediate past-Moderator
- Eric Chilton - last MC as Treasurer
- Peter Brain - retiring as Moderator of North Western synod
- John Humphreys - last MC as convener of Training Committee (will continue as synod moderator)
- Andrew Prasad - comes to end of service as RJ&MM convener at 2007 Assembly.

Others completing their service on Mission Council (that we are aware of):

- Richard Pope (South Western synod) moved to a new pastorate (in January) in the West Midlands synod
- Mrs Wilma Prentice (Mersey)

Ask if there are any others.

Next meeting 5-7 Oct.

The GenSec should thank Chaplain and Moderator

12.30p.m.

Closing Worship

Chaplain

1.00p.m.

Lunch



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

A

Mission Council Advisory Group

1. Editor of the Church's main journal/periodical.

The Staffing Advisory Group, in seeking to meet the deadline for placing an advertisement for this post in *Reform*, asked MCAG to approve the post on behalf of Mission Council. MCAG acted accordingly. It is intended that this will no longer be an Assembly-appointed post, but the post holder will be responsible to the Director of Communications.

2. Proposals on 'Mission Policy and Theology' (Paper O)

MCAG considered the paper which is to be presented to Mission Council as part of the *Catch the Vision* report. While broadly welcoming the paper, MCAG is concerned about the proposed roles of Mission Council, and of the General Secretary.

- i) Paragraphs 4 and 5: The consequence of Mission Council taking on direct responsibility for the agenda of the MPT Department while at the same time acquiring more delegated responsibility from a biennial meeting of General Assembly may overburden Mission Council and make it less able to give thought to broader policy and priority-making on behalf of the Church.
- ii) MCAG felt some unease about the feasibility of the MPT (Mission) department working effectively without a committee. It was important for staff to have an intermediate body to whom they are accountable (apart from the General Secretary as their line manager), and who would set priorities for their joint work. The infrequent meetings of Mission Council could not give sufficient detailed attention to (what is at present) the combined agendas of five Assembly committees.

MCAG therefore makes the following suggestions, for consideration during the *Catch the Vision* report on this matter:

- a) that a single representative Mission Committee should be appointed to
 - o execute the policy and priorities set by Mission Council
 - o gather intelligence from synods and local churches about their mission concerns and opportunities
 - o oversee the work of the department;
 - o provide a point of accountability for staff

b) that the *General Secretary* should be a member of the team but there should be a separate team leader to co-ordinate the work of the department.

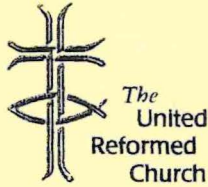
c) that the team leader's role should be performed initially by members of the existing team in rotation, for such length of time as decided by the *Mission Committee*.

d) that the *Nominations Committee* should appoint a convener and a committee (asking each synod to provide a list of names so that a balanced and representative committee could be appointed).

3. Sexual Ethics Steering Group

The *Sexual Ethics Steering Group (SESG)* continues to oversee the implementation of recommendations passed by *Mission Council* in January 2006. Work accomplished thus far:

- The group has briefed the *Training Committee*, the *Ministries Committee* and the *Moderators* regarding work to be done within their areas. Each committee/group has responded positively and begun to identify and prioritise its work. As those bodies complete their work, further resolutions will be brought to *Mission Council* through *SESG*.
- A *Pastoral Response Task Group* has been formed and has begun its work. Its members are: *Revd. David Trafford*, *Dr. Sharn Waldron*, and *Revd. Rowena Francis*. They are coordinating their work with the *Safe Church (Res. 6)* work on a *URC* policy regarding sexual harassment and abuse. *SESG* anticipates bringing a proposed *Pastoral Response Team* system to *Mission Council* in October 2007.
- *SESG* continues to work with the *Safe Church all Synods* group that is implementing *Time for Action*, and will do so until restructuring is complete and the work may be taken into a *Department of the Ministries of the Church*.
- *SESG* will seek ways to assure long-term oversight of this work, possibly through periodic risk assessment procedures.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

A1

Mission Council and Assembly A paper by the Clerk to Assembly

Part 1, Introduction

Traditionally in Reformed Churches a General Assembly has three functions, Legislative, Executive, and Judicial. To these should probably be added two other responsibilities, Liturgical, and Ceremonial. All five are currently the responsibility of the URC General Assembly, although the way in which the Assembly carries out these responsibilities and the proportion of the Assembly's time given to each varies radically.

- The **Legislative** role of the Assembly is the most obvious. In the list of functions of the General Assembly contained in the Structure, there are several general but also three specific references to the Assembly making rules for the governance of the Church:-

(vi) to make regulations respecting theological colleges belonging to the United Reformed Church, to appoint the principal, professors and other members of the teaching staff, and Board of Governors, and to superintend their work;

(xi) to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church and Part 1 of the Statement of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below;

(xii) to make, alter or rescind rules for the conduct of its own proceedings and of those of other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church and such other rules, bye-laws and standing orders as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable for the performance of its functions and the carrying into effect of any of the provisions contained in the Basis and the Structure and for the conduct of the business and affairs of the General Assembly and of the other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church;

- The Assembly's **Executive** function is also fully set out in the list of functions:-
 - (i) to oversee the total work of the church;*

- (ii) *to make decisions on reports and recommendations from its own committees, issue such directions and take such actions as it deems conducive to the propagation of the gospel, the welfare of the United Reformed Church, the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole and the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed;*
- (iii) *to conduct and foster the ecumenical relationships of the United Reformed Church;*
- (iv) *to support and share in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad;*
- (v) *to determine the standards and scope of an adequate ministerial education and training;*
- (vii) *to recognise theological colleges previously recognised by the Congregational Church in England and Wales or the Congregational Union of Scotland and such other colleges in such manner and for such purposes as the General Assembly may determine;*
- (viii) *to appoint moderators of synods;*
- (ix) *to remit questions concerning the witness and judgement of the church for general discussion in church meetings, elders' meetings, district councils and synods, and to call for reports from these councils;*
- (xiii) *to appoint at its discretion additional members to serve on synods;*
- (xiv) *to make such alterations in the boundaries and groupings of districts and synods and to establish such new districts and synods as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;*
- (xvii) *to receive and decide upon applications for admission into the United Reformed Church from ministers, probationers and congregations, transmitted by synods through their moderators;*
- (xviii) *to decide upon questions regarding the inclusion on the Roll of ministers of the United Reformed Church which have been previously considered and transmitted with recommendations by synods (but excluding any matter which is being dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below);*
- (xix) *to provide for the raising of funds for the work of the United Reformed Church and to determine arrangements for payment of*

stipends and expenses to ministers and officers of the United Reformed Church and for such other financial matters as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;

(xx) to consider and decide upon issues and representations duly transmitted by other councils of the United Reformed Church;

- **The Judicial function of the Assembly relates primarily to its function as a final court of appeal, and while increasingly in recent years this function has been carried out on behalf of the Assembly either by the Ministries Committee or the Ministerial Discipline (Section O) Panel, the Assembly continues, from time to time, to hear those appeals which fall outside the remit of these two groups but which are covered by the following functions:-**

(x) to interpret all forms and expressions of the polity practice and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church including the Basis and the Structure and to determine when rights of personal conviction are asserted to the injury of the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church;

(xv) to consider and decide upon references and appeals duly submitted

The Assembly's role with regard to questions of Ministerial Discipline has now been seriously reduced, and in terms of the formal functions of the Assembly is described in three functions, and an additional clause appended to the list of functions:-

(xxi) to make and (if necessary) to terminate all appointments to the Commission Panel and to any administrative office under the Process for Ministerial Discipline contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and to exercise general oversight and supervision of the operation of that Process (save only that decisions in individual cases taken in accordance with that Process are made in the name of the General Assembly and are final and binding);

(xxii) to provide for the setting up of an Appeals Commission in accordance with Paragraph 12 of Section O, Part 1 of the Manual for any appeal brought under Paragraph 11 of Section O, Part 1 of the Manual;

(xxiii) In the absence of any reference to the Assembly Commission by the appropriate district council or synod (the case of any minister who is a moderator of synod being necessarily dealt with under this provision) and where either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party the General Assembly (or the

Mission Council acting on its behalf) considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister to be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process at the appropriate time as specified in that Process.

2(5)(B) 'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case against a minister under the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline, neither General Assembly nor Mission Council on its behalf shall exercise any of General Assembly's functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'

Lastly, in order that all of these general functions might be carried out efficiently, the General Assembly has in its list two non-specific functions:-

(i) to oversee the total work of the church;

(xxiv) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.

- The other two roles or responsibilities of the General Assembly, Liturgical and Ceremonial, are not covered by the Basis and Structure or regulations agreed by the Assembly, but include the Daily Worship of the Assembly, the Assembly Communion and Bible Study, the presentation of newly ordained ministers, the formal acknowledgement and greeting of Ministers celebrating Jubilees, the welcoming of guests and of Local Churches newly admitted to the URC. While many of the customs of the General Assembly predate the union of 1972 and therefore have never been subject to a decision by the Assembly, there have been cases where a customary practice has been modified by decision of the Assembly thereby producing some slight anomaly. For example, the commemoration of deceased Ministers and Missionaries, a feature of the Assembly Communion, is a matter of custom and practice but it was an Assembly decision to add the names of non-ministerial former Moderators and Clerks to this list.

Part 2, Argument

Already the General Assembly struggles to fulfil all of its various responsibilities. The number of Resolutions coming to the Assembly each year

has grown so that in 2005 & 2006 over 60 Resolutions were brought forward, and in 2005 four quite large pieces of business had to be held over for a year. The creation of Mission Council, intended in part to relieve the pressure of business by prioritising and where possible determining business brought by Committees, has not worked as well as had been hoped. This is in part because Mission Council itself has generated work for the Assembly, but mainly because the terms of reference of Mission Council are such that it is authorised to act on behalf of the General Assembly and with the authority of the General Assembly only in cases of urgency. Once the Assembly meets only every second year it will be necessary to reconsider this restriction.

However, alongside addressing the general issue of the relationship of the Mission Council to the Assembly it is necessary to consider the five functions of the Assembly and see if practical changes are needed to enable these functions to be carried out.

1. **Legislative:** The Assembly carries out its legislative function in two ways. It adopts resolutions and Standing Orders which directly or indirectly affect the ways in which the URC runs itself. Most of these resolutions are adopted by the Assembly by a majority decision after one discussion. Sometimes where a committee is engaged in a particularly complex and protracted piece of business it may give warning to the Assembly of its intention to bring detailed resolutions to a future Assembly, but this is rare. From time to time the Assembly institutes constitutional changes. These will usually be changes either to the "Basis of Union" or to the "Structure of the United Reformed Church", but from time to time other changes are deemed to fall under the standing order which covers these matters:-

6a. Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

The relevant sections of the Structure are:-

(b) The General Assembly shall vote on a motion to approve the proposal which shall require a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass.

(c) The General Assembly shall, if such motion to approve the proposal is passed, refer the proposal to synods and may, if it deems appropriate, refer the proposal also to district councils and in exceptional cases also to local churches.

(d) The General Assembly shall in making any such reference set a final date for responses to be made, which shall normally be at an appropriate time before the next annual Assembly.

(e) If by such date notice has been received by the General Secretary from more than one third of synods (or, if it has been so

referred, more than one third of district councils or more than one third of local churches) that a motion 'that the proposal be not proceeded with' has been passed by a majority of members present and voting at a duly convened meeting of such body, then the Assembly in its concern for the unity of the church shall not proceed to ratify the proposal.

(f) If by such date such notice has not been received, a motion to agree the proposed amendment shall come before the General Assembly at its next meeting. Such a motion shall require a simple majority of the members present and voting to pass. In its concern for mutual understanding within the life of the church, before voting on such a motion the General Assembly shall invite a representative of any synod from which the General Secretary has duly received notification under 3(1)(e) to present the main reasons for its objection.

In the event of this procedure being retained unmodified, it is entirely possible that an entirely non-controversial constitutional change could be proposed by a Committee or a Synod with no final decision being made until four years later. It is therefore suggested that a modification to this rule be introduced to allow the Mission Council, with some safeguards, to act on behalf of the Assembly in making constitutional changes.

1. **Executive:** The Executive function of the Assembly lies primarily in its continued oversight of the work the various Committees and Working Parties set up by the Church, and in its oversight of the Synods and of the Moderators of Synod, all of which report to the Assembly. Currently approximately one third of the Assembly's Committees report annually to the Assembly, and the remaining two thirds report every other year. Synods report in writing every year, and each year one third of the Synods also reports through a presentation. The Moderators report annually. While all these reports allow for the possibility of the Assembly scrutinising and questioning the work of those reporting, it should be recognised that in practice only the Committee reports are subjected to this level of scrutiny. The Assembly also appoints, on an annual basis, all the members of its Committees, and while most of these are done *en bloc* through the report of the Nominations Committee, there are a number of appointments made by the Assembly as specific individual appointments. Within living memory these appointments were subject to debate, and the Assembly might from time to time be invited to choose between two or more candidates for a post, but more recent practice has replaced competing nominations with a single nomination from an appointing panel. It is therefore suggested that while most appointments be made as at present by the Assembly at its regular meeting, Mission Council be given wider discretion to appoint than it currently exercises. The question of Committee Reports and the ongoing oversight of Committee work is more complex. Three options appear to be available to us.

- a) Continue as at present with one third of committees reporting to every Assembly and one third reporting to every other Assembly.
- b) Have every Committee report to every Assembly. If the number of Committees is to be reduced, as suggested by the Catch the Vision Group, this would be feasible.
- c) Create a cycle of reporting whereby all committees report in some detail to Mission Council once every so many years, probably two.
A pattern such as c), if applied also to Synods, would allow for the Church should it deem it appropriate, to exercise a greater degree of scrutiny over the work of the Synods than is currently possible, and might also allow the Moderators Meeting to raise matters of concern for wider discussion than is easy at present.

2. **Judicial:** The Judicial function of the Assembly has reduced greatly in recent years. The Introduction of the Section O procedures and the authority given to the Ministries Committee to act on behalf of the General Assembly in matters relating to the work of the Accreditation Sub-Committee has greatly reduced the number of appeals coming before the Assembly, and the nature of those few that still come onto the floor of the Assembly suggests that no change should be made to the current practice. The inevitable delay in dealing with appeals caused by changes to the pattern of the Assembly does not seem to merit any change.

3. **Liturgical:** The Liturgical elements of the Assembly are not greatly affected by the move from an Annual to a Biennial Assembly. It may be necessary to make a decision as to the whether the Assembly Communion shall be used to remember Ministers etc. who have died in the preceding 24 months or whether some other system be introduced but in all other respects, Worship Communion and Bible Study will remain a part of the life of the assembly.

4. **Ceremonial:** A much harder question to answer is what should be done with the various ceremonial elements of the Assembly? The Moderator of the General Assembly in his or her own person embodies the dignity of the Church and as such has a number of ceremonial responsibilities both within the Assembly and during the following year. Separate proposals are being brought by the Catch the Vision Group relating to the continuing role of the Moderator in a church with a biennial Assembly but decisions will have to be made about whether the recognition of Ministerial Jubilees should be confined to the assembly, whether newly ordained ministers should be presented biennially or whether some other forum is appropriate, and whether the admission of New Churches and/or their formal welcome should remain an Assembly matter. Several of the denominations which have traditionally been represented at the General Assembly have traditionally sent their Moderator. How will this be affected by the change? Do we wish to issue any guidance to our friends and colleagues as we make the change?

Part 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

1. If we are to avoid excessive delay in making decisions two changes are recommended.
 - Amend the remit of Mission Council so as to widen its ability to act on behalf of General Assembly so that instead of only being empowered to act in matters of urgency it is allowed to act on behalf of the Assembly in all matters where Mission Council deems it inappropriate to delay until the next meeting of the assembly.
 - In matters relating to Constitutional Change it is suggested that the current rule requiring a 2/3rds majority in Assembly followed by a referral to Synods and then a simple majority be abandoned and that Mission Council be allowed to Act on behalf of the Assembly for one of these votes subject to certain conditions, namely that Mission Council carries the vote by at least 2/3rds. That all Synods vote in favour of the Change and that the majority in the Assembly whether it be the first or the second vote be required to be 2/3rds. Should any of these conditions not be met then the current rule regarding Constitutional Changes should continue in force with the concomitant delay.
2. It is recommended that every committee and every Synod be required to report briefly to every Assembly. That a strict limit be placed upon the length of these reports and that additionally each Committee and Synod report at least once to the Mission Council between Assemblies and that no Committee be empowered to bring new business before the Assembly without the matter first being laid before the Mission Council.
3. It is recommended that the annual Nominations Committee general report containing several hundred names be dealt with by Mission Council but that those posts traditionally moved separately, e.g. Clerk of Assembly, General Secretary, Principal of Westminster College etc. continue to be dealt with by the assembly and that changes in the length of timed appointments be made to enable this to happen.
4. No changes are suggested for the Judicial Functions of the Assembly.
5. No changes are suggested for the Ordinary Liturgical functions of the assembly.
6. The Office of the Moderator will be covered by a separate report.
7. It is recommended that the Closure of Churches and the Admission of New Churches become the responsibility of Mission Council and that Mission Council report all Church Changes to the Assembly. It is also recommended

that representatives of new Churches be welcomed at a Mission Council meeting rather than at the Assembly.

8. No recommendation is offered with regard to the welcoming of newly ordained Ministers. There are arguments for this being done in the context of the Assembly which will mean, in some cases a delay of two years, but the arguments for it being done more rapidly which will mean it being done either in Mission Council or at some other event are equally strong. A decision will need to be made!
9. It is recommended that the act of commemoration of deceased Ministers and Missionaries remain a part of the Assembly Communion.
10. Where General Assembly or Mission Council has set up a working party to undertake a particular piece of work which is to be reported to Mission Council it is recommended that a strict timetable be agreed for this work before it begins and that only in the most exceptional circumstances should this timetable be departed from.

J. Breslin
Clerk
January '07



**MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007**

A2

Election of Advisory Groups to Mission Council 2007-2008

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

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

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

Moderator	Stephen Orchard	
Immediate past Moderator	Elizabeth Caswell	
Moderator-elect	to be appointed	
2 Committee Conveners	Morag McLintock	2010
	Andrew Prasad	2008
Treasurer	John Ellis (ex officio)	
4 members of Mission Council	3 VACANCIES	2007
	Irene Wren	2008

The General Secretary

The Deputy General Secretary is secretary to the Mission Council Advisory Group.

Those elected to serve on this group who are conveners of Assembly Committees, serve for 4 years from their year of appointment or until they cease to be conveners, whichever is the shorter. Those who are appointed, because they are members of Mission Council, serve for 4 years from year of their appointment or until they cease to be members of Mission Council, whichever is the shorter.

2. Staffing Advisory Group

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

Convener	Val Morrison	2008
Secretary	The General Secretary	
3 members	Peter Paye	2009
	Keith Webster	2010
	VACANCY	2007

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.

3. 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	Brian Woodhall	2008
Secretary	Graham Rolfe	2010
One representative from each synod plus, as consultants:		
A Senior Financial representative		
Secretary for International Relations		
Secretary for Life and Witness		
Secretary for Church and Society		
A CRCW Development Worker		
Secretary for Youth Work		
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.

4. Section O Process Advisory Group

Convener	Julian Macro	2010
Secretary	Margaret Carrick Smith	2010
Ex officio:		
Secretary of Commission Panel		
Convener of Commission Panel (co-opted)		
The General Secretary		
The Clerk to the Assembly		

The Secretary for Ministries
The Legal Adviser is in attendance

The convener and secretary may or may not be members of Mission Council. They normally serve for 4 years. Other members of the Group serve 'ex officio'.

5. Church House Management Group

Convener	Donald Swift	2008
Secretary	Human Resources Manager	
3 members	VACANCY	2007
	Val Morrison	2008
	John Woodman	2009

Ex officio:
The Deputy General Secretary
The Chief Finance Officer
The Director of Communications
(The Human Resources and Facilities Manager)

The convener and members of the Group may or may not be members of Mission Council. They normally serve for 4 years and report to the Trustees. Church House staff serve 'ex officio'.

6. Criminal Records Bureau (Churches Agency for Safeguarding) Reference Group (established in January 2004)

Adrian Bulley (a synod moderator)
Liz Crocker (a child care specialist)
Wilma Frew (a magistrate)
The Secretary for Youth Work
The Children's Work Development Officer
The Deputy General Secretary

7. Resource Sharing Task Group

Convener	Elizabeth Caswell	2008
Secretary	John Rea	
Members	Rachel Greening	2009
	Dick Gray	2009
	Margaret Atkinson	2011
	Tom Woodbridge	

This group organises consultations with synod-appointed representatives (two per synod)

Action required of Mission Council

Mission Council Advisory Group:

Elect three members of Mission Council

Staffing Advisory Group

Elect a member (who need not be a member of Mission Council).

Church House Management Group

Elect one member who has experience of business management (who need not be a member of Mission Council)

Nominations shall be taken from a proposer and a seconder; or from groups at Mission Council.

Information

Resource Sharing Task Group

January 2007 Mission Council appointed Miss Margaret Atkinson (Yorkshire), to serve on this group.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

A3

Grants and Loans Group Annual Report 2006

1 INTRODUCTION

The Grants and Loans Group (GLG) administers the Church Buildings Fund, which provides grants and loans to churches to assist with improvements/modifications to church buildings, and the Mission Project Fund, which provides grants for mission work. We have continued our policy of giving grants only to synods and churches with the greatest need.

2 BUDGET PROVISION

For the year 2006 the budget for grants from the Church Building Fund was approx £97000. This is the expected income from dividends, deposit account interest and loan interest. This has been used primarily for provision of funds for facilities for the disabled. By the end of the year £54000 had been spent, with £36000 granted but not yet spent and a further £20000 approved at our December meeting. There is always a problem knowing when a grant will be taken up as there are often delays in building work being carried out. If the grant is not taken up within 12 months an extension has to be applied for, but will normally be given. 2 loans of £60000 and £100000 respectively have been approved for remedial work on church buildings. The allocation for the Mission Project Fund was £135000 (including £20000 from Carmichael Montgomery Capital Fund) of which we have spent £95000, with outstanding grants of £16000 which have not yet been taken up.

3 GRANTS FOR FACILITIES FOR THE DISABLED

Once again the expected large drop in applications for grants towards costs of facilities for the disabled has not occurred. Thus we have not been able to consider any other projects in 2006. There have been 12 grants paid this year and 4 more grants were approved at our December meeting. Thus with the outstanding grants from earlier in the year we have already committed £56000 for 2007. A summary of the expenditure is given in the appendix.

A 'one off' this year was the return of a grant given for work on disabled facilities at a church in 2004 which was subsequently closed in 2005 and sold off in 2006 (in the NW Synod). The full grant was returned from the proceeds of the sale. We are always concerned that money may be given to churches that do not have a realistic future. We have to rely on the Synod for this assessment. Therefore it is important that Synods evaluate the applications carefully before giving their approval.

4 MISSION PROJECT FUND

In 2006 15 applications were received of which 12 were approved, but 5 were for extensions of existing projects. A summary of the projects is given in the appendix. We ask for an annual report from all the mission projects and are very encouraged by the initiative, determination and commitment of the people seeking to be 'church' in their communities.

5 REFLECTIONS

GLG believes that the monies it makes available from Central Funds provides a real benefit, both to local churches and communities, and that without it many projects would not get started. I commented last year that the hope was that these projects if successful would become self financing. However it is becoming clear that many of the projects, especially those in inner cities, though very successful will need continued financial support. If we are to continue giving this extra support then we feel that it is very important that an independent objective evaluation should be carried out. Therefore as a pilot study we have asked one of the projects which is asking for a 5 year extension to their support (Marlpool and Langley) to get an independent assessment of their work up-to-date. We will continue to support the work while this evaluation is being carried out. They have very kindly agreed to do this and hopefully it will be completed in 2007.

We have found, especially with applications to the Mission Project Fund, that the absence of a representative from the appropriate Synod at the meeting makes us unable to give a proper consideration to the application. In these cases we have decided that we will not consider the application unless a representative is present from the synod.

In response to the 'Catch the Vision' process we have questioned the future of the Grants and Loans Group and whether our business could not be carried out just as effectively in other committees. MCAG considered the matter and have asked us to continue at least until the new pattern of committees is established.

6 THANKS

I would like to record my thanks to all the members of the committee and especially to Graham Rolfe for taking on the role of secretary. I would like to also thank Rob Seaman (Finance Office) for all the support he gives us.

Brian Woodhall
Convenor
February 2007

APPENDIX

1 SUMMARY OF GRANTS PAID FOR FACILITIES FOR DISABLED

North Western Synod	3 Grants	Total	£12720
Mersey Synod	4 Grants	Total	£5000
East Midlands Synod	4 Grants	Total	£19450
Eastern Synod	3 Grants	Total	£11760
South Western Synod	1 Grants	Total	£5000

2 SUMMARY OF LOANS

East Midlands Synod	2 loans	Total	£160000
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3 SUMMARY OF 'MISSION GRANTS AGREED

Inner Manchester Churches	£16250	over 5 years (NW Synod)
Tonge Moor	£15000	over 5 years (NW Synod)
Abbey Meads	£7000	over 2 years (SW Synod)
Cannington	£2780	over 1 year (SW Synod)
Brixham	£5000	over 3 years (SW Synod)
Plume Avenue Colchester	£9300	over 5 years (Eastern Synod)
Cambourne	£5485	over 3 years (Eastern Synod)
Bury Park, Luton	£9000	over 3 years (Thames North Synod)
Marlpool and Langley	£14000	over 2 years (East Midlands Synod)
Friary, West Bridgeford	£37500	over 5 years (East Midlands Synod)
Falmouth	£10500	over 3 years (SW Synod)
Barnstaple	£6600	over 3 years (SW Synod)



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

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The Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Introduction

The Listed Buildings Advisory Group was established as a sub-committee of Mission Council, some twelve years ago. It came into existence as part of the Church's response to new listed buildings legislation and its wish to accept responsibility, under the Ecclesiastical Exemption arrangements, for managing the statutory controls for alterations to its own listed church buildings.

It understands its principal current functions to be:

1. By providing a point of liaison between the responsible Synod officers, to ensure that the managing trustees of churches occupying listed buildings and those who deal with applications for consent to carry out work on listed buildings all receive the best possible consistent service to support them in fulfilling their responsibilities under listed buildings legislation.
2. After consultation with relevant Synod Officers, to advise Mission Council and General Assembly on matters related to the legislation.
3. Through its officers to provide a point of contact with government and non governmental agencies on matters related to the maintenance and conservation of historic church buildings.
4. Through its officers to ensure that the voice of the United Reformed Church is heard on government and non governmental bodies concerned with the distribution of grant aid, and the development of national policy related to historic church buildings.

These functions, it believes, take into account the original purposes intended for the Group and also subsequent changes in the context for its work since 1994, principally:

1. Drastically reduced church membership: reduced expertise at local level; historic buildings perceived by some as an increasing burden.
2. The fabric of historic (and other) church buildings further deteriorating because of accumulating arrears of maintenance.
3. Greater rigour expected in denominational management of the ecclesiastical exemption arrangements

4. Increased responsibility falling on the local leadership (usually the elders) under revised charity law.

5. New attitudes to heritage protection at national and regional level: the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and English Heritage now actively seeking partnership.

6. Wider availability of finance and other resources to assist with the maintenance and development of historic church buildings.

The year 2006 may well be remembered particularly as the year marked by new public attitudes to listed buildings. Historic buildings and with them historic churches, received a higher profile than hitherto. The work of bodies such as the Historic Chapels Trust and the Historic Churches Preservation Trust seemed to assume greater prominence. English Heritage, now responsible for managing the List, adopted a new approach to the denominations. With the high profile launch of their national campaign 'Inspired' they declared that the majority of listed buildings were in fact churches, many of them at risk in one way or another. They started signalling that they wanted to work with the denominations. This goes beyond managing the List per se. It also includes recognising the current life of churches, wishing to work with them to advise on properly managed repairs and repair programmes.

Working with English Heritage

Acting as a pilot study on behalf of the United Reformed Church as a whole, churches in the Yorkshire Synod area responded in 2006 by taking part in two English Heritage projects, the outcomes of which are due to be published shortly.

1. Religion and Place. This was a national project by English Heritage designed to 'focus attention on thousands of buildings that are at the heart of religious, cultural and social life in England today'. During the year, John Minnis, an architectural historian from English Heritage, prepared a study of religious buildings, including United Reformed Church buildings, in Leeds. It comprises a gazetteer of churches and other places of worship active since 1900, with some selected for more detailed study.

2. Fabric needs survey. In order to build up a more detailed picture of the situation, the Yorkshire Synod collaborated with English Heritage in a project designed to evaluate what was needed to put the historic church buildings into reasonable order and maintain them. In November, an English Heritage architect worked with a cross-section of Yorkshire churches, making visits to a sample of them.

Further review. Under discussion is an English Heritage proposal to build on the fabric needs survey with a review, probably during 2007/2008, of the listing status of all the United Reformed Church buildings in the Yorkshire Synod area. A similar exercise involving Roman Catholic church buildings in two sample Dioceses proved to be very helpful to that church and it is to be expected that significant advantages will follow a detailed study of the Yorkshire church buildings.

3. Places of Worship Forum. Just over twelve months ago English Heritage set up the Places of Worship Forum and gave it the remit of advising English Heritage concerning its work specifically in relation to historic places of worship. Although the United Reformed Church was not originally allotted a place on the Forum, the Chair of our Listed Buildings Advisory Group has attended most meetings so far on behalf of the Churches Main Committee and so has been able to represent the interests of our Church.

The United Reformed Church has now been given a place on the Forum in its own right and so is assured of permanent representation. This is especially important in the light of imminent changes to the Churches Main Committee.

With many listed church buildings in desperate need of assistance to keep them standing, in Yorkshire and beyond, these projects have the potential to make a contribution to securing funds to help maintain them.

The listed building, millstone or opportunity?

The Chair and Secretary of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group, together with other representatives of the United Reformed Church, attended in June the conference of the Historic Chapels Trust at their magnificently restored former Unitarian Church in Todmorden, and were impressed by its very positive tone. Also present were leaders of organisations with experience and expertise in helping to conserve and maintain historic places of worship, in almost every case seeing them enhanced as centres of community and spiritual activity. The experience of the Methodists and Anglicans in particular as reported at the conference demonstrated the importance of exploring the value of historic church buildings as a significant asset in the context of mission, outreach and service to the community. They can show us new ways of developing mission in and from the historic church building.

Hartley Oldham
David Figures
1 February 2007



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Inter-Synod Resource Sharing

Report to General Assembly - July 2007

The important change of emphasis in the approach to resource sharing as being "needs driven" continues. All meetings have been conducted in a good spirit with openness and transparency an essential element. The work towards the goal of greater sharing of resources between synods carries on and those involved in the process are always looking for new ideas and ways to improve what is already in place.

The quartet and quintet meetings have met in accordance with the existing arrangements. The exchanges of information and ideas between synods have proved to be useful and beneficial. There is evidence of a greater collective understanding of the problems and concerns faced by individual synods.

The three main issues under constant review are:

- the use of receipts from the sale of properties;
- the use of manse funds;
- the expenditure of funds on church buildings.

Also under discussion at the full consultation held in September 2006, was the definition of "Core Tasks" of a new synod, referred to as Synod 14. Ms Rachel Greening presented a brief paper to the September 2006 consultation which attempted to define a model synod and what it might look like including what the "core tasks" may be if one was starting with a blank canvas. Whilst it is understood all synods would not be the same, Synod 14 as a model could be developed through consultation to establish core functions and costs and could be used as a template from which to measure individual synod variations to meet local needs.

There was general consensus that the following topics were relevant to all synods:

- what does the local church expect of the organisation?
- raising funds to meet the commitment to the Ministry and Mission Fund;
- staffing levels in synods;
- fund raising - generally - how can sources outside the church be accessed?
- the creation of the Synod 14 model - how should it look?

Synods are asked to look at these issues and suggest ideas and ways of moving forward to meet the challenges of the future in a more effective and efficient way. It is suggested this can best be achieved through the quartet and quintet meetings to be held in June/July 2007.

The Task Group has met on several occasions since the General Assembly in 2006. In continuing their analysis of the "core tasks" and finance issues they have identified a number of ideas which they will debate in the coming months. They are as follows:

- mission - money follows mission - money enables mission;

- changes to the structures - the removal of district councils;
- the creation of new synods;
- input from people - use of volunteers or not;
- meeting M and M payments.

It was also agreed some consideration should be given to looking for an alternative to what was called 'soft' grant options. There needs to be a change in the mind-set away from pouring money into buildings irrespective of their benefits for mission, to a more creative ecumenical partnership approach where churches come together, to share resources of buildings, finance and people.

There is still more work to be done in seeking to encourage all synods towards the harmonisation of policies on a number of related issues. There appears to be some evidence of a willingness to move closer towards the objective but some synods still remain to be convinced.

The Revd Martin Hazell (Thames North) and Mr Clifford Patten (Eastern Synod) have both stood down as representatives to the consultation process. Mr Hazell also served on the Task Group. Both have made significant contributions to whole process over the years and the United Reformed Church is indebted to them for their valuable service to the church. Replacements will be notified in due course.



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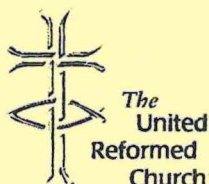
Ethical Investment Advisory Group report

As requested by Mission Council, the Ethical Investment Advisory Group has obtained information from Synods on the value, management and allocation of their investments, and on their current ethical policies. The response was good, and the results are summarized below.

Synod investments totalled over £63m; in addition, the United Reformed Church Trust had £20m invested, and the Ministers' Pension Fund £72m. Seven Synods, with investments totalling £44m, invest entirely through charity-pooled investment funds, such as CCLA's Charities Investment Fund, Epworth's Affirmative Equity Fund and M&G's Charifund. The ethical policies of these funds are published, and are monitored by the investment committees of the United Reformed Church Trust and Synods. Six Synods invest about £20m directly via stockbroker managers. For them, the ethical policy has to be agreed with the manager, and monitored more regularly. Most of these Synods have agreed policies in line with Assembly guidance; we noted that the policy of Northern Synod is more permissive, and that its investments were particularly wide-ranging.

In March 2006, Mission Council asked EIAG to explore the possibility of extending the scope of the United Reformed Church's ethical investment guidelines, to include the impact of a company's behaviour among the factors to be considered by United Reformed Church investors. This would be a substantial piece of work and the Group has been exploring the possibility of undertaking it jointly with colleague denominations. Discussions are continuing.

During the year, the Church Investors Group, in which the United Reformed Church is active, wrote to British Airways expressing its concern that a Christian employee had been refused permission to wear a cross at work; CIG noted that the publicity arising could adversely affect share values. The United Reformed Church added its name to the letter, and the Ethical Investment Advisory Group welcomed the Church Investors Group initiative.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

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London Synod Commission Report to Mission Council/Assembly 2007

The London Synod Commission was established by Mission Council in Autumn 2005 with the following members:

Revd Bill Mahood (Convenor); Mrs Sheila Brain (Secretary); Revd Wilf Bahadur (until September 2006); Miss Rachel Greening; Revd Malcolm Hanson; Revd Heather Pencavel.

Terms of reference

1. To investigate the feasibility of creating a London Synod and to submit an initial report to the 2006 Assembly (Resolution 42, Assembly 2005). To submit a full report to the 2007 Assembly.
2. To open up a broad consultation process, in order to assess the rationale for such a change and to consider whether the advantages significantly outweigh the disadvantages
3. To consult in depth with the Southern and Thames North Synods, and in lesser detail with the surrounding Synods whose boundaries might be significantly altered by the creation of a London Synod (Eastern, East Midlands, Wessex).
4. To consider the ecumenical dimensions of the proposal and the implications for future ecumenical work and mission in Greater London.
5. To explore alternative ways in which the URC could relate more effectively to London in mission and service.
6. To recommend practical means by which any changes might be implemented.

Throughout the consultation process, the Commission has been careful to maintain an open mind, considering various options and seeing the merits and difficulties of each. We have listened carefully to the people we have met in person, and taken note of all the written submissions from a wide range of sources. A number of individuals responded to the initial invitation (printed in REFORM) to send us their thoughts, and we have received further individual responses since then. We are also grateful to those churches and District Councils in the Thames North and Southern Synods which responded during autumn 2006 with their valuable comments and concerns.

Having taken all the evidence into consideration and although not totally unanimous in our conclusions, the Commission has agreed to test the mind of the church by recommending:

- 1) the establishment of a London Synod, based in principle on the area of the Greater London Authority, from a date to be decided.**
- 2. the setting up of Working Groups to make the necessary arrangements in relation to boundary changes, trust, legal and finance matters, and any other relevant issues.**

1. Background

When the United Reformed Church was established in 1972, careful thought was given to the proposed synod structures, including whether to go for a single London synod, or to split along the North/South Thames divide. A number of factors led to the decision to go for the latter option, partly linked to the relative financial and numerical strength of churches inside and outside London but also related to ecumenical considerations at that time. There was also a generally agreed principle to aim for synods with a balance of urban/ suburban/ rural churches. During the *Catch*

the Vision process the question was raised as to whether this principle actually best serves the mission of the United Reformed Church in Greater London. A significant development is the establishment of the Greater London Authority (GLA) in 2000 which identified Greater London as having a single unified identity comprising its 33 separate boroughs brought together under the GLA and its elected Mayor. The Churches responded to this by strengthening the ecumenical structures of the London Church Leaders (and in particular the *London Churches Group for Social Action*). Whilst the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church are unlikely to change the structure of their existing dioceses, it is notable that the major Free Churches have already made changes in order to relate more easily to London as a whole. Both the Baptists and the Salvation Army have reviewed their structures and, most significantly, the Methodist Church has opted for a single London District to cover the GLA, together with a re-drawing of their Districts outside the boundary in order to relate more coherently to other new government regional structures also.

For the United Reformed Church the attempt to project a single identity in dealing with its relationship to London as a whole has sometimes led to duplication of effort between the two synods and occasional confusion. This does not detract from the enormous level of co-operation between the two moderators concerning their representational role, nor from the concerted work done by inter-synod working groups such as the Urban Churches Support Group (UCSG) and the London Strategic Development Group (LSDG). The challenge therefore to the United Reformed Church as a whole and to its London churches in particular is whether the time is ripe to seize this opportunity for a radical re-think of our life and mission within London in terms of structural change or whether there are other ways of achieving the same goals.

2. Consultation process

The Commission gave initial priority to identifying the principles underlying the suggestion of a London Synod and assessing the basic advantages and disadvantages. In addition it gave careful consideration to the process of consultation with local churches and Districts, ecumenical partners and other relevant bodies.

2.1 Principles to be established and questions to be raised include: Is there a strong vision for a London Synod and what has changed since 1972? What would be its size and where would the boundary be? What happens to the churches outside the area and how would this affect surrounding synods? What are the specific concerns expressed in opposition to the idea and how might these be met? Would the loss of the broad spread of church life (urban, suburban, rural) be outweighed by the commonality of interest of the churches lying within the whole Greater London Authority (GLA)? How do other denominations deal with the London situation? What are the legal and financial implications?

2.2 Consultation Process

The first stage of the consultation involved direct meetings with the two moderators and other key people involved in the London scene (both URC and ecumenical) together with verbal and written submissions from Synod and District representatives and others, as well as ecumenical partners. We also consulted with people from outside the immediate GLA area, recognising the concerns of people from the commuter belt, particularly those to the immediate north (e.g. Hertfordshire) who look towards London both for work and for leisure activities. The moderators of neighbouring synods were invited to comment on how changes might affect their synod and whether they had suggestions to make.

A further crucial contact was with the *London Strategic Development Group (LSDG)*, which had been established jointly by the two synods to develop a ten-year strategic plan for mission and ministry in London. The LSDG was involved at this same time in a major survey of London churches, leading up to the "*London Summit*" in November 2006. Whilst it was agreed to try and keep the two processes separate, both the Commission and the LSDG have remained in close contact and have been aware of one another's work.

As a result of these initial deliberations the Commission produced a detailed set of proposals (as set out in §3 below) which were submitted to all the local churches and District Councils covered by the two London synods for consideration during Autumn 2006, with a view to testing responses to the three options which were suggested. The response paper asked for an indication of the proportion of people in favour or against each of the three options on offer, without necessarily taking a formal vote, and also to report on the main questions and concerns raised so that these could be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions.

When considering the options the key questions to be addressed were:

- *What structures will best serve mission and ecumenical relations in the south-east of England and particularly in London?*
Will those same structures also properly serve the needs of local churches?

3. Options for consideration

3.1 Status Quo – retaining the present Thames North and Southern Synods

This would recognise that London works at many different levels and is not necessarily a homogeneous whole; that not all communities within the GLA boundary identify with the city; that the current synods offer well-established and wide-ranging resources and experience drawn from a spread of urban, suburban and rural churches; that not changing structures would mean a saving of time, money and resources which would otherwise have to be spent on structural and administrative changes.

Disadvantages: existing joint work is expensive in time, effort and finance and results in duplication and possible confusion; ignores the stronger London identity which has developed with the GLA and the London Mayor and is a hindrance to a coordinated response to regional issues; loses the opportunity for co-ordinated mission across London and a sharing of experience amongst inner London churches; political and ecumenical partners may be unclear as to whom they are relating – separate synods or both together.

3.2 Status Quo but with the addition of a London Agency

This would leave the synods as they are, but establish a joint agency along the lines of the present LSDG, drawn from both synods. This would recognise that London needs to be taken seriously as a focal point for mission and for political, social and ecumenical relationships; that people in the 'home counties' relate to London for work and leisure and have some London focus in their life; that there are benefits in being able to draw on the resources of both synods; The Agency would be answerable to both synods. One synod moderator might be given specific responsibility within the agency or both moderators could be involved in different aspects of work. Its remit might include: considering and raising awareness of London-wide issues; relating to ecumenical partners; co-ordinating the URC response on political and social issues.

Disadvantages: Could lead to duplication, frustration, delay and reduced effectiveness arising from the handling of London issues in separate bodies, with a lack of clarity about answerability; the Agency could acquire a life of its own which did not integrate into the life of the synods and which would become yet another administrative layer, with associated cost implications; without having full synodical powers, it could lack authority to implement plans for action.

3.3 New London Synod – based on GLA boundary

This would establish a synod covering the GLA area – i.e. the 33 London boroughs. It would recognise that since the creation of the GLA and the election of a London Mayor, the capital has gained a coherent identity in both social and political terms; that there is an increasing number of pan-London agencies, including church-related; that there is a commonality of interest for churches lying within the area; that improved transport arrangements have broken down the old north/south divide. The new synod would have about 150 churches with a good range of strength and patterns of life, which is comparable to other synods. It should be noted

that because of some local anomalies in terms of existing cross-border groupings or of natural transport links into London, the exact boundary of the new synod might need to be negotiated. *Disadvantages:* Loss of the breadth of life across urban, suburban and rural situations; divided loyalties in relation to where people work and where they live; impact on neighbouring synods with a potential shift in their 'centre of gravity' and a corresponding need for local churches to shift their focus in a different direction; expense of disentangling Trusts and establishing something new.

4. Practical issues identified by the Commission, if a London Synod were to be created

4.1 Defining a suitable boundary

4.1.1 The Commission considered various options as to the size and boundaries of the synod (e.g. M25; the wider commuter area; the strict boundary of the GLA). After careful consideration, the Commission felt that the most logical boundary for a London Synod would be that of the Boroughs that make up the Greater London Authority (GLA). This creates a synod which would be roughly equivalent size in terms of number of churches and membership to most other synods. It ensures that the synod has boundaries co-terminous with Local Authority boundaries which can clearly relate to the structures and concerns of London as a capital city. There would, however, need to be some flexibility in terms of defining the precise border, taking into account existing cross-border partnerships and natural transport links into London which are a major factor for some of those located in the commuter belt outside the GLA.

4.1.2 Implications for neighbouring synods

The implications for the Thames North and Southern Synods are considerable. The new synod would include around two thirds of Thames North and a third of Southern. But the changes for these two synods would also have implications for other synods with shared boundaries. This certainly includes the Eastern and Wessex Synods and possibly more. On the basis of discussion so far it seems likely that churches within the current Chiltern District might move from Thames North into Wessex, possibly necessitating relocating the Wessex Synod office from Southampton. Southern Synod would lose its London churches but might acquire some from Wessex (from Guildford District). In this case the relocation of the synod office from Croydon (within GLA) would be essential. Some churches of Thames North might naturally move into Eastern Synod, recognising that this would also relate naturally to the Eastern Regional Development Agency. However, it is not yet clear how all the churches of the current St Albans District might be reallocated. Some might well prefer to transfer to Eastern Synod, but others look naturally towards London, especially those within the immediate London transport networks. If a significant number of them were to be allowed to become part of the new London Synod that might distort its shape and its intended focus on relating to the GLA. There will clearly need to be further discussions about the details of possible boundary changes within all of these synods.

4.1.3 Implications for local churches

If the above changes were to be implemented, then churches near the border of the new synod would be most affected by its creation. This would be true for both those inside the boundary and those outside it. A number of churches would find that they need to have a new focus for their relationships. There would be a need to deal sensitively with groups of churches (and team ministries) that straddle the proposed boundary of the new synod. Some situations would have to be dealt with on an individual basis.

4.2 Resources of people and leadership

The Commission has taken advice about the resources of people and leadership that are already enjoyed by the synods. It believes that these resources are spread throughout the

Thames North and Southern Synods and that the re-allocation of these as a result of the formation of a new London Synod would not deprive any of the continuing synods of resources and leadership in a disproportionate way. There would undoubtedly be a sense of loss resulting from changes in personal relationships and contacts, but the Commission does not believe that, within the structures that would ensue for all the synods involved, there would be insufficient resources of people and leadership to equip them for the future.

On the other hand, it is recognised that Southern Synod, in losing its suburban London dimension, would become more town and rural in character, with no obvious focus of resources, and that the London Synod itself would take on a more homogeneous character, so that both would lose something of the stimulus and resources of the present wide diversity of congregations in the two synods.

4.3 Finance and Trust matters

Technically, it would be legally possible to make the change without having to alter the Trusts (i.e. leave churches where they are). However, good practice suggests that Trusts should be directly linked to their synods as far as possible, to avoid confusion, and it was this principle that led to recent changes across the country, to bring Trusts into line with their respective synods. So a change of existing trusteeship for the churches affected by moving synod would be recommended, which would inevitably have cost implications, although savings could probably be made by doing it in a single transaction using a single legal agent. Careful consideration also needs to be given as to how this cost might be met without imposing an unnecessary burden on the local churches involved.

It was noted that there could well be long-term savings in the running costs of the new synod in terms of efficiency and avoidance of duplication, although it is difficult to quantify this. There would be a need to re-locate the Southern Synod office (currently in Croydon, a London borough), which would incur initial cost but might also result in long-term savings. Even if no change in synod structure is made, there would still be ongoing financial implications if it were agreed to establish an 'Agency' and the new administrative structures needed to support it. The strategic plan put forward by the LSDG ("*Bread to Spare*") also spells out the financial cost of implementing this – the *London Summit* meeting gave the impression that people do not seem to be afraid of the challenge of raising money for mission when it is put in that context. The Commission was aware that costs are not just about money; the practical process of change would be demanding of people's time, energy and resources. However this should not be seen as a barrier in itself and the costs of any proposals must be considered relative to the main issues of principle and to the costs of doing nothing.

4.4 Travel

The Commission is of the view that travel may be relatively easy within a new London Synod, which will be compact in terms of size. London travel is improved because of new developments in public transport and public policy (e.g. congestion charges leading to a reduction in heavy traffic in central London, etc.). But as surrounding synods and churches seek to put new relationships into practice some people may find that for those outside London there is an increase in the extent and difficulty of travel. This should however be compared with other synods across the country where travel distances have been considerably larger from the start.

5. Results of Consultation with local churches and Districts

The consultation with the churches in the two synods produced an inconclusive result, with no overwhelming vote for any one of the options. The response represented approximately 40% of

churches, which was statistically a good result for such a survey, but still cannot be judged to be fully representative of the views of all church members throughout the synods. We are very appreciative of those churches who made the effort to respond, but are also aware that some of the remaining churches may not have been given the chance of expressing a view, whilst others felt that their views were not of any significance or that it did not really affect them. On balance, it could be said that a majority of those responding favoured option 2 : i.e. for the establishment of some kind of joint mechanism or "Agency" which would take on responsibility for dealing with issues relating to London as a whole, on behalf of both synods. However, those opting for this include both (i) those who were opposed in principle to a change in the current arrangements (largely on grounds of cost and disruption) and (ii) those who saw such a move as a possible first step towards a more unified approach (i.e. testing the ground for the future possibility of a single synod). Thus it includes those with very differing views on the overall merits of the idea of a London Synod.

A significant part of the consultation was the request for questions and comments to be submitted. Many of the responses related to practical issues that had already been identified by the Commission (see § 4). A summary of the responses is set out in the Appendix.

6. Summary

6.1 As stated in the introduction, the Commission has been careful to maintain an open mind throughout the consultation. There seems to be a clear indication of a consensus that if we were starting afresh with a "blank sheet" then the case for a single London Synod would probably be overwhelming. There is also an argument that with the removal of the District Council layer from our structures, this is an opportune moment for making further adjustments to past arrangements and that the re-allocation of individual churches or groups would thus become a much simplified process. However, the problem is that making such changes would still involve a considerable amount of time, effort and expense and this would need to be justified.

6.2 The Agency option. The consultation process with the churches in Thames North and Southern Synods produced a lot of helpful comments, but did not, in the end, lead to a clear conclusion about which option was most favoured. The second option – retaining the present synods but adding a London "Agency" – was, like the other options, favoured by some and rejected by others. What it did show, however, was the strong feeling that London does need on occasions to be treated as a whole. If a London Synod is not set up, then an agency or commission of some kind might well meet this need, with the regional and ecumenical agendas included in its remit. However, the view was also expressed that if such an agency were set up, then it would almost inevitably lead to the demand within a short period for a single synod as being the most sensible development for the future, with the implication that the demand for change may well grow in any case. Beyond that, and without doing more detailed work, it is not clear exactly what shape such an agency might take or how it might work and there were some strong doubts about its feasibility, alongside support for its potential. It should be noted that the LSDG expressed strong doubts about this option as a means of delivering the proposed strategy for URC mission in London. In any case, it became clear in the course of the consultation that if there is no agreement on the formation of a London Synod, then it would be the responsibility of the present synods to work out together for themselves how best to deal with London as a whole and that it would not be appropriate for General Assembly to make such a decision. The Commission therefore agreed that it is not necessary to give this option further consideration here.

6.3 The London Synod option. Any decision now needs to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the London Synod proposal. The consultation with local churches did not result in a clear preference or in overwhelming arguments one way or the other, but this also has to be taken in the context of the broader consultation which reflected a wide range of

experience. In the end, the members of the Commission were themselves not unanimous in their views as to the relative weight which should be given to the considerations involved in the consequences of a decision. It was agreed therefore to present both sides of the case, so that the wider church could make its own assessment.

6.4 The case for a London Synod. We were all impressed at the potential benefits of creating a London Synod. The strongest arguments in favour of this proposal can be summarised as follows:

1. It would recognise London as a coherent entity, thus enabling a more integrated approach to mission and service to London as a whole.
2. It would help in providing a platform for strategic thinking on the social and political agenda of the Greater London Authority.
3. Similarly, it would enable the areas outside London to relate more strategically to their own Regional Development Agencies.
4. The moderator and the Synod would be able to concentrate on London issues.
5. Its boundaries would correspond more closely with those of our Free Church partners, with benefits for some of our ecumenical relationships.
6. It would save some resources and some confusion in relation to representation and involvement in London groupings and projects.
7. It would enable greater sharing of common concerns between churches in similar communities within the GLA.
8. The London churches would be freer to develop their own corporate character and responses without the strong influence of neighbouring suburban churches.
9. The London Strategic Development Group came together in response to the perceived need for churches in London to work more closely together and has been met with enthusiasm from local churches

6.5 The case for the status quo. The case for a London Synod, seen in isolation, seems almost overwhelming. However, it cannot be considered without also looking closely at the potential consequences. Some are practical and administrative, others are matters of judgement

1. There would be a loss of the sharing of rural and urban experience which would be noticeable within both the new London and Southern Synods in different ways.
2. The present two synods have so far managed to co-operate in finding ways of dealing with regional issues through ecumenical agencies
3. The regional agenda is important but is a relatively minor part of a synod's work. Some synods relate to more than one government region, or else a region covers more than one synod, and ways have to be found of managing this.
4. The present two synods have co-operated in finding way to deal with the mission needs of local churches – as in the creation of the LSDG.
5. While it is true that some Free Church partners have changed their structures to treat London more as a whole, that is not in itself sufficient reason for us to do the same. We have to make a judgment based on our own pastoral, practical and mission opportunities
6. The practical process of change would be very demanding of time, energy and resources, which need to be recognised and assessed.
7. The LDSG has already succeeded in producing a proposed strategy for London churches to share more closely, and the Urban Churches Support Group also covers both synods.
8. Many people living outside the GLA also relate to London for work and leisure, and it could be potentially helpful for them to be involved in London issues.

9. There does not seem to be widespread enthusiasm or vision for the proposal of a London Synod among the churches and the consultation highlighted some anxieties in relation to the proposed change and its associated costs.

7. Conclusion

A majority of the Commission feel that the advantages of change are visionary and timely, and that the consequences and costs of change are acceptable and would in the long term have their own benefits. They are convinced by the argument that current structures lead to duplication and confusion in relating to London. There would be significant benefits to mission in the London area and the cost implications should be secondary to that. It should be possible to make boundary changes acceptably and flexibly, in order to meet the concerns of those whose focus is primarily towards London. It would be good to face these and other structural changes all at the same time. The loss of diversity of communities in London and Southern would be counterbalanced by the gain in treating the huge conurbation of London in a coherent way.

Other members of the Commission accept that there would be some advantages in the change, but believe that there would also be some significant disadvantages. The benefits of change would be outweighed by the amount of upheaval and additional cost entailed in restructuring. The present structures seem to work well enough in terms of mission, ecumenical relations and the regional agenda, and there are advantages in leaving the present synods more or less as they are without having to face the questions involved in the re-allocation of churches. The changes which are going on at the moment in relation to the removal of the District Councils from our structures is already causing enough disruption. The two London Synods should be encouraged to continue to address the challenges of London in their own way through their separate and joint work.

The Commission is thus divided in its answer to the original question - *Do the potential advantages significantly outweigh the disadvantages?*

As a way of testing the mind of the wider church, the Commission suggests that Mission Council and General Assembly consider the following draft resolutions.

8. Draft Resolutions

- 1. General Assembly agrees to the establishment of a London Synod, based in principle on the area of the Greater London Authority, from a date to be decided.**
- 2. General Assembly asks Mission Council to set up Working Groups to make the necessary arrangements in relation to boundary changes, trust, legal and finance matters, and any other relevant issues.**

Appendix

Responses to the consultation

Concerns and questions

1. Cost: the concern most frequently expressed was clearly that of the potential cost and time involved in changing Trust arrangements and establishing new structures. For some this appeared to be the only reason given for resisting change. Even some of those in favour of a synod queried the likely cost, although several explicitly said they thought it was justified, or that the advantages outweighed the cost. The consultation paper had deliberately not specified any actual costings, as these cannot be precisely calculated in advance of any decision to proceed, because of the variety of factors which would need to be taken into account. It was felt that it would be misleading to suggest any hypothetical figures (although some people seem to have tried to do that) which would distract from the challenge to consider the options first and foremost on the basis of mission strategy and opportunity.
2. Change: There were quite a lot of complaints about too much happening all at once, with this extra change coming so soon after the loss of Districts. Others felt that we should not fail to seize this opportunity whilst re-structuring was going on anyway. Delay could lead to confusion.
3. Boundaries: There were a number of queries about precise boundaries, especially from those whose relationships stretched across the GLA border, some of whom felt that the synod was a good idea in principle – but not if it broke up their successful church grouping. Many (but not all) in the commuter belt immediately north of London expressed strong views about their sense of ‘belonging’ to London, to which they look for both work and leisure. On the other hand, some of those in the outer London boroughs lying within Southern Synod did not really feel part of London, but identified more with Kent and the South East. There were also questions about the knock-on effects on neighbouring synods and anxiety about where churches might end up. However, some welcomed the opportunity for a re-drawing of synod boundaries, (e.g. the possible transfer of current Chiltern District churches into Wessex Synod and a corresponding move of some churches from Wessex into Southern). Some rural churches on the edge of Thames North would welcome a transfer to Eastern Synod which has a more rural focus.
4. Travel: Ease of travel into London was a key factor for many just outside the GLA (e.g. Watford, Potters Bar), with a fear of the extra distances involved if they had to relate outwards to a new synod. On the other hand, for some in Southern Synod, there would be an advantage in looking inwards towards London rather than across the breadth of Southern England. It was noted that the Southern Synod Office would need to be re-located from Croydon, which is a London borough.
5. London as a coherent entity: This was strongly underlined by many of those in favour, seeing this a renewed opportunity for a focussed mission to London by churches working together within the capital, recognising their common interests in relating both to their own local London boroughs and to the GLA and its Mayor.
6. Loss of the breadth of church life: In contrast to the above, there were those (particularly in Southern Synod) who felt that it would be a real loss to remove the spread of representation from urban and rural areas sharing together.

7. 'Agency' : Many of those against a London Synod favoured the idea of an Agency, either in preference to option 1 or else they voted for both options 1 and 2. This was a clear recognition that there needs to be some arrangement for establishing a single response mechanism for the URC in relation to London as a whole. However, others voted against option 2 because of concern about an extra layer, more bureaucracy, or a lack of clear accountability – and some said it was definitely “a bad idea”. Others thought that this could be tried out, and then if it proved to be good, this might lead eventually to a more favourable attitude to a single London Synod. This fits with some (verbal) comments that the time may not be right – see also (above) concern about coping with too much change all at once.
8. Not really concerned: a number of churches felt that they did not really understand what is going on, or did not feel that they relate to the synod or were not much interested in anything beyond their own locality. Some felt that they had too little information to make a decision. However, there were also some who made the positive emphasis that this was a decision for “the powers that be” and that they were happy to live with whatever decision is made.
9. Alternative options: the following suggestions were offered by one or two respondents :
 - a) simply transfer those churches from Southern Synod which lie within the GLA into Thames North Synod and let them get on with identifying a ‘London focus’ within that. *(note: this might still require the transfer out of some Thames North churches into other synods in order to maintain a balance)*
 - b) create a new and extra ‘Home Counties’ synod covering the Thames North area which does not fall within the GLA, thus avoiding the need to transfer churches into Eastern or East Midlands (which might make those synods overlarge). *(note: this would require considerable financial outlay, both for setting it up and then additional running costs for an extra synod, so was not considered to be feasible)*

Consensus Decision Making for the United Reformed Church

This paper has been prepared on behalf of Mission Council by Martin Hazell, Andrew Littlejohns, Lindsey Sanderson and Elizabeth Nash. It was extremely valuable that we were guided, supported, trained and encouraged by Jill Tabart from the Uniting Church in Australia who came to England at the invitation of Thames North Synod in November 2006.

Resolutions to Assembly.

- 1) **General Assembly resolves that:**
 - a) **from the close of Assembly 2007 it shall adopt a system of decision making by consensus in addition to the process of making decisions by majority voting.**
 - b) **all discussions and decisions will begin by using consensus procedures except the election of the Moderator of the General Assembly and matters covered by section 3(1) & (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church which will be dealt with by majority voting.**
 - c) **the consensus procedures will be used by Mission Council and other Assembly committee meetings and welcomes and encourages their use by Synods and other United Reformed Church committees.**
- 2) **General Assembly resolves to amend the Standing Orders of the General Assembly by adding a new section 9 (pages 5-8 below) and renumbering the current sections 9 to 12 as 10 to 13.**

Gathering God,
you shelter us under your wing like a hen with
her chicks;
and then encourage us to reach out in new
and exciting ways.
But we long for what we know,
for what we have always done.
Be with us as we listen for your voice through
others' insights
and discern where you want us to go,
what you want us to do
and what you want us to be.

Sometimes we fail to hear what others with
less confidence have to say;
sometimes we are so used to making decisions
that we ignore and unknowingly trample on
other people's feelings and views.

Help us to listen...
to others...
to you...
and to our heart's desires...

Help us to understand that majorities are not
always right,
one person alone can throw new light on old
problems,
the most eloquent speeches sometimes hide
your truth,
committees can close down discussion rather
than open it up to your Spirit.

Forgive us those times when we have pushed
our own personal views,
have failed to listen to others and have
perhaps influenced a meeting to achieve
earthquake or fire for our own ends.

Help us to appreciate that
you may not be in the wind,
but in that small voice whispering in our ear
the way you wish us to go...

1.1 Introduction

Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your decisions, the peace to which you are called as members of a single body

Colossians 3:15

1.2 Consensus decision making is a process of listening for God's word to us through the prayerful engagement of all who are making the decision. It requires careful and skilful moderating as the council seeks to discern the will of God through everyone involved being heard and discovering an agreed outcome. Although there is room for disagreement, the process encourages the whole meeting to 'come to a mind'. While vigorous debate is expected, the process seeks not to be confrontational but rather, in love, to cherish views from across the range of possibilities and patiently to work through the issues until a solution is found.

2.1 The Roots of Consensus

The responsibility that each Council of the United Reformed Church exercises is 'under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit.' (*The Manual, The Structure of the United Reformed Church 1.(3)*) Both this Conciliar model and a process of making decisions by consensus find their origins in the practice of the early church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters to the first Christian communities.

2.2 In Acts 2 the early Christian community is epitomised by the sharing of meals and possessions, in caring for one another and expressing joy as they worshipped together and welcomed newcomers. For that community and for the church today, the image of the body is important. 1 Corinthians 12:1-27 reminds us that each person's gifts need to be valued and that each person's contribution is necessary if the whole body, with Christ as its head, is to live the fullness of life; whilst

Philippians 2:5-8 reminds us to act in humility, as is Christ's nature, and acknowledge our own vulnerability and weakness. On four occasions in the Acts of the Apostles we find a record of a communal decision making process. By looking at the issues addressed (appointing a replacement for Judas 1:14-26; the distribution to the Greek speaking widows 6:1-7; gentile acceptance 11:1-18; circumcision 15:1-33) we begin to see a pattern emerging of how the process was carried out.

- There was reliance on prayer and scripture and the memory of being with Jesus. (Acts 1:23-26)
- There was an over-riding sense of purpose in being followers of Jesus. (Acts 6:1-7)
- There was an openness to the guiding of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:15-18) and
- throughout the whole process there was the desire to discern God's will (Acts 15:28).

2.3 As the church grew in number and maturity throughout the first century, often having to embrace situations as complex as any the church struggles with today, it sought to model itself around Paul's injunction to the church at Philippi

'If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart, any consolation of love, any participation in the Spirit, any warmth of affection or compassion, fill my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another and a common attitude of mind. Leave no room for selfish ambition and vanity, but humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to each other's interests and not merely to your own.'

Philippians 2:1-4

2.4 The United Reformed Church believes that in the Councils of the Church we hear the voice of God mediated through human voices. By encouraging community, praying together, listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility and sharing what is on our hearts and minds we discern most acutely the leading of God.

3.1 Why change the way we make decisions?

As a church we have always sought to work towards God's will and plan for us. It has been our tradition and understanding that each council of the Church 'comes to a mind' over a matter. The ideal is that the council reaches a unanimous agreement even if in the end we have to do this by taking a vote. However this ideal has not always been achieved in our present process of making decisions.

By encouraging community, praying together

3.2 Being a community of individuals means that there will always be differences in our interpretation of God's plan. In the traditional approach this is resolved by pitting opposing viewpoints against each other. It is an adversarial setting. It encourages the taking of one viewpoint or the other when speaking. Often people stick ever more rigidly to the viewpoint they originally took. Changing one's viewpoint implies that someone has 'lost' and another 'won'. Pride can get in the way of the process of discerning God's will. Recently the United Reformed Church has recognised some of these difficulties and introduced an 'alternative motions' procedure.

3.2 Consensus decision making is significantly different and places the emphasis on listening to one another as we seek God's will. It places equal validity on all insights and input. People still share their insights but without the confrontational atmosphere. This means that those who are not as adept at debating in the traditional sense, can contribute without fear of being outspoken by those more experienced in meeting procedure. Changing one's mind after listening to various opinions and insights is not a source of embarrassment it is more a mutual eagerness to discover an appropriate way forward for the church. Participation through small groups and through the use of indicator cards can be quite liberating for some people, particularly those who in

the past may have found it difficult to feel they have been included or have their voice heard or respected. Above all, listening to one another is the heart of consensus.

4.1 How to move to a consensus process

The first step in developing consensus is to build the community in each council or meeting. Christian communities develop when members of a group share the life they have in Christ. It is strengthened as members are open to each other's insights and feelings in pursuit of the ideals and practices around which the community is formed. The ideal of community we seek to achieve in the Church finds its fulfilment in the relationships expressed in the Trinity where love binds Father, Son and Holy Spirit together.

4.2 Then the United Reformed Church will be required to be much more open than we are now, to accept leadership and to be prepared to venture along a pilgrimage without knowing or prejudging the outcome. Often the way forward on an issue develops as the process unfolds, such that the outcome is quite different from any of the possibilities first envisaged. Openness to the Spirit's guidance is an exciting journey of anticipation!

4.3 Being 'open' means all members are expected to contribute to the process, hearing dissenting voices without ill feeling or a need to attack the other person, building on earlier insights as discussion proceeds, always searching for the way forward that heeds the insights being shared. All views are honoured. It enables new and different ideas and solutions to be found, which had not been previously thought of.

4.4 There will need to be neutral (unbiased) leadership from the Moderator. It will be important for the Moderator to be trained properly, as well as being given regular and appropriate feedback. In meetings the Moderator

By...
listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility

can be given support through a facilitation group, which will offer guidance and suggestions for different ways forward as well as enabling and reporting on group discussions. If possible all meetings should take place in a context where people can sit around tables so that a move to group discussion is simple and easy.

4.5 Assembly Committees will be expected to use consensus procedures in their own meetings so what they bring to Assembly will already have been through a careful and prayerful listening process. What is offered to the Assembly from a committee will be designed to ensure the Assembly is well-resourced to engage in discerning the way forward on any matter.

By...
sharing what is
on our hearts
and minds we
discern most
acutely the
leading of God

4.6 It's important to realise that a consensus outcome may be agreement on the process for handling an issue, rather than a definitive decision to support or reject particular words. It may offer the opportunity to explore the principles behind what we believe by allowing us to open them up to discussion. It may be that more work or further consultation is required, before it is clear what the church needs to be saying on an issue.

4.7 Consensus is a process of pilgrimage. It is not always possible to come to a mind at a particular time. The Church may have to be willing to accept that some decisions take more time and we must be prepared to allow that to happen – the item may need to be re-visited at a later meeting. It should also be accepted that some decisions need constant review because contexts, in which those decisions have been made, change.

Consensus is a process
of pilgrimage

4.8 This document is a beginning. There will, no doubt, be many changes and refinements ahead for us as we work and listen together in consensus.

Resources

A Manual for Meetings 2000 The Uniting Church of Australia ISBN 1 86407 223 7

Coming to Consensus by Jill Tabart WCC 2003 ISBN 2-8254-1392-5

General Assembly Standing Orders

Section 9

Consensus Procedures for the Councils of the United Reformed Church

The purpose of Council meetings of the United Reformed Church include:

- worshipping, sharing, learning and building community together.
- sharing in formal occasions and welcoming visitors.
- overseeing the life and work of the church by
 - ◆ receiving the reports of committees and people who are accountable to the council.
 - ◆ taking decisions concerning the life and work of the United Reformed Church such as
 - deciding priorities
 - planning work to be done, changed or not done,
 - considering issues and channelling them to the other councils of the church,
 - ◆ being responsible for the financial and Trust life of the church.

Further details of the functions of the councils of the church are found in the Manual.

