



The
United
Reformed
Church

MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2002

MINUTES

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Flora Winfield and the Moderator the Revd Elizabeth Welch, and included the induction of the Revd Roy Lowes as Secretary for Training. Thanks were expressed by the Moderator to the Revd Bill Mahood who had taken the Chair upon her departure for her visit to India during the previous Mission Council Meeting. The Moderator also brought greetings from India.

02/01 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone to the meeting, mentioning in particular: the Revd Brian Jolly (Life & Witness Committee Convener), the Revd Martin Camroux (Church & Society Committee Convener), the Revd Kathryn Price (deputising for the Revd Derek Lindfield), the Revd John Young (Doctrine, Prayer & Worship Committee Convener), Ms Emma Pugh (Fury Council chair), Mrs Ann Ball (East Midlands Synod), the Revd Rosalind Harrison (South Western Synod), Mr Peter Devaney (Wales Synod, deputising for the Revd David Fox), the Revd Brian Evans (Convener of visitors to Northern Synod) and the Revd Roy Lowes (Secretary for Training).

02/02 Attendance

There were 59 members present with 19 staff and others in attendance and Mrs Barbara Hedgecock (Minutes Secretary).

Apologies for absence were received from the Revd Nannette Lewis Head (Equal Opportunities Committee Convener), the Revd Derek Lindfield (Youth & Children's Work Committee Convener), the Revd Alasdair Pratt (Assembly Arrangements Committee Convener), Ms Amanda Wade (Fury Council), the Revd David Miller (East Midlands Synod), the Revd Richard Mortimer (Eastern Synod), Mrs Gill Shepherd (Thames North Synod), the Revd John Jenkinson (Yorkshire Synod), the Revd David Fox (Wales Synod), the Revd John Arthur (Synod of Scotland), Miss Catriona Smith (Synod of Scotland), the Revd Dawn Mather (Southern Synod), Mrs Lillian Covell (Mersey Synod), the Revd Angus Duncan (Grants and Loans Group Convener), Mrs Karen Bulley (Pilots Development Officer) and the Revd Liz Byrne (Yardley Hastings Centre Minister).

02/03 Minutes of Mission Council 2-4 October 2001

The minutes of the meeting held on 2-4 October 2001, which had been circulated, were presented by the Clerk. They were approved and signed as a true record by the Moderator.

02/04 Business

Proposed changes to the order of business were agreed.

02/05 Matters Arising

01/61 and 01/79 URC Ministers' consultation

The Revd Bill Mahood reported on behalf of the group which was considering this proposal that costings had not been finalised and that a report would be made at the March Mission Council meeting.

02/06 Visit to Northern Synod (Paper A)

The Revd Brian Evans, convener, introduced the report on this pilot visit, which was regarded by the synod as a valuable experience. Mr Evans commended the Northern Synod's "Strategy for Mission" document. Mission Council agreed that it would be premature to take a view about repeating the exercise in other synods. This would be considered after the discussions planned for the October meeting of Mission Council concerning developments and proposed restructuring in some synods. A summary of the report and this decision would be taken to General Assembly. The Clerk pointed out that there was an error in paragraph 7.4 of the report in that the Basis of Union contained no recommendations as to the control of financial assets; this would need to be corrected in any report to Assembly.

02/07 Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) (Paper C)

The Deputy General Secretary presented the report of MCAG.

Paragraphs 1 - 4 were matters of report.

Paragraph 5 The Deputy General Secretary presented the recommendation from MCAG that: **the group which was set up by General Assembly Resolution 41 (1997) to give help to individuals and churches who had problems as a result of the Assembly's decisions on human sexuality should be disbanded.** This was agreed and thanks were given to the members of the group: Ms Lis Mullen and the Revds Elizabeth Caswell, Malcolm Hanson, Jim Hollyman, Glyn Jenkins and John Waller.

Paragraph 6 The General Secretary introduced this item. MCAG recommended that: **a Church House Reference Group be established** with the remit and membership proposed in the paper (with the addition of the Secretary for Communication). The General Secretary said that MCAG would need to make some small adjustments to the details proposed. It was agreed that the group should be formed and MCAG was authorised to amend the details.

Paragraph 7 The Deputy General Secretary presented the recommendation from MCAG that: **from now on the Church and Society Committee should appoint the United Reformed Church representatives to the new group Churches Together for Health and Healing (CTHH) and should receive reports from them.** This was agreed.

Paragraph 8 Payment of expenses for meetings. The Deputy General Secretary presented the proposal from MCAG that: **as a matter of principle, any Assembly Committee or sub-committee calling a meeting of synod representatives should meet the cost of attending that meeting out of its own budget.** After some discussion this was agreed. It was also agreed that the Mission Council report to the Assembly would indicate what would and would not be included in this provision, and would also suggest that there could be negotiation between the committee and synods.

Paragraph 9 Notice of agenda items for the meetings of Mission Council in 2002 was given for information.

02/08 Resource Planning Advisory Group (RPAG) (Paper E)

The convener of RPAG, the Revd Julian Macro, presented this report which had been prepared at the request of Mission Council at the October 2001 meeting. Mr Macro reported that the situation was worse than that indicated in the 2003 budget, due mainly to a higher than expected number of ministers and a reduction in available income for investment together with lower returns.

With the permission of the Moderator the Revd Christine Craven, Secretary for Ministries, presented the projected number of ministers in stipendiary service for the years 2002 to 2005.

It was noted that 59 additional stipends must be added to the budget to provide for part-time ministry and Church Related Community Workers.

Decisions about the way forward would need to be taken at the March 2002 meeting. There was considerable discussion during which it was made clear that some churches would find it very difficult to increase their giving significantly. Although there were large capital resources in some parts of the church, these were insignificant when compared to the need for income flow. Although it was acknowledged that when challenged appropriately, members were often prepared to give generously and sacrificially, it was generally understood that difficult decisions would need to be made soon. Concern was expressed that if the present debate was insufficiently understood in the wider church there could be a detrimental effect on morale. It was therefore agreed that the General Secretary and the Deputy General Secretary would draft a statement for discussion later in the meeting. *See Minute 02/17*

02/09 Scottish Ecumenical Synod

Mrs Helen Mee introduced a presentation on the recent Scottish Ecumenical Synod meeting which had been a significant event in Scottish Church life. The presentation was followed by a short discussion. Members of Mission Council were informed that further information could be obtained from the following website: www.acts-scotland.org.uk

02/10 Moderator's Paper on the Rôle and Purpose of Mission Council (Paper F) and October theological reflections

The Moderator presented these two papers and invited discussion on the questions contained in Paper F. It was pointed out that when Mission Council was created it had been the intention that it should work in a way similar to that suggested by the first four questions. The Moderator thanked members of Mission Council for the wide range of comments made; these would be noted for possible further discussion at future meetings.

02/11 Policy on Ethical Investment (Paper H)

The General Secretary introduced this paper which had been prepared following the resolution that had been passed at the General Assembly meeting in July 2001:

General Assembly instructs Mission Council to review and report to General Assembly in 2002 upon the ethical policies of the United Reformed Church with regard to the investments of the church, with particular reference to companies involved with the arms trade.

After discussion on ethical, environmental and human rights issues, it was agreed that a brief addition should be made to the report to indicate that though adoption of the proposed policy would constitute a step forward, it should not be seen as a final position. The revised report and the following proposed policy would be taken to General Assembly:

It is the policy of the United Reformed Church to recommend that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the church should avoid any investment in

- **Those companies whose business is the manufacture or supply of weapons of destruction;**
- **Those companies whose business is the promotion of pornography;**

- **Those companies a significant part of whose business is in the supply of alcoholic drinks, tobacco products or military equipment (other than weapons of destruction), or the provision of gambling facilities.**

The definition of these activities, or of what constitutes a significant part of a company's business, will require judgement. The Mission Council's Ethical Investment Advisory Group will offer advice on ethical issues from time to time.

The above policy can only be advisory; the responsibility for specific investment decisions remains with each body of trustees.

02/12 The Women's Union of the Scottish Synod and Resolution 8.2 of the Unifying Assembly (Paper D)

This paper, discussion of which had been deferred from the October 2001 meeting of Mission Council, was introduced by the Deputy General Secretary. The Unifying Assembly meeting in Glasgow on 1 April 2000 had resolved: *The General Assembly, acknowledging the great service to the church of the Women's Council of the Congregational Union of Scotland, instructs the Mission Council to consider whether there are implications for the central organisation of the church in the context of current ecumenical thinking.*

The Deputy General Secretary proposed that: **Paper D should constitute the response of Mission Council to General Assembly.** This was agreed.

