

MISSION COUNCIL JANUARY 26 2008

MINUTES

Mission Council met at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire on 27th January 2008. Present with the Moderator were 63 voting members, 12 staff and 5 visitors in attendance.

Session One

Mission Council was convened by the Moderator, the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard, who invited the Chaplain, the Revd Lucy Brierley, to lead opening worship. Worship included the induction of the Revd Dale Rominger as Secretary for World Church Relations.

Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone present and offered a special welcome to those attending for the first time or in a new capacity. Guests from CWM partner churches were welcomed:

Dr Jyotsna Patro	Church of North India
Revd Cheryl Dibeela	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
Mr Rudolph Brown	United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands
Mr Lee Chong Kai	Presbyterian Church of Singapore
Revd Utia Manavaikai	Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Members - Revds Peter Ball, Adrian Bulley, Nigel Uden, David Varcoe, Elizabeth Welch, Alan Wickens, Mr Nigel McDonald, Miss Emma Pugh, Mrs Margaret Telfer, Mr James Wickens, Mr Patrick Smyth.

Staff - Ms Suzanne Adofo, Mrs Karen Bulley, Mr Andrew Grimwade, the Revd Graham Jones, Ms Michelle Marcano, Mr Lawrence Moore, Mr Steve Summers.

08/01 Agenda

The Deputy General Secretary tabled papers A(a); D1; and a leaflet about the M&M Fund.

08/02 Minutes

The Minutes of the October Meeting were adopted as a true record.

08/03 Matters Arising (Paper A1)

i) The Clerk presented paper A1. Mission Council addressed the recommendation that a co-Moderators should be elected at the 2008 Assembly to take up responsibility at Assembly in 2010. This was agreed, but concern was expressed about the apparent failure to elect a co-Moderator to serve from 2008 to 2010.

Ms Morag McLintock moved that ***Mission Council requests synods to nominate one Elder for the role of co-Moderator to serve in partnership with the Revd John Marsh as co-Moderator from General Assembly 2008 to General Assembly 2010.***

This was seconded by the Revd Terry Oakley.

After discussion the proposal was carried by 29 votes to 22.

Mr John Ellis moved that **Action 2** be not put. Mission Council agreed.

Any outstanding issues related to the paper would be brought to March Mission Council.

ii) Law and Polity Group

The Deputy General Secretary reported on the formation of a Law and Polity Group and proposed the following membership of the group: The Revd Prof. David Thompson (Convener); Mr David Eldridge; Ms Morag McLintock; the Revd John Durell, and Mr Donald Swift, the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. Mission Council agreed.

iii) Human Sexuality Task Group (Paper A2)

The Deputy General Secretary and the Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the proposed Terms of Reference for the Group. This was agreed, subject to the modification of section C.5 to read 'Generally, to act as a reference point and to give leadership over issues to do with human sexuality in consultation with the Sexual Ethics Advisory Group'. The Deputy General Secretary also reassured Mission Council that gender balance would be maintained. It was hoped that a list of nominations for the group could be brought to the March Mission Council.

iv) Life Together and Relating Together (Papers A3 and A4)

The Deputy General Secretary outlined the background to the papers and noted that they would be circulated via synods.

08/04 Appointment of General Secretary (Paper A5)

The Clerk presented the report of a committee convened to consider the appointment of a General Secretary. The Clerk requested that Mission Council ratify the committee's acceptance of the General Secretary's resignation. Mission Council agreed.

A number of expressions of interest and nominations had been received. It was intended to interview in February and bring a nomination to Mission Council in March.

08/05 Our Life Together (Paper A5)

The Revd Richard Mortimer presented the paper J1. Mission Council divided into groups to discuss the paper.

08/06 CWM - Community of Women and Men in Mission

The Leader of the Group, Dr Jyotsna Patro, brought the greetings of the CWMM group. She outlined the group's background and ethos, and noted that the group had been invited to spend time with the URC, including this meeting of Mission Council. She described the group's impressions of the United Reformed Church and its place in British society.

Mission Council adjourned for lunch

08/07 Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller (Convener of the Racial Justice and Multi-Cultural Ministries Committee) offered a reflection on Shabbath, which asked why people respond to difference with fear or violence. We should honour the Creator by positively valuing diversity.