The process of consensus:

Consensus means a decision of the council reached unanimously, or where a small minority of members of the council is willing to accept a proposal that is not their first preference.

Agreement means a decision of the council where, after careful consideration of the options, a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so that the matter may be resolved.

- 1) At each stage of the process the moderator will **clarify the nature of the session**, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.
- 2) **Worship** is a vital element in the meeting of every council of the church.
- 3) **Community building** is important to help the process of consensus to work.
- 4) **General Sessions** include ceremonial occasions, formal addresses and opening and closing ceremonies etc.

5) The Information Session:

This session aims to inform the council on the issue to be considered. A range of options are presented to the council by different people who can speak in favour of their option. Members of the council are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek for clarification or further information.

6) The Discussion Session:

This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. All those present may contribute.

- 7) The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole council, time for thinking during a break etc. The use of coloured cards is very helpful at this stage. In particular the moderator should ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.

- 8) The quality of discussion is significantly improved if the council meets around tables so that small group discussion can happen quickly and easily.

- 9) As the discussion session proceeds possible ways forward for the church are developed until a specific proposal is reached.
- 10) **The Decision Session:**
Only those council members present may contribute to this session.
- 11) Discussion continues with speakers contributing to the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. At all times, speakers are encouraged to suggest a way forward for the council, rather than merely speaking with passion for a pre-determined view. Minor changes of wording can be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- 12) The proposal should be displayed throughout the discussion in such a way that all can see the text and any progressively agreed changes to it.
- 13) If there is a major new insight expressed, then it may be appropriate to move back into a discussion session.
- 14) After summing up where the assembly seems to be heading, the moderator checks whether the assembly is nearing consensus using one or more questions such as the following:

What is your response to this proposal?
(inviting a show of indicator cards)

- i) Do you believe we have **consensus** in support of this proposal?
- ii) Do you believe we have **consensus** not to support this proposal?
- iii) If there is strong but not unanimous support:
 - (1) Who supports the proposal?
 - (2) Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **consensus**?

- (3) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?’
- (a) After further discussion accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome. Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **agreement**? If so they may choose to record their dissent.
- (4) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal? Look for **further possibilities** including:
- (i) adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration
 - (ii) ask the Moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly
 - (iii) refer the issue to another council or group to deal with
 - (iv) decide the issue is unnecessary/ inappropriate to continue dealing with
 - (v) declare that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity.
- (5) Only if the issue is urgent move to **majority decision**.

The Moderator

The role of the moderator is very important
The Moderator:

- assists the assembly to discern the will of God as far as possible
- is alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as members contribute
- pauses for prayer or buzz group reflection as appropriate
- encourages trust and integrity in contributions
- ensures care and support for those whose honesty or minority voice makes them vulnerable
- invites members to respond to speeches showing indicator cards, and reflects the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent
- suggests or encourages creative modifications of a proposal, picking up insights expressed
- summarises discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the discussion.

The council and moderator may be assisted by a **facilitation group**. This will be appointed at the beginning of each Assembly by the Assembly. It will:

- enable group work, collate responses from groups and report back to the council
- help and support the Moderator
- be responsible for the display of the text under discussion.

Coloured Cards

Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making – but they are helpful.

Each member is given two cards:

1. Orange – held at the end of a speech and so that the Moderator can see, indicates warmth towards a point of view, or approval of a proposal.
2. Blue – held at the end of a speech and so that the Moderator can see,

indicates coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.

3. Cards held crossed indicate to the Moderator it's time to move on to the next subject.

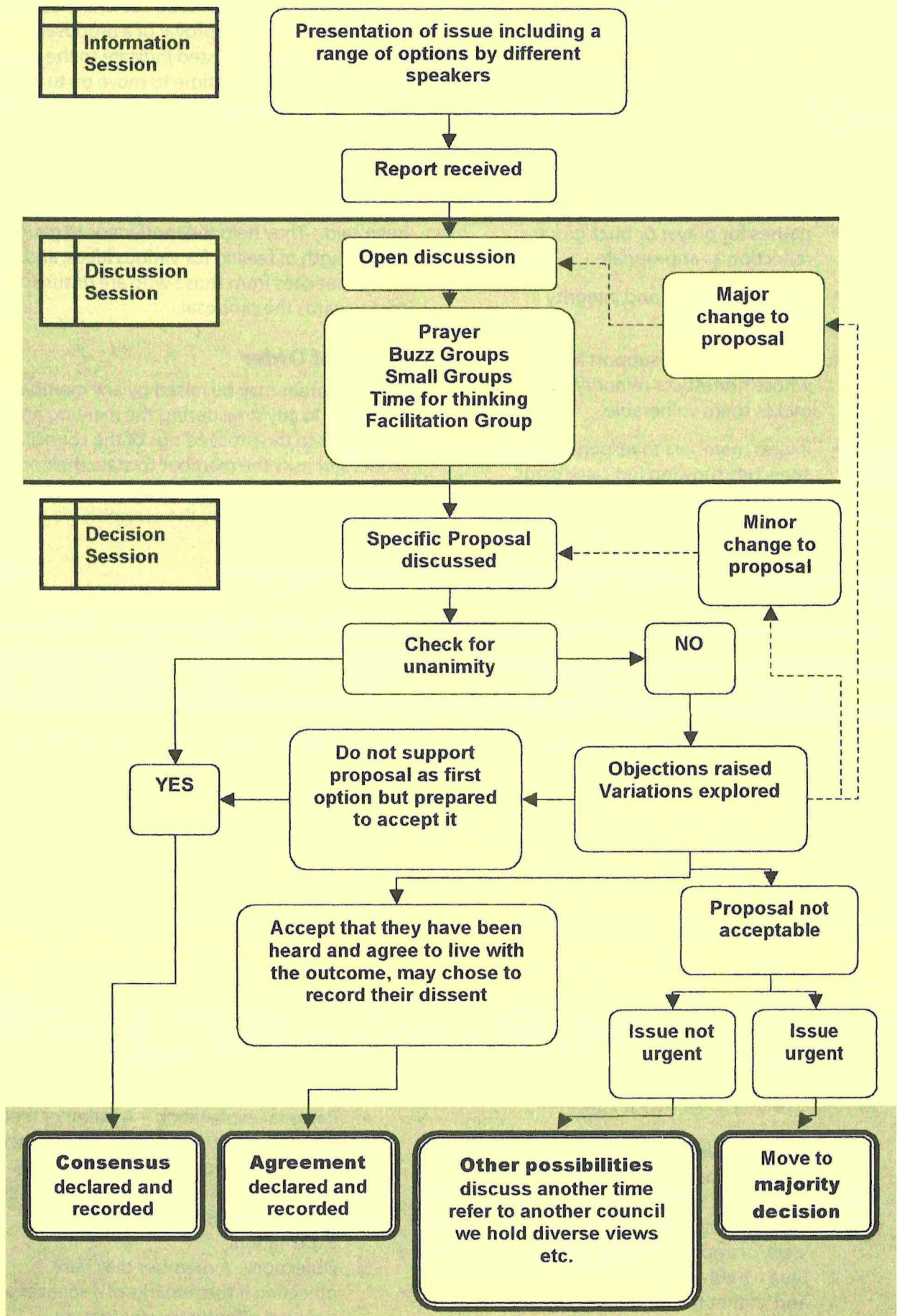
Cards should be shown when the Moderator asks for them and so that the Moderator can see them. They indicate response to what has just been said. They help the moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, and to invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

Points of Order

Points of order may be raised by any member of Assembly at any time during the meeting and must refer to the proceedings of the council. The Moderator asks the member to state their point of order. The Moderator rules on it immediately, or asks for a decision by the assembly via a simple majority vote.

Points of order include:

1. Out of order – the speaker is digressing from the matter being discussed.
2. Closed session – that the matter in hand is sensitive and should be conducted in private. This is voted on immediately without discussion. It can be raised more than once during a discussion. If it is agreed, all those who are not members of the council must leave. Members must treat the subsequent discussion in the strictest confidence and must not divulge its content or process to non-members.
3. Adjournment of the discussion – this is voted on immediately without further discussion. It can be proposed more than once in a discussion. It cannot be brought by a person who has already spoken. When the discussion is resumed the person whose speech was interrupted has the right to speak first.
4. Personal explanation – A member feeling that some material part of their former speech has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may ask to make a personal explanation.
5. Objection – A member may raise objection if the remarks of a speaker are deemed offensive or derogatory.





**MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007**

A9

Section O Advisory Group

I. RESOLUTIONS FOR MISSION COUNCIL

i. Church Related Community Workers

Proposal to extend Section O (and MIP) to cover Church Related Community Workers - Holding resolution

By virtue of Paragraph 22 of the Basis of Union, persons are called to the ministry of church-related community work and commissioned and inducted in accordance with Schedules D and F to the Basis of Union.

At present there is no disciplinary process applicable to CRCWs and the resolutions which the Advisory Group has prepared for Assembly in July are designed to bring CRCWs within the ambit of Section O. However, as these involve constitutional amendments, they cannot come into force until the next following Assembly.

To provide a temporary solution, the Group requests Mission Council to resolve that, should any disciplinary situations arise in the meantime involving CRCWs, they will be dealt with under the Section O Process in the same manner as if the CRCWs concerned were Ministers of Word and Sacrament (subject only to any necessary changes arising from the particular ministry exercised by CRCWs).

Mission Council is also asked to note that similar provisions to provide for CRCWs are included in the resolutions relating to the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, which are being re-introduced to Assembly this year.

If the resolution to approve the introduction of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure is passed by Assembly this year, those involved within the Procedure will require an indemnity from the Church similar to that provided for those with roles within Section O. The Advisory Group will produce an appropriate resolution ready to go the next following Assembly, along with the resolutions to ratify the introduction of the new Procedure.

Parts II of both Section O and MIP (if approved) will require significant amendment to cover the introduction of CRCWs. This will be a task for the Advisory Group during the next twelve months.

RESOLUTION

Mission Council resolves that should any disciplinary situations involving CRCWs arise before Assembly 2008 they will be dealt with under the Section O Process in the same manner as if the CRCWs concerned were Ministers of Word and Sacrament (subject only to any necessary changes arising from the particular ministry exercised by CRCWs).

2. Appointment to Section O Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group arises as a result of some office held in the Church, not by nomination of a person in his/her own right. An exception was made when Hartley Oldham's term of office as secretary of the Group ended in 2006; Mission Council agreed in March 2006 that he should remain as a member of the Group for 12 months.

The main reason was to provide continuity whilst the new convener and secretary became acquainted with their roles. Two other reasons were mentioned. The first was that, having played a substantial part in the drafting of the proposed MIP procedures, it would help if he stayed on the Group until that was in place.

The second matter related to training, where he had become fully involved in organising and leading the Training Days.

Looking at these three aspects in turn:

Continuity: Whilst perhaps not as pressing a need as it was a year ago, the Group is still benefiting greatly from Hartley's incomparable knowledge of these matters, and would be much helped by his continuing presence.

MIP: Because of two deferments by General Assembly this process will not be in place for at least a further year, so Hartley's drafting work continues.

Training: This is an area of major importance which demands a high level of concentrated effort, not just in the preparation and leading of the events themselves but in the detailed planning which has to take place. Problems (most significantly of low attendance) have been identified which the Group is taking steps to address. Hartley has been and is deeply involved, together with Andrew Middleton, in this and his loss at this stage would be extremely detrimental. The Group is undertaking a review of the whole training issue, and as a first stage of that review has decided that someone should be appointed to the Group with specific responsibility for planning, co-ordinating and participating in the training of Mandated Groups, the Joint Panel and Assembly Commissions.

Conclusion: We ask Mission Council to agree to appoint an additional member of the Section O Advisory Group with responsibility for training. The Group further requests Mission Council to appoint Hartley Oldham as that member, acknowledging that his experience and skills will be used beyond that specific remit. Hartley has graciously expressed his willingness to continue working with the Group.

RESOLUTION

Mission Council agrees to appoint Hartley Oldham as a member of the Section O Advisory Group with special responsibility for training issues.

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- II. REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY (for Information - and as background to Papers A9i, A9ii, A9iii which have to be scrutinised by Mission Council before being sent to General Assembly)**

The Advisory Group continues to review the Ministerial Disciplinary Process in the light of experience. The Process is necessarily complex and detailed but we seek to do what can be done to help those who have the unenviable task of using it. The Group

realises how much the Church owes to those who accept such responsibilities. We both recognise and emphasise the constraints imposed on all concerned by the need for complete confidentiality.

We have been happy to welcome Mrs Wilma Frew as Secretary of the Assembly Commission.

We are grateful to Mr Hartley Oldham for remaining a member of the Group, accepting a continuing responsibility for the training of those who operate the Process. We are about to undertake a major review of training for members of Mandated Groups and the Assembly Commission.

In the light of the Resolution concerning Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) passed at General Assembly in 2002 and ratified in 2003 we are bringing resolutions which will bring Church Related Community Workers under the provisions of Section O.

Assembly asked the Group to prepare a separate Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (MIP), and we emphasise that such a Procedure should not be seen in any sense as disciplinary. Assembly in 2006 referred our proposals back to the Group and through *Reform* we sought wider views about areas of concern. In the event we received very few representations but have been able to take into account points made to us. We have also made the necessary changes to bring CRCWs under the provisions of the MIP.

The MIP is needed so that the Church can address a situation where a minister or CRCW can no longer exercise ministry on account of i) medical and/or psychiatric illness and/or ii) psychological disorder and/or iii) addiction but is not able to recognise or accept that this is the case. It is hoped that in such difficult circumstances issues can be resolved pastorally by those having oversight of the minister or CRCW or through the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee. However there could be circumstances where a situation cannot be so resolved and for the sake of the Church and the minister or CRCW a formal procedure is required as a last resort. It is important to note that should a MIP hearing decide to remove a minister or CRCW from our roll the MIP does contain an appeal procedure, a point that may not have been made sufficiently clear previously.

We recommend that Mission Council appoints an Advisory Group to oversee the MIP (Section P).

We are bringing eleven Resolutions to General Assembly 2007. **Resolution A** invites the Assembly to ratify its decision of 2006 to introduce a new Part I of Section O (2006 Resolution 8). It should be noted that Mission Council, acting on behalf of the Assembly, altered the wording in order to remove references to the MIP. It was this altered wording which was presented to the Synods for review.

Resolution B invites the Assembly to ratify the amendments to the Structure in relation to Section O, first approved by the Assembly last year under Resolution 9.

We are presenting a revision of Part II of Section O at **Resolution C**. The changes are necessary because of the new Part I, and because of some improvements which have been prompted by experience gained from recent cases. Recognising that many ministers serve in posts with outside bodies (for example prison and hospital chaplaincies, posts in education and youth and social work), changes are being introduced to provide that any necessary information concerning disciplinary steps which involve a minister working in any such post is, where appropriate, brought to the attention of the organisation concerned.

The Assembly is asked to approve Part I of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure at **Resolution D**, and to note the proposed Part II at **Resolution E**, which takes the same form as Resolution 11 of 2006.

It has been recognised that, when an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission makes recommendations concerning a minister's future ministry, it is necessary for the Synod to monitor the situation to ensure that these are brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the Minister in future.

Resolution F creates a new Synod function to cover this.

Resolution G, which is the same as Resolution 12 of 2006 apart from the deletion of the final paragraph which related to the Rules of Procedure on appeals and the addition of references to CRCWs, amends the Structure in relation to the MIP.

Resolution H seeks to replace the changes to Part I of Section O which were removed by Mission Council when the MIP was referred back by the Assembly last year. These are the necessary changes to Section O occasioned by the introduction of the MIP. It also includes the necessary references to CRCWs.

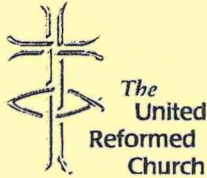
Resolution J effects the same changes as Resolution H but without references to the MIP. (This resolution is necessary in case the Assembly either in 2007 or the next following Assembly rejects the MIP.)

Resolution K amends the Structure to introduce a new Part II to Schedule F in order to make similar provisions for CRCWs to those which appear in Schedule E in relation to Ministers of Word and Sacrament. It also makes one small change to Schedule E itself.

Finally, **Resolution L** introduces the necessary changes to the Structure to bring CRCWs under the provisions of Section O.

Resolutions D, F, G, H, J, K and L, if passed, are subject to the "two year rule", and will therefore be sent to Synods for consideration before returning to Assembly for ratification.

Part II of both Section O and the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (Section P) will need to be amended to include references to CRCWs. Among others, that will be a major task for the Group in the coming year.



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2007

A9i

Section O Advisory Group Resolutions for General Assembly 2007

Resolutions A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,J, K and L. (There is no Resolution I to avoid confusion with numbers) Obviously these resolutions will be given numbers when included in the Book of Reports to Assembly.

Please note that Resolutions D, F, G, H, J, K and L are all subject to Paragraph 3.1 of the Structure, and therefore should, if passed by the Assembly in 2007, be referred to Synods with a view to presenting them for ratification at the next following Assembly.

It should also be noted that if Resolution D is not passed, then Resolution F will be presented in the form which excludes references to the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, and Resolutions E, G and H will not be put.

If Resolution D is passed, then all the following resolutions including both Resolution H and Resolution J should be put. If passed, both of these should be referred to Synods although only one of them will be presented for ratification at the next Assembly: Resolution H if Resolution D is ratified, and Resolution J if it is not.

Resolution [A]. This resolution ratifies the replacement of the existing Part I, first approved by Assembly last year under Resolution 8. Note that this ratifying resolution shows the wording of the new Part I stripped of the cross-references to MIP.

General Assembly agrees to ratify its decision to replace the existing Part I of the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline with the following:

[Note: The wording below shows Part I without the references to the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, the introduction of which was deferred by General Assembly 2006. On behalf of the General Assembly Mission Council has agreed that these changes be made.]

1. 1.1 Under the provisions of this Section O an Assembly Commission (as defined in Section A of Part II) 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 or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals 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 Ministerial Disciplinary Process (known as "the Section O Process") the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission is also able to make recommendations and offer guidance but only within the limits prescribed in Section F of Part II.

1.2 Once the disciplinary 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 or process of the Church.

2. The Assembly Commission, the Commission Panel, the Appeals Commission and all aspects of the Section O Process shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of the Section O Process, save only that, so long as it remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with this Section O Process shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister and on all the councils of the Church.

3. 3.1 In considering the evidence and reaching its decision, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission shall in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto which states the responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers of the United Reformed Church and the criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministry.

3.2 As part of such consideration, the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall be entitled to have regard to any conduct on the part of a Minister occurring prior to his/her ordination to the ministry which, in the Commission's view and when viewed in the light of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, would have prevented, or was likely to have prevented, him/her from becoming ordained, where such conduct was not disclosed by the Minister to those responsible for assessing his/her candidacy for ordination.

4. 4.1 A Minister may appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete his/her name from the Roll of Ministers under Section F of Part II or to issue a written warning under that Section by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure at Part II, stating the ground/s of such appeal.

4.2 The Mandated Group of the Council which lodged the Referral Notice in any case may in the name of that Council appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure stating the ground/s of such appeal. 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.

4.3 No-one other than the Parties has any right of appeal from the decision of the Assembly Commission.

5. Procedural matters shall in every case be dealt with in accordance with the Rules of Procedure as contained in Part II.

6. 6.1 Save only as provided in Paragraph 6.2, this Part I of the Section O Process is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

6.2 Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to Part I as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the United Reformed Church, required to bring the Section O Process into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law.

6.3 All such changes to the Section O Process as are made by Mission Council under Paragraph 6.2 shall be reported to the next meeting of the General Assembly.

.....
Resolution [B]. This resolution ratifies the amendments to the Structure in relation to Section O first approved by Assembly last year under Resolution 9.

General Assembly agrees to ratify its decision to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(xviii)

Replace the existing 2(3)(A)(xviii) with the following:

'Where the District Council, acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below, considers that a Minister is or may not be exercising his/her Ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that Minister to the Commission Stage of the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the Minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).'

Paragraph 2(3)(B)

Replace the existing 2(3)(B) with the following:

'Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any Minister, whether by the District Council or by one of the other Councils of the Church, the District Council shall not exercise its functions in respect of that Minister (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.'

Paragraph 2(3)(C)

Replace the existing 2(3)(C) with the following:

'No appeal shall lie against the decision by a District Council to initiate the Disciplinary Process in respect of any Minister under Function (xviii) above.'

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(xiv)

Replace the existing 2(4)(A)(xiv) with the following:

'In the absence of any reference into the Disciplinary Process by the appropriate district council and where the Synod, acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below, considers that a Minister is or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that Minister to the Commission Stage of the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the Minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).'

Paragraph 2(4)(B)

Replace the existing 2(4)(B) with the following:

'Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any Minister with the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process, whether by the Synod or by one of the other Councils of the church, the synod shall not exercise its functions in respect of that Minister (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.'

Paragraph 2(4)(C)

Replace the existing 2(4)(C) with the following:

'No appeal shall lie against the decision by a Synod to initiate the Disciplinary Process in respect of any Minister under Function (xiv) above.'

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxii)

Replace the existing 2(5)(A)(xxii) with the following:

'To provide for the setting up of an Appeals Commission in accordance with the Ministerial Disciplinary Process for the hearing of appeals under that Process.'

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxiii)

Replace the existing 2(5)(A)(xxiii) with the following:

'In the absence of any reference into the Disciplinary Process by the appropriate District Council or Synod (the case of any Minister who is a Moderator of Synod being necessarily dealt with under this provision) and where the General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf) acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below considers that a Minister is or may not be exercising his/her Ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister to the Commission Stage of the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).'

Paragraph 2(5)(B)

Replace the existing unnumbered paragraph immediately following the functions of General Assembly with the following paragraph to be numbered 2(5)(B):

'Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any Minister, whether by the General Assembly or by one of the other Councils of the Church, the General Assembly shall not exercise its functions in respect of that Minister (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.'

.....

Resolution [C]. General Assembly agrees to replace the existing Part II of the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline with that included as Appendix xx on page yy (See separate document)

.....

Resolution [D]. This is a resolution to introduce a procedure (to be known as 'the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure') designed for dealing with cases of Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers who may be suffering from incapacity as instanced in the resolution below

General Assembly resolves to introduce a procedure (to be known as the "Ministerial Incapacity Procedure") designed for dealing with cases involving Ministers of Word and Sacrament or Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) who are regarded as being incapable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, their respective ministries on account of (i) medical and/or psychiatric illness and/or (ii) psychological disorder and/or (iii) addiction and approves the Introduction and Part I of that Procedure in the form set out below:

SECTION P

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CASES OF MINISTERIAL INCAPACITY

*The Introduction which follows does not form part
of the text of the Incapacity Procedure*

INTRODUCTION

The Procedure which follows allows the Church to deal with the cases of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) who are regarded as being incapable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, their respective ministries on account of (i) medical and/or psychiatric illness and/or (ii) psychological disorder and/or (iii) addiction. It is not a disciplinary process and will only be invoked in situations where the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee, if that committee has been involved, has said that it can do no more.

Whilst considered as a last resort, the Incapacity Procedure will nevertheless enable the Church to take decisive action in cases where the continued exercise of ministry would undermine the promises made by the Minister at ordination or, in the case of a CRCW, at his/her commissioning, to lead a holy life and to preserve the unity and peace of the Church.

PART I – subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure (governed by General Assembly Function 2(5)(xi) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)

Note: The words and expressions marked * (the first time they appear) are defined in Part II of this Procedure.

1. Under the provisions of this Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (herein called “the Incapacity Procedure*”) a Review Commission* and, in the event of an appeal, an Appeals Review Commission* shall operate under the authority of the General Assembly for the purpose of considering and deciding upon cases properly referred to it in which Ministers* or Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs)*, whilst not perceived to have committed any breach of discipline, are nevertheless regarded as being incapable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, ministry on account of (i) medical and/or psychiatric illness and/or (ii) psychological disorder and/or (iii) addiction.

2. The Review Commission, the Standing Panel*, the Appeals Review Commission, and all aspects of the Incapacity Procedure shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure* to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of this Incapacity Procedure, save only that, as long as that Procedure remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with the Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister or CRCW and on all the councils of the Church*.

3. Subject only to Section H of Part II, when the case of any Minister or CRCW is being dealt with under the Incapacity Procedure, it must be conducted and concluded entirely in accordance with that procedure and not through any other procedure or process of the Church.

4. The Incapacity Procedure shall not be initiated in respect of any Minister or CRCW if his/her case is currently being dealt with under the Disciplinary Process, save only where the Incapacity Procedure is initiated as a result of a recommendation from the Disciplinary Process, giving rise to a short transitional overlap between the commencement of the case within the Incapacity Procedure and the conclusion of the Disciplinary Process in relation to that Minister or CRCW.

5. Although the operation of the Incapacity Procedure is not based upon the conscious breach by the Minister or CRCW of the promises made at ordination or commissioning, the Review Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Review Commission shall, in considering the matter and reaching its decision, in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union* and in particular (in the case of Ministers) Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto and (in the case of CRCWs) Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II thereto which state the responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers and CRCWs of the Church and the respective criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministries.

6. Save only as provided in Paragraph 7, this Part I of the Incapacity Procedure is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

7. Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by a single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to any part of the Incapacity Procedure as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the Church, required to bring that procedure into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law and any such changes as are made under this Paragraph shall be reported to the next annual meeting of the General Assembly.

.....
Resolution [E]. (This takes the same form as Resolution 11 of 2006)

General Assembly resolves to take note of Part II of the proposed Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Resolution E and requests Mission Council to bring this to the next following Assembly for decision in the form attached (see Appendix x, pp xx-xx), subject to such amendments as may be recommended by Mission Council.

(See separate document)

.....
Resolution [F]. This resolution amends the Structure in order to create a new Synod function which will give Synods a responsibility in relation to any recommendations or guidance made by an Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission under the Section O Process [or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure – *to be added if the resolution to approve the introduction of MIP is approved by Assembly*].

General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Paragraph 2(4)(A)

Add a new function :

2(4)(A)(xv) to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Section O Process [or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure - to be added if the resolution to approve the introduction of MIP is approved by Assembly] appends recommendations to its decision not to delete the name of a minister from the Roll of Ministers or a church related community worker from the Roll of Church Related Community Workers or appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or church related community worker from the respective Roll, any such recommendations are brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or church related community worker in future and that any such recommendations (or guidance, if such be the case) are brought fully to the attention of any others identified under the relevant Process or Procedure as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information.

Renumber the existing functions 2(4)(A)(xv) and (xvi) 2(4)(A)(xvi) and (xvii) respectively.

.....
Resolution [G] A resolution taking the same form as Resolution 12 of 2006 omitting the final part of last year's resolution referring to Section C, the Rules of Procedure on Appeals, but extended to bring church-related community workers within the ambit of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (MIP)

General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church to bring church-related community workers within the ambit of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (MIP):

Paragraph []

The following to be introduced as a new Paragraph of the Structure to be numbered []

[].1 The Procedure contained in this Paragraph [] of the Structure (known as the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure) shall apply where those responsible for initiating it in respect of any particular minister or church related community worker consider that s/he is or may not be exercising the ministry of Word and Sacrament or the ministry of Church Related Community Work as the case may be in accordance (in the case of ministers) with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto and (in the case of CRCWs) with Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II thereto and perceive the issue as relating to the incapacity of the minister or CRCW on account of (i) medical and/or psychiatric illness or (ii) psychological disorder or (iii) addiction.

[].2 No right of appeal shall lie against the decision taken in accordance with Paragraph [].1 above to initiate the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure in respect of any minister or CRCW.

[]3 The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding.

[]4 As soon as any minister or CRCW becomes the subject of a case under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, none of the Councils of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister or CRCW in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this paragraph.

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(viii)

Replace the words ‘the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xv) below’ with the words ‘the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xiv) below or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Paragraph [] of the Structure.’

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xi)

Add the words ‘... and Part I of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Paragraph [] of the Structure.’

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xviii)

Replace the words ‘the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below’ with the words ‘the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Paragraph [] of the Structure.’

Paragraphs 2(5)(A)(xxiv) and (xxv)

Add new Paragraphs 2(5)(A) (xxiv) and (xxv) as follows:

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxiv)

‘To make and (if necessary) to terminate all appointments to the Standing Panel and to any administrative office under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure and to exercise general oversight and supervision of the operation of that Procedure (save only that decisions in individual cases taken in accordance with that Procedure are made in the name of the General Assembly and are final and binding).’

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxv)

‘To provide for the setting up of an Appeals Review Commission in accordance with the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure for the hearing of appeals under that Procedure.’

Renumber the existing Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxiv) as (xxvi)

Identify the Paragraph immediately after the General Assembly Functions as 2(5)(B)

Resolution [H] A resolution to make changes to Section O, Part I, based on Resolution [A] but extended to make the necessary changes to Section O occasioned by the introduction of the MIP and the intention to bring CRCWs in to the Church's ministerial disciplinary process.

General Assembly agrees to replace the whole of the existing Part I of Section O with the following:

SECTION O

Process for dealing with cases of Ministerial Discipline

PART I – Substantive Provisions

(governed by General Assembly Function 2(5)(xi)
of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)

1. 1.1 Under the provisions of this Section O an Assembly Commission (as defined in Section A of Part II) 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 or a church-related community worker (CRCW) has committed a breach of discipline and, if the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission should so decide, whether on that account his/her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs as the case may be or alternatively whether a written warning should be issued to him/her. The Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission may also decide to make a recommendation/referral in accordance with provisions of Paragraph 1.3. Under the Ministerial Disciplinary Process (known as “the Section O Process”) the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission is also able to make recommendations (other than recommendations under Paragraph 1.3) and offer guidance but only within the limits prescribed in Section F of Part II.

1.2 Subject only to Paragraph 1.3, once the disciplinary case of any Minister or CRCW 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 or process of the Church.

1.3.1 If it considers that the situation concerning a Minister or CRCW involved in a case within the Section O Process relates to or involves a perceived incapacity on the part of that Minister or CRCW which might render him/her unfit to exercise, or to continue to exercise, the ministry of Word and Sacrament or the ministry of Church Related Community Work on account of (i) medical and/or psychiatric illness or (ii) psychological disorder or (iii) addiction, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission may make an Order in accordance with the Rules of Procedure referring the case back to the Synod Moderator/Deputy General Secretary or other person who called in the Mandated Group with a recommendation that the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (as defined in Section A of Part II) be initiated in respect of the Minister or CRCW concerned, whereupon the Section O Process shall stand adjourned pending the outcome of such recommendation.

1.3.2 The Rules of Procedure contained in Part II shall provide for the service of the above Order (and any accompanying documentation if appropriate) on the Synod Moderator/Deputy General Secretary or other person who called in the Mandated Group and under those Rules s/he shall be required, within the time therein specified, to notify the Secretary of the Assembly Commission

or the Appeals Commission in writing whether the recommendation has been accepted or rejected.

1.3.3 If the recommendation has been accepted, the notification shall specify the date on which the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure was initiated, whereupon the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall make a further Order declaring the Ministerial Disciplinary case to be concluded, subject only to the continuation of the Minister's or the CRCW's Suspension until the issue of his/her Suspension has been resolved in accordance with the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.

1.3.4 If the recommendation has been rejected, the notification shall state the reasons and the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall forthwith reactivate the Ministerial Disciplinary case.

2. The Assembly Commission, the Commission Panel, the Appeals Commission and all aspects of the Section O Process shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of the Section O Process, save only that, so long as it remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with this Section O Process shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister or the CRCW and on all the councils of the Church.

3. 3.1 Subject only to Paragraph 3.2, the Section O Process shall not be initiated in respect of any Minister or CRCW if his/her case is currently being dealt with under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.

3.2 The Section O Process may be initiated in respect of a Minister or CRCW as a result of a recommendation issuing from the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, in which case there may be a short transitional overlap between the commencement of the Ministerial Disciplinary case and the conclusion of the case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.

4. 4.1 In considering the evidence and reaching its decision, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission shall in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular (in the case of Ministers) Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto and (in the case of CRCWs) Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II thereto which state the responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers and CRCWs of the United Reformed Church and the respective criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministries.

4.2 As part of such consideration, the Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission shall be entitled to have regard to any conduct on the part of a Minister or CRCW occurring prior to his/her ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or his/her commissioning to the ministry of Church Related Community Work as the case may be which, in the Commission's view and when viewed in the light of Schedule E or Schedule F to the Basis of Union, would have prevented, or was likely to have prevented, him/her from becoming ordained or commissioned, where such conduct was not disclosed by the Minister or CRCW to those responsible for assessing his/her candidacy for ordination or commissioning.

5. 5.1 A Minister or CRCW may appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete his/her name from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs under Section F of Part II or to issue a

written warning under that Section by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure at Part II, stating the ground/s of such appeal.

5.2 The Mandated Group of the Council which lodged the Referral Notice in any case may in the name of that Council appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete the name of the Minister or CRCW from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure stating the ground/s of such appeal. 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 or CRCW.

5.3 No-one other than the Parties has any right of appeal from the decision of the Assembly Commission.

6. Procedural matters shall in every case be dealt with in accordance with the Rules of Procedure as contained in Part II.

7. 7.1 Save only as provided in Paragraph 7.2, this Part I of the Section O Process is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

7.2 Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to Part I as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the United Reformed Church, required to bring the Section O Process into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law.

7.3 All such changes to the Section O Process as are made by Mission Council under Paragraph 7.2 shall be reported to the next meeting of the General Assembly.

.....

Resolution [J]. A resolution to make changes to Section O, Part I, based on Resolution [A] but extended to make the necessary changes to Section O occasioned by the intention to bring CRCWs into the Church's ministerial disciplinary process. Unlike Resolution [H] this resolution does not include references to the MIP.

General Assembly agrees to replace the whole of the existing Part I of Section O with the following:

SECTION O

Process for dealing with cases of Ministerial Discipline

PART I - Substantive Provisions
(governed by General Assembly Function 2(5)(xi)
of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)

1. 1.1 Under the provisions of this Section O an Assembly Commission (as defined in Section A of Part II) 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 or a Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) has committed a breach of discipline and, if the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission should so decide, whether on that account his/her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs as the case may be or alternatively whether a written warning should be issued to him/her. Under the Ministerial Disciplinary Process (known as "the Section O Process") the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission is also able to make recommendations and offer guidance but only within the limits prescribed in Section F of Part II.

1.3 Once the disciplinary case of any Minister or CRCW 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 or process of the Church.

2. The Assembly Commission, the Commission Panel, the Appeals Commission and all aspects of the Section O Process shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of the Section O Process, save only that, so long as it remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with this Section O Process shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister or CRCW and on all the councils of the Church.

3. 3.1 In considering the evidence and reaching its decision, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission shall in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular (in the case of Ministers) Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto and (in the case of CRCWs) Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II thereto, which state the respective responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers or CRCWs of the United Reformed Church and the criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministries.

3.2 As part of such consideration, the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall be entitled to have regard to any conduct on the part of a Minister or CRCW occurring prior to his/her ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament or his/her commissioning to the ministry of Church related Community Work as the case may be which, in the Commission's view and when viewed in the light of Schedule E or Schedule F to the Basis of Union, would have prevented, or was likely to have prevented, him/her from becoming ordained or commissioned, where such conduct was not disclosed by the Minister or CRCW to those responsible for assessing his/her candidacy for ordination or commissioning.

4. 4.1 A Minister or CRCW may appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete his/her name from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs under Section F of Part II or to issue a written warning under that Section by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure at Part II, stating the ground/s of such appeal.

4.2 The Mandated Group of the Council which lodged the Referral Notice in any case may in the name of that Council appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete the name of the Minister or CRCW from the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure stating the ground/s of such appeal. 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 or CRCW.

4.3 No-one other than the Parties has any right of appeal from the decision of the Assembly Commission.

5. Procedural matters shall in every case be dealt with in accordance with the Rules of Procedure as contained in Part II.

6. 6.1 Save only as provided in Paragraph 6.2, this Part I of the Section O Process is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

6.2 Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to Part I as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the United Reformed Church, required to bring the Section O Process into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law.

6.3 All such changes to the Section O Process as are made by Mission Council under Paragraph 6.2 shall be reported to the next meeting of the General Assembly.

.....
Resolution [K]. A resolution to make changes to the Basis of Union to bring church-related community workers within the ambit of the Church's ministerial disciplinary process

General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Basis of Union to provide for the Section O process to include church-related community workers:

Paragraph 20

Add the following sentences at the end of the paragraph:

In the United Reformed Church all ministries within the life of the Church shall be open to both men and women. Appropriate affirmations of faith shall be made by those entering upon all ministries within the life of the Church.

Paragraph 21

After the words 'to their office.' add a new sentence as follows:

The ordination and induction of ministers shall be in accordance with Schedules C and D.

After the first paragraph, add an additional paragraph as follows:

The totality of ministers who fall within any of the categories defined within Schedule E, Paragraph 1 and are in good standing may be referred to as the Roll of Ministers. Ministers shall conduct their ministry according to the criteria set out in Schedule E.

Paragraph 22

Replace the words 'and are then commissioned and inducted to their office to serve for a designated period' with 'are then commissioned to the office of church related community worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period'.

Paragraph 26

Remove this paragraph as its contents have been transferred to Paragraphs 20 and 21 in the changes proposed above.

Schedule E, Paragraph 4

Remove the word ‘disciplinary’ on the last line.

Schedule F

The existing Schedule F to become Schedule F, Part I and a new Schedule F, Part II to be added as follows:

Part II

Those who have been called to the Ministry of Church Related Community Work and commissioned and inducted to their office in accordance with Paragraph 22 of the Basis of Union shall constitute the Roll of Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) of the United Reformed Church.

CRCWs must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmations made by CRCWs at commissioning and induction (Schedule F Part I) and the Statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which CRCWs undertake to exercise their ministry.

Acting in due exercise of their functions as contained in the Structure of the United Reformed Church, the councils of the Church have authority in certain circumstances (without prejudice to a CRCW’s conditions under the plan for partnership in ministerial remuneration) to suspend a CRCW which involves a temporary ban on the exercise of the duties of his/her ministry by the CRCW concerned but not his/her removal from the Roll of CRCWs.

A CRCW under suspension shall not represent him/herself as a CRCW and shall refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as such. Suspension also means that the CRCW may not exercise the rights of membership of any council of the Church. Suspension does not remove any of the rights accorded by the process of determining the matter which had led to the suspension.

A person whose name has been deleted from the Roll of CRCWs and who remains a member of the United Reformed Church has the privileges and responsibilities of that membership, but not those of a CRCW and should refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as a CRCW. However, should that person be re-instated to the Roll of CRCWs he/she would on being called to a post approved by the United Reformed Church need to be inducted to that post but not commissioned since commissioning is not repeatable.

.....
Resolution [L] This is a resolution to amend the Structure to bring CRCWs within the ambit of Section O

General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church to provide for the Section O Process to include church-related community workers

Paragraph 1(4)

Add an additional Paragraph 1(4) as follows:

Unless otherwise expressly stated or clearly excluded by the context, the expressions 'minister', 'ministers', 'ministry' and 'ministerial' when used in the Structure shall refer to the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(i)

After the words 'oversight of' add '(i)' and after the words 'General Assembly' add 'and (ii) church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(ii)

After the word 'ministers' (the first time it appears) add 'or church-related community workers' and after the word 'ministers' (the second time it appears) add 'and any commissioning and induction of church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(vi)

After the word 'ministry' add 'of word and sacrament or the ministry of church-related community work'.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(viii)

After the word 'ministers' add 'or church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(xviii)

Replace the existing 2(3)(A)(xviii) with the following:

Where the District Council, acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below, considers that a minister or church-related community worker is or may not be exercising his/her ministry of word and sacrament or church-related community work as the case may be in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E (in the case of ministers) or Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II (in the case of church-related community workers) to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister or church-related community worker to be dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister or church-related community worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).

Paragraph 2(3)(A)(xix)(l)

After the words 'lay people' add '/church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(3)(B)

Replace the existing 2(3)(B) with the following:

Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any minister or church-related community worker with the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process, whether by the Synod or by one of the other Councils of the church, the Synod shall not exercise its functions in respect of that minister or church-related community worker (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.

Paragraph 2(3)(C)

Replace the existing 2(3)(C) with the following:

No appeal shall lie against the decision by a District Council to initiate the Disciplinary Process in respect of any minister or church-related community worker under Function (xviii) above.

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(v)

Alter the word 'ministry' to 'ministries of word and sacrament and church-related community work'.

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(vi)

Alter the word 'ministry' (the first time it appears) to 'ministries of word and sacrament and church-related community work' and alter the word 'ministries' (the second time it appears) to 'the above ministries'.

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(vii)

After the words 'Roll of Ministers' add 'or the Roll of Church-Related Community Workers'.

Alter the words 'Function (xv)' to 'Function (xiv)'.

Paragraph 2(4)(A)(xiv)

Replace the existing 2(4)(A)(xiv) with the following:

In the absence of any reference into the Disciplinary Process by the appropriate district council and where the Synod, acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below, considers that a minister or church-related community worker is or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union or Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II, as the case may be, to refer the case of that minister or church-related community worker to the Commission Stage of the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister or church-related community worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).

Paragraph 2(4)(B)

Replace the existing 2(4)(B) with the following:

Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any minister or church-related community worker with the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process, whether by the Synod or by one of the other Councils of the church, the synod shall not exercise its functions in respect of that minister or church-related community worker (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.

Paragraph 2(4)(C)

Replace the existing 2(4)(C) with the following:

No appeal shall lie against the decision by a Synod to initiate the Disciplinary Process in respect of any minister or church-related community worker under Function (xiv) above.

Paragraph 2(5)(f)

After the word 'ministers' add a comma and the words 'church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(v)

Alter the words 'adequate ministerial training' to 'adequate training for ministers and church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xviii)

After the words 'Roll of Ministers' add 'and the Roll of Church-Related Community Workers'.

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xix)

After the word 'ministers' add a comma and the words 'church-related community workers'.

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxii)

Replace the existing 2(5)(A)(xxii) with the following:

To provide for the setting up of an Appeals Commission in accordance with the Ministerial Disciplinary Process for the hearing of appeals under that Process.

Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxiii)

Replace the existing 2(5)(A)(xxiii) with the following:

In the absence of any reference into the Disciplinary Process by the appropriate District Council or Synod (the case of any minister who is a Moderator of Synod being necessarily dealt with under this provision) and where the General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf) acting through its Mandated Group as defined in the Disciplinary Process referred to below considers that a minister or church-related community worker is or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E or Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister or church-related community worker to the Commission Stage of the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister or church-related community worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (for the avoidance of doubt the calling in of the Mandated Group under that Process in order to fulfil its responsibilities marking the commencement of the Disciplinary Process).

Paragraph 2(5)(B)

Replace the existing 2(5)(B) with the following:

Once the Disciplinary Process has commenced in the case of any minister or church-related community worker, whether by the General Assembly or by one of the other Councils of the Church, the General Assembly shall not exercise its functions in respect of that minister or church-related community worker (save only in the provision of such pastoral care as may be appropriate) until the Process has been duly concluded.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

A9ii

Section O Advisory Group
Appendix: Text related to Resolution C

PART II - Rules of Procedure (governed by General Assembly Function 2(5)(xii) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)

A. GENERAL

A.1 These are the Rules of Procedure referred to in Paragraph 5 of Part I.

A.2 In the interests both of the Minister and of the whole church, the Section O Process once begun should be conducted and concluded as expeditiously as possible, consistent with the proper conduct of the procedures. To this end, these Rules impose time limits for the various steps which have to be taken. However it is equally in the interests of all that the Section O Process once begun should not be aborted, delayed or hindered by an unduly narrow or restrictive application of the time limits or indeed of any other aspects of these Rules.

A.3 Accordingly if any of the time limits specified in these Rules of Procedure are not complied with, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission may in its discretion allow a reasonable further period for such compliance, except as regards the strict time limit imposed upon the right of appeal (Paragraph G.1). In other cases, if the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission considers that sufficient time has been allowed and the action required has still not been carried out or that there has been an unreasonable delay in the carrying out of the action (whether or not these Rules imposed a time limit in such case), it may proceed and attach whatever weight it believes appropriate in the circumstances to such failure to comply, or to any delay in compliance.

A.4 The sole object of the Section O Process is to enable a decision to be reached in accordance with Section F, or Section G in the event of an appeal. All statements, whether written or oral, made during and in the context of this process shall be regarded as being made in pursuance of that object and for no other reason. All such statements shall be treated as confidential within the framework of the Section O Process.

A.5 For the purpose of Parts I and II of this Section O, a reference to any of the Sections A to J shall mean a reference to that Section of this Part II and the following words and expressions carry the following meanings :-

A.5.1 **"Appeals Commission"** shall mean the Commission constituted for the hearing of each Appeal in accordance with Section G.

A.5.2 **"Appointers"** shall mean the persons responsible under Section C for the appointment of the Assembly Commission.

A.5.3 **"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.

A.5.4 **"Basis of Union"** shall mean the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church.

A.5.5 **"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.

A.5.6 **"Commission Stage"** shall mean that part of the Section O Process initiated in accordance with Paragraph B.8.1 and continuing until the conclusion of the case.

A.5.7 **"Council"** shall mean the council of the Church whose Mandated Group issues the Referral Notice.

A.5.8 **“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.

A.5.9 **“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”**.

A.5.10 **“Hearing”** shall mean the Hearing conducted by the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission under Section E or Section G.

A.5.11 **“Initial Enquiry”** shall mean the enquiry conducted by the Mandated Group, in conjunction with the person calling in the Mandated Group in accordance with the provisions of Section B, during the period beginning when it is so called in and ending when it serves either a Notice of Non-Continuance or a Referral Notice in accordance with these Rules of Procedure.

A.5.12 **“Investigation”** shall mean the process of investigation carried out by the Mandated Group as set out in Section D.

A.5.13 **“Joint Panel”** shall mean the Panel as defined in Paragraph B.3 from which one person shall be appointed to be a member of the Mandated Group.

A.5.14 **“Mandated Group”** shall mean the group mandated to act in the name of a District Council under Section B 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.

A.5.15 **“Minister”** shall mean a person whose name is on the Roll of Ministers who is under consideration within the Section O Process.

A.5.16 **“Notice of Appeal”** shall mean a Notice specified in Paragraph G.1 whereby either of the parties in any case indicates his/her/its intention to appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission.

A.5.17 **“Notice of Non-Continuance”** shall mean a Notice served under Paragraph B.7.2 at the conclusion of the Initial Enquiry by the Mandated Group on the person calling it in to indicate that the Mandated Group does not intend to proceed further with the disciplinary case against the Minister.

A.5.18 **“Notice of Reference back”** shall mean a Notice from the Appeals Commission of any reference back for a re-hearing by the Assembly Commission under Paragraph G.11.7.

A.5.19 **“Outside organisation”** shall mean any body or organisation outside the Church by which the Minister is employed or with which the Minister holds any position or post or has any involvement, paid or unpaid, where such body or organisation would have a reasonable and proper expectation of being made aware of the particular step(s) being taken and/or the particular recommendation(s) or guidance being issued under the relevant paragraph of these Rules of Procedure in which the reference to the expression ‘Outside Organisation’ appears.

A.5.20 **“Parties”** shall mean (i) the Council, which for the purpose of the Section O Process shall act solely and exclusively through the Mandated Group, and (ii) the Minister.

A.5.21 **“Referral Notice”** shall mean a Notice specified in Paragraph B.8 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.

A.5.22 **“Roll of Ministers”** shall have the meaning given to it in Paragraph 1 of Schedule E of the Basis of Union.

A.5.23 **“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)(xiv) 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 this Part II of Section O.

A.5.24 **“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.

A.5.25 **"Section O Process"** shall mean the whole Process set out in Parts I and II of this Section O (subject to such variations as shall from time to time be made).

A.5.26 **"Structure"** shall mean the Structure of the United Reformed Church.

A.5.27 **"Suspension"** and **"to suspend"** shall have the meanings assigned to them in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union.

A.5.28 **"Synod Panel"** shall mean the Panel referred to in Paragraph B.2.1 from which persons shall be appointed to be members of the Mandated Group.

A.6 A.6.1 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4, appointment to the Commission Panel shall be by Resolution of the General Assembly on the advice of the Nominations Committee (or such other committee as may in the future perform the functions of the Nominations Committee), who shall in considering persons for appointment take into account (i) the need for balance and for a variety of skills and specialisations, particularly in the following areas - experience in ministerial oversight, theology and doctrine, law, counselling, psychology, mental health, experience in conduct of meetings and tribunals, and (ii) the advantages of including on the Commission Panel persons from a variety of ethnic minority backgrounds.

A.6.2 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4, members of the Commission Panel shall be appointed for such term not exceeding five (5) years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit with power for the General Assembly to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms of five (5) years each, but any person who reaches the end of the term of his/her appointment on the Commission Panel whilst serving as a member of an Assembly Commission in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.

A.6.3 The General Assembly shall appoint from the Commission Panel one member to be the Convener of the Commission Panel and one member to be the Deputy Convener of the Commission Panel, each (subject to the provisions of Paragraph A.6.2) to serve for such period as General Assembly shall decide.

A.6.4 When any member of the Commission Panel reaches the age of seventy, s/he must forthwith resign from the Commission Panel and shall no longer be eligible to serve on any new Assembly Commission, but any person who reaches his/her seventieth birthday whilst serving on an Assembly Commission in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.

A.7 In any case where a person authorised or required to take some action regarding (i) the appointment of persons to any Mandated Group or (ii) the calling in of a Mandated Group or (iii) some other administrative or procedural matter under the Section O Process is unable for any reason to do so, then, unless the Section O Process already makes specific provision for such a situation, that person's duly appointed deputy shall take such action in his/her place. This Paragraph does not permit any member of an Assembly Commission, an Appeals Commission or a Mandated Group to appoint his/her own deputy.

A.8 In any case where the Secretary of the Assembly Commission (or the General Secretary in the case of Appeals, save where Paragraph G.10.5 applies) is unable for any reason to carry out the duties of that office, his/her place shall be taken by a deputy duly authorised by or in the name of General Assembly.

A.9 Where any issue or question of procedure arises whilst the matter is under the jurisdiction of the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission that Commission shall resolve each such issue or question or give such directions as shall appear to it to be just and appropriate in the circumstances.

B APPOINTMENT AND ROLE OF MANDATED GROUPS AND INITIATION OF SECTION O

B.1 B.1.1 To enable it properly to carry out its Function 2(3)(A)(xviii) of the Structure, every District Council shall act solely through a group of three persons ("the Mandated Group") which shall have mandated authority to act in the name of the District Council in every matter requiring consideration under that Function.

B.1.2 The Mandated Group called in to deal with any particular case under Paragraph B.6.1, Paragraph B.9.2 or Paragraph B.9.3 has no pastoral role to fulfil and its precise functions are described in Paragraphs B.7 and B.8.

B.2 In cases arising under Paragraph B.6.1 (District Council), the Mandated Groups charged with the responsibilities ascribed to them under these Rules of Procedure shall be constituted in the following manner:

B.2.1 Two members thereof shall be appointed by each District Council on a standing basis from a Synod Panel itself appointed and maintained by each Synod, there normally being on such panel at least one, and preferably two, persons from each District within the Synod. One such member shall, wherever possible, be appointed to the Mandated Group from the District from which the case emanates.

B.2.2 The Synod Moderator or other person responsible for calling in the Mandated Group shall appoint the remaining person to the Mandated Group from the Joint Panel in accordance with the procedure set out in Paragraph B.3.

B.3 B.3.1 There shall be a standing panel ('the Joint Panel') consisting of a maximum of thirteen persons, of whom one shall be nominated by each Synod and selected preferably on account of some legal, tribunal or professional experience or other similar background, which would equip them for assuming a role as part of a Mandated Group. The list of those currently on the Joint Panel shall be held by the Synod Moderators.

B.3.2 In cases arising either under Paragraph B.6.1 (District Council) or Paragraph B.9.2 (Synod) (where one member of the Joint Panel will be required to serve) the Synod Moderator or other person responsible for calling in the Mandated Group shall appoint the remaining member of the Mandated Group for that case from the Joint Panel.

B.3.3 In cases arising under Paragraph B.9.3 (General Assembly or Mission Council on its behalf) the Deputy General Secretary, in consultation with such other officers of General Assembly as s/he considers appropriate, shall constitute the Mandated Group by the appointment of all three persons, each of whom shall be selected from either the Joint Panel or any of the Synod Panels (at least one from the Joint Panel and at least one from the Synod Panels).

B.3.4 Any Mandated Group called in prior to the setting up of the Joint Panel shall consist of three persons from the appropriate Synod Panel.

B.4 If any member of a Synod Panel or the Joint Panel is a member of a local church connected with a case or has any pastoral or personal involvement in a case or is the subject of a disciplinary complaint, that person shall not form part of the Mandated Group for that case.

B.5 B.5.1 If any member of a Synod Panel or the Joint Panel is disqualified under Paragraph B.4 or is for any other reason unable to act in a particular case, the person calling in the Mandated Group shall appoint another member from the same panel to serve as a member of the Mandated Group for that case. The Mandated Group for all matters relating to that case shall be its remaining member(s) together with the person(s) appointed under this Paragraph. If only one such person is disqualified or otherwise unable to act, then, until any such further appointment is made, the mandate shall continue to be held by the remaining two members of the Mandated Group. If two members of the Mandated Group are disqualified or otherwise unable to act, there is no mandate for the remaining member to act alone.

B.5.2 No person shall serve as a member of or as the spokesperson for a Mandated Group in connection with any case where s/he would fall within any of the restrictions contained in Paragraph C.3.1.

B.6 B.6.1 B.6.1.1 If at any time the Moderator of the Synod or (if for any reason s/he should be unavailable or unable to act) the President of the District Council in consultation with such officers of the District Council as s/he considers appropriate believes that there is or may be a disciplinary issue in respect of any Minister s/he shall forthwith in the name and on the authority of the District Council call in its Mandated Group, at the same time informing the Minister that this step has been taken. The Section O Process in the case of any Minister shall commence with the calling in of the Mandated Group.

B.6.1.2 In calling in the Mandated Group, the person so doing:

(i) shall notify those two persons who, as members of the Synod Panel, will form part of the Mandated Group by virtue of Paragraph B.2.1 that they are called upon so to participate, advising them of the identity of the Minister but giving no further information at that point and

(ii) shall notify one person from the Joint Panel of his/her intention to invite that person to serve as a member of the Mandated Group, advising him/her of the identity of the Minister but giving no further information at that point.

B.6.1.3 In the event that any of the proposed appointees on to the Mandated Group is/are unable or unwilling to act, the process(es) of appointment from a Synod Panel and/or the Joint Panel shall continue until a Mandated Group consisting of three members has been duly constituted.

B.6.1.4 As soon as the above steps have all been taken, the person calling in the Mandated Group shall issue to each member thereof a written statement setting out the reasons for the calling in of the Mandated Group, the names of possible informants and any other sources of information at that time available. To avoid prejudice, that statement must not contain any assumptions or inferences or any personal reflections or opinions.

B.6.2.1 In cases of extreme emergency, the Moderator of the Synod or other person entitled to call in the Mandated Group under the Rules of Procedure may, if s/he considers that there are strong and urgent reasons for so doing and only so long as s/he forthwith calls in the Mandated Group under Paragraph B.6.1, suspend the Minister with immediate effect either orally or in writing. Suspension imposed orally shall be immediately confirmed in writing to the Minister.

B.6.2.2 The person imposing the Suspension under Paragraph B.6.2.1 shall forthwith (i) give written notice of the Minister's Suspension to the Moderator of the Synod (if s/he is not the person calling in the Mandated Group), the Secretary of the District Council, the General Secretary and the Secretary for Ministries, and (ii) make a written disclosure of the Minister's Suspension to the responsible officer of any relevant Outside Organisation (as defined in Paragraph A.5.19). In order to preserve confidentiality any notice or disclosure given under this Paragraph shall not disclose any reason for the imposition of the Suspension (see also Paragraphs B.8.2 and B.11). However, any such notice or disclosure shall contain a statement explaining the effect of Suspension as outlined in Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and shall (if such be the case) state that the Police have been apprised of the matter giving rise to the Suspension.

B.6.3 Suspension imposed under Paragraph B.6.2.1 shall continue during the Mandated Group's initial enquiry period referred to in Paragraph B.7.1. If at the end of that period the Mandated Group serves a Referral Notice on the Minister, it must also serve on him/her a Notice confirming the continuance of the Suspension during the Commission Stage.

B.6.4 In the event that the initial enquiry period terminates without the issue of a Referral Notice, the Minister's Suspension under Paragraph B.6.2.1 shall automatically cease on the issue of a Notice of Non-Continuance under Paragraph B.7.2, whereupon the person imposing the Suspension under Paragraph B.6.2.1 shall give written notice of the cessation of the Suspension both to the Minister and to the persons specified in Paragraph B.6.2.2.

B.7 The functions of the Mandated Group called in by the person authorised for that purpose under Paragraph B.6 in any particular case are described in this Paragraph B.7 (as regards the initial enquiry) and in Paragraph B.8 (as regards its role during the Commission Stage):

B.7.1 The Mandated Group shall carry out its own initial enquiry with all due expedition in consultation (where practical and appropriate) with the person calling in the Mandated Group for the sole purpose of ascertaining whether the Commission Stage should be initiated. Having done so, it must bring its initial enquiry to a conclusion in accordance with Paragraphs B.7.2 and B.7.3.

B.7.2 If the Mandated Group decides as a result of its initial enquiry not to proceed any further with the matter, it shall serve on the Moderator of the Synod or other person calling it in a notice to that effect (a Notice of Non-Continuance), which shall have the effect of discharging from further involvement in that case the Mandated Group itself (subject to due compliance by it of Paragraph H.4) and the Council in whose name it conducted the initial enquiry.

B.7.3 On receipt of a Notice of Non-Continuance the person calling in the Mandated Group shall forthwith notify the Minister and the Secretary of the District Council that the Mandated Group is not proceeding any further and if the person calling in the Mandated Group has already suspended the Minister under Paragraph B.6.2.1, s/he must notify all the persons, bodies and organisations specified in Paragraph B.6.2.2 that disciplinary proceedings against the Minister and the Minister's Suspension are terminated with immediate effect.

B.7.4 If on the other hand the Mandated Group decides as a result of its initial enquiry to initiate the Commission Stage, it shall follow the procedure laid down in Paragraphs B.8.1 and B.8.3 whereupon the Commission Stage will be initiated.

B.8 B.8.1 Whenever the Mandated Group, having as a result of its Initial Enquiry become aware of any information relating to the Minister concerned which might require disciplinary investigation, concludes unanimously or by a majority that this is indeed so, it shall forthwith in the name of the District Council suspend the Minister (unless s/he has already been suspended under Paragraph B.6.2, in which case the Mandated Group shall serve on the Minister a notice that his/her Suspension shall continue during the Commission Stage) and initiate the Commission Stage in accordance with Paragraph B.10. Suspension under this Paragraph shall take effect when the Minister receives Notice

thereof from the Mandated Group either orally or in writing. Suspension imposed orally shall be immediately confirmed in writing (as to the contents of the written notice of Suspension, see also Paragraph B.11).

B.8.2 Suspension, whether imposed under Paragraph B.6.2.1 or B.8.1, does not imply any view about the correctness or otherwise of any allegations made concerning the Minister, nor does it affect the Minister's stipend nor the Minister's pension arrangements under the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Scheme.

B.8.3 The Mandated Group shall forthwith, by written notice to the person who called it in, advise him/her of the issue of the Referral Notice and the Notice of Suspension, and that person shall in turn forthwith (i) give written notice thereof to the Moderator of the Synod (if s/he is not the person calling in the Mandated Group), the Secretary of the District Council, the General Secretary and the Secretary for Ministries, and (ii) make a written disclosure of the Minister's Suspension to the responsible officer of any relevant Outside Organisation, unless notice thereof has already been given to that Outside Organisation under Paragraph B.6.2.2. In order to preserve confidentiality any notice or disclosure given under this Paragraph shall not disclose any reason for the imposition of the Suspension (see also Paragraphs B.8.2 and B.11). However, any such notice or disclosure shall contain a statement explaining the effect of Suspension as outlined in Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and shall (if such be the case) state that the Police have been apprised of the matter giving rise to the Suspension.

B.8.4 During the Commission Stage it is the responsibility of the Mandated Group to conduct the Investigation in accordance with Section D, to comply with all procedural matters under the Rules of Procedure and to present the case against the Minister at the Hearing under Section E and at the Hearing of any Appeal under Section G.

B.9 B.9.1 To enable them to carry out their respective functions under Paragraphs 2(4)(A)(xiv) and 2(5)(A)(xxiii) of the Structure, every Synod and the General Assembly shall act solely through a group of three persons ("the Mandated Group") which shall have mandated authority to act in the name of the Synod or the General Assembly as the case may be in every matter requiring consideration under those respective functions.

B.9.2 In connection with any such steps under Paragraph B.9.1 as are required to be taken by a Synod, if at any time the Moderator of the Synod, in consultation with such officers of the Synod as s/he considers appropriate, believes that there is or may be a disciplinary issue in respect of any Minister in membership or under the authority of that Synod, s/he shall forthwith in the name of the Synod appoint two persons from the Synod Panel for that Synod and one person from the Joint Panel as provided in Paragraphs B.2 and B.3 to constitute the Mandated Group for the particular case and at the same time inform the Minister that this step has been taken and follow the procedure laid down in Paragraphs B.6.1.2/4. The Mandated Group so appointed shall be deemed to be called in and vested with authority in like manner to the Mandated Group of a District Council called in under Paragraph B.6.1.

B.9.3 In connection with any steps under Paragraph B.9.1 as are required to be taken by General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf), if at any time the Deputy General Secretary, in consultation with such other officers of the General Assembly as s/he considers appropriate, believes that there is or may be a disciplinary issue in respect of any Minister s/he shall forthwith in the name of General Assembly appoint three persons drawn from the Synod Panels and the Joint Panel as provided in Paragraph B.3.3 to constitute the Mandated Group for the particular case and at the same time inform the Minister that this step has been taken and follow the procedure laid down in Paragraphs B.6.1.2/4. The Mandated Group so appointed shall be deemed to be called in and vested with authority in like manner to the Mandated Group of a District Council called in under Paragraph B.6.1.

B.9.4 The whole of this Section B shall apply to cases falling within Paragraph B.9 with the necessary changes and in particular in Paragraph B.8.1 the reference to "the District Council" shall be replaced by a reference to "the Synod" or "General Assembly" as the case may be.

B.9.5 On any occasion throughout the Section O Process where notices and papers are required to be sent to the Moderator of the Synod, then in a case proceeding under Paragraph B.9.3 they shall also be sent to the Deputy General Secretary.

B.10 To initiate the Commission Stage pursuant to Paragraph B.8.1, the Mandated Group in the name of the Council shall take the following steps:

B.10.1 Serve on the Secretary of the Assembly Commission a duly completed Referral Notice which should clearly state the reasons why the Mandated Group believes that a breach of ministerial discipline has or may have occurred and which should also include where possible a summary of the supporting information on the basis of which the Mandated Group has issued the Referral Notice and which must disclose the name and address of any Outside Organisation notified of the Minister's Suspension under either Paragraph B.6.2.2 or Paragraph B.8.3.

B.10.2 Serve on the Minister notice of the issue of the Referral Notice and of his/her Suspension (or of the continuance of his/her Suspension if Paragraph B.6.2 applies).

B.11 The Notice of Suspension, whether issued under Paragraph B.6.2 or Paragraph B.8.1, shall inform the Minister that, in accordance with these Rules of Procedure, any conduct on his/her part during such Suspension which breaches or contravenes Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union may be taken into account by the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission in reaching its decision under Section F or Section G as the case may be.

B.12 Once a Referral Notice has been issued by a Mandated Group in any case, no further Referral Notice shall in any circumstances be issued in respect of the subject matter of that referral, save only where the Minister has been the subject of an earlier disciplinary case in which the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission issued a written warning under the provisions of Paragraph F.2.2 or Paragraph G.11.3.

C. REFERENCE TO AND CONSTITUTION OF THE ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

C.1 On receipt of either a Referral Notice or a Notice of Reference back, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall forthwith take the following steps:

C.1.1 Acknowledge receipt of such Notice.

C.1.2 In the case of a Referral Notice, serve on the Minister a copy of the Referral Notice and a Notice which shall invite the Minister's preliminary response.

C.1.3 In the case of a Notice of Reference back, invite any comments from the Parties regarding the Notice and accompanying statement received by them from the General Secretary in accordance with Paragraph G.14.1.

C.1.4 Inform the Convener and the Deputy Convener of the Commission Panel (or in their absence or the absence of either of them the person or persons specified in Paragraph C.2.2 or Paragraph C.2.3) ('the Appointers') of the receipt of the Referral Notice or the Notice of Reference back and pass to such person or persons copies thereof and of any other papers which accompany such Notice.

C.1.5 Inform the General Secretary, the Moderator of the Synod and the Secretary of the District Council of the receipt of the Referral Notice but not of the contents thereof, apart from the name of the Minister.

C.1.6 On receipt of the Minister's response under Paragraph C.1.2 and any documents which may accompany it, provide the Mandated Group with copies thereof.

C.1.7 In any case arising as a consequence of a Notice of Reference back, where comments are received from either of the parties as a result of the invitation contained in Paragraph C.1.3, provide the other party with copies thereof.

C.2 C.2.1 The Appointers shall, within 7 days of compliance by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission with Paragraph C.1.4 (or within such further time as they shall reasonably require), jointly appoint five (5) persons from the Commission Panel to constitute the Assembly Commission for the hearing of that case, and in making such appointments they shall have regard to the provisions of Paragraphs C.2.4 and C.3.

C.2.2 In the absence of either the Convener or the Deputy Convener of the Commission Panel, the General Secretary shall act jointly with the other one in the appointment of the Assembly Commission under Paragraph C.2.1.

C.2.3 In the absence of both the Convener of the Commission Panel and the Deputy Convener of the Commission Panel, the General Secretary and the Moderator of the General Assembly shall together appoint the Assembly Commission under Paragraph C.2.1.

C.2.4 The Appointers shall (so far as possible) (i) appoint at least one man and at least one woman and at least one minister and at least one lay person onto the Assembly Commission and (ii) have regard to the nature of the case, the need for balance and the skills, specialisation and cultural understanding of the members of the Commission Panel.

C.3 C.3.1 No person shall be appointed to sit as a member of the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission in the hearing of any case in which he/she has any involvement, whether as a member of any local church, District Council or Synod connected with the case or (in the event of a re-

hearing under Paragraph G.11.7) a member of the previous Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission, or whether on account of some personal or pastoral involvement as a result of which it is considered by those responsible for selecting the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission for that case or by the proposed appointee him/herself that it would not be appropriate for him/her to hear the case.

C.3.2 Under the Rules of Procedure, either of the parties may object on any of the grounds set out in Paragraph C.3.1 to the proposed appointment of any person to the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission for the hearing of his/her case and, in the event of any such objection, the decision of those charged under the Section O Process with making the appointment shall be final and binding.

C.4 C.4.1 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall send to each member of the Commission Panel whom the Appointers propose to appoint to the Assembly Commission notice of his/her proposed appointment, stating the name of the Minister but containing no further details of the case. The Notice shall draw the invitee's attention to Paragraph C.3.1 and shall request confirmation that the invitee is willing to accept appointment and that s/he is unaware of any circumstances which in the present case might prevent him/her from serving on the Assembly Commission.

C.4.2 The Invitee shall within 7 days of receipt of such Notice serve on the Secretary of the Assembly Commission a Notice indicating whether s/he is able and willing to accept appointment and, if so, confirming compliance with Paragraph C.3.1.

C.5 C.5.1 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall serve notice on the Parties setting out the name and office or credentials of each proposed appointee, drawing attention to Paragraphs C.3.1 and requiring notice of objection to any of the proposed appointees under that Paragraph to be served upon the Secretary of the Assembly Commission within 14 days of the service of the Notice given under this Paragraph.