02/13 Section O oversight group (Paper B)

This paper, discussion of which had been deferred from the October 2001 meeting of Mission Council, was introduced by the Deputy General Secretary. Mission Council agreed to propose to General Assembly that the oversight of the Section O Process, currently the responsibility of the General Secretary, the convener of the Ministries Committee and the Clerk, should be given to the Mission Council. The details would be as indicated in Paper B. The Deputy General Secretary reported that the Revd Tony Burnham and Mr Hartley Oldham would be willing to serve as convener and secretary of the group respectively. It was agreed, subject to the General Assembly accepting the proposal, that these appointments would be made with periods of service of four years.

02/14 A review of the Windermere Centre

On behalf of the Life and Witness Committee the Revd Brian Jolly, noting that the Centre had not been reviewed since its opening, requested Mission Council to agree to set up a review of the Windermere Centre. All were in favour of a review with a report being made to Mission Council in March 2003. MCAG would be asked to draw up a remit and suggest names for consideration at the Mission Council meeting in March 2002.

02/15 Nominations Committee (Paper G)

The Revd Glyn Jenkins, convener, presented the report.

Mission Council received the recommendation from the Nominating Group for the Director of the Windermere Centre, convened by the Revd Peter Brain, and passed the following resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints Mr Lawrence Moore as Director of the URC National Training Centre, Windermere, for a period of five years, with effect from 1 April 2002.

Mr Brain stated that the termed appointment was renewable and was not contrary to current employment legislation. The terms of this appointment would not bind Mission Council or the General Assembly to act similarly in future.

Mr Jenkins asked Mission Council to note that the Revd Keith Forecast was convening a Nominating Group for the Moderator of the South Western Synod and that the following people had accepted nomination as conveners-elect of Assembly Committees:

Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee: the Revd Keith Forecast

Pastoral Welfare sub-committee: Mr Alan Wharton

Training Committee: the Revd John Humphreys

Ecumenical International Exchange Committee: the Revd Chris Baillie

Inter-faith Committee: the Revd Dr John Parry

Disciplinary Panel: the Revd David Helyar (Deputy Convener elect)

All names would be brought to Assembly in 2002 and each would become convener (or deputy) in 2003.

Referring to paragraph 3 of the report which concerned URC representatives on Governing Bodies of Theological Colleges Mr Jenkins moved the following resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the following to represent the URC on the Ministerial and Educational Training Committee at Mansfield College: the Revd Rachel Poolman and Professor Malcolm Johnson. This was agreed.

Mr Jenkins reported that it had not yet been possible to find a nominee for the position of Honorary Treasurer. He therefore moved the following resolution: **Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, agrees to extend the appointment of Mr Graham Stacy as Honorary Treasurer to 31st December 2002.** This was agreed and thanks were expressed to Mr Stacy. The Nominating Group further asked Mission Council to give serious and urgent consideration to names of people with senior financial experience whom it might approach. Suggested names should be given to the General Secretary or Deputy General Secretary. Ideally the Group would wish to bring a name to Assembly in 2002 so that he or she could work alongside Mr Stacy for 6 months.

The Moderator reported on the process which had been undertaken in order to nominate the next Deputy General Secretary. On behalf of the Nominating Group she proposed that: **Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd Ray Adams as Deputy General Secretary, for a period of seven years, with effect from 1 September 2002.** This was agreed.

02/16 Zimbabwe - Resolution from Church and Society Committee

Speaking with the permission of the Moderator, Dr Andrew Bradstock, Secretary for Church and Society, informed Mission Council of the serious situation being faced by the Commitment For Life Partner, Silveira House. The following resolution was presented: **Noting with concern the current situation in Zimbabwe and its impact on our Commitment for Life Partners at Silveira House, Mission Council instructs the**

Moderator to write to the Director of Silveira House assuring him and his staff of our prayerful solidarity with them at this time. This was agreed.

Dr Bradstock also urged churches to write, but he advised caution in the light of the fact that mail could well be intercepted. The address of Silveira House would be placed on the URC website, together with a model letter.

02/17 Resource Planning Advisory Group (Paper E) *Continued from Minute 02/08*

A draft statement was read to Mission Council. Although more work needed to be done on the drafting, the statement was thought to be, in broad terms, appropriate. Mission Council therefore agreed that a briefing paper would be distributed to Mission Council members to use as they thought appropriate.

02/18 Closing Remarks

The Moderator declared that the business of the meeting had been completed. She then thanked and greeted the Revd Derek Wales, Moderator of the Wessex Synod, who would retire on 31 January.

Closing Worship was led by the Chaplain.

United Reformed Church

Visit to Northern Synod

Report to General Assembly 2002

1. Origin of Visit

1.1 In 1998, General Assembly passed the following resolution : Assembly agrees that in 2001 a visit to the Northern Province (Synod) will be made on its behalf by a team of three people.

1.2 The three people subsequently appointed by Assembly to carry out the visit were :
Sandra Dears (Training Officer, Mersey Synod)

Keith Forecast (at that time, North Western Synod Moderator, now Training Officer Wales Synod)

Brian Evans (Convener ; at that time, Yorkshire Synod Clerk)

1.3 This resolution was Assembly's response to an invitation from Northern Synod to carry out such a visit.

2. Objective of Visit

2.1 The objective of the visit, as described in the 1998 Assembly papers, was "encouraging the Northern Synod to consider its life and work, goals and methods ; to enable affirmation and critique of the Synod's structures and patterns of work ; and to promote reflection on the operation of the Synod in relation to other councils of the Church, ecumenical partners, and community organisations".

2.2 The original proposal from Northern Synod had been that each Synod should be visited in this way at regular intervals. The decision of Assembly, however, was that this initial visit should serve as a pilot, which would make it possible to decide whether such visits should become part of the life of Assembly.

3. The Process of the Visit

3.1 For good practical reasons, the visit started in the autumn of the year 2000, rather than in 2001.

3.2 Between September 2000 and March 2001, one or more of the visitors attended the following meetings :

3.2.1. Two meetings of Synod (October 2000 and March 2001)

3.2.2. Three meetings of the Planning, Mission and Resources Committee (PMR) (September, November, January)

3.2.3. Meetings of the Ecumenical Committee and of the Ministries and Training Committee

3.2.4. Meetings with the Moderator and Synod Clerk, with the District Secretaries, with the Synod Office Staff, and with representatives of Committees whose full meetings it had not been possible for the visitors to attend.

3.3 The visitors themselves met in Liverpool in February and in March 2001.

3.4 An interim report was presented to Synod at its March meeting. Members of Synod were invited to complete a short questionnaire that day. Their responses have contributed significantly to this report.

4. Circumstances of the Visit

4.1 The visit coincided with Synod's adoption of a new Strategy for Mission, presented in a document entitled "On Being a Faithful Church in a Demanding Age".

4.2 This document was discussed at the September PMR, and adopted by Synod at its October meeting.

4.3 The implementation of the Strategy was, therefore, a main concern of Synod and its Committees during the remaining months of our visit.

4.4 The visitors thus witnessed a Synod undergoing a period of rapid and radical change. Our report is therefore less a snapshot than footage from an incomplete video film.

5. The Strategy Document - "On Being a Faithful Church in a Demanding Age"

5.1 This is a brave and radical blueprint for the life of the Synod over the next ten years. In adopting it, Synod was declining to play safe, and showing an awareness of the demands of mission. Many of the details, of course, had yet to be worked out at the time at which our visit was completed.

5.2 The document has been extensively discussed by PMR, by Synod, and to some extent by District Councils. Only a small minority of Church or Elders' Meetings, however, seem to have discussed it so far.

6. New Synod Structure

6.1 There are promising features in the developing structure. PMR is well established as the group that guides the new strategy. There is valuable cross-communication between the Synod committees. The Church and Society Committee, and the Belonging to the World Church Committee have both developed useful networks. The Trust plays a valuable enabling role.

6.2 We wonder, however, whether there may be rather too many Synod committees, which it may be difficult to staff - at least without draining the District Councils and the local churches of human resources. Might it, perhaps, be possible for Synod to cover the same ground by replacing some of the committees and their conveners by individual advocates or co-ordinators, who would hold a watching brief, and set up ad hoc groups when action is needed in a particular area?

6.3 At the same time, the remit of the Ministries and Training Committee seems to be extremely wide. The case for separate committees here seems to be strong.