08/08 Vision4Life

The General Secretary reported on the progress of the Vision4Life process. The Revd Kirsty Thorpe described the origins of Vision4Life, and outlined the format and content of the material, with details of how it may be obtained. She noted that the material was completely flexible and could be used in different ways. The introductory materials would be sent to local churches, with extra copies available at Spring synod meetings.

08/09 Youth and Children's Work (Paper B)

The Revd Neil Thorogood presented the Summary Report of the Review of the Youth and Children's Work Training and Development Programme. He noted that this was a summary of a much bigger report which was being sent to synods for consultation. Following that, a paper would be presented to March Mission Council, in anticipation of being reported to General Assembly.

08/10 Treasurer's Report

i) Legacies (Paper C) : The Honorary Treasurer, Mr John Ellis, spoke about a proposed policy on the treatment of General Legacies. He proposed changing the use of legacies bequeathed for URC general purposes by instituting a legacies fund. Such a proposal would help produce a much cleaner budgeting process. It would also encourage committees to share visions for future special projects which could be funded from a legacies fund. It would also provide assurance that people's bequests would be used for priority projects.

Mr Ellis moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council agrees to the creation of a designated Legacy Fund.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Pension Fund (Paper C1): Mr Ellis presented the paper and moved the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, amends paragraphs 6.4 and 6.4.4 of the Rules of the United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund so that they read as follows:

6.4

"The Pension Trustee may, in the manner which it thinks fit and as if it were absolutely and beneficially entitled, use the whole or any part of the Fund to invest in, acquire, dispose of, lend or otherwise deal in or undertake to deal in any property, assets, rights, options, assurances, contracts or interests (whether or not such transactions involve liability, produce income or are authorised by law as investments for trust assets). Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions trust money may be invested or applied as follows:"

6.4.4

"In the purchase of assets of a non-income producing nature and any transaction calculated in the opinion of the Pension Trustee to offset or reduce any risk of loss to the Fund, or to facilitate efficient portfolio management (including the reduction of cost or the generation of additional capital or income with an acceptable level of risk), and so that the Pension

Trustee may deal in foreign currencies (either at the official rate of exchange or any other rates), contracts for differences and other derivatives (exchange traded and non-exchange traded) for present or future settlement.”

The Resolution was carried.

Paper C2

Mr Ellis presented the paper and moved the Resolution:

Noting that (a), that the Convener of the Pensions Executive is appointed by General Assembly and has always been a professional actuary, (b), the Treasurer is an *ex officio* member of the Executive, and (c), the Executive also seeks suitable representatives of the Church’s two main pension schemes to serve, Mission Council resolves that the Pensions Executive should include within its membership three people appointed by General Assembly, one of whom should be appointed as the Convener.

The Resolution was carried.

iii) Ministry and Mission Fund

Mr Ellis encouraged members of Mission Council to promote distribution and use of the newly-produced M&M leaflet.

08/11 Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper A)

i) The Deputy General Secretary noted that an *ad hoc* group was required for the March Mission Council, so that financial material could be scrutinised on behalf of Mission Council.

ii) A group was needed to examine the various expectations of Mission Council in the light of Catch the Vision, for example, ecumenical representation on Mission Council.

Nominations were sought for both groups.

iii) Declaration of a Safe Church

Papers E2 and E3 from the October Mission Council were being examined by the legal adviser and the Section O Advisory Group.

iv) Sexual Ethics Advisory Group

Synods had been invited to appoint advisors to oversee procedures in response to alleged incidents of sexual harassment and abuse against adults. A similar request had been made for pastorally sensitive people to be available to serve on a Pastoral Response Team. Nominations were being sought for Assembly-appointed advisors.

v) Ministerial Incapacity Procedure Advisory Group

The Section O Advisory Group had proposed that a separate advisory group to administer the MIP be appointed. Mission Council agreed.

vi) The United Reformed Church Trust (Paper A(a))

The Clerk presented the paper and moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting with the authority of General Assembly, appoints the Chairperson of the URC Trust to be a member of General Assembly and of Mission Council

and noted that a further resolution would be moved at Assembly 2008, having the effect of adding the Chairperson of the URC Trust to the list of *ex officio* members of General Assembly.