C.5.2 Any such Notice of Objection must state the grounds for such objection.

C.5.3 To ensure that the Commission Stage is moved along in a timely manner, any Notice of Objection received outside the period allowed will not normally be considered unless very good reason can be shown for its late delivery.

C.5.4 The Appointers shall consider any objection properly delivered and shall decide whether to uphold or reject the objection.

C.5.5 If they reject the objection the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall serve notice thereof on the objector.

C.5.6 If they uphold the objection, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall serve notice thereof upon the objector, the person to whom the objection was taken and the other Party upon whom the Notice referred to in Paragraph C.4.1 was served.

C.5.7 In the event of any objection being upheld, the procedure outlined in Paragraphs C.2 to C.5 shall be repeated to complete the appointment of the Assembly Commission and to give notice to the Parties of the person appointed.

C.6 The Appointers shall appoint one member of the Assembly Commission to be its Convener, but s/he shall not have a casting vote, unless the Assembly Commission shall in circumstances arising under Paragraph C.7.1 of these Rules consist of an even number of members.

C.7 C.7.1 In the event that during the Commission Stage any member of the Assembly Commission shall be unable to carry out his/her duties on the Assembly Commission, the remaining members shall continue to act as the Assembly Commission, subject to there being a minimum of three members.

C.7.2 In the event that in the terms of Paragraph C.7.1 the Assembly Commission shall be reduced to fewer than three members at any time after it has taken any steps under Section E the Assembly Commission so appointed shall stand down and be discharged and a new Assembly Commission shall be appointed under this Section C.

C.7.3 Once the Assembly Commission has been duly constituted and has taken any steps under Section E, no person shall subsequently be appointed to serve on that Assembly Commission.

C.7.4 If the Convener of the Assembly Commission is unable to continue to serve for the reasons stated in Paragraph C.7.1, the remaining members shall, following consultation with the Appointers, appoint one of their number to be the Convener in his/her place.

D. INVESTIGATION BY THE MANDATED GROUP

D.1 It shall be the role of the Mandated Group to investigate the matters which are the subject of the Referral Notice with a view to presenting the case in the name of the Council at the Hearing.

D.2 In the course of the Investigation, the Mandated Group shall normally interview the person or persons lodging the initial complaint (if any) and the Minister concerned and shall make all other investigations which it considers necessary.

D.3 Any person being interviewed in accordance with Paragraph D.2 may, if s/he so wishes, have a friend present with him/her at such interview.

D.4 In cases where Paragraph E.7.1 applies, the Mandated Group may itself monitor the criminal proceedings, but shall otherwise for the period specified in that Paragraph suspend its own investigation of any matter under the Section O Process which might also be related to the criminal proceedings.

E FORMAL PROCEDURES UP TO AND INCLUDING THE HEARING

E.1 The Assembly Commission's sole purpose in conducting the Hearing under this Section E is to establish whether or not there has been a breach of ministerial discipline, having regard to Paragraph 3 of Part I.

E.2 The object of Paragraphs E.3, E.4 and E.5 is to ensure that the Parties are aware beforehand of the evidence which will be presented at the Hearing and that they have time to consider the same.

E.3 E.3.1 Unless the case is subject to compulsory adjournment under Paragraph E.7, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall as soon as practicable after the appointment of the Assembly Commission:

E.3.1.1 provide the Convener and the other members of the Assembly Commission with (i) copies of the Referral Notice, (ii) the Minister's response under Paragraph C.1.2 and (iii) any documents which may accompany it and

E.3.1.2 in the case of any Assembly Commission appointed as a consequence of a Notice of Reference back, provide the Convener and the other members thereof with copies of (i) the Notice of Reference back, (ii) the documents, statements and information delivered to the previous Assembly Commission in accordance with these Rules of Procedure and (iii) any comments received from the parties as a result of the invitation contained in Paragraph C.1.3 and

E.3.1.3 consult with the Convener and the other members of the Assembly Commission and, where possible, with the Parties as to a suitable venue, date and time for the Hearing and, having so consulted, decide thereupon.

E.3.2 Having complied with Paragraph E.3.1, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall forthwith serve on each of the Parties a notice which shall:

E.3.2.1 notify the date, time and place of the Hearing,

E.3.2.2 notify the Parties that the Referral Notice and any statement from the Minister lodged in response to the Notice referred to in Paragraph C.1.2 will be part of the documentary evidence at the Hearing,

E.3.2.3 call upon the Parties to lodge copies of any documents or of any further statements relating to matters to which they may wish to refer at the Hearing (the Notice should indicate to the Parties that copies of any such documents or statements will be made available to the other Party),

E.3.2.4 call upon the Parties to state the names of persons whom they propose to invite to attend the Hearing and, briefly, the purpose of their attendance and the approximate length of time which each of the Parties will require at the Hearing,

E.3.2.5 call upon the Mandated Group to nominate a spokesperson (who need not be a member of the Mandated Group) to act on its behalf in the questioning of witnesses and in the general presentation of the case and indicate the name and status of such person,

E.3.2.6 call upon the Minister to state whether s/he wishes to have a person present with him/her at the Hearing pursuant to Paragraph E.10.1 and, if so, call upon the Minister to indicate the name and status of such person and whether s/he will be present to give the Minister support and advice under Paragraph E.10.1.1 or to present the Minister's case under Paragraph E.10.1.2.

E.4 E.4.1 Within 14 days of the service of the Notice under Paragraph E.3, the Parties shall comply with Paragraphs E.3.2.3 and E.3.2.4 by serving on the Secretary of the Assembly Commission the documents, statements and information requested, whereupon the Secretary shall forthwith provide copies thereof for the Convener and the other members of the Assembly Commission.

E.4.2 As soon as possible after the expiration of such period of 14 days referred to in Paragraph E.4.1, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall provide each Party with copies of the documents, statements and information delivered by the other Party under Paragraph E.4.1.

E.4.3 The Parties shall respond to the respective invitations contained in Paragraphs E.3.2.5 and E.3.2.6 no later than 14 days prior to the date set for the Hearing and copies of each Party's response shall thereupon be sent by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission to the other Party.

E.5 E.5.1 It shall be for the Assembly Commission to decide on all procedural and evidential matters, both before and during the Hearing. It may make such directions as it deems appropriate regarding such matters and fix a time for compliance with such directions, if necessary postponing or adjourning the Hearing to enable such compliance to be made. Such matters shall include the following:

E.5.1.1 All matters relating to the form of the written material lodged by the Parties in accordance with Paragraph E.4.1 and the extent to which the same may be later amended or supplemented, and to which further written material may be introduced and disclosed and

E.5.1.2 The extent to which written statements, videos and other recordings and transcripts shall in exceptional circumstances be admitted as evidence at the Hearing.

E.5.2.1 Having notified the Parties prior to the Hearing, the Assembly Commission may invite any person with expert or specialist knowledge in any particular field to attend the Hearing with a view to that person giving evidence at the Hearing and may issue such requests and directions in that connection as it considers appropriate.

E.5.2.2 The legal advisers to The United Reformed Church shall be available for the purpose of advising the Assembly Commission on matters relating to procedure, evidence and interpretation at any point in the Section O Process.

E.6 E.6.1 Either Party may at any time request an advancement or postponement or adjournment of the Hearing, setting out his/her/its reasons for such request.

E.6.2 The Assembly Commission may at any time advance, postpone or adjourn the Hearing as it considers it appropriate, whether of its own accord or at the request of either Party, but always having regard to the need to conclude the Section O Process as expeditiously as possible. Notice of the amended hearing date, time and place shall be served on the Parties by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission.

E.6.3 Any advancement of the hearing date shall normally require the consent of both Parties.

E.7 E.7.1 Where (i) the Minister is the subject of a criminal charge for an alleged offence falling into any of the categories set out in Paragraph E.7.2 below relevant to the subject matter of the Section O Process or (ii) information has been laid before the Police which may result in such relevant criminal charge being brought against him/her, in either such event the Assembly Commission shall (unless the circumstances of Paragraph E.9.1 apply) postpone or adjourn its own proceedings pending the verdict of the criminal courts (whether or not on appeal) on the charges brought against the Minister (as to which see Paragraph E.7.7) or the withdrawal of the charge (in relation to alternative (i) above) or the notification that no charge is to be brought (in relation to alternative (ii) above).

E.7.2 The categories of criminal offence relevant to adjournment under Paragraph E.7.1 are:

E.7.2.1 unlawful killing, or deliberate or reckless, actual or threatened, infliction of physical injury to the person or damage to the property of another,

E.7.2.2 rape, sexual abuse or any other offence of a sexual nature,

E.7.2.3 criminal offences relating to stalking and/or sexual harassment,

E.7.2.4 fraud, blackmail, theft or burglary.

E.7.3 If the case falls within this Paragraph E.7, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall, as soon as practicable after the appointment of the Assembly Commission, notify the Parties of the compulsory adjournment of the case.

E.7.4 It shall be the responsibility of the Mandated Group to procure a duly certified Court record or memorandum of the decision of the criminal or civil court in connection with any such case and to lodge it with the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, whereupon the Section O Process shall be re-activated and the case brought to a Hearing as soon as possible, unless the Minister shall have lodged with the Secretary of the Assembly Commission within twenty-eight days of the passing of the sentence in the criminal case, written evidence that s/he has lodged an appeal against the verdict of the criminal court on the charges brought against the Minister (as to which see Paragraph E.7.7).

E.7.5 In the event of the Minister being convicted of any criminal offence, whether or not within the categories listed in Paragraph E.7.2, the Assembly Commission shall for the purposes of the Section O Process regard the commission of such offence(s) as proved.

E.7.6 If the Minister has given to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission the written evidence of appeal in the criminal case referred to in Paragraph E.7.4, it shall be his/her responsibility to notify the Secretary of the Assembly Commission of the outcome of his/her appeal in the criminal case as soon as s/he becomes aware of it and to supply to the said Secretary a duly certified court record or memorandum of the decision on the said appeal, whereupon the Section O Process shall be reactivated and the case brought to a hearing as soon as possible. Meanwhile the Minister shall respond promptly to any requests for information from the Secretary of the Assembly Commission as to the progress of the appeal in the criminal case. If the Minister fails to comply with the provisions of this Paragraph, the said Secretary may him/herself seek and obtain the required information as to the progress and outcome of the appeal in the criminal case.

E.7.7 The purpose of this Paragraph is to make clear that the compulsory adjournment of a Section O case in circumstances falling within Paragraph E.7.1 ceases immediately the criminal court has reached a verdict (whether or not on appeal) as to whether the Minister is guilty of the offence(s) with which s/he has been charged and will not continue during any extended period in a criminal case where the court, having reached its verdict, has deferred sentencing to a future date or where the Minister is appealing against the sentence only and not against the guilty verdict itself.

E.8 Any of the following may be taken into account by the Assembly Commission in reaching its decision under Paragraph F.2 that is to say:

E.8.1 Any obstruction or unreasonable delay on the part of either of the Parties in complying with the procedural steps prior to the Hearing and/or

E.8.2 The failure by the Minister to attend at the Hearing without satisfactory explanation and/or

E.8.3 Any obstruction caused by either of the Parties to the Assembly Commission in the conduct of the Hearing itself and/or

E.8.4 Any conduct on the part of the Minister during his/her Suspension under the Section O Process which breaches or contravenes Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and/or

E.8.5 Any failure, unnecessary delay or obstruction on the part of the Minister in complying with the requirements of Paragraph E.7.6.

E.9 E.9.1 The Assembly Commission has no power to accept the voluntary resignation of a Minister. A Minister may however at any time during the Section O Process and of his/her own free will make a written statement to the Assembly Commission admitting the truth of some or all of the facts or circumstances alleged, on the basis of which the Assembly Commission would consider it correct to make a decision to delete under Paragraph F.2.1 or to issue a written warning under Paragraph F.2.2. In such circumstances the Assembly Commission can, if it considers it appropriate so to do and having

informed the Minister that the consequences of such admission might be a decision to delete or to issue a written warning, convene, conduct and conclude the Hearing and on the basis of that admission reach its decision in accordance with Paragraph F.2.

E.9.2 If as a result of its investigation during the Commission Stage, the Mandated Group unanimously comes to the view that no breach of discipline on the part of the Minister has occurred or at least that no breach can be established to the standard of proof required, it may give written notice to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission before the Hearing date that as a consequence it does not intend to press the case against the Minister. Thereupon the members of the Assembly Commission shall consult together to decide whether they still require the Parties to attend a formal Hearing before them or whether in the circumstances their attendance can be dispensed with. If they elect for the former, the Hearing will take place as planned. If they elect for the latter, they may in consultation together dispense with the formal Hearing and come to the decision to allow the name of the Minister to remain on the Roll of Ministers under Paragraph F.2.1. If this procedure is adopted, the said consultation shall constitute the Hearing and its decision shall be effective for all purposes as though a formal Hearing had taken place.

E.9.3 Paragraph E.9.2 shall not apply where the Mandated Group, whilst not pressing the case for Deletion, requests the Assembly Commission to issue a written warning under Paragraph F.2.2. In such a case a formal Hearing shall take place.

E.10 E.10.1 The Minister may invite one person to accompany him/her at the Hearing ('the accompanying person') in which case either of the following shall apply:

E.10.1.1 If the Minister elects to present his/her response, the accompanying person may give him/her support and advice but shall not address the Assembly Commission nor question the Minister or any of the witnesses nor present the Minister's response nor take any active part in the Hearing.

E.10.1.2 If the Minister elects to invite the accompanying person to present the Minister's response, the Minister will not be permitted in the interests of the good ordering of the procedures at the Hearing to question the witnesses nor present the response himself/herself.

E.10.2 Neither the spokesperson nominated by the Mandated Group in accordance with Paragraph E.3.2.5 nor the Minister's accompanying person invited to present his/her response under Paragraph E.10.1.2 shall be permitted to give evidence in the case or personal testimony as to the Minister's character, either by written statement or orally at the Hearing. Where the Minister has invited a person to be present at the Hearing to give support and advice only under Paragraph E.10.1.1, the Assembly Commission may, in its absolute discretion if it sees fit, consider a written statement received from such person prior to the Hearing strictly limited to personal testimony as to the character of the Minister, but shall not permit him/her to give evidence in the case or oral testimony as to character at the Hearing.

E.11 All members of the Assembly Commission or, if Paragraph C.7 shall apply, those persons, not fewer than three, who are acting as the Assembly Commission shall attend the Hearing, which may only proceed provided that the Assembly Commission remains quorate throughout the Hearing. No member of the Assembly Commission who does not attend the whole of the Hearing shall play any part in the making of the decision reached under Paragraph F.2.

E.12 E.12.1 The Hearing must be conducted in private and only the following persons shall be permitted to attend:

The Members of the Assembly Commission

The Secretary of the Assembly Commission or a duly appointed Deputy (see Paragraphs A.8 and E.12.3)

The Minister

The accompanying person defined in Paragraph E.10.1

The members of the Mandated Group

The Spokesperson for the Mandated Group (if not already a member of the Mandated Group)

Any witnesses (but only while giving evidence, unless the Assembly Commission otherwise directs)

A representative of the Church's legal advisers (see Paragraph E.14.3)

Any persons responsible for operating the recording equipment or otherwise preparing the verbatim record of the proceedings referred to in Paragraph E.12.4

Any other person by the direction of the Assembly Commission and with prior notification to the Parties.

E.12.2 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall (unless excluded for reasons specified in Paragraph C.3.1) attend the Hearing for the purpose of giving such procedural advice to the Assembly

Commission as may be appropriate and of ensuring compliance with Paragraph E.12.4. S/he shall not be present when the Assembly Commission deliberates and decides on the case.

E.12.3 In the event that the Secretary of the Assembly Commission cannot for any reason be present at the Hearing, the Assembly Commission shall itself appoint such person as it considers appropriate to deputise for him/her for that purpose, ascertaining beforehand that such person is not excluded for reasons specified in Paragraph C.3.1. Such person shall carry out the duties set out in Paragraph E.12.2 but shall not be present when the Assembly Commission deliberates and decides on the case.

E.12.4 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission or his/her deputy shall prepare a summary minute of the proceedings at the Hearing (the Secretary's minute). Where possible, a verbatim record of the proceedings shall also be made by electronic recording or by such other means as shall be directed by the Convener of the Assembly Commission. The Record of the Hearing shall consist of the Secretary's minute together with any such verbatim record, which shall be transcribed in the event of an appeal.

E.13 E.13.1 The conduct of the Hearing is in the hands of the Assembly Commission and, subject to the Assembly Commission's overriding discretion, the order of procedure shall be as follows:

E.13.2 The Mandated Group through its spokesperson shall be given the opportunity to make an opening submission and then to present its evidence and question its witnesses. Persons called to give evidence by the Mandated Group are open to questioning by the Minister or his/her spokesperson as the case may be.

E.13.3 If the Minister is presenting his/her own case, s/he shall then be given the opportunity to present his/her evidence in person, following which s/he is then open to questioning by the spokesperson for the Mandated Group.

E.13.4 If a spokesperson is appearing for the Minister, that spokesperson shall be given the opportunity of questioning the Minister, who shall then be open to questioning by the spokesperson for the Mandated Group.

E.13.5 The Minister may if s/he wishes remain silent and furthermore cannot be compelled to attend the Hearing of the Assembly Commission and it is a matter for the Assembly Commission in considering its decision as to what weight should be attached to the Minister's silence or non-attendance.

E.13.6 The Minister or his/her spokesperson shall then have the opportunity of questioning any further witnesses whom s/he wishes to call and when each one has given his/her evidence that witness shall then be open to questioning by the spokesperson for the Mandated Group.

E.14 E.14.1 The members of the Assembly Commission shall be entitled to ask questions and also to interject during the examination of witnesses if they consider the questioning to be oppressive or immaterial to the matter in hand or if for any other reason they consider it appropriate so to do.

E.14.2 Persons who have already been questioned may be asked to answer further questions later in the Hearing if it appears to the Assembly Commission that this would be helpful and appropriate in the circumstances.

E.14.3 A representative of the Church's legal advisers shall normally be present at the Hearing (unless his/her attendance has been expressly dispensed with by the Assembly Commission) in order to advise and address the Assembly Commission on matters of procedure, evidence and interpretation, but s/he shall not take any part in the decision reached by the Assembly Commission, nor shall s/he be present when the Assembly Commission deliberates and decides upon the case.

E.15 At the Hearing the Parties shall be allowed to question any such person as attends the Hearing under Paragraph E.5.2.1 and to comment on any evidence, information, opinion or advice offered by him/her.

E.16 E.16.1 E.16.1.1 In all cases the burden of proving the case against the Minister shall fall upon the Mandated Group.

E.16.1.2 In considering the evidence before it, the Assembly Commission shall apply the civil standard of proof, which requires that decisions on disputed allegations shall be reached on the balance of probability.

E.16.2 During the Commission Stage of any case brought against a Minister, the Assembly Commission cannot take cognisance of any matter which has already been part of the body of evidence laid before any Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission during the Commission Stage of any previous case brought against that Minister unless (i) the decision reached in the previous case (whether or not on appeal) fell within Paragraph F.2.2 and (ii) such matter in the opinion of the current Assembly Commission falls within the scope of the conduct, statement, act or omission in respect of which the written warning referred to in that Paragraph was issued. The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall have authority to inspect the papers of that earlier case for the sole purpose of ensuring compliance with this Paragraph.

E.16.3 The Assembly Commission may at its discretion have regard to information concerning any matter which, although not referred to specifically in the Referral Notice (including any such arising during the Commission Stage), is in its opinion germane to the issue(s) specified in the Referral Notice provided that (i) it believes it right and proper to do so and (ii) it affords to each of the Parties a proper opportunity of considering and refuting or challenging any such information.

E.17 No person appearing in any capacity before the Assembly Commission at the Hearing (as distinct from those serving the Assembly Commission in compliance with Paragraph E.12.4) shall make any record of any part of the proceedings at the Hearing by means of any tape recording system or other mechanical or electronic recording device or system.

E.18 When the process of presenting and examining the evidence at the Hearing has been concluded, the spokesperson for the Mandated Group and the Minister or the accompanying person as appropriate (in that order) shall be given the opportunity to address the Assembly Commission, following which the Convener of the Assembly Commission shall announce to the Parties that the members of the Assembly Commission would at that point retire to consider their decision which would not be announced that day but would be notified to the Parties in accordance with Paragraph F.3. The Hearing is thus concluded.

F. THE DECISION of the ASSEMBLY COMMISSION

F.1 F.1.1 Following the conclusion of the Hearing, the Assembly Commission shall, all meeting together but in the absence of the Parties, consider the evidence presented to it, in order first to determine whether the allegations (or any of them) made against the Minister have been proved to its satisfaction and, if so, whether they are sufficiently serious as to amount to a breach of discipline by the Minister in the light of Paragraph 3 of Part I.

F.1.2 If the Assembly Commission concludes that a breach of discipline has so arisen, it must then consider whether it should direct the name of the Minister to be deleted from the Roll or whether in the circumstances the issue of a written warning would be sufficient. In this context the Assembly Commission may take into account, in addition to the seriousness of the allegations, such factors as the degree of remorse shown by the Minister and his/her preparedness to change or to undergo counselling or training.

F.2.1 Having completed the process set out in Paragraph F.1, the Assembly Commission shall reach its decision (either unanimously or by majority vote) which shall be either to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers or to allow his/her name to remain on the Roll of Ministers.

F.2.2 If the Assembly Commission considers that there has been some conduct, statement, act or omission on the part of the Minister which, although not sufficiently serious to justify deletion, is nevertheless of sufficient concern to justify lesser disciplinary action against the Minister it may, whilst allowing the name of the Minister to remain on the Roll and as part of its decision, issue a written warning to the Minister that any continuance or repetition of any of the disciplinary matters complained of might be considered a cause for deletion by a future Assembly Commission.

F.2.3 If the decision is that the name of the Minister shall remain on the Roll of Ministers, whether or not it also decides to issue a written warning, the Assembly Commission may in its written statement (see Paragraph F.3.3) append such recommendations to its decision as it considers will be helpful to moderators of synod, district councils, local churches, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries and others within the Church and also to any relevant Outside Organisation. It is emphasised that any such recommendations must relate to the future ministry of the Minister only and that they are of an advisory nature and do not form part of the decision.

F.2.4 If the decision is to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers, the Assembly Commission is particularly requested to include appropriate guidance concerning any restrictions which it considers ought to be placed upon any activities involving the Minister after his/her deletion with the object of assisting moderators of synod, district councils, local churches, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries and others within the Church and also any

relevant Outside Organisation. It is emphasised that any such guidance is of an advisory nature and does not form part of the decision.

F.3 In recording its decision the Assembly Commission shall comply with the following:

F.3.1 It shall state whether its decision is unanimous or by a majority.

F.3.2 It shall set out any written warning issued to the Minister under Paragraph F.2.2.

F.3.3 It shall append a written statement of its reasons for reaching its decision, but shall not be obliged (unless it wishes to do so) to comment in detail on all or any of the matters of evidence laid before it.

F.4 The decision so taken shall conclude the involvement of the Assembly Commission in the Section O Process, except as to the discharge of its responsibilities under Paragraph J.2, and shall have the effect provided for in Paragraph F.7.

F.5 F.5.1 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall within 10 days of the date of the decision serve on the Minister and the Mandated Group notice of the decision and of the written Statement of Reasons given under Paragraph F.3.3. Such notice shall draw the attention of the Minister and the Mandated Group to the strict time limit for serving Notice of Appeal under Paragraph G.1.1.

F.5.2 If Paragraph F.2.2 applies, s/he shall at the same time (i) serve on the Minister any written warning referred to in that Paragraph, (ii) send a copy thereof to the Mandated Group and (iii) send to the Minister and the Mandated Group copies of any recommendations or guidance appended to the decision of the Assembly Commission under Paragraph F.2.3 or Paragraph F.2.4.

F.6 F.6.1 At the same time as s/he serves on the Minister and the Mandated Group the documents referred to in Paragraphs F.5.1 and F.5.2, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall send to the General Secretary, the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Secretary for Ministries and, in a case arising under Paragraph B.9.3, the Deputy General Secretary a Notice to the effect that a decision has been reached by the Assembly Commission, simply stating whether the decision of the Assembly Commission has been to delete or to retain the name of the Minister on the Roll of Ministers, and, if the latter, whether or not a decision to issue a written warning was also made. Such notice shall not contain any further information other than that the decision is still subject to the possibility of an appeal being lodged and that a further Notice will be sent under Paragraph F.6.3 (if there is no Appeal) or under Paragraph G.1.2.1 or Paragraph G.1.2.2 (if there is an Appeal).

F.6.2 If an appeal is lodged by either Party, the procedure contained in Section G shall apply.

F.6.3 If within the time specified in Paragraph G.1.1 no appeal is lodged by either Party, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall within 10 days of the expiration of such period (or within 10 days of the decision itself if the first proviso to Paragraph F.7.2 applies or immediately upon receipt by him/her of irrevocable notices from both parties of the waiver of their rights of appeal if the second proviso to Paragraph F.7.2 applies) send to the Minister and the Mandated Group and the persons referred to in Paragraph F.6.1 notice of that fact and of the consequent termination of the Minister's Suspension in accordance with Paragraph F.7.1 or F.7.2 whichever is applicable and at the same time shall send to those persons (with the exception of the Secretary of the District Council and the Secretary for Ministries on the grounds of confidentiality) copies of the Statement of Reasons sent to the Minister and the Mandated Group in accordance with Paragraph F.5.1. At the same time the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall send to all those persons, including the Secretary of the District Council and the Secretary for Ministries, copies of the documents sent in accordance with Paragraph F.5.2. The Mandated Group shall thereupon comply with Paragraph H.4.

F.6.4 At the time of compliance with Paragraph F.6.3, the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall also send to the responsible officer of any relevant Outside Organisation notice of the decision of the Assembly Commission, including, in the event of a decision not to delete, the date of cessation of the Minister's Suspension, together with details of any recommendations or guidance issued by the Assembly Commission as appended to its decision which it expressly states to be its wish to pass on to such Outside Organisation.

F.7 F.7.1 In the event of the Assembly Commission deciding to delete and there being no appeal against that decision under Paragraph 4.1 of Part I within the period allowed under Paragraph G.1, the Suspension shall continue up to the first day after the expiration of such period, on which day

the deletion shall automatically take effect. The Section O case shall be regarded as concluded on such day.

F.7.2 In the event of the Assembly Commission deciding not to delete and there being no appeal against that decision under Paragraph 4.2 of Part I within the period allowed under Paragraph G.1, the Suspension shall automatically cease on the first day after the expiration of such period and the Section O case shall be regarded as concluded on that date, provided that (i) where the Mandated Group has formally signified to the Assembly Commission under Paragraph E.9.2 that it does not intend to press the case for any disciplinary action to be taken against the Minister and 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 and in that case the Section O case shall be regarded as concluded on the date on which the Assembly Commission formally notifies its decision to the Parties under Paragraph F.5 or (ii) where the decision is to allow the Minister's name to remain on the Roll of Ministers and no written warning is issued and where both parties within the time allowed for an appeal to be lodged state in writing and irrevocably that they waive their rights of appeal, the Minister's Suspension shall cease and the Section O case shall be concluded, both events taking place on the date on which the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall have received such statements from both parties (as to the notification of the cessation of the Suspension, see Paragraphs F.6.3 and F.6.4).

G. APPEALS PROCEDURE

G.1 G.1.1 Any Notice of Appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission given under Paragraph 4 of Part I must be served on the Secretary of the Assembly Commission no later than 21 days from the date of service of the decision of the Assembly Commission on the appellant and for this purpose time shall be of the essence, and such Notice shall state the grounds of the appeal (which may be in detail or in summary form as the appellant chooses).

G.1.2 G.1.2.1 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall forthwith notify the General Secretary that an Appeal has been lodged, at the same time passing on to the General Secretary the Notice of Appeal together with the body of papers laid before the Assembly Commission in hearing the case and the Record of the Hearing as defined in Paragraph E.12.4. The General Secretary shall thereupon act in a secretarial and administrative capacity in all matters relating to the Appeal.

G.1.2.2 At the same time the Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall also notify the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Secretary for Ministries and, in a case arising under Paragraph B.9.3, the Deputy General Secretary that an Appeal has been lodged against the decision of the Assembly Commission.

G.1.3 Except for those Rules which by their context are inappropriate for the Appeals Procedure, the Rules set out in Section E shall also apply to Section G (with the necessary changes).

G.2 On receipt of the Notice of Appeal served under Paragraph G.1, the General Secretary shall as soon as possible take the following steps:

G.2.1 Acknowledge receipt of the Notice of Appeal, send to the Appellant a copy of the Record of the Hearing (see Paragraph E.12.4) and follow the procedure set out in either Paragraph G.2.2 or Paragraph G.2.3.

G.2.2 (If the Appeal is brought by the Minister under Paragraph 4.1 of Part I) serve Notice of the receipt of the Appeal on the Mandated Group, attaching to such Notice a copy of the Notice of Appeal served under Paragraph G.1.1 and of any accompanying statement of reasons and a copy of the Record of the Hearing (see Paragraph E.12.4) and call upon the Mandated Group to submit within 21 days from the date of service of the Notice under this Paragraph a counter-statement containing any comments which the Mandated Group wishes to make in connection with the Appeal or

G.2.3 (If the Appeal is brought by the Mandated Group under Paragraph 4.2 of Part I) serve Notice of the receipt of the Appeal on the Minister, attaching to such Notice a copy of the Notice of Appeal served under Paragraph G.1.1 and of any accompanying statement of reasons and a copy of the Record of the Hearing (see Paragraph E.12.4) and call upon the Minister to submit within 21 days from the date of service of the Notice under this Paragraph a counter-statement containing any comments which the Minister wishes to make in connection with the Appeal.

G.3 G.3.1 The Officers of the General Assembly shall within 14 days of receipt by the General Secretary of the Notice of Appeal under Paragraph G.1.1 of these Rules (or within such further time as they shall reasonably require) appoint the Appeals Commission in accordance with Paragraph G.3.2 and Paragraphs G.4 to G.7.

G.3.2 The Appeals Commission for the hearing of each such appeal shall consist of the following five persons:

G.3.2.1 A Convener who shall be a member of the United Reformed Church (but not necessarily a member of the General Assembly) with legal and/or tribunal experience to be selected by the officers of the General Assembly and

G.3.2.2 The Moderator of the General Assembly or if for any reason he/she should be unable to serve, a former Moderator of the General Assembly to be selected by the officers of the General Assembly and

G.3.2.3 Three other members of the General Assembly to be selected by the officers of the General Assembly.

G.3.3 The relevant date for ascertaining whether persons qualify for appointment under Paragraph G.3.2 is the date on which under the Rules of Procedure the Secretary of the Assembly Commission notifies the General Secretary that an appeal has been lodged against the decision of the Assembly Commission.

G.3.4 In selecting persons for appointment to the Appeals Commission in accordance with Paragraph G.3.2, the officers of the General Assembly shall, so far as possible, apply the same criteria as are set out in Paragraphs A.6.1 and C.2.4 in relation to appointments to the Commission Panel and to Assembly Commissions.

G.3.5 All persons proposed for appointment to an Appeals Commission, in any capacity, are subject to Paragraph C.3.1.

G.4 G.4.1 The General Secretary shall send to each of the proposed appointees for the Appeals Commission an invitation to serve on the Appeals Commission for the hearing of the Appeal in that case, naming the Minister concerned but supplying no further information about the case.

G.4.2 The Notice of Invitation to serve shall draw the attention of each proposed appointee to Paragraph C.3.1 and shall request confirmation that s/he is willing to accept appointment and that s/he is unaware of any circumstances which in the present case might prevent him/her from serving on the Appeals Commission.

G.4.3 The Invitee shall within 7 days of receipt of the Notice of Invitation serve on the General Secretary a Notice indicating whether s/he is able and willing to accept appointment and, if so, confirming compliance with Paragraph C.3.1.

G.5 G.5.1 The General Secretary shall serve notice on the Parties, setting out the name and office or credentials of each proposed appointee, drawing attention to Paragraphs C.3.1 and C.3.2 and requiring notice of objection to any of the proposed appointees under Paragraph C.3.2 to be served upon the General Secretary within 14 days of the service of the notice given under this Paragraph.

G.5.2 Any such Notice of Objection must state the grounds of such objection.

G.5.3 To ensure that the appeals process is moved along in a timely manner, any Notice of Objection received outside the period allowed will not normally be considered unless very good reason can be shown for its late delivery.

G.5.4 The Officers of the General Assembly shall consider every objection properly notified and shall decide whether to uphold or to reject the objection.

G.5.5 If they reject the objection, the General Secretary shall serve notice thereof on the objector.

G.5.6 If they uphold the objection, the General Secretary shall serve notice thereof on the objector, the person to whom the objection was taken and the other Party on whom the Notice specified in Paragraph G.5.1 was served.

G.5.7 In the event of any objection being upheld, the procedure outlined in Paragraphs G.4 and G.5 of these Rules shall be repeated to complete the appointment of the Appeals Commission and to give notice to the Parties of the person appointed.

G.6 The Convener of the Appeals Commission shall not have a casting vote, unless the Appeals Commission shall, in circumstances arising under Paragraph G.7.1, consist of an even number of members.

G.7 G.7.1 In the event that any member of the Appeals Commission shall be unable to carry out his/her duties on the Appeals Commission, the remaining members shall continue to act as the Appeals Commission, subject to there being a minimum of three members.

G.7.2 In the event that for the reasons stated in Paragraph G.7.1 the Appeals Commission shall consist of fewer than three members at any time after the Appeals Commission has taken any steps in connection with the Appeal, the Appeals Commission so appointed shall stand down and be discharged and a new Appeals Commission shall be appointed in accordance with Paragraphs G.3 to G.7 to hear the Appeal.

G.7.3 Once the Appeals Commission has been validly constituted and has taken any steps in accordance with this Section G, no person shall be subsequently appointed to serve on that Appeals Commission.

G.7.4 If the Moderator of the General Assembly is unable to serve, the remaining members shall, following consultation with the Officers of the General Assembly, appoint a former Moderator of the General Assembly to be the Convener of the Appeals Commission in his/her place.

G.7.5 Notwithstanding that, during the conduct of the appeal, a new person may assume the office of Moderator of the General Assembly, the person previously holding such office shall continue to serve as a member of the Appeals Commission to the exclusion of his/her successor in that office.

G.8 Each member of the Appeals Commission when appointed shall receive from the General Secretary copies of the following:

G.8.1 Notice of the Assembly Commission's decision.

G.8.2 Any statement of reasons given by the Assembly Commission.

G.8.3 Any written warning issued.

G.8.4 Any recommendations or guidance appended to the decision in accordance with Paragraph F.2.3 or Paragraph F.2.4 as the case may be.

G.8.5 The Notice of Appeal, containing the grounds for the appeal.

G.8.6 Any counter-statement received under Paragraph G.2.2 or Paragraph G.2.3.

G.8.7 The body of papers laid before the Assembly Commission in hearing the case.

G.8.8 The Record of the Hearing. (See Paragraph E.12.4)

G.9 The Appeals Commission when constituted shall consider the following matters:

G.9.1 Whether there is or may be new information which has come to light and which could not reasonably have been available to the Assembly Commission before its decision was taken under Paragraph F.2.

G.9.2 Whether any such new information would in its opinion have been material in that, had it been tested and proved to the satisfaction of the Assembly Commission, it might have caused it to reach a different decision.

G.9.3 Whether there may have been some procedural irregularity or breach of the rules of natural justice or serious misunderstanding by the Assembly Commission of the information before it or of any aspect of the Section O Process itself.

G.10 G.10.1 Before reaching its decision on the Appeal, the Appeals Commission shall constitute a Hearing at which the Parties shall attend before the Appeals Commission.

G.10.2 The General Secretary shall consult with the Convener and the other members of the Appeals Commission and, where possible, with the Parties as to a suitable venue, date and time for the Hearing

and, having so consulted, shall decide thereupon and shall forthwith send a notice to the Parties informing them of the arrangements for the Hearing.

G.10.3 At the Hearing of the Appeal, there shall be no further investigation or re-hearing of the evidence nor any further evidence introduced, except for the purpose of considering whether there are sufficient grounds for referring the case for re-hearing in accordance with Paragraph G.11.7.

G.10.4 The General Secretary shall (unless excluded for the reasons specified in Paragraph C.3.1) attend the Hearing for the purpose of giving such procedural advice to the Appeals Commission as may be appropriate and of keeping a formal record of the Hearing. S/he shall not be present when the Appeals Commission deliberates and decides on the case.

G.10.5 If the General Secretary cannot for any reason be present at the Hearing, the Appeals Commission shall itself appoint such person as it considers appropriate to deputise for him/her for that purpose, ascertaining beforehand that such person is not excluded for reasons specified in Paragraph C.3.1. Such person will carry out the duties set out in Paragraph G.10.4 but shall not be present when the Appeals Commission deliberates and decides on the case.

G.10.6 The General Secretary or his/her deputy appointed under Paragraph G.10.5 shall prepare a summary minute of the proceedings at the Hearing (the Secretary's minute). Where possible, a verbatim record of the proceedings shall also be made by electronic recording or by such other means as shall be directed by the Convener of the Appeals Commission. The Record of the Hearing shall consist of the Secretary's minute together with any such verbatim record.

G.10.7 A representative of the Church's legal advisers shall normally be present at the Hearing in order to advise and address the Appeals Commission on matters relating to procedure, evidence and interpretation and issues arising under Paragraph G.10.3, but s/he shall not take any part in the decision reached by the Appeals Commission, nor shall s/he be present when the Appeals Commission deliberates and decides upon the case.

G.10.8 The conduct of the Hearing of the Appeal is in the hands of the Appeals Commission whose Convener will at the outset of the Hearing read out the decision of the Assembly Commission.

G.10.9 The Convener will then invite the Parties (commencing with the appellant) to make oral representations to the Appeals Commission on the subject matter of the Appeal.

G.10.10 The Hearing will then be concluded.

G.11 The Appeals Commission shall at the conclusion of the Hearing and all together but in the absence of the Parties and of the General Secretary and of the legal adviser consider and arrive at any of the following decisions (which may be taken unanimously or by a majority vote) always having in mind Paragraph 3 of Part I:

G.11.1 It may uphold the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete or

G.11.2 It may uphold in its entirety the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete (whether or not this also includes a decision to issue a written warning to the Minister under Paragraph F.2.2) or

G.11.3 It may uphold the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete, but in addition may issue a written warning to the Minister in the terms of Paragraph F.2.2 if the Assembly Commission has not itself already done so or

G.11.4 If the Assembly Commission has decided not to delete but has issued a written warning to the Minister under Paragraph F.2.2 the Appeals Commission may uphold the decision not to delete but may direct that the written warning be withdrawn or

G.11.5 It may reverse the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete or

G.11.6 It may reverse the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete, but may if it considers it appropriate issue a written warning to the Minister in the terms of Paragraph F.2.2 or

G.11.7 It may refer the case for re-hearing by another duly constituted Assembly Commission (but only if it considers that there has been some procedural irregularity or serious misunderstanding by the Assembly Commission of the information before it or of any aspect of the Section O Process itself or if material new information becomes available which could not reasonably have been produced before the Assembly Commission).

G.12 There shall be no appeal from the decision of the Appeals Commission and (unless Paragraph G.11.7 applies) the decision of the Appeals Commission shall bring the Minister's Suspension to an end.

G.13 In recording its decision the Appeals Commission shall comply with the following:

G.13.1 It shall state whether its decision is unanimous or by a majority.

G.13.2 It shall set out any written warning issued to the Minister under Paragraph G.11.2, G.11.3 or G.11.6.

G.13.3 It shall append a written statement of its reasons for reaching its decision, but shall not be obliged (unless it wishes to do so) to comment in detail on all or any of the matters of evidence laid before it.

G.13.4 If the decision is that the name of the Minister shall remain on the Roll of Ministers, whether or not it also decides to issue a written warning, the Appeals Commission may in its written statement (see Paragraph G.13.3) append such recommendations to its decision as it considers will be helpful to moderators of synod, district councils, local churches, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries and others within the Church and also to any relevant Outside Organisation. It is emphasised that any such recommendations must relate to the future ministry of the Minister and that they will be advisory only and are not part of the decision.

G.13.5 If the decision is to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers, the Appeals Commission is particularly requested to include in its written statement (see Paragraph F.3.3) appropriate guidance concerning any restrictions which it considers ought to be placed upon any activities involving the Minister after his/her deletion with the object of assisting moderators of synod, district councils, local churches, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries and others within the Church and also any relevant Outside Organisation. It is emphasised that any such guidance is of an advisory nature and does not form part of the decision.

G.13.6 In addition to its power to make recommendations or to offer guidance under Paragraph G.13.4 or Paragraph G.13.5 respectively, the Appeals Commission may if it sees fit endorse, overrule, vary or modify in any way any recommendation made or guidance offered by the Assembly Commission in the case in question. For the avoidance of duplication, the Decision Record shall in every case set out in full any recommendations or guidance issued by the Appeals Commission, even where they simply endorse those issued by the Assembly Commission in their entirety.

G.14 As regards the notification of the decision, the General Secretary shall comply with the following:

G.14.1 S/he shall within 10 days of the date of the decision serve on the Minister and the Mandated Group notice of the decision and of the written Statement of Reasons given under Paragraph G.13 and such Notice shall (unless Paragraph G.11.7 applies) state that the Minister's Suspension ceased on the date of the Appeals Commission's decision.

G.14.2 If the decision is taken in accordance with either Paragraph G.11.3 or Paragraph G.11.6, the General Secretary shall at the same time serve on the Minister the written warning referred to in those Paragraphs and shall send a copy thereof to the Mandated Group.

G.14.3 If the decision is taken in accordance with Paragraph G.11.4, the General Secretary shall at the same time serve on the Minister and on the Mandated Group notice that the written warning issued following the decision of the Assembly Commission is withdrawn.

G.14.4 S/he shall at the same time send to the Minister and the Mandated Group copies of any recommendations or guidance appended to the decision of the Appeals Commission under Paragraph G.13.4 or Paragraph G.13.5 as the case may be.

G.14.5 S/he shall at the same time send to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Secretary for Ministries and the Deputy General Secretary copies of the documents served on the Minister and the Mandated Group under Paragraphs G.14.1 to G.14.4 and, unless Paragraph G.15 applies, the Mandated Group shall thereupon comply with Paragraph H.4.

G.14.6 At the time of compliance with Paragraph G.14.5, the General Secretary shall also send to the responsible officer of any relevant Outside Organisation notice of the decision of the Appeals Commission, including, in the event of a decision not to delete, the date of cessation of the Minister's

Suspension, together with details of any recommendations or guidance issued by the Appeals Commission as appended to its decision which it wishes to pass on to such Outside Organisation.

G.15 If the decision is taken in accordance with Paragraph G.11.7, the Notice served by the General Secretary under Paragraph G.14.1 shall constitute a Notice of Reference Back. The Assembly Commission appointed for the re-hearing of the case shall not be given any information relating to the conduct of the previous Hearing but may have sight of the documents, statements and information delivered to the Assembly Commission under the provisions contained in Section E.

G.16 The decision so taken shall conclude the involvement of the Appeals Commission in the Section O Process, except as to the discharge of its responsibilities under Paragraph J.2, and shall have the effect provided for in Paragraph F.7.3.

G.17 The attention of the Mandated Group is particularly drawn to Paragraph H.4

H FORMS, SERVICE OF DOCUMENTS and MISCELLANEOUS MATTERS

H.1 Model forms of Notice have been prepared to assist those concerned with the Section O Process. The forms of Notice may be amended from time to time and new forms introduced. Use of the model forms is not compulsory and minor variations in the wording will not invalidate the Notice being given, but it is strongly recommended that the model forms be used and followed as closely as possible to avoid confusion and to ensure that all relevant information is supplied at the proper time.

H.2 H.2.1 Service of any document required to be served on an individual shall be deemed to have been properly effected in any of the following ways:

H.2.1.1 By delivering the document personally to the individual to be served.

H.2.1.2 By delivering the document or sending it by first class pre-paid post or by Recorded Delivery post addressed to the last known address of the individual to be served in a sealed envelope addressed to that individual.

H.2.1.3 In such other manner as the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission (if service relates to the Appeals Procedure) may direct having regard to the circumstances.

H.2.2 Service of any document required to be served on any Mandated Group shall be deemed to have been properly effected in any of the following ways:

H.2.2.1 By delivering the document personally to that member of the Mandated Group who has been nominated in the Referral Notice to accept service or in the absence of such nomination to the person who signed the Referral Notice, provided that in either case such person is still a member of the Mandated Group when such service is required to be effected.

H.2.2.2 By delivering the document or sending it by first class pre-paid post or by Recorded Delivery post addressed to the person referred to in Paragraph H.2.2.1 at the address specified in such nomination or, in the absence of such nomination, at the address given in the Referral Notice.

H.2.2.3 In such other manner as the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission (if service relates to the Appeals Procedure) may direct having regard to the circumstances.

H.2.3 Service of any document required to be served on the Secretary of the Assembly Commission or on the General Secretary shall be deemed to have been properly served if delivered or sent by first class pre-paid post or by Recorded Delivery post addressed to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission or the General Secretary as the case may be at the address given in the current issue of the Year Book or subsequently notified or (in the absence of any such address in the Year Book) in an envelope addressed to that person at Church House, 86 Tavistock Place London WC1H 9RT and marked "Section O Process".

H.2.4 All documents required to be served shall be placed in a sealed envelope clearly addressed to the addressee and marked "Private and Confidential".

H.2.5 In the case of service of documents by first class pre-paid post, service shall be deemed to have been effected on the third day after the posting of the Notice.

H.3 Deletion as a result of the Section O Process shall have the effect of terminating any contract, written or oral, between the Minister and the United Reformed Church or any constituent part thereof in relation to his/her ministry.

H.4 Within one month of the conclusion of each case as provided in Paragraph F.7, the Mandated Group shall prepare a written report of its conduct of the case and submit it to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, who shall, in order to preserve confidentiality, remove from the report the name and address of the Minister, the name of the Minister's church(es) and any other information which might lead to the identification of any individuals involved in the case. The purpose of the report shall be to help those charged with the ongoing review of the operation of the Section O Process to monitor the performance of Mandated Groups and thus to ensure that all appropriate training and assistance is provided and the highest standards are maintained.

For the avoidance of confusion, there is no Section I, the Rules of Procedure moving directly from Section H to Section J.

J. REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY, COSTS & RETENTION OF RECORDS AND PAPERS

J.1 The General Secretary shall report to the General Assembly all decisions reached by the Assembly Commission and the Appeals Commission in the following manner:

J.1.1 If a decision of the Assembly Commission is subject to appeal, the Report shall simply state that a decision has been reached in a case which is subject to appeal and shall not name the Minister.

J.1.2 If a decision of the Assembly Commission is not subject to appeal and is to delete under Paragraph F.2.1, the Report shall so state and name the Minister.

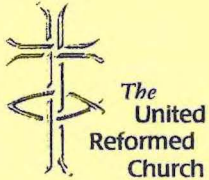
J.1.3 If a decision of the Assembly Commission is not subject to appeal and is to allow the name of the Minister to remain on the Roll of Ministers under Paragraph F.2.1 with or without the issue of a written warning under Paragraph F.2.2, the Report shall so state without naming the Minister.

J.1.4 In any case which goes before the Appeals Commission, if the decision is to delete, the Report shall accord with Paragraph J.1.2 and if the decision is to allow the name of the Minister to remain on the Roll of Ministers with or without the issue of a written warning, the Report shall accord with Paragraph J.1.3.

J.2 The cost of operating the Section O Process and the reasonable and proper expenses of persons attending a Hearing and the costs of any reports obtained by or on the authority of the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission or any other costs and expenses which the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission deem to have been reasonably and properly incurred in the course of such process (but excluding any costs of representation) shall be charged to the general funds of the Church, and the Report of each case to the General Assembly shall state the total cost incurred in that case.

J.3 The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall be responsible for the keeping of the record of decisions taken by the Assembly Commission and by the Appeals Commission, and for the custody of all papers relating to concluded cases, which shall be kept in a locked cabinet at Church House.

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MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

A9iii

Section O Advisory Group
Appendix: Text related to Resolution E

MINISTERIAL INCAPACITY PROCEDURE

PART II – not subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure
(governed by General Assembly Function 2(5)(xii)
of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)

A. GENERAL

A.1 The following is a list of definitions of terms as used in the Incapacity Procedure:-

- **“APRC”** means the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee which operates under the General Assembly of the Church
- **“Appeals Commission”** means the Commission constituted under the Disciplinary Process for the purpose of hearing and deciding each appeal dealt with under that process
- **“Appeals Review Commission”** means the Commission consisting of three person constituted for the purpose of hearing and deciding upon each appeal under Part II, Section L of the Incapacity Procedure
- **“Assembly Commission”** means the Commission constituted under the Disciplinary Process for the purpose of hearing and deciding upon each case dealt with under that process
- **“Basis of Union”** means the Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church
- **“Church”** means the United Reformed Church
- **“Commencement Notice”** means the Notice sent or delivered to the Secretary of the Review Commission in accordance with Part II, Paragraph B.3 in order to initiate the Incapacity Procedure

- **“Consultation Group”** means the group of persons required to be consulted in accordance with Part II, Paragraph B.1 as to whether the Incapacity Procedure should be initiated
- **“Decision Record”** means the record of the Decision made by the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission as the case may be in the case of any Minister under consideration within the Incapacity Procedure
- **“Disciplinary Process”** means the Process operated by the Church for the purpose of exercising ministerial discipline contained in Section O of the Church’s Manual
- **“District Council”** means that District Council which exercises oversight of the Minister in accordance with its function under Paragraph 2(3)(i) of the Structure (unless such meaning is excluded by the context) and references to District Councils 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”
- **“Enquiry”** means the enquiry carried out by the Review Commission in accordance with Part II, Section G
- **“Hearing”** means any Hearing conducted by the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission under Part II, Sections J or L
- **“Incapacity Procedure”** means the whole Procedure set out in Parts I and II hereof for dealing with cases of ministers falling within Part I, Paragraph 1 hereof
- **“Minister”** means a person whose name is on the Roll of Ministers and who is under consideration within the Incapacity Procedure
- **“Minister’s Representative”** means any person appointed to represent a Minister in accordance with Part II, Paragraph A.7
- **“Notice of Appeal”** means a Notice of Appeal lodged by or on behalf of a Minister in accordance with Part II, Paragraph L.1.1
- **“Record of the Hearing”** means the Secretary’s Minute together with any verbatim record made and transcribed in accordance with Part II, Paragraph J.9
- **“Review Commission”** means a Commission consisting of five persons selected as described in Part II, Section D for the

- purpose of hearing and deciding upon each case dealt with under the Incapacity Procedure
- **“Roll of Ministers”** has the meaning given to it in Paragraph 1 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union
- **“Secretary of the Review Commission”** means the person appointed to act as the Secretary of the Review Commission in accordance with Part II, Paragraph D.2
- **“Secretary’s Minute”** means the summary minute of the Hearing prepared by the Secretary of the Review Commission in accordance with Part II, Paragraph J.9
- **“Standing Panel”** means the panel of persons constituted in accordance with Part II, Section C who will form part of each Review Commission
- **“Statement of Reasons”** means a statement appended to the Decision Record setting out the reasons for the Decision
- **“Structure”** means the Structure of the United Reformed Church
- **“Suspension” and “to Suspend”** shall have the meanings given to them in Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union
- **“Synod”** means the Synod of which the Minister concerned is a member (unless such meaning is excluded by the context)

A.2 The Incapacity Procedure needs to move along in a timely manner so that feelings of frustration and unfairness do not arise as a result of unexplained delays and also so as to reduce the period of maximum stress for the Minister and all those involved. Yet, of equal importance, the issues have to be explored sensitively to enable wise and thoughtful decisions to be taken. Thus the Review Commission must at all times be mindful of the need to balance proper expedition on the one hand with the need to achieve natural justice both for the Minister and the whole Church and an outcome which is fair and properly considered.

A.3 Subject to the exception contained in Paragraph A.4 all statements, whether written or oral, made during and in the context of the Incapacity Procedure shall be regarded as being made in pursuance of that object and for no other reason and shall be treated as confidential within the framework of the Incapacity Procedure.

A.4 The Review Commission may, with the consent of the person or group making it, pass on any statement falling within Paragraph A.3 to any person or group within the Church, provided that the Review Commission satisfies itself that any statement so passed on will remain within the confidential forum of the recipient(s).

A.5 In any case where a person authorised or required to take some action regarding the appointment of persons to the Standing Panel or to any Review

Commission or in the initiation of the consultation specified in Paragraph B.1 or as a member of the Consultation Group or in the subsequent issue of a Commencement Notice or some other administrative or procedural matter under the Incapacity Procedure is unable for any reason to do so, then, unless the Incapacity Procedure already makes specific provision for such a situation, that person's duly appointed deputy shall take such action in his/her place. This paragraph does not permit any member of a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission to appoint his/her own deputy.

A.6 In any case where the Secretary of the Review Commission or the General Secretary in the case of appeals) is unable for any reason to carry out the duties of that office, his/her place shall be taken by a deputy duly authorised by or in the name of the General Assembly.

A.7.1 Any Minister coming within the Incapacity Procedure shall be entitled to appoint another person to act as the Minister's Representative* in receiving and responding to any forms, letters or other documents, in dealing with any other procedural matters and in attending any meeting or Hearing*, with or without the Minister.

A.7.2 In the case of any Minister who, by reason of his/her incapacity, may be incapable of understanding the implications of his/her involvement in the Incapacity Procedure or the nature and substance of the Commencement Notice*, or of dealing with any procedural issues or of taking any active part in any meetings or at any Hearings, the Review Commission, or the Appeals Review Commission, as the case may be, may, in response to an application made on the Minister's behalf, agree to the appointment of an appropriate person to act as the Minister's representative for the purposes set out in Paragraph A.7.1.

A.7.3 In the case of a Minister coming within Paragraph A.7.2 on whose behalf no such application is made under that Paragraph, the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission may invite APRC* to advise whether such an appointment would be appropriate in the Minister's best interests and, if so, to recommend a person for appointment and may thereupon appoint the person so recommended as the Minister's representative for the purposes set out in Paragraph A.7.1.

A.7.4 In the event that APRC, for whatever reason does not respond to the invitation contained in Paragraph A.7.3, the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission may, following consultation with the Moderator of the Synod*, itself appoint a person as the Minister's representative for the purposes of Paragraph A.7.1.

B. INITIATION OF THE INCAPACITY PROCEDURE

B.1. If at any time the Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary believes that a particular Minister may be incapable of exercising (or of continuing to exercise) his/her Ministry on any of the grounds specified in Paragraph 1 of Part I, s/he shall consult with the other of them and with the Convener of APRC and those persons ("the Consultation Group*") shall together consider whether the Incapacity Procedure should be initiated.

- B.2. As part of that consultation they must satisfy themselves as to the following matters:-
- B.2.1 that all reasonable steps to rehabilitate the Minister have been made; and
 - B.2.2 that the procedures for ill health retirement do not apply or that there is no reasonable prospect of their implementation or of the resignation of the Minister; and
 - B.2.3 that, if APRC has already been involved, that Committee believes that it can do no more for the Minister; and
 - B.2.4 that no case against the Minister is already in progress under the Disciplinary Process.
- B.3. If, having so consulted, the Consultation Group believes, unanimously or by a majority, that the Incapacity Procedure should be initiated, the Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary shall forthwith send or deliver to the Secretary of the Review Commission* a Commencement Notice in order to initiate the Incapacity Procedure, setting out the reasons for the issue of such notice and at the same time inform the Minister that this step has been taken.
- B.4. The Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary may, if s/he considers that there are strong and urgent reasons for so doing, and only so long as s/he forthwith invokes the consultation procedure set out in Paragraphs B.1 and B.2 above, suspend* the Minister with immediate effect, either orally or in writing. Suspension* imposed orally shall be immediately confirmed in writing to the Minister and written notice shall also be given to the Secretary of the District Council. In the event that the Consultation Group decides that a Commencement Notice should not be issued, the suspension shall immediately be terminated and written confirmation thereof sent by the Moderator of the Synod or Deputy General Secretary as the case may be to the Minister and the Secretary of the District Council.
- B.5. On the initiation of the Incapacity Procedure the Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary shall put in train appropriate procedures to ensure pastoral care for the Minister, his/her family and the local church(es) involved.
- B.6. Should the Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary receive in accordance with the provisions applicable to the Disciplinary Process a recommendation falling within Paragraph 4 of Part I, s/he shall forthwith invoke the consultation procedure set out in Paragraph B.1 and B.2 and, unless the Consultation Group consider, either unanimously or by a majority, that there are compelling reasons to the contrary, the Moderator of the Synod or the Deputy General Secretary who received the said recommendation shall forthwith initiate the Incapacity Procedure in accordance with Paragraph B.3 and shall attach to the Commencement Notice a copy of such recommendation. S/he shall send a copy of the Commencement Notice to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission* or the Appeals Commission* as the

case may be to enable that commission to make a final order declaring the proceedings under the Disciplinary Process to be concluded.

C. STANDING PANEL

- C.1 Appointment to the Standing Panel shall be by resolution of General Assembly on the advice of the Nominations Committee, who shall in considering persons for appointment select one person from each of the following categories, namely (i) a former moderator of General Assembly (who shall also have the responsibility of consulting with the officers of the General Assembly for the purposes set out in Paragraph D.4.1, (ii) a Synod Moderator or a minister in local pastoral charge, (iii) a doctor with experience of general medical practice and (iv) a person with some legal, tribunal or professional experience or other similar background (see also Paragraph D.6.1).
- C.2 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph C.3, members of the Standing Panel shall be appointed for a term not exceeding five years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit with power to the General Assembly to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms not exceeding five years each.
- C.3 When any member of the Standing Panel reaches the age of seventy, s/he must forthwith resign from the Standing Panel and shall no longer be eligible to serve on any new Review Commission, but any person who reaches his/her seventieth birthday whilst serving on a Review Commission in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.

D. REVIEW COMMISSION

- D.1 No person shall sit as a member of the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission in the hearing of any case in which s/he has any involvement whether as a member of any local Church, District Council* or Synod connected with the case or whether on account of some personal or pastoral involvement as a result of which it is considered by the officers of General Assembly or by the proposed person him/herself that it would not be appropriate for him/her to take part in the hearing of the case.
- D.2 A Secretary shall be appointed by resolution of General Assembly, on the advice of the Nominations Committee, to be responsible for all secretarial and procedural matters laid upon him/her by the Incapacity Procedure, including the servicing of the Review Commission, and the period and terms of office shall be such as General Assembly shall decide.
- D.3 On receipt of a Commencement Notice, the Secretary shall forthwith take the following steps (marking every envelope containing papers despatched in connection with the Incapacity Procedure with the words 'Private and Confidential'):
- D.3.1 Acknowledge receipt of such Notice and

- D.3.2 Send to the Minister copies of the Commencement Notice and any supporting documentation, together with a Notice giving the Minister the opportunity to submit a written response within a period of one month from the date of the Commencement Notice and
- D.3.3 Send to each member of the Standing Panel a copy of the Commencement Notice and any supporting documentation, together with a Notice drawing attention to Paragraph D.4 and requesting confirmation that the addressee is unaware of any circumstances which in the present case might prevent him/her from serving on the Review Commission.
- D.4.1 The member of the Standing Panel in the first category mentioned in Paragraph C.1 (or the member in the second, third or fourth categories (in that order) if the member(s) in the preceding category(ies) is/are unable to participate in the particular case) shall forthwith consult with the officers of General Assembly and jointly with them appoint as the fifth member of the Review Commission a person (not already a member of the Standing Panel) chosen on account of particular expertise or experience in the subject matter of the case, ascertaining through the procedures set out above that no conflict of interest or other reason would prevent such person from serving upon the Review Commission.
- D.4.2 In the event that any member of the Standing Panel shall be unable to take part in the particular case, the Secretary shall invite the officers of General Assembly to appoint another person from the same category as specified in Paragraph C.1 as his/her replacement on the Review Commission.
- D.5 When the identity of all five members of the Review Commission has been provisionally ascertained, the Secretary shall notify the Minister or the Minister's representative in writing thereof and invite him/her to state within 14 days of receipt of the Notice whether s/he has any objection to any of the persons serving upon the Review Commission and, if so, the grounds for such objection. Any such objection shall be considered by the officers of General Assembly, whose decision on whether to uphold or reject the objection shall be final.
- D.6.1 The Review Commission shall appoint its own convener who shall be a member of the Church and who shall normally be the person appointed to the Standing Panel by virtue of his/her legal, tribunal or professional experience or other similar background under Paragraph C.1(iv).
- D.6.2 The Convener of the Review Commission shall not have a casting vote, unless the Review Commission shall in circumstances arising under Paragraph D.7.1 consist of an even number of members.
- D.7.1 In the event that any member of the Review Commission shall be unable to carry out his/her duties on that Commission, the remaining members shall continue to act as the Review Commission, subject to there being a minimum of three members.

- D.7.2 Once a Review Commission has been duly constituted and has taken any steps to investigate the case, no person shall subsequently be appointed to serve on that Review Commission.
- D.7.3 In the event that the Review Commission shall be reduced to fewer than three members at any time after it has taken any steps to investigate the case under the Incapacity Procedure, that Review Commission shall stand down and be discharged and a new Review Commission shall be appointed under this Section D which shall have access to all information (including documentation available to the former Review Commission).
- D.7.4 If the Convener of the Review Commission is unable to continue to serve for the reason stated in Paragraph D.1, the remaining members shall appoint one of their number to be the Convener in his/her place.

E. SUSPENSION

- E.1 If the Minister has already been suspended before the case has come into the Procedure, the Review Commission must, as soon as it has been constituted, decide whether the suspension should be continued or lifted, and inform all those concerned.
- E.2. If the Minister has not already been suspended, the Review Commission may, either immediately upon its appointment or at any time during the continuance of the case, resolve that the Minister be suspended.
- E.3 Any suspension, whenever imposed, may be lifted by the Review Commission at any time during the continuance of the case.
- E.4 Any decision made by the Review Commission under Paragraph E.1, E.2 or E.3 shall immediately be notified in writing by the Secretary of the Review Commission to the Minister, the General Secretary, the Synod Moderator and the Secretary of the District Council (and the Deputy General Secretary if s/he issued the Commencement Notice under Paragraph B.3).
- E.5 An existing suspension continued under Paragraph E.1 or a new suspension under Paragraph E.2 shall remain in force until either:-
- E.5.1 the Review Commission makes a subsequent decision relative to that suspension or
- E.5.2 the Review Commission reaches a decision under Paragraph K.4.2 that the name of the Minister be retained on the Roll of Ministers*, in which case the suspension automatically ceases on the date upon which that decision is formally notified to the Minister or
- E.5.3 the Review Commission reaches a decision under Paragraph K.4.3 that the name of the Minister be deleted from the Roll of Ministers, there being no appeal within the period allowed, in which case the suspension shall continue up to the date of deletion (i.e. the date of expiry of such period under Paragraph K.4.3) or

- E.5.4 there is an appeal against the decision of the Review Commission, in which case the suspension shall continue throughout the appeal proceedings and automatically cease on the date of the formal notification of the Appeals Review Commission's decision to the Minister (whether this be that his/her name be retained on or deleted from the Roll of Ministers, in the latter case the termination of the suspension coinciding with the deletion).
- E.6 For the avoidance of doubt, in the case of a suspension first imposed under the Disciplinary Process upon a Minister who then enters the Incapacity Procedure through the issue of a Commencement Notice, the provisions of the Incapacity Procedure, and not those of the Disciplinary Process, shall thereafter govern all aspects of that suspension. Conversely, in the case of a suspension first imposed hereunder upon a Minister who then enters the Disciplinary Process as a result of the steps set out in Section H, the provisions of that Process shall thereafter govern all aspects of that suspension.

F. INITIAL REVIEW

- F.1 The members of the Review Commission shall consult together as soon as possible to consider the information laid before them and to agree upon the course which their enquiry* should take (as to which, see Section G below).
- F.2 At the outset the Review Commission will need to address the following questions:
- F.2.1 Have all the steps outlined at Paragraphs B.1 and B.2 been taken?
- F.2.2 How has the Minister responded, if at all, to the issues raised in the Commencement Notice, particularly those relating to his/her conduct and/or behaviour or to any other concerns and/or problems expressed about his/her ministry and will it be necessary to meet with other persons with knowledge of any relevant events or circumstances to test the accuracy and weight of these matters and their importance to the enquiry?
- F.2.3 Should an early meeting with the Minister be sought or should this be deferred pending further enquiry?
- F.2.4 Is specialist advice and guidance relevant as to the question of whether, based on the criteria set out in Part I, Paragraphs 1 and 5, the Minister is or is not capable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, ministry? If so, what steps should be taken to ensure that such advice and guidance are available for consideration by the Review Commission?
- F.2.5 Are there any special factors in the particular case which should be taken into account at this stage? This is particularly relevant in cases coming into the Procedure following a recommendation from the Ministerial Disciplinary Process.
- F.3 Having carried out its initial review and agreed on its modus operandi, the Review Commission will move into the enquiry stage of its proceedings.

G. CONDUCT OF ENQUIRY

- G.1 The Review Commission shall have control of all procedural matters, including the gathering of information and any issues relating to the Minister's suspension. The Review Commission shall also have discretion as regards the extent to which written statements, reports, videos, recorded interviews and other recordings and transcripts may be taken into account.
- G.2 The members of the Review Commission will need to pay constant attention to all the issues referred to in Paragraph F.2 and any other factors present throughout the whole progress of the case.
- G.3 Where cases come into the Procedure following a recommendation from the Disciplinary Process, information may already have been considered within that Process. However, the Review Commission must always carry out its own enquiry and cannot rely upon such information simply because it was presented and considered within the Disciplinary Process.

- G.4 In the light of Paragraph 1 of Part I the Review Commission should, as early as possible in its investigation and wherever possible or practicable, take the following steps:
- G.4.1 meet with the Minister or, if circumstances render this impossible or impracticable, with the Minister's representative, either or whom may, if s/he wishes, have a friend present with him/her and
- G.4.2 seek the written permission of the Minister or his/her representative (but only so far as the latter has the authority in law to grant such permission on behalf of the Minister) to apply for copies of all the Minister's medical notes, records and reports from his/her General Practitioner and copies of the reports from any specialist who may have examined or been consulted by the Minister.
- G.5 If the Review Commission is unable to follow the steps outlined in Paragraph G.4 in any given case, it will need to consider the underlying reasons very carefully and be prepared to proceed with its enquiry in the light of the best information available.
- G.6 As envisaged in Paragraph F.2.2, the Review Commission may also meet with other persons during the course of its enquiry and should inform each such person that s/he may be called later to give evidence and answer questions at a Hearing with the Minister present. If any such person refuses or expresses an unwillingness to attend any Hearing in person, the Review Commission may invoke the provisions of Paragraph G.1.
- G.7 The Review Commission shall be entitled to call for and consider all minutes of meetings, correspondence, notes, reports and documents which it considers appropriate to its enquiry. This provision shall not apply where those from whom such documentation is requested can show that it is protected by confidentiality, but instead they would be asked to supply a written report which would also be available to the Minister.

H. RECOMMENDATION FOR REFERRAL TO THE DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

- H.1.1 If it considers that, in a case within the Incapacity Procedure, an issue of discipline is or may be involved, the Review Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Review Commission, may, at any time during the proceedings and whether or not a Hearing has yet taken place, refer the case back to the person who initiated it in accordance with Paragraph B.3 with the recommendation that the Disciplinary Procedure should be commenced in respect of the Minister, whereupon the proceedings under the Incapacity Procedure shall stand adjourned pending the outcome of that recommendation.
- H.1.2 In such a situation, the Secretary of the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission as the case may be shall forthwith send or deliver to the person who initiated the case a written notice containing such recommendation, signed by the Convener and incorporating a statement of the reasons on which the recommendation is based, in summary form if the

Commission so decides, together with such other documentation (if any) as the Commission authorises the Secretary to release.