6.4 The structure does not fully identify the complementary roles of District Councils, Synod and General Assembly. By reference to the functions of these different Councils as set out in the Basis of Union, it ought to be possible to make it clear which subjects are best tackled at District Council, which at Synod, and which at General Assembly.

7. Synod and the District Councils

7.1 This is a key issue in Northern Synod, which is, as far as we know, the only Synod within which the District Councils control most of the financial resources.

7.2 There is, moreover, a striking contrast between the relative wealth and strength of the Newcastle District and the weakness of other Districts, particularly Cumberland/Solway.

7.3 Under these circumstances, we wonder whether it is feasible for Synod to play its proper role of providing the resources that enable the District Councils to supervise and support the mission of the local churches.

7.4 We urge Synod to consider transferring its financial assets from District Council to Synod control, as is recommended in the Basis of Union, thus making fairer sharing among the churches more possible. An alternative course of action might be the development of inter-District resource sharing on the model of the inter-Synod sharing now practised by the United Reformed Church at national level.

7.5 The Synod has shown a refreshing willingness to change District boundaries. We believe that there is a strong case for reducing the size of the Newcastle District (which could at present more properly be called the Tynedale District), and thus making for a more equitable distribution of resources. This process would be facilitated if, as recommended at 7.4 above, these resources were transferred to Synod control.

7.6 The Cumberland/Solway Council problem is real. There is a perception that its small size is making it difficult to attract ministers, who fear the danger of isolation.

7.7 Our URC Synod boundaries have compounded the Cumberland problem in an ecumenical context : whilst the larger area of Cumbria is not only an administrative county but also an Anglican diocese and a Methodist District, the URC has divided it between the Northern and North Western Synods. We recognise that this is a complex problem, for which a solution has not yet been found. We believe that it should be addressed again,

7.8 The concentration of the Training and Development team resource at Synod level should enable priority to be given to the smaller Districts, where the need is greatest. There is, however, the danger that the team's Newcastle base could further marginalise Cumberland/Solway, which is separated from the North East not only by geography, but also by culture.

8. Ecumenism

8.1 The aim that all local churches should be part of a wider ecumenical group (though not necessarily of an LEP) by 2010 is perhaps the most striking feature of the entire Strategy.

8.2 Responses to the questionnaire issued at the March 2001 meeting of Synod provided impressive evidence of ecumenical work that is already taking place in many parts of the Synod area. This varied from combined study and worship to community action through, for example, holiday clubs, Christmas Day provision for the lonely, and the organisation of street warden teams.

8.3 Berwick and South West Northumberland are already designated as Areas of Ecumenical Action, where the churches aim to provide one ordained minister (of whatever denomination) in each local community.

8.4 This is a creative use of the crisis that all denominations face in providing ministry for scattered rural communities, and not only in Northern Synod.

9. The Mission of the Church

9.1 We have already noted (see 5.1 above) Synod's awareness of the mission of the Church. The work envisaged in the Strategy Document is seen as complementary to the work of Mission Council in the document "Growing Up", and the five marks of mission.

9.2 The responses to our questionnaire make it clear that, as in other Synods, there are local churches largely preoccupied with the business of survival, and operating entirely in a "maintenance " mode.

9.3 Others, however, have interestingly distinctive areas of mission. We were especially impressed, for example, by what we heard about work with prisoners, the West End (Newcastle) Refugee Project, and one congregation's link with a church in Port Elizabeth. There are also many other imaginative mission initiatives taking place locally, which we affirm.

10. The Training and Development Team

10.1 The Team has five members : full time Development Strategy Officer, Training Strategy Officer, and Adult Training Officer ; and part time Children's Officer and Ecumenical Officer.

10.2 When initial problems in recruiting the half-time Children's Worker have been overcome, this Team will be a powerful resource in the life of the Synod. The use of this resource by local churches will need to be carefully monitored. Responses to the questionnaire suggested a polarisation between those local churches who saw the work of the Team as irrelevant to their small and elderly congregations, and those churches who saw a wide range of ways in which the Team's support could be valuable.

10.3 There is, however, no obvious link between the Team and the Ministries and Training Committee. We believe that Team management ought to be in the hands of a small group (or individual) linked to this Committee. At present management seems to rest with the officers of Synod. The Task Group appointed by the General Assembly Training Committee to look at the terms and conditions of Synod Training Officers has recently recommended that their accountability should be through a manager rather than a committee ; and that the manager should preferably not be the Synod Moderator, who has leadership and pastoral roles. We have in mind for the Team the type of manager appointed by Synods to supervise the work of their YCWT.

10.4 There is a need to give the Team a proper level of support through the Synod Office.

10.5 We are surprised by Synod's decision to opt out of the national YCWT scheme, a decision which, in addition to its implications for the Northern Synod, will have the effect of weakening the church's national team - although we are aware that a review of the national YCWT scheme is being undertaken.. Youth and Children's work must not be neglected, and we fully share Synod's sense of urgency in recognising the need to recruit a Children's Officer, if necessary by casting the net wider than hitherto.

10.6 From time to time, Team members have been used as Interim Moderators. All District Councils find it difficult to recruit Interim Moderators, and such an appointment clearly gives a Team member a foothold in a local church, and an insight into its needs. There is, however, a danger that it could lead to a misunderstanding of the role of the Team in the life of the Synod - and an element of role confusion, if not in the Team member, then in the local church.

11. Practical Matters

11.1 We suggest that the Synod Office accommodation is inadequate. At our request, the Officer Manager drew up a list of desiderata. We recognise, as would he, that full implementation is scarcely feasible ; but, at the very least, we suggest that there should be facilities for the Training and Development Team, a more adequate office for the Moderator, and a room where Synod committees can meet.

11.2 The part time Office Manager seems to have made a real impact on organisation, and in caring for the other staff members - by annual reviews, for example, and the provision of Job Descriptions. We understand that his appointment is scheduled to end in 2002. We believe that there might be much to be said for extending it further - or least considering other ways in which the role at present being played by the Officer Manager can be filled.

11.3 The staff employed in the Office cover a good age range, and are deeply involved both in the life of the Synod and in local church life. There is an awareness of the need for staff development that will equip the staff members, in due course, for employment outside the United Reformed Church, if that is their wish. We wonder, however, whether The Legal and Trust Secretary's post has the potential, as envisaged, to become the basis of a full time career ; and we think it especially important that he should receive such training for possible secular employment.

11.4 We wonder whether the practice of delaying the circulation of the minutes of Synod, and of at least some of the committees, until just before the next meeting is conducive to the efficient conduct of business. We recommend that minutes should be circulated as soon as possible after a meeting, preferably with each item marked with the initials of the person who has to take action on it before the next meeting.

11.5 The Synod is, we believe, the only one within the URC that regularly holds a two day Synod (Friday evening and Saturday). This arrangement has clear advantages in providing time for fellowship, and for the conduct of business. There seemed to be a tendency for people to drift away on the Saturday afternoon - although this problem is not unknown in other Synods.

12. Summary of Main Recommendations

Our main recommendations are as follows :

12.1 We recommend that Church and Elders' meetings be encouraged to discuss the Strategy document, and report back to Synod through District Councils, so that the ownership is widened. (5.2 above)

12.2 We recommend that serious consideration be given to the replacement of some Synod committees by individual advocates or co-ordinators. (6.2 above)

12.3 We recommend that the Ministries and Training Committee be disbanded, and replaced by separate committees responsible for Ministries and for Training. (6.3 above)

12.4 We recommend Synod to consider the transference of financial assets from District to Synod control. (7.4 above)

12.5 We recommend a further revision of District boundaries, with the particular aim of reducing the size of the Newcastle District. (7.5 above)

12.6 We recommend that Synod should consult the North Western Synod about possible changes in boundaries, with a view to ensuring that the whole of Cumbria is incorporated within the same Synod ; and, if such changes are felt to be desirable, to bring appropriate proposals to General Assembly. (7.7 above)

12.7 We recommend Synod to ensure that provision is built into the Training and Development Team's remit for work with the smaller Districts. (7.8 above)

12.8 We recommend Synod to place the management of the Training and Development Team in the hands of a small group, or an individual, entirely distinct from the Synod officers and responsible to the Ministries and Training Committee. (10.3 above)

12.9 We recommend Synod to ensure that, having withdrawn from the national YCWT scheme, it gives high priority to fostering youth and children's work. (10.5 above)

12.10 We recommend that members of the Training Team should not be asked to serve as Interim Moderators. (10.6 above)

12.11 We recommend that Synod should enlarge its office accommodation, to include facilities for the Training and Development Team (whose work as a team would be much enhanced by having such a central point), a more adequate office for the Moderator, and a room where Synod committees can meet. (10.4 and 11.1 above)

12.12 We recommend that serious consideration be given to a further extension of the appointment of the Synod Office Manager. (11.2 above)

12.13 We recommend that the minutes of meetings of Synod and its committees should be circulated as soon as possible after the meeting. (11.4 above)

12.14 We recommend that other Synods should consider adopting the procedure of holding a two day Synod (Friday evening and Saturday), especially those Synods covering large rural areas. (11.5 above)

12.15 We recommend to other Synods, as a model of good practice, the thorough review of the life and mission of Northern Synod contained within its Strategy document, "On being a Faithful Church in a Demanding Age". (5.1 above)

Appendix 1

The Synod Strategy Document, "On Being a Faithful Church in a Demanding Age"

Appendix 2

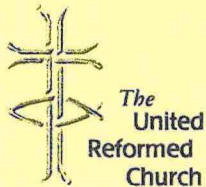
13.1 We greatly enjoyed the process in which we were involved. It was very interesting to see the inner workings of another Synod. We are grateful to the Moderator, Synod Clerk, and all others who welcomed us into their meetings and, indeed, their homes.