The Resolution was carried.

vii) Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Mission Council ratified the appointment of Mr Peter West (LBAC Officer for the Eastern Synod) as Secretary of the new Appeals Commission.

08/12 Nominations Committee (Papers D and D2)

i) The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the report, and moved adoption of the Resolution: that the following should serve on the Mission Committee:

The Revds Ed Cox (Convener), Elizabeth Caswell (Co-convener), the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Assembly Moderator, Moderator-elect and past Moderator (ex-officio), an ecumenical representative nominated by CTBI, Representatives from Synods to consist of

Mrs Chris Eddowes, the Revds Mike Walsh and Andrew Willett, Mrs Anne Parker, the Revds Clare Downing, Louise Franklin, Peter Ball and Tracey Lewis, Mr Peter Pay and Mr David Jonathan, the Revds Pauline Sparks, Simon Walkling and Mary Buchanan. Staff members in attendance would include the Secretaries for Mission, Ecumenical Relations and Faith and Order, Church and Society, Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, World Church Relations, and the Commitment for Life Programme Coordinator.

[Full details of the Faith and Order Reference Group were not included in the circulated papers. At the request of the Nominations Committee convener they are printed below:

Convener	The Revd Dr Robert Pope	2012
	The Revd Dr Susan Durber	2012
	The Revd Dr Sarah Hall	2014
	The Revd Fleur Houston	2012
	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	2014
	The Revd Neil Messer	2014
	The Revd Dr John Bradbury	2012]

Mission Council agrees to the composition of the Mission Committee and the Faith and Order Reference Group as set out in the Nominations Committee Report, with effect from 1st January 2008.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Reappointment of synod moderators (Paper D2)

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Nigel Uden as Moderator of the Southern Synod for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Peter Noble as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried.

Mr Hanson moved the Resolution

Mission Council agrees to increase the number of members on the Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators to twenty-four, and to limit their service to six years.

The Resolution was carried.

iii) Think Tank (Paper D1)

The General Secretary reflected on the Draft Remit and Composition of the proposed 'think-tank' on Mission and Spirituality.

Dr Cornick noted that meeting times and their duration should be flexible; feedback might be channelled through Mission Council rather than MCAG; and the composition and method of appointment might include the immediate past Moderator(s)

Noting the General Secretary's comments, Mission Council adopted Paper D1.

08/13 Ministries Committee

i) The Revd Peter Poulter presented paper E and moved the Resolution

Mission Council resolves to establish a Working Party on Housing Provision for Ministers and CRCWs with the following membership: Convener, Secretary and one minister in stipendiary service appointed by Mission Council plus two members nominated by both the Finance and Ministries Committees, and one nomination each from Retired Ministers Housing Sub-committee and PLATO. The Working Party will have power to co-opt further members as appropriate.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Review of Ministerial Development

The Revd Terry Oakley outlined proposals for future patterns of Ministerial Appraisal. A pilot process would be trialled, and firm proposals would be brought in 2009.

08/14 Proposed inter-synod gathering

Mr Oakley outlined plans for a URC-wide event to take place in the years between General Assemblies. It would be possible to plan and organise such an event at the University of Loughborough in 2009. The moderators or synod clerks of West

Midlands, East Midlands, Eastern or Thames North synods could be contacted for further details. It was emphasised that such events would not be a charge on General Assembly funds, but would be organised and financially underwritten by the participating synods.

08/15 Setting the Compass

The General Secretary made a PowerPoint presentation called '*Setting the Compass - towards a long range plan for the central resources of the church 2010-2015*'. The presentation, which resulted from initial conversations between the General Secretary and the Treasurer, offered the following assertions and indicators:

- local congregations are the principal expression of our life, in community and dispersed;
- healthy churches share certain factors; small groups, clarity of purpose etc
- current decline equals about 1.5 members per church per year;
- at the current rate there will be 59,000 members in 2015; if we set the goal of increasing by 1%, that would make 78,000 members on 2015;
- the church can decide on levels and types of ministry and training;
- the church can give choice to ministers about manses and housing;
- its was possible to overhaul of M&M and stewardship;
- what do we want from central staffing?;
- explore options for ecumenical co-operation in administration;
- volunteers were needed with experience of scenario planning;

In response, members of Mission Council welcomed the presentation as offering serious, clear strategic thinking; it was suggested that synods might be similarly engaged; there was a plea for 'joined-up' thinking, and a request that theology, spirituality and prayer ought to undergird and inform strategic thinking about the future.