- H.1.3 That Notice shall state that the proceedings under the Incapacity Procedure shall stand adjourned to await the recipient's response and shall also state the time, which shall be not be longer than one month, within which the recipient must notify the Secretary in writing whether the recommendation contained in the Notice has been accepted or rejected.
- H.2.1 The Secretary shall at the same time send a copy of the said Notice to the Minister. It is assumed that the Minister will already have copies of all the accompanying documents mentioned in Paragraph H.1.2, but, if there are any which s/he has yet not seen, copies of these must also be sent to him/her.
- H.2.2 The Secretary shall at the same time send copies of the said Notice (but not the accompanying documentation) to the General Secretary, the Secretary of the District Council and the Moderator of the Synod (in any case where s/he is not already the recipient of the Notice under Paragraph H.1.1).
- H.3.1 If written confirmation is received from the recipient of the Notice, countersigned by the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, that the recommendation contained in the Notice has been accepted and that a Referral Notice has been issued under the Disciplinary Process in respect of the Minister, the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission as the case may be shall declare the case within the Incapacity Procedure to be concluded and no further action shall be taken in respect thereof. The Secretary shall give written notice to this effect to the Minister and the persons specified in Paragraph H.2.2.
- H.3.2 If written notification is received from the recipient of the Notice that the aforesaid recommendation has been rejected, the case shall forthwith be resumed within the Incapacity Procedure. The Secretary shall give notice to this effect to the Minister and the persons specified in Paragraph H.2.2.
- H.4 No recommendation for referral to the Disciplinary Process shall be made in any case which comes within the Incapacity Procedure as a result of a recommendation from the Disciplinary Process.
- H.5 As to the position regarding the suspension of a Minister to whom this Section H applies, see Paragraph E.5.5.

For the avoidance of confusion, there is no Section I.

J. HEARINGS

- J.1 The Review Commission shall decide when it is appropriate for a Hearing to take place and whom it requires to attend, whereupon the Secretary shall consult with the Convener, the other members of the Review Commission, the Minister and any other such persons as might be required to attend as to the venue, date and time for the Hearing and, when these are fixed, shall give written notification thereof to all concerned with the request that they confirm

their intention to attend and, in the case of the Minister, state whether it is his/her intention to have a person to accompany him/her.

J.2 The Hearing shall be conducted in private and only the following persons shall be permitted to attend:

- The members of the Review Commission
- The Secretary or a duly appointed Deputy
- The Minister
- A person chosen by the Minister to accompany him/her
- Any medical, specialist, expert or other witnesses, but only while giving evidence, unless the Review Commission otherwise directs
- A representative of the Church's Legal Advisers, if requested to attend by the Review Commission.
- Any person responsible for operating the recording equipment or otherwise preparing a verbatim report of the proceedings referred to in Paragraph J.9.

J.3 Subject to ensuring that the rules of natural justice are observed, the Convener should ensure that the proceedings are as relaxed and informal as possible.

J.4 All witnesses called by the Review Commission to give evidence shall be subject to questioning by the Convener (and by other members of the Review Commission with the Convener's permission). The Minister shall be entitled to ask questions of such witnesses.

J.5 When the process described in Paragraph J.4 has been completed, the Minister or his/her representative may invite witnesses called by him/her to give evidence and may question them, as may the Convener and other members of the Review Commission with the Convener's permission.

J.6 When all the witnesses have given evidence, the Minister or the Minister's representative may if s/he wishes address the Review Commission.

J.7 In the special circumstances of any case the Convener may, if s/he considers it appropriate and helpful, vary any of the above procedures at his/her discretion.

J.8 In considering the evidence and information before it, the Review Commission shall apply a standard of proof on the balance of probability.

J.9 The Secretary of the Review Commission shall prepare a summary minute of the proceedings at the Hearing ('the Secretary's Minute*'). Where possible, a verbatim record of the proceedings shall also be made by electronic recording, or by such other means as shall be directed by the Convener. The Record of the Hearing* shall consist of the Secretary's Minute together with any such verbatim record, which shall be transcribed in the event of an appeal.

J.10 At the conclusion of the Hearing the members of the Review Commission will wish to deliberate upon their final decision, together with any guidance and/or recommendation(s) which they may wish to append to their decision. The Convener will inform those present that the decision will not be made that day

but that written notification of the decision will be given within ten days to the Minister, the General Secretary, the Synod Moderator and the Secretary of the District Council (and the Deputy General Secretary if s/he issued the Commencement Notice in accordance with Paragraph B.2.1). The Hearing is thus concluded.

K. REVIEW COMMISSION'S DECISION AND ITS NOTIFICATION

- K.1 Following the conclusion of the Hearing, the Review Commission shall, all meeting and deliberating together, but in the absence of the Minister and all other persons, consider all the information concerning the Minister which has been before them during the case for the purpose of reaching a decision in accordance with Paragraph K.2. In particular they must make a careful and detailed appraisal of all of the following:
- K.1.1 the circumstances which have led up to the commencement of the case as indicated in the Commencement Notice and
 - K.1.2 any expert opinion of a medical, psychological or similar or related nature in respect of the Minister which has been sought by the Review Commission or which has in any way been presented to it during the case and
 - K.1.3 information supplied by the Minister and others within the Procedure, whether or not on the Minister's behalf and
 - K.1.4 reports and other documentation requested by the Review Commission from other persons or bodies within or outside the Church with whom the Minister, through the exercise of his/her ministry, might have had a particular involvement, such as ecumenical posts, chaplaincies or positions within public bodies and
 - K.1.5 all other factors properly coming within the scope of the review being undertaken by the Review Commission and
 - K.1.6 the weight to be attached to each of the factors in the case as indicated above, bearing in mind the manner in which the information was provided and, where appropriate, whether the Minister or his/her representative had the opportunity of challenging or commenting upon it.
- K.2 The purpose of the deliberation referred to in Paragraph K.1 is to enable the Review Commission to reach (either unanimously or by a majority) a decision in accordance with Part 1 Paragraph 5 as to whether, having full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto the name of the Minister in the particular case should remain upon, or be deleted from, the Roll of Ministers.
- K.3 The Review Commission shall record its decision (the Decision Record*) and, in doing so, shall state whether it was reached unanimously or by a majority and shall append a statement of its reasons (the Statement of Reasons*) for the decision, but shall not be obliged, unless it wishes to do so, to comment in detail on any of the matters considered by it.

- K.4.1 The decision so taken shall conclude the involvement of the Review Commission in the Procedure except as to the discharge of its responsibilities under Paragraph N.2 and shall have the effect provided for in Paragraph K.4.2 or Paragraph K.4.3, whichever is applicable.
- K.4.2 If the Review Commission/Appeals Review Commission decides to retain the Minister's name on the Roll of Ministers, his/her status is unchanged.
- K.4.3 If the Review Commission decides to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers, no appeal having been lodged by or on behalf of the Minister within the period specified in the notification referred to in Paragraph K.8.1, deletion shall take effect on the date of expiry of such period.
- K.5 Every decision reached under the Procedure (whether or not on appeal) is made in the name of the General Assembly and is final and binding on the Minister and on all the Councils of the Church.
- K.6 Within ten days of the date of the Review Commission's decision the Secretary shall send or deliver written notification of the decision and copies of the Decision Record and the Statement of Reasons to the Minister or his/her representative.
- K.7 Where the decision is that the Minister's name be retained on the Roll of Ministers, the Secretary shall at the same time send or deliver copies of the Decision Record and the Statement of Reasons to the General Secretary, the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Deputy General Secretary (but only if s/he issued the Commencement Notice) and the Secretary of the Ministries Committee.
- K.8 Where the decision is that the Minister's name be deleted from the Roll of Ministers, then:
- K.8.1 The written notification shall draw the Minister's attention to his/her right of appeal and specify the precise date by which notice of appeal must be lodged by the Minister with the Secretary.
- K.8.2 The Secretary shall, at the same time as taking the action required under Paragraph K.6, send to the General Secretary, the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Deputy General Secretary (but only if s/he issued the Commencement Notice) and the Secretary of the Ministries Committee a Notice to the effect that a decision has been made by the Review Commission that the Minister's name be deleted from the Roll of Ministers. Such Notice shall not contain any further information other than that the decision is still subject to appeal and that a further Notice will be sent when it is known whether there is to be an appeal or not.
- K.8.3 If by the date specified in the written notification to the Minister under Paragraph K.6 as the final date for the lodging of an appeal no appeal has been lodged by the Minister, the Secretary of the Review Commission shall send copies of the Decision Record to the General Secretary, the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Deputy General Secretary

(but only if s/he issued the Commencement Notice) and the Secretary of the Ministries Committee.

K.8.4 If the Minister lodges a Notice of Appeal*, the procedure set out in Section L applies.

L. APPEALS PROCEDURE

L.1.1 Should the Minister wish to appeal against the decision of the Review Commission to delete his/her name from the Roll of Ministers, s/he or his/her representative must lodge written notice of such Appeal with the Secretary of the Review Commission within 21 days of receipt by the Minister of the written notification of the decision under Paragraph K.6 (which shall set out the grounds of the appeal either in detail or in summary form as the Minister chooses).

L.1.2 The Secretary of the Review Commission shall forthwith notify the General Secretary that an Appeal has been lodged, at the same time passing on to the General Secretary the Notice of Appeal together with the body of papers laid before the Review Commission in hearing the case and the Record of the Hearing as defined in Paragraph J.9. The General Secretary shall thereupon act in a secretarial and administrative capacity in all matters relating to the Appeal.

L.1.3 At the same time the Secretary of the Review Commission shall also notify the Moderator of the Synod and the Secretary of the District Council (and the Deputy General Secretary if s/he issued the Commencement Notice in accordance with Paragraph B.3) that the Minister has lodged an Appeal against the decision of the Review Commission.

L.1.4 A Notice of Appeal which is outside the time limit specified in Paragraph L.1.1 will not normally be accepted. The General Secretary may, however, at his/her discretion accept a Notice of Appeal out of time, but only if s/he is satisfied that there are exceptional circumstances which would justify the exercise of discretion by the General Secretary to allow the appeal out of time.

L.1.5 The Rules set out in this Part II as applicable to the Review Commission shall also apply to the Appeals Review Commission (with the necessary changes), except for those which by their context are inappropriate for the Appeals Procedure.

L.1.6 No-one apart from the Minister shall have a right of appeal against a decision of the Review Commission.

L.2 On receipt of the Notice of Appeal lodged under Paragraph L.1, the General Secretary shall as soon as possible acknowledge receipt of the Notice of Appeal and send to the Minister a copy of the Record of the Hearing before the Review Commission (see Paragraph J.9).

L.3.1 The Officers of the General Assembly shall within 14 days of receipt by the General Secretary of the Notice of Appeal under Paragraph L.1.2 (or within such further time as they may reasonably require) appoint the Appeals Review

Commission, which shall consist of three persons, in accordance with Paragraphs L.3.2 and L.3.3.

- L.3.2 The three persons to be so appointed shall be (i) a person with some legal, tribunal or other professional experience or other similar background (being a member of the United Reformed Church but not necessarily a member of General Assembly), who shall normally act as Convener of the Appeals Review Commission, (ii) a former Moderator of the General Assembly and (iii) either a person with general medical experience or one with professional expertise in the condition(s) giving rise to the subject matter of the case (such person not necessarily being a member of the Church).
- L.3.3 In the event that for any reason it is inappropriate for the person in the first category specified in Paragraph L.3.2 to be the Convener of the Appeals review Commission, the convenership shall be assumed by the person in the second category thereof.
- L.3.4 Persons appointed to an Appeals Review Commission are subject to Paragraph D.1.
- L.4.1 The General Secretary shall send or deliver to each of the proposed appointees a written invitation to serve on the Appeals Review Commission for the hearing of the Appeal, naming the Minister concerned but supplying no further information about the case.
- L.4.2 The invitation shall draw the attention of each proposed appointee to Paragraph D.1 and shall request confirmation that s/he is willing to accept appointment and that s/he is unaware of any circumstances which in the present case might prevent him/her from serving on the Appeals Review Commission.
- L.4.3 The Invitee shall within seven days of receipt of the invitation to serve notify the General Secretary in writing whether s/he is able and willing to accept appointment and, if so confirming compliance with Paragraph L.4.1.
- L.5.1 The General Secretary shall notify the Minister or the Minister's representative in writing of the names, addresses and credentials of each proposed appointee, drawing attention to Paragraph D.1 and pointing out that any objection to any of the proposed appointees must be made to the General Secretary in writing within fourteen days, setting out the grounds of such objection.
- L.5.2 To ensure that the appeals process moves along in a timely manner, any such objection received outside the period allowed will not normally be considered unless very good reason can be shown for its late delivery.
- L.5.3 The officers of the General Assembly shall consider every objection properly notified and shall decide whether to uphold or reject it.
- L.5.4 If they reject the objection, the General Secretary shall notify the Minister or the Minister's representative.

- L.5.5 If they uphold the objection, the General Secretary shall give written notification thereof to the Minister or the Minister's representative and to the person to whom the objection has been taken and the above procedure shall be repeated as often as is necessary to complete the appointment of the Appeals Review Commission.
- L.6.1 In the event that any member of the Appeals Review Commission shall be unable to carry out his/her duties on that Commission, the remaining members shall continue to act as the Appeals Review Commission, subject to there being a minimum of two members, in which event, but not otherwise, the Convener shall have a casting vote.
- L.6.2 In the event that, for the reasons stated in Paragraph L.6.1 the Appeals Review Commission shall consist of fewer than two members at any time after that Commission has taken any steps in connection with the Appeal, the Appeals Review Commission so appointed shall stand down and be discharged and a new Appeals Review Commission shall be appointed in accordance with the procedure laid down in this Section L to hear the Appeal.
- L.6.3 Once the Appeals Review Commission has been validly constituted and has taken any steps in accordance with this Section L, no person shall be subsequently appointed to serve on that Appeals Review Commission.
- L.7 Each member of the Appeals Review Commission when appointed shall receive from the General Secretary copies of the following:
- L.7.1 The Decision Record and
- L.7.2 The Statement of Reasons and
- L.7.3 The Notice of Appeal, setting out the grounds of the appeal and
- L.7.4 The body of papers considered by the Review Commission
- L.7.5 The Record of the Hearing
- L.8 The members of the Appeals Review Commission, when constituted, shall consult together as soon as possible to review the information laid before them and to agree upon the course which their conduct of the appeal shall take, following the procedures set out in Sections F, G and H (if they deem the latter appropriate). In addition, they may, if the circumstances so require, consider any of the following, particularly if any such issues are raised in the Notice of Appeal:
- L.8.1 Whether there is or may be new information which has come to light and which could not have reasonably been available to the Review Commission before it made its decision under Section K.
- L.8.2 Whether any such new information would in its opinion have been material in that, had it been tested and proved to the satisfaction of the Review Commission, it might have caused it to reach a different decision.

- L.8.3 Whether there may have been some procedural irregularity or breach of the rules of natural justice or serious misunderstanding by the Review Commission of the information before it or of any aspect of the Procedure itself.
- L.9.1 Before reaching its decision on the Appeal, there shall be a Hearing before the Appeals Review Commission which the Minister shall normally be expected to attend.
- L.9.2 The General Secretary shall consult with the Convener and the other members of the Appeals Review Commission and, where possible, with the Minister or his/her representative as to a suitable venue, date and time for the Hearing and, having so consulted, shall decide thereupon and shall notify all concerned in writing of the arrangements for the Hearing.
- L.9.3 The General Secretary shall (unless excluded for the reasons specified in Paragraph D.1) attend the Hearing for the purpose of giving such procedural advice to the Appeals Review Commission as may be appropriate and of keeping a formal record of the Hearing. S/he shall not be present when the Appeals Review Commission deliberates and decides on the case.
- L.9.4 If the General Secretary cannot for any reason be present at the Hearing, the Appeals Review Commission shall itself appoint such person as it considers appropriate to deputise for him/her for that purpose, ascertaining beforehand that such person is not excluded for reasons specified in Paragraph D.1. Such person will carry out the duties set out in Paragraph L.9.3 but shall not be present when the Appeals Review Commission deliberates and decides on the case.
- L.9.5 The General Secretary or his/her deputy appointed under Paragraph L.9.4 shall prepare a summary minute of the proceedings at the Hearing (the Secretary's minute). Where possible, a verbatim record of the proceedings shall also be made by electronic recording or by such other means as shall be directed by the Convener of the Appeals Review Commission. The Record of the Hearing shall consist of the Secretary's minute together with any such verbatim record.
- L.9.6 A representative of the Church's legal advisers may, at the invitation of the Appeals Review Commission, attend the Hearing in order to advise it on matters relating to procedure, evidence and interpretation, but s/he shall not take any part in the decision reached by the Appeals Review Commission, nor shall s/he be present when it deliberates and decides upon the case.
- L.9.7 The conduct of the Hearing of the Appeal is in the hands of the Appeals Review Commission whose Convener will at the outset of the Hearing read out the decision of the Review Commission.
- L.9.8 At some point during the Hearing the Convener will invite the Minister or his/her representative to address the Appeals Review Commission on the subject matter of the Appeal.
- L.10.1 The members of the Appeals Review Commission shall at the conclusion of the Hearing, all meeting and deliberating together but in the absence of the

Minister and all other persons consider and arrive at their decision in accordance with Paragraph L.10.2. In so doing they are required to make a careful and detailed appraisal of all the factors set out at Paragraphs K.1.1 to K.1.6 and of all the information, reports, representations and other factors forming the subject matter of the appeal

- L.10.2 The purpose of their deliberation is to enable them to reach (either unanimously or by a majority vote) a decision in accordance with Paragraph 5 of Part I of the Procedure as to whether, having full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto, the name of the Minister in the particular case should remain upon, or be deleted from, the Roll of Ministers.
- L.10.3 There shall be no appeal from the decision of the Appeals Review Commission which is final and binding on the Minister and on all the Councils of the Church.
- L.11.1 The Appeals Review Commission shall record its decision (the Decision Record) and, in doing so, shall state whether it was reached unanimously or by a majority and whether its decision upholds or reverses the decision of the Review Commission and shall append a statement of its reasons for the decision (the Statement of Reasons), but shall not be obliged, unless it wishes to do so, to comment in detail on any of the matters considered by it.
- L.11.2 The decision so taken shall conclude the involvement of the Appeals Review Commission in the Procedure except as to the discharge of its responsibilities under Paragraph N.2.
- L.11.3 If the decision is that the name of the Minister shall be deleted from the Roll of Ministers, such deletion takes effect with immediate effect.
- L.12 Within ten days of the date of the Appeals Review Commission's decision the General Secretary shall:
 - L.12.1 Send or deliver written notification of the decision and copies of the Decision Record and the Statement of Reasons to the Minister or his/her representative and
 - L.12.2 Send or deliver copies of the Decision Record and the Statement of Reasons to the Moderator of the Synod, the Secretary of the District Council, the Deputy General Secretary (but only if s/he issued the Commencement Notice) and the Secretary of the Ministries Committee.

M. FORMS, SENDING/DELIVERY OF DOCUMENTS and MISCELLANEOUS

- M.1 Model forms have been prepared to assist those concerned with the Procedure. The forms may be amended from time to time and new forms introduced. Use of the model forms is not compulsory and minor variations in the wording will not invalidate them, but it is strongly recommended that the model forms be used and followed as closely as possible to avoid confusion and to ensure that all relevant information is supplied at the proper time.

M.2 Any form, letter or other document required to be sent or delivered to a person under the Procedure shall be assumed to have been received by that person if sent or delivered in any of the following ways:

M.2.1 By delivering the same personally to the person concerned or

M.2.2 By delivering the same or sending it by first class pre-paid post or by Recorded Delivery post addressed to the last known address of the person concerned in a sealed envelope addressed to that person or

M.2.3 In such other manner as the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission (in the latter case if the sending or delivery relates to the Appeals Procedure) may direct having regard to the circumstances.

M.3 Any form, letter or document required to be sent or delivered to the Secretary of the Review Commission or on the General Secretary (in the case of an appeal) shall be delivered or sent by first class pre-paid post or by Recorded Delivery post addressed to the Secretary of the Review Commission or the General Secretary as the case may be at the address given in the current issue of the Year Book or subsequently notified or (in the absence of any such address in the Year Book) in an envelope addressed to that person at Church House, 86 Tavistock Place London WC1H 9RT and marked "Ministerial Incapacity Process".

M.4 All documents required to be served shall be placed in a sealed envelope clearly addressed to the addressee and marked "Private and Confidential".

M.5 Where any form, letter or other document is sent by first class pre-paid post, it shall be assumed to have been received by the recipient on the third day after the posting of the same.

M.6 Where any issue or question of procedure arises whilst the matter is under the jurisdiction of the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission, that Commission shall resolve each such issue or question or give such directions as shall appear to it to be just and appropriate in the circumstances.

M.7 Deletion as a result of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall have the effect of terminating any contract, written or oral, between the Minister and the United Reformed Church or any constituent part thereof in relation to his/her ministry.

N. REPORT TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY, COSTS AND RETENTION OF RECORDS AND PAPERS

N.1 The General Secretary shall report to the General Assembly all decisions reached by the Review Commission and the Appeals Review Commission in the following manner:

N.1.1 If a decision of the Review Commission to delete the name of a Minister from the Roll of Ministers is subject to appeal, the Report shall simply state that a

decision has been reached in a case which is subject to appeal and shall not name the Minister.

- N.1.2 If a decision of the Review Commission to delete is not subject to appeal, the Report shall so state.
- N.1.3 If a report has already been made to the General Assembly under Paragraph N.1.1 and the Appeals Review Commission reverses the decision of the Review Commission and allows the name of the Minister to remain on the Roll of Ministers, the General Secretary shall report the decision of the Appeals Review Commission to the next meeting of the General Assembly without naming the Minister.
- N.2 The cost of operating the Procedure and the reasonable and proper expenses of persons attending a Hearing and the costs of any reports obtained by or on the authority of the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission or any other costs and expenses which the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission deem to have been reasonably and properly incurred in the course of the Procedure (but excluding any costs of representation) shall be charged to the general funds of the Church, and the Report of each case to the General Assembly shall state the total cost incurred in that case.
- N.3 The Secretary of the Review Commission shall be responsible for the keeping of the record of decisions taken by the Review Commission and by the Appeals Review Commission, and for the custody of all papers relating to concluded cases, which shall be kept in a locked cabinet at Church House.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

A10

Post-Moratorium Task Group

1. Introduction and Summary

1.1 In 1999, a major report entitled "Human Sexuality Report 1999" was presented to General Assembly. It was the fruit of two years' work undertaken in five groups. It remains a full and useful document and is the most recent of a series of reports produced on the subject within our church. A few printed copies are still available from Church House, or it can be found on the Church's website (www.urc.org.uk).

1.2 One of its recommendations, which became General Assembly resolution 34 (1999) sought to test the mind of the church on a form of words which read as follows:
"In the context of the affirmations commended to the church in Resolution 31, the United Reformed Church affirms and welcomes people of homosexual orientation within the life of the church and society, but does not believe that there is a sufficiently clear mind within the church at this time to affirm the acceptability of homosexual practice."

1.3 Following discussion in the wider church over the next year, a number of resolutions were brought to the Assembly in 2000, among them:

" **Resolution 14.** General Assembly, recognising that the statement contained within Resolution 34 of 1999 has received a measure of support in the councils of the church, but not sufficient to allow it to proceed:

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

"**Resolution 15.** General Assembly asks that for a period of seven years, during which reflection, prayer and sharing continue, no resolutions attempting to define the policy of the church on homosexuality should be proposed in any of the councils of the church."

1.4 This established the **moratorium** which comes to an end at Assembly 2007. In preparation for this Assembly, Mission Council has given thought to the next steps that might be taken.

1.5 After looking at possible options, Mission Council recommends to General Assembly that it -

1. remind the church of the very considerable work which led up to the Human Sexuality Report 1999, acknowledging that discussions have not in fact been continued or developed in the intervening time.
2. call the church to a recognition of the continuing diversity and disagreement that exists over these issues and also to a recommitment to stay together and work

together.

3. emphasise the value and place of the current Catch the Vision and Evangelism Consultation process, and set the next phase of discussions within that context.
 4. outline a process for the consideration of issues that need further exploration.
 5. encourage continuing restraint over attempts to define policy.
-

2. The current context

2.1 Since the 1999 report to General Assembly on Human Sexuality, there have been some developments in the perception of same-sex relationships within society as a whole, and there have been changes in the law, notably in relation to civil partnerships.

2.2 Within the church, opinions and attitudes seem to have changed very little. The church has, moreover, not taken the opportunity that was envisaged and encouraged in the Assembly resolutions in 1999 and 2000 to continue open and constructive discussion of matters of human sexuality.

2.3 Assembly affirmed in 2000 that the normal assessment procedure was the way decisions about candidates for ministry were to be taken.

2.4 General Assembly has, however, not made any formal decisions against or in favour of the ordination of people in committed same-sex relationships. It is reaching a common mind on this that has so far proved impossible. While some have felt that it was always legitimate for such people to be ordained if they fulfilled other criteria acceptably, others have seen such a step as a new and unacceptable departure from the traditions of the church.

2.5 For some, this absence of a declared policy has meant freedom to make decisions locally and in the councils and committees of the church according to best Christian judgment. This is the procedure permitted under Resolution 14(b) of 2000 (see 1.3 above). For others, the absence of a policy has seemed to become a policy in itself, in that it has allowed actions which were not acceptable to sections of the church.

2.6 While therefore there has not been any real progress in terms of understanding or agreement within the church, we are in a new situation in several respects -

- civil partnerships have been introduced and also new anti-discrimination legislation relating to employment and the provision of goods and services;
- tensions within the Anglican World Communion have raised the profile of this issue within the life of the church and society;
- the media have heightened the general awareness of issues of same-sex relationships within society;
- we are now in the midst of re-evaluating our life as a church through the Catch the Vision process;
- there is reluctance in many parts of the church to re-engage in a discussion which was so distracting, distressing and divisive.

2.7 It is the last two points which are particularly relevant at this moment. As the moratorium comes to an end, we cannot simply revert to where we were seven years ago. As part of the Catch the Vision process, a series of "Evangelism (or Hothorpe) Consultations" has been set up. These involve people from across the theological traditions of the church and have already been the means of establishing good relationships and a desire to explore a number of issues together in some depth. This

part of the CtV process is reported elsewhere. It is sufficient to note here that this is an ongoing process which is expected to make major contributions to the life and ethos of the United Reformed Church during this year, and that the reopening of the sexuality discussion at this stage could overshadow that work in an unhelpful way, particularly as the consultations so far have been leading towards a greater sense of unity and cooperation. It would be constructive to build upon the fruits of this work over the coming months and as it reaches completion.

3. Some convictions

3.1 Beyond the deep convictions that unite us as Christ's people, it seems important to review the range of particular convictions that do or should unite us at this point. Among these are the following.

1. In order to maintain its *integrity*, the church must look honestly at itself and face up to the extent of its internal diversity.
2. The church's life is built on our *relationships* in Christ and with one another. It is vital to meet one another within the life of fellowship and common discipleship. It is also vital to be committed to exploration and dialogue together. Bringing people of differing understandings together for discussion has more often than not proved to be fruitful. Engaging in the process is as important as its conclusions.
3. The *unity* of the church is a gospel priority and a divine gift, to be responded to in human terms through the struggle of living together.
4. The *Catch the Vision* process is of great significance for the life of the church. It would be most helpful if the next steps in the human sexuality discussion, rather than interfering with this process, could be taken in the light of it.
5. More work is needed on a wide *range of issues* which have not been adequately addressed so far or which need to be looked at afresh in the changing circumstances. There are complexities in what might appear at first sight to be simple issues – such as the fact that civil partnerships do not necessarily imply sexual activity. Some of these are fundamental to discerning the way forward.
6. This work is important and the church should *commit* itself to this continuing process with all that that means concerning resources and time.

3.2 At the same time the depth of the tensions and pain amongst us must not be underestimated. For those who take a strong view towards either end of the spectrum of understanding there is sometimes sheer incomprehension that anyone could possibly believe what they understand their opposite colleagues to believe. Both "sides" can regard the other as unchristian and grossly mistaken in their attitudes and actions; neither can see how the other's position can be justified or acceptable in the life of the church. They may be horrified or mystified by some of the points made in the summaries that appear below (see section 7). There are others who occupy a more "middle" ground who cannot understand what all the fuss is about, and others again who have struggled deeply to hear and understand the different voices and resolve things in their own minds, but have been unable to reach any conclusions. But none of us has the right to condemn others without striving to listen to and understand them. All of us have prejudices, make assumptions and believe stereotypes. All of us need to bring these humbly before God for reassessment.

3.3 This is, of course, not the first time we have been at such a painful point. There are some similarities with decisions about the ordination of women in ministry, and

even more so over pacifism. In last century's passionate debates over pacifism there was a strong and uncomprehending tension between people who sometimes thought that those who believed differently from themselves were denying the gospel. It may be that just as strongly in this case, many people feel passionately because the expression of sexuality has to do with the integrity of the gospel they believe and live by. It touches deep emotional chords because it concerns people's own self understanding. It touches core issues of the interpretation of Scripture and its relation to contemporary life. This sense of deep significance is experienced by people at both ends of the spectrum.

3.4 Clearly, our own church is not alone in this struggle. Any church that is not almost totally monolithic, and this includes practically all the mainline churches in this country, feels the force of this tension, sometimes almost to breaking point. This does seem a good reason for trying to explore some of the issues ecumenically, though at the end of the day we have to work this out in our own way. Some Anglican and Methodist documents, as well as some international approaches, have been considered briefly over recent months, and could be helpful. We may need to return to these as we chart a way forward.

4. Unity and diversity

4.1 We need perhaps at this point to weigh what unity means to us. We are bound together as Christians not just by being part of one church, but by our common receiving and sharing in the grace of God through Jesus Christ. We share one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We have therefore to look at our disagreements in the light of this deep covenant bond as well as our Lord's passionate prayer that we might be one. At the same time we clearly do not and cannot believe exactly the same things within our faith. Over the years we have had to find ways of living with our differences. This particular issue seems to present us with the challenge – if we cannot agree over human sexuality, and if we cannot persuade others of the rightness of our understanding, how shall we then live together and is it right that we should go on trying? It seems to us that the first, practical, part of that question has not been fully addressed. There are some difficult detailed questions here which need to be explored (see section 9 below). Regarding the imperative of unity, it has been powerfully put to us – how can we pray for unity and understanding in the world, and for peace between Israel and Palestine for instance, when we do not ourselves demonstrate a unity which copes with diversity?

4.2 It is a painful but joyful reality that those with whom we may profoundly disagree within the life of the church are also servants of Christ and recipients of God's grace. We need to recognise therefore that they may have insights which we have not yet received and that we may have valid insights to share with them. It should not be in our Christian vocabulary to say – 'I do not like what you are saying or what you believe and therefore I must walk away.' It is also in the nature of our church that we are not only a united church but a diverse church. We are here exploring the extent of that Christian diversity. We give considerable time and energy to exploring our ecumenical relationships with other churches. We need now to conduct our own internal "ecumenical" discussions.

4.3 In summary, we need to keep a sense of proportion about this issue, which can never be as important as the gospel itself nor all those things in which we are firmly united. We must also consider the impression we make on the world around us. We believe we have come to a point where we need to say to one another –

- this is who and where we are;

- can we now recognise and face our differences?
- and how might we live with that?

5. Options

5.1 In considering the question – what happens when the moratorium expires at General Assembly 2007? - Mission Council has recognised that there are several options. Those to which detailed consideration has been given include -

- *Extending the moratorium for a further period*
- *Allowing the moratorium to end and doing nothing further*
- *Making a fresh attempt to define the church's policy*
- *Making a "commitment" to stay together and work together*
- *Making a "commitment" and agreeing to continue exploring a number of key issues*

5.2 Each of these options has its attractions as well as problems. There is a widespread feeling that the moratorium has brought a welcome relief from open controversy. On the other hand there is need to make a number of decisions, some of which cannot be put off indefinitely. The first two options were not felt to be satisfactory because they would not move us forward. The third option would simply not be viable, given the recent experience of inconclusive discussions, and the sheer impossibility so far of being able to reach a common mind on a declared policy.

5.3 Also, at this point in our history, we want to give full value to the Catch the Vision process. A fresh debate on issues of sexuality could all too easily become a major distraction from that creative piece of work. We note that work has recently been commissioned on key areas of our life such as our use of the Bible, prayer and evangelism. It would be good to give more time for that work to bear fruit and to developing patterns of common thinking and action without being diverted by less essential issues.

5.4 Bearing all these factors in mind, therefore, Mission Council proposes to develop the last of the options above by –

- (a) inviting Assembly to endorse the Commitment set out below (sections 6 and 7), and**
- (b) outlining a process by which further discussions can take place in the light of work already done (the 1999 report) and the Catch the Vision process (sections 8 and 9).**

5.5 The first of these would provide an occasion for the open recognition of diversity and the need for an atmosphere of respect; it would emphasise the significance of unity with diversity, and encourage a continuing journey together. It would represent a healthy and necessary living with tension and difference and provide the context for the next stage of discussions.

5.6 The second would allow for the outworking of the Catch the Vision process and also provide appropriate means for further discussions.

5.7 It needs to be recognised that the endorsement of a Commitment of this nature will not be easy for everyone. In particular it does not define an end point at which decisions will need to be reached. However, it is offered as a means of holding us together meanwhile, so that we can face these difficult issues with mutual respect and

perhaps come to some measure of understanding. It does not presume any particular outcome. On a journey of this nature none of us knows exactly what the destination may be or what new discoveries we may make along the way. None of us should expect to take the church in our own direction, only that we seek together to find our Lord's direction for his church.

5.8 Perhaps the challenge in front of us can be put in the following terms. All of us read the same story in the Bible, we belong to the same heritage of faith. How is it then that some can come to mutually exclusive understandings of what is most honouring to God in relation to one key aspect of human living? We need to listen to one another to discover how that has happened and to understand the nature of that difference before deciding what to do or how to live with it. We may find more agreement than we had expected. We may find some of those differences are insoluble. We may find ways of living with that tension.

6. The Commitment

6.1 This Commitment aims to create a framework for conducting our church life and future discussions together. It is suggested that General Assembly should make such a commitment and invite synods and local churches to do the same.

6.2 In this way we hope to:

- (a) ensure that all within the United Reformed Church can feel that their voice and views have been heard and are recognised as having their own integrity,
- (b) agree to continue in fellowship together despite divisions of understanding and practice on this issue,
- (c) commit ourselves to travel this path of further exploration together.

6.3 In recognising that the broad range of positions outlined in the Commitment is generally representative of different views held within the church at the present time, it needs to be emphasised that none of these should be regarded as a settled or "watertight" position that cannot be reviewed or revised as understanding develops, and that none of them as such is the official position or policy of the church.

7. Commitment on Human Sexuality

As the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church,

7.1 we recognise that –

- many of the issues and views surrounding human sexuality can seem to be intractable and irreconcilable;
- despite lengthy debates, much study and many reports, opinions have not changed sufficiently for us to be of one mind;
- this is a deeply emotive and potentially divisive issue;
- human sexuality and the language we use about it raises many complex questions, not least in the area of biblical interpretation.

7.2 while it is not possible to do full justice to the variety of views represented within the church, we recognise that the range includes -

7.2.1 some people who feel that the debate on human sexuality has become a

wrong focus and has received too much attention, believing that:

- faithful living and worship should take priority over controversy about human sexuality;
- participation in God's mission and Christ's ministry in the world demands all the energy of God's people;
- this is not a matter over which policy decisions imposing a universal rule are necessary or appropriate;
- the church's existing assessment procedures are appropriate for discerning the call of God;
- responses to pastoral situations involving people in same-sex relationships are best determined within the local church;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views can create painful tensions, though it may also offer opportunity for growth and development.

7.2.2 some other people who feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it concerns the Word of God, and for them is a passionately held matter of holiness, purity and obedience to God's commands in scripture, believing that:

- God's creation plan is for the complementarity of man and woman, and that sexual relations apart from that are therefore disordered;
- scripture and the traditions of the church teach that the only legitimate pattern for sexual relations is between a man and woman within the commitment of marriage;
- all scriptural references to same-sex activity are explicit in their condemnation;
- same-sex activity is an affront to Christian morality and offensive to many people of other faiths and of none;
- people in sexually active same-sex relationships should not be accepted for ministry;
- the acceptance of same-sex (civil) partnerships on the part of society and the state is a matter to be resisted;
- the character and teaching of Jesus requires that both grace and truth must be embodied in dealing with this issue and with the people concerned;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates painful tensions.

7.2.3 some others again who feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it is a passionately held matter of God's unbounded grace, justice, the work of the Spirit and faithfulness to God's revelation in Christ and in scripture, believing that:

- God's will is for newness of life for all people in Christ, regardless of any human distinctions, including sexual orientation;
- it is God's creative intent that there are people whose innate sexual orientation and its fulfilment are directed towards others of the same sex;
- some people are called by God into committed, loving, same-sex relationships, including their sexual consummation, and that such relationships can be judged by the fruits of the Spirit that result;
- whilst most scriptural references to same-sex activity seem negative, they are not relevant to the contemporary understanding of same-sex relationships; emphasis needs to be given to the scriptural themes of grace, love and faithfulness;
- where vocations to ministry of those in committed same-sex relationships are discerned through the processes of the church to be the work of the Holy Spirit, such vocations should be upheld;

- this is an issue of justice, and the church should celebrate changes made to address unjust structures in society as, in part, the work of the Spirit;
- the church should welcome the creation of civil partnerships and support such unions pastorally;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates painful tensions.

7.3 recognising this very wide range of views, we -

- acknowledge this diversity;
- accept that these views are all held with integrity and often with passion;
- acknowledge that those who are sisters and brothers in Christ are so through God's calling rather than personal choosing;
- believe that Christ calls us to strive to live together;
- realise that this can only be done by reliance on the grace of God to enable mutual respect, love and continuing exploration together;
- agree to continue to explore these differences in the light of our understanding of Scripture and under the Holy Spirit's guidance for our individual and shared life in today's world.

7.4 in love and submission to Christ who holds us together, we therefore commit ourselves to stay together, to work and pray together, to treat one another with respect, and to seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding.

[Note: This could lead very naturally to a liturgical form along these lines -

"As the United Reformed Church, recognising that there are different understandings among us regarding issues of human sexuality, we recommit ourselves:

Leader: In love and submission to Christ who holds us together, do you commit yourselves to stay together?

Response: We do.

Leader: Will you work and pray together?

Response: We will.

Leader: Will you treat one another with respect?

Response: We will.

Leader: And will you together seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding?

Response: We will."]

8. Ways of working

8.1 In the period after Assembly, if Assembly accepts these proposals, it might be good to invite synods and local churches to make their own affirmation of the Commitment, and so to identify themselves with this action.

8.2 Also in this period, time needs to be allowed for the relevant work of the Catch the Vision process to be completed and assimilated into the life of the Church.

8.3 It is a clear conviction that the process of further discussion needs to take place without the pressure of deadlines. While there may be need to come to some conclusions, and this process cannot be entirely open-ended, discussion might well

be hindered rather than helped by the imposition of a timetable. It is imperative that the whole church is given space to be and to reflect.

- 8.4 In order for further work to be coordinated and be moved forward, it would be advisable for a small group, perhaps a task group of Mission Council, to have responsibility for overseeing the process and ensuring that discussions are held with the appropriate people and ecumenically.
- 8.5 One of the first things the group might be asked to do is to review the processes used in similar discussions by some other churches, such as the Church of Sweden and the French Reformed Church, and to consider these as models for our own use. We might also want to learn from the methods of those who have encouraged "conflict transformation".
- 8.6 The group might usefully gather and publish accessible materials covering the diverse range of subjects and views which would be of help to small groups and local churches.
- 8.7 The group would be responsible for considering how best to deal with the issues listed below, how discussions might take place and with whom – whether by special groups, ecumenically or by existing committees - and how local churches and the councils of the church might also be involved. The group would coordinate this work and report back to Mission Council.

9. Some issues to be explored further

Mission Council recognises that as well as the range of issues considered in the report of 1999, there are many related, often complex and significant issues which need to be explored in more depth and in a constructive atmosphere, and in terms of the processes set out above (section 8). In outline some of these are -

9.1 Theology

Among several theological issues to be addressed, a coherent and comprehensive theology of same-sex partnerships is urgently needed as a basis for any further decisions. (A number of the following points depend on establishing a clear theological framework.) Ideally, as with earlier work, this should be set within the context of human sexuality, marriage and relationships in general as well as our understanding of gender.

9.2 Advocacy

Related to this is the need for clarity about the church's teaching on matters of sexual relationships. What do we actually affirm and teach about marriage, singleness, celibacy and same-sex relationships, for instance? Within this, how does the church cope with two incompatible sets of teaching, one of which says that same-sex practice is wrong and the other of which says that it can be life affirming? Do we say that our church teaches both?

9.3 Standards in ministry

What are acceptable patterns of life within ordained ministry? What standards are expected of ministers and members in relation to different expressions of sexuality? How are we to understand a minister's promise to lead a holy life?

9.4 Discipline

Recognising that there are ordained ministers within the church in openly same-sex

relationships, are they under similar disciplinary constraints as heterosexual and single ministers? If so, what do we understand those constraints to be?

9.5 Legal implications

Some recent legislation carries implications for the church. These need to be reviewed both in terms of what is required of the church and the church's own response. It would be good to do this work ecumenically, and particularly in the light of recent work in the Methodist Church.

9.6 Blessing of partnerships

What attitude should the United Reformed Church take regarding the blessing of civil partnerships? Do the present guidelines need to be reviewed, and should they be subject to debate and decision in General Assembly?

9.7 Unity

Believing that the unity of the church is a gospel priority, how much internal diversity is tolerable before that unity is contradicted? Clearly there is much diversity within the present church over many issues, but would it ever be acceptable in the name of unity to have such a diversity of beliefs and practices that members and ministers denied the actions and beliefs of others and where some ministers were totally unacceptable in some parts of the church? (Methodist Conference in 2005 asked that its "Faith and Order Committee should reflect upon the theological implications of being a Church that has to live or contend with different and mutually contradictory convictions." We need to address the same question from our own perspective.)

9.8 Practical implications of Diversity

We need to look carefully at the implications of the kind of diversity envisaged in the previous point. Might the acceptance of mutually exclusive interpretations living side by side lead all too painfully to the "clustering" of churches and ministers of similar views? What does it mean for a minister to be called locally but recognised nationally, particularly if different criteria seem to be used in different parts of the church? Might some candidates for ministry and some existing ministers seeking pastorates need to look for areas of the country where they might be more readily accepted than in others? If such pressures arise, how do we maintain the integrity of the church?

9.9 Conscience

What are the implications of personal conscience in this area? For example, what freedom do individuals and congregations have to reject the ministries of those whose attitudes or lifestyles are not acceptable to them?

9.10 Stereotyping

How do we overcome the dangers of stereotyping, which need to be challenged wherever they come from?

9.11 Pastoral issues

How should the church respond to those whose orientation is other than heterosexual and those in same-sex relationships and civil partnerships? How should the church respond to those who find such relationships and partnerships unacceptable and offensive in a Christian context? There is also potential for a wide range of issues of principle to arise from pastoral situations. Such things as a person's reorientation of gender could affect a minister. Situations like this need to be looked at now so that when they do arise they can be addressed with understanding and care.

9.12 Other sexuality issues

Beyond all these issues there are other, wider and urgent matters within the field of human sexuality which should also be concerning us. While these do not strictly belong within the scope of the human sexuality debate, they may serve to set this in perspective and remind us of related issues that also need our response. Examples might be sexual trafficking, gendercide, prostitution, pornography, rape and genital mutilation.

Draft Resolutions

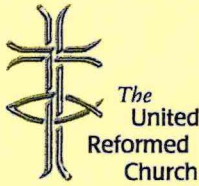
1. General Assembly welcomes and accepts Mission Council's guidance concerning the ending of the moratorium on policy decisions on matters of human sexuality.
2. General Assembly agrees to the wording of the Commitment on Human Sexuality.
3. General Assembly adopts the Commitment on Human Sexuality on behalf of the church.
4. General Assembly invites local churches and synods similarly to adopt the Commitment.
5. General Assembly regrets that wider and continuing discussions have not taken place on matters of human sexuality during the period of the moratorium, reminds the church of earlier work presented to Assembly, in particular the 1999 report, and calls for discussions to be initiated at the appropriate time in the light of the Catch the Vision process and in the spirit of the Commitment.
6. General Assembly asks Mission Council to set up a task group to enable discussions and to oversee the process of addressing issues of human sexuality, particularly those set out in its report.
7. General Assembly urges members of councils and local churches not to press for policy decisions on these matters during this process, but to join in discussions that might help to increase understanding and unity.

Notes for Mission Council

1. *As requested, a range of selected people (roughly 20) have been consulted about the detailed wording of the Commitment. Replies have been received from 13 people. These were very gratefully received and have all been carefully considered by the Task Group. It has not been possible to accept all the suggestions, but where agreed, changes have been made.*
2. *The Task Group has not responded to all the points raised at the January Mission Council. In particular it has not felt it right to develop section 9 much further nor to set out a programme or timetable for this discussion process. It has seemed more important to us that time is allowed for the Catch the Vision process to work through and for these matters to be considered without pressure. However, it has to be said that one of the most difficult matters in discussion has been over whether the*

Commitment should include the words (in 7.4) "... stay together through this process" For a variety of reasons this was not felt appropriate, though our experience does underline the pain which is felt by some among us. For the sake of the whole church we urge that the commitment to travel at least the next part of the journey together be gladly undertaken.

3. *It would be possible to go on adding and subtracting words and phrases in this report ad infinitum... Through the consultation process and within the Task Group the wording has been mullled over in great detail, with many emails and many changes, in an attempt to achieve an accurate balance and interpretation. While Mission Council may of course alter whatever it wishes, it might want to be cautious about altering too much at this stage unless it is something of real significance.*
 4. *The questions for Mission Council now are -*
 - 4.1 *Does Mission Council accept the report?*
 - 4.2 *Is there any wording that needs to be changed?*
 - 4.3 *This has become a long report despite attempts at brevity. If accepted, is Mission Council content that it should go to Assembly in more or less this form?*
 - 4.4 *In presenting the report to General Assembly, Mission Council might wish to reflect on the need to -*
 - *allow debate on the report as a whole;*
 - *allow for final amendments to the wording of the Commitment;*
 - *resolve to accept the report and the Commitment;*
 - *affirm the Commitment perhaps in a liturgical response at the end of the debate or towards the end of Assembly. The wording of the final point (7.4) might be adapted as the basis for this.*
 - 4.5 *Does Mission Council agree to the draft resolutions?*
 5. *The Task Group members are Mr Ben Beke, Revd Dr John Bradbury, Mrs Janet Eccles, Revd Malcolm Hanson (Convener), Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith, Revd Sally Willett. This is the Group's final report.*
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MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

A11

Staffing Advisory Group

The Staffing Advisory Group has undertaken the following work during the last two months.

Posts Reviewed

1. Editor of the United Reformed Church's National Journal/Periodical. The title for this post indicates some changes which the Assembly Communications and Editorial Committee wish to explore in relation to what is currently called 'Reform'. Staffing Advisory Group received the proposal for the post based on a three day working week, the initial tasks being to work with an Editorial Board and in consultation with the readership to re-define, re-design and re-launch a new journal/publication. Following the initial work the postholder would continue to work with the Editorial Board to produce the journal/periodical.
Previously the post of Editor of Reform was an Assembly appointment - this does not equate with the place of the new post within the Communications group of staff and Staffing Advisory Group therefore recommend that this should no longer be an Assembly appointment and that the postholder should be responsible to the Director of Communications.
Due to the need to meet the deadline for placing an advertisement for this post MCAG was asked to approve the post(see paper A) subject to ratification at Mission Council. (Resolution 1).
2. Secretary for Church and Society. This is currently a two year appointment from October 2005, agreed in order to continue the work related to Church and Society issues within the United Reformed Church but also to explore the possibility of greater ecumenical co-operation in this area of work. As a result of this initiative the Joint Public Issues Team has been set up and Mission Council have received a paper (Paper M) outlining the results of the review of that work to date. Staffing Advisory Group have looked at that paper together with a revised Job Description emphasising the complementary nature of the two aspects of the work and recommend the continuation of the post of Secretary for Church and Society. The postholder will work within the Joint Public issues Team and as part of the

Mission Policy and Theology Team within the United Reformed Church.
(Resolution 2)

3. Children's Work Development Officer. This is currently a twelve month post agreed with the aim of exploring the ecumenical possibilities for shared resourcing of children's work. Staffing Advisory Group received the paper prepared for Mission Council (Paper C) and additional information specifically relating to the Children's Work Development Officer post. A number of issues affecting Youth and Children's work are currently on the agenda of the Youth and Children's Work Committee with the aim of enabling a coherent and exciting strategy for Youth and children's Work to develop across the United Reformed Church. A review of the work of the Youth and Children's Work Training and Development Officer team is due to be completed by December 2007 and likely changes in the resources available from the central staff of the Methodist Church will both impact on the variety, nature and methods of working with children.

In view of the timescale and potential impact of these changes together with the desire to ensure that the eventual shape of the whole resource devoted to children's work across the denomination will be appropriate for the needs of the beginning of the 21st century, Staffing Advisory Group recommend the following:

- a) an extension of the Children's Work Development Officer post to (at the latest) December 2009.
 - b) by May 2009 Mission Council should receive recommendations regarding the future resources required for the support of children's work in the United Reformed church.
 - c) a programme setting objectives, milestones and expected progress towards achieving the above to be produced by October 2007.
- (Resolution 3)

4. Mission Secretary. As reported at the January meeting of Mission Council Staffing Advisory Group have, in the light of discussions and proposals relating to the Mission Policy and Theology team in the new structure, considered the future of the post of Secretary for International Relations and the work related to Life and Witness. It is considered that there should be a post of Mission Secretary the purpose of which would be to focus on mission, fusing together the concerns about mission within Europe and the UK with missiological insights from the world church. Staffing Advisory Group have undertaken a consultation process with the Conveners of the Life and Witness and Ecumenical Committees in order to produce an appropriate Job Description. Work is continuing on this and it is expected that it will be

finalised by May 2007 with the aim of appointing to the post by 1st November 2007.

5. Secretary for World Church Relations. It is intended that this post should cover some small parts of the work of the Secretary for International Relations and incorporate some of the work currently undertaken by the International Relations Programme Officer. Work is currently being undertaken to produce an appropriate Job Description and it is hoped that this work will be finalised by May 2007.

Resolutions

1. Mission Council approves the appointment of an Editor of the United Reformed Church's National Journal/Periodical as a three day per week post and agrees that this should no longer be a General Assembly appointment.
2. Mission Council approves the continuation of the post of Secretary for Church and Society.
3. Mission Council agrees to the Staffing Advisory Group recommendations relating to the Children's Work Development Officer post:
 - a. an extension of the Children's Work Development Officer post to (at the latest) December 2009.
 - b. by May 2009 Mission Council should receive recommendations regarding the future resources required for the support of children's work in the United Reformed church.
 - c. a programme setting objectives, milestones and expected progress towards achieving the above to be produced by October 2007.(Resolution 3)



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

B

Catch the Vision Steering Group Report

This report seeks to update Mission Council on developments since its January meeting. Mission Council will appreciate that this report is being prepared only six weeks after that meeting, and that some the most important concerns of the Group, and indeed the Church, are still under development. We ask Council to join with us in exercising the discipline of patience!

1. The proposed new committee structure

We remain grateful to Philip Woods for working further on this, and a separate paper (Paper O) summarises that work and is offered to Council for consideration. The Steering Group feel it right to draw Mission Council's attention to the considerable weight which these proposals will place on its shoulders. It is, of course, for Council to decide if that weight is acceptable. However, in general, the Group welcome the paper and suggest that if its proposals be adopted for an initial experimental period of three years and then be reviewed.

2. The Moderator of General Assembly

We were naturally delighted that Mission Council responded so warmly to the suggestion of alternating the post between Ministers of Word and Sacraments/CRCWs and Elders, and the creation of a leadership team. However, we also noted carefully Mission Council's disquiet with the thought of altering the way in which the Moderator is elected, and we therefore return with the suggestion that, beginning in 2008, each Assembly shall elect two Moderators, one for the current year, and one for the year beyond that. The election of this year's Moderator will of course determine whether we should first elect a minister or elder.

3. Spirituality

Patience is a virtue. Following discussions with a team of media experts and with the Communications and Editorial Committee, we have decided to approach our proposal of a DVD in a different way. Communications and Editorial are prioritising work on the church's web-site. It will be possible to run video material on the site. We therefore intend to work through local churches telling their stories via the web-site, with the intention of then deciding which stories could be used as part of the DVD. We would still aim to produce a DVD in time for the 2008 Assembly.

John Campbell is spending his sabbatical working on a programme of local church renewal. We hope that we will have a 'taster' to present to Assembly, but at present we have nothing to report which was not reported in January.

4. Worship

As we have been discussing spirituality as a Group, we have found ourselves returning again and again to the question of worship. It is a subject which has been continually brought to our attention in the past year, so much so that we thought we should share that with Mission Council. We believe that worship is the central experience moulding Reformed spirituality. We have heard heartening stories of vibrant, dynamic worship from all parts of the theological spectrum in the URC, but we have also heard of frustrations and difficulties, and of worship which seems badly prepared and inadequately led. That perturbs us, for by the grace of God, worship is one of God's 'trysting places' where through the sacramental power of bread, wine and Word, God encounters the people of God. A bad experience of worship does not encourage a visitor to return.

We understand the difficulties - ever larger pastorates, fewer lay preachers, the time required to produce worship teams in local churches and the ever increasing demands on our ministers. We have found ourselves though, pondering what priority we give to worship as we weigh up the conflicting demands of pastoral care, community building, political campaigning, and 'structural' engineering.

At present we simply wish to share those concerns with Council, and ask them to reflect back to us whether this is a concern which is more widely shared. Our concern is not to be judgemental - we are all worship leaders in our different ways. We wonder rather what the church can do to support and enable those who have the holy responsibility of leading worship laid on them. We note that 'disclosing new worlds', the Windermere Director's lectionary blog, gets over a hundred hits a day, and that may be some evidence of people's needs.

5. The future of Church House

Members of Mission Council will remember that in our 2005 report we noted that there was no coherent business case for moving Church House out of London (paras 107-9) and that we would begin discussions with the Methodist Church about sharing premises, '...not to produce short-term savings (although it will probably produce long-term reductions in costs) but to foster ecumenical working and creativity.' Last year we reported that those conversations were continuing.

They have taken a significant leap forward in the past months with a professional feasibility study being undertaken to see if it would be possible to move the URC's operations into the Methodist building in Baker Street. That work and our response to it are still underway, but we feel it right at this moment to report to Mission Council. Voices in past Assemblies have urged the national offices of the church to 'get their acts together' and mirror the joint working which happens so much at local level. Both the Methodist Church and ourselves have been involved in re-structuring at the same time. Both of us (for differing reasons) accept that this is not the time for unity but for what a Methodist colleague called 'parallel walking'. It may be that we are being presented with a window of opportunity which will not return for at least a generation. The Steering Group have been working on the assumption that they have correctly interpreted the mind of the church as encouraging these conversations, and we now seek confirmation of that as we enter a critical stage of the process.

6. The future management of CTV

We have been doing further work on this. We believe that the CTV 'brand' should be taken forwards, because it has now achieved recognition, and the church seems to have adapted the prayer into its own

strap line, 'God's people...transformed by the gospel...making a difference'. There will be two pieces of outstanding work left after Assembly - the DVD and John Campbell's work. We suggest that they should be managed as follows:

- a) the DVD should be managed by the Communications and Editorial Committee
- b) John Campbell's work should be managed by the 'Hothorpe' group who have journeyed with him thus far. They would act as a 'Council of Reference' until the material is produced.

Once the production stages of both are complete, responsibility should revert to Mission Council.

We have always argued that the regeneration of the church and a new concentration on mission and spirituality is a long-term matter. We believe that we now have the structures in place which will allow that concentration. The creation of the Mission department will help focus energy, and it remains our hope that the conciliar re-structuring we have been involved in will allow the voice of the local church and the Synods in which they are gathered to determine the priorities of the church.

We would also like to suggest one further way in which that focus could be enhanced. Spirituality and mission are not there to be 'managed'. They don't work in that kind of way. Rather, we need unagenda'd space for dreaming dreams and seeing visions. Prophets, people of prayer, and those who work at the edge are rarely comfortable with the structures and confines of institutional life. We need a kind of 'think-tank' which can see God's blue sky beyond the church's red tape. So, we offer you our dream.

We envisage a group of 15-20 people, meeting twice a year for 24 hours at Windermere (maybe at the end of July and the following April), to turn their minds, with the Moderator(s) of Assembly, to the on-going renewal and spiritual refreshment of the life of the church. We imagine a mix of theologians and Biblical scholars and practitioners (both lay and ordained) representing of the theological and cultural diversity of the church. There will also be ecumenical participants. It will be serviced by the Central Secretariat, and convened by the Moderator.

We believe that it should initially be selected by the Moderator. It will serve for one year, and then be replaced by a new body. No member should normally serve for more than two periods of one year consecutively.

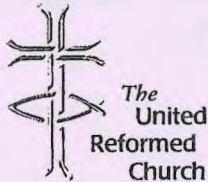
Any possible papers, projects or programmes suggested by the group will then be handed back to Mission Council, or the appropriate committee / department for further consideration and development. The intent is to keep a freshness of vision at the heart of our structures, and to enable sensitive response to the shifting spiritual and theological environment in which the church finds itself.

We would recommend that this be experimental, and that we review the experiment at the end of three years.

7. Legal and Trustee matters

We are still awaiting the conclusion of work on the possibility of avoiding a statutory instrument.

We are indebted to Eric Chilton for the considerable amount of work that he has undertaken on Trustee matters. Those matters are tabled separately under the 'P' heading.



**MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007**

C

Towards the Future of United Reformed Church Children's Ministry

**Report to Mission Council from the Youth and Children's Work Committee on the
First Seven Months of the Children's Work Development Officer (CWDO)
March 2007**

1. Introduction

1.1 "...for a long time, children in Britain have been under invested in; not enough has been spent on them.", Professor John Bradshaw, of York University, one of the authors of the recent UNICEF report on the well being of children in industrialised countries, in which the UK was found to be in the bottom third in five of the six categories. "We're looking overall at a rising level of social concern about what we're doing to children in terms of the stable background we give them, the expectations we lay on them, and the way in which we don't allow them to have a proper childhood" (Rowan Williams BBC1 2006). This is something of the social climate of children in Britain in which we are called to work.

1.2 We also know, not least from the experiences of many in the URC, that many children have no contact at all with the Church, and many perceive the Church as having nothing to offer them nor any concern for them and their lives.

1.3 Whilst adults may often leave the church and return after a period, children who leave the church seldom ever return. This evidence turns on its head the accepted view of children's work that suggests that it is normal for children to leave the church but if we have sown the right seeds, they will eventually come to fruit. This suggests that unless our youth and children's work becomes a model of excellence which engages the young meaningfully in the Christian faith, then we will in fact be having the opposite effect to that which we desire; rather than encountering the reality of God, becoming part of the church, and growing in faith, they may simply leave.

1.4 But the news is not all bad. Most of our churches do have some children's work and some are growing. The URC has an honourable record of investing in its children's work, and we give thanks for that commitment and many achievements. The ongoing challenge is to continue to develop our ministries amongst children to the highest level possible in terms of resources, training, relevance and creativity.

1.5 Historically, the appointment of a Children's Advocate helped to put children firmly on the URC's agenda. The Children's Advocate became a supportive voice for children's rights and importance and the 1990 Charter for Children in the Church was a bold and exciting step. The process of disseminating the Charter's vision to the local church has been slower and harder. It is the time to take another bold step, as we evolve from advocacy to involvement. The decision to appoint a Children's Work

Development Officer up until August 2007 continued this commitment. This report indicates the work under way already and potential future directions.

2 What has been happening?

2.1 Communications

- The CWDO has written to every URC to invite responses to a questionnaire about the current scale of URC work with children.
- Just before Christmas, 2006, "Not Urchin" was published to all who were on the "Urchin" mailing list. Again there was an invitation to feed back exactly what people in local churches would find most helpful and accessible by way of regular publications (in print or electronically). Another edition will be published in April.
- A new URC Children's Ministry logo is being finalised so that all our materials can have a common identity and higher impact.
- Design work has been completed on a new web site.

2.2 Consultation

- The CWDO has had a number of meetings across synods with local church children's workers. These have mainly been arranged through the synod Youth and Children's Work Trainer. Recurring themes have been the request for training, better information about available resources, issues around all age worship, new styles of church, children's involvement in communion and church membership.

2.3 URC Children's Assembly

- This is BIG NEWS! 2007 will see the first ever Children's Assembly alongside General Assembly. We suspect this is fairly unique within Christian history. All synods are being invited to send five or six children between 9-13 with two leaders. The event will be based on the same site as General Assembly, and careful planning is taking place to integrate the two gatherings. Synods have also been given £1,000 to run pre-Children's Assembly events so that children unable to attend this summer in Manchester can also participate in the debates and have their say. We see this as an incredible step forward.

2.4 Ecumenical Work and Explorations

- Through attendance at the CTBI's Consultative Group for Ministry amongst Children (CGMC), the CWDO has been involved in wider ecumenical initiatives, including the provision of CORE training for children's workers.
- CGMC is also producing information for local churches on the implications of the Government's Extended School's Programme.
- The CWDO is involved in the ecumenical review of the "Roots" materials for Sunday activities for all ages. About half of URC congregations responding to the survey use this material.
- In partnership with the Methodist Church, Scripture Union, the Church of England and National Children's Homes, the CWDO is running a series of road shows based around the book "Building Strong Towers". This retelling of Bible stories seeks to open their messages to children experiencing times of challenge and difficulty.
- The CWDO is involved in the creation of the "Peace builders" pack, alongside Pilots, Methodist Children and the Church of North India. This pack explores the role and work of children as peace-makers in their homes and

communities. The project is being jointly launched in India and London this Easter, with the General Assembly Moderator Elect (Revd. Dr. Stephen Orchard) travelling to India as part of the URC delegation.

- There have been significant preliminary discussions with the Methodist Church about possible future cooperation in children's work.

3. Future Possibilities for URC Children's Work

Resourcing the local Church

3.1 The URC, in returns so far, works with over 66 775 children and young people and of these, 18 476 attend on a Sunday. These figures are encouraging but sadly show a drop of 4.9% and 7.8% respectively over the previous year. Although it is difficult to tell to what extent these figures represent an accurate view, conversations with local children's workers have suggested that the mid week figures in particular may be very much underestimated, usually because the person completing the return is not in contact with the mid week work. It is also interesting to note that of all the churches who replied that they have no children and young people, most have buildings that are used by children's groups and organisation groups throughout the week and with which the church is not in contact. Only a tiny minority of our churches genuinely have no local children with whom they are or could be in contact. What is clear is that churches need support to develop their existing work and to utilise the opportunities they do have to work with children's groups in their community.

3.2 We do not know exactly how many volunteers work with children in our churches but we do know that the vast majority of our churches rely on small teams of committed individuals for all their children's work:

- The National Children's Office needs to be proactive in providing support and information to local churches, this includes developing a regular network for communication and a clear brand image by which people can identify correspondence and resources as belonging to the URC Children's Office
- Children's workers should be given the opportunities to be part of a network for mutual development and support.
- Training for children's workers needs to be even more widely available through the YCWT Team, nationally and ecumenically.
- We need to find ways to support the local church in getting involved with children, through PILOTS, uniformed organisations, extended schools and community groups.
- We need to provide support and guidance to the local church on matters of government policy concerning children such as the impact of Extended Schools and proposed legislation about compulsory training for those who work with children and new changes to the OFSTED registration, in order for the church to better be involved in local children's provision.
- Not just Sundays! We need to recognise that midweek work is a valid and culturally relevant way of encouraging children's faith development and that the church of the 21st Century is not just gathering and worshipping on Sundays and encourage congregations to try new ways of being church.
- We need to encourage good stewardship by helping churches to find the right material for their work amongst children and promoting sharing of resources where possible.
- We need to help churches to recruit new volunteers and ensure that they are adequately trained and supported and that expectations are realistic.

Encouraging children's participation

3.3 It is the duty of the church to speak out on behalf of the poorest and weakest and children and young people are increasingly in need of an advocate and a voice on issues that particularly affect them. At the same time there is an increasing awareness of the need to involve children as active citizens. Because we believe that "The Holy Spirit speaks powerfully to children as well as adults" (Charter for Children in the Church), the Youth and Children's Work Committee seeks to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard in the local and national church. To do this we need to be more proactive in encouraging and facilitating children to take part, hence our excitement about the Children's Assembly.

3.4 Within this we need also to recognise that, for increased participation to be successful, local churches will need education and support to involve children more fully in the decisions of the church:

- We need to be proactive in speaking out on behalf of children with other denominations.
- We need to model ways of encouraging children to speak out for themselves and taking their views into consideration, as much as we need to help children to learn and grow in discipleship.
- We need to support the local church and the Synods in seeking out and responding to the views of children.

Children and Spirituality

3.5 Catch the Vision speaks of the need for a new spirituality for the 21st Century. Although fewer children attend our Sunday worship and many have no contact with the church, recent research shows that children are increasingly interested in spirituality. If the church does not offer them opportunities for the genuine expression and exploration of this, they will look elsewhere. The Charter for Children states that "Children are equal partners in the life of the church", we need to find ways of making this vision a reality. "The church that does not accept children unconditionally into its fellowship is depriving those children of what is rightfully theirs, but the deprivation such a church will suffer is far more grave." ("The Child in the Church", BCC, 1976):

- We need to provide resources for the local church to support spiritual development of children and young people.
- We need to ensure that training in youth and children's ministry is a core part of pre and post ordination training and training for lay workers.
- We need to continue to theologically reflect on how we can truly be a church of and for all ages and the implications of this in areas such as Membership and Holy Communion.

Ecumenical work

3.6 The United Reformed Church should work ecumenically wherever possible, remembering that the URC has a distinctive identity and theology which adds to the kaleidoscope that is the church. The Catch the Vision report to General Assembly 2006 affirmed that we are coming of age as a denomination, here to stay and with a distinctive voice and experience to bring into the ecumenical world. This applies to work with children in the Church too.

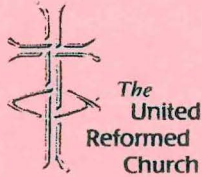
3.7 The experience of this year so far suggests that there is potential for greater cooperation:

- We should continue to explore with Methodist Children, with whom we have already established a close relationship, how we can better work together on joint and co-operative pieces of work.

- Explore the possibility of establishing a single administrative unit to encourage and support the children's ministry of the URC and Methodist Church, including joint publications, email and web service and training

4. Resolution:

Mission Council reaffirms its willingness to explore the ecumenical possibilities for resourcing work with children, especially with the Methodist Church, and encourages the Youth and Children's Work Committee to bring concrete proposals in time for General Assembly, 2008.



MISSION COUNCIL

23-25 March 2007

D

Global Warming /Climate Change

A paper and resolutions submitted to Mission Council jointly by Commitment for Life, Church and Society and the Ecumenical Committees for General Assembly

Global warming/climate change is widely recognised by scientists and governments as the greatest challenge facing the earth. Climate change is an environmental issue, with consequences including devastating heat waves, drought, the spread of disease, habitat loss, species extinction and increased storms and rising sea levels causing both inland flooding and coastal inundation. Climate change is also a justice issue, whilst the west/north have made the biggest contribution to the causes of global warming the south is least able to mitigate the situation and most likely to pay the highest price. Scientists warn of an impending 'tipping point', a point of no return after which the level of carbon in the atmosphere will cause an irreversible and accelerating change. It is imperative that all of civil society, including the Church acts.

What has the URC in association with sister churches done to date?