13.2 For a variety of reasons, our visit, scheduled by General Assembly for 2001, started in the Autumn of 2000, and continued through the winter. We were fortunate to escape, more or less unscathed, the floods of autumn, the snows of winter, and the general inability of the railway companies to provide an adequate service in the wake of the Hatfield, and to a lesser extent, the Selby, tragedies.

13.3 The earlier start to the visit meant that it coincided with the adoption, and the first steps in the implementation, of the Synod Strategy document. Had the visit taken place six months later, the implementation would have been a good deal further down the line.

13.4 The visit was enormously expensive in terms of hours spent on the road : for the nearest visitor, travelling to Newcastle involved a round trip of almost 250 miles. For the most distant, the figure was more like 500.

13.5 We hope that the Northern Synod will feel that the process was worthwhile. Such visits, conducted on a regular basis to every Synod within the United Reformed Church would involve an enormous commitment of resources. Although the visitors are very happy to have been able to serve the Church through this project, we do wonder whether a commitment to further visits to Synods could be justified in terms of the mission of the Church.



MISSION COUNCIL

2 - 4 October 2001

B

Section O : Oversight Group Recommendations

The Group has reviewed its status, membership and role and recommends that

1. responsibility for the oversight of the Section O Process is given to Mission Council;
2. Mission Council works through a Section O Advisory Group;
3. the new Group has the same remit as the present one, except that it shall report to Mission Council;
4. instead of it being a duty for the convener of the Ministries Committee, a convener of the Group is appointed;
5. a secretary is appointed and added to the Group, giving a total membership of four;
6. and additional people, in attendance, are listed.

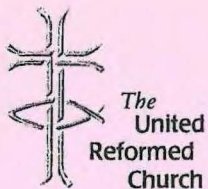
The Arguments

- 1.0 **Oversight** of Section O was given to a Group consisting of the General Secretary, the Clerk of the Assembly and the Convener of the Ministries Committee. This was intended as a temporary measure. It is now proposed to regularise this.
- 1.1 **Why Mission Council?** There are three possible options:
 - (a) an Assembly Committee
 - (b) an Assembly Sub-Committee or, say the Ministries Committee or
 - (c) Mission Council

While the subject is important, to create a full committee with all the implication for representation seems unnecessary. However to add to the responsibilities of the Ministries Committee something so contrary to the positive aspects of the committee's role and, recognising the kind of skills and membership required for this task makes this inappropriate. Therefore it is proposed to give the responsibility to Mission Council, which would report, as and when necessary to the Assembly. Moreover the Mission Council is representative of all synods and all synod moderators attend. Therefore this is the committee which has the necessary experience to test proposals for the Group.

2. **Mission Council** is already used by the present Group as a testing ground for proposals and as a conduit to the Assembly. It is proposed therefore that the Group becomes an Advisory Group of MC.
3. **The remit** is to oversee the Section O process, monitoring how it works and being responsible for presenting to Mission Council of any changes for decision by the Assembly. Specific cases are not the business of the Group.
4. **Convener** It is recognised that the Convener of the Ministries Committee already has a significant work load. Moreover s/he may have had no previous experience of the workings of Section O. Therefore it is suggested that the Convener be someone with the appropriate experience, or the time to focus on the complexity of the process eg. a former synod moderator. However it is recommended that the Convener need not, ex-officio, be a member of Mission Council and reporting to MC and Assembly would be the responsibility of the General Secretary, supported by the Clerk.
5. **Membership** The General Secretary with experience of the process, and the Clerk, with expertise in procedural matters ought to remain as members of the Group. However a secretary to undertake the task of dealing with the detail of the process ought also to be a member of the Group. At present this task is undertaken by a former legal adviser, Hartley Oldham.
6. **In attendance** The Group already has a number of people who attend to give advice to the members: the Secretary of Ministries, Revd Christine Craven, who deals with administrative matters and is a link, when necessary, with the Ministries Committee; the Secretary of the Commission, Revd Alasdair Walker, and the Legal Adviser, Mr Andrew Middleton.
7. **Recommendation** A careful reading of the proposals and supporting arguments will show that the changes are minimal and reflect the experience and working practices of the present Group.

*Tony Burnham
July 2001*



MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2002



Mission Council Advisory Group

1. **Occupational Health scheme** The consultation for representatives of the synods, agreed at the last Mission Council meeting, has been arranged for 13 February. The outcome will be reported at the next meeting.
2. **Community regeneration project** MCAG approved retrospectively the action of the General Secretary in committing £120p.a. to this ecumenical project. However it expressed the view that the project should in future be related to and be funded through the Church and Society Committee.
3. **Secretaryship of Assembly Commission** It was reported that the present secretary, Alasdair Walker, would be unable to serve in the months of January and February 2002, as would one of his nominated deputies, Graham Long. In the event that a case arose which the remaining deputy, Alasdair Pratt, could not deal with, the General Secretary was authorised to appoint (in this order) either Brian Evans, John Seager or John Slow pro tem.
4. **Extended occupation of a manse by the Deputy General Secretary** MCAG has been concerned that John Waller would be required to vacate his present accommodation on his retirement, just as he was beginning his year as Moderator of the General Assembly. It was felt that this would pose an unacceptable strain. After consultation with the relevant committee conveners it has been agreed that John and Margaret Waller can remain in their present accommodation until the summer of 2003, on terms to be agreed between them and the church.
5. **Resolution 41 pastoral group** This group was set up by Assembly decision in 1997 with the intention of giving help to individuals and churches which had problems as a result of the Assembly's decisions on human sexuality. Although very few requests for help have been made, Mission Council has kept the group in being on a year-by-year basis, the last extension being until October 2001. The last request for help was made more than 12 months ago and MCAG recommends that the group should be **disbanded**. The members are: Elizabeth Caswell, Malcolm Hanson, Jim Hollyman, Glyn Jenkins, Lis Mullen and John Waller.
6. **Church House Reference Committee** The General Secretary has shared with MCAG his concern that responsibility for the management of Church House does not fall within the remit of any existing committee or group, even though there can be significant policy and financial implications. MCAG shared this concern and agreed to propose to Mission Council that a **Church House Reference Committee be established**, responsible to Mission Council through MCAG for the following remit:
 - ◆ expenditure on the building and equipment
 - ◆ office management, including IT systems management and monitoring
 - ◆ levels of support staffing

- ◆ the housing of Assembly-appointed staff
- ◆ taxation and benefits
- ◆ financial control
- ◆ any other related matters

It is envisaged that after some concentrated initial work the committee would need to meet twice a year, but brief meetings might need to be called at short notice to deal with unanticipated items. The implementation of the committee's decisions would remain within Church House, chiefly in the Finance and Personnel offices. The proposed membership of the committee would be:

- ◆ A convener
- ◆ Secretary for Finance
- ◆ Office and Personnel Manager
- ◆ 3 people with general understanding of buildings and management, with the General Secretary (until September 2002, then DGS) to service.