The General Secretary thanked members of Mission Council for their comments and said that he and the Treasurer would develop the ideas in the presentation.

08/16 Thanks

The Moderator thanked the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre for their hospitality to Mission Council during the past ten years.

He also greeted Arnold Harrison, who was attending his last Mission Council before retirement as Moderator of the Yorkshire synod, and paid tribute to his ministry within the United Reformed Church.

The Moderator requested prayer for those who would be involved in the appointment of a General Secretary.

The Chaplain conducted closing worship.

ELECTING THE MODERATOR

I have been asked to give a ruling on the apparent conflict between the decisions of the 2007 General Assembly concerning the election of Moderators and the decision of the Mission Council in January 2008, on receiving a report on implementation of these decisions, to call for the election of an Elder to serve as Co-moderator from the Assembly of 2008 as well as electing Co-moderators to serve from 2010.

The debate at Mission Council was carried out on the assumption that the General Assembly had provided for two Moderators from 2008 and the recommendations from the group on implementation had over-ridden this decision. Mission Council therefore regarded itself as re-asserting the will of Assembly. Unfortunately, no-one stopped to review the text of the General Assembly decisions and I regret that I did not suspend the debate until this had been clarified.

The resolutions of the 2007 General Assembly to be taken into account are the following:

Resolution 5

General Assembly resolves that as from 2008 it shall elect two Moderators at its biennial meeting, one a minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker, and one an Elder, to serve together for the following two years.

Resolution 5a

General Assembly asks Mission Council to review the whole process for the nomination and election of Moderators of General Assembly.

Resolution 25 refers to the election of Moderators of the General Assembly. Para 3.1. says '..... The Moderators shall serve jointly for two years commencing at the biennial Assembly following the Meeting at which the report of the election is received.'

Resolution 5 would be implemented by an election of two Moderators in 2008 to serve from 2010. The group also recommended, in relation to Resolution 25 that the two Moderators serve simultaneously and that the rules for finding candidates in the absence of nominations be revised, drawing in the Nominations Committee if necessary. Mission Council accepted the first of these proposals and will have opportunity to revisit the second and others in March.

The election of an elder to serve from 2008 at the 2008 Assembly is in contravention of Resolution 25. Anyone elected at the 2008 Assembly serves from the next biennial Assembly, i.e. 2010, the biennial Assembly following the Meeting at which the report of the election is received. Any elder serving as Co-moderator from 2008, if that is indeed a biennial Assembly, should have been elected in 2007. Unfortunately, this detail was overlooked in processing the many changes to our procedures.

Mission Council acted in good faith in its interpretation of Resolution 5 but should also have considered Resolution 25 before revising the recommendations before it. The matter would have been clearer if the recommendations had been headed with the Assembly resolutions which gave the group its mandate.

I conclude, with some reluctance, that the Mission Council decision to seek the election of an Elder to serve as Moderator from 2008 was out of order and that the matter will need to be reconsidered at the March meeting of Mission Council. In the meantime the General Secretary should remind synods of the procedures for nominations to come to the 2008 General Assembly with a view to electing Moderators to serve from 2010.

Stephen Orchard
1 February 2008

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This was seconded by the Revd Terry Oakley.

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Any outstanding issues related to the paper would be brought to March Mission Council.

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The Deputy General Secretary reported on the formation of a Law and Polity Group and proposed the following membership of the group: The Revd Prof. David Thompson (Convener); Mr David Eldridge; Ms Morag McLintock; the Revd John Durell, and Mr Donald Swift, the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. Mission Council agreed.

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08/09 **Youth and Children's Work (Paper B)**

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08/10 **Treasurer's Report**

i) Legacies (Paper C) : The Honorary Treasurer, Mr John Ellis, spoke about a proposed policy on the treatment of General Legacies. He proposed changing the use of legacies bequeathed for URC general purposes by instituting a legacies fund. Such a proposal would help produce a much cleaner budgeting process. It would also encourage committees to share visions for future special projects which could be funded from a legacies fund. It would also provide assurance that people's bequests would be used for priority projects.