1. Produced a study and action guide entitled Roots and Branches (Assembly 1998) for local churches.
2. Adopted the Five Marks of Mission (Assembly 1999) as our core mission driver which includes as the fifth (but of equal ranking): to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.
3. Passed a Denominational Environmental Policy (Assembly 2004)
4. Promoted the ecumenical Eco-Congregation project www.ecocongregation.org designed to help churches consider environmental issues within their church life and take positive action, with excellence being marked with the Eco-Congregation Award
5. As members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches aided the development of the Accra Confession (2004), which was subsequently taken up by the Council for World Mission (2006) in the 'Living out the Accra Confession' statement (appendix 1) inviting people, congregations and churches to covenant for justice to transform ourselves and the world according to God's purposes and promises, inspired by the vision of a new heaven and a new earth.
6. Promoted Operation Noah www.operationnoah.org – the churches' campaign on climate change (Assembly 2004)

7. In 2005 established with the Methodist Church 'Creation Challenge' an environmental network enabling those who are active on environmental matters to pool ideas and expertise and to make care of God's creation a central part of local church life and witness. The network is working with synod property officers to produce an audit regarding environmental friendliness, which could be added to quinquennial surveys of church buildings.
8. Is developing a partnership with the church and government of Kiribati, in the Pacific, to spread understanding of climate change issues and to take action on environmental damage in the Pacific.
9. Is launching at Assembly 2007 "At the Water's Edge", a Commitment for Life publication with Bible study and worship ideas reflecting the link between climate change and poverty including stories from some of its four partner countries, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Zimbabwe.

Climate change requires concerted decisive action by all civil society, governments, business, the voluntary sector including churches and all people. Current government targets are to achieve a 60% cut in carbon emissions from the 1990 level by 2050. However, it is increasingly recognised that even this level of cuts is too little too late, with the poor bearing the highest cost. The church has an honourable record of campaigning and acting, most recently in debt and trade issues. It is important for the church to take a prophetic lead to act for the well being of the world including the poorest and as Christian witness. Recognising our common purpose, International Relations, Church and Society with Commitment for Life seek to work together with the whole church to reclaim a spirituality of caring for the whole of creation and encourage the whole church to act for the common good.

General Assembly

- (a) Notes with approval the work already achieved on the issue of climate change and recognises the need to reaffirm and build this into the whole life of the local church;**

Recognises the urgent need for all civil society, including the church to 'cut the carbon';

Commends Operation Noah, the churches' campaign on climate change, with its call to a radical new lifestyle for churches and their congregations.

- (b) Calls on the United Reformed Church to shrink its carbon footprint and asks Mission Council**
- **to determine how carbon emissions can be monitored at national, synod and local church levels, and**
 - **to develop plans to implement year on year cuts in carbon emissions;**

Recommends that such an exercise is outsourced in conjunction with ecumenical partners.

Acknowledges the value of the 'Creation Challenge' environmental audit in connection with quinquennial surveys of church buildings and encourages its use as part of this process.

Commends the ecumenical 'Eco-Congregation' project as a resource to help churches consider and take action on environmental issues within their life and mission.

Urges local churches to be active in campaigning for environmental justice.

Living out the Accra Confession

1.1 In the process of covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth a milestone was reached in Accra, Ghana, in August 2004, with the declaration of the Accra Confession by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) General Council. Following on from this the journey has been joined by the Council for World Mission (CWM) keen to explore the mission implications of the Accra Confession, as it names the principalities and powers with which we must contend as we seek to proclaim God's good news in our time. Together WARC and CWM convened this meeting, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (15-19 May 2006) *Living out the Accra Confession: Implications for our spirituality and mission* to take the process on so that it might not remain like lake Chilwa in Malawi, Southern Africa, which was described for us as rich and pregnant with life, yet stagnant and limited because it has no river outlets to share its goodness beyond its shores.

1.2 Thus, we affirm that Accra is not the end, but a signpost along the way and that with us and all those who have declared that 'we commit ourselves to seek a global covenant for justice in the economy and the earth in the household of God' (AC 33¹) the covenanting process now enters a new stage and we invite all God's people to join us in this journey.

1.3 Further we believe that the Accra process must continue, for confessing

- can lead to spiritual renewal (1 John 1:9)
- is itself a missional response to God's calling today (Philippians 2:11)
- is an expression of our partnership with God (Isaiah 55)

Reclaiming spirituality

2.1 We were reminded in our Bible studies that God created us and the whole creation in God's integrity. However, today we are driven towards a state of madness by the forces of domination, the logic of empire (AC 19) and the neo-liberal temptation to worship mammon, not God (AC 22). This madness extends to the whole creation which is today paying a high price, threatening life in all its forms (MK 5:1-19). The Accra Confession warns that there may be no life at all if this madness continues and reminds us of God's call to choose life not death.

2.2 In this spirit we affirm that restoring our relationships with one another based on the virtues of mutual love, respect and justice, and our interconnectedness with the Earth, and with the compassionate God, the very source of life, is an urgent action that we and all humanity must take.

2.3 In this spirit we recognise that our human-centred perspective on nature is a misconception of God's creation.

2.4 In this spirit we are called to cherish the earth for it is the source of life; that we should recycle what we have already taken and find our rest and renewal in its life-giving beauty.

2.5 In this spirit we should reclaim the significance of spirituality in our lives and reconnect ourselves with nature, the incarnate reality of God's life-giving and life-renewing bounty, in communities of celebration.

2.6 In this spirit we should rejoice with those who are rejoicing and weep with those who are weeping, celebrating God's love and care for all creation in the giving, sustaining, transforming and ending of life.

2.7 In this spirit we acknowledge that many churches have distorted the full wonder of God's purposes in creation in their theology, their worship of wealth, their misunderstanding of God's blessings, their anthropocentric notions of relations with nature and God.

¹ (AC 33) – This and other similar references refer to the Accra Confession, which this statement should be read in conjunction with as it sets out some of the implications of the Accra Confession and proposes how they might be taken up.

2.8 We therefore seek to reclaim our spirituality that we may be empowered for life in this world of death and destruction.

Reclaiming a theology of God's Economy

3.1 The Accra Confession's great challenge for churches in our time is to reclaim the true theological and biblical meaning and activities of economy (*oikonomia*), from the way it has been distorted, indeed poisoned, by the modern neo-liberal economy. Theological concepts such as trust, riches, fidelity, bond, exchange, saving, fiduciary, even business – in Chinese (Seng Yi) literally 'meaning of life' - have been co-opted by the dominant neo-liberal economy, and must be reclaimed or rescued by the churches. The neo-liberal global economy, an economic system based primarily on individual accumulation of wealth and property, is claiming total and hegemonic control over all of life, 'demanding an endless flow of sacrifices from the poor and the Earth' (AC 10). The Accra Confession has stated very clearly that 'in biblical terms such a system of wealth accumulation at the expense of the poor is seen as unfaithful to God and responsible for preventable human suffering and is called Mammon' (AC 14).

3.2 As churches we must reclaim the theological idea that the economy of God is in direct contradiction to the current neo-liberal economy. God's *oikonomia* is located within God's good earth (*oikonomene*) and God's all-encompassing household (*oikos*), which is no less than the whole lovely earth and the vast interconnected cosmos. It is God, not the market, who ultimately shapes the form and direction of the world, including economic activities.

3.3 God's *oikonomia*, in direct contradiction to the dominant neo-liberal economy:

Is a participatory economy which is life-enhancing and life-centred,

Promotes a solidarity economy of justice and sharing to ensure that all people have fullness of life,

Ensures that there is no poverty and no inequality,

Advocates participatory practices and values leading to equitable and sustainable mechanisms and governance for production, trade and finance,

Emphasizes that compassion, grace, love and justice are God's economic measures,

Recognizes the limits of extraction of natural resources and promotes ecological integrity

Celebrates and builds-up communities that are centred on the sharing of goods, ensuring justice for all.

3.4 This is the churches' task to reclaim a theology of life sustaining wholeness.

Reclaiming mission

4.1 The Accra Confession names the principalities and powers of our time as neo-liberal economy, environmental destruction and our living in the context of empire. Against this background we are called by God to follow Jesus in announcing the good news of liberation and redemption, to reclaim life in its fullness for all.

4.2 We have learnt from the participants and churches represented here how this can be taken up in transformative mission,

- Rejecting – saying 'no' to the forces of death and destruction
- Rebuilding – working with God to establish life in its fullness
- Rejoicing – celebrating the goodness of God

4.3 Specifically in respect of the economy we understand this as:

- Reaffirming the call of the Accra Confession to reject the injustices of the present neo-liberal, deceptive and seductive consumerist market system
- Rediscovering and rebuilding 'markets' as the place for celebrating and nourishing life in community
- Rejoicing in the joy of mutual sharing, of giving and receiving which markets at their best truly enable

4.4 Specifically in respect of the environment we understand this as:

- Rejecting the exploitation of creation and repenting of lifestyles which contribute to its exploitation and degradation
 - Rebuilding our relationship with the creation, which God has entrusted to our care
 - Recognising the beauty and bounty of God's creation and rejoicing in it, for it is God's gift to us
- 4.5 Specifically in respect of empire we understand this as:
- Joining with the Accra Confession in rejecting all ideas of empire which subvert God's sovereignty over life and which act contrary to God's just rule; and confessing our historical complicity with empire
 - Rebuilding relationships amongst the peoples of the earth, accepting all as sisters and brothers in the global community of all God's people; and committing ourselves to partnership in mission
 - Recognising that in mutual love and respect we are enriched by each other and through this discover the joy of life
- 4.6 In these terms God calls us to transformative mission today.

Invitation to Covenanting for Justice together

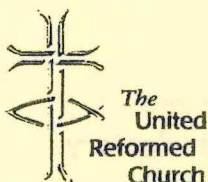
5.1 Accordingly we invite all God's people to join with us in a 'covenanting for justice' movement to transform ourselves and the world according to God's purposes and promises, inspired by the vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

5.2 The Accra Confession defines our relationship as a covenanting relationship which has been initiated by God. Initiating a Covenanting for Justice movement opens a door to everybody to join in the struggle for God's justice in the economy and the earth. The Accra Confession reminds us that our journey will not be easy; therefore, we need the solidarity of each other. Through mutual encouragement and solidarity we can increase our capacity, our strength and our courage as we engage with the principalities and powers of our time. Our working together in Kuala Lumpur has given us a lot of encouragement and a promising experience to this end, so we boldly say, 'Join us!'

Specifically

We, the participants of the WARC-CWM Malaysia forum invite:

- 6.1 Our churches and congregations, and their partners in the worldwide ecumenical community to unite their commitments, wisdom, and resources in our common covenanting journey.
- 6.2 CWM, WARC WCC, LWF and other ecumenical and mission agencies to work together on the basis of their own processes such as WARC's Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth, and the WCC's AGAPE process, in order to build synergy in their efforts.
- 6.3 CWM and WARC, along with the WCC, to commit themselves for an initial period of five years to the Covenanting for Justice movement working together ecumenically.
- 6.4 The Covenanting for Justice movement to intentionally work together with social movements, people's movements and civil movements as the Accra Confession has encouraged us to do.
- 6.5 The Covenanting for Justice movement to intentionally work together with other faith communities so that it might be enriched by their traditions of justice and respect for the earth.
- 6.6 Mission agencies to engage in a similar covenanting process on mission in the context of empire.
- 6.7 All parties to contribute to the sharing of stories, experiences and resources, contributing to the development of a Covenanting for Justice movement.
- 6.8 Churches, ecumenical and mission agencies to develop training opportunities on covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth.
- 6.9 The Covenanting for Justice movement to initiate a study on the theology of wealth, poverty and justice.



**MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007**

E

The remit of the Finance Committee

The remit of the Committee has not been reviewed for many years.

Presently the remit states:

"The committee is responsible for the general financial oversight of funds administered for the benefit of the United Reformed Church under the overall authority of General Assembly, for ensuring that proper procedures are in place for the maintenance of accounting records, the safe custody of assets and the preparation of financial statements, for giving financial advice to other councils of the Church as appropriate, and for taking such decisions with regard to the finances of the Church as are necessary within the policies set by General Assembly."

However this does not properly reflect the work now undertaken by the Committee.

First, in 2004 the Committee assumed the responsibilities previously given to the Resources Planning Advisory Group of the Mission Council. These included long term planning and the control of the budgetary process. These additional tasks have not yet been reflected in the remit.

Secondly, the setting up of the new arrangements for the Charity Trustees has also changed its role. The regular key tasks of the Trustees are the Annual Audit, the agreement of the Budget in conjunction with Mission Council, and Risk Management. In these tasks the Trustees are assisted by the Finance Committee.

The following revised remit is, therefore, proposed to reflect the present role of the Finance Committee:

The Finance Committee is appointed by and accountable to General Assembly, with nominations for Committee membership being proposed by the Nominations Committee, in agreement with the Finance Committee.

The Committee is responsible for the general financial oversight of funds administered for the benefit of the United Reformed Church, its long-term financial planning, and the preparation and control of its budget under the authority of Mission Council and the Trustees.

The Committee will ensure that proper procedures are in place for the maintenance of accounting records, controlling and monitoring the budgetary process, and the preparation of financial statements in compliance with applicable United Kingdom law and accounting standards. To this end the Committee should expect to liaise with auditors at least once per annum.

The Committee may take such decisions with regard to the finances of the Church as are necessary within the policies set by General Assembly.

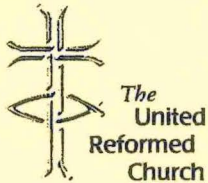
Although the Committee is responsible to General Assembly, there will be occasions where its work will be complementary to or in support of the Trustees or other Committees as they fulfil their responsibilities, especially in the security of assets; long-term financial planning; budget control monitoring; appraisal of business cases; assessing, monitoring and managing risk and in particular its financial implications; compliance with charity legislation generally but with particular regard to finance; compliance with generally accepted accounting practice, best governance and general financial advice as appropriate.

Eric Chilton

21st February 2007

Resolution

General Assembly agrees the revised remit for the Finance Committee.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

E1

The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund
Board Membership

Currently the Board has 12 directors (the Trustees) comprising 4 ex officio directors,
4 directors nominated on behalf of the Church and 4 directors nominated on behalf of the members. The nominated directors are brought to General Assembly by Nominations Committee for approval.

Recent changes in legislation relating to the membership of Pension Fund Boards requires that not less than one third of the directors are member representatives and for them to be nominated by the members, and not by Nominations Committee and General Assembly. Accordingly a new process is being designed which complies with the law and will be brought into force from General Assembly 2007.

The opportunity has been taken to review the company Articles of Association generally in regard to the appointment of directors. Appropriate changes in the Articles to bring them up to date have now been agreed at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Company.

Therefore from General Assembly 2007 will comprise:

the four ex officio directors by virtue of their office

The Honorary Treasurer (John Ellis)

The Convener of the Maintenance of Ministry Committee (Geoffrey Roper)

The Convener of the Pensions Executive (Maurice Dyson)

The Convener of the Investment Committee (Richard Nunn)

the four directors nominated on behalf of the Church

for which the process for selecting the directors in the future will follow procedures recently introduced for the Trustees of the Church.

the four directors nominated on behalf of members

for which the new process will be followed.

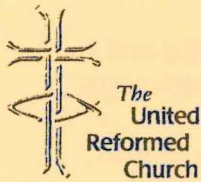
~~The agreement of Mission Council is sought on the composition of the Board and the revised arrangements suggested for the nominating directors; and is asked to report this to General Assembly for its approval.~~ ^{has agreed}

Eric Chilton.

27th February 2007.

Resolution

General Assembly agrees the revised arrangements for nominating directors of the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

F

The Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church

Introduction

A photo taken with a camera can give a very accurate picture of how things are at a particular moment. It cannot tell you what happened before the image was formed, nor can it give any sense of the flow of events. On the other hand a film is able to tell a story in such a way that a viewer is able to understand why things end up as they do. At least that is the theory. This description of the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church adopts the "film" approach, in that it picks out events from a long story in order to build up a picture of this particular Church at the beginning of the 21st century. It makes no attempt to be a history. It selects events from the past in order to illuminate the present.

The beginning

Christ is made the sure foundation,
Christ the head and corner stone,
Chosen of the Lord and precious,
Binding all the Church in one,
Holy Zion's help for ever,
And her confidence alone.

That verse from an old Latin hymn translated by John Mason Neale was sung at the service of thanksgiving following the first formation of the United Reformed Church on 5 October 1972. It contains a reminder of where the story must always begin.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) If that is the beginning, then the task of the church in any place or tradition is to continue the ministry of Christ in the world and among his people. The United Reformed Church therefore bases its understanding of ecclesiology on this statement in its Basis of Union:

"Within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church the United Reformed Church recognises its responsibility under God:

- 1 to make its life a continual offering of itself and the world to God in adoration and worship through Jesus Christ;
- 2 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;

- 3 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;
- 4 and to bear witness to Christ's rule over the nations in all the variety of their organised life."

It is with the one, holy and catholic church that the United Reformed Church recognises its beginning as being with Christ. It shares with that one church 1000 years of history, the councils and historic creeds of the church, its saints and martyrs, and its developing ecclesiology. That sharing continued for another 500 years or so with all but the Orthodox family of Christians.

When the United Reformed Church was first formed, in this sense it was not something new and different, it was continuing the ministry of Christ and it was in continuity with the life of the church throughout the centuries. The story of what happened next assumes that beginning.

The Reformation

Only in a film is it possible to jump over many centuries from the beginnings of the church to the ferment of ideas and debate, and eventually division, that was the Reformation in Europe. This seismic change in the church was stimulated by the general increase and interest in learning and much aided by the development of the printing press. Internally the church had become complacent and in places corrupt, and in its external life the church was so involved with the political power struggles of the day that conflict was inevitable and a concern for the poor and needy was often overlooked. A succession of leaders emerged, all of whom intended to reform the church rather than divide it, but in the event their efforts achieved both things.

In the undoubted bitterness that followed the Reformation, for centuries each part of the church sought to depict what had happened in terms that tended to demonise the other. Thus Protestants saw Catholics as those who preferred privilege and corruption to the demands of simple biblical faith, and Catholics saw Protestants as heretics who would not accept the discipline of the church. This demonisation has left a legacy which still has currency, but one of the fruits of the ecumenical movement is a growing recognition that in reality the Reformation brought change for good in all parts of the church. There is also recognition that some very regrettable things were said and done by both sides in the Reformation struggle.

Of course that is a huge generalisation, as will be any short description of how new churches emerged from the Reformation ferment. Names like Peter Waldo, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Huldreich Zwingli and William Farel pass across the screen, each leaving a particular emphasis and very often a group of followers who would develop their ideas into an ecclesial system. The one thing they all had in common was a desire to reconnect with the Word of God that had become flesh and lived among us, and in that search the Bible assumed a central position. The Bible, or portions of it, was translated into the language of the people and studied with enthusiasm. The churches that emerged from the Reformation all gave a high place in

their ecclesiology to the Bible: in particular now the United Reformed Church acknowledges "the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people" (Basis of Union 12).

Ironically, this may be seen as the weakness as well as the strength of the churches which emerged from the Reformation, in that then as now they could not agree in some aspects what was the Word of God revealed by the Spirit in the Scriptures.

From these general points the focus moves to the figure of John Calvin, simply because in the reforms he introduced in Geneva are the foundations of the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church. Calvin had a simple answer to the question, what is the church? "Wherever we see the Word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot doubt that the Church of God has some existence". The basic unit of the church is a congregation gathered around the Word and the Sacraments.

However, the final three words, "has some existence", are crucial, for Calvin developed a polity, a structure, for the church which to him was a great deal more than a simply human organisation. The polity existed for the good health of the church; it provided a framework to protect the preaching of the Word and the administration of the Sacraments, as well as a community which enabled believers to live out their vocation as disciples of Christ.

Two particular points spring from this. Calvin looked to the New Testament for his model of the church, and he believed it was the only one to be found there, yet he also believed that the detail could be adjusted to meet the needs of local circumstance. He proposed four orders of minister: ministers, who preached the Word and administered the two Gospel Sacraments, and shared pastoral care with the elders; doctors, who had a teaching function, chiefly with the ministers but also with lay people; elders, who with the ministers had oversight of everyone; and deacons, who led the church's ministry of compassion, especially to the poor and sick. Each of these was a valued ministry in its own right, there was no "ranking" of ministry, and none was seen as a stepping stone to another. Those whom God called to these ministries were called to a function, not to a status: like all Christians, they were equally members of one Body serving under the headship of Christ.

However, and particularly in relation to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, Calvin wished to give the **function** of ministry a high standing; precisely because it is through the preaching of the Word and the administering of the Sacraments that God makes himself known to us, and it is these functions that make the church the church. Unless the Word is preached and the Sacraments administered, there is no church. We are left with the question, still relevant today, can function and person be so neatly distinguished? If we have a high view of a particular ministerial function will not human nature lead inevitably to any person exercising that function being treated as a special person?

The second particular point is related. It concerns discipline. Calvin insisted that there

should be a consistory of ministers and elders responsible for the discipline of the congregation in the areas of morals, the participation in worship, and of Christian knowledge. He argued persistently that the consistory should be independent of the state in carrying out this task. For Calvin discipline was not a negative matter. It was important so that God was glorified through the church and so that those who had fallen from the high Christian calling could be helped back into the way. He was not one of those who wanted to create a church of the pure, and it was only some of his later followers who decided that discipline should be a third mark of the church, along with the Word and the Sacraments. Nevertheless Calvin did put considerable emphasis on high moral values and on teaching people to be able to express what they believed and why they believed it. The community of the saints had high standards and they supported one another in a common life in Christ.

From a 21st century perspective the Genevan church looks somewhat austere and authoritarian, but its uncompromising message of the grace of God in Jesus Christ above all else gave it inner strength and created a tradition which spread throughout Europe and eventually across the whole world. Perhaps the key lay in the Word and Sacraments in the centre and the open-ness to reform under the guidance of the Holy Spirit within which the centre was contained.

As the film pans out from viewing one man in one city in a few years in the 16th century to take in all the countries of Europe, including England, Scotland and Wales, the flurry of activity makes clear that the Reformation was a movement involving many people beyond its famous names, and where ideas were shared, debated and developed over many decades. The three nations on which the film now turns its focus had their own particular political and social character, which gave rise to the ecclesiological question – now that the established church had broken away from the authority of the Pope in Rome, should its governance be congregational, Episcopal or Presbyterian?

The majority answer in Scotland was Presbyterian, in England and Wales Episcopal, but in the latter nations a significant minority emerged that was either Congregational or Presbyterian. Congregational denotes an understanding of the church based on the gathering under God of professed believers covenanting together in the local church meeting, who order their witness and worship according to the Word. Presbyterian denotes an understanding of the church as the place where the Word is preached, the sacraments administered and elders and ministers unite to exercise spiritual discipline and pastoral care.

It is hard now to imagine the pressures and tensions that played upon this minority. Of itself, separation from fellow Christians is a painful step, but in this case it also meant alienation from the political process, often social exclusion, and in some instances the division of families. Small wonder that the convictions which led people into the minority were radical and profound. Small wonder that Congregationalists in particular sought strength from one another in a close covenanted relationship in Christ. Much of the character of Congregationalism was forged in the bitter experience of the first half of the seventeenth century.

Yet even then there was not a desire to sever completely the links with those of an

Episcopalian conviction. That was something forced on the minority.

The Formative Years

From the time of the Anglican settlement there were those who felt that the reform of the English Church was not driving deeply enough. They sought a pure Church, reformed in accordance with the Word of God, and they became known as Puritans. Among these was Thomas Cartwright who argued for a national Church organised along Presbyterian lines. For this he lost his Cambridge Chair, and endured two periods of exile. More radical Puritans thought that the only way to achieve purity of church order and worship was for Christians to be separate from 'the world'. They were dismayed that 'the world' had intruded into the Church of England, and were particularly concerned that godly and ungodly alike were legislated into the state Church and were receiving communion therein. They became known as Separatists, and a principal part of their protest was ecclesiological. They did not believe that the Church comprised all the inhabitants of the land; positively, they contended that the Church comprised those called by grace who enter into a willing covenant with God, and that the sole Lord of the Church is Jesus Christ. They did not deny that the magistrate should keep civil order, but they refused to have him implicated in the ordering of the Church's worship and life. For making this witness a number of them were executed. Puritan teaching concerning the nature of the Church and its relations to the state has flowed down to the United Reformed Church of today.

During the reign of James I many Separatists became exiles in Holland, and some of these were among those who became Pilgrims to the New World in 1620. By 1640 some exiles were returning home, and during the Commonwealth and Protectorate the Presbyterians and Congregationalists were able to gather openly and, indeed, to produce their most important statements of faith and order, the Westminster Confession (1647) and the Savoy Declaration (1658). Following the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 came the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Some two thousand ministers, mostly Presbyterian though with over two hundred Congregationalists and eight or nine Baptists, left their livings rather than give their 'unfeigned assent and consent' to the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. They believed that Christ was the sole Head of the Church and they could not accept a situation in which the monarch, whose authority over the state they acknowledged, should have authority in spiritual matters over the Church. By the Toleration Act of 1689 orthodox Protestant Dissenters were given the right to freedom of worship, though they were still barred from civic office and from the professions. They registered meetings for worship, built meeting houses, and established Dissenting Academies for the higher education of their young men. In due course a number of them became leaders in business and industry – fields that were open to them.

The Presbyterians went into an early decline partly because they were divided in their attitudes to the creeds and statements of faith. Some became Congregationalists or Unitarians, other returned to the established church, and only a small number continued in their original tradition. In many ways Congregationalists flourished in this minority situation: each congregation could decide for itself where it stood in regard to creeds and forms of worship, and because a covenanted relationship between the members as

one in Christ was central to their polity, they were well fitted to support one another in the hardships resulting from their minority position. Towards the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries Congregationalists in England and Wales were active in the Evangelical Revival and in this period also a number of theological academies were established for training ministers and preachers.

That last word draws attention to the fact that in a growing church and a poor church much of the preaching and teaching was done by lay people. In some cases this was due to anti-clerical feeling but generally it was a case of necessity. However a tradition was established which would continue through all the changes that were to come. Another practice which became a tradition was that of singing the faith. People like Isaac Watts and Philip Doddridge wrote hymns based on biblical texts, and together with the Scottish psalter, these formed an important part of the diet of worship. What has been more recently derided by some as a hymn sandwich began as a positive way of ordinary people expressing their biblical faith together. The origins of the practice need to be recovered. One other factor of this period was the importance given to church discipline. Readers of old minute books could be excused for thinking that almost all Congregationalist deacons and Presbyterian elders did when they met together was to decide what should be the consequences of church members' (and occasionally their own) falls from grace, often in sexual matters. Discipline was not something negative: its goal was the honouring of God and the repentance and restoration of believers.

As the 19th century progressed most of the disabilities that had been placed on Nonconformists (and Roman Catholics) were lifted. Gradually the distinction between church and chapel ceased to be a social one. Many of the leading industrialists and entrepreneurs were Congregationalists: very often they paid for the building of churches and attendance was expected of their employees. Congregationalists were also active in social and political life, frequently speaking out for justice in radical ways. Concern was not limited to life in their own country. In 1795 the London Missionary Society was formed, initially on a non-denominational basis, but it quickly became the missionary arm of Congregationalists to which significant sums of money and numbers of people were committed in spreading the glorious Gospel of the blessed God. In church life some of the disadvantages of independence began to be felt as some of the restrictions imposed in 1662 were lifted and the Congregational Union of England and Wales was established in 1832, with a network of County Unions to deal with the legal issues of property and finance, as well as to give a measure of mutual support. In 1919 there was yet another major change when a number of ministers were set apart to act as Moderators, with the particular functions of pastoral care of ministers and assisting the movement of ministers between churches. Inevitably this also brought a greater measure of commonality among all the churches in the Union. Dating from the same time, and no less significant, was the decision to admit women to the ordained ministry. More seeds had been sown which would yield a rich harvest.

The camera pans back a few years. Following the Act of Union in 1707, and increasingly after the Industrial Revolution, there was a considerable migration of Scots to England and Wales. Inevitably they brought their Presbyterianism with them and eventually in 1876 the Presbyterian Church of England was formed out of this influx and of the few who had remained Presbyterian since the Great Ejection. The title belied the fact that

there were two congregations in Wales and two in the Channel Isles! The Church flourished particularly in industrial areas and major centres of population. It had a very limited presence in rural areas. Unlike its future partner, the Presbyterian Church believed that world mission was a function of the church, not something that could be carried out by a separate society. It therefore established an Overseas Missions Committee of the General Assembly which became responsible for mission in certain parts of Asia.

In the years between 1918 and 1939, and more particularly after 1945, in an increasing number of places Congregationalists and Presbyterians, facing the slight beginnings of decline, recognised their common roots in the Reformation and formed united congregations which owed allegiance to both denominations. This was found to be a lot more acceptable than the first abortive attempt in the post-war period to unite the Union and the Church. There was simply not enough agreement to reach a conclusion. However the attempt led in 1951 to a Covenant which was accepted by the Assemblies of both denominations and which included the words: "sharing a common faith and inheriting together the traditions of Reformed Churchmanship, they do now enter into a new and solemn relationship with one another, covenanting together to take counsel with one another in all matters of common concern..." Something had started which had a momentum of its own and over the next decade or so the percentage of Presbyterian congregations, in particular, which were part of local unions with Congregationalists reached a level which was bound to be influential. Over the same time a change of ecclesiology took place in Congregationalism which would pave the way to union: in 1966 the Congregational Union of England and Wales became the Congregational Church in England and Wales. It was not an easy change given the struggles of the past, and some did not go with it, but it is an example of a Reformed Church recognising that outward forms are not of the essence of the church and that a new situation may demand changes in things that are not essential.

On a very different plane a small group of Congregationalists took a step which grew in significance in the following decades. They were appalled by the terrible deprivation and suffering of many people in Germany immediately after 1945, as well as being concerned to counter anti-German feeling in a Christian spirit of reconciliation. They began with the provision of food and clothing to those most in need, but then moved on to a church to church relationship which bore fruit in 1957 in a Covenant of Pulpit and Table between the Congregational Union of England and Wales and the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz. From this and other seeds grew a rediscovery of links between Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe and Congregationalists and Presbyterians in Britain.

There was another element in the "new situation" which had been growing throughout most of the 20th century. This was the Ecumenical Movement. From its beginnings in the Edinburgh missionary conference in 1910, both Congregationalists and Presbyterians had been leaders in this movement. Both had been committed to seek Christian unity as a response to the prayer of Christ, and in the middle years of the 1960s this commitment was tested in the beginnings of formal union conversations between the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. Would those who had been vocal in wider circles put their words into practice in their

own lives?

How different was Wales?

So far England and Wales have been treated as one country and as far as the development of ecclesiology is concerned, the same factors largely affected both. However, it is arguable that debate about ecclesiology has been of less significance in Wales. To an extent many of the major churches in Wales would see themselves as being in the Reformed tradition as defined by Calvin. The Church in Wales has bishops but since 1921 has put aside any formal link with the state. The Presbyterian Church of Wales is a product of the Calvinistic wing of the Evangelical Revival. The Union of Welsh Independents and the Congregational Federation have adopted a strongly independent understanding of ecclesiology, while the United Reformed Church in Wales has followed a similar path to that in England.

It was not particularly ecclesiological debate that led people to take these different paths. More significant was the pressure created by the 18th century enlightenment. Freedom of thought and conscience was being encouraged by some to such an extent that others decided that orthodoxy was the only way to protect the faith. That inevitably led to the question, who defines orthodoxy?, and a division into denominations according to the answer that was given.

The Welsh language and culture has always been a significant factor in the difference between England and Wales. After a catastrophic decline in the number of Welsh speakers during the first part of the 20th century there has been a concerted effort to foster the use of the language and develop interest in the culture. Across the Welsh denominations this has coincided with a renewed interest in Welsh and Celtic spirituality. The relationship between language, culture and national identity is a continuing issue in the discussion about what it means for a church to be authentically Welsh. For the time being there is something of a distinction in Wales between Welsh speaking and English speaking churches.

The United Reformed Church: the 1972 union

There were those in the wider ecumenical movement who felt that achieving this union was not a difficult task: both in their origins and in the way they were as churches at the end of the 1960s Congregationalists and Presbyterians seemed very similar. This was depicted as a very small step on the road to Christian unity. However true that may be, the way in which the two churches voted on the union scheme indicated the major ecclesiological difference between them.

After wide discussion of various draft proposals over a number of years, the Assemblies voted on the Scheme of Union in May 1971 following debates held simultaneously – although geographically almost as far apart as possible, in London and Newcastle-upon-Tyne. A sufficient majority in both Assemblies passed the proposal. Then, over the following months each local church and congregation had a vote: Congregational churches had to vote on whether or not to be part of the United Reformed Church, Presbyterian churches automatically became part of the new church unless they

specifically voted not to be. This was because at this critical moment the decisive discernment of the mind of Christ was deemed to be in the individual Congregationalist Church Meetings and in the Presbyterian General Assembly. The outcome of a great deal of voting, for County Unions and Presbyteries also voted, was confirmed at the Assemblies of May 1972 and effected at a Uniting Assembly on 5 October 1972. Many of those Congregational churches which voted not to join the United Reformed Church formed themselves into the Congregational Federation.

How were these very different ecclesiologies reconciled? It was more by reference to the experience of tradition rather than seeing tradition as a fixed yardstick against which all change had to be measured. Experience had taught Congregationalists that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer they gathered under the Word in local fellowship in a Church Meeting. Experience had taught Presbyterians that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer their representatives gathered under the Word in General Assembly. From this experience was developed a conciliar church in which there is dispersed authority. That means that the authority to discern the mind of Christ is dispersed between the various councils of the church, depending on the nature of the matter to be determined. The experience of both Congregationalists and Presbyterians was married together in a way different from what both had been previously.

The United Reformed Church had four levels of council; locally there was a Church Meeting at which all members have speaking and voting rights, and an elected Elders Meeting. Each had its own defined functions but they operated as a partnership. Although the particular role of Elders was to give spiritual leadership to the church, and often they would give guidance and advice to a Church Meeting, it remained the case that the members meeting together were responsible for the life and mission of the church locally. In areas there were District (in Scotland Area) Councils, made up of serving ministers and representatives of all the local churches in the area; in the nations of Scotland and Wales, and in the regions of England there were Synods with a similar basis of membership; and finally there was the General Assembly, chiefly made up of representatives of District/Area Councils, with an equal number of ministers and elders or other lay people. (N.B. At the time of writing – early 2007 – and following the full scale denominational review process entitled Catch the Vision, inaugurated in 2002, a change is underway which will result in the abolition of District Councils, leaving Synods as the only Council between the local church and General Assembly).

It remains the case that this is not a hierarchy of councils in which the wider councils can automatically overrule those with a more limited area. Authority to determine the mind of Christ has been given to one council or may be shared by several. Some examples of this: a local Church Meeting determines the pattern of its own worship and mission by itself. District Councils decide the deployment of ministers and share with Church Meetings in their calling. Synods, having consulted others, decide who should be accepted for training for the ministry, and on the initiative of Church Meetings determine the purchases, sales and major alteration of buildings. The General Assembly makes decisions and advises on matters concerning the common life and mission of the United Reformed Church, and is alone responsible on matters of doctrine or of the basic structure of the Church. In these latter areas the Assembly cannot implement changes

without first consulting the Synods. There exists in every case, except that of the General Assembly, a right of appeal against the decision of any council of the church.

One sentence in the Structure of the United Reformed Church reveals how this conciliar structure is to be put into practice. "Decisions on the part of any council shall be reached only after the fullest attempt has been made to discover the mind of the other councils or of local churches likely to be affected by the decision".

At the heart of the United Reformed Church's ecclesiology lies the Basis of Union. A look at its key features provides a number of flashbacks to Calvin's understanding of the church, linked to his belief that apart from the Word and Sacraments all is open to change through the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paragraph 12 is a good starting point. "The United Reformed Church confesses the faith of the Church catholic in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It acknowledges that the life of faith to which it is called is a gift of the Holy Spirit continually received in Word and Sacraments and in the common life of God's people. It acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people."

If that is at the heart of the Church, its lifeblood is unity. "There is but one Church of the one God" begins the Basis, and as it reflects on that unity it comes to the conclusion "the failure and weakness of the Church have in particular been manifested in division which has made it impossible for Christians fully to know, experience and communicate the life of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church". The Spirit which has called this new church into life has done so specifically to enable one small step and one big vision of Christian unity to be achieved. "The United Reformed Church has been formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been remiss in the past and to be reconciled. It sees its formation and growth as part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people".

To continue the image, the vital organs of the United Reformed Church are the Word and the Sacraments. "In the ministry of the Word, through preaching and the study of the Scriptures, God makes known in each age his saving love, his will for his people, and his purpose for the world." In practice ministers, lay preachers, and elders exercise this ministry along with others with teaching skills.

The Church "observes the gospel sacrament of baptism into Christ as a gift of God to his Church, and as an appointed means of grace." Baptism is seen as the sacrament of entry into the church and is therefore administered once only to any person. It is administered with water in the name of the Trinity.

The Church celebrates the gospel sacrament of the Lord's Supper. "When in obedience to the Lord's command his people show forth his sacrifice on the cross by the bread broken and the wine outpoured for them to eat and drink, he himself, risen and ascended, is present and gives himself to them for their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace".

The Word and Sacraments are God's gifts: ministry is the human response. It is a continuation of Christ's ministry and the whole people of God offer it. "This service is given by worship, prayer, proclamation of the gospel, and Christian witness, by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility, and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one". In this fundamental sense every member of the United Reformed Church shares in ministry.

To equip people for the ministry of the whole Church, the Church decided to recognise two ordained offices; minister of word and sacrament and elder. To those called to these particular offices, the Church gives authority to exercise a ministry, setting them apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces, which solemn setting apart is in the case of ministers and elders termed ordination. The task of ministers is described as to "conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world". Elders "share with ministers in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders' meeting for the whole church". They are also associated with ministers in all the councils of the church.

Analogies are often difficult to continue, but it can be suggested that the brains of the church are its verbal confessions of faith. Here the United Reformed Church recognises that over the ages many such confessions have been made to express the essentials of the faith within the understanding of the time. So it bears thankful witness to the catholic faith contained in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. It recognises the particular declarations and formulations of faith produced in the Reformed tradition, of which the Savoy Declaration and Westminster Confession may serve as examples. And at its formation in 1972 it set out its own confession of faith, which can be found in paragraph 17 of the Basis of Union. In 1997 the General Assembly adopted an alternative statement of faith, not to supersede the earlier one but to stand alongside it as a way of expressing the faith in inclusive language. However, members, ministers and elders are not required formally to subscribe to any of these confessions: rather there are suggested affirmations to be made by a person entering membership and required affirmations to be made by elders and ministers – in these latter two cases including a willingness to exercise ministry according to the Statement of the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D to the Basis of Union).

It has already been seen how Presbyterians earlier splintered over the question of adherence to creeds. In the mid-20th century Congregationalists in particular varied considerably in their attitude to any formulation of the faith, but the significant majority was clear that for unity of fellowship to have any real meaning and to have any claim to be part of the one holy, catholic and apostolic church there needs to be some agreement on the core nature of the Christian faith. Particularly is this true of a church which regards the Word as its supreme standard for faith and conduct. The United Reformed Church therefore requires of its members a statement of a Trinitarian faith and a life-long commitment to discipleship of Jesus Christ, along with a commitment to the life of the local fellowship, and then provides examples of how faith has been expressed in various parts of the Christian tradition – both as a yardstick and as a guide to development in faith and understanding. However, "believing that it is through the

freedom of the Spirit that Jesus Christ holds his people in the fellowship of the one Body", it is committed to uphold the rights of personal conviction. This spiritual freedom is treasured and respected but it is subject to just one limitation. If an individual asserts their freedom in a way that damages the substance of the faith or the unity of the church to a serious degree, then the church may decide that for the sake of peace and unity that individual should be disciplined.

Those who drafted and re-drafted the Scheme of Union to the point where it became the Basis of the United Reformed Church did so in the belief that they were guided by the Holy Spirit, but they did not believe that the Spirit's work was complete when their task ended. They believed that their ecclesiology embodied the essential notes of the church catholic and reformed but they guided the new church to "reserve the right and declare its readiness at any time to alter, add to, modify or supersede this Basis so that its life may accord more nearly with the mind of Christ".

The people who were members of the United Reformed Church at its first formation in 1972 had shared in several years of discussion and voting as the union proposals moved through their various drafts. In that sense they were probably more aware of the ecclesiology of their own Church than were many of their ecumenical partners. However mostly that awareness faded quickly because it was to further reconciliation and reunion that the new Church was chiefly committed. Already another partner was on the scene.

The United Reformed Church: the 1981 union

Like the Reformation itself, the Churches of Christ began as a movement within the church rather than an attempt to form a new church. Its origins lie with Thomas Campbell, a minister of the Anti-Burgher Secession Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and his son Alexander. Campbell's desire was to reunite the various Presbyterian churches in Ireland but in that effort he was frustrated. Nothing daunted, he set out to apply his convictions in an ever-widening circle that extended to Scotland, England and the United States. His convictions were expressed in the propositions of his *Declaration and Address*, the first of which reads: "That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one, consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to Him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else, as none can be truly and properly called Christian." This was truly a movement for Christian unity although it was probably before its time.

The irony was that Campbell found himself at odds with his church and eventually left it. He met like minds among Baptists and Independents in Scotland and the new denomination which emerged took some of their principles into its practice. It also embraced a weekly Communion, something Calvin had always wanted! Further it developed a conciliar structure. But it was above all the desire for Christian unity that marked out the Churches of Christ (Disciples of Christ in the USA).

The Churches of Christ in Britain and Ireland had been observers throughout the union

talks and had had some influence on the ecclesiology which emerged, with a view themselves to uniting with the United Reformed Church. However this further union took another nine years in the fulfilment, chiefly because the Churches of Christ were unable to find unity among themselves on the question whether this was the union to which God was calling them. In the end they split into two groups, the larger of which took the name of the Reformed Association of the Churches of Christ and in 1981 joined with the United Reformed Church.

Although it was a case of a small church joining with a much larger church, there were two particular and significant changes brought about by the union. These concerned baptism and ministry.

The Churches of Christ practised "believer baptism" whereas the norm in the United Reformed Church was "infant baptism". Quite deliberately the Basis of Union was changed to recognise explicitly that the two modes of baptism are to be made available in the life of every worshipping congregation. Both forms are honoured by the church and understood to be used by God in the upbuilding of faith. It remains the case that baptism can only be administered once to any person.

It was general practice in the Churches of Christ for the minister to preach the Word and for the elders in turn to preside at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the United Reformed Church the elders as such did not have a role in the leading of worship. Reflection on this difference, and on practice in sister churches, led to the recognition that ministers of word and sacrament did not have to be stipendiary, nor was there any particular reason why some of them should not be engaged in other employment. So, although the former practice of the United Reformed Church regarding presidency at the Sacrament was continued, a small core of non-stipendiary ministers was created from the ranks of the Churches of Christ elders and from the time of union it was possible for people to candidate, train and be ordained as non-stipendiary ministers.

At this point it is possible to do a kind of health check on the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church. This union was different from the previous one, in that the Church did not go out of existence, but it is interesting to note which councils were parties to the decision. In 1977 when the General Assembly agreed to proceed towards this further union on the basis of a report presented to it, a resolution from the floor referring that decision to synods and district councils was rejected. As has already been seen this particular initiative fell in the following year. In 1980 the Assembly agreed to proceed on the basis of a new report, but this time it referred that report to synods, district councils and local churches. The inconsistency is not easy to explain but it does seem clearly to be agreed that the ultimate decision properly rested with the Assembly.

The United Reformed Church: the 2000 union.

The origins of Congregationalism in Scotland were not the same as those in England and Wales. The Reformation in Scotland had resulted in a Church of Scotland very much in the tradition of Calvin. There was therefore no parallel to the experience of the Great Ejectment. Instead a small movement was established in the 18th century around the figure of John Glas, a Church of Scotland minister, who was ultimately removed from his

parish because he questioned any connection between the church and the civil authorities, and because he favoured a gathered fellowship rather than a parish model for the church. On the other hand he regarded the ministry of elders as being essential for the church.

Those who followed in this loose-knit movement in the next two centuries were concerned less with questions of church order and more, in the 18th century with responding to the revolutionary and democratic movements sweeping Europe, and in the 19th century with the strongly felt need for spiritual revival in the face of sterile rationalism. What kept this movement outside the Church of Scotland was not ecclesiology but the failure of orthodoxy to accommodate radical enthusiasm.

The Congregational Union of Scotland came into existence in the 19th century as a mutual aid and mission society for those who found themselves in this movement. From 1887 it was described as a union of pastors, professors and churches, a description which throws an interesting light on the self-understanding of the Union. In 1896 it united with the Evangelical Union, another body with Presbyterian roots. Once again the departure from the Church of Scotland had not been over church order as such, but over a conviction of the importance of the freedom of religious belief. Whilst all comparisons are dangerous, it has been said that one of the consequences of this history has been that the church meeting has not been such a significant body in Congregationalism in Scotland as it was in England and Wales.

The other important aspect of Congregationalism throughout this time is that it was Scottish. As with the Church of Scotland, from which it was separated for largely pragmatic reasons, it was rooted in the soil and in the heritage of a people. How the Scottish-ness of a church is best expressed was an underlying theme in the turmoil of the last years of the 20th century.

From this very different background, in the middle years of the 20th century the same question was being faced in Scotland as in England and Wales: how should Congregationalism and Presbyterianism change to meet the challenge of an ecumenical age? What was the mission of a numerically small and declining Congregational Union? The debate was keen and divisive but it led eventually to talks with the United Reformed Church and a union scheme which was rejected by the Congregationalists in 1987. The Scottish Congregational Church was created in 1996. It was this body which resumed union talks towards the end of the century, and after the usual round of voting in the various councils of the church a Uniting Assembly took place in April 2000.

On this occasion no changes were made in the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church as so far described but once again the smaller partner did make a significant difference to the church's understanding of itself.

The jurisdiction of Reformed churches is normally defined by national boundaries. In the case of the United Reformed Church, however, the jurisdiction of the General Assembly covered England and Wales from 1972 and in 1981 it was extended to cover Scotland as a small number of former Churches of Christ in that country opted to be part of the Church. At that point the 12 synods covered Wales and 11 English regions –

the Mid Scotland District being part of the Northern Synod. A sense of national identity had been growing in both Scotland and Wales for some years, political devolution had led to the creation of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly, and there had always been a different educational and legal system in Scotland. The new United Reformed Church searched for and found a form which would allow it to be a church in three nations as well as having a unity which embraced all three. There are now 11 provincial synods covering the English regions, and national synods for Scotland and Wales. Whilst they are all part of the one church, it is recognised that the national synods are distinctive as they relate to the religious, political and social institutions of their nations and in the case of Scotland operate under a different legal system.

A second health check is now in order. In 1988 the General Assembly gave first approval to the Proposals for Unification and referred them to synods and district councils. The following year the failure of the Proposals was reported. In 1998 the General Assembly gave first approval to the Proposals for Union and referred them to synods and district councils, with the rider that any council voting against the Proposals had to register their objection by 31 December. This reinforces the view that the Assembly can decide such matters but that first it should consult all those likely to be affected by the decision (in this case the local church voice could be heard through their representatives on synod and district council).

The United Reformed Church: a view from the pews on its ecclesiology in 2006.

What does the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church look like to a person sitting in the pew (or increasingly likely a chair) in 2006? Quite possibly the person will not even have encountered the word and, even if she has, she will not find it at all easy to describe what the United Reformed Church is like and why. In that she will be like many of her sisters and brothers in other traditions and indeed it may well be that in the past she has been part of one of those traditions.

However, she is where she is, and much of what she will see and hear and do on Sunday morning will reflect the ecclesiology of the particular tradition in which she finds herself.

For example, if she worships in one of the older "meeting house" type of church buildings she will very much have the sense of a congregation gathered around the Word. It may well be that a favourite text is painted on the wall. And whatever the age of the building it is quite likely that in the worship the centrality of the Scriptures will be made evident. It is quite possible that the worship will have a structure that can be traced back to Calvin's: it will probably be dominated by the sermon and there will be opportunity to sing the faith – Watts and Wesley having been joined by Kaan and Kendrick.

But not all will be as it ever was. Sometimes the words and style of the prayers will be a reminder of Celtic roots which predated the Reformation. Sometimes the congregation may make response through Taize or Iona prayer and songs. On the walls may be colourful banners reminding of the presence and peace of the Holy Spirit. And in places

there may be candles as a visual reminder of Jesus Christ, the Light of the World. All that before the youth group take over a service or a liturgical dance group adds yet another dimension. The elders have been taking seriously and imaginatively their responsibility for the worship of the local church.

She may be worshipping in one of the many Local Ecumenical Partnerships of which the United Reformed Church is a part. In that case the worship may have its roots in Methodist tradition, be an Anglican liturgy or an ecumenically agreed form of worship. The building might be a school hall, a community centre, a 'shared building' or a parish church now part of an ecumenical partnership. The variety of possibilities testifies to the extent to which the United Reformed Church lives its life and worship within a wide ecumenical reality.

Church notices read out or printed on a sheet may refer to an Elders' Meeting or a Church Meeting where decisions are going to be made about local church life and mission. The names of members who are sick or bereaved may be listed and a prayer group organised to pray for them. The same group may be praying for the other churches in the same part of the Synod, for a minister being inducted or a training event planned; for the local night shelter, prisoners of conscience or trade justice. Notice may be given of a visit soon to be paid by members of the Waldensian Church or the Reformed Church in Hungary and the need to give hospitality. Or it may be reported that the Moderator of the General Assembly is visiting the next town shortly when there will be a chance to hear a wider perspective on some issue of current Christian concern.

In these and other ways the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church is a current reality to the person in the pew, not necessarily a recognised reality but a felt one nonetheless.

The United Reformed Church: the continuing story, facing the challenge of change

So the rushes from the pew for 2006 show a mixture of continuity and change. This would be echoed in a close reading of the film of the last three and a half decades. Whilst in one sense it is true that the United Reformed Church has had three separate existences in its short life, in other ways there has been a continuing story, although always adapting to the new circumstances. By way of a trailer for the next film, a number of interlocking themes illustrate the pressure points in the area of ecclesiology which the United Reformed Church may need to address in the coming years as it struggles between an often counter-cultural continuity with tradition and an openness to the God who beckons us from the new and the different.

The United Reformed Church: Unity

But first, we need a little background history.

In its Basis the Church recognised that it needed to be reconciled within itself. In 1972 there were 300 years of separate history to be reconciled as well as many personally valued aspects of different traditions. Although the pace of reconciliation varied from place to place and person to person, it was generally the case that it was achieved with

remarkably little pain in a relatively short time. A small number of former Congregational churches exercised their right to secede in the early years, but they were outnumbered by those who had hesitated to vote in favour of union in 1972 but quickly changed their position and applied to join the United Reformed Church in its first few years.

At a local level the pressures which caused the establishment of many joint Congregational/Presbyterian churches before 1972 have continued: there are now a sizeable number of joint Methodist/United Reformed churches, and in many other places buildings, ministry, and/or mission are shared in a variety of ways with Methodists, Baptists, Moravians, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Wales and other partners. By and large the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church is able to encompass all such sharing: the recognition of ministry is an issue with Episcopal churches, and the role of elders and of the Church Meeting is often an unresolved question in united churches.

On the wider scene, from the mid-1970s it was possible for attention to be devoted to the issue of the reconciliation of the divided parts of the Christian tradition in this country. The major initiative to arise from these efforts was the proposed Covenant for Unity between the Church of England, the Methodist Church, the Moravian Church and the United Reformed Church. Others who took part in the initial discussion did not feel able to consider being participants. The Covenant would commit the churches to a measure of common decision taking, and to make that feasible it proposed that the two churches that did not have bishops should consider taking episcopacy into their system. The quid pro quo was recognition of the existing ministries of the non-episcopal churches.

The proposal caused serious division within the United Reformed Church. There were those who pointed out that bishops were not in themselves foreign to the Reformed tradition, that bishops did not have to conform to the then current Church of England pattern, and that unity was an over-riding imperative, not only for its own sake but also for the sake of mission. Against this it was argued that hierarchy of any sort was foreign to the United Reformed Church and its uniting traditions, that the same was true of any authority given to individuals rather than councils, and that principle should not be sacrificed for the sake of unity. Although the General Assembly decided to enter the Covenant on a majority vote, the minority against was sizeable and significant and it is by no means certain that it would have been possible to implement the decision. In the event the situation did not arise as the Church of England General Synod could not get the required majority in support and the Covenant fell.

It is illuminating to fast-forward at this point to 2002. After prolonged ecumenical discussions in Wales a proposal was put to the Church in Wales, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church that they should jointly appoint an ecumenical bishop to have oversight in East Cardiff. The Synod of Wales voted in favour of the proposal and the matter was brought to the General Assembly. In this case the issue that caused the most concern was not episcopacy as such but the fact that under the proposal the first bishop would have to be a man. This appeared to contravene the Basis of Union which says that all ministries shall be open equally to women and men. The argument

that caused the Assembly to accept the proposal was that the Synod of Wales believed that the realities of the situation in Wales at that moment made it impossible for other than a man to be appointed. The Assembly recognised that seeking to be a Church in three nations had consequences, and thus it should be prepared to agree things appropriate in one nation but not in others. That recognition remains important even though the proposal for an ecumenical bishop did not ultimately get the support of the other ecumenical partners.

A similar situation developed in Scotland soon afterwards, where many years of union talks led to proposals that would have involved the Church of Scotland, the Episcopal Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church. It was accepted that, if all the partners had accepted these proposals, the Synod of Scotland would have been allowed to leave the United Reformed Church and become part of a new united church. That it did not happen does not alter the fact that a principle had been tested and established.

The ecumenical scene in Britain changed significantly in 1987 when the British Council of Churches ceased to exist, to be replaced by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and parallel organisations to serve each of the four nations. For the first time the Roman Catholic Church became a full member. In the light of this the emphasis was no longer on churches moving closer to one another with a view to organic union; rather it was that the churches would work together at all levels whilst allowing individual churches to engage in such theological discussions with one another as they deemed helpful. For many in the United Reformed Church, our story and our sense of having discerned God's call to be One Church no longer mesh exactly with this emphasis. The question arises: Do we hold fast, or is God calling us into something new?

In 2001 General Assembly endorsed Three Ecumenical Principles to guide the work of the United Reformed Church. These are;

- a) To expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community.
- 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 and church traditions, and to seek, as appropriate, to work with members of other faith communities for the promotion of biblical values of love, peace and justice.
- 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. (note the "persevere").

Today the United Reformed Church still affirms unequivocally its commitment to ecumenical activity at local, intermediate and national level. It gives thanks for courageous witness and painstaking hard work in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, intermediate and national Ecumenical Instruments, but it recognises honestly the many problems of relating in several directions, the frustration at the lack of progress, and the at times bewildering complexity which is the other side of the joy at the ever growing membership of ecumenical bodies. There is an important emphasis on building bridges to those outside the formal structures, notably Pentecostals, New Churches and Fresh

Expressions of Church (those exploring church in cultures not touched by traditional churches). And there has been something of a shift in emphasis towards managing and developing the diversity in our unity and exploring what it means to live with differences. Inter-faith and ecological/environmental issues have moved up the agenda. The United Reformed Church lives with all these challenges. Increasingly all its ecumenical commitment raises questions about its own identity and what it has to share with its ecumenical partners. Is it a commitment to unity and a willingness to travel light, or is it a witness to the tradition from which it has come?

The United Reformed Church: Church Meeting and Membership

In the formative years of the seventeenth century becoming a member of a Congregational or Presbyterian church was to adopt a particular costly identity. Membership was very significant. Logically, if the United Reformed Church takes seriously the need to witness to the tradition from which we have come, it will look back to the importance of committing oneself to be part of a local community of believers, and to the recovery of the spirit which led to the formation of congregations four centuries and more ago, where people saw their only hope in a covenanted relationship that involved them in meeting, not only for worship, but also for every other aspect of their common life in Christ. To be together and led by the Spirit was not a burden but a privilege (Hebrews 10: 23 – 25). However it has to be recognised that in the 21st century this may be to move deliberately in the opposite direction to current trends.

Those who suffered the Great Ejection may well have quoted the words of Jesus: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters". (Matthew 12:30) That was their experience. It is not the experience of the 21st century. The circumstances of today point to another saying of Jesus: "whoever is not against you is for you". (Luke 9:50) Perhaps the logic of that is to open decision taking, whatever form it may take, to all who by their presence are part of any worshipping congregation.

Whilst many members of the United Reformed Church are committed to the particular church of which they are a part, there is a growing number who find themselves in a particular congregation simply because they are at home in its worship and fellowship. Some of them may have become members without appreciating the full implications of membership of a church which has an existence beyond the local. An increasing number do not even wish to be members even if their commitment to the Christian cause is exemplary. In a situation where many no longer walk with Christ is it sensible to insist with those who do that personal discipleship is not enough, and that it must be followed by membership of a church? That is a major issue for a church which has based its structure on the understanding that membership is crucial since it is the members together who continue the ministry of Christ.

Although the Church Meeting holds a key place in the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church, in almost all cases it is only a minority of members who attend. Most are happy to leave the leadership of the church to the elders, or to those who like meetings. It is simple fact that attending meetings of any sort is a minority occupation these days and there are a variety of reasons why this is so. Further, there is no indication of a change in social attitudes in regard to meetings. The question perhaps

will need to be faced: is it better to recognise changed perceptions and allow the elders, or a leadership team, to be the arbiters of the mind of Christ in the local situation, or is the shared leadership of all the members such a fundamental principle that it needs to be continued whether people take advantage of it or not?

Whichever answer is given, there is a further question regarding membership. The United Reformed Church is founded on a clear understanding of membership, and only those who are members have a vote in its meetings. Another social change has been a growing reluctance in all parts of life to enter long-term commitments. So, many congregations now have a significant body of people within them who are not members but who regularly attend worship and fully participate in the mission of the church. Some do not see the need to make the particular commitment of membership, others make the theological point that they are members by baptism and do not need to make any further promises. Is it right that such people have no formal place in a Church Meeting or any other council of the church?

Behind the reluctance of some to attend meetings, or to enter a commitment with a particular Christian community, lies a deeper challenge in the 21st century. No longer is the debate over whether bishop or council, Assembly or Church Meeting is the place where the mind of Christ is discovered. The challenge comes from the view that each individual can discern the mind of Christ for her/himself and that no individual or body, however local or distant, has the right to question or determine that discernment. The origins of this challenge can be found in the attitude of Western society to authority in any sphere. It is undoubtedly having an effect in the church.

The United Reformed Church: Mission

We have seen that questions the United Reformed Church must face about unity lead to questions about identity, which in turn provoke questions about membership. They also call forth questions about mission. If the purpose of the United Reformed Church is not, or not simply, to be a catalyst in a movement towards church unity, what is its purpose under God? What marks should distinguish it as it works together with sister churches? Are the principles on which it was founded relevant to the demands of mission?

Over the years a number of strands of mission have evolved. Although people have from time to time come together in groups for particular purposes, generally the United Reformed Church has not been divided in parties, despite the broad spectrum of theologies within it. The one group that has existed almost from 1972 is the Group for Evangelism and Renewal (GEAR), which has consistently and constructively advanced the cause of personal evangelism and renewal alongside the need for renewal and evangelism in the church. It exists both as a support network for its own members and as a spur to others in its particular understanding of mission. GEAR is not the only part of the church which puts a high value on personal evangelism.

Another approach is that of community involvement. In the past the constituent traditions of the United Reformed Church have been gathered congregations of people who shared a particular ecclesiology and Christian tradition. In many places, and increasingly as local churches take on the shape of a looser and looser denominational

commitment, they have adopted the role of community based churches, seeing themselves as having a particular responsibility for the community in which they are set. They are a community for those Christians who want to serve, and sometimes change, that community. A particular focus for this approach has been the development of the ministry of Church Related Community Workers, people commissioned to help discern God's will for the well-being of community, and to enable the Church to live out its calling at the community's heart. The Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church lists them in the same section as ministers and elders.

An even more recent approach has been the development of multi-cultural ministry, with the recognition that Christians who come to Britain from other countries and cultures do not always have to conform to the particular traditions they find here – and that providing a more open Christian welcome and acceptance can actually enrich the worship and fellowship that existed before.

In 1999 the United Reformed Church announced a programme entitled "Growing Up" which sought to balance the commitment to unity with a commitment to share in God's mission. At its heart were the Five Marks of Mission, originally formulated by the 1988 Lambeth Conference and endorsed in their present form by the 1997 Forum of Churches Together in England. The Five Marks are:

- 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 the unjust structures of society;
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Again, however, changing perceptions in wider society present the United Reformed Church with challenges. There is no doubt that the church established in the Basis and Structure was one sure of its foundation and its tradition, and organised both to allow initiative and give support, whichever was needed in different parts of its life. However, it also had the nature of a settled church, in the sense that it was accepted by a society which, if it was not actively Christian, at least regarded the church as a necessary part of its life. That view was barely tenable in 1972 and has become increasingly less so in the years since.

This in turn leads to a discussion about the nature of mission. Is the purpose to bring individuals into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Is it to bring people to baptism so that, whatever happens afterwards, they are assured of a place in the Kingdom? Is it to bring people into a community, so that they can enter into a covenant relationship with Christ and his people? Is it to offer a place where people may have a spiritual experience of a particular type? Is it to provide a community from which people may serve the needs of people in the wider community? Is it to create a community that is a sign and a voice for God's justice in the world? The possibilities are endless, but they have a place in this study in the sense that ecclesiology ought to serve the needs of mission. And it is arguable that the Basis and Structure address a settled mission situation that no longer applies.

The missionary situation is now the most compelling, but it also links with issues emerging from the earlier reflection on membership. The ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church is based upon a particular understanding of membership and puts those who are members at the heart of its life, yet none of the approaches to mission developed by the United Reformed Church seems to put much emphasis on the importance of church membership. One can engage in mission in any of these forms, or any others, whether one is a church member or not. Once again we see the interaction of the neuralgic points in the area of ecclesiology which the United Reformed Church will need to address in the coming years.

The United Reformed Church: Ministries

Recent ecumenical discussions have shown that, whilst most ecumenical partners identify people who carry out many or most of the functions of elders, none has an order of ministry like that in the United Reformed Church and in the Reformed tradition generally. Certainly the idea of elders ordained to their ministry for life is not one easily accepted by others, and it is questioned by some in the United Reformed Church. The issue needs to be brought into focus. What is the most effective model of leadership for a local congregation? Is it a team of individuals brought together, none of them having a firm commitment beyond a specific number of years? Is it the identification of two or three individuals with specific gifts in particular areas who can work with a minister or local church leader? Or is it still for the greater health of the church to set apart individuals with gifts of spiritual insight and leadership, allied to pastoral concern, and to see them as the core of leadership on a long-term basis both locally and in wider councils?

The words "set apart" lead inevitably to another issue that needs to be brought into focus. Historically elders first gathered with the minister around the Word and the Sacraments as the means by which God in Christ drew near and fed the people. The Reformed tradition sees worship, as expressed in faithful preaching of the Word and administration of the Sacraments, as the essential core of the church. The primary responsibility for worship in the United Reformed Church (responsibility, not necessarily practice) is placed in the hands of ministers and elders and for this central task both are set apart by ordination. It is a vital and a shared responsibility.

There are at least two difficulties in continuing with this argument. One is that from its first formation, responsibility for worship (and not just practice) in the United Reformed Church has in practice rested significantly with a body of lay preachers who until relatively recently were not given formal recognition in the councils of the church and whose place is still in many ways unclear. Such people are recognised but not ordained. The other difficulty is that the United Reformed Church has recently added the ministry of Church Related Community Workers to that of ministers and elders in paragraph 20 of the Basis of Union. These are all designated as "particular ministries", yet Church Related Community Workers are commissioned rather than ordained, and their ministry has no direct connection to the worship of the church.

This is an area requiring much further work. A major Consultation on Eldership in October 2006 concluded, not unanimously but very clearly, that ordination is that setting apart appropriate for ministries, established through testing over time, as being central

to the life of the Church and, in principle we should not be averse to extending ordination to include ministries which prove themselves in this way. It is certainly true that the ordination of elders is a stumbling block to many ecumenical partners. Are elders ministers or lay people? If the former, why not call them ministers? If the latter, why are they ordained? However two further points need to be made.

One is that, as the October 2006 Consultation did attempt to meet those concerns when it said: "The whole membership of the Church, the clergy included, is primarily..... 'lay'..... because the Church is the *laos*, the people of God"..... So that the Church might be equipped to be the Church, God summons men and women to be set apart for the ministry of Word and Sacrament and pastoral oversight. In the Reformed tradition that ministry is shared by ministers of Word and Sacrament and Elders, who are called to ensure that the faith is passed from generation to generation for the building up of the body of Christ (Basis of Union Paragraph 19). Together they are responsible for the Church of God in its councils, local, regional and national. Together they are accountable for the worship and mission of the church. Together they exercise pastoral oversight and take responsibility for the discernment and nurture of God-given gifts and talents in others. Together they share a ministry at the Lord's Table. Those ministries remain crucial to the nature and purpose of the Church".

The second is that, while not denying the difficulties that stands on principle can create, the representatives of our ecumenical partners at the Consultation are clear that ecumenism develops less by doing what is convenient and more by the production of reasoned justifications for different practice.

On another matter, some early work has already been done in the area of creating a diaconal ministry. It could bring together some of the existing ministries in this area – for example Church Related Community Workers, pastoral workers, youth workers, evangelists, workers with the elderly. The list would need more careful attention, but to hold together in some framework of recognition and support those with special responsibility for continuing Christ's ministry of care may be one way of developing the church's outward mission.

Despite all the affirmation of individuals in ministries mentioned above, questions remain. We have seen that membership is important because it is church members who make the decisions of the councils of the church. But the councils themselves are coming under question: to have a pattern of regular meetings puts a heavy burden on personnel and sometimes makes decision-taking a long drawn out process. It is also costly in time and money. So the question is now being asked, why do all the decisions have to go to councils? Why not appoint individuals to particular offices and trust them to get on with it? Why is the church, of all communities, so reluctant to trust individuals? The mission situation makes these questions sharper than they would have been in the past. The answer lies in a recognition of human frailty. No one person, however trusted, is able always accurately to discern the mind of Christ. Experience has taught that that is always best discerned in community. Discernment needs the gifts of all.

In God's eyes no one person is more important than another and the Reformed tradition has long recognised the danger inherent in giving status or power to the individual. Yet

the story told in the first film would not have been as it was had not individuals given leadership and had that leadership not been accepted. For every person in the church's story who has abused a position of leadership there must be at least an equal number who have used it effectively in the service of Christ. Leadership may be recognised as a gift given to a few and needing to be respected and allowed to flourish. That may or may not be reflected in some people being given the title of bishop. The crunch question is not one of a title; but whether a leader or bishop has an authority or function not given to anyone else in the church. It is impossible to predict how this question will be answered but, if it is to be addressed within the United Reformed Church, it can only be done in the context of a firm belief in the importance of the vocation of every Christian.

The United Reformed Church: 2 Questions about Ecclesiology

Where exactly is the church? This is not a new question but the fact that it gets many answers sometimes leads to confusion. The majority answer, in past, present and future is that the church is the community of people with whom I most normally worship and experience Christian fellowship. The answer is based on experience. But only a minority would give such a limited answer and they would not represent the position of the United Reformed Church. That tradition believed it was possible for the catholicity of the church to be found in a single fellowship but in its true form it was always open to wider fellowship.

The fact that the United Reformed Church is in three nations enriches our experience of the catholicity of the Church. Ironically in an age of instant communication there is arguably more focus on the local and less awareness of the church beyond, than there was thirty years ago. Efforts are being made to increase the sense of belonging together and the numerical weakness of the church will make these of increasing importance.