7. **Churches Together for Health and Healing** Last March Mission Council agreed to advise Assembly to continue the existence of the Methodist/United Reformed Church Health and Healing Development Group for a further year or until a wider ecumenical body was in being to continue the work. Happily the second eventuality has occurred first. There is a need for some small structural changes to reflect the new situation. MCAG recommends that from now on the Church and Society Committee should appoint the URC representatives to CTHH and should receive reports from them. These would be summarised within the Church and Society Committee's reports to General Assembly. With the ending of the life of the Development Group, its budget will need to be transferred to the Church and Society Committee in order to meet the costs of the new ecumenical arrangement.
8. **Payment of expenses for meetings** A letter from the Eastern Synod was considered, complaining at the practice of calling meetings, asking the synods to send representatives and also to meet the cost of their attendance. MCAG agreed to ask Mission Council to decide that, as a matter of principle, any Assembly committee or sub-committee calling a meeting of synod representatives should meet the costs of attending that meeting out of its own budget. It was hoped that this decision would set a precedent that would be followed by the other councils of the church.
9. **Agendas for the meetings of Mission Council in 2002** In addition to considering the agenda for the January meeting, MCAG identified some of the major topics which would need to be included in the March and October agendas. The list which follows is by no means complete.

March

Ethic investment
 Youth and Children's Work review
 RPAG and budget for 2003
 Grants and Loans Group
 Occupational Health Scheme
 Authority task group
 Assembly resolutions

October

Personal oversight task group
 Mersey and Yorkshire synod structures
 Church Life Profile



MISSION COUNCIL

2 - 4 October 2001

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The Women's Union of the Scottish Synod and resolution 8.2 of the Unifying Assembly.

The General Assembly, acknowledging the great service to the church of the Women's Union of the Congregational Union of Scotland, instructs the Mission Council to consider whether there are implications for the central organisation of the church in the context of current ecumenical thinking.

This resolution was passed by the Unifying Assembly in Glasgow on 1 April 2000. Over the following eighteen months the implications of the resolution have been discussed by the Mission Council Advisory Group, the Life and Witness Committee and by the Mission Council itself.

The Women's Union has had a long history in Scottish Congregationalism and it has been given an established place in the life of the Scottish synod. Through its branches and its organisation it meets the spiritual and social needs of many women in our Scottish churches. At the same time it is clear that there are other women within the Scottish Synod who do not find the ethos of the Women's Union helpful. It is too simplistic to say that the Union appeals to older women whereas younger women look for a different style of community. However, the statement may stand as a generalisation.

An informal enquiry was made as to the extent of women's organisations in England and Wales that might be similar to the Women's Union. It was known that there are many groups in local churches but it was felt that there was no particular value in seeking accurate statistics. The result of the enquiry made through the English and Welsh synods revealed the following:

An informal summary of women's work in synods and districts other than the synod of Scotland

Northern	No synod or district committees. Annual rallies in two districts. A person at synod level looks after women's issues
North Western	Some annual rallies in districts.
Mersey	No women's organisation at synod level. Cheshire district has an annual rally.
Yorkshire	Synod women's committee: Annual Assembly. Care of ministers' widows. Relates to Palatinate link.

East Midlands	No women's organisation at a synod level. Two or three districts have an annual women's rally.
West Midlands	Women's committees in three districts.
Eastern	Women's committees in two districts.
South Western	Synod women's committee. Annual conference.
Wessex	Three district councils have women's committees. Annual rallies are held.
Thames North	Nothing at synod or district level.
Southern	Annual meeting organised by moderator's wife (it has brought resolutions to synod) Districts have meetings.
Wales	Annual Conference at Trefeca for all of Wales. Three district organisations: Cardiff Area Ladies' Fellowship, Pembrokeshire District Women's Forum, North Wales District Women's Fellowship. Two rallies are held each year in the East Wales district.

NB: Involvement in the Women's World Day of Prayer is not included in this summary.

In recent years within the United Reformed Church and elsewhere a new pattern of relationships has grown up through the Community of Women and Men in the Church. This development has been (and is) the concern of the Life and Witness Committee and its predecessors. A sub-committee has been established to be the focus of support.

It would be easy to characterise the present situation as one of competition, or even conflict, between two different ways of engaging in women's work or women's issues. Assembly is encouraged to see such a view as missing an opportunity. The opportunity is that of continuing a dual approach, encouraging people in all three nations to support one another in whatever ways they find helpful, and recognising that in the future there will be new ways to support both women and men in their spiritual and social life and growth.

If the Assembly is minded to respond in that way, then the implication for the central organisation of the church is that the Life and Witness Committee should continue to support and encourage women's work and women's issues in all their variety throughout the United Reformed Church.

Report from Resources Planning Advisory Group

The 2003 Budget

The October 2001 meeting of Mission Council passed the following resolution:

Mission Council, noting the report of RPAG that the budget for 2003 may require expenditure cuts of £400k, asks the Group to continue its programme of consultations, and to make a fuller report (where possible setting out options) at the January meeting.

The December meeting of RPAG had the advantage of nine month figures for the URC's Income and Expenditure in 2001 and information about pledges made by Synods for 2002 M&M. These 2002 pledges amounted to **£18,657k** rather than the **£18,750k** in the 2002 Budget. It is prudent to use the pledged figure of **£18,657k** as the baseline for the 2003 Budget. The projected outcome in 2003 is now worse than seemed likely in October, due mainly to higher than anticipated minister numbers and a larger reduction in interest income (caused both by reduced amounts available for investment because capital has already been used to meet deficits and by yet lower interest rates).

Budget holders were most helpful in presenting their budgets for 2003 and a number of significant reductions were offered; nonetheless the projected expenditure in 2003 comes to **£21,108k**. Budget holders have since been asked if they can identify further savings, but it may be that any further reductions identified now will eat into the savings that we normally find at the end of each year. These anticipated but unidentified savings form the basis for our willingness to entertain a projected deficit of **£250k**.

Projected non-M&M income in 2003 is **£987,000**; this represents a substantial reduction from such receipts in recent years largely because of the decline in dividends and interest as capital has been used. As a result, the amount that would have to be found from M&M is **£20,121k**. Using the **£18,657k** pledged by Synods for 2002 M&M as a baseline, this would require an increase in M&M contributions of 8% - and we are reminded that whatever is raised for M&M is given by a constituency which is decreasing at circa 3% per annum.

The draft budget looks for M&M contributions of **£19,300k** – the table below gives an indication of the level of shortfall that would arise from differing levels of M&M contributions if total expenditure were **£21,108k**:

<i>Increase in M&M over 2002 pledges</i>	<i>would produce</i>	<i>projected shortfall</i>
1%	£18,844k	£1,277k
2%	£19,030k	£1,091k
2½%	£19,123k	£997k
3%	£19,217k	£904k
3½%	£19,310k	£811k
4%	£19,403k	£718k
4½%	£19,497k	£624k
5%	£19,590k	£531k

Mission Council must determine the appropriate target for 2003 M&M contributions from Synods. Whatever target is agreed will then need to be advocated vigorously in Synods so that the targets are reached, in order that agreed programmes can be funded and stipends and salaries paid.

A projected deficit of **£250k** may be acceptable but the difference between that and the projected shortfall from whatever level of M&M is agreed for 2003 must itself be met by savings in expenditure, over and above those for which account is already taken. If there are definite savings that can be identified and agreed for a later year it may be possible to accept a deficit larger than **£250k** in 2003, but caution is needed. However no savings can be achieved without real pain and curtailing valued activities that have been agreed by Assembly. For this reason it is imperative to raise as much as possible through M&M.

RPAG has identified some options for savings – expressed as "broad brush" rounded figures where possible. RPAG is not making any value judgements as to their acceptability and these are not recommendations but are intended as a basis for preliminary consideration. In the light of such consideration, RPAG could prepare a further report for the March 2002 meeting when decisions will have to be made by Mission Council.

Stipends and salaries

The draft budget allows for an increase in stipends and lay salaries of 4%. If the stipend increase is kept to 3% the saving would be circa **£150k**;- if the total of lay salaries can also be contained within a 3% envelope there could be further savings of over **£10k**.

Ministerial retirement age

The provision that Ministers can stay on full stipend for up to six months after reaching 65 has led to an average age at retirement of 65 years, 3 months - adding about 6 minister years to the payroll. If the provision for delayed retirement were removed the saving could be of the order of **£110k** per annum.

Minister numbers

Current Church policy is that the number of stipendiary ministers should change at half the rate of change in Membership. If the number of stipendiary Ministers declined at approximately the same rate as overall Membership declined, the saving would be about **£200k** pa - but this could only be achieved by restricting the issue of certificates of transfer from other churches, probably by not issuing any such certificates.

CRCW numbers

CRCWs are not included in the "minister count" but are paid by M&M. The decision to more than double the number of CRCWs in post to 30 over the next few years has major budgetary implications. If the number of CRCWs in post does increase, as agreed, there will further financial problems ahead.