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The Resolution was carried.

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Trustee may deal in foreign currencies (either at the official rate of exchange or any other rates), contracts for differences and other derivatives (exchange traded and non-exchange traded) for present or future settlement.”

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Paper C2

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Nominations were sought for both groups.

iii) Declaration of a Safe Church

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The Section O Advisory Group had proposed that a separate advisory group to administer the MIP be appointed. Mission Council agreed.

vi) The United Reformed Church Trust (Paper A(a))

The Clerk presented the paper and moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting with the authority of General Assembly, appoints the Chairperson of the URC Trust to be a member of General Assembly and of Mission Council

and noted that a further resolution would be moved at Assembly 2008, having the effect of adding the Chairperson of the URC Trust to the list of *ex officio* members of General Assembly.

The Resolution was carried.

vii) Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Mission Council ratified the appointment of Mr Peter West (LBAC Officer for the Eastern Synod) as Secretary of the new Appeals Commission.

08/12 Nominations Committee (Papers D and D2)

i) The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the report, and moved adoption of the Resolution: that the following should serve on the Mission Committee:

The Revds Ed Cox (Convener), Elizabeth Caswell (Co-convener), the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Assembly Moderator, Moderator-elect and past Moderator (ex-officio), an ecumenical representative nominated by CTBI, Representatives from Synods to consist of

Mrs Chris Eddowes, the Revds Mike Walsh and Andrew Willett, Mrs Anne Parker, the Revds Clare Downing, Louise Franklin, Peter Ball and Tracey Lewis, Mr Peter Pay and Mr David Jonathan, the Revds Pauline Sparks, Simon Walkling and Mary Buchanan. Staff members in attendance would include the Secretaries for Mission, Ecumenical Relations and Faith and Order, Church and Society, Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, World Church Relations, and the Commitment for Life Programme Coordinator.

[Full details of the Faith and Order Reference Group were not included in the circulated papers. At the request of the Nominations Committee convener they are printed below:

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	The Revd Dr Susan Durber	2012
	The Revd Dr Sarah Hall	2014
	The Revd Fleur Houston	2012
	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	2014
	The Revd Dr Neil Messer	2014
	The Revd Dr John Bradbury	2012

Mission Council agrees to the composition of the Mission Committee and the Faith and Order Reference Group as set out in the Nominations Committee Report, with effect from 1st January 2008.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Reappointment of synod moderators (Paper D2)

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Nigel Uden as Moderator of the Southern Synod for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Peter Noble as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried.

Mr Hanson moved the Resolution

Mission Council agrees to increase the number of members on the Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators to twenty-four, and to limit their service to six years.

The Resolution was carried.

iii) Think Tank (Paper D1)

The General Secretary reflected on the Draft Remit and Composition of the proposed 'think-tank' on Mission and Spirituality.

Dr Cornick noted that meeting times and their duration should be flexible; feedback might be channelled through Mission Council rather than MCAG; and the composition and method of appointment might include the immediate past Moderator(s)

Noting the General Secretary's comments, Mission Council adopted Paper D1.

08/13 Ministries Committee

i) The Revd Peter Poulter presented paper E and moved the Resolution

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- explore options for ecumenical co-operation in administration;
- volunteers were needed with experience of scenario planning;

In response, members of Mission Council welcomed the presentation as offering serious, clear strategic thinking; it was suggested that synods might be similarly engaged; there was a plea for 'joined-up' thinking, and a request that theology, spirituality and prayer ought to undergird and inform strategic thinking about the future.

The General Secretary thanked members of Mission Council for their comments and said that he and the Treasurer would develop the ideas in the presentation.

08/16 Thanks

The Moderator thanked the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre for their hospitality to Mission Council during the past ten years.

He also greeted Arnold Harrison, who was attending his last Mission Council before retirement as Moderator of the Yorkshire synod, and paid tribute to his ministry within the United Reformed Church.

The Moderator requested prayer for those who would be involved in the appointment of a General Secretary.

The Chaplain conducted closing worship.