In practice, however, there are other understandings of the catholicity of the church. For some it is represented by the total witness of all the churches in their area. "Churches Together" is the expression of Christ in each community. Such a view puts a low value on the theological and ecclesiological differences between the denominations and presents a challenge for the future. Yet others see the catholicity of the church represented by the worldwide expression of their particular tradition. For those in the Reformed tradition this can be an enriching experience, if initially confusing, as one discovers that one's sisters and brothers come up with different answers to many of the burning issues of the day! For some the catholicity of the church is represented by the worldwide expression of Christian faith among many denominations and traditions, through the World Council of Churches, for example. For some it also expressed through a lively affirmation of the great communion of saints in the church past, present and to come.

There is a view that the catholicity of the church is found only in that generalised picture of the church militant and triumphant. The church is an image, a picture, a not yet. There is immense value in seeing the church in some sense as a pilgrim people, walking together in some form that is recognisable but which is incomplete. It may be many films down the road but there is a completeness that is only in Christ.

Does ecclesiology matter? Truth to tell, this is not a subject that attracts a lot of interest in most United Reformed Church circles. In many cases the subject is viewed negatively, as something which stands in the way of ecumenical development, and which by its focus on history and tradition is in danger of deflecting the Church from the need to change to meet the demands of mission in 21st century Britain. A more neutral view would simply say that how the Church is run is not important: what it **does** is the priority.

In fact the priority should be what the Church **is** – the very concern of ecclesiology. Only when there is clarity about the nature of the Church can mission and the issues of priorities and resources be determined with conviction.

There are two particular reasons why clear thinking about ecclesiology is important for the United Reformed Church at this time. One is that if the United Reformed Church is to remain true to its self-understanding as a catalyst towards Christian Unity, it will help both itself and its ecumenical partners if it can be clear about its identity. The other reason is recognition that the times when ecclesiology was a major issue for the Church – in this story, the Reformation and, on a much smaller scale, the discussions leading to the formation of the United Reformed Church – were also times when mission came to the top of the agenda.

Ecclesiology gives Church its character and personality. It is not to be a character and personality designed to suit the preferences of the members, nor even one that is necessarily in tune with the spirit of the age. The Church is the Body of Christ and, imperfect though it may yet be, the goal is to enable Christ to be seen in all the Church is and does.

Note: In this paper the word "catholic" in its lower case form is used to describe the world-wide church in all its traditions. In the upper case form "Catholic" refers to the Roman Catholic Church.

Appendix: The United Reformed Church: an ecclesiological pressure test

Over the years between 1997 and 2000 the ecclesiology of the Church was put under severe pressure. The issue causing the pressure was human sexuality, focussed on the question of whether or not people in homosexual or lesbian relationships should be admitted for training for the ministry. Important though that issue is, it will not be discussed here.

The General Assembly of 1997 had before it a resolution, coming as a result of long discussion initiated by a committee, which included a sub-clause which said that there was nothing to prevent people in such relationships from being trained for the ministry. The resolution and the argument that supported it had been published well in advance so that the members of Assembly had been able to consider the latter deeply and consult with others in their areas. A serious debate took place, at the end of which the resolution was passed by a majority of about two to one. However, after the vote some 50 members of the Assembly took advantage of a standing order which allowed them to have their names registered in the minutes as having objection to the resolution. On a

few previous occasions individuals had taken advantage of this standing order, but never before or since has such a large number done so.

The Assembly had acted within its authority in passing a resolution on this subject in this way, but it quickly became clear that many in the other councils of the church were not prepared to accept what it had decided because they believed deeply that it was a wrong decision. Some uncomfortable months followed.

However, at the same time as passing the well-remembered resolution 19, the Assembly also set in train a rigorous study of all the issues surrounding the subject, including the evidence of the Bible and its interpretation, and also including the adequacy of the Structures of the church to cope with subjects on which there was a strong difference of opinion.

The result of this study was presented to the Assembly of 1999, and although some argued that the supporting documents did not entirely justify this conclusion, offered a resolution which was in essence the opposite of much of resolution 19. However the Assembly was asked, and agreed, to handle the matter in a very different way from that it had used two years before. A resolution was passed on a majority vote asking each of the synods by March of the following year whether or not they agreed with this new resolution of the matter. Only if less than one third of the synods voted against the new conclusion would it be put to the Assembly for a definite decision. A serious attempt was being made to ensure that on this sensitive and divisive matter an eventual Assembly resolution would be accepted by the church at large.

In the event more than one third of the synods indicated that they did not support this new resolution of the matter and so the Assembly never voted on it. Instead in 2000 it passed a resolution which recognised strong differences of opinion and proposed how they could be held within a single fellowship relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The argument here is that, under severe test, the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church proved to be sound. Mistakes were certainly made along the way but ultimately the right of the Assembly to make a decision on this matter was recognised and the need to consult others in a serious way before the decision was clearly demonstrated.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

G

Life and Witness Committee Covenant Membership and Mission

1. Understanding Covenant

The Church is the body of Christ, a people gathered by God to become a sign, expression and foretaste of God's reign in the world. It is a community called into being by God's grace to play its part in keeping the Covenant God has made with all creation (Gen 9:12). We neither merited this special covenantal relationship with God, nor have we always been faithful in keeping our side of the Covenant; but God graciously and amazingly has repeatedly ratified the Covenant with those frail folk whom God has invited to play a leading part in the divine mission, e.g. Abraham and Sara (Gen 17:7), Moses (Exodus 34.10) and the followers of Jesus (Gal 3: 14, 26-29; I Peter 2: 9-10). Christians, therefore, are drawn into relationships with God and one another which are rooted in the promises God has made with the whole creation since the foundation of the world.

As church members we join with the communion of saints who have gone before us, as well as all the gathered saints worldwide, who sit under Word and around Table in order to offer worship to the triune God and be equipped for God's service in society. Out of gratitude for what God has done for us we open ourselves to all those who lay claim upon our lives. In joy and with thanksgiving for God's gifts we are strengthened to stand up for the values of God in the world. Our ongoing challenge and obligation therefore is the sometimes complex and always demanding business of keeping faith with the Covenant.

In the Reformed heritage we find fascinating and impressive forebears who built their church life upon this central idea of Covenant. They stressed their obligations to one another in the light of the gracious way they had found God dealing with them through the divine human Covenant. Freely they had received, so freely they had to give; as Christ had laid down his life for them, so they had sacrificially to be of service to one another. Membership in such churches was not a matter of fulfilling the contractual obligations attached to membership of a club; rather it was akin to belonging to a people's movement whose life had become devoted to responding faithfully to what God willed them to be and do. When these churches met for decision making they were not concerned with democratic transactions so much as with God-centred obedience. From such exciting yet exacting traditions we can still learn vital principles about what it means for us to be church members today.

Church membership then is a person's response in gratitude for the call of the Covenant God who invites us to covenant together in common service to God and our neighbours. It is a commitment to engage in a shared journey of faith and mission with the Church catholic as well as reformed, world wide as well as local, individually as well as through the councils of the church.

Locally, membership is an expression of a relationship with a local congregation in which one exercises one's gifts and is nurtured by the gifts of fellow members. It involves time, energy and money being given for the mission of the local church; it means playing one's part in making the life of the local church a sacrament of the Kingdom through worship and service to the community.

More widely, membership expresses a relationship with the United Reformed Church in its shared life, mission and journey of faith. It is an endorsement of the ownership of shared vision, priorities and spirituality, as well as a means of becoming involved in practical engagement in support of the vision of the Kingdom as something that extends 'from Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8); it is a participation in the wider work and mission of the entire community of faith through the denomination's programmes and people. In the context of a local ecumenical partnership this relationship extends to the other participating denominations, while in a wider ecumenical context, it is through our membership of bodies like the Council for World Mission, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches. In short, membership is to choose to be part of that particular worshipping community called Church, those sinful saints and saintly sinners who are seeking to make a difference in and to the world for Christ's sake, with fellow Christians from other churches and all people of 'good will'.

2. Changing attitudes to membership and its practice

Our response to God's grace is worked out in a changing social context. How ought we to think of membership within the United Reformed Church now? The question is important because our answers may have different emphases than when the Church was formed in 1972. The scene has changed both outside and inside the church.

Sociological Changes

Changes in society have affected the way people see membership and belonging, and these affect how people see the way they belong to the church. These include:

- increased mobility
- the increased number of separate communities to which people belong (work, home, social life, the internet),
- growing individualism
- people do not, as a rule, make long-term commitments to groups and institutions, be they churches, political parties or local clubs.
- postmodern consumers ask "What's in it for me?" rather than "What can I offer?"
- this consumerist mentality means that people are quick to move away and out of groups when there are difficulties or when things happen that don't suit them.
- the widespread phenomenon of customisation - "making it fit me exactly" - extends to membership and involvement in groups.
- the increasing gap between faith (understood primarily in terms of private spirituality) and its expression in institutional Christianity - a tendency to "believe but not belong".

Church Pressures

Although the church has not always found it easy to respond quickly to sociological changes, there have been changes within the United Reformed Church which have affected how people see membership. These include:

- an increasing number of congregations which are local ecumenical partnerships, where people see no need for organizational membership or see their membership as being of 'the Church'.
- disillusionment with patterns of church life and reduced participation in church meetings. The perception that church membership is only about eligibility to vote at church meetings means that the wider dimensions of the covenant relationship are lost.
- a shift in emphasis from infant baptism to thanksgiving and dedication services with believers baptism as the point of commitment. Fewer people grow up through the church, absorbing the ethos of being a member.
- a more open approach to communion, with it being an integral part of the service and open to 'non members', including children. People feel that they can participate fully without becoming 'members'.
- the practice of parts of the United Reformed Church to determine commitments to the Ministry and Mission Fund as if there were a head tax. There are stories that some people have been discouraged from becoming members because of the cost to the local church, and other stories that some congregations with few members have low assessments even though they have large reserves.

Reacting to the Pressures

While it can be argued that the Church is called to be counter-cultural rather than capitulate to social change, it is also true that theology and our understanding of Church have developed out of particular, changing social contexts. The pressures mentioned above already contribute to the new context in which membership is being considered in many of our churches today.

No single organisational response will deal with the complexity of the issue: for while there is evidence of increased attendance at cathedral worship, which offers a personal and corporate spiritual experience without requiring a commitment to membership, those churches and communities which require a high level of personal commitment are also growing. It is not, then, a matter of simply decreasing or increasing the 'barriers to entry', but of seeking to present the privilege of covenant membership in a challenging way.

However, two specific changes are suggested as a response to these pressures:

i) Breaking the tie between membership and assessment would remove any unhealthy pressure which may deter people from becoming members and the inequity that sometimes results. We therefore ask Mission Council to devise a process for agreeing local church contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund which do not primarily focus on membership numbers, and to work on it being implemented throughout the United Reformed Church.

ii) A few categories of people would benefit from the flexibility of being able to be members of more than one local congregation or denomination at once. These include:

- A student who spends half of each year in his/her home congregation and half in a congregation in the place of study
- A weekly commuter, or a family with a holiday home they go to frequently, who are active in churches in both places
- The spouse and/or family of a minister who has pastoral charge of more than one congregation
- An elder or other person who makes a commitment to help a neighbouring church
- Members of Local Ecumenical Partnerships

We would seek to provide the option of having multiple membership that is recognized by the local and the wider church.

The person would be a recognised part of each of the congregations in which s/he and the congregation make commitments to each other within the Covenant relationship. This would support mutual caring, sharing in decision making, contributing to costs, and holding responsibility, while recognising that the person is also involved in similar commitments elsewhere for clear reasons.

We would therefore ask for administrative work to be done on how the wider church would count such members so as not to disadvantage the local church or the member.

3. Deepening our personal experience of membership

The Believers' Baptism service in *Worship: from the United Reformed Church* shows a clear distinction between two aspects of membership, expressed in two stages of the process during the service:

- i) An affirmation of Trinitarian faith with repentance and turning to Christ followed by baptism and the declaration "God receives you by baptism into the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church"
- ii) Reception into full privileges and responsibilities of church membership through making promises of commitment to a life of worship and fellowship; accepting the gift and cost of following Christ; and proclaiming the good news of God in Christ. A promise, made by the congregation, is followed by "... we welcome you into membership of this congregation of the United Reformed Church".

The first of these stages is the unrepeatable entry into the universal Church of Jesus Christ. The second stage has long been recognised as transferable between congregations when a person goes to live somewhere else, or for other reasons wants to join another fellowship.

In the service of believer Baptism (and in the Confirmation service for those who were baptized as infants) membership of the Church catholic and of its United Reformed expression, is attained through membership of a local church. The only way to become a member of the United Reformed Church is through becoming a member of a local church, by believer's baptism, confirmation, or transfer from another church. Denominational membership is an automatic consequence of and part of the commitment of local membership.

Among the reasons some people have been reluctant to become members are

- feeling it doesn't make a difference
- being too shy to stand up in public
- not having seen it done before because it happens so rarely in that church
- their acceptance of a cultural assumption that belief is inward and personal rather than outward and corporate
- not wanting to make a permanent commitment
- having been active in church life for so long that it is embarrassing to make a new member's commitment
- not being part of the 'main' Sunday congregation even though active in the local church in other ways, because of time availability, preferred worship style, or other reason
- the church would have to increase its annual levy
- the requirement to attend preparation classes
- feeling "not good enough"
- feeling unable to commit to being more involved in church life
- being unwilling to withdraw from membership in another church
- not wanting to go through another ceremony when transferring church

- being so active regionally, denominationally, or ecumenically that local involvement can't be great

Some of these concerns could be answered by holding an annual Covenant Renewal, which would have other advantages for the whole congregation

- all members would reaffirm their faith and renew their covenant promises together
- new members would be welcomed and their contribution recognised with thanksgiving
- there would be opportunity for baptism, confirmation or transfer as appropriate, but within the corporate occasion rather than focusing solely on the individual
- it would be a regular part of the congregation's life and so newcomers would see it happening
- preparation of the whole congregation in the weeks beforehand could be supplemented by individual or group preparation as appropriate
- there would be room within the corporate expression of the covenant to embrace the different stages individuals had reached in personal commitment on their own spiritual journey
- in local churches where there is more than one congregation or worshipping group meeting at different times or in different styles of worship or spirituality, the covenant renewal could be celebrated in one special joint event, or in a series of events
- people would be affirmed for their Christian life and witness even if their attendance and service to the local church is limited by other responsibilities. It would be an opportunity to recognise the many who have not become members who already make major contributions through, for example sacrificing their own desire or comfort for the sake of others, putting the common good before their own, and through their loyalty and faithfulness.

Existing material and resources to support local churches preparing people to renew their covenants or to make them afresh, include

- *'Worship: from the United Reformed Church'* (2003)
 - Renewal of Baptismal Promises by the Congregation (pages 315-318)
 - A Service for Rededication Sunday based on the Five Marks of Mission (pages 319-324)
 - Service of Rededication on the theme of unity (pages 325-334)
- *The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church* (Rejoice and Sing number 761) and a recently prepared study guide.
- *'Talking about God'* - a short five-unit TLS LITE course
- Parts of *'A Gift Box'*
- *'Let's Discover the United Reformed Church'*
- *Guidelines on Church Discipline* by Alan P.F. Sell: (United Reformed Church 1983), especially the Appendix on Rededication Services, where the local church has the opportunity to reaffirm its faith corporately.
- *'The Methodist Worship Book'* (1999)
 - The Covenant Service (pages 281-296)

4. Covenant membership and mission

A fundamental question to be asked about membership is how it serves the people of faith while also helping to bridge the gap between a church and its local community. All our churches need to be outward looking and engage with the community around them, while enriching those who have chosen

to commit themselves to the Church. How does the United Reformed Church's understanding of membership help or hinder this process?

We believe that a better understanding and fuller participation in the idea of covenant will help create a more positive and wider understanding of membership. The bible records how God's covenant with Israel was made and renewed at various points throughout their history. That experience invites the Church today, living in the face of individualism, social fragmentation, and global challenges affecting everyone, to act counterculturally by living an intentional, shared life which embraces relationships and responsibilities from a personal level to a global scale. Specifically, membership of the United Reformed Church is a commitment to a shared journey of faith and mission, expressed locally and through the wider councils of the Church.

In each place, it is a covenant commitment to the local congregation to offer and exercise one's gifts and be nurtured by the gifts of others. It is a commitment of time, prayer, energy and money to the mission of the local Church and to play one's part in making that local community of Christians a sign and manifestation of the Kingdom of God, in the fellowship of believers throughout the world.

Resolutions

General Assembly

- 1. reaffirms local church membership as an expression of faithful and committed response to God's covenant with creation and Christ's call to discipleship within the fellowship of the Church.**
- 2. encourages all churches to initiate conversations within their congregations and with other partners on renewing their understanding of covenant membership and to explore the importance of personal faith and commitment in creating flourishing communities.**
- 3. asks Mission Council to examine the feasibility of providing the option of multiple membership within the United Reformed Church, and between the United Reformed Church and ecumenical partners, which is recognised by local churches and the wider Church**
- 4. asks Mission Council to devise a process for agreeing local church contributions towards the Ministry and Mission Fund which do not primarily focus on membership numbers, with a view to implementing it throughout the United Reformed Church.**
- 5. invites local churches to explore holding an annual Covenant Service as a way of renewing the corporate commitment of existing members, welcoming new members and providing a regular focus for discussion about the meaning and context of membership within the United Reformed Church.**



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

H

DRAFT

Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

**Audit of Church Structures, Policies, Procedures &
Practices for barriers to full Participation of
Minority Ethnic People**

(Assembly 2005 Resolution 34 c) & d): Developing Multicultural Ministry)

Audit Group: Mr Delbert Sandiford (Chair)
Revd Fiona Thomas
Revd Wale-Hudson Roberts
Ms Michelle Marcano
Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

1. Introduction

1.1 General Assembly 2005 prophetically declared the United Reformed Church to be a Multicultural Church¹, and committed to practical steps for developing multicultural ministry². Resolution 34 sets out several practical steps to assist the denomination grow as a multicultural Church, and indeed become a clear and visible reflection of its diverse membership at all levels of its life and witness. Resolution 34 d) sets out the audit task and the subject of this report.

Resolution 34 d):

General Assembly authorises the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to conduct an audit of church structures, policies, procedures and practices for the presence of barriers to full participation of minority ethnic people, and to report with recommendation to Mission Council no later than October 2006.

1.2 An ecumenical Audit Group led by the Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) was formed in autumn 2005 to take forward Resolution 34 d). Changes in the structure of CCRJ at the end of 2005 made it necessary to change the leadership of the United Reformed Church (URC) audit process. In spring 2006 the Anglican Southwark Diocese graciously agreed to Mr Delbert Sandiford, (Executive Officer for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns), chairing the ecumenical Audit Group.

1.3 In addition to Resolution 34 d), the ecumenical Audit Group was authorised by the March 2006 Mission Council to include Resolution 34 c) as part of the audit process to avoid duplication as there were clear overlaps in the tasks involved.

Resolution 34 c):

General Assembly instructs the Secretaries for Training, Ministries, and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to evaluate the accessibility to minority ethnic people of the systems of candidacy and training for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Workers, lay preachers, and lay leaders, and to report with recommendations to Mission Council no later than March 2006.

Further, the Audit Group was asked to report to the October 2006 Mission Council on both parts d) and c) of Resolution 34. The ecumenical Audit Group, however, needed more time to do its work and at the October 2006 Mission Council it was given further leave to complete its task and bring its final report to Mission Council in March 2007.

1.4 This Audit Report is the end result of the audit process conducted by the ecumenical Audit Group in just less than twelve months. It was clear to the Audit Group from the outset that it needed to focus on specific areas of ministry and levels of the Church's life because of time constraints. This report is therefore not claiming to be exhaustive but rather to present emerging snapshots and trends to indicate where and how the URC might encourage future growth in minority ethnic participation in the life and work of the denomination. The report will also highlight some of the gaps that need following up.

1.5 The ecumenical Audit Group consisted of Mr Delbert Sandiford, Executive Officer for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns for the Anglican Southwark Diocese and chair of the Audit Group; Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts, Racial Justice Officer for the Baptist Union of Great Britain; Revd Fiona Thomas, Training Officer for Thames North Synod; and Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, URC Secretary for Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry (RJ&MM). Ms Michelle Marcano, URC Human Resources & Facilities Manager, and Revd Dr Andrew Prasad, Convener of RJ&MM contributed as consultants to the Audit Group.

¹ Resolution 52, General Assembly 2005 Book of Reports

² Resolution 34 a) – e), General Assembly 2005 Book of Reports

1.6.1 Methodology

- a) The Audit Group adopted different approaches that would yield information and perspectives within a short space of time:
- i) Agreed key questions for conversations with specific church structures, leaders, councils, committees, and networks
 - ii) Face-to-face conversations with key church leaders, committees, and networks
 - iii) Consideration and evaluation of relevant published materials
- b) Recommendations are summarised as resolutions to Mission Council at the end of the report.

1.6.2 Acronyms

The following acronyms have been used in the Report:

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CCRJ	Churches Commission for Racial Justice
EMLOMA	Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers' Association
RJ&MM	Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry
RJA	Racial Justice (& Multicultural Ministry) Advocates
URC	United Reformed Church

2. Commendations

2.1 The Audit Group commends the United Reformed Church for its vision and courage, professing to be a Multicultural Church in 2005, and proactively seeking to grow as a truly inclusive Church. The Church, now more than ever, still has a responsibility to take a moral lead in society and to model the kingdom of Christ to the world – a community of hope for inclusiveness, harmony, and respect. The URC in the UK and Europe is now widely recognised as a leader in multicultural ministry. As a denomination it is a source of inspiration as it boldly adopts the vision of the multicultural church as a moral and theological imperative, together with its associated economic, political, and social implications.

2.2 The URC is commended for enabling and empowering the work of RJ&MM Committee and Secretary which in the past few years have taken forward many of the tasks involved in growing and building a truly Multicultural Church. The issue of black and minority ethnic involvement and participation in the life of the Church is a critical issue as recognised by Assembly 2005 Resolution 34. Much work in this area has been done through the **Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Advocates Network (RJA)**, the **Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers' Association (EMLOMA)**, and increasingly so through the **URC Minority Ethnic Conferences**.

2.3 It needs noting that the Audit Group's research had to rely to a large extent on people's perspectives and experiences due to a lack of statistical information and data. This is obviously an area for further attention for such data can help us identify what issues are there and form the questions as to why they are there and how we can address them. However, the Audit Group wishes to acknowledge the willingness and openness of individuals and groups that helped make its tasks less difficult. All the contributions from groups and networks, in particular the Synod Training Officers, were invaluable to the Audit Group's work. It especially wishes to acknowledge the positive responses it received from

the Assembly Committees it consulted with and their Secretaries, noting in particular Ministries, Training, Communication & Editorial, Nominations, and Equal Opportunities committees. The Group was especially encouraged by the committees' willingness to take on board the issues and concerns it raised, and the commitment to follow them through where it was identified further work needs to be done. The Group also wishes to commend the leadership of the United Reformed Church, in particular the Synod Moderators, the General and Deputy General Secretaries for their expressed commitment to making their contribution to increasing BME participation and involvement at all levels of the life of the Church.

3. The Audit Group's Findings

3.1 The Audit Group's enquiry into BME participation in the life of the URC was focused in these specific areas:

- Leadership & development
- Theological Training & the Candidacy Process
- Training for Learning and Serving & Lay Preaching
- Elders Training and Selection
- Publications and Media Representations
- Youth and Children Programmes

The Group met and/or consulted with Synod Training Officers, Assembly Secretaries, Assembly Committees, Synod Moderators, the URC Secretariat, synod and local church networks and groups, and evaluated Theological Training materials at Assembly and regional/local levels, Ministerial Information Packs, Elders' Training materials, and Reform Magazine.

3.2 The Audit Group felt good about particular areas where work had been done or is being done to increase BME involvement and participation:

- Enquirers Conferences ensures BME representation
- Diverse images depicted on candidacy information packs
- Equal Opportunities Committee periodic ethnic monitoring
- RJ&MM Multicultural Youth Programme
- RJ&MM's work in collaboration with Nominations and Equal Opportunities Committees to create a BME Skills database
- Increased level of observance of Racial Justice Sunday in the URC
- The provision of multicultural ministry and diversity training resources like the '**URC Multicultural Ministry Toolkit**', and the '**We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality**' packs to help equip the churches to become multicultural communities of Christ.
- The URC Secretaries for Human Resources and RJ&MM have put in place a strategy for cross-cultural and racism awareness training primarily for all Assembly staff and Synod Moderators, but will also be made available to all levels and councils of the Church in due course. This training is planned to commence in autumn 2007.
- Increasing growth in the URC Annual Minority Ethnic conferences where it is envisaged that BME skills audit will make a huge impact. In addition Ministries 'Road Shows' will not only increase the number of BME in leadership in the future, but will also encourage and support leadership development within the BME communities.

3.3 The Audit Group did find some areas of concern and wishes to draw attention to these:

- a) A marked lack of BME representation in leadership at all levels of the life of the Church, for example, at the synod level there is no BME synod moderator at present. This is caused by a combination of things, from the lack of available pool of suitably confident and able BME, to lack of accessibility to appointment information and processes, to institutional racism and so on. Leadership is very important especially as encouragement and visible role models for the younger BME generations.

- b) Absence of home grown BME in much of URC publications including 'Reform' creates a vortex of invisibility of BME as if they do not exist. The diversity that is depicted reflects a strong world mission outlook. This leaves the BME membership in the URC feeling as if they do not matter. This contributes to feelings of marginalisation, and reluctance to come forward to participate, and when people do not feel encouraged they do not feel confident to get involved. The lack of visible involvement makes it harder for changes to take place.
- c) Ethnic monitoring is almost non-existent, and when there is monitoring in place, certain key areas are not included in the monitoring form, for example, the elders, ministers, candidates for ministry, leadership and governance and so on. The Group affirms the importance of ethnic monitoring taking place but it must do so in such a way that it is an integral and routine part of the way things are done in the URC. The Group would suggest including ethnic monitoring in the URC Annual Returns. This way it will be easier for people to see the need for such monitoring, as well as having a conscientising effect on the whole church so that all can work together to ensure all God's people are given the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the Church.
- d) Lack of cross-cultural and racism awareness training routinely offered to key people, groups and leaders involved in the process of discerning ministry. The training resources and personnel are available but the issue seems to be lack of authority and will at local level, for instance, to implement such training.
- e) The lay and ordained training materials evaluated, e.g. 'A Course for Elders', generally treat the audience or potential clients as if they are all from the same cultural backgrounds. The Group is aware that some of these materials like the elders' course have been in use for some years and are probably due for some updating. If this is so then it would be timely to ensure the updated versions are as culturally sensitive and inclusive as possible. This can happen through BME representation in whatever strategy is put in place for updating such resources and materials.

4. Catch the Vision & New Structures

- 4.1 The Audit Group is especially concerned with the changes in structures especially in regards to the disappearance of district councils, and the reduction in size of General Assembly. The Group's main concern is to do with how these changes may affect BME representation and participation in the life of the URC especially at the level of governance and leadership. Currently the Group is aware of the difficulty of getting BME representation to General Assembly. A reduction in the size of General Assembly is likely to increase that difficulty even more in the future. The Group would want to suggest that special arrangements for representation be made for BME, women, and young people. If such arrangements are already in place for any group other than BME, then we would suggest that such arrangements be extended to BME.
- 4.2 Another concern is to do with the impact the disappearance of district councils will have in the participation of BME at regional and synod levels. It is important that synods and local churches are encouraged to be diligent in ensuring that there is BME representation and involvement at this level of the Church's life. One way to try and address this is to target the provision for alternate delegates at synod meetings, and also at Mission Council, as opportunities for BME to participate and to gain experience and exposure.

5. Leadership & Accountability for Racial Inclusiveness

- 5.1 The United Reformed Church is a conciliar Church. This makes it difficult for the Audit Group to identify where authority and responsibility lie in terms of driving forward the action to make racial-ethnic inclusiveness a reality in the URC. At the Assembly level of course are the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee

and Secretary who discharge an enabling role, developing resources, keeping the score, shaping policies, and raising awareness. They cannot enforce compliance. Their role is primarily a resourcing and influencing one.

5.2 At the local level the RJAs and EMLOMA act as 'eyes' and 'ears' on the ground and their role is to call attention to the needs on the ground but they are not empowered to ensure compliance. They also can only influence and persuade.

5.3 General Assembly passes resolutions giving authority for work to be undertaken to make the URC a multicultural and racially inclusive Church. These resolutions are then handed along to synods and local churches through the conciliar chain. But the responsibility for implementing the resolution in the local church, which is the bedrock of implementation, must lie with an individual. This is a common feature of the conciliar decision making process. Therein lies the biggest challenge for the multicultural vision. The lack of a clear point of accountability for delivering racial inclusiveness creates not only uncertainty but also at worst inaction. Outcomes are expected but no one has any authority for making them happen.

5.4 In this situation we look to the exercise and influence of leadership to move things forward. Culturally organisations look to leaders to help them solve problems and deliver outcomes. The leadership of the United Reformed Church encompasses the following:

- Moderator of Assembly
- The General and Deputy General Secretaries in the central office
- The Synod Moderators at regional level
- The Ministers at local churches level

As already stated, in the conciliar church situation it cannot be a command and control style of leadership. It has to be one of influencing, defining what needs to be done to achieve full BME participation, and helping those in positions to deliver to bring it about. They may not have authority to enforce compliance, but they do have influence and they can do that by preaching, teaching, resourcing, and encouraging. In that situation, such leaders must be fully recognised as the principal points of leverage in making racial inclusiveness a reality at regional and local levels. They need to be sensitised, resourced, and supported for this purpose, and be required to keep the Assembly and synods informed of how the work is progressing.

5.5 The point to emphasise is that in the conciliar decision making situation the influence and impact of leadership in inspiring and moving the church to make needed changes cannot be underestimated. And for the purpose of achieving full BME participation and growing a truly multicultural and inclusive United Reformed Church, leadership influence is absolutely critical.

6. Gaps in the Audit Enquiry

6.1 The Audit Group felt keenly the many gaps left in its work due to the pressure of time and the demands on the individual members' by their own organisations and jobs. The Group especially wishes to record its disappointment not to have the time to consult more fully with the Youth and Children's committee and staff. However, the Group is aware of ongoing co-operation and collaboration between the RJ&MM and Youth Secretaries, to ensure this issue of BME participation is taken forward by FURY and its leadership.

6.2 The Group also regrets that it was not able to consult fully with the URC Theological Colleges but is very hopeful given the positive response of the Training Committee to take these concerns forward. It is especially pleased that the Secretaries for Training

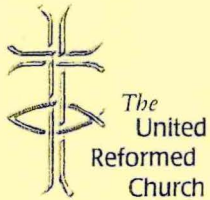
and RJ&MM together with the principal for Northern College have been tasked by the Training Committee to follow up the concerns of the Audit Group in relation to that area of the Church's life.

7 Recommendations

- 7.1 The Audit Group on behalf of the Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry Committee presents its final report to Mission Council as a draft version inviting Mission Council's comments and guidance; and asks Mission Council to receive its final report and affirm the URC RJ&MM programme which is tasked with taking forward the huge amount of work needed to build a multiculturally inclusive United Reformed Church;
- 7.2 The Audit Group on behalf of RJ&MM asks that Mission Council adopts the following resolutions:
- a) Mission Council authorises the Secretaries for Communication & Editorial and Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry to draft an ethnic monitoring form to be included in the United Reformed Church Annual Returns
 - b) Mission Council encourages the synods to support and enable the URC Minority Ethnic Conferences which not only affirm the gifts black and minority ethnic members bring to the life of the URC, but they also help develop BME leadership for the life of the Church now and into the future
 - c) Mission Council urges synods and local churches to use the 'Multicultural Ministry Toolkit' and 'We Belong' training pack to help local church members and groups become cross-culturally aware and literate
 - d) Mission Council affirms the Training committee in its commitment to developing learning centres that are culturally sensitive and aware, and encourages that committee to ensure all lay training materials it is responsible for developing are culturally sensitive and inclusive
 - e) Mission Council instructs the Assembly Arrangements committee to ensure that any special arrangements for particular groups (e.g. women and youth) to be represented in the new and reduced General Assembly be made applicable to BME representation as well
 - f) Mission Council encourages synods and local churches to be culturally sensitive during the process of seeking representation to synod meetings and to Mission Council and to use the provision for alternate delegates as an opportunity to involve BME participation
 - g) Mission Council encourages those in leadership at all levels of the Church's life to be intentional in promoting multicultural inclusiveness influencing and inspiring people to make the needed changes

Delbert Sandiford, Chair of the Audit Group
Andrew Prasad, Convener RJ&MM
Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Secretary RJ&MM

March 2007



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

H1

Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

Audit Report: ADDENDUM

The Audit Group had agreed that it would be more favourable to Mission Council if our final report was presented in the form of an executive summary. In the course of our enquiry we accumulated a huge amount of information that could easily make this report into a very substantial and cumbersome document. Our intention is to submit the full and detailed record of our enquiries to the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee to keep for future reference. What we present to Mission Council therefore are highlighted issues, not the full report. We hope highlighted issues will help give some direction to where the URC needs to focus now and into the future in its endeavour to witness to the world and society as a kingdom building community of Christ's multicultural followers.

This addition to our report (see Paper H) gives Mission Council added insight into our enquiry, the kind of information gathered, and conclusions drawn.

1 Governance

In considering governance our enquiry sought to focus on the level of BME representation in local churches, synods, and Assembly Committees. We were impressed with the ready availability of statistics of church members by ethnic origin for 2001 and 2005 collected by the Equal Opportunities Committee. It has been helpful to see the distribution of ethnic groups by synodical areas. Similar statistics, however, were not available for ministries, synods, Assembly Committees or any other group. We, therefore, relied on qualitative information which indicated that BME members are under represented in most areas of church life except the ordained ministry. (Synod Moderators indicated from personal knowledge that BME representation among ordained ministers was approximately 4% compared with 3.5% BME church membership). We were not able to form a view of representation among elders who play a significant role in local church governance, discernment, and pastoral care. Although information has been collected for this group by gender no data is available on BME representation. (This could be put right as an add-on when the data on elders is next collected).

We took note of the view of the Racial Justice Advocates that there is a virtual absence of BME representation in church leadership, and this absence in itself discourages BME leadership involvement. "There isn't anyone like me here". Other reasons advanced for under representation were that some BME groups did not stay on after church thus missing opportunities for contacts which facilitated a sense of bonding and getting to know people; the reliance on the meetings culture for doing business which is seen as representing middle-class ways of doing things which may turn some people off; and insufficiency of information about governance structures.

More systematic ethnic monitoring will clearly help to establish what level of under representation exists across church ministries and structures, and to start the process

of determining why and what might be done about it. It may not be easy to raise the level of BME representation without good information about experiences and skills available within these groups. A skills audit at church level will be helpful in identifying potential.

2 Ministries

The Audit Group reviewed the ministry packs, and commends the positive affirmation initiatives that have been taken to show BME faces on candidating packs with the exception of the Lay Preacher's pack, and to have BME representation at Enquirers' conferences. We felt that the texts within packs were ethnically neutral, and that the encouragement shown on the covers of packs had not been reinforced in the scripts. Some consideration should also be given to BME representation in the Lay Preacher's pack.

We were told by EMLOMA that most lay and ordained ministers were born overseas. These bring welcome gifts to church life, and Synod Moderators took the view that in the absence of home-grown ministers they can be good ministry role models who encourage others into ministry. Nevertheless, there is a perceived shortage of home-grown BME ministers in a church which was blessed with a significant increase in non-white membership between 2001 and 2005. Such growth must be a source of untapped potential. We can only speculate as to whether the shortage of home grown BME ministers creates an expectations barrier around this and other roles.

It would be worth considering becoming more intentional about BME ministry and establishing a programme for targeting BME young people for vocation, providing encouragement, mentoring and support at the local church, and creating an opportunity for them to come together from time to time for mutual support and sharing of experience. A start might be a weekend conference for BME young people to explore vocation. The Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Office had organised a very well attended Multicultural Youth Weekend in October 2005, with the co-operation and support of the Youth Office. Whilst the denominational aspiration is to be truly inclusive and multicultural, for the purpose of increasing the number of BME young people fully involved in the life of the URC, it may be worth considering a BME youth weekend event. We are pleased that the RJ&MM and Youth Secretaries are looking at these issues together and urge Mission Council to give them the needed support and encouragement in this area of work.

3 Training

The shortage of statistics was keenly felt in this area. The Audit Group draws on the evidence provided by Training Officers who considered a request from us at their July 2006 meeting, and the Training Committee. Training Officers reminded the Group that the Enquirers' Conference was not the only route into ministry, and that there are some BME representatives on Training for Learning and Serving courses. We were pleased to hear this as they will feed through the system in the fullness of time. In other areas of training we detected a hint of BME under representation in training events, or participation only by one ethnic group. These are impressions and recollections. Ethnic monitoring of training events would help to clarify levels of participation.

We also explored how far training was sensitive to the cultural needs of participants - for example, having English as a second language, participants having to do two jobs while undertaking TLS, or the absence of BME tutors at Theological Colleges. This exploration proved inconclusive, but Training Officers were aware of these and other potential barriers to training.

Given their role in planning and delivering training the Audit Group explored how prepared Training Officers themselves were for incorporating cultural awareness in courses. They took the view that racial and cultural awareness training would be helpful to them in undertaking their role.

The role of the Elder has already been referred to in the discussion about ministries. The Deputy General Secretary spoke about the recent consultation and the conversations this has initiated. There is a window of opportunity here for adding a multicultural dimension to their training with particular reference to pastoral care across cultures. *The 'Multicultural Ministry Toolkit' and the 'We Belong' training pack can help in this area.*

4 The public face of the URC

How the church communicates with its members may give overt and subliminal messages of how it sees them. The Audit Group, therefore, examined four back numbers of "Reform" to gain a snapshot of how it reflects church, and came to the following conclusions. The text covers the range of church activities in Britain and worldwide. Stories, articles, letters, book reviews, and small ads very broadly reflect the three countries and the worldwide mission of the church. World mission is particularly well represented with stories such as those about the Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches, Jubilee and World Debt, Christian Aid and mission exchange reports.

There is little to indicate that the URC in Britain is multiethnic in its composition. It is rare to find a story featuring minority ethnic people here. In the editions that were reviewed there are many photographic images of black and Asian people, mostly in the world church context. The dominant image is one of people living in poverty, or of white representatives of the URC in Britain visiting projects and programmes abroad.

The overall impression presented by "Reform" is that the URC is white, and middle aged although there is the occasional reference to young people. Black and Asian people are people who live overseas living hard lives, struggling against poverty, and deserving of the help and support of white URC members.

These considerations have been shared with the Communications and Editorial Committee who have graciously responded indicating their intention to take seriously the under representation of BME people as they develop and revamp the magazine.

The URC Ecumenical Audit Group
Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee
March 2007



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

J

Report from the Ministries Working Party on the implications of Resolution 2 General Assembly 2006 Housing of Non-Stipendiary Ministers

Introduction

1. General Assembly 2006 passed resolution 2 which instructed Mission Council 'to investigate the possibility of changing United Reformed Church regulations to allow flexibility in the provision and payment for housing of non-stipendiary Ministers. Mission Council asked Ministries to carry out the investigation.
2. For some years we have been following the advice to General Assembly 1997 (Book of Reports p.105 3.4) which states:

It would not be normal for housing to be provided for a non-stipendiary Minister. Where there is a manse available, and the non-stipendiary wishes to use it, there is no reason why this should not be arranged. Such an arrangement however, should include a lease or licence, entered into by the Trustee on the advice of a solicitor, and a commercial rent would be payable.

3. Resolution 30 on deployment in the Equipping the Saints report to General Assembly 2005 asks for flexibility and imagination to be used in deployment exercises. It is a logical step to suggest that part of the flexibility might be a development of the advice given to the 1997 GA with regard to the housing of those in non-stipendiary service.
4. The Ministries Committee therefore has no problems in principle to housing of those in non-stipendiary service, but could not support any decisions which placed those ministers involved in a situation where they incurred increased tax demands.

The tax implications

5. The denomination in the UK that makes most use of procedures that offer accommodation in exchange for duties is the Church of England,

where the system is commonly known as 'House for Duties'. Our enquiries have revealed that there is no overall scheme but each diocese produces its own. The example of the House for Duties scheme from the Diocese of London sets out the standard of housing provision, with local congregational responsibilities, which is very similar to that which is set out in the United Reformed Church's Plan for Partnership. However the scheme does not clarify the tax agreements which we assume have been reached when the housing is provided to those not in receipt of a stipend. It does seem to imply that any such agreement is based on a priest offering not less than two days plus Sunday duties.

6. We feel that two days plus Sunday is a fair minimum for provision of a manse. The Chief Financial Officer (Andrew Grimwade) suggested that the next step should be to ask for a copy of a letter setting out the formal agreement between an Anglican diocese and the Inland Revenue in respect of House for Duties. The United Reformed Church could then approach the IR for a similar agreement.
7. On further enquiry, we ascertained that, although there is no standard scheme for 'House for Duties', Church House, Westminster, does offer advice to the dioceses in preparation for negotiations with the Inland Revenue about housing provision.

The advice relates to *Part 3, Chapter 5 of the Income tax (Earnings and Pensions) Act 2003:*

Where living accommodation is provided to an employee by reason of the employment, a tax charge arises on the value of the benefit. 'Employee' includes an office-holder.

However Section 99(2) provides:

"This Chapter does not apply to living accommodation provided for an employee if -

- a) it is provided for the better performance of the duties of the employment, and*
- b) the employment is one of the kinds of employment in the case of which it is customary for employers to provide accommodation for employees."*

Both tests have to be satisfied for exemption to apply.

8. The United Reformed Church already has an agreement with its Inspector of Taxes in regard to the tax implications of manse provision for Ministers in part-time stipendiary service. The formal agreement reached between the United Reformed Church and the Inland Revenue recognised that, providing the maintenance and expenses relating to the

manse met by the local church are proportionate to the scoping of the pastorate, the minister would incur no additional tax demands in respect of the housing.

9. It would seem that the dioceses have used the 'better performance' and 'customary' tests to argue for no additional tax demands for those in non-stipendiary as well as stipendiary service. A letter raising these issues was prepared by Judy Stockings and Andrew Grimwade and has been sent to be the tax office in Salford which deals with ministerial tax. We have received a reply to say that if the minister in non-stipendiary service is given housing to enable the better performance of the duties then, pro rata to the amount of time offered for service, this provision will not be seen as a taxable benefit. However the United Reformed Church needs to bear in mind that some dioceses have not persuaded the relevant Inland Revenue officer that the housing provision should not be a taxable benefit, so there is no guarantee that we can successfully argue the case with each tax office dealing with those in non-stipendiary service.

10. The 2006 General Assembly resolution acknowledged that housing provision might not be appropriate in all cases. We agree, and think that in some cases it would not be unreasonable to ask for a commercial rent. Provision of housing that is comparable to that offered under the Plan for Partnership needs to be reserved for those who can offer a considerable amount of time to the pastorate and have modest means of financial support. However it is unlikely that a Minister in non-stipendiary service who receives a sizeable salary would be able to offer two days a week plus Sunday duties in return for housing provision.

The limitations of housing provision

- 11 a) In the case of Ministers in stipendiary service, the Church makes provision for widows/widowers/divorcees and there is the possibility of retired ministers housing. We believe that Resolution 2 should not be interpreted to mean that this extended provision should apply to those in non-stipendiary service. Rather, the provision of housing would be limited to a specific pastorate and period of service. Therefore, Ministers who offer for 'house for duties' should be clearly advised about the need to make their own provision for their accommodation needs after their period of service.

- b) The rule should also be seen as permissive allowing synods to house ministers when a certain set of conditions apply. It should

not be seen as bringing in a blanket provision of housing or housing allowance for non-stipendiary service.

Retired Ministers and 'House for Duties'

12. Resolution 2 may not only apply to ministers in non-stipendiary service. Ministers due to retire may be willing to offer a period of years in this way. Such housing provision should not be confused with retired ministers housing. When a minister lives in a RMHS property and offers ministerial oversight to a church that local church will pay a rent to the society. Under resolution 2 the retired Minister, if eligible, will not move into RMHS property until they finish serving under the provision of resolution 2.

Recommendations from the Ministries Committee

- 1 Mission Council agrees that, under resolution 2 General Assembly 2006, Synods should be permitted to provide 'house for duties' to ministers in non-stipendiary service on condition that the following conditions are met:
 - a) the minister is offering no less than two days a week plus Sunday duties,
 - b) there is a written agreement between minister and pastorate or post indicating the terms of the duties and of the housing provision. This agreement should be lodged with the Synod and subject to regular review,
 - c) agreement has been reached with the Inland Revenue not to consider such provision as a taxable benefit for the minister on the grounds that the accommodation is provided for the better performance of his/her duties,
- 2 Such housing provision does not commit the United Reformed Church to the provision of housing for widows/widowers, should the minister die in service, or for divorcees.
- 3 RMHS property should not be used to provide housing under the terms of resolution 2 GA 2006.

Ministries Committee 27th/28th February 2007



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

K

Ministries Committee

Resolution (M1)

**Upper Age limit for transfer from
non-stipendiary to stipendiary service**

**General Assembly rescinds General Assembly 1997 Resolution 34 (f),
f) Assembly resolves that applications to transfer from non-stipendiary to
stipendiary ministry must be received by province before the date of the applicants
53rd birthday, and resolves that from this point forward there shall be no upper age
limit for transfer from non-stipendiary to stipendiary service.**

**In line with the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, the Ministries Committee
believes that there can be no objective justification for retaining the transfer from
non-stipendiary to stipendiary service age limit since Ministers who request such a
transfer are already trained and ordained.**

The Ministries committee therefore recommends the deletion of this rule.

Resolution (M2)

Duty to Consider (Amendment)

**General Assembly reaffirms its policy that Ministers in full time stipendiary service
should normally retire in the month of their 65th birthday but resolves that with the
agreement of the synod and of the pastorate/post concerned this retirement may
be deferred for a period of up to six months.**

**For the avoidance of doubt, General Assembly reaffirms its decision of 2006,
Resolution 26 'Duty to Consider' extension of full-time stipendiary service, for cases
where a minister wishes to extend a period of full-time service beyond the six
months after his or her 65th birthday.**

- 1 In 1993 Assembly resolved that ministers must retire not later than six months
after their 65th birthday.**
- 2 In 1997 Assembly added to this permission a procedure which allowed ministers
to extend full time service for a maximum 3 years in exceptional circumstances.**

- 3 In 2002 Assembly resolved that ministers should retire in the month of their 65th birthday unless agreement under the current procedures had already been reached or there were exceptional circumstances which allowed for an extension of up to 3 years under the 1997 resolution.
- 4 In 2006 the 'Duty to Consider' resolution removed the need for exceptional circumstances to accompany the request for an extension to full time service beyond 65.
- 5 Since the 2006 resolution requests for extensions have been for periods of less than six months. The Ministries suggests that for such short periods of extended service the resolution of 1993 should be reinstated. This allowed the minister and pastorate to come to a local agreement on a suitable date for retirement, which fitted in with an individual pastorate's timetable.
- 6 Under such an agreement the Ministries Committee would require a letter from the minister giving the actual date of retirement together with a supporting letter from the pastorate and Synod to be sent to the Ministries committee. This notification would follow receipt of the Duty to Consider letter sent to ministers at the time of their 64th birthday.
- 7 If a minister wishes to continue in full time service for longer than six months after his/her 65th birthday then the 2006 'Duty to Consider' procedure must be followed.

Resolution (M3)

The Assessment procedure from July 2007

General Assembly approves the following aims for the procedure to be used when assessing candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work;

- i) **There should be one common practice throughout the United Reformed Church, thereby reaffirming the decision made in the 1996 criteria for assessment work from July 2007,**
- ii) **There should be a common United Reformed Church standard for the selection of candidates for training.**

The demise of District Councils will require changes to the assessment process and in line with the aims for the procedure of assessment. General Assembly approves the following revised procedure:

Interview or conversation	Status of interview or conversation
The Enquiry stage	
Meeting with Minister or Interim Moderator	Informal and exploratory
Meeting with Moderator/or Moderator's deputy	Informal and informative. However the Moderator has a responsibility to check that the potential candidate fulfils the basic age, membership and educational criteria agreed by General Assembly. If a candidate does not meet any or all of the criteria the Moderator should discuss what steps could be taken in order for the candidate to satisfy the criteria or what other forms of service might be offered to the Church.
Enquirers Conferences	At any point during this stage of the process the potential candidate should attend a Synod Enquirers Conference.
The formal candidating stage	
Church Meeting Interview	Produces a decision of a Council of the Church. If the decision is not to recommend the candidate will not proceed to the next stage
Synod Interviews	<p>Produces a decision of a Council of the Church. If the decision is not to recommend the candidate will not proceed to the next stage</p> <p>Therefore any candidate who goes on to the Assessment Conference goes sponsored by the Synod.</p> <p>With the demise of the District Council, in the case of candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, Synod will need to arrange for an assessed service and see through any appropriate placement work or 'shadowing'. The Synod also will need to collect local knowledge and opinion of the candidate, which is set in a wider context than that of the local church alone, to help in reaching an informed decision. The new Structures of each Synod will doubtless determine how that is to be achieved.</p>

	<p>The Synod interview should also identify whether there are determining factors in each candidate's situation, personal or otherwise, which the interviewers would want the Training Board to take into account in selecting the resource centre and training programme. This information should be sent to the Training Board via the Ministries office along with the report on the candidate for the Assessment Board</p>
<p>Assessment Board Conference</p>	<p>At the end of this Conference two decisions will have been made on behalf of the United Reformed Church, recognising that the Assessment Board has a mandate to do its work from General Assembly.</p> <p>The first decision taken by the Assessment Board will be that the candidate may or may not go forward for training.</p> <p>If there is a positive recommendation it will be accompanied by a second decision taken by the Training board as to the Resource Centre through which the candidate/student will be trained. The Training Board will also give an indication of the nature of that training.</p> <p>The Training Board interviews the candidate during the weekend of the assessment Conference, but plays no part in the decisions reached by the Assessment Board.</p>
<p>During training</p>	<p>The Synods will be asked to continue to exercise the pastoral care of the candidates as is presently the case. This should not present a conflict since no candidate will have been sent to the Assessment Conference who does not have the prior support of the Synod.</p> <p>Synods will also continue to attend the annual progress meetings with the training</p>

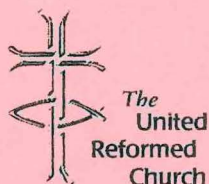
	institution. However we request that copies of these reports should be sent to the Assembly Ministries/Training Committees who have responsibilities on behalf of the whole Church. This will enable the Committees to evaluate, and learn from, the decisions that have been taken and raise their awareness of any concerns which may emerge.
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- 1 The proposal to change the locus of the final decision from the Synod to the Assessment Board is made in the light of discussions that have taken place since the 2005 resolution to abolish the Districts, thereby removing a decision of a Council of the Church from the candidating process and requiring a revision of the present procedures.
- 2 The proposed revision of the procedure will:
 - a) ensure the retention of that element in the procedure provided by the District interview by adding assessment which is wider than the local church commendation to the Synod interviews
 - b) continue to offer pastoral care to the candidates and students through the Synods during selection and through training.
- 3 David Cutler, the Convener of the Assessment Board, Christine Craven, Secretary for Ministries, and 24 representatives of the Synods on the 12th January 2006 and considered the implications for the candidating procedure of changes to the structures of the United Reformed Church. The implications were also discussed by the Assessment Board which met on the 9th September 2006 when the note of the January discussion and the agreements reached were taken into account.
- 4 All who have so far considered this matter have been clear that there must be a consistency about the decisions made to send candidates for training which can be delivered by the Assessment Board. However the ongoing pastoral care of students is also a matter of importance and this might be more effectively delivered by the Synod which sponsored the candidate.
- 5 The process proposed seeks to address both the need for consistency and for pastoral care as it continues to engage all the Councils of the Church in the discernment of vocation and thus ensures the final decision remains responsibility of the whole church. At the same time local knowledge of the candidate's needs

is given necessary weight both at the assessment stage and throughout the training period.

- 6 In due course the decision about a student's readiness for ordination/commission should include representatives from all the bodies which have been monitoring the individual's development through the course of training. However, the readiness for ordination/commission for students whose assessment for the ministries of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work took place before July 2007 should for the time being follow the procedure in place prior to July 2007. This last procedure is currently under review.
- 7 Further work also needs to be done on the procedures for supporting those who are not accepted for training at whatever stage in the process that decision is made.

February 2007



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23-25 March 2007



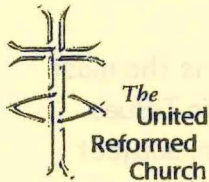
Committee for Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry

Abolition of the Slave Trade Bicentenary 2007

The Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry committee brings an update to Mission Council on the Mission Council October 2006 resolutions relating to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bicentenary 2007:

1. The Committee presents to Mission Council the '*Lest They Be Forgotten*' worship resource we have developed for the use of the whole Church throughout the year 2007, and asks that Mission Council commends the resource to the churches and synods for their use at any time suitable and convenient during the year to commemorate this important event in our shared history;
2. The Committee is making arrangements to working closely with the Assembly Moderator and the Assembly Arrangements Committee to ensure that an appropriate form of commemoration of the anniversary is held at Assembly 2007 that would include a formal statement of deep regret in recognition of Britain's involvement and specifically the links of our own predecessors had to the slave trade;
3. The Committee is set to promote a UK annual Anti-Slavery Memorial Day once such a date is announced and confirmed, ensuring that it is included in our Church calendar and diary, and using it to promote the need for eradicating all forms of contemporary slavery.

Convener: Andrew Prasad
Secretary: Katalina Tahaafe-Williams
March 2007



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

M

Joint Public Issues Team

Summary of Review

The internal review of the Joint Public Issues Team concludes that:

- The Team has done much good work;
- All three denominations are contributing to and gaining from the Team;
- Good progress has been made on developing a new way of working; areas for further development have been identified;
- The different structures of the denominations have raised issues which were not expected; now that these have been recognised and defined, the Team's way of working can accommodate them;
- The Team is successful and will continue to improve its effectiveness

The review makes a number of detailed proposals to apply the lessons learnt over the first few months. The Team will need to remain flexible in its approach and to review its operation regularly.

The review also makes proposals to deal with the problems that have arisen; the Management Group is confident that these will enable the Team to move towards a resolution of the tensions identified.

On the question of whether the team should continue after the pilot year, the review makes the following proposal

The Team should continue in very much its present form, which is compatible with the changes currently proposed by the Methodist and United Reformed Churches. It has developed an ethos and way of working which gives it the flexibility to adapt to changing structures, inputs and demands from the three denominations while enabling them to maintain their clear, separate identities.

It also makes some more detailed proposals for the successful operation of the Team in the longer term, including regular reviews of its effectiveness.

The Management Group is satisfied that this ecumenical cooperation is the most effective way in which the three denominations can engage with Public Issues and recommends that the Team should continue beyond the pilot year, subject to annual reports and 3 yearly reviews, the first of these to be undertaken in autumn 2009.

Resolution

Mission Council noting that the Management Group is satisfied that ecumenical cooperation is the most effective way in which the three denominations, United Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Baptist Union, can engage with Public Issues resolves that, subject to the agreement of our ecumenical partners, the Team should continue beyond the pilot year, subject to annual reports and 3 yearly reviews, the first of these to be undertaken in autumn 2009.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

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Church and Society Committee

Assisted Dying

1. Why this debate now?

1.1. The context is a momentum for change to the legislation governing euthanasia, which saw Lord Joffe's *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill* attract considerable support in the House of Lords early in 2006. The Bill was eventually defeated, due in part to opposition from Church of England bishops sitting in the Lords, but there will almost certainly be fresh attempts to amend the law. Some Christian denominations have clearly stated positions on Assisted Dying and Euthanasia; however, these issues have not been formally discussed by the United Reformed Church. A resource pack *A Time To Die* produced by Church and Society in 2002 covered issues of bereavement and loss but deliberately made no reference to assisted suicide, for the reason that: *euthanasia is at present not legal in this country* (1).

1.2. The Church and Society committee agreed in January 2006 that this was an issue that the Church should be encouraged to consider and the intention to mount a debate was signalled in the report to General Assembly in 2006(2). The Committee has encouraged discussion through:

- A questionnaire, distributed widely and available at General Assembly 2006. (Section 9 and Appendix A)
- The Church and Society network hotline
- The Church and Society pages on the URC website
- An article in the October 2006 edition of Reform, and
- The Secretary raising the issue during visits to synods, districts and local churches
- A study guide. (Appendix F)

1.3. Many responded, their views nearly always being based upon formative personal experiences, either as a professional carer, or as a result of living through the death of a loved one. Encouragingly, some churches and districts reported that they held discussions, often led by people who had briefed themselves for the task. Invariably, the report back was that the debate was lively, with people sharing a range of experiences. By February 2007, 139 responses had been received, including 12 from groups. Trends from the responses are highlighted in Section 9; the questions asked and a fuller summary of responses will be found in Appendix A.

1.4. This paper does *not* pretend to be exhaustive, nor overly academic; it does try to identify the main issues of concern, recognising that medical advances make this a complex issue. It points the reader wanting more to further sources of information. In compiling it, the Church and Society committee has been assisted particularly by the Revd. Delia Bond, co-ordinator of the URC Health and Healing Network; the Revd. Dr. Neil Messer, senior lecturer in Christian theology in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Wales, Lampeter; Malcolm Johnson, Professor

of Health and Social Policy at Bristol University, Professor of Gerontology and End of Life Care, University of Bath, and former Convenor of the Church and Society committee; Dr. Pamela Cressey, Convenor of Eastern Synod Church and Society Committee and a retired GP, and colleague members of the Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Church Joint Public Issues Team; and also by the many people who have taken the trouble to respond to the questionnaire (See Section 9 and Appendix A).

2. Political context

2.1. Lord Joffe's Bill would have enabled adults of sound mind, who were suffering unbearably as a result of terminal illness, to receive medical assistance to die at their own request (3). The Bill contained a number of safeguards, including requiring that:

There be medical confirmation that the person was of sound mind, had a terminal illness, and was suffering unbearably

A specialist in palliative care discuss other options with the patient

A second doctor confirm the diagnosis

A solicitor and an unbiased witness satisfy themselves that the criteria had been fulfilled

The patient be given fourteen days to change her/his mind.

2.2. The Bill was defeated by 148 votes to 100 after a seven hour debate. The Archbishop of Canterbury was one of those who spoke against it, saying:

Whether or not you believe that God enters into consideration, it remains true that to specify, even in the fairly broad terms of the Bill, conditions under which it would be both reasonable and legal to end your life, is to say that certain kinds of human life are not worth living (4).

3. Perspectives

3.1. As Christians, our perspectives on Assisted Dying, are shaped by our faith and informed by Christian theology. We acknowledge that those of other faiths, or without faith, may have a different view, informed by their background. As Christians we believe in the sanctity of human life. It is God given and not ours to extinguish. We also accept that we are mortal, and have a finite life span on earth. We believe in life after death and the promise of eternal life. There is a sense in which death is the ultimate healing. We believe in living the Christian life in all its fullness within the limitations of our circumstances.

3.2. Some Christians hold the view that life should be preserved for as long as possible, because it is always possible that God will intervene and effect a miraculous recovery, beyond that which medical science can comprehend. Others feel that whilst it could never be acceptable to help end the life of a patient by a deliberate act, in some circumstances it could be acceptable to withhold treatment and to allow a patient to die. The words of the 19th Century humanist poet Arthur Hugh Clough, are often quoted in euthanasia debates: *Thou shalt not kill, but needst not strive, officiously to keep alive (5)*. These words now have a significance beyond that envisaged when Clough wrote them, for advances in medical science mean that life can be sustained, even in 'a persistent vegetative state' in patients who would have died less than a generation ago. However, it is the active provision of assistance to a patient to take her/his own life that is at issue now.

3.3. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales and the Church of England House of Bishops submitted a joint paper to the House of Lords Select Committee formed to consider Lord Joffe's Bill. The submission was based upon the belief that God himself had given to humankind the gift of life. As such, it was to be revered and cherished. All human beings were to be valued, irrespective of - among other factors - age and potential for achievement.

3.4. The two Churches submitted that all decisions about individual lives bear upon others, with whom we live in community, and for this reason it could not be held that the law relating to euthanasia was simply concerned with private morality. This was an issue in which society had to make a positive choice to protect the interests of its vulnerable members, even if this meant limiting the freedom of determination of others.

3.5. Neither Church insisted that a dying or seriously ill person should be kept alive by all possible means for as long as possible. Patients might reasonably refuse a particular treatment as being too burdensome. Treatment for a dying patient should be proportionate to the therapeutic effect to be expected and should not be disproportionately painful, intrusive, risky, or costly, in the circumstances pertaining. Having said that, the aim of giving or refusing treatment should never be to make the patient die. Patients should not be able to demand that doctors collaborate in bringing about their death; that, the submission said, would be illegal and morally wrong. If doctors were allowed, in some circumstances, to kill their patients rather than care for them, this would lead, inexorably, to an undermining of trust. A change in the law to permit assisted dying would change the cultural air breathed by all of us, and affect attitudes to older people and those with chronic illness. The submission concluded:

It is deeply misguided to propose a law by which it would be legal for terminally ill people to be killed or assisted in suicide by those caring for them, even if there are safeguards to ensure it is only the terminally ill who would qualify. To take this step would fundamentally undermine the basis of law and medicine and undermine the duty of the state to care for vulnerable people. It would risk a gradual erosion of values in which, over time, the cold calculation of costs of caring properly for the ill and the old would loom large. As a result, many who are ill or dying would feel a burden to others. The right to die would become a duty to die (6).

3.6. The Methodist Church made a submission recognising that there were complex moral problems integral to the final stages of some terminal illnesses, but noting that the Christian tradition insists on the infinite respect owed to every individual human being - not proportional to well being, nor any assessment of seriousness of illness, injury or disability (7).

3.7. The submission of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (now Dignity in Dying) said that many terminally ill people would like medical help to die, but to provide that help was currently illegal. Despite this, health professionals repeatedly broke the law, out of compassion and respect for the wishes of terminally ill patients. Some patients attempted to end their own life - with or without the help of a loved one - sometimes with deeply distressing consequences, not just for the patient, but also for the relative. The general public had made it clear in opinion polls that they wanted the law changed. The Society said:

the choice is not between permitting and preventing medically assisted dying. The choice is between making medically assisted dying visible and regulated, or allowing

it to continue 'underground' without any safeguards, transparency or accountability (8).

3.8. The Royal College of General Practitioners opposed the Bill. The Royal College of Physicians asked its members for their views and reported that 73 per cent of those who responded were opposed to it. The British Medical Association adopted a "neutral" position, but has since said that it does not believe patients have a right to assistance to end their lives.

4. A Reformed view – by Neil Messer

4.1. There are probably four areas of debate that require some critical attention from a Christian perspective that regards 'the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, [as] the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people' (9): human autonomy; suffering, compassion and the love of neighbour; acts, omissions and the doctrine of 'double effect'; and consequences and 'slippery slopes'.

4.2. Human autonomy

4.2.1. The notion that human autonomy must be respected is a very widespread assumption in contemporary debates about medical ethics. It has philosophical roots in the work of two very different thinkers, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill; Kant particularly could support a more nuanced version of it than the one frequently put about in discussions on medical ethics. Be that as it may, when respect for autonomy is considered in contemporary debates - including those about assisted dying - it often means: if I am an adult whose capacity for free and informed decision-making is not significantly impaired by illness, disability, coercion or anything else, then I should be free to do what I choose with my own life, to the extent that exercise of my freedom does not hinder anyone else's exercise of theirs. The freedom to which I am entitled is often taken to include the freedom to end my own life at a time, and in a manner, of my own choosing and the right to have medical help to do so. Such an understanding of autonomy informed many of the arguments in favour of the Joffe Bill, including a number of the submissions to the House of Lords Select Committee.

4.2.2. Such a view of autonomy is open to criticism from several perspectives. For example, some feminists might argue that it assumes an individualistic understanding of human life that reflects male more than female experience(10). From a Reformed Christian standpoint, the basic assumption that my life is my own, to do with as I choose, seems unsustainable. A key biblical theme is that God is the creator, owner and giver of human life, and no human can claim absolute ownership of their own - or anyone else's - life. This would seem to be part of what underpins some of the laws in the Torah, including those about the taking of life. The central reason for Christians saying that 'we are not our own' is that we 'were bought with a price' (1 Cor 6: 20), that we have been 'purchased' by Christ's saving death in order that our lives might be transformed, renewed and might become all that God means them to be. As Paul recognises, this affirmation sets limits on the things that we ought to do with our own - or other people's - bodies. Some might say that Paul is only addressing Christians when he says this. However, it would seem a strange theological stance to say that whatever Christ's death shows us about God's good purposes for human life *only* applies to those who are already Christians.

4.2.3. In short, if Christians are to think about euthanasia and assisted suicide, respect for autonomy will prove a very unsatisfactory starting point. A more promising

start can be made from considering how God's gift of life should be respected and protected in these circumstances, or as Barth formulated it in *Church Dogmatics* what it means in these circumstances to obey the command 'Thou shalt not kill' (11). Whereas Barth thought that obedience to God's command could, in some exceptional situations, involve the taking of human life, he seems not to have allowed that euthanasia could ever be commanded by God. Christians working within this tradition who wish to make a case for assisted dying would need to show that Barth was wrong, and that assisted suicide and euthanasia could in some circumstances be ways of obeying God's command to protect human life.

4.3. *Suffering, compassion and love of neighbour*

4.3.1. Another dominant line of argument focuses on compassion; some patients, particularly some who are chronically or terminally ill, experience terrible pain and suffering and long for death to release them; surely the compassionate thing to do is to help them to a quick, painless and dignified end. In the debate about the Joffe Bill, this view was expressed frequently and forcefully, with the help of powerful and well-publicised stories of sufferers and their families.

4.3.2. It might seem that the Christian imperative to love our neighbour as ourselves would reinforce this line of argument (as Malcolm Johnson suggest in Section 6). Those who have not experienced such suffering in their own lives or those of loved ones should be cautious in what they say about this; it would be easy to speak glibly or even callously. But that said, this line of argument contains buried assumptions that are distinctly problematic for our Christian tradition. One is the assumption that we know what 'loving our neighbour' means. It might seem obvious, for example, that when my neighbour is in pain, the over-riding demand of neighbour-love is to do whatever I can to relieve pain; and if that means euthanasia, so be it. But this assumption, that the relief of pain and suffering has an importance which over-rides other obligations, is a peculiarly modern one that seems to owe more to secularising trends of thought (in particular, eighteenth century utilitarianism) than to the sources of our Christian tradition. It should not be denied that the relief of suffering is a highly important obligation - the long history of Christian involvement in medicine bears witness to that - but it might not be the *only* or the *over-riding* obligation.

4.3.3. The biblical witness at the roots of our tradition suggests a more nuanced understanding of both suffering and love. For example, Paul pleaded with God to be relieved of the 'thorn in his flesh' but received the answer 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:1-10), which suggests an understanding of suffering that is both richer and more complex than the utilitarian view summarised above. Certainly, in the picture presented by Paul's account, his suffering is a real and terrible evil; but at the same time, mysteriously, it has become an occasion by which he has experienced God's grace in a powerful way.

4.3.4. There is no room in this picture for downplaying the reality of suffering or for glib talk about its being 'good for the soul'. But Paul also witnesses to the mysterious ways in which God is encountered in the midst of suffering. His testimony suggests that it won't do to conclude that my over-riding obligation to my suffering neighbour is to do everything I can to end suffering, including killing her or him. Such a line of thought leads some Christian thinkers to argue that one of the most important contributions that Christian churches can make to the debate about euthanasia and assisted suicide is to be the kind of communities that can give suffering human beings the resource to *endure* pain and indignity. Stories can be told of ways in which this has happened, to remarkable effect - the Christian roots of the hospice movement should be noted - but it has to be said that our churches often fail to live

up to their calling in this regard. If our practice were better, our words and arguments might sound less hollow.