Continuing Ministerial Education

The costs of Continuing Ministerial Education are projected to be **£227k** in 2003 of which grants for in-service training are **£84k**. A change of policy and reduction in grants could reduce this expenditure.

Youth and Children's work

Costs relating to Youth and Children's Work appear in the budget under four headings: central cost of Youth and Children's Work Trainers; Youth and Children's Work Committee; Yardley Hastings; and Pilots Development. The Youth and Children's Work Review is underway and is expected to report to March Mission Council. While its remit was not primarily financial, the review group has been asked to take account of the very considerable, and rising, costs of these programmes - some **£653k** in 2003. The cost of the YCWT/YLTO programme to the national budget is projected to be **£259k** (and Synods also have substantial additional expenditure in connection with trainers). It is particularly difficult to arrive at a realistic budget for the National Youth Resource Centre as so much depends on the number and cost of each bed night, but a deficit of circa **£130k** (excluding stipend) can be expected in 2003.

Church House costs

These costs (including support staff, etc) are spread over a number of budgets. It may be possible, in the medium term, to make significant savings from a major re-organisation, which would itself, however, involve considerable time and effort.

Other options

There are some specific programmes which could be considered - if not in the short term, then when posts become vacant: for example the Rural Consultant whose costs are shared equally with the Methodist Church - the URC share would be £27.5k in 2003; the Pilots Development programme is estimated to cost £72k in 2003; the Racial Justice Programme has only recently been established and is estimated to cost £82.8k in 2003. The International Church Relations programme could also come under further review. The quality of this work is not questioned, but the costs must be borne in mind.

It has been suggested that many of the grants paid by the URC to ecumenical bodies are disproportionately large; where this is the case we could bring our contributions into line with normal percentages.

On the other hand, in this report RPAG is bound to draw attention to the fact that some costs are almost certain to increase at a rate in excess of inflation. These include IT, professional fees, work to comply with new legislation, Pastoral Reference Committee costs and the need to replace current voluntary post-holders with paid staff.

Summary of possible savings from the draft budget – detail in the text above:

Stipend increase at 3%, not 4%	£150,000
Lay salary increase held below 4%	£10,000+
Ministerial retirements at 65th birthday	£110,000
Ministerial numbers in line with membership numbers	£200,000
CRCW numbers not increased to 30	*
Continuing Ministerial Education	*
Youth and Children's Work	*
Specific programmes	*
Ecumenical Grants	*

* It is not appropriate to give a specific figure for these items as a decision might be taken to reduce the level of work undertaken rather than to discontinue it altogether.

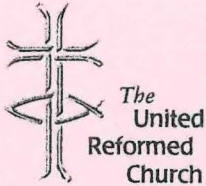
This is not a comfortable report for RPAG to bring to Mission Council, however we know that careful reflection and prayerful consideration will be given to these issues.

URC 2003 DRAFT BUDGET

	Budget 2002	Budget 2003	increase/(decrease) amount	%
EXPENDITURE				
MINISTRY				
Local and special ministries and CRCWs	14,716	15,417	701	4.8%
Synod moderators - stipends and expenses	498	518	20	4.0%
Ministries committee	232	239	7	3.0%
	15,446	16,174	728	4.7%
TRAINING				
College training for stipendiary ministers	1,150	1,115	(35)	-3.0%
Other training for stipendiary ministry	187	226	39	20.9%
Training for non-stipendiary ministry	95	140	45	47.4%
Central cost of Youth and Children's Work trainers	259	259	0	0.0%
Lay training costs	100	98	(2)	-2.0%
Training committee	126	137	11	8.7%
	1,917	1,975	58	3.0%
OTHER MISSION ACTIVITIES				
Grants	308	317	9	2.9%
Ecumenical committee and international Council for World mission	307	295	(12)	-3.9%
Church and Society Committee	50	50	0	0.0%
Racial Justice programme	96	81	(15)	-15.6%
Life and Witness committee	61	83	22	36.1%
Windermere Centre	103	100	(3)	-2.9%
Youth and children's work committee	45	40	(5)	-11.1%
Yardley Hastings	181	192	11	6.1%
Pilots Development	106	106	0	0.0%
Other committees	70	72	2	2.9%
	11	15	4	36.4%
	1,338	1,351	13	1.0%
SUPPORT ACTIVITIES				
General Assembly and Mission Council	233	204	(29)	-12.4%
Communication and Editorial	303	310	7	2.3%
Finance office	295	323	28	9.5%
Central secretariat	202	219	17	8.4%
Professional fees	81	92	11	13.6%
Computer network	48	55	7	14.6%
URC House costs	216	217	1	0.5%
General church costs	136	112	(24)	-17.6%
Depreciation of buildings	0	75	75	
	1,514	1,607	93	6.1%
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	20,215	21,107	892	4.4%

URC 2003 DRAFT BUDGET

	Budget 2002	Budget 2003	increase/(decrease) amount	%
INCOME				
MINISTRY AND MISSION CONTRIBUTION:	18,750	19,300	550	2.9%
INVESTMENT INCOME				
Dividends	280	257	(23)	-8.2%
Interest	260	50	(210)	-80.8%
	540	307	(233)	-43.1%
GRANTS RECEIVED				
Memorial Hall Trust	350	320	(30)	-8.6%
New College Trust	280	300	20	7.1%
	630	620	(10)	-1.6%
LEGACIES AND MAJOR DONATIONS	50	50	0	0.0%
SUNDRY INCOME				
CWM Mission Support programme	0	0	0	
Other	8	10	2	25.0%
	8	10	2	25.0%
TOTAL INCOME	19,978	20,287	309	1.5%
NET INCOMING/(OUTGOING) RESOURCE	(237)	(820)	(583)	



MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2002

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ROLE AND PURPOSE OF MISSION COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION

At a recent meeting of the Life and Witness committee, the question was asked as to whether we could have a 'Jesus link' on the web site. The answer came that this would be difficult as the United Reformed Church could not agree as to what would go on the web site with regard to Jesus.

Is there a central core of Christian faith and life which holds the United Reformed Church together? The implication of this discussion was that it wasn't possible that there could be agreement within the United Reformed Church as to the range of views about Jesus.

The question of what it means to be the United Reformed Church has even greater weight in an age when the issue of what it means to be church is being insistently raised in many different places.

We live in an age in Western Europe where several parts of the church are declining and ageing. How far do we accept this and live in the best way we can to manage decline, or how far do we try and move forward and turn decline into growth? Are we called to be more faithful to the way in which we've lived in the past generation or two, or more faithful to the whole tradition of the church which is more diverse than in one particular church, or more open to new possibilities involving change?

This issue is before us as we look at each area of the life of the United Reformed Church and at the life of the church as a whole. If being a national church means being more than a collection of congregations, districts and synods, the challenge is to see the sense of vision and identity that holds us together and takes us forward. This process is already well under way with the 'Growing up' material. We are not on our own in grappling with these issues, but are in partnership with Christians of many different traditions each in their own way facing the same questions.

What is the role of Mission Council in holding and developing the vision for the future of the United Reformed Church? What steps can be taken to develop this role further?

John Waller's paper on 'what are we about in Mission Council' helpfully quotes the original vision from 1992. It would also be good to have another look at this and see how much progress has been made since then.

The particular trigger for looking at the role of Mission Council at this time has been the number of task and working group reports that have come to Mission Council and been either 'accepted as a resource' or taken no further. (John Waller has done some further work analysing what's been taking forward or not over the past ten years) However, there are further areas to do with our conciliar ecclesiology, the role of General Assembly, the co-ordination of the work of committees, and the relationship with Synods that are worth unpacking when we look at the particular question of the role and purpose of Mission Council.

ECCLESIOLOGY

Ecclesiology describes the way we understand the nature and purpose of the church. Ecclesiology is not so much about describing an institution as interpreting the living relationship the people of God have to the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. Out of different interpretations of this relationship have come the different traditions of the church over the centuries.

The Reformed tradition has had a particular focus on the revelation of Jesus as the Word of God and the interpretation of that Word in Scripture, preaching and teaching, and on the participation of the whole people of God in the decision-making life of the church.

There are gifts that our tradition has to bring to the wider church, as has become clear in the Trilateral informal discussions between ourselves, the Methodist Church and the Church of England.

However, there are also questions about the way in which we live at present, e.g.