MISSION COUNCIL JANUARY 26 2008

MINUTES

Mission Council met at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire on 27th January 2008. Present with the Moderator were 63 voting members, 12 staff and 5 visitors in attendance.

Session One

Mission Council was convened by the Moderator, the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard, who invited the Chaplain, the Revd Lucy Brierley, to lead opening worship. Worship included the induction of the Revd Dale Rominger as Secretary for World Church Relations.

Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone present and offered a special welcome to those attending for the first time or in a new capacity. Guests from CWM partner churches were welcomed:

Dr Jyotsna Patro	Church of North India
Revd Cheryl Dibeela	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
Mr Rudolph Brown	United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands
Mr Lee Chong Kai	Presbyterian Church of Singapore
Revd Utia Manavaikai	Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Members - Revds Peter Ball, Adrian Bulley, Nigel Uden, David Varcoe, Elizabeth Welch, Alan Wickens, Mr Nigel McDonald, Miss Emma Pugh, Mrs Margaret Telfer, Mr James Wickens, Mr Patrick Smyth.

Staff - Ms Suzanne Adofo, Mrs Karen Bulley, Mr Andrew Grimwade, the Revd Graham Jones, Ms Michelle Marcano, Mr Lawrence Moore, Mr Steve Summers.

08/01 Agenda

The Deputy General Secretary tabled papers A(a); D1; and a leaflet about the M&M Fund.

08/02 Minutes

The Minutes of the October Meeting were adopted as a true record.

08/03 Matters Arising (Paper A1)

i) The Clerk presented paper A1. Mission Council addressed the recommendation that a co-Moderators should be elected at the 2008 Assembly to take up responsibility at Assembly in 2010. This was agreed, but concern was expressed about the apparent failure to elect a co-Moderator to serve from 2008 to 2010.

Ms Morag McLintock moved that ***Mission Council requests synods to nominate one Elder for the role of co-Moderator to serve in partnership with the Revd John Marsh as co-Moderator from General Assembly 2008 to General Assembly 2010.***

This was seconded by the Revd Terry Oakley.

After discussion the proposal was carried by 29 votes to 22.

Mr John Ellis moved that **Action 2** be not put. Mission Council agreed.

Any outstanding issues related to the paper would be brought to March Mission Council.

ii) Law and Polity Group

The Deputy General Secretary reported on the formation of a Law and Polity Group and proposed the following membership of the group: The Revd Prof. David Thompson (Convener); Mr David Eldridge; Ms Morag McLintock; the Revd John Durell, and Mr Donald Swift, the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. Mission Council agreed.

iii) Human Sexuality Task Group (Paper A2)

The Deputy General Secretary and the Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the proposed Terms of Reference for the Group. This was agreed, subject to the modification of section C.5 to read 'Generally, to act as a reference point and to give leadership over issues to do with human sexuality in consultation with the Sexual Ethics Advisory Group'. The Deputy General Secretary also reassured Mission Council that gender balance would be maintained. It was hoped that a list of nominations for the group could be brought to the March Mission Council.

iv) Life Together and Relating Together (Papers A3 and A4)

The Deputy General Secretary outlined the background to the papers and noted that they would be circulated via synods.

08/04 Appointment of General Secretary (Paper A5)

The Clerk presented the report of a committee convened to consider the appointment of a General Secretary. The Clerk requested that Mission Council ratify the committee's acceptance of the General Secretary's resignation. Mission Council agreed.

A number of expressions of interest and nominations had been received. It was intended to interview in February and bring a nomination to Mission Council in March.

08/05 Our Life Together (Paper A5)

The Revd Richard Mortimer presented the paper J1. Mission Council divided into groups to discuss the paper.

08/06 CWM - Community of Women and Men in Mission

The Leader of the Group, Dr Jyotsna Patro, brought the greetings of the CWMM group. She outlined the group's background and ethos, and noted that the group had been invited to spend time with the URC, including this meeting of Mission Council. She described the group's impressions of the United Reformed Church and its place in British society.

Mission Council adjourned for lunch

08/07 Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller (Convener of the Racial Justice and Multi-Cultural Ministries Committee) offered a reflection on Shabbath, which asked why people respond to difference with fear or violence. We should honour the Creator by positively valuing diversity.