4.4. *Acts, omissions and double effect*

4.4.1. A third line of argument often used in favour of assisted dying is, in effect, that we already practice forms of euthanasia, so we might as well be honest and do it more efficiently and effectively. Doctors withhold or withdraw medical treatment that could prolong a patient's life, so why not give a lethal injection that will end it all more quickly and easily? Or again, doctors might give drugs with the aim of relieving pain even though they can foresee that those drugs would have the side-effect of shortening the patient's life. In doing this, they appeal to the ethical and legal principle of 'double effect' which states that an action done with a good intention (in this case, relieving pain) can sometimes be permissible even if it also results in a foreseen but unintended evil consequence (shortening the patient's life). Some advocates of assisted dying argue that these distinctions - between acts and omissions, and between intended and foreseen consequences - are false, and therefore if we accept some kinds of action (or inaction) that hasten patient death, we should be willing to go further and accept direct intentional killing.

4.4.2. These issues are more philosophical than theological. However, many of those who deny the significance of the act/omission distinction and the relevance of the 'double effect' principle assume a view of ethics in which the only relevant factor in assessing the morality of an act is its consequences. A strong case can be made that Christians are committed to a richer view of moral action. For example, we have a stake in the claim that there is an important difference between *aiming to relieve pain*, knowing that this might also hasten death, and *aiming to kill*. Part of the difference might lie in the effects that these different courses of action would have on those who performed them, and on the communities and societies that sanctioned them. It is not only the end results of actions that matter, but also the kind of people and communities we become. If I am a doctor who gets accustomed to aiming to kill some of my terminally ill patients, that could gradually make me into a different kind of person than I would be, if I restricted myself to trying to relieve their pain. Similarly, a society that became accustomed to the intentional killing of some of its terminally ill members might also gradually develop an altered moral character as a result (12)

4.5. *Consequences and slippery slopes.*

Another important strand of public debate concerns the possible consequences, beneficial and harmful, of proposed legislation. Opponents of assisted dying sometimes argue that even if it could be morally justified in individual cases, the effect would be that the lives of many more innocent and vulnerable people would be placed at risk. A related claim is that even if legislation contained built-in safeguards, to permit assisted dying would set society on a 'slippery slope' which would lead eventually to widespread euthanasia, loss of respect for human life, and the loss of protection for the vulnerable. In a sense, these arguments are secondary to those already discussed. If Christians conclude on principle that it is morally unacceptable to legislate for assisted dying, the arguments about consequences and slippery slopes will be superfluous. However, they are not unimportant; the social consequences of legislation should be considered, and even if assisted dying were morally legitimate in some cases, it could still be the case that the likely harmful consequences were so great that it would be wrong to legalise it. This, however, is an argument that is likely to turn more on empirical evidence than theological considerations.

5. Practical considerations

5.1. Advances in technology and medicine give us choices that were not available even a generation ago; choices about whether we prolong life at all costs, or recognise that there is a time to die. So many considerations come into the debate: the age of the patient, the quality of life, the cost and efficacy of treatment and the patient's wish and readiness to die. There will be as many views on this subject as there are individuals, each coming with their own beliefs, traditions and experiences; some will have been uplifting; others will have been dreadful. Each patient will have a different threshold of pain, and attitude to suffering. Each will have thoughts and beliefs about death and personal fears. Health professionals will have their own views; they are often under pressure to assist terminally ill and suffering patients to end their lives – if not from the patient, then from family members.

5.2. As Christians we recognise we are made up of body, mind and spirit, and we function in relationships. There are many types of suffering, not just physical, and when addressing end of life issues we must heed the necessity to address not just physical, but also spiritual, mental and emotional needs.

5.3. Peace of mind is important at all stages of life, and especially at the time of death. This requires that there are opportunities for the patient to speak to, and pray with, someone she or he can trust, and to express concerns regarding people left behind, and the restoration of relationships, with God, family members and others. Often it is too difficult and painful to speak with those who are closest. It will be the chaplain, minister, doctor or nurse - especially in a hospice setting – who will listen, reflect and allow the patient to make confession and give thanks. These professionals who, daily, see suffering in others, have their own perspective, and also need to be supported in prayer and love.

5.4. This is an important part of the Healing Ministry. See Appendix E. As churches and individuals we pray for healing, and have to accept that sometimes the greatest healing is death and being brought into the nearer presence of God. We do see prayers answered, and we give thanks when people are cured and healed. We long for all prayers to be answered in the way we want, but have to content ourselves with the knowledge that prayers are answered by God in his time and his way.

5.5. Hospice facilities are stretched and there is insufficient capacity to cope with all who are terminally ill (see Section 8). Many without families die alone in hospital - not always the best place to be when dying, as hospital resources are often too stretched to give the love, understanding, spiritual and emotional care and attention required. Care in the home from specialist nursing organisations can be wonderful, but sometimes it can be sadly lacking, putting great strain on families.

5.6. In recent years, people have often been reluctant to discuss death, leaving superstition, fear, anger and guilt, especially about untimely death. Many say they are not afraid of death itself, but of the manner of dying as they have seen suffering first hand. They are fearful of unmanageable pain in body, mind or spirit and of the inability to communicate wishes, and loss of dignity when they reach a point where they can do nothing for themselves. Many are afraid of dementia and the loss of personality. There is a fear of life-threatening diseases, and the treatment -or unavailability of treatment. People ask themselves: Will I be able to cope - and what about those looking after me. What about the burden I will be to them? There are those who say: If ever I become a vegetable and can no longer speak or move or do

anything for myself, then please do not artificially keep me alive. What most would wish for is a timely, gentle and peaceful death in a loving, caring situation.

5.7. It is difficult to observe suffering in others, and difficult for the sufferer to endure. Where does suffering fit into the Christian perspective? We are all part of a fallen world - it is part of our human condition. There is evil, sickness, suffering and disease; we cannot escape it whatever our piety and belief, none of us is immune. We are all caught up in it, until God's Kingdom comes, it will continue to be so. We believe God does not send suffering but promises to be with us in our suffering and works through channels here on earth. He works through those who are alongside, who strive to alleviate and prevent the suffering of others. The Church, God's body on earth - through prayer, pastoral care, befriending, listening and the healing ministry in its broadest sense - can reach out to those who are suffering and dying. Through being part of, or in touch with, the caring professions – reaching out into the wider community and looking at wider world issues – the Church has a significant role in the alleviation and prevention of suffering. The developing concept of "parish nursing" may come to play a significant role. See Appendix D .

5.8. As Christians we believe in the sanctity of human life, life is God given and not ours to extinguish. Equally, we have to accept that the greatest healing is death and being brought into the nearer presence of God. We also accept that we are mortal and have a finite span on earth, and that death will come to each; we are not immortal. We believe in life after death and the promise of eternal life. We believe in living the Christian life in all its fullness within the limitations of our circumstances. Our Christian lives should be manifest by showing and sharing Christian love, care and concern, and by praying for one another.

5.9. As you read this paper, this may well be a good point at which to pause – for reflection and prayer.

6. A researcher's epiphany – a personal view by Malcolm Johnson

6.1. As an academic gerontologist (a researcher on ageing and the lifespan), like the overwhelming majority of other gerontologists – who study everything up to the brink, but no further - I had paid little professional attention to death and dying. But in 1988, I was asked to produce an Open University course on end of life issues. After much effort, we not only persuaded the Department of Health to fund the production, but also completed a full half-credit undergraduate course, *Death, Dying and Bereavement* which has now been used by up to 40,000 students (13).

6.2. During the three years it took to create the learning materials, the Course Team were immersed in matters related to dying. It was an immensely difficult human task; though very rewarding. We had many wonderful collaborators, including St Christopher's Hospice in South London and its charismatic founder, Dame Cicely Saunders, who is regarded as being the founder of the Modern Hospice Movement. Dame Cicely promoted the humane care of dying people with the evangelical zeal of the deeply convinced Christian she was. At that time and later, I was persuaded of her orthodox Anglican Christian view that all life was sacred and should never be taken. She added to this dictum a phrase that has become the doubtful mantra of the hospice and palliative care movement: The taking of life is never justified because we now have the ability to deal with all pain. This claim was made extensively by those who opposed Lord Joffe's Bill.

6.3. Further involvement with death and dying led me into work on funerals and memorialising with another social innovator, Lord Michael Young, who had just created The National Funerals College as a result of the misery he saw in researching his book *A Good Death* (14). Michael – a sometime Buddhist – observed the common everyday experience of death as a lamentable commentary on our death-denying society. We wrote (along with others) a publication called *The Dead Citizens Charter* (15). I took a closer interest in the real life experience of dying at the end of the 20th century, including training staff in care homes for older people, on how to understand the social and psychological processes of dying. My team taught the history of death, the cultural diversity of approaches to death and elders, the importance of symbolic rituals such as funerals, the contemporary meanings of spirituality and ‘biographical’ pain’ and how to deal with death professionals – funeral directors, doctors and clergy.

6.4. My research on older people at the end of life led me to understand the anguish that many experience as they face imminent death. The average age of people in care homes today is 90. With endless time to think, but not much time to live, a great deal of time is given over to reflection. For some, all is harmony and contentment. But most find that unconfined time for life review takes them into the deeper recesses of memory. Too often the dominant recollections are of dreadful experiences – things done by others to harm them, actions taken but deeply regretted, things always promised yet still undone. This leisure to reflect is accompanied by disability and an incapacity to right these wrongs, and there is much guilt and self loathing. Some see this as unforgivable sin. Others with no belief, simply feel tortured. Yet they rarely find a sympathetic and safe listener to relieve this profound distress: which I have called ‘biographical pain’.

6.5. So when we observe the landscape of contemporary death, it is not one of pain-free transition, assisted to a comfortable end by palliative care. Such services are rationed (mostly to younger people with cancers). More to the point, the indications are that the great majority die in physical pain which goes untreated or unrelieved by medication; or in unrevealed ‘biographical pain’. Without the opportunity to be relieved of this appalling anguish and the possibility of forgiveness, it seems right to allow those whose lives are a living hell to exit with careful provision, and dignity.

6.6. These observations over nearly a decade have made me a critical friend of the hospice movement and I am no longer able to stand with Dame Cicely Saunders on assisted death. I no longer accept arguments about the nobility of pain or the restrictions on freewill imposed by a God who will choose the hour and the manner of death, regardless of human cost. This is not our God of love. When you have seen it, you recognise the awfulness of continuing to sustain life that is finished; you know that to enable a patient to choose to leave it all behind in a controlled and honest way is a supreme act of love.

6.7. In this brief account of an emerging recognition of the fallacy of the theologically supported view that all life is worth living, there has been no space to address the theological arguments. Yet there is much to be said about the perversity of the arguments which elevate ‘God-given’ pain, however extreme, into an opportunity for personal growth and grace. Nor is it a repudiation of the sanctity of life argument to recognise that there are circumstances in which sustaining human life is no more than pious punishment. So, I hope the URC, and other mainstream churches in the UK, will soon come out from behind the screen of traditional but flawed theology – as we so commendably have in the case of women and homosexuals – to support humane and well-ordered policies, which will enable the tormented to end their suffering with dignity.

7. Living Wills

7.1. Provisions of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, expected to come into force in autumn 2007, put on a statutory footing - and therefore give greater status to - so-called 'Living Wills' or 'Advance Directives'. These can be used as a way to express preferences regarding health care and treatment in the event of incapacity. They allow individuals, while they are mentally able, to give expression to how they wish to be treated in certain circumstances; this information goes to their medical advisers, and if requested, to a friend or family member, who would act on their behalf if they became physically and/or mentally incapacitated.

7.2. Some see this as a helpful way in which patients can make clear their views to medical staff and relatives particularly on life sustaining treatment and resuscitation. Knowing the patient's wishes can avoid confusion and assist carers and families when difficult decisions are discussed regarding further intrusive surgery, intensive treatment and resuscitation. However, there is concern about such documents being ignored or used to *facilitate* a person's death.

7.3. Discussion with Churches – particularly with the Catholic Church – resulted in safeguards being written into the Act. One of the most significant was the statement that the default position would be to continue treatment – that is to say that if there was any doubt about the patient's intentions or state of mind when writing the Living Will, or the motives of the person appointed to act, then treatment should be continued until these were resolved.

7.4. Some fears concerning the legislation do remain: A Living Will might not give the patient adequate opportunity to change her/his mind in a situation that was not adequately foreseen, a vulnerable patient could be exposed to pressure in drawing-up a Living Will, and anyway, any such document, drawn-up in advance, could not cover all conceivable circumstances that might arise. (The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales is producing a booklet on Living Wills, to be published, by the Catholic Trust Society).

7.5. An example of a Living Will can be seen in Appendix B

8. Palliative Care

8.1. Good palliative care recognises that each person has unique physical, emotional and spiritual needs, all of which ought to be addressed. It aims neither to hasten death, nor to prolong life at all costs. But accepts that when a patient is dying, the relief of suffering, be it physical, emotional or spiritual, takes precedence over both of these concerns.

8.2. There have been rapid advances in palliative care and in the growth of the hospice movement, such that a briefing by the Christian group CARE says succinctly: *We do not have to kill the patient to kill the symptoms* (16). However, provision and expertise is not uniformly available. There seems to be general agreement on the need for better provision and for medical staff to be better trained in the discipline - a clear point to emerge from the responses to the Church and Society Questionnaire (Section 9 and Appendix A).

9. Response to questionnaire

9.1. Church and Society highlighted a number of questions in its questionnaire. By February 2007 139 responses had been received, including 12 from groups. Trends from the responses are identified below; the questions asked and a fuller list of responses is detailed in Appendix A.

Many people are worried about becoming a burden as their health fails.

Most are not so much afraid of death itself, but have associated fears: being alone, suffering unbearable pain, and losing dignity.

Most accept that there may come a time when it is right to withdraw medical intervention, but that this is not the same as assisting the death of someone who still has quality of life.

Most accept that some palliative treatment may hasten death, and are happy with this, as long as the intention of treatment is relief of pain.

People do fear that if assisted dying is permitted, the permission may be misused.

Everyone agrees that palliative care should be better resourced.

10. Conclusion and recommendations

10.1. Church and Society encourages General Assembly to recognise that Assisted Dying is a complex subject; advances in technology and medicine pose new challenges. We believe there is a time to die, and we recognise that there are circumstances in which it will be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life. However, we do not believe it is right to empower, or to give doctors responsibility for providing, medical intervention which deliberately seeks to assist a patient to die. We recognise that these are often matters of fine judgment but we do not support changes to legislation to allow assisted dying or euthanasia.

10.2. There is clearly considerable interest in the subject within the Church. Many people have views born out of personal experience of seeing suffering in body, mind or spirit - or all three. Most have experienced the death of a loved one and that has helped form their view on death and the way of dying. Sensitivity rather than dogmatic pronouncement is therefore required.

10.3. We recognise that the issues raised have implications for the Church and the pastoral care of the chronically sick and the terminally ill. There is a need to offer prayerful support, for sufferers and carers. We recognise pain can be in body, mind and spirit, and that care must be taken to address all three.

10.4. We recognise and respect the fact that those of other faiths, or no faith, may have a different view of life, death and suffering.

10.5. Whilst acknowledging the dilemma and anxiety which sometimes surrounds terminal illness, we believe the vulnerable might be at risk from possible abuse of legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. However, we do support the right that terminally ill patients already have, to decline treatment that might prolong life.

10.6. **General Assembly affirms the report Assisted Dying to be an accurate expression of the mind of the United Reformed Church, as encapsulated in the following statements:**

1. As Christians we regard all human life as being God given, and therefore precious; we believe that death is not the end and we have faith that there is a more perfect life to follow.
2. We recognise that there is a time to die and that there are circumstances in which it will be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life.
3. We recognise that some palliative treatment for the terminally ill, makes the patient more comfortable and pain free, but can also hasten death. We believe this to be acceptable, as long as the primary purpose of the treatment is pain relief and comfort of the patient.
4. We could not support legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. We would therefore oppose any change in the law to permit voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide.
5. We believe that a Living Will or Advance Directive which has been prepared by a patient of sound mind, can be helpful for carers and relatives; however we do not believe such a document should be used to facilitate a person's death.
6. We believe that additional resources are needed to provide more uniformly available and more high quality palliative care.
7. We recognise the valuable contribution made by the hospice movement and express our prayerful support all those who work in, and promote hospices, and others who befriend and provide pastoral care for the dying.

11. References

1. United Reformed Church. *A Time to Die. A resource pack for the churches.* 2002
2. United Reformed Church. *General Assembly 2006. Annual report, resolutions and papers.* Page 52. para. 5.3.
3. *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill.* Printed 9 November 2005. Full text available at http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/pabills/200506/assisted_dying_for_the_terminally_ill.htm .
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6. Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales and Church of England House of Bishops. *Joint submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill.* 2004. Available at <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/topics/euthanasia.htm> and http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/news_item.2004-10-19.9713099720
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8. Voluntary Euthanasia Society (now Dignity in Dying). *Submission to the House of Lords select committee on the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill.* 2004 Available at www.dignityindying.org.uk .
9. United Reformed Church. *The Basis of Union, Schedule D*

10. Susan Frank Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 53-6, 137-41.
11. Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3 of 14.
12. Acts, omissions and double effect are helpfully dealt with by Nigel Biggar *Aiming to Kill: the ethics of suicide and euthanasia*. London: DLT 2004
13. Donna Dickenson, Malcolm Johnson and Jeanne Katz (eds) *Death, Dying and Bereavement*. London: Sage (Second edition). 1993 & 2000
14. Michael Young and Lesley Cullen. *A Good Death: Conversations with East Londoners*, London: Routledge. 1966
15. Michael Young, Malcolm Johnson et al. *The Dead Citizens Charter: National Funerals College*. Available from NFC, 75, Long Ashton Road, Bristol, BS41 9HY, price £5. Cheques payable to National Funerals College.
16. *Euthanasia Explained*. CARE. Undated

12. Sources of further information

The *Life Valued* programme of CARE, a Christian charity, opposes any change to the law regarding assisted dying for the terminally ill and supports the development of better palliative care www.care.org.uk .

Care NOT Killing is an alliance of human rights and healthcare groups and faith-based organisations which seeks to promote better palliative care, to ensure that legislation regarding euthanasia and assisted suicide is not relaxed. www.carenotkilling.org.uk .

Not Dead Yet UK is a network of disabled people who have joined an international alliance of those who oppose the 'legalised killing' of disabled people http://www.livingwithdignity.info/ndy_home.html .

Dignity in Dying (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society) promotes patient choice at the end of life and campaigns for a change in the law to permit medically assisted dying within strict safeguards www.dignityindying.org.uk .

Friends at the End supports doctor assisted suicide with good palliative care www.friends-at-the-end.org.uk .

More information about Parish Nursing (Appendix D is available at www.parishnursing.co.uk .

13. Suggested further reading

Report of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill. 2005. Available at www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk HL 86-I, 86-II and 86-III.

Report of a debate in the Scottish Parliament on 'Dying with Dignity' 11 December 2006 is at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or->

04/sor1111-02.htm#Col11876 Minutes of the meeting of a Scottish cross-party group on palliative care on 17 November 2004 are at http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/crossPartyGroups/groups/palliative-docs/Minutes_041117.pdf . A guide to the Scottish Dying with Dignity consultation is at <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/pdfs/mb-consultations/DyingWithDignity-summary.pdf> .

Nigel Biggar *Aiming to Kill: the ethics of suicide and euthanasia*. London: DLT 2004

Neil Messer *SCM Study Guide to Christian Ethics*. London; SCM 2006.

Allen Verhey *Reading the Bible in the strange world of medicine*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003.

Appendix A Summary of responses to questionnaire

One hundred and thirty-nine responses were received by 16 February 2007, including twelve from groups. Numbers in brackets indicates where several respondents made the same point.

1. As Christians how does our faith affect our views on this subject?

- sanctity of life/precious gift (16)
- eternal dimension affecting perspective on temporal events; death as end and beginning (19); God with us in the transition (2); helps take fear out of death (6); allows us to talk about death during life; brings hope but should acknowledge pain of loss
- gives view of suffering at odds with culture of comfort
- only God has right to end life (9) - no person should interfere; God's will, right time (5); should not act like God in extending longevity (4)
- well-being is material, physical *and* spiritual
- Christ's love for us - why does he let us suffer? God does not wish his children to suffer (3)
- my belief and desire to be allowed to make choices regarding my destiny goes against general Christian belief
- makes it very difficult to accept assisted dying (2)
- do not believe in conscious personal life 'after' death - understand eternity as another dimension - through faith we are granted windows into gift of eternal life
- not as much as it should
- very little (3)
- sometimes conflicts with more human instinct that no one should have to linger in pain, lack of dignity, burden (13)
- ensure way we live does not directly or indirectly cause death of another person
- medical advances and caring professionals, are also expressions of God's love (2)
- God's will that we should care for one another until end of life (3)
- life should not be ended prematurely or irresponsibly
- transforms it; life beyond death as an excitement to be anticipated eagerly but life on earth still sacred

2. What is the "ideal" death?

- in faith; reconciled to God/at peace with God (8); at the end of a fulfilled life in assurance of God's forgiveness and love (3)
- without pain/anxiety (35) and loss of physical/mental dignity (11)
- anticipated; not lingering - surrounded by love, family, friends (27)
- with time of preparation (12) farewells/restoring relationships
- in sleep/peacefully (30); quick (21); when elderly/after long and fulfilled life (6)
- to die suddenly with no illness/pain - but this is selfish, a shock for relatives/friends - and why should I be so fortunate as not to suffer
- at time chosen by individual if possible (including right to have assistance to die)
- not causing too much pain for those who love me - having confidence that those we love can go on without us (4)
- peaceful cessation of the human machine
- can there be such a thing? (4)

3. Are we worried about becoming a burden, restricting the lives of carers, using up family resources, and not getting good care?

- yes to all of these (70)
- generally no (5); God will supply; trust in God's care and love; 'worry' shows our failure to trust
- media generate anxiety
- being a burden/restricting lives of family (6); impulse for drawing up living will?
- cost of care/standards/availability (8)
- elderly distressed at having to sell homes; paying for funeral/wanting money to leave to family
- horror of being put into a home
- should be balance between sacrificial care of family and that provided by state
- many worries would disappear if we were a more caring community
- concern about lack of support for carers (2); love should never be a burden but illness or disability presents strains (6)
- as most can expect to live longer, it will be an increasingly complicated situation for individuals and families
- terminal care usually seen as excellent
- good care is physical, spiritual and emotional
- hope for best care possible; no-one should be denied proper care and compassionate treatment
- people are unprepared - not wanting to think about future
- may be worrying unnecessarily; can do something about it/plan to help alleviate (4)
- should be target to match entry standards (maternity) to exit standards

4. What are people most afraid of when they die? Being alone? Unbearable pain? Loss of dignity? Being trapped in a body that has become a tomb?

- majority agreement with all the above, plus
- leaving others behind/not saying goodbye/unfinished business - unpreparedness (6)
- dying outside relationship with God; not having a saviour
- loss of mental faculties/ability to communicate (20); the unknown
- reduced quality of life with debilitating illness more frightening than death itself
- being alone might be a benefit - the others are outside our choice and might be good argument for a human agency in death, just as there was in birth
- people seldom show their real feelings - so how do we really know?; depends on individual
- being alone is not a worry; God is with us

- inappropriate attempts to resuscitate people ready to die
- being somewhere I don't want to be - ie. in hospital
- only one cure for fear of death, the Christian message of promise of eternal life in Jesus
- don't think I fear death, in many ways I look forward with some curiosity

5. *What does 'Quality of life' mean?*

- will vary at different stages of life/for different people (15)
- might improve after death
- having something positive to experience or give (13); ability to achieve what you set out to do (8); sense of purpose (9)
- ability to maintain dignity/independence (21) mobility/skills; being in control of own decision-making (10)
- ability to communicate and be listened to (17)
- living without severe pain/terminal degenerative illness (12) - not burden to family
- enough resources for needs (2); freedom from want or fear (3)
- loving and being loved/valued/respected (11)
- family and friends/relationships (13)
- in some circumstances, knowing the truth enhances quality of life
- living life rather than existing in life (5)
- not being useless (2)
- feeling that life, even if less active, is still worthwhile
- freedom
- God knows
- having faith
- being close to God and people around me, able to be used by him
- no human being has right to define quality of life for others (2)
- support to make the most of your present abilities (6)
- when memories have gone, I don't know what I would feel - just hope I would not be in any pain and would be visited by relatives even if I cannot recognise them, possibly just knowing someone was there

6. *With modern technology it is possible to keep people alive artificially, even when vital organs have failed. How do we feel about that?*

- we shouldn't do that (25)
- 'Thou shalt not kill, but needst not strive officiously to keep alive' (4)
- difference between kidney failure at 18 and 90
- waste of money/resources (3)
- grey area; hardest question to answer - depends on age of patient/professional prognosis (7)
- can't be sure if illness will cause death soon or if patient will recover after substantial time - if there is doubt, keep alive (5)
- wrong to keep alive if brain death is proven (4); brain dead is dead
- with medical advances God-given, we should maintain life sensibly (4)
- our own advancement has created more problems than it has solved
- my first feeling is a shudder of revulsion and I want to ask why
- life-saving technology is good - life-prolonging technology, when everything we naturally think of as 'life' has stopped, is playing God and dangerous

6a. *Do we need to make a distinction between assisting someone to die who still has quality of life, and withdrawing medical intervention at the right time?*

- majority say yes

- difference between not treating someone and giving drugs to kill them; intention is everything
- is it really living or just not letting go?
- should only be with agreement of patient (7) and family/medical advice; right to choose is paramount
- how do we define quality of life and right time? difficult to decide measurement criteria; assessing when to withdraw medical intervention is key
- quality of life may be considered reasonable by others but unbearable by patient
- who are we to judge?
- do not believe in life at all cost
- assisting someone who has reached the point where they want to die is showing immense love to them
- those who respond to the appeal for help should not be criminalised

6b. Do we also need to recognise that some palliative treatment makes the patient more comfortable and pain free, but also hastens death?

- majority agree
- yes, but shouldn't be the intention of the treatment (2)
- if there is any quality of life, patient should be helped to live
- most palliative treatment enhances sufferer's life
- comfort and quality of life should take precedence over extending life
- why get hung up on time? - why be afraid to hasten death in this way? (2)
- need for constant review because of scientific advances.

7. What are our fears about assisted dying? Is it that it will be abused by doctors, relatives or nursing homes or hospitals? That there will be untimely deaths of the helpless? Does it send out the wrong signals to society?

- all of the above (42)
- assisted dying is wrong (10)
- devalues sanctity of life (2); ignores God's will; cheapens and degrades life
- who will decide where line is drawn? (2)
- fears well-summarised but greatly exaggerated
- failure of Joffe Bill was a tragedy/URC should support his approach (2)
- why are people so fearful? (2)
- favour assisted dying being made legal
- no fear of assisted dying for self if no quality of life
- pressure on those who are ill (4); if becomes commonplace; those incapacitated could be at mercy of institutions - nothing is totally voluntary; people could ask for assisted dying to avoid perceived burdening of others; exercising own choice may become a battle; who is to be trusted?
- some disagreement on potential for abuse by medical profession/family:
 - Shipman/Allitt were able to act without legitimisation of assisted dying
 - where money is to be made in completion of certificates, some doctors will be less worried about ethics
 - danger in less well-run institutions where bed-blocking is a concern
 - fear, inconvenience and financial considerations will cloud judgement of family
 - with proper safeguards, may lead to reduction in abuse
 - puts too much power in hands of doctors
 - fear of bad and uncaring practice
- 'assisted' needs defining - ensure safeguards/proper and effective controls(32)
- desperate people going abroad suggests something needs to be done; can understand why some people want it; society should accept we are all different
- human right to commit suicide - why not help if it's a person's own decision?

- more research needed (2)
- people fear losing control - blame doctors when they have done no wrong
- shouldn't be needed with good palliative care (3)
- once the law has devalued life, who is to stop it being devalued further by anyone with an agenda?
- if dealt with openly there should be no wrong signals and hopefully few fears - if individual has control of own death, that is not abuse
- not morally wrong, but to demand assistance as of right or legally may place too much weight on medical staff
- should trust medical profession/loving and caring families (2)
- people need to discuss dying before they reach stage of terminal illness
- should benefit society overall
- if people of faith emphasised that death is not the end, perhaps some of the anguish around assisted dying could be allayed
- with modern science God has given us potential to 'play God' with life all the time, eg. genetic engineering
- legalising would help a loving partner to carry out the final loving act to a loved one - I would hate to see my partner suffer if s/he no longer wanted to be alive
- the objections to it are far outweighed by the misery caused by refusing to allow it
- we realised, even more clearly, as our Church discussed the issue that our prayers for the medical profession are vital, as they struggle with ethical issues.

8. *Suffering is a part of life but when it becomes unbearable do we have a duty to release the sufferer rather than prolong it?*

- majority say yes
- no (19)
- 'duty' is the wrong word (18) - 'choice' or 'permission'
- doctors have duty to release patients from suffering by controlling pain properly (12)
- not by killing them; why call it 'release' when you mean kill?
- consider why suffering (pain) is unbearable - poor pain management? lack of skills/resources on part of carers/nurses? lack of commitment?
- is refusing to kill someone to be equated with prolonging their suffering? Compare how we treat animals - but humans are not animals in this sense
- patient must have final say if possible (18)
- modern lifestyle/medicines mean general health is better - so suffering may be prolonged - not always best for patient
- difficult to define where such a point is reached; the most difficult question (16)
- stopping treatment knowing it will lead to death is different from the lethal injection (3)
- unbearable pain/suffering is very subjective (3)
- if suffering becomes intolerable, treatment as administered in hospices should be available
- faith versus humanity - as a human being I feel sufferers should be released but as a Christian I am aware of God in charge in the progress of every situation
- rights and conscience of those who might feel pressured to 'release' someone must be safeguarded
- society, and especially some churches, seem to place too much emphasis on sanctity of life at all costs, rather than quality of life

9. *What do we think about 'Living Wills?' (See Section 7).*

- two-thirds of respondents approve: excellent; everyone should be encouraged to produce one while mentally able to do so; with proviso of legal/medical assurance

- that person is capable of the decision and is acting in own free will; allows dignity in death; sensible and good
- mixed feelings/not happy (9)
 - wrong - grieves God and violates his plan (3)
 - problem of possible difference between thoughts when preparing living will, and reaching the stage of it being acted on (5); instinct to cling to life is strong
 - could help relatives/medical staff reach decision (4); in loving families there should be no doubt of patient's wishes; takes pressure off family and guilt they can feel (7); allows individual to 'speak' even if no longer able to
 - huge burden to put on doctors and families
 - useful as far as they go (3); not always treated as binding by doctors
 - who is to execute the will?
 - slippery slope; treading difficult line; could be open to abuse (5)
 - should be one factor in complex equation rather than 'legally binding' over eg. views of next of kin
 - problems with 'legally binding' - should be proviso for people to change their mind/review (6) without pressure from relatives
 - as long as there are safeguards, so that potentially curable or 'improvable' people are not killed
 - legislation must be watertight and not have loopholes allowing wide interpretation
 - not totally sure why it should be necessary to take this legal step
 - most of us are not decisive enough to make one
 - have already made/signed one; want to make further enquiries

10. In all of this, presumably we would want to promote the need for good, readily available, palliative care.

- all those responding agree
- need equivalent of hospices/Macmillan nurses for dementia sufferers and families - would appreciate if C&S committee could look into this
- need for hospices to be able to manage proper home treatment
- example of continuing heart medication for 90 year old with total dementia/incapacitated after severe stroke: family suggested stopping medication and letting death occur naturally: accused of seeking euthanasia
- yes, but not as excuse to avoid grappling with the other issues (3)
- yes, especially if patient can return home/move to proper accommodation for care - hospices can't take all who need to be monitored - hospitals are not the place for the terminally ill; geriatric wards are no place to end a life with dignity
- hospice movement/hospices are beacons of light (8); their role in care and dignity for the terminally ill must be emphasised and extended with NHS finance
- urgent need for practical and emotional support for carers
- should be government funded/part of NHS (5), and not dependent on charity/'luck of the draw'/postcode lottery
- specially trained staff can make a huge difference to patients and those left behind
- especially in hospitals; perception is that hospices do better job than NHS
- if good, readily available palliative care was a common fact then assisted dying would hardly be needed (3)
- this is where society's money and research should be going - if assisted dying became legal, less time and money would be put into promoting and researching palliative care.

Appendix B

Living Wills (Advance directives)

Note: final wording awaiting confirmation by solicitor

The preparation of a Living Will can offer peace of mind to certain people, and assistance to medical practitioners who may be involved in their treatment. It is becoming more common for individuals to record on a simple form what they wish to happen in their medical care in the future, especially near the end of their life, if they are unable to convey their wishes to their carers, both medical and personal. This may be because they are physically and/or mentally incapacitated, or are unconscious. It concerns their wishes on whether or not they want to be resuscitated or kept alive artificially.

It is possible to write a simple signed statement, or there are various forms available to help. An example of such a form appears below, or you may like to ask a solicitor to provide a more detailed document. The important thing is that others know that you have recorded your wishes, so it is a good idea to discuss it with your next of kin or a near friend, your GP, maybe your solicitor, and give each a copy of the form, and also to have one available in your papers. It is not usually helpful to keep it with your Will! You will probably wish to ask someone to be your "health care proxy", who would take part in decision-making on your behalf if the living will was needed.

Suggested form for a living will

This is to record my wishes about my medical treatment, to take effect in the event of my being unable to communicate my preferences at a future date. This may be because of physical or mental deterioration in my health, which makes me unable to communicate my views, or because I am permanently unconscious. I understand that I may change my mind at any time, and I will aim to review this document regularly to check that I still agree with it. I understand that I cannot demand any particular treatment, ask for anything against the law (such as euthanasia or assisted suicide); refuse the offer of food and drink by mouth or refuse the use of measures solely designed to maintain my comfort and dignity such as appropriate pain relief, and basic nursing care essential to keep me comfortable such as washing, bathing and mouth care.

I am writing this Living Will as an Advance Directive, and declare that I understand its scope, and am mentally and physically capable of making the decisions contained in it. I have not been influenced or harassed by anyone else when preparing it. My wishes are set out below.

FULL NAME

Date of birth

Current address

.....

Nat. Ins. number

Name and address

of GP

.....

Name and address of primary contact(s) - health care proxy(s) (the person(s) you would like to be contacted to approve the decisions of medical personnel if required by your Living Will):

Name

Contact address

Telephone number

or

Name

Contact address

Telephone number

My wishes are as follows: I do, however, accept palliative care, including medication, to relieve distressing symptoms such as restlessness or pain, and to retain my dignity as far as possible.

(Delete in each case the alternative 1) or 2) which is not applicable)

A) If I a) have a severe physical illness and/or a severe mental illness, (b) am unable to participate effectively in decisions about my medical care, and (c) there is very little chance that I will recover in the opinion of two independent medical practitioners,

1) I do not wish to be kept alive by artificial means, or to have medical procedures to prolong my life or

2) I do wish to be kept alive for as long as is reasonably possible using whatever form of medical treatment is available

B) If I become and remain unconscious for months or more, and in the opinion of two independent medical practitioners am not likely to recover,

1) I do not wish to be kept alive by artificial means, or to have medical procedures to prolong my life or

2) I do wish to be kept alive for as long as is reasonably possible using whatever form of medical treatment is available .

C) I have specific wishes in certain circumstances named below:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Your signature

(witnessed)

Date

For the witnesses:-

I declare that when the maker signed this document he/she understood what it meant and that, as far as I am aware, no pressure has been put on the maker and that he/she has made it by his/her own wish

Witness 1 *

Signature

Contact details
.....

Witness 2 *

Signature
Contact details
.....

** Witnesses must be 18 or over but not a partner, spouse, relative or anyone else who stands to benefit under the maker's ordinary will*

Review dates and signature:-

Notes

- 1) Living Wills are recognised as being legally enforceable by the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the General Medical Council and the Law Society
- 2) Your Living Will should be discussed if possible with your family, your Medical Practitioner and your 'advocate'. Copies should be deposited with each of them, and you should keep a copy in your papers. You may like to carry a card saying that you have a Living Will, and where it can be found.
- 3) This form applies to England and Wales only. In Scotland a similar procedure is known as 'A Welfare Power of Attorney', which must be granted by the Donor while he or she is mentally competent, and registered by the Donor at the Office of the Public Guardian. The above form could perhaps be adapted.
- 4) A new document is due to be introduced shortly for England and Wales called a Lasting Power of Attorney, but is not yet available.
- 5) The United Reformed Church cannot accept liability for this form

Appendix C

Case histories – for use with Study Guide

1. Alice died two years after she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. During the two years, she threw herself into work at her church. Her husband said: "Alice recognised she would have a short life, but she had the peace that the Lord had saved her. It was comforting for me to see her so at ease. The last thing she said to me was "I am content". *Baptist Times October 20 2005.*

2. Anne, a retired doctor, was suffering from an incurable brain disease. She had seen her husband die from a closely related degenerative illness, four years before. She said she did not want the "long slow demise" that he had suffered. She travelled to Switzerland to take her life, by drinking barbiturates, with the help of the Dignitas clinic. Her son said: She was ready to go and that makes it all the easier for us. We respect her choice. We are very thankful that her suffering was over". *Daily Telegraph. January 25 2006.*

3. Superman actor Christopher Reeve was paralysed in a horse-riding accident in 1995; his spinal injury was so severe that his first lucid thought was that it might be better for everyone if he were to die. However, his passion for how he chose to live

his life from then on, his courage, his determination and his generosity in spirit were an inspiration to all those he subsequently met. He died in October 2004. Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation www.christopherreeve.org .

4. Our son Danny died a drawn-out, painful death from an incurable bowel disease. By the time he was 21 he had gone through over 300 operations. We pursued every possible hope until the top international specialists eventually conceded there was nothing more they could do. The best drugs often couldn't alleviate his pain and so he spent the last year of his life asking the doctors for medical help to die. The doctors would not help him die and instead Danny practically had to starve himself to death. What he went through at the end of his life is a disgrace. After all Danny had to go through, he should have at least had the choice of dying well. *People's stories from Dignity in Dying* www.dignityindying.org.uk

5. Dependent upon a wheelchair since girlhood, Janice hopes her rapidly progressing muscular dystrophy won't claim her life before she has a chance to see her 17-year-old daughter go to college. Despite pain and immobility, Janice says she never would kill herself and thinks it is an awful mistake to allow doctors to prescribe life-ending drugs to people facing terminal illness. The core of Janice's belief is that life is a gift, no matter what the person's situation. Assisted suicide sends the opposite message, she believes. "If someone becomes an inconvenience or a bother, we throw them away. It's a Pandora's box. We don't have a clue about what this is going to do in the future. www.euthanasia.com

6. Yvonne, had only a distant elderly cousin and was fearful about what would happen if she became terminally ill or mentally incapacitated. She wanted to make provision for that eventuality, so asked various friends and a solicitor to take care of her affairs, in that event. She approached her minister to take her funeral when the time came and gave instructions for that too. Sadly she developed cancer just a few years later, went through all the usual treatments and yet died a year later, after the expectation and hope that she would have 2-3 more years. She died after just a few weeks in a hospice, supported by the church and surrounded by many friends who really valued her friendship and had great love for her. She was afraid of pain, and had a Living Will in place. When she knew there was no coming back, she bravely faced the inevitability of death. She prepared herself with prayers of confession, was prayed with on numerous occasions, she was anointed and found a deep peace, but would often ask: 'Is today the day when I will die. When will it be?' Other patients came into her small ward and occupied the other beds, and died and she was still there witnessing their deaths. Painkilling morphine helped her, but also had other side effects. She did not want to be artificially fed or to have more intrusive surgery, she was kept comfortable and pain free, but as she got weaker, she said: 'I am ready for the Lord to take me, there is no more I can do for anyone'. Over the weeks she slowly got weaker and when she died she had close friends around her. The minister took her funeral as she had requested with her hymns and wishes adhered to. Her church was packed, with friends. The singing was great as they gave thanks for her life. She used her Living Will, died with dignity and love surrounding her, she had refused some treatment when it was no longer going to be beneficial, and was ready to die when the time came, and totally at peace with herself and her Lord and those around her.

7. Bert had had several heart attacks and strokes, and life was limited to a wheelchair. Conversation was difficult, and he could do nothing for himself. A life long Christian he had requested the doctors not to resuscitate him if he had another major

heart attack; he had endured enough. He put his things in order with his family and friends and with God, was at peace and took every day as it came. He enjoyed life within his very limited condition, and when he suffered another massive heart attack, he died.

Appendix D

Parish Nursing

The title 'Parish Nurse' is widely used and recognised in North America where nurses operate across denominations and across faiths. In Britain, the term is less familiar. A Parish Nurse might operate within a local church context and provide a number of services that could be summarised as being medically informed pastoral care and health education and promotion within a spiritual context. Below is an example of a job description for a parish nurse who might operate within Britain.

1. Health Educator

The Parish Nurse will find all sorts of ways of promoting health in the congregation and local community, for example by organising health-care teaching with parent-toddler groups, exercise classes with the elderly, stress management courses with business professionals, or by participating in teaching on drugs, alcohol and sex education with youth groups. Such classes could be in church buildings or beyond. The Parish Nurse will also be concerned about environmental and safety issues and First Aid facilities relating to the church and local community, and will encourage church members to take appropriate actions.

2. Personal Health Counsellor

The Parish Nurse will organise clinic sessions at the church building or elsewhere, when blood pressure checks, weight management, and personal health advice are freely available to everyone in the congregation and community who wishes to attend. In addition s/he will make supportive visits to people who are in particular need because of family illness, bereavement, redundancy or other problems. S/he will also provide health care advice for colleagues in ministry and leadership within the church.

3. Referral Agent

Where necessary the Parish Nurse will make referrals to GPs, dieticians, physiotherapists, counsellors, social service departments and voluntary bodies as appropriate. This will require the development of good local relationships with other health care professionals and wide knowledge of local voluntary organisations.

4. Trainer and Co-ordinator of Volunteers

When a family in the church or community is in need of extra practical care, the Parish Nurse will train and co-ordinate volunteers to help. Unlike many NHS nurses, the Parish Nurse is in communication with many people who want to volunteer but do not know how to get involved appropriately. The Parish Nurse will run First Aid courses in order to equip people to provide practical care in emergencies.

5. Developer of Support Groups

The Parish nurse will identify needs for self-help support and develop groups such as stroke clubs, single parent groups, twins groups, bereavement care groups and so on. The church building may or may not be appropriate for these, but the spiritual and physical elements of health will feature in their programmes.

6. Health Advocate

The Parish Nurse will accompany clients to hospital appointments if desired, and act as advocate for them in all their dealings with health institutions.

7. Integrator of Faith and Health

Prayer and discussion of spiritual issues will form a part of most of the Parish Nurse's interactions with clients so that wholeness of mind, body and spirit are the perceived aims of interventions. The Parish Nurse will be recognised by the church as part of the ministry staff team, even if working in a voluntary capacity.

For more information about parish nursing, go to www.parishnursing.co.uk

Appendix E

Christian Healing Ministry: a brief introduction

There is no one single definition of healing ministry for it encompasses so many aspects of life. It is a biblically based ministry and is seen as the response of the churches to Jesus' commission to preach the gospel and heal the sick. It is about meeting people at their point of need, where they are, and helping them on their journey to wholeness.

Healing, wholeness and salvation: These words embrace what God has done for us through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The New Testament shows us that Jesus' healing of the sick and casting out demons were a vivid demonstration of the coming of the kingdom, and his charge to continue that ministry in his name was part of his commission to his disciples.

- This ministry is in response to Jesus' commission.
- There is the recognition that all healing comes from God and we believe that he works through his body on earth, and so through faith, prayers, and actions we can be part of that process to bring healing and wholeness in body, mind, spirit and the emotions.
- It is the seeking of harmony with God, self, others, environment and creation.
- It is a journey towards living life to the full within our limitations (eg. age, state of health or situation).
- It is truly holistic, concerned with the health and wellbeing of the whole person within a web of relationships, a specific context and history.
- It encompasses and encourages the prayerful and practical support of the whole Christian community for individuals and families and communities experiencing sickness and suffering.
- In practical terms there is a very wide remit, for it embraces most aspects of life where there is brokenness and disease including physical illness, broken relationships, abuse, trauma and depression.
- There is a pastoral aspect, which co-operates with and recognises God working through the medical professions.

- Expression of God's love and compassion for all people and the recognition of his being present in suffering. It is wholly inclusive.
- Through this ministry, human suffering, sickness and healing are put into context, given meaning they could not have apart from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- The ministry of healing is eschatological; it offers healing of the Christian soul within the context of eternity and preparation into eternal life.

Healing ministry embraces forgiveness and reconciliation. Christ's reconciling work on the cross is central to forgiveness and reconciliation. This includes the need to return to the full health of right relationships, starting with the right relationship with God, and recognising our dependency.

Repentance, forgiveness and the dealing with guilt, anger, rebellion and resentment are key to this ministry. So many are angry with God, themselves, or others, and are severely burdened and diseased by the past. Much help is needed to bring some to the point where there can be healing and reconciliation and restoration.

In 2 Cor 5:17-19 we are urged to work towards reconciliation. In Col 1:20 there is a cosmic dimension to Christ's death on the cross; Jesus by his act, reconciled himself to all things whether on earth or in heaven. In Eph 2:16 reconciliation is seen as being supremely concerned with the healing of relationships. Reconciliation is the activity of God and man is the recipient.

The healing ministry works towards peace in the deepest sense of the word – the sense of well being that comes about when the will of God is being done, where there is a harmony of being at one with the purposes of God the creator. It embraces, prosperity, bodily health, contentedness, and good relations between people.

In practical terms for the church, it embraces:

- Pastoral care at all levels.
- Prayer, prayer groups, praying with people, healing services, sacraments, anointing, listening, preparation for death.
- Being involved in the community in whatever way is appropriate for the person and situation, with disabled, ethnic groups, elderly, marginalised, rejected, imprisoned, lonely, vulnerable, sick, terminally ill, bereaved, carers, victims and the frightened.
- Healing of memories
- Deliverance ministry for people and places
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Healing services to bring healing and wholeness in the widest sense - not just seeking cures.

Questions asked:

- Are prayers answered? Yes, not always as we want or in our time, but they are answered in God's way and his time.
- Are people physically healed? Yes but not always. We don't know why some are physically healed and others are not. Often healing is not immediate but comes as a package: change of heart, lifestyle, seeking of forgiveness, medical intervention and prayer.
- Do miracles still happen? Yes, peoples' lives change against all the odds.

- What is the usual response to healing? To go and tell others and serve the Lord and live life to the full. There is a new joy and excitement as people experience the living God and become powerful witnesses.

Useful books on the Healing Ministry

A Time to Heal (a manual) Church House Publishing 2000. ISBN 07151383
Francis MacNutt *Healing* Hodder and Stoughton 1997. ISBN 0340661402
Francis MacNutt *The Prayer that Heals* Ave Maria Press. 2005 ISBN 1594710554
Agnes Sanford *Healing Gifts of the Spirit* Arthur James 1979. ISBN 0853052107
Randolf Vickers *The Anointing to Heal* Terra Nova Publications 2005. ISBN 1901949389
John Gunstone *A Touching Place* Canterbury Press 2005. ISBN 1853116319
Healed, Restored, Forgiven. Prayers and Liturgies 2004. Canterbury Press ISBN 1853115878
R T Kendall *Total Forgiveness* Hodder and Stoughton 2001. ISBN 034075639X
Nicky Gumbel *Why does God allow suffering* Kingsway 1999. ISBN 0854768629
Ian Cowie *Jesus healing works and ours* Wild Goose Publications (Iona Community) 2000. ISBN 1901557278
Ruth Burgess and Kathy Galloway (eds.) *Praying for the Dawn* Wild Goose Publications (Iona Community) 2000. ISBN 190155726X

Appendix F

Study Guide

Note: The study guide still needs fine tuning and formatting

This Study Guide has been produced for use with the report on Assisted Dying. The subject is complex and there are no easy answers to the problems associated with end of life issues, suffering and death. The Guide is designed for small group discussion, and is in seven parts which can be used over a series of sessions. Each section looks at particular issues to do with assisted dying, and includes reflections, biblical references and questions for group conversations, and relates directly to a section in the report on Assisted Dying.

Contents

1. Introduction
2. A Reformed view
3. Suffering, dying and fears associated with end of life issues
4. Practical considerations
5. The elderly
6. Living wills - advance directives
7. Where do we go from here?

Suggestions for use

Each module can be used as a basis for discussion for one session or more, depending upon interest and circumstances. It is suggested that each session commences with prayer and a Bible reading. There is a prayer at the beginning of each section which you may find helpful. Some of the issues are very delicate and may become personal and distressing. Be sensitive to one another and respect

differing views, experiences and feelings. Pastoral follow-up may be needed after discussing some of the issues.

Make a note of your thoughts, ideas and concerns as you go along, the issues to pray about, and what, if any, changes you would like to see within the church, community, society, family, amongst friends and from yourself. May it be an enriching experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for giving us this opportunity to spend time together to discuss the complex issues about life and death and the mystery of suffering. Give us grace to listen to one another with open minds and be understanding when others have differing views from ourselves.

May we discern your words of wisdom, your truths as your Holy Spirit moves amongst us. May we be aware of your loving presence as we seek your guidance through the scriptures, prayers, and listening to one another.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?

1 Corinthians 15:55

See Sections 1-3 of the report, and Appendix 3 (case studies)

If someone you loved was suffering unbearably, had lost their quality of life, and dignity, and wanted to die... what would you want for them?

Would you be assured that they would be called home in God's good time? Or would you want to help them towards a gentle release? The answer isn't easy. For Christians, ethical and moral dilemmas rarely are.

Some seek clear theological guidance; others are influenced by traumatic personal experience.

Assisted Dying – the notion that people of sound mind, who are terminally ill and suffering unbearably might receive medical help to end their lives – has become an issue of hot debate. Although an attempt to legalise this was defeated in the House of Lords in 2006, it is sure to re-emerge (2.1).

As Christians, we see death as an ultimate healing. Many feel there is a time to die, and that it might not be right to use medical advances to keep people alive artificially, when all quality of life is gone. But there are real concerns about positive action being taken to end life. During the House of Lords debate, the Archbishop of Canterbury said:

"Whether or not you believe that God enters into consideration, it remains true that to specify ...conditions under which it would be both reasonable and legal to end your life, is to say that certain kinds of human life are not worth living (2.2)."

Dignity in Dying (formerly the Voluntary Euthanasia Society) takes the view that health care professionals frequently break the law, out of compassion and respect for the wishes of terminally ill patients, and the choice is:

"...not between permitting and preventing medically assisted dying. The choice is between making medically assisted dying visible and regulated, or allowing it to continue 'underground' without any safeguards, transparency or accountability (3.7)."

Questions

1. Have you had personal experience of a loved one suffering, and of wondering whether it would be better if death intervened? Did faith help in your situation?
2. Do you believe that human life was given by God, and should therefore only be taken by God, in God's good time?
3. Do you see circumstances in which the power to assist in a person's death might be misused – by medical staff or by family?
4. What about the view of Dignity in Dying that it happens anyway, and it would be better if it were regulated?
5. Do you see a distinction between assisting a person to die and keeping someone alive artificially? Do you agree with Arthur Hugh Clough? He said *Thou shalt not kill, but needst not strive, officiously to keep alive* (5).

Different views are more fully explained on various websites: (See 12. Sources of Further Information).

2. A REFORMED VIEW

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for creating the world in all its richness and beauty, and that we are a part of your creation, and have been given the gift of life. You have given us communities, families and friends in which to live and grow, may we seek to understand more of your truths so that we may use our time and our lives wisely, to your glory. Help us to value life, and know that when the time comes, death is not the end, but a new beginning still surrounded by your love. Give us the grace and wisdom to be open to discern your truth and will for your people, and in the midst of suffering know your love. In the name of Jesus Amen.

See Section 4 of the report.

The section of the Church and Society report entitled 'A Reformed View' is an attempt to identify some of the central theological and ethical issues at stake in the assisted dying debate and to ask how a Christian Church in the Reformed tradition should respond to those issues. This section of the study guide offers some more general comments about how the Reformed tradition might shape our moral living, thinking and decision-making. This might help explain some of the thinking behind the more specific arguments in the report.

The URC 'acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people' (1). This formula identifies a central role for our Scriptures in shaping our doctrine and ethics. It also, deliberately, admits of a wide range of interpretations of Scripture and understandings of the nature of its authority. It allows a role for other sources (usually summarised as tradition, reason and experience) in theological and ethical thinking, and allows for a certain amount of prayerful improvisation on the part of a believer, or believing community, faced with new situations and questions.

When 'discerning the Word of God in Scripture', we need to remember that the biblical writings come from very different historical and social contexts from ours, and might not directly address our questions and concerns. We will not find within the Bible any formula for addressing the hard questions of contemporary medical ethics. In addressing these questions, the Bible functions most importantly in what New Testament scholar Richard Hays calls a 'symbolic world' mode (2). That is to say, it informs the Christian community's vision of the world, its relation to God, and our place within it, re-shaping the community's moral imagination along the lines of that biblical world-view. This re-shaping of the moral imagination happens (or should happen) centrally in the worship and shared life of the Christian community.

As Christians participate in the Church's worship and corporate life, this should enable them to grow in Christian character and to develop virtues, including a kind of 'practical wisdom' informed by faith, that will help them to live and act well in the morally testing situations which they encounter. This approach suggests that faithful Christian living will indeed involve an element of moral improvisation in response to new situations, but this does not mean that everything is up for negotiation. Some hold the view that Christian ethics does include moral principles and rules that are absolute and exceptionless, or as near as makes no difference.

It is possible to outline some features of a biblically-shaped 'symbolic world' that are particularly relevant to the issue of assisted dying:

□ Human life, in common with the whole material world, is created by God, who loves it and has pronounced it 'very good'. However, human life and the world are flawed and alienated from God in profound and complex ways (in traditional Christian language, 'fallen'). But God has responded decisively to this predicament, offering humanity and the world, the hope of healing, reconciliation and ultimate fulfilment in and through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

□ Because humans are God's creatures, our life is not our own, but is given to us as a loan or gift by God; this understanding lies, for example, behind the biblical prohibition of murder.

□ Because every human is one of God's beloved creatures, for whom Christ died, every human life has great and unconditional value. No human life, however limited, damaged or dependent, is beyond the reach of God's love. This should make us highly suspicious of the claim, often made in discussions of medical ethics, that some human lives are not worth living, or that some human individuals have less of a claim to our respect and protection than others.

□ However, it would be misleading to talk of human life in this world as having an 'absolute' or 'infinite' value: Christians have not usually thought that human lives should always be prolonged at all costs. Indeed, the Christian tradition of honouring martyrs suggests that there are situations in which it is wrong to cling to life. The Christian faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ means that our hope is not 'for this life only' (1 Cor. 15:19), and that God's loving care for us does not cease with our death.

□ A major theme in the Bible is God's covenant relationships with humankind, and with particular communities (notably Israel and the Church); this leads some Christian ethicists to think of particular human relationships, including marriage, family life and professional/patient relationships in health care, as covenant relationships that call for particular virtues and impose particular obligations.

Questions

1. What does it mean to be created by God and how does that relate to our attitudes towards life and death?
2. What do we understand by a covenant relationship with God? How do we honour that relationship with God?
3. How do we value human life? Does the value of a human life ever become worthless?

1 See Basis of Union, para. 12

2 Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997

3. SUFFERING, DYING AND FEARS ASSOCIATED WITH END OF LIFE ISSUES

Prayer

We give thanks Lord, that we have come together to think and talk about the great mysteries of suffering and death. We thank you that you have an everlasting love for us, and that you want us to love and care for others.

We are often afraid to talk about suffering and dying because we do not know the answers to these mysteries and we are fearful in case we upset others and unsettle ourselves. May your Holy Spirit guide us as we look at the scriptures and speak with one another. Help us to understand more of your love for us and for all people and give us insights into the mysteries of suffering and death and take away our fear. Help us in our discussions to be sensitive to one another's feelings and help us to know how we should act as individuals and as a church or group in respect of end of life issues.

Thank you that you died and suffered and rose again for us, so that we may know more about the mystery of death and life everlasting. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Bible Reading

Luke 10: 25-37. Mark 12: 28-34. Matthew 19: 16-19. James 5: 13-16

See Sections 4.3 – 5 of the report, and most other sections. Also see Appendix A (case studies) and Appendix E (healing ministry).

This is not a subject that can be addressed in isolation for we live in communities, thus it relates to the whole of the report and the Appendices. However we will endeavour to focus on just a few aspects in this section to try to unravel our understanding of suffering and our response to it.

Our responses to these issues will be informed by our faith, the teaching we have received and our own experiences. By listening to one another you may come to a different understanding and to see things from a different perspective.

First, let us look at suffering from the theological perspective highlighted in section 4.3 of the report which addresses suffering; you may find it helpful to re-read that section (or read it aloud if you are in a group).

Questions

1. What does loving your neighbour mean?

2. What is suffering? Is it only physical or are there other forms of suffering? Can we see suffering in isolation?

3. Are we afraid of suffering for ourselves or others? If so, how does that affect our response to suffering?

'Thou shalt not kill' is one of the commandments. Our dilemma is how to respond to extreme suffering and pain, especially when the patient requests help and when complete relief is not possible, to help or allow the patient to die. Here we enter the realm of palliative care and hospices (see module 4 of this Study Guide), Living Wills (module 6) and social and political matters (module 1).

Share with one another any experiences of suffering you feel relevant.
In your opinion was this dealt with in the best possible way?
If not, how could it have been dealt with differently?
Were you involved in any decision making?

From the pastoral and practical perspective look again at section 5.7 of the report (if you are in a group, you could read it out loud).

This gives the church many things to discuss in respect of how we respond to caring for sufferers in practical ways. The Lord taught us and showed us how to pray, in James 5: 13-16 we are urged to pray when anyone is in trouble, it is something we are all called to do as Christians.

Much will depend on individual circumstances. You may like to discuss:

1. Do we pray enough? If not, how could we encourage one another to pray for others?
2. If all resources were available, money, time, people, expertise, etc., how would we aim to alleviate suffering?
3. With the resources we have, what should be our priorities in our community, or nationally?
4. What do you think of the idea of parish nursing? Is it relevant for your area? (See Appendix D.)
5. The Healing Ministry encompasses all aspects of life. Can you see areas where it operates in your church already and might it be developed further? (See Appendix E.)

If you would like further information contact your Synod Adviser for the Healing Ministry or see the recommended book list at the end of Appendix E)

You might like to make notes of your responses to these questions.

Take time to pray about all you have discussed and be pastorally sensitive to those in the group who have not found this subject easy.

4. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Prayer

Loving God, we thank you that you have gathered us here to think about and discuss the issues of illness and suffering at the end of life. We ask that your Holy Spirit may guide our words and thoughts so that we are in tune with your will. Show us how best to care for those near death, enabling them to know they are loved and valued in surroundings in which they are comfortable and pain free. Help us to be mindful too,

of the lonely, frightened and hurting people who have no one to love them or bring relief. In our modern society, show us how we determine the right time to die when someone is suffering, and how best we can care for them. Help us all to value life and live each day to the full within our limitations of age and health. May we remember that death is not the end but a new beginning with you, surrounded by your love In Jesus' name, Amen.

See Section 5 of the report, and Appendices C (case studies), D (parish nursing) and E (healing ministry)

Bible Reading

John 14: 27 (14-27) John 13: 12-17 (1-17) Romans 11: 1-19

Re-read paragraph 5.1 of the report. If you are in a group, it might help to read this aloud.

This gives us profound dilemmas as Christians as we seek to follow Christian teaching and view the situation in perspective and give meaningful and helpful support and comfort. Our natural instinct is to offer pastoral care, but sometimes even that feels beyond us in the most extreme of situations, and we flounder.

What can we do in these sad and prolonged situations of terminal decline? Our pastoral response will depend on whether the patient is at home, in hospital or in a hospice or nursing home, whether there is a large supportive family or just one carer, or no family. Also the wishes of the patient and family must be respected when they prefer not to have visitors.

As Christians we recognise we are made up of body, mind and spirit, and we function in relationships. There are many types of suffering, not just physical, and when addressing end of life issues we must heed the necessity to address not just physical, but also spiritual, mental and emotional needs. This brings us to peace of mind which is important at all stages of life, and especially at the time of death. (Refer to 5.3).

Visiting the terminally ill is not always easy, and many shy away from it, though training can be helpful. The length of the visit and the timing has to be carefully gauged, and sometimes 'just being there', is enough.

Appropriate conversation can be valued, but most of all the person still needs to be treated as a person, not an illness, to have their needs and dignity respected. The pastoral visitor must be sufficiently aware to listen and meet them at their point of need.

Appropriate prayers, visits, practical help and the opportunity for the patient to talk to someone confidentially about the big issues, personal confessions, the meaning of life and death, etc. to have someone to pray with them and bring Holy Communion may help to bring peace of mind.

Palliative care is managing and relieving extreme pain and discomfort through medication and appropriate care. Hospitals can offer excellent end of life palliative care but are often too busy to devote the time to long-term terminally ill patients.

The hospice movement offers specialist palliative care for the terminally ill at home, in a hospice, special hospital unit or care home. This is usually excellent, with the patient receiving expert pain relief, care with the emotional and practical needs of

family and friends being met as well. Hospices are usually quieter than hospitals with staff having time and training to deal with end of life issues. Through the trained chaplains, appropriate spiritual care is offered; this can bring peace of mind to both patient and family and friends.

Chaplains in all these situations have an important role in bringing spiritual help and comfort to the suffering and dying. However, there is insufficient capacity to cope with all who are terminally ill (see paragraph 5.8 and section 8 of the Report). Inevitably some die in hospital alone, in geriatric wards where staff are busy.

For those looking after dementia sufferers, there is an even greater problem, how and where best to care for them, especially when other terminal illnesses add to the problem? (These issues are explored further in module 5 of this Study Guide.)

There are no easy or universal answers. Each group discussing these issues will have their own experiences to draw on. You might find it helpful to look at the responses to the questionnaire (Appendix A) at this stage, as many are relevant to the practical considerations raised.

Questions

1. What are Christian responsibilities when it comes to caring for the terminally ill? Do we tailor our responses to the situation i.e. when the patient has a large supportive family and friends or when there is no family at all? Look at the case studies (Appendix C) and draw on your own experiences.
2. Take a look at Appendix D on Parish Nursing. Could this be helpful when addressing end of life issues?
3. In your experience, is hospice care widely available or are there limitations in the availability of places?
4. Take a look at Appendix E on the Healing Ministry. Could you see this as an extension of pastoral care relevant to the situations we have been discussing?
5. If there is a serious problem with care for someone who is terminally ill, what should we do, if anything? If there is no space in the hospice, what then? What are the issues to be considered before intervening?
6. Hospices are often stretched. How can the church offer support?
7. Do you liaise with, value and support your hospital chaplains in their special role?
8. How can the church and individuals best support the patient, family, carers, chaplains and friends?

5. THE ELDERLY

Prayer

O Lord God, look with mercy on all those whose increasing years bring them isolation, distress, or weakness. Provide for them homes of dignity and peace; give them understanding helpers, and the willingness to accept help. And, as their strength diminishes, increase their faith and their assurance of your love. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

See Section 6 of the report.

For many old people there is much time available, perhaps too much, to sit and ponder over their lives, with success and failure, opportunities taken and missed, relationships broken and not restored.

Malcolm Johnson highlights the 'anguish' which many old people endure in paragraph 6.4 of the report. He speaks of 'biographical pain', which includes promises made but unfulfilled, wrongs unable to be righted, leading to guilt and self-loathing:

"Some see this as unforgivable sin, others, with no belief, simply feel tortured . Yet they rarely find a sympathetic and safe listener to relieve this profound distress..."

The following meditation, 'Old Nun's Prayer' could provide the basis for a full discussion on the agonies of those who are growing old and dependent. It may be helpful to read it straight through, and then invite people in the group, or ourselves if alone, to recall situations with elderly relatives or friends who may have these thoughts – or indeed ourselves, whatever our age! It is in many ways a positive conversation with God, sorting out what is a good way to deal with old age!

Lord, thou knowest better than I know myself that I am growing older, and will some day be old. Keep me from getting talkative, and particularly from the fatal habit of thinking that I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs.

Keep my mind from the recital of endless details - give me wings to come to the point. I ask for grace enough to listen to the tales of others' pains.

Help me to endure them with patience. But seal my lips on my own aches and pains - they are increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally it is possible that I may be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet. I do not want to be a saint - some of them are so hard to live with - but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil. Make me thoughtful - but not moody; helpful, but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all. But thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

Responses to the questionnaire raise further issues. Question 3 focused on the elderly: "Are we worried about becoming a burden, restricting the lives of carers, using up family resources and not getting good care?" (See Appendix A, 3.)

Questions

1. How can we as Christians ensure that people who are old and frail do not feel themselves to be a burden? What work is undertaken by us as individuals and churches to help old people to feel a). valued? b). secure?
2. How can our dignity be maintained if we become disabled, frail in mind, dependent? As God's people are all equal in his sight, created by him and, as Jesus taught, loved by him, do we have a special responsibility to care for the elderly?
3. What about Christian Homes and Nursing Homes – are there any in your area, and how are the churches involved? What worship services are held in Homes, Hospitals, and are special prayers and themes chosen?

4. How could we achieve the same standard of care for the elderly dying as is available in the Hospice Movement? There is no way at the present time that all those who need hospice care can have it . 'It should be a target to match exit standards with entry (maternity) standards' (Appendix A, 3.)

6. LIVING WILLS - ADVANCE DIRECTIVES

Prayer

We thank you that we are a part of your creation. There is much we do not understand about life, death and suffering and thus we are sometimes fearful and unsure how to best deal with the end of life issues, especially when there is suffering in body, mind or spirit or all three. Some may have experienced suffering in others or caring for a loved one and one is aware of the strain and anxieties cast upon the carers. In our discussions, may your Holy Spirit direct and guide us and bring us comfort as to the way forward for ourselves and others. As we discuss Living Wills, may we be honest with ourselves and each other, about our fears of losing control of our lives and having suffering over which we have little or no control. We want to value life with all its richness and possibilities, but also want to recognise the right time to let go and not prolong suffering. We thank you that you gave your life for us and overcame death, and showed us that death is not the end, but after death we have everlasting life with you still surrounded by your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

See Section 7 of the report and the example of a Living Will (Appendix B).

The preparation of a Living Will can offer peace of mind to certain people, and assistance to medical practitioners who may be involved in their treatment. Take a look at the example of a Living Will in Appendix B.

It is becoming more common for individuals to record on a simple form what they wish to happen in their medical care in the future, especially near the end of life, if they are unable to convey their wishes to their carers, both medical and personal. This may be because they are physically and /or mentally incapacitated, or are unconscious. It concerns their wishes on whether or not they want to be resuscitated or kept alive artificially.

It is possible to write a simple signed statement, or there are various forms available to help. Appendix B is an example of such a form, or you may like to ask a solicitor to provide a more detailed document. The important thing is that others know that you have recorded your wishes, so it is a good idea to discuss it with your next of kin or a near friend, your GP, perhaps your solicitor, and give each a copy of the form, and also to have one available in your papers. It is not usually helpful to keep it with your Will! You will probably wish to ask someone to be your "health care proxy", who would take part in decision-making on your behalf if the Living Will was needed.

It is at times when people have experienced the dying of loved ones or friends that the subject comes into focus, especially if the experience is not a good one.

When "DNR" (Do Not Resuscitate) is written on hospital notes without the knowledge of - or discussion with - the patient or relatives, distress is caused.

Confusion by some carers about what is euthanasia may cause unnecessary interference. If there is a Living Will that may help to avert this, but there is no guarantee that the patient's wishes will be known or accepted.

Health workers on the whole welcome Living Will instructions as a factor in their choice of treatment, given the provisos of appropriateness at the time of decisions. Though these may have legal standing there is still uncertainty about how they should be interpreted.