1. Have we individualised our interpretation of the participation of the whole people of God in the life of the church in a way which emphasises the importance of each individual's or individual council's view as over against the importance of the view held by the community as a whole? Does our understanding of the church lead to a fragmentary approach to the life of the church, rather than to an approach where we are all seen as wrestling with the same issues and seeking after the same vision, albeit in different ways?
2. Do we as a conciliar church with our emphasis on interpreting that conciliarity through structures and meetings diminish the possibilities of the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst? Do we enable the whole people of God to be more fully alive with the possibilities that God has to offer us in each place?

In what way does Mission Council help the whole church to keep faithful to all that God is calling the church to do and to be? This means setting priorities which focus on overarching issues and being clear about the relationship between Mission Council, General Assembly, Assembly Committees and Synods so that work is not unnecessarily duplicated.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is theoretically the main body that holds the church together and gives vision to the church. There is a question as to whether General Assembly gives a lead to the church. Many of its members are new each year. The Agenda is predetermined by the work the committees are doing, or by resolutions the synods might happen to bring forward. There is little opportunity for the Assembly itself when it meets to consider new areas. The business primarily happens in formal plenary sessions.

General Assembly is not necessarily perceived as the body which speaks for the whole church. Instead it can be seen as being remote and not having to do with the concerns of the people at the grassroots.

Does the General Assembly allow those coming to talk about the matters that are really on the hearts and minds of the whole people of God? Does General Assembly give enough time to inspire and to celebrate?

Would it be helpful to have more co-ordination between Mission Council and General Assembly when setting the Agenda of the Assembly in order to prioritise a limited number of overarching concerns of the church?

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES

Since I have been appointed to serve on each of the committees of our church, I have become more aware of the fragmented nature of the work of the committees. Each committee is given a remit by General Assembly. From time Mission Council and General Assembly pass pieces of work on to the committees. Apart from this, committees set their own agendas and get on with their work, reporting primarily to General Assembly. Does this system cut against an overall co-ordination of the life and work of the United Reformed Church? While each committee does good and effective work, (and I'm really impressed as I go round by the amount of time given by so many people) where is the question of the way in which the committees fit in with an overall vision for the future of the church addressed? Where is an assessment made as to whether these are the committees we need for the future of the church and how co-ordinated the work of the committees is with each other and with the needs of Synods, Districts and local churches?

While committees report to General Assembly, there is not the possibility in such a gathering, because of the size of the gathering, the expertise of those present and the time allowed for business, to give to a detailed scrutiny of the work of committees. (One of the issues raised at the last Assembly was that we went too quickly through the committee reports – but if we spent more time on the detail, would that give us enough time for the vision, or for resolutions?)

Should Mission Council have more of an overview of the work of committees, so that Mission Council can draw together and co-ordinate the work across the church? Should we be clearer about what we say no to as well as what we say yes to?

TASK AND WORKING GROUPS

The setting up of task and working groups in order to take forward particular pieces of work seems like an excellent idea. It enables more focussed work to be done, in a concentrated way, by a small group of knowledgeable people. Over the last year Mission Council has encountered a hiccup with this system.

- Two reports have been 'accepted as a resource' (The Grouping of Churches, and the Small Churches Task Group). It's not clear what this means, except that these reports are not to be taken to General Assembly (apart from one resolution out of The Grouping of Churches) or sent out to the churches or districts.
- One report (Use of Local Church Premises) is to be edited and published. Presumably it is then available for people who might happen to hear about it, but it wasn't thought it needed to be taken to General Assembly or sent out to churches or districts.
- Two reports (Diaconal Ministry and Accountability of Ministry) have been set to one side.
- One report, on oversight ministry, has come and gone with regularity over a period of years and we are now revisiting it again at Mission Council.

These reports represent a great deal of work by a number of people, work that appears to have a limited result in terms of take up within the church more widely than Mission Council. I think that this raises a number of questions:

- Do we give a clear enough remit to the groups?
- Do we try and do too much at once?
- Are these the topics that are central to our life?
- Are there other areas of a wider nature we should be spending more time discussing?
- Are we sufficiently able to prioritise – who does the work of prioritising?
- Does our ‘instantaneous culture’ mitigate against giving sufficient time to talk through reports over a period of time in a dialogue between the working group and Mission Council and the wider church?
- Are we sufficiently clear about the role of Mission council, in terms of the balance between the need to tackle detailed business and the need to take an overview of where the United Reformed Church is going?

In a time of decline, the temptation can be to try and focus on particular parts of the picture in some detail because these seem easier to get hold of, and to look inwards upon ourselves rather than outwards to the whole world. Yet, if the church is to be renewed, above all else we need to be seeing the big vision of who God still is for God’s world today.

How far it is the responsibility of Mission Council both to help the whole church see the big vision and to set a limited number of achievable priorities for the church as a whole? (This could mean limiting the number of task and working groups at work at any one time)

SYNODS: THE THIRTEEN OR THE ONE?

David Cornick in Reform has already raised the issue of the relationship between Synods and Mission Council. One of the liveliest parts of a recent Mission Council was the input from Synods. There is a sense of Synods developing their own agendas and life separately from the life of the church nationally. The current proposals for re-structuring Districts and Synods that are being looked at in a number of synods are one example of this. Papers are now available from the Mersey and Yorkshire Synods outlining their proposals. These papers will come to Mission Council for discussion in October 2002.

There is a dilemma about the number of ‘tiers’ in the life of the church. It can begin to seem as if each one is getting on with its own work, without reference to the other councils.

While it’s good to have a diversity of work, the dilemma comes when each tier of the church has the same expectation of the congregations and is asking congregations to respond to a variety of initiatives. I’m sure we’re all familiar with church secretaries who just shake their heads sadly when the next round of paperwork comes through the post or representatives on District Councils or Synods who feel it was far too much to try and take things back to the local church.

Mission Council is the place where representatives of Synods meet together. Could more be done to structure the agendas of Mission Council so that the meetings take on board the concerns of Synods and give a greater sense of a link between the national church and the church regionally and locally? (e.g. on resources and deployment). Do we need a stronger sense of the kind of issue it is

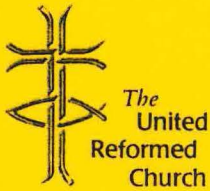
appropriate to discuss at Mission Council and the kind of issue it is appropriate to discuss at Synod, without duplicating the work or overloading the agenda?

Does it matter that there is diversity of approach around the church when it comes to structures, as long as we are all working towards the same overall goal (e.g. 'the renewal of the church for the sake of the world' or 'creating contagious Christian communities')

CONCLUSION

I have tried to raise some issues and questions that relate to the work of Mission Council in the context of the wider setting of this council in the life of our church as a whole. I bring these issues as one deeply committed to the renewal of the church for the sake of the world. I believe that renewal comes both from our increased dependence on the living God and from an ability to look at ourselves and the life of our church and to see in what specific ways God might be wanting to call us to move forward.

Elizabeth Welch
Mission Council
January 2002



MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2002

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Nominations Committee Report to Mission Council - January 2002

1. Assembly Appointments

- 1.1. The Appointment Group for the post of Director of the URC National Training Centre, Windermere, convened by the Revd Peter Brain, recommends the appointment of Mr Lawrence Moore, for a period of five years, with effect from 1 April 2002.
- 1.2. The Revd Keith Forecast is convening an Appointment Group for the SouthWestern Synod Moderator.

The following have accepted nomination by the committee

2. Conveners-Elect for Assembly Committees

- 2.1 Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee: the Revd Keith Forecast [to become Convener in 2003]
- 2.2 Pastoral Welfare sub-committee: Mr Alan Wharton [to become Convener in 2003]
- 2.3 Training Committee: the Revd John Humphreys [to become Convener in 2003]

3. URC representatives on Governing Bodies of Theological Colleges

- 3.1 Mansfield College: Ministerial and Educational Training Committee: the Revd Rachel Poolman and Professor Malcolm Johnson

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, is asked to confirm the above.

AN ETHICAL INVESTMENT POLICY FOR THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

Resolution of General Assembly, July 2001

The following resolution was passed at the General Assembly meeting in York in July 2001:

General Assembly instructs Mission Council to review and report to General Assembly in 2002 upon the ethical policies of the United Reformed Church with regard to the investments of the church, with particular reference to companies involved with the arms trade.

This report has been prepared by the Ethical Investment Advisory Group ('EIAG') appointed by Mission Council in response to the above General Assembly resolution.

Preamble

The Bible encourages us to use what is entrusted to us in constructive ways: in the Old Testament we learn that humankind was placed on the earth 'to till it', to use its resources productively (Gen. 2.15), and our Lord suggests that stewardship of another's money is to be undertaken in a positive and creative spirit (Matt. 25.14-30). So while in setting these guidelines we have been clear which activities we feel morally obliged to avoid, we have wanted to see that very avoidance as creating more potential for the church's resources to be used in ways that promote 'life in all its fulness'.

The legal obligations of trustees

The legal obligations of trustees are best described in the high court judgement in the often-quoted case of the Bishop of Oxford vs the Church Commissioners.

This judgement stated that charity trustees' primary duty is to choose investments 'solely on the basis of established investment criteria', aimed at obtaining 'the maximum return consistent with commercial prudence'. It repeats this principle in negative terms by stating that 'trustees must not use property held for investment purposes as a means for making moral statements at the expense of the charity.'

There is a major exception to this general rule. 'If trustees are satisfied that investing in a company engaged in a particular type of business would conflict with the very objects the charity is seeking to achieve, they should not so invest.' This applies 'even if [not investing] would be likely to result in significant financial detriment.' The most quoted example of this is cancer research charities not investing in tobacco companies.

But, the judgement makes it clear that to qualify for the 'in conflict with the objects of the charity' exception the conflict must be very clear and not a matter of individual opinion. It states that exceptions of this sort will be extremely rare. It refers specifically to armaments where individual opinions will differ within the Church. Armaments are therefore excluded from this exception.

However, the judgement goes on to state that trustees 'may accommodate the views of those who consider that on moral grounds an investment would conflict with the objects of the charity, so long as they are satisfied that course would not involve a risk of significant financial detriment'. This enables the trustees to reflect the fundamental values of the organisation. It is this approach that guides our existing ethical investment policy.

Proposed changes to the URC ethical investment guidelines

The current URC ethical investment guidelines, reported to General Assembly in 1995, state that we should avoid investing in companies whose main business (defined as approximately 30% of turnover) is the manufacture of alcoholic drinks, tobacco products or armaments, or the provision of gambling facilities. In addition, following a decision of General Assembly in 1992, the trustees are not currently investing in Nestlé.

The EIAG has reviewed the above guidelines and proposes that they should be amended by the addition of a total exclusion of investment in (a) those companies whose business is the manufacture or supply of weapons of destruction and (b) any company that promotes pornography.

The EIAG also proposes that the explicit measure of 30% to define 'main business' should be replaced by a statement authorising the EIAG to determine what constitutes 'significant part of a company's business' in particular cases. The EIAG anticipates that, whilst in normal circumstances it would continue to use approximately 30% as the primary determinant, the omission of a specific percentage would allow it to exercise judgement, for example in the case of very large international groups clearly involved in specific activities which nevertheless do not amount to 30% of total group turnover.

The United Reformed Church does not have sufficient resources to undertake continuous research and monitoring. In exercising judgement the EIAG would therefore use its ecumenical links, in particular its membership of the Church Investors Group.

The proposed revised policy is as follows:

It is the policy of the United Reformed Church to recommend that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the church should avoid any investment in

- **those companies whose business is the manufacture or supply of weapons of destruction;**
- **those companies whose business is the promotion of pornography;**
- **those companies a significant part of whose business is in the supply of alcoholic drinks, tobacco products or military equipment (other than weapons of destruction), or the provision of gambling facilities.**

The definition of these activities, or of what constitutes a significant part of a company's business, will require judgement. The Mission Council's Ethical Investment Advisory Group will offer advice on ethical issues from time to time.

The above policy can only be advisory; the responsibility for specific investment decisions remains with each body of trustees.

Commitment for Life and the Fourth Mark of Mission: our position explained.

Commitment for Life, as a mission priority of the United Reformed Church, offers our churches one way to become involved in working for a fairer world. As our Church takes up the Five Marks of Mission as a framework for its mission, so Commitment for Life helps address particularly the Fourth mark: **to seek to transform unjust structures in society.**

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has exalted the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty." Luke 1: 25-53

"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18: 14b

In Jesus, the love of God is made concrete, in terms of strengthening the weak, embracing the outcast, and defeating poverty. Jesus came to lift up the humble and fill the hungry with good things. His vision is worked out with unexpected people at unexpected times and in unexpected places. Let us ask ourselves whether we are at that moment in history, what the Bible calls a *kaïros*, when we face God-given opportunities for change, when collective action will make our dreams of a fairer and safer world a real possibility.

Working with our overseas partners and with Christian Aid and the World Development Movement, we want to share stories and experiences, make connections and begin to understand and challenge the forces that are at work behind the term "globalisation". Commitment for Life continues to campaign for debt relief, supporting the lead given by the Jubilee Debt Campaign and Jubilee Plus, and also campaigns for fair rules on trade, supporting the Trade Justice Movement with WDM and Christian Aid's Trade for Life campaign. We continue to promote fair trade. Our objective is to see poverty defeated, supporting the internationally agreed target of halving global poverty by 2015. We also want to understand the connections between poverty in the UK and poverty overseas.

The campaign for debt relief – Jubilee Debt Campaign and Jubilee Plus

The United Reformed Church was a member of the Jubilee 2000 coalition from the outset and gave it much support in time and money both locally and nationally. It also supported Drop the Debt, which focused on achieving a New Deal on Debt at the G8 Summit in Genoa in July 2001. We continue to support the Jubilee Debt Campaign, which co-ordinates UK-based action around debt, and have a seat on its board. We also support Jubilee Plus, which takes forward the international campaign and provides analysis and data to support the struggle for a fairer international finance system and greater accountability on the part of the international financial institutions.

The wider context and international poverty reduction targets

Increasingly the issue of debt cancellation is being seen within the wider context of achieving the 2015 poverty reduction targets, raising levels of bi-lateral aid, and justice in implementing trade rules so that development and poverty eradication objectives can be realised.

The 2015 Poverty eradication targets are:

- A reduction by one half in the proportion of people living in poverty (i.e. on less than \$1 a day) by 2015
- Universal primary education in all countries by 2015
- A reduction by two-thirds in the infant mortality rates for infants and children under 5 and a reduction by three-fourths in maternal mortality – all by 2015
- Other targets include: progress towards gender equality; access to reproductive health services and the implementation of national strategies for sustainable development in all countries by 2005.

These aims are reflected in the 6-point plan for eliminating child poverty drawn up by the coalition of NGOs and faith groups working with the Chancellor and Secretary of State for International Development to meet the 2015 target. The URC is an active member of this coalition. These aims also tie in with the Department for International Development's (DfID) objectives of "working to manage globalisation in the interests of poor people" and "creating faster progress towards the International Development targets."

Trade for Life and the Trade Justice Movement

Both Christian Aid and WDM are members of the Trade Justice Movement, a group of organisations concerned with the negative impact of international trade rules on the poorest people, the environment and on democracy. There is growing evidence to suggest that the existing rules, drawn up by the WTO, have already caused:

- the deepening of poverty and inequalities
- increasingly secure access and control over markets in developing countries by multinational corporations
- prevention of developing countries from promoting policies in their own development interest.

The Trade Justice Movement is calling for:

- An independent review of current trade rules
- A new approach to trade that focuses on poverty
- New rules to protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems
- Genuinely democratic trade negotiations . . . rich and poor countries to have an equal say.

What about Fair Trade?

The United Reformed Church has been a supporter of the Fair Trade Foundation for several years and actively promotes the use of fairly-traded produce – such as Traidcraft goods. This remains an important aspect of the trade campaign and needs our on-going support, while at the same time we tackle the wider trading relationships and work to make all trade work for the poor by asking who makes the rules and how fair is the system.

Commitment for Life...

- asks all churches to ensure that only fairly traded tea and coffee are used in their local church as a mark of concern for the poor.
- suggests that churches promote Traidcraft as one of the Fair Trade organisations.
- commends **Fairtrade Fortnight** 4-17 March 2002, with its special posters and suggested actions, as a key opportunity to promote fair trade.

What about poverty in the UK?

It is increasingly apparent that global trends affect communities in the North as well as in the South and that communities in both hemispheres can learn from each other. Together we can help each other develop more effective ways of responding at home and abroad to the impact of globalisation. Commitment for Life is concerned to raise awareness around issues affecting our communities in this country and the growing problem of poverty and exclusion in the UK.

Since the United Reformed Church nationally contributes to Church Action on Poverty (CAP) Commitment for Life does not support it financially; we will, however, seek to raise awareness about issues of concern to CAP, and increase our practical solidarity with people experiencing poverty in this country.