As litigation increases, especially in hospital, a written statement of the patient's wishes can be very helpful to doctors and nurses in making correct choices of treatment, with the written Living Will to guide them.

Questions

1. What is a suitable time to bring up the subject of living wills with family and friends? Do you know anyone who has made one? Do you have experience, first- or second-hand, of caring for someone so incapacitated that you were consulted on decisions that must be made for them on artificial prolongation of life? Were these decisions difficult to make? Was there a Living Will available and if so, was it helpful?

2. Are there dangers in persuading someone to fill in a form expressing their wishes? Might there be pressure on them to make a choice for the sake of others, which they did not really want? How can we explain that this is not euthanasia, (it is not helping the person to die), but accepting that it only applies if they would die if left without artificial aid, either medical or mechanical?

3. What has our Christian faith to say about our making life-or-death decisions for: a) ourselves? b) others? Is modern medicine always helpful as it enables people to be kept alive artificially, indefinitely? There are continuing advances in transplant surgery - heart, lung, liver, kidney, face. Is there a limit to ethical use of transplants to prolong our natural lifespan? Are we in danger of interfering with God's created order?

4. If we believe in life after death why do we cling on to this mortal life in spite of sickness and suffering?

5. Does the fact of Jesus' miraculous healing affect our choice of artificially prolonging our life, in case we might undergo a miracle cure in the future? (Jairus' daughter healed - St Mark's Gospel chapter 5, the story of the raising of Lazarus - St John's Gospel, chapter 11.)

After this session, be pastorally sensitive and supportive to one another, especially if someone is caring for a loved one who is terminally ill, or who has had a recent diagnosis .

7. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Prayer

Gracious God, we give thanks for the richness of the discussions we have had. Thank you for opening our eyes to the many issues it has raised, and that as a group we have had the opportunity to share experiences, concerns and to think about issues in a new way. We ask that you will help us as we discuss ways forward, help us to focus on the real needs in our church, community, family and amongst our friends. May your Holy Spirit move amongst us as we seek to discern the way forward, as individuals, and as a group or church.

May we seek to help others to have peace of mind and feel safe and loved as they face the end of life. Show us how to be your body here on earth. In Jesus' name, Amen

Reflect on your discussions and refer back to your notes. Are there any areas for prayer or change?

- as a church
- as a denomination
- as a group of people
- as an individual
- as a family
- ecumenically

Does anything need changing? Attitudes, procedures, level of care?

- as a church
- as a denomination
- as a group of people
- as an individual
- as a family
- ecumenically

What can I/we do? Are there any ideas for the next step?

- as a church
- as a denomination
- as a group of people
- as an individual
- as a family
- ecumenically

Make up a prayer to encompass the richness and diversity of your discussions and pray for the way forward.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25th March 2007



Catch the Vision: Outline Plan for Mission Policy and Theology Department

1.1 This paper draws on the wide-ranging responses received to the draft paper of the same title, circulated for consultation in January. In its current form it is designed for discussion in Mission Council in March, after which elements of it will be incorporated into the *Catch the Vision* report to the 2007 General Assembly. Because much of the restructuring process is being carried out in parallel, there are points at which this report is blind to other developments, which will need to be taken account of at Mission Council.

1.2 The following proposals for Mission Policy and Theology cover:

- Purpose, priorities and performance
- Governance and management
- Operations
- Budget
- Ecumenical dimension
- Implementation

To begin though it is important to locate the specifics within the context of the whole and how we might all work together in building up the life of the church locally and corporately.

2. Overview

2.1 General Assembly 2006 proposed that the central operation of the church should be restructured into three departments – Ministries of the Church, Administration and Resources, and Mission Policy and Theology – with the request that a more detailed proposal be brought to the 2007 Assembly. Whilst this paper sets out the proposal for Mission Policy and Theology (MPT), it is important first to take note of the whole context in which we are trying to *catch the vision*.

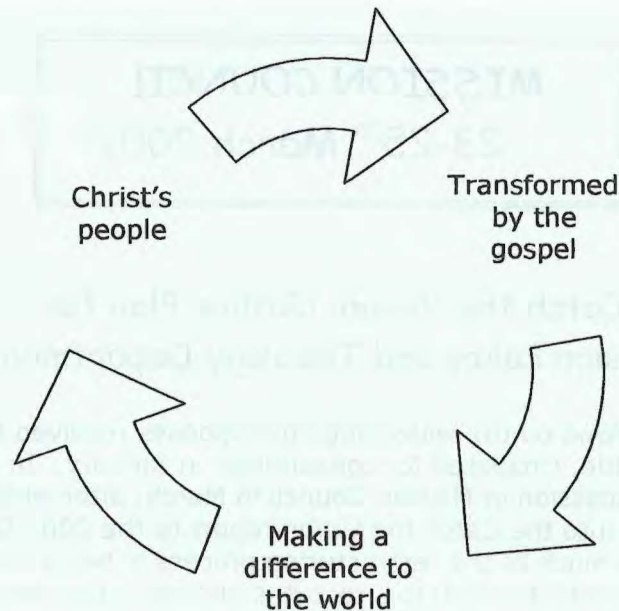


Figure 1 – *Catching the Vision*

2.2 The United Reformed Church, along with other UK churches, has been experiencing significant decline. Between 1979 and the 2005 the proportion of the population attending church has almost halved (Brierley, 2006¹), but for the United Reformed Church decline has been even more marked, having reduced from 190,000 members in 1979 to 70,000 in 2005 (Brierley, 2006). Against this background *Catching the Vision* was launched in 2002, as a major review of our life, seeking to address decline by reshaping the church and giving it a fresh sense of purpose.

2.3 As presented in figure 1 *Catch the Vision* presents a dynamic way of being for the United Reformed Church, which can be translated into our life and witness, if we understand that life to be a process in which changed lives (making a difference) and building up the church (being Christ's people) are not differentiated activities, but rather are part of the same cycle of activity which takes us from being, through learning and doing, to building up the community of the church (the lower part of figure 2).

¹ Peter Brierley, *Religious Trends 6*

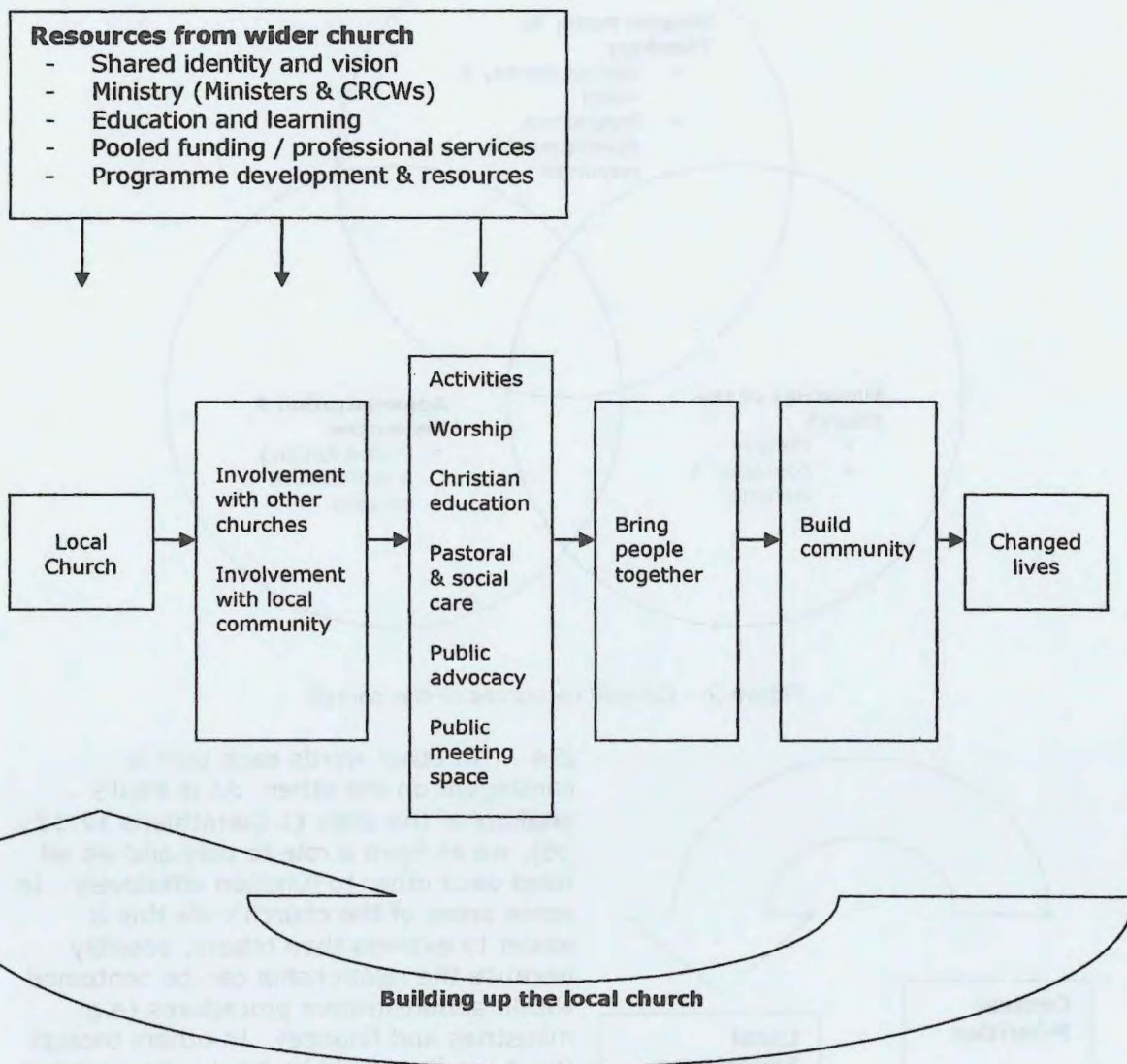


Figure 2 - Building up the local church

2.3 The challenge for central and synod entities is how their contribution (resources from the wider church – the upper part of figure 2) can contribute usefully to this dynamic, which must necessarily be played out and focussed locally. Central restructuring attempts to address this by focussing the central operation in three broad areas, in which each should be informing the other through the General Secretariat functioning as a coordinating agency making connections and drawing people together to address the tasks and challenges which emerge from our experience of being church (i.e. the collective experience of local churches). In these terms we should also be looking to develop a dynamic relationship between the local and the central in which each should be informing the life of the other and thus together building up the whole.

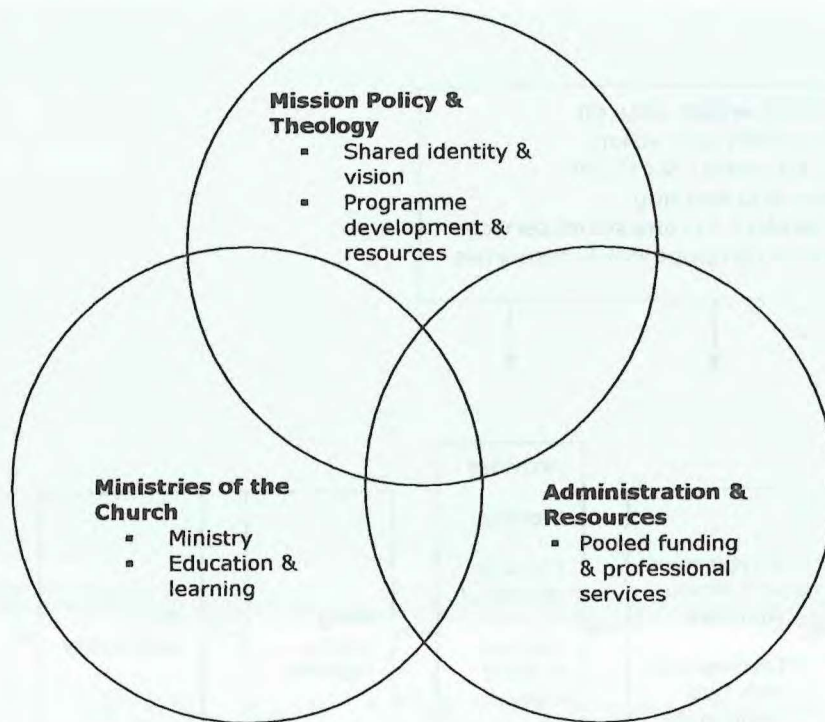


Figure 3 – Central resources of the church



2.4 In other words each part is contingent on the other. As in Paul's analogy of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-26), we all have a role to play and we all need each other to function effectively. In some areas of the church's life this is easier to express than others, possibly because the relationship can be contained within administrative procedures (e.g. ministries and finance). In others though the dynamic should be freely expressed to enable maximum creativity (openness to the Spirit), but this is much harder to embrace and is the particular challenge facing the relationship between MPT and the local church: How can each inform the other for the building up of the whole?

Figure 4 – Local/central dynamic relationship

2.5 This is a running theme, which is best understood in terms of 'dynamic relationship' – always a work in progress, but one which should be focussed on enabling local experience to inform central priorities, and central priorities (gleaned from the overview of many local situations) to contribute to the shaping of local church life and witness, and the building up of the whole church.

3. Purpose, priorities and performance

3.1 The central task of MPT, as its name suggests, is to focus on mission and theology, working with the whole church to formulate and give expression to our

mission and faith in ways which bring alive our vision of 'being Christ's people, transformed by the gospel, making a difference to the world'.

3.2 Whilst the department will bring together existing work on ecumenical relations, interfaith relations, racial justice & multicultural ministry, public affairs (church & society), international relations (*Belonging to the World Church*), *Commitment for Life*, doctrine (faith & order), prayer and worship, and mission it should take seriously the challenge expressed in 3.1 and organise its work around this focus.

3.3 In the transitional phase from Assembly 2007 to Assembly 2008 MPT should develop programme proposals for consideration and adoption at the 2008 Assembly which express our vision in terms of the Five Marks of Mission. This should be based on existing work, but not limited by it. If any existing work does not fit this framework, then the proposal should be to abandon it. If there are serious omissions, then there should be a proposal for how they will be dealt with. The emphasis should be on doing a few things well, focussing our energy to best effect.

	Being Christ's people (Community/Building up the church)	Transformed by the gospel (Learning)	Making a difference to the world (Actions leading to changed lives)
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 the unjust structures of society			
To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth			

Table 1 - A framework for MPT priorities

3.4 Significantly, whilst MPT might lead in developing these proposals, it is clear from the framework that it embraces work across the board and so should involve Ministries of the Church and Administration and Resources in the process.

3.5 Once adopted, the proposals should become the basis for evaluating the performance of the department and the church's work. If we are serious about 'making a difference' we need to develop the means to manage performance - in other words, to learn from experience and to apply that learning in ways which enable us to realise or appropriately amend our goals. It is no longer an option to launch a programme with good intent and just let it take its course. If we

expect a programme to make a difference, then we must critically monitor it as a means of supporting and encouraging its success.

3.6 At present the only things which are universally measured in the United Reformed Church are money and membership/attendance figures. They tell us something about our organisational health, but give little clue as to whether we are having any impact in our mission (whether we are 'making a difference'). Church growth or decline is an important pointer (and should not be underestimated in its significance), but it is a pale reflection of all that we might count as our contribution to God's mission. MPT and the other departments, in the light of *Catch the Vision* should give serious consideration to identifying how else we might measure our achievements. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they are more considerable than the financial/statistical figures indicate and so, if we can meaningfully capture them, they could have a significant role in contributing to rebuilding our sense of purpose and self-confidence.

4. Governance and management

4.1 Because of the focus on mission policy and theology (what we do and the faith that underpins it) MPT will work directly with Mission Council as the council of synods (themselves being councils of local churches, and so therefore Mission Council is a forum in which we can bring together and reflect upon the whole life of the church). Pooling our experience of the church locally, regionally, nationally and internationally (Christ's people) Mission Council will read the signs of the times, reflect on them in the light of God's word (open ourselves to be transformed by the gospel), so that we can make a difference in our congregations, to the communities we minister with and to, and to the world. Then working through various networks (mission enablers, racial justice advocates, *commitment for life* advocates, global partner coordinators, ecumenical officers, etc) MPT will seek to give effect to the policies and programme (action) priorities which Mission Council has determined. Thus, MPT through dynamic interaction with the life of the church at every level will have a role in assisting Mission Council to lead the church in reflection on its mission and theology and be responsible for implementing the church's mission priorities.

4.2 Mission Council will also exercise oversight of the operational side of the department's work, with a particular emphasis on the effectiveness of the United Reformed Church's policies and programmes. In line with the roughly six-month cycle of Mission Council meetings MPT will produce an activities report for Mission Council, indicating progress and pitfalls in the implementation of the church's priorities in mission and theology, identifying any developments which suggest revisions, new work or the abandonment of existing work. The emphasis will be on learning through our experience of being church and applying that learning in a coherent fashion to effect continual improvements in the church's life and witness. Holding policy development, prioritisation and oversight in Mission Council enables a holistic approach which sees the church's life and witness as an integrated whole which needs to be developed balancing local experience and central insight, alongside capabilities (covered by Ministries and Resources) and the outworking of our vision (a function of mission and theology).

5. Operations

5.1 MPT will, as already noted, be overseen by Mission Council. The executive staff team will be coordinated by the General Secretary (team leader) and will comprise (initially) the following posts:

- Secretary for Mission (exact title & job description still to be finalised)²
- Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith & Order
- Secretary for Church & Society
- Secretary for Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry
- International Relations Programme Officer (exact title & job description still to be finalised)
- *Commitment for Life* Co-ordinator

5.2 They will be supported by four administrative staff who between them will ensure the smooth running of the MPT team office.

5.3 This new staffing configuration has been arrived at by ending the posts of Secretary for Life & Witness and Secretary for International Relations and re-designating the International Relations Programme Officer post as an executive position. The support staff numbers have been reduced by one through eliminating a vacant position and increasing the hours of some of the remaining staff who previously worked part-time, effecting an overall saving.

5.4 The executive staff team will meet regularly (initially fortnightly or even weekly and later, approximately every 4 weeks) to coordinate their activities and to avoid unnecessary duplication of work. Together, under the leadership of the General Secretary, they will determine how the work allocated to them by Mission Council is taken forward and reported back and be responsible for the operational effectiveness of the MPT department.

5.5 Their principle working method will be through **synod and locally-based networks** to ensure continual local/central feedback, i.e. that the experience of the local church should continually be driving the outworking of Assembly/Mission Council agreed priorities and programmes. As of now these networks are:

- Mission Enablers
- Ecumenical Officers
- *Commitment for Life* Advocates
- Church & Society network
- URC Peace Fellowship
- Creation Challenge (URC/Methodist environmental network)
- Health & Healing network
- Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry Advocates/Coordinators
- Minority Ethnic Conferences
- Ethnic Minority Lay & ordained Ministers' Association
- *Belonging to the World Church* Advocates
- European Partnership Coordinators
- Global Partner Coordinators
- Inter Faith Relations Advocates
- Silence & Retreats network
- Synod Rural Link People
- Community Mission & Ministry network

5.6 With greater emphasis being placed on networking some initial work will be required to clarify their purpose and the roles of those who serve in them. As is presently the case there will need to be some asymmetry in their design, for what works for one synod may not work for another and what is appropriate for

² CRCW team (& others) make a case that this post should focus on 'community engagement and mission' bringing in learning from our involvement with people in local communities - *SAG/Mission Council might wish to express a view on this*

one network may be ill-suited to others. Accordingly, as networks assume greater significance there should be an ongoing dialogue with synods and Communications on how they could be developed to best effect. By the same token there should be a review of networks in the light of the emerging priorities, considering what networks, working in what ways might best help us to implement them.

5.7 As an example of how things might develop it has already been observed that we should add a network focussed on worship, which might harness and develop the creative skills of those with a gift for hymn-writing, liturgy and so on, enabling this resource to be shared more widely through the church (e.g. through workshops, use of the website, etc.).

5.8 Networks, whilst contributing to the day-to-day process cannot deliver everything. From time to time Mission Council will identify that a new policy or programme is called for, or that an existing policy or programme needs a major review, in which case it would decide to handle it in one of two ways:

- a) If it is of limited scope, e.g. a revision of the worship book (i.e. more 'technical' in nature), it would appoint a *task group*, bringing together relevant expertise to prepare a report and proposals for Mission Council.
- b) If it concerns a major aspect of the church's mission or theology, e.g. our ecumenical strategy, it would appoint a *consulting group*, comprising a representative of every synod who together would meet in committee to address the issue and who would also facilitate a church-wide discussion on the issue, enabling the wide experience of the church to be drawn upon and in the shaping of any proposals for change, build ownership in the outcome as part of the process.

5.9 The emphasis on networks and consulting is a deliberate attempt to build a more dynamic relationship between the Assembly operation and local church life than has previously been afforded through the committee system, giving new meaning and a fresh sense of purpose to our self-understanding as a conciliar church.

5.10 In addition two standing groups will remain:

- The *Commitment for Life* committee (which is substantially based on the *Commitment for Life* advocates network) to oversee this independently funded programme of the church; and
- The Advisory Group on Faith and Order (effectively a network of theologians who advise the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith & Order on United Reformed Church doctrine and polity when such clarifications are called for).

6. Budget

6.1 The initial MPT budget (excluding *Commitment for Life*) with comparative figures for 2006 and 2007 is set out below. It is based on the 2007 budget figures of the constituent parts and assumes no reduction on those figures for 2008 and an inflationary increase for staff costs.

MPT Department	Budget		
	2006	2007	2008

Staff Costs		314,600	269,400	277,500
Staff expenses (travel, etc.)		70,500	55,400	55,400
Office Costs (other costs)		14,500	13,900	13,900
Total core costs		399,600	338,700	346,800
Committees, conferences & other costs		53,000	52,500	-
Networks & Programmes		14,000	13,000	36,500
Mission analysis/development				20,000
<i>Belonging to the World Church</i>		90,000	90,000	90,000
Overseas partner assistance programmes		30,000	30,000	30,000
URC/Methodist National Rural Officer		27,000	30,000	30,000
Ecumenical representation		21,000	20,000	25,000
Ecumenical grants		207,870	196,500	200,500
Total programme costs		442,870	432,000	432,000
Total Combined costs		842,470	770,700	778,800

6.2 As a provisional budget, which experience of the new configuration and changing priorities might reshape, it is based on existing expenditure patterns, so that ecumenical representation and ecumenical grants (previously contained within the ecumenical budget) are increased to accommodate such expenditure by the other committees (attendance at ecumenical meetings, small grants, etc.) rather than as an expression of increased commitment or expenditure in that area. The most significant change reflects the move away from committees, which releases considerable additional funds for programme work and networks and for a new item mission analysis/development to fund mission research (what in other circles might be termed market research) as a contribution to increasing the effectiveness of our work as envisaged in section 3.

7. Ecumenical Dimension

7.1 Much of the work which constitutes MPT is ecumenical in one form or another. In particular some aspects of the work are organised ecumenically:

- URC/Methodist National Rural Officer – a shared post and programme
- Joint Public Issues Team – bringing together URC, Methodist and Baptist work on public affairs in a joint team.

There is also the Methodist-URC Liaison Committee meeting the needs of Methodist-URC congregations, and there are ongoing explorations in other areas of our life where work might be more effectively handled collaboratively between two or more churches pooling their resources. All of this will continue with MPT and Mission Council encouraging it as an important contribution to the development of the United Reformed Church's life and witness.

7.2 Such collaborative working places additional resources (expertise, etc.) at our disposal, which can be to our considerable benefit. At the same time it enables us to share our particular gifts with our partners. Accordingly, we cannot plan our work in isolation. This is not be a problem, as it accords with our ethos and potentially gives us greater scope to better support the significant number of our local churches which are in local ecumenical partnerships of one form or another, in line with the intention to develop a dynamic relationship between central and local priorities.

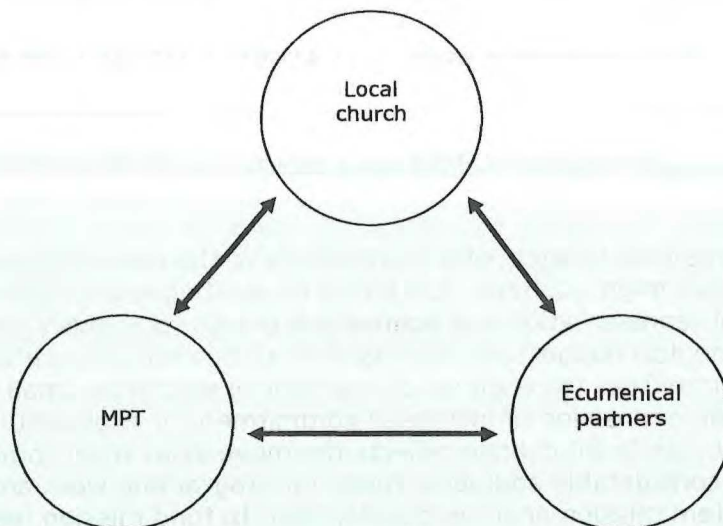


Figure 5 – Towards dynamic ecumenical relationships

7.4 As part of this approach MPT should make space for regularly meeting with those who represent us on ecumenical bodies, as part of our support for their work on our behalf and to ensure that our approach to mission and theology is informed by ecumenical thought and practice.

8. Implementation

8.1 Assuming the 2007 General Assembly agrees this or some variant of this proposal, implementation will begin following the Assembly as follows:

Transitional Period up to 2008 General Assembly

- Existing committees wind up their business, identifying specific unfinished policy work which needs to be carried forward (Mission Council will review and decide on such action as is called for)
- Committees not reporting to the 2008 Assembly will hold their final meeting before the end of December 2007
- Committees reporting to the 2008 Assembly may continue into 2008 if necessary to finalise their Assembly report
- The current informal MPT executive staff team meeting will be formally constituted
- MPT staff job descriptions will be amended to bring them into line with the new working arrangements
- New working practices will be implemented in the MPT staff team to maximise the benefits of team working
- The General Secretariat and Assembly staff team will identify crossover areas of work between the three departments and ensure that people are appropriately involved and/or informed about work which involves or is relevant to more than one department and report this to the October 2007 Mission Council
- The MPT team will begin work on the prioritisation process (paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4) in the line with the model offered in paragraph 2.5 and figure 4.
- The Secretary for Mission will begin work on 1st November (or as soon as possible thereafter)
- The MPT department will formally begin its existence on the 1st January 2008 (enabling a smooth budgetary transition)
- The MPT team will produce its first activity report to the March 2008 Mission Council, along with the proposals called for in paragraph 3.3.
- Work to develop networks in line with this proposal (paragraphs 5.5 and 5.6) including consultation with synods should be carried out during this period
- The process of identifying and transferring work which is more appropriately handled by Ministries or Resources (e.g. sending/receiving mission partners programme and stewardship) should be completed by the end of 2007.

8.2 From Assembly 2008 the MPT department should be fully functioning and operating as envisaged. In January 2010 a review (arranged by Mission Council) should be carried out to evaluate the department's initial effectiveness and a report and recommendations brought to the 2010 Assembly, where any necessary adjustments can be made.

Proposed Resolutions

- 1. General Assembly adopts this plan for the creation and functioning of a Mission Policy and Theology department.**
- 2. General Assembly requests Mission Council to bring proposals for the Mission Policy and Theology department's work programme to the 2008 Assembly.**
- 3. General Assembly requests Mission Council to arrange for a review of the working of the Mission Policy and Theology department in January 2010 and to report its findings and recommendations to the 2010 Assembly.**



**MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007**

P

**Trusteeship and Governance of the United Reformed Church
Governing Document**

The process for the Election of Trustees has proved satisfactory and the nominations are the subject of a separate report from the Nominations Committee.

Following a further discussion with the Charity Commissioners a few minor amendments have been made to the document made available to the Mission Council in October. Mission Council is now asked to approve the Governing Document Paper P1, for submission to General Assembly for adoption.

Both the Catch the Vision group and the Trustees have had considerable discussion on the relationship of the Trustees to the councils of the Church bearing in mind the conciliar nature of our governance. A paper was produced for discussion and this was précised and distributed to potential Trustees as part of the nomination process. This is Paper P2 and amplifies Section 8 of the Governing Document.

Section 11 deals with disqualification by virtue of the Charities Act 1993. The Act defines eligibility for trusteeship, an issue which was raised during our October discussion at Mission Council. It states that "no one shall be appointed as a Trustee if he/she is under the age of 18 or if he/she would at once be disqualified from office" and a number of reasons are given. These include disqualification "by virtue of section 72 of the Act or any statutory re-enactment or modification". As this means the reasons may change over time a general statement only was included in the Governing Document. However some are particularly relevant such as being "incapable by reason of mental disorder, illness or injury of managing their own affairs" and being "absent without permission of the trustees from all their meetings."

An additional qualification for us is that our Trustees should be members of the United Reformed Church. Therefore should a Trustee resign from church membership he/she is disqualified and must also resign as a Trustee.

Another issue which has been raised relates to the Trustees and their relationship to the United Reformed Church Trust. The Trust is a limited company by guarantee for the purpose of holding the assets of the Church and it has a Board of Directors to fulfil its tasks. General Assembly in 2006 appointed the Trust as the Charity Trustee. Thus the directors of the Trust

have taken the additional responsibility for Trusteeship. At present the functions of a Trustee and a Director of the Trust are distinct. However there is a provision in the latest charity legislation for the creation of Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIO) whereby companies limited by guarantee may become CIO's. When this is available application will be made for the United Reformed Church Trust to become a CIO. This facility was one of the reasons for choosing the United Reformed Church Trust as the vehicle for Trusteeship .

Eric Chilton

4th March 2007



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

P1

The United Reformed Church
Governing Document

Concerning the United Reformed Church and the constitution of a body to take responsibility for and be accountable to the temporal authorities for its religious and other charitable work.

Adopted on the day of.....20..... by Minute..... of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.

Statements

The United Reformed Church was formed in 1972 by the union of the Presbyterian Church of England and the uniting churches of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, and was enlarged in 1981 by union with the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, and in 2000 by union with the concurring churches of the Congregational Union of Scotland, in accordance with the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000.

The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church represents that church in its entirety including its constituent synods and local churches and its associated bodies and its committees constituted and appointed to carry out the work that is conducted centrally on behalf of all the members of the United Reformed Church. The General Assembly meets once every two years but the members elected to serve or are otherwise entitled to be present and vote thereat shall continue to hold office until the next ordinary meeting of General Assembly.

The General Assembly is the highest review body and the final authority of the United Reformed Church and has under the Basis of Union and Structure of the Church the power to make, alter or rescind rules for the conduct of its own proceedings and of those of other councils and commissions of the United Reformed Church.

The object of the United Reformed Church is to advance religion in accordance with the Basis of Union and to conduct such other ancillary and incidental charitable work.

1. Governing Document

The property of the United Reformed Church shall be administered and managed in accordance with the provisions in this Governing Document.

2. Name

The name of the body hereby constituted is the Trustees of the United Reformed Church (the Trustees).

3. Object

The object of the Trustees is to administer and manage the general property held in connection with the United Reformed Church and conduct the temporal affairs, dealings and matters of the United Reformed Church which are administered centrally and ensure compliance with the temporal obligations of the United Reformed Church arising from its status and from its pursuance of its objects and work. Within the meaning of the expression in the Charities Act 1993 they are the charity trustees of the general property held in connection with the United Reformed Church.

4. Application of Income and Property

Money and property will be held by or under the control of the Trustees and be used to further the work of the United Reformed Church.

5. Amendments

Amendments to this governing document may only be effected by General Assembly by a 75% majority vote at the meeting at which any amendment is proposed.

6. The conduct of business meetings

The Trustees shall hold four regular meetings each year.

Special meetings may be called by the Chairperson or by any two Trustees provided that at two weeks clear notice is given to all the Trustees and the business to be discussed is adequately stated.

The quorum of the Board of Trustees is six or greater.

At meetings, decisions must be made by a majority of the Trustees present and voting.

The person chairing the meeting shall have a casting vote whether he/she has voted previously on the same question.

7. Trustees

The body of Trustees when complete shall consist of 16 members consisting of 3 ex-officio Trustees, 12 elected Trustees and one nominated Trustee. Exceptionally this may be increased temporarily if additional Trustees are co-opted or the term of service of the Chairperson is extended, as provided below.

The ex-officio Trustees shall be the Moderator of the General Assembly, the General Secretary, and the Deputy General Secretary.

The elected Trustees shall be appointed as follows:-

Synods will be grouped into three constituencies (Synod groups) namely Northern, North Western, Mersey, and Scotland; West Midlands, South Western, Wessex and Wales; and Yorkshire, East Midlands, Eastern, Thames North and Southern. Each group may nominate three Trustees. A Trustee will serve from the end of the General Assembly at which the Trustee from the Synod group is due to retire. So far as reasonably possible the synods will cooperate so that the trustee body will have in its number at least one Trustee who has legal experience, at least one who has investment experience, at least one who has finance experience, at least one who has human resources experience and at least one who has full involvement in leading the life and witness of a local church, whether he or she is a minister or an elder. The first elected Trustees shall be the individuals listed in the first column of the schedule hereto who have been nominated by the Synod groups in the corresponding row of the second column of the schedule.

Except during the initial sequence of retirement, on the occasion of each ordinary General Assembly one elected Trustee from each Synod group shall retire. In respect of each group, the Trustee to retire shall be the one who has been longest in office. This means that, normally, Trustees elected from Synod nominations shall retire at the General Assembly when they have completed six years service. The initial sequence of retirement shall be as follows, namely, one elected Trustee from each group shall retire at the General Assembly in 2010; followed by one Trustee from each group at the General Assembly in 2012; followed by one Trustee from each group at General Assembly in 2014.

Mission Council may nominate three Trustees for election, namely, one to be a representative of FURY and two to ensure there is adequate gender and ethnic representation of the life of the Church. Trustees elected from Mission Council shall retire at the General Assembly when they have completed six years service.

The nominated Trustee shall be appointed by Mission Council to act as Honorary Treasurer and he or she shall hold office for 4 years.

The Trustees may co-opt up to 2 additional Trustees, with the agreement of Mission Council and by following the process for nomination below, in the event of:

1. Unexpected vacancy
2. Requirement of specific expertise

for such period as the Trustees and Mission Council agree being no longer than 2 years or until the next ordinary General Assembly meets in 2010 or subsequently, whichever is shorter.

A Trustee so co-opted may be nominated for election at the next General Assembly for a Synod or Mission Council vacancy.

Trustee indemnity insurance will be provided.

After they have served their term, each Trustee must stand down for a minimum of two years but will then be eligible for re-election.

Timetable and process for nomination (every two years to coincide with General Assembly):

- Synods groups and Mission Council consider candidates for Trustees whom they will nominate and seek their consent and agreement to stand for election. Synod groups and Mission Council may nominate more candidates than the number of vacancies provided that they list candidates in order of preference
- Synods groups and Mission Council provide nominations (together with CV and two references - one from the local church and one professional, for each nomination) to the Nominations Committee by the end of November/December.
- Nominations Committee take up references, review eligibility and discuss with the Trustees at their Spring meeting
- The Trustees may then interview candidates
- Nominations Committee in agreement with the Trustees will nominate preferred candidates to the General Assembly for election.

On the occasion of the impending retirement of the Honorary Treasurer, Mission Council will advise Synods and ask for nominations to be provided to the Nominations Committee who will follow the above procedure.

The Trustees will elect one of their Synod nominated members as Chairperson who will act as a facilitator and serve the office of Chairperson. His/her term of service as a Trustee may be extended by up to two years if necessary to provide continuity of Chairperson in which case he/she would be an additional Trustee so that the normal pattern of rotation of Trustees is maintained. The

appointment, and any extension of service, will be endorsed by Mission Council. After the term of service, the Chairperson must stand down for a minimum of two years.

If an elected Trustee is appointed Honorary Treasurer his/her term of service may be extended by up to two years if necessary to provide continuity.

8. Mission Council's relationship to the Trustees

Mission Council is the standing representative body entrusted with the general care of the spiritual and ecclesiastical matters of the United Reformed Church. Mission Council is responsible for ensuring that policy, directions and resolutions of General Assembly are carried out and for implementing policy and determining priorities in the conduct of the work of the United Reformed Church between meetings of General Assembly. Subject to these directions, the Trustees are responsible for the application of the income and property of the United Reformed Church.

9. Clerk

The Trustees at their first meeting after each General Assembly shall appoint a clerk who need not be a Trustee. In this case the clerk may attend all meetings and, with permission of the meeting, may speak but not vote.

10. Holding Trustee

The United Reformed Church Trust shall be the holding trustee of the general property of the United Reformed Church which the Trustees consider may more conveniently be held by that body than by the Trustees.

11. Disqualification and removal of trustees

Individuals who are disqualified for acting as trustees by virtue of the Charities Act 1993 or the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000 shall not be able to take office as Trustee and if disqualified whilst a Trustee shall cease to hold office.

12. The centrally-managed work of the United Reformed Church

General Assembly entrusts to Mission Council the employment of staff and the control of costs within a budget agreed by the Trustees.

13. Trustees not to be personally interested

No trustee shall acquire any interest in property belonging to the United Reformed Church (otherwise than as a trustee) or receive remuneration or be interested (otherwise than as a trustee) in any contract entered into by the trustees.

14. Repair and insurance

All buildings being general property of the United Reformed Church shall be kept in repair and shall be adequately insured, including third-party and accident insurance as well as buildings and contents insurance. The trustees shall also insure suitably in respect of public liability and employer's liability.

15. Annual Report and Accounts

The Trustees' report and accounts shall be prepared on an annual basis and presented to *General Assembly* when it meets and to *Mission Council* in the intervening years. When *General Assembly* meets it will also be presented with the Trustees' report and accounts for the intervening year.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

P2

The United Reformed Church Relationship with our Charity Trustees

1. Who are the Charity Trustees?

The question seems to be a legalistic one concerned with the compliance with the law but underlying this it is concerned with the proper and efficient administration of our charitable organisation. Good governance requires a structure which enables the proper management of responsibilities with accountabilities. The United Reformed Church is required to identify its Charity Trustees who are the "persons having the general control and management of the administration of a charity" (s. 97 (1) of the Charities Act 1993). They are the people who are legally responsible for the oversight in the charity. In a sense they are the highest review body under General Assembly of all that the Church does and under charity law, the buck stops with them.

At first sight it might appear that the Charity Trustees of the General Assembly should be the people who conduct the ongoing debates and discussions and reach the actual decisions. It is clear from discussions with the Charity Commissioners that, because of the degree of close involvement required, they do not regard large bodies as fulfilling this role. Therefore, although both General Assembly and Mission Council have detailed agendas and make policy decisions, they are in neither case an appropriate body to act as the Charity Trustee of the Church.

At General Assembly 2006 the United Reformed Church Trust was appointed as Charity Trustee for the purposes of section 97 of the Charities Act 1993. Thus the Directors of the Trust are the people who undertake the role of Trustees.

2. The role of a Trustee

The role of a Trustee is to ensure that the charity acts in accordance with its purposes and sound principles; preserves the charity's assets and ensures it operates on a financially secure basis; assesses and responds appropriately to risks and opportunities. A Trustee is responsible for discharging various duties and exercises a number of discretions under general trust law and statute. A Charity Trustee is responsible in addition for ensuring compliance with the obligations under the Charities Act 1993. The Trustees also have a role in ensuring that the Church sets and seeks a credible vision. The role of a Trustee is not to formulate policy - that remains with General Assembly. But the

Trustees cannot carry into effect anything which is unlawful according to the law of England and Wales.

The Trustees have oversight of the administration and management - not the policy making - of the charity. They therefore exercise control over the affairs of the Church on behalf of General Assembly and accordingly make some executive decisions in furtherance of this function. The overall policy of the Church, its work and direction remain with General Assembly and between meetings with Mission Council.

Thus it could be said that the Trustees give assurance to the Church that its affairs are being conducted in a law abiding and efficient manner in accordance with the policies agreed at General Assembly and Mission Council; that the necessary resources required are available; that risks are being managed; and that everything done is in accordance with the law and sound financial practice.

3. The interface with General Assembly and Mission Council

As the Trustees will be fully involved in the life of the Church at various levels, collectively they will be participating in the ongoing debates and discussions. Many of the Trustees will be members of General Assembly and Mission Council. This should ensure that the Trustees have a real understanding of matters that affect the well being of the Church and are fully conversant with its policies. Thus there should be no significant divergence with the aims and objectives of General Assembly and Mission Council.

Tensions might arise over priorities in the use of resources and the allocation of scarce resources to meet all the aspirations of the Church. However ideally this would result in a healthy dialogue between the Councils of the Church and the Trustees in order to reach a decision by consensus. To this end the Trustees should be seen as both part of the conciliar government of the Church and separate from it as an independent review body. Thus the Trustees would expect to be able to offer comments on significant proposals before final consideration by the Church and for their views to be known. This should help discussion and hopefully avoid confrontation.

4. Frequency and pattern of meetings

There are a number of regular tasks and it is envisaged these will be dealt with at regular meetings in the following months:

September A.G.M. of URC Trust

Any issues arising from General Assembly and, the following year,
Commence process for Election of New Trustees
Budget for next year

Report of Investment Committee and meeting with Investment Managers

- December Preparation for Annual Audit and commence review of Risk Management
Report of Remuneration Committee
- March Complete review of Risk Management
Commence Trustees Annual Report
Report of Church House Management Group
- May Review of Strategic Plan, key objectives and results for year
Report of Audit Committee and meeting with Auditors
Agreement of Annual Report and Accounts.

In addition any matters referred to the Trustees by Mission Council and issues of policy which have resource implications which will be dealt with as they arise.

Meetings will be held at Church House.

Eric Chilton

12th December 2006



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

P3

**Appointment of United Reformed Church
Trustees to serve from General Assembly 2007 (Part 1)**

1. In addition to the ex-officio Trustees, viz, the Moderator of General Assembly, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary and the Honorary Treasurer, (nominated Trustee (- P3i)) Mission Council is responsible for putting forward to Assembly nine names, three from each of the groups of synods as defined in the Governing Document (Mission Council paper C1 Oct 2006) for appointment as Trustees. Additionally, one nomination may come from FURY, and Mission Council may add two further names to achieve balance. All are subject to appointment by General Assembly.
2. The Governing Document, on the basis of charity law and the present Trustees' experience, suggests that "so far as reasonably possible" the trustee body should have at least one Trustee with experience from each of the following categories – legal, investment, finance, human resources, local church leadership.
3. From the Church's perspective, the kind of people being sought would also have -
 - empathy and commitment towards and understanding of the work of the Church,
 - flexibility and vision,
 - the confidence of the Churchand together would form an integrated and well balanced team.
4. The grouping of synods we have been working with is -
 1. N, NW, M, Y and Scotland
 2. WM, SW, Wx and Wales
 3. EM, E, TN and SUnder the procedures agreed by Mission Council in October 2006, 15 names were put forward by synods, with no nominations from TN or Wx. All those nominated were considered suitable and highly competent people. However, the number of candidates submitted provided an unbalanced list of respectively 8, 3 and 4 names. In the event, the names being put forward to Mission Council do follow the groupings with one exception. As this is for the initial period of 3 years only, it was considered that this might be acceptable, especially as it provides the best balance of experience. The grouping of synods in this way is intended to ensure a reasonable balance of representation from the different regions. There is a proposal to change these groupings slightly.
5. So far no name has been presented by FURY. Regarding the two possible "balancing places" it is suggested that an additional female trustee and someone from an ethnic minority be nominated by Mission Council. A name will be brought to Mission Council to fill the first of these. Of those tentatively approached to fill the second, so far none has been willing or able to serve. In all three cases, of course, the same criteria apply as with those nominated by synods – that those nominated need to be suitably experienced and need to supply acceptable references.

6. The procedure for gathering nominations and references, of course, takes time. We have worked with the deadline of bringing names to Mission Council so that they can be taken to Assembly with Mission Council's support. However, within the timescale it has not been possible to bring names in relation to two of the possible vacancies, that from FURY and someone from an ethnic minority. We could now either (a) leave these positions vacant until General Assembly 2008, (b) continue pursuing names which might then be approved by a subsequent Mission Council on behalf of Assembly once all the "vetting" was complete, or (c) authorise Nominations Committee, in consultation with the present Trustees, to seek to find suitable names for these vacancies and to bring them, again once "vetting" was complete, and if possible, directly to Assembly 2007. In order to test Mission Council's views on this a resolution proposing option (c) is drafted below.
7. Appointments in the first instance will be for 3, 5 or 7 years to provide continuity and to establish a pattern of rotation. From General Assembly 2010 the normal term of service will be 6 years.
8. The list of nominees has been reviewed by the Nominations Committee. All candidates have submitted cv's and satisfactory and supportive references. They are all members of the United Reformed Church. Together they would provide a balance of the skills and experience set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 above. Those nominated are currently subject to acceptance by the present Trustees. Their names will be brought to Mission Council in March once this agreement has been obtained.
9. Regarding those others nominated by synods, all of whom are excellent candidates, it is suggested that their names be held for reconsideration at a future time in relation to any unforeseen vacancies, to follow on those retiring from 2010 onwards and in relation to Pension Board Trustees to be appointed in 2008.

Proposed Resolution

present **Mission Council authorises Nominations Committee, in consultation with the Board of Trustees, if possible to bring directly to General Assembly the names of suitable people to fill the remaining vacancies on the list of Trustees.**

for a period of three years (to 2010) because of his current work and valuable experience in relation to risk assessment, work with the Pension Board and as company secretary. (Mission Council has power to agree cooption on the basis of a recommendation by the Trustees.)

Proposed resolutions

- 1. Mission Council agrees to forward, for appointment by General Assembly, the list of those nominated to serve as Trustees of the United Reformed Church from Assembly 2007 for the appropriate terms.**
- 2. Mission Council agrees to the cooption of the Revd Michael Davies as a Trustee until Assembly 2010.**



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007



Nominations Committee Report

1. With the appointment of Martin Hazell to another post, it is necessary to replace him on the panel of tellers for Election of Moderator 2007 which was agreed at Assembly 2005. Normally members of this panel are serving Synod Clerks. The new panel of Tellers at Assembly 2007 to act in the election of the Moderator for 2008 is proposed as: Mr Peter Pay (Convener), Dr Graham Campling and Dr Jim Merrilees.
2. The Nominating Group for the Moderator Elect of the Yorkshire Synod, convened by the Revd Cecil White, has recommended the appointment of the Revd Kevin Watson, currently minister at Ponteland and Stamfordham.
3. As the Committee awaits decisions about the reshaping of Assembly committees, and as it is already clear that the Life and Witness Committee and its Stewardship Sub-Committee will be replaced, it has been agreed that existing members be asked to continue to serve if necessary beyond their term rather than being replaced at this stage.
4. Progress continues to be made on monitoring and equal opportunities issues, but it will not be possible to make a full analysis of those approached to serve on committees and Boards until after the May meeting of the committee. This will, of course, be too late for this year's book of Assembly Reports. This matter will come back to the October meeting of Mission Council unless it is agreed to submit a Supplementary Report to the Assembly.

Resolution

Mission Council agrees that, notwithstanding the decision of General Assembly 2005, the Tellers at General Assembly 2007 for the election of the Moderator for 2008, shall be Mr Peter Pay (Convener), Dr Graham Campling and Dr Jim Merrilees.



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

R

The Nature of the United Reformed Church's Ecumenical Engagement

The Challenge

Where should we focus our limited resources for ecumenical initiatives? To answer that question, the Ecumenical Committee has tried to get a clearer picture of how our current ecumenical engagement needs to look.

Where Are We?

- 1) A lot has happened in the last ten years. In the 1990s the *Called to Be One* process replaced Councils of Churches with Churches Together groups and drew Roman Catholics into full involvement. It said nothing about inter-faith or environmental/ecological issues, though, whereas today both are centre stage.
- 2) The Anglican - Methodist Covenant has been a real cause for rejoicing, laying to rest the damaging myths held in each tradition about the other's history. However, it has shown how difficult it will be to bring about further visible, structural unity. More immediately attainable goals are needed, though not as substitutes for the ultimate prize.
- 3) The recent Methodist - United Reformed Church document *Peacemaking: a Christian vocation* has been hailed as an excellent example of modern ecumenical collaboration - a short, intense study on a focussed area, co-opting experts to do a particular piece of work. Many younger ecumenists see their most natural outlet as the single-issue pressure group on concerns such as trade justice, refugees and asylum issues, or the environment.
- 4) The United Reformed Church is still firmly committed to ecumenical activity. We give thanks for courageous witness and painstaking hard work in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, intermediate forums and national Ecumenical Instruments. We rejoice at ever-growing membership of ecumenical bodies. The bad news is that we have to recognise, honestly, the many problems of relating in several directions at the same time, the frustration caused by lack of progress, and the sometimes bewildering complexity of relationships.
- 5) Today the ecumenical movement can be very varied. It is also building bridges to those in non traditional churches, outside the Churches Together structures - notably Pentecostals, New Churches and Fresh Expressions of Church.

6) One focus for the ecumenical debate is about responding to diversity in unity. This arises because:

- a) Many ecumenical partners find themselves threatened by potentially church-dividing issues, especially around human sexuality. They are confronted with the question: *how do we hold together those within our own number who in all integrity disagree?*"
- b) Some see God calling us to new, emerging ways of being church or fresh expressions, and ask how to hold together more traditional and more experimental forms, while encouraging a thousand different flowers to bloom.
- c) Those pondering the shape of global Christianity wonder how to hold together the forms it takes in the North and West with those emerging from Southern cultures.
- d) Some traditions worldwide stress their particular roots. Others are forming united or uniting churches across historic divides. Both these witnesses need to be heard.

7) The other focus for debate is about how we live with our differences. As well as the reasons already given, this arises because:

- a) There are concerns over how to relate to Islam, and whether the debate about multi-culturalism is shifting from how to get people a place at the table, to how to manage the debate they then have.
- b) It has been said that the theme of the Kingdom of God in the New Testament is universal in scope, while its content is particular to individual lives and specific situations. If so, the ecumenical task is to affirm this universal scope against a fast-expanding background of different settings, ways of talking and sets of ideas. Can we recognize it when we share a common goal, or search for the same truth, but use different language to describe it?
- c) To do our theology in a wide range of different contexts is a big challenge. We have to be even-handed in dealing with others. We also have to struggle with whether God is calling us to work with what we find or stand over against it for the sake of the Gospel.
- d) Contemporary thinking about evangelism affirms the value of each person's search and story, rather than stressing the need for common ground. Emerging church thinkers plead for the treatment of everyone as individuals, so we can all learn and even teach.

8) Some people respond to the current state of affairs by doubting whether we can hold together; they predict new schisms - and alliances. It is easier to identify possible schisms than to foresee the shape of any new alliance. Those who agree about the public issues which should concern the church also disagree just as strongly on the nature of the church, so if the church split it could

fracture into small pieces rather than being able to form new groupings.

9) There is an emerging debate about ecumenical core values. At an ecumenical officers' conference in 2006, it was suggested that full visible unity was a last gasp of late Enlightenment utopian thinking which has no place in the 21st century.

10) In a recent poll Christian Aid emerged as the most hated charity and the Salvation Army the third most hated, because they were "religious" rather than "spiritual". Although there are some questions about how the poll was done, it does seem that people now associate something "religious" with being old, boring and disconnected - whilst something "spiritual" is compelling, different, creative and fresh.

Four Ways Forward

11) The United Reformed Church still upholds the definition of *organic unity* offered by the Second World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh in 1937: *A Church so united that the ultimate loyalty of every member would be given to the whole body and not to any part of it.* We would see certain elements of such a Church as non-negotiable, such as the ordination of women to all forms of ministry, but we believe organic unity remains important for good reasons:

- a) because it is based on the prayer of Jesus that his followers should be One;
- b) because we believe that in the last century those who went before us heard God's renewed call to be One and we must witness to their insight;
- c) because of its symbolic value for work in healing and reconciliation;
- d) because if God is One in Trinity, and there is one earth for which we all share responsibility, then for us to be divided in our response to one another, to our environment and to God is a denial of that oneness;
- e) because when the Church is called to new ways it matters how we put things to rest. Drawing a line under our shared history of persecution and martyrdom may be a powerful response to sectarianism and encourage good community relations;
- f) because we live in the transition between the modern world of the 18th to 20th centuries and the post modern 21st century world. It is too easy to say that everything which went before is irrelevant now;
- g) because even if it was starry eyed to dream about a future with one church, we may be called to hold on to that vision while others lose it, even if we have to redefine and revalidate our arguments in terms of the world we live in now.

12) The United Reformed Church is committed to recognising ecumenical partners as people of worth, made in the image of Christ and part of his body the Church. In the past, we have tended to recognise what we share with other Christians, and suggest renewed unity with them on that basis. Now, we may be

starting to see that there are still differences between us, and we had assumed more similarity than was there. If part of our new focus needs to affirm the diversity in our unity, then holding together with others despite our differences is a pressing challenge. We shall need to affirm as a core value our recognition of others and the presence of God in them, their gifts and their creativity. This will help us to witness to the truth we share as Christians in the face of our culture, which increasingly challenges the Church by alternative ways of understanding and portraying the reality around us.

13) The United Reformed Church bears witness to living with differences. We acknowledge a common starting point, but accept that this works out locally in different ways. For us, the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for our faith and conduct. In each local church the gathered fellowship of believers seeks God's help to carry out their witness in the place where they are. In making decisions on such historic issues as administering baptism, on whether or not to remarry divorced people, or on our attitudes to warfare and weaponry, we have lived out our differences. We will need to continue reflecting on the ways we use the Bible and hear its message, and on what theology and spirituality teach us about the richness of God, if we are to prevent our standard core from becoming a lowest common denominator.

14) The United Reformed Church will explore ecumenically the theme of space. This is important because:

- a) God's gift of space and time permits hospitality, encounter and exploration. The practice of ecumenism demands a radical hospitality towards other people, an openness to what emerges and the gift of space - not least for those with no background in the Christian faith or others wanting to re-engage.
- b) Exploring how to inhabit and use space opens up questions of how to live together peacefully in a divided global family.
- c) As Catch the Vision moves on to spirituality, we will consider the ecumenical dimension in inviting God to inhabit the silence and stillness we seek within us, which used to be full of our own concerns.
- d) As we build bridges to fresh expressions of Church, we will need to find common ground with growing virtual and online communities, especially of younger believers, in their search for God.
- e) To hold ourselves together, across our diversity, we will need to set aside reverent space for God in word, text and pixel, as well as in hospitality, community, church council meeting and shared discernment.
- f) Space allows room to unfold and is therefore crucial to the concept of growth, which would seem to be one of God's central concerns. The first things God places on this earth after creation are those that grow and bear fruit.

15) We see this statement deepening the theoretical basis of the Three Ecumenical Principles agreed at General Assembly 2001;

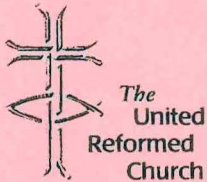
a) To expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community.

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 and church traditions, and to seek, as appropriate, to work with members of other faith communities for the promotion of biblical values of love, peace and justice.

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.

Resolution for General Assembly

Building on the Three Ecumenical Principles (2001) General Assembly adopts the statement on the Nature of the United Reformed Church's Ecumenical Engagement.



MISSION COUNCIL 23-25 March 2007

S

Assembly Arrangements Committee

Resolutions to General Assembly 2007

1. The Committee will propose a resolution for the dates and location of the General Assembly in 2010.
2. The Committee will also propose that General Assembly be permitted on a single motion to deal en-bloc with more than one resolution attached to a report, or with the resolutions to more than one report.

This closely follows the method used by the Methodist Church and others, for dealing with matters for which it is anticipated that no debate will be required. A safeguard will be provided to the extent that before, or at Assembly, any member of Assembly would be entitled to remove a proposal from the en-bloc business by giving notice to the Clerk of a question on that particular proposal. This safeguard would demonstrate that there is no question of stifling any debate that members of Assembly believe is necessary.

Assembly would then take a single vote to approve the en-bloc business without individual items being spoken to or debated. That vote would have the same authority as if each resolution had been proposed, debated and voted upon individually.

Following resolution 52 at the General Assembly 2006, **future numbers of representation** of various categories of membership of Assembly are yet to be decided – e.g. ecumenical and international guests. These refinements do not take effect until Assembly 2010; consequently it is thought more appropriate to await the outcome of the other structural changes before making these decisions at Assembly 2008.

The timetable and content of General Assembly 2007

We expect to start at 3.30pm on Saturday 7 July and to finish at 1pm on Tuesday 10 July. The **constitution of Assembly** will take up the first session on Saturday and will, as usual, include the greeting of all our **guests** – local church representatives, UK ecumenical representatives, overseas guests and representatives of other faiths (in this latter category, to the extent that is acceptable to the guest).

On Sunday morning, we expect to receive our **new Ministers** and honour **Jubilee Ministers**. This will be followed by worship, including the celebration of Communion.

As ever, we look forward to the participation of **FURY** – who will have met beforehand for their customary preparatory meeting “What do you think?”. In addition this year for the first time, there will be a **Childrens’ Assembly** - parallel to, and at times convergent with, the main Assembly.

There will be appropriate reflection on the anniversary of the **Abolition of Slavery Act**. There will be worship and bible study, though not necessarily at the times or in the order that they have previously occurred.

We expect there to be opportunity for further discussion of matters from **Catch the Vision**. We know that there is a substantial document to be presented on the difficult and delicate issue of “**Assisted Dying**”. Either or both of these topics may be more effectively dealt with initially in smaller discussion groups; both the facilities and the time available will be factors that condition the Committee’s decision in this respect.

Synods due to report to Assembly this year are: Eastern, East Midlands, Thames North and Yorkshire. Discussion has revolved around the question whether these reports should be made this year. A decision on this will be required from those Synods or by Mission Council.

Committees, including their sub-committees, **due to report (annually)** are: Mission Council, Ministries, Church & Society, Synod Moderators, FURY, Nominations, Pastoral Reference, Finance, and Assembly Arrangements.

Committees, including their sub-committees, **due to report (bi-annually)** are: Doctrine, Prayer & Worship, Ecumenical, Life & Witness, Racial Justice, and Inter-Faith Relations.

Currently we do not anticipate that any evening will be given over to a keynote speaker, or that any evening will end before 9pm. We therefore advise that any special interest meetings should be arranged accordingly. As in previous years, packed lunches will be provided.

The remainder of the content and timetable of Assembly depends greatly on the reports and resolutions that are revealed, and decided upon, at this meeting of Mission Council.

Luther King House is expecting to welcome members of Assembly who wish to visit there on Saturday evening. Tours, talks, and refreshments will be available from 9pm to 11pm. We are grateful to the Principal and staff for the generosity of their offer, and expect that many people will want to take up this opportunity.

There will again be a **bookshop** at Assembly this year, provided by a Manchester book retailer. It is also expected that some of the static displays will be replaced by more interactive material. Martin Hazell is encouraging the committees and organisations to be innovative and imaginative in their **communication** both in this area, and in their presentations to the plenary sessions of Assembly.

In **procedural matters** we shall continue to explore different ways of conducting our business. We shall continue the use of the orange and blue cards to indicate our feeling towards the matter under discussion. However, these will be set in their proper context with the further innovation of the move to decision-making by consensus. To properly accomplish this process it will be necessary to distinguish between the stages that a report passes through – information, discussion and decision-making. This too will have a bearing on the timetable and method of dealing with each matter under consideration.

As always, a significant number of people contribute their time, expertise and considerable commitment to this huge undertaking. It requires co-operation and tolerance – but at its best it can, and does, result in moments of awe and wonder.

.....
William M McVey
Convener

March 2007



MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

ADD

Additional Business

1. Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Supplementary report, following on from Paper A4 and Resolutions

Appeals Procedure

In 2006, General Assembly agreed to make changes to the Structure of the Church to allow for the introduction of a separate appeals system under the Church's Ecclesiastical Exemption Procedure for consenting to alterations to listed church buildings. This allows a church not satisfied with the decision of a Synod to put its case to a panel independent of those involved in the original decision.

As an alteration to the Structure, the original decision needs to be ratified at a subsequent General Assembly and an appropriate resolution is set out below, followed by a resolution to make a consequential change to the Rules of Procedure on Appeals. We request Mission Council to take these resolutions to Assembly.

Hartley Oldham
David Figures

[] A resolution to ratify Resolution 14 of 2006 as regards a new Appeals Procedure to apply in the case of Listed Buildings:

General Assembly agrees to ratify its decision taken under Resolution 14 of 2006 to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Paragraph 5(2)

In the opening sentence, after 'outside paragraph 5(1)' add 'or paragraph 5(3)'.

Paragraph 5(3)

Add a new paragraph as follows:
'Applications for consent to carry out works to buildings coming within the Church's Control Procedure under the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Regulations for the time being in force

and appeals from decisions made thereunder shall be dealt with in accordance with that procedure and not under paragraph 5(2) above.'

[] A resolution to make a change to the Rules of Procedure on Appeals as regards a new Appeals Procedure to apply in the case of Listed Buildings:

General Assembly agrees to make the following change to the Rules of Procedure on Appeals:

Replace the existing Paragraph 8.11 with the following: 'The provisions of this Section "Rules of Procedure on Appeals" shall not apply to cases which are being determined within the Ministerial Disciplinary Process or the Church's Control Procedure under the Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Regulations for the time being in force.'

2. Report on Charities Act 2006 Implications

The Charities Bill received Royal Assent on 8 November, becoming the Charities Act 2006. As a result of this legislation, charities that are excepted from registration, such as the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Baptist Church, will have to register in the future. This has implications for local churches, synods and the United Reformed Church as a whole in England and Wales. (The rules are different for Scotland, the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.)

The Act will take some time to implement and these provisions are not expected to come into force before 2008.

The United Reformed Church as a whole is already working on this issue and PLATO (Synod Property Legal Administrative and Trust Officers) is looking at the implications for synods. This paper focuses on the implications for local churches.

Initially, churches in England and Wales whose reported total income exceeds £100,000 in any year will need to register as Charities. It is intended that the threshold for registration will eventually be brought into line with other charities at £5,000 p.a. so most will need to register, but this will take some time to happen. The next change in thresholds is not expected until after a 5-year review of the workings of the Act. (While the Act is being implemented the Charity Commission will not be obliged to accept applications for voluntary registration from charities below the agreed threshold and has indicated that it will not do so.)

United Reformed Church representatives have been involved with other denominations in consultations with the Charity Commission over the registration process. It has become clear that the Commission is keen for denominations to agree with them ways to make the process as smooth as possible for churches and for its own staff who will have an increased workload.

Churches that need to register will have to fill out a form and provide a copy of their governing document/constitution. Denominations are being encouraged to agree a model version for their churches - if it is then adopted by the local church it will be 'fast-tracked'. If it is varied it will need to be examined in more detail by Charity Commission. Work is currently in progress on such a document.

It is likely that there will be a specific form for excepted charities to use and the Charity Commission will encourage each denomination to supply specific advice notes to assist their own churches in completing the form. (Until the forms are available we can do no work on this.)

There will no longer be a presumption of public benefit for religious charities, but the Charity Commission has indicated that if local churches use model governing documents already agreed with the Charity Commission then public benefit related questions on the application form would not need to be answered in addition.

It may be possible to register pastorates that work together rather than individual churches in some cases. There has been a suggestion from the Methodist Church that they will consider registering circuits in some instances.

LEPs are considered as charities in their own right, and will need their own form of governing document. (It appears unlikely that model constitutions as currently drafted will be appropriate.) The Churches Together in England Group for Local Unity is being encouraged to work with denominations to produce a model that can be used ecumenically.

Discussions so far indicate that the Charity Commission will distinguish between ownership of land and buildings under statutory trusts and the local congregation and its money. This accords with advice offered previously - Elders are the Charity Trustees for the working funds of churches (General Assembly Reports 2001 and 2004), while responsibilities in relation to statutory trust property remain shared between the local church and the Trustees in accordance with the detailed advice that went to General Assembly in 2006.

This means that Elders are the charity trustees for local churches and will need to register as such. This does not ignore the authority of Church Meeting, but acknowledges that it is impractical for every member to be a charity trustee, particularly as there are legal exclusions that apply to charity trustees.

As referred to in the paper on Trusteeship that went to Mission Council on 27 January 2007, local churches will be required to provide Accounts, Annual Reports and Trustees Reports to the Charity Commissioners. Accounts and Annual Reports are not a new requirement and advice has already been circulated on accounts and is available on the main United Reformed Church website (www.urc.org.uk). The Trustees Report is new and advice on how to draft it will also be circulated. It is not envisaged that responsibilities of Elders will otherwise change - they already act as the charity trustees of local churches.

Summary

Churches with an annual income over £100,000 will need to register in the first phase, probably in 2008. As a denomination we need to agree a fast-track process with the Charity Commission to facilitate that happening.

Action

1. **The United Reformed Church needs to agree a model constitution for local United Reformed Churches with the Charity Commission. (Work is in progress within the Task Group and it has been agreed that our legal advisor Janet Knott will be the main contact with the Charity Commission.)**
2. **The United Reformed Church needs to encourage and work with CTE Group for Local Unity (GLU) to produce a model constitution for local churches that can be used ecumenically.**
3. **Synods are advised to identify which churches are likely to need to register in the first phase and to consider how they may help facilitate the process if they have not already done so. It is not yet entirely clear how annual income will be calculated, particularly in respect of fundraising for property projects - it may be in churches' interests to register and if in doubt churches should be identified at this point as possibly needing to register.**
4. **The Task Group will liaise with synods, through PLATO, on implementation.**
5. **When the Charity Commission produces the registration forms the United Reformed Church will need to draft guidelines for local churches on how to complete them. (Liaison will continue between the Charity Commission and United Reformed Church Task Group.)**
6. **Mission Council is asked whether they would like an advice note to be circulated to Church Secretaries within the Spring Mailing from Tavistock Place.**

**Task Group Report
March 2007**



The
United
Reformed
Church

MISSION COUNCIL
23-25 March 2007

ASS

Changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church to simplify its Governance

At the Assembly of 2006 it was agreed to alter the structure of the United Reformed church by moving to a single tier of Church Government between the Local Church and the General Assembly. This was to be 13 "New" Synods. Various alterations to the Basis and Structure of the URC were moved in order to begin this process and having been agreed were referred to Synods for their formal approval.

Although the Church has the power to make the necessary amendments to its Structure to achieve those proposals, unfortunately it has become clear that the abolition of District Councils will create some problems in connection with the property trusts contained in the various URC Acts and legal advice has made it clear that an emendation to the URC Acts would be necessary to resolve those problems.. This would be done through a Statutory Instrument laid before Parliament on our behalf by the Charity Commissioners. Although the Charity Commissioners have indicated a willingness to do this should it be required, they have stated that it would probably take three years to complete. It would also be the responsibility of the United Reformed Church to meet all the costs including those of having the Instrument prepared, and as this work is done by Parliamentary Draftsmen we may conclude that there would be considerable expense.

In consultation with the Catch the Vision Working Group alternative ways of achieving the ends desired by the Assembly have been sought and several different possibilities have been explored. None were perfect but the preferred option is offered here for consideration. While alterations to the Basis and Structure, differing considerably from those presented in 2006, will be needed there will be no need to amend the URC Acts and, references to District Councils contained in past Assembly Resolutions and elsewhere in the Church's rules and regulations will, in most cases, need no alteration.

It is therefore suggested that the Assembly be advised to retain District Councils, with a much reduced membership (minimum seven, maximum thirteen), with their presidents and secretaries appointed by the Synod and with powers limited to those matters which are either the responsibility of the District Council under the trusts referred to in the United Reformed Church Acts 1972, 1981 & 2000, or which have been delegated to it by the Synod. It shall be for Synods to decide whether to have a reduced number of Districts or the same number as at present, being mindful both of the Church's desire to move towards a slimmer, more rigorous organisation as envisaged in the Catch the Vision Report to General Assembly in 2005 and of the fact that currently we have 24 District Councils where the total Church membership is less than a 1000. Meetings of these District Councils would only be necessary when there is relevant business to be transacted.

Quite a bit of work will be needed to prepare the necessary documentation to lay before the Assembly in July. The wishes of Mission Council with regard to this are therefore urgently sought!