08/08 Vision4Life

The General Secretary reported on the progress of the Vision4Life process. The Revd Kirsty Thorpe described the origins of Vision4Life, and outlined the format and content of the material, with details of how it may be obtained. She noted that the material was completely flexible and could be used in different ways. The introductory materials would be sent to local churches, with extra copies available at Spring synod meetings.

08/09 Youth and Children's Work (Paper B)

The Revd Neil Thorogood presented the Summary Report of the Review of the Youth and Children's Work Training and Development Programme. He noted that this was a summary of a much bigger report which was being sent to synods for consultation. Following that, a paper would be presented to March Mission Council, in anticipation of being reported to General Assembly.

08/10 Treasurer's Report

i) Legacies (Paper C): The Honorary Treasurer, Mr John Ellis, spoke about a proposed policy on the treatment of General Legacies. He proposed changing the use of legacies bequeathed for URC general purposes by instituting a legacies fund. Such a proposal would help produce a much cleaner budgeting process. It would also encourage committees to share visions for future special projects which could be funded from a legacies fund. It would also provide assurance that people's bequests would be used for priority projects.

Mr Ellis moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council agrees to the creation of a designated Legacy Fund.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Pension Fund (Paper C1): Mr Ellis presented the paper and moved the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, amends paragraphs 6.4 and 6.4.4 of the Rules of the United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund so that they read as follows:

6.4

"The Pension Trustee may, in the manner which it thinks fit and as if it were absolutely and beneficially entitled, use the whole or any part of the Fund to invest in, acquire, dispose of, lend or otherwise deal in or undertake to deal in any property, assets, rights, options, assurances, contracts or interests (whether or not such transactions involve liability, produce income or are authorised by law as investments for trust assets). Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions trust money may be invested or applied as follows:"

6.4.4

"In the purchase of assets of a non-income producing nature and any transaction calculated in the opinion of the Pension Trustee to offset or reduce any risk of loss to the Fund, or to facilitate efficient portfolio management (including the reduction of cost or the generation of additional capital or income with an acceptable level of risk), and so that the Pension

Trustee may deal in foreign currencies (either at the official rate of exchange or any other rates), contracts for differences and other derivatives (exchange traded and non-exchange traded) for present or future settlement.”

The Resolution was carried.

Paper C2

Mr Ellis presented the paper and moved the Resolution:

Noting that (a), that the Convener of the Pensions Executive is appointed by General Assembly and has always been a professional actuary, (b), the Treasurer is an *ex officio* member of the Executive, and (c), the Executive also seeks suitable representatives of the Church’s two main pension schemes to serve, Mission Council resolves that the Pensions Executive should include within its membership three people appointed by General Assembly, one of whom should be appointed as the Convener.

The Resolution was carried.

iii) Ministry and Mission Fund

Mr Ellis encouraged members of Mission Council to promote distribution and use of the newly-produced M&M leaflet.

08/11 Mission Council Advisory Group (Paper A)

i) The Deputy General Secretary noted that an *ad hoc* group was required for the March Mission Council, so that financial material could be scrutinised on behalf of Mission Council.

ii) A group was needed to examine the various expectations of Mission Council in the light of Catch the Vision, for example, ecumenical representation on Mission Council.

Nominations were sought for both groups.

iii) Declaration of a Safe Church

Papers E2 and E3 from the October Mission Council were being examined by the legal adviser and the Section O Advisory Group.

iv) Sexual Ethics Advisory Group

Synods had been invited to appoint advisors to oversee procedures in response to alleged incidents of sexual harassment and abuse against adults. A similar request had been made for pastorally sensitive people to be available to serve on a Pastoral Response Team. Nominations were being sought for Assembly-appointed advisors.

v) Ministerial Incapacity Procedure Advisory Group

The Section O Advisory Group had proposed that a separate advisory group to administer the MIP be appointed. Mission Council agreed.

vi) The United Reformed Church Trust (Paper A(a))

The Clerk presented the paper and moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting with the authority of General Assembly, appoints the Chairperson of the URC Trust to be a member of General Assembly and of Mission Council

and noted that a further resolution would be moved at Assembly 2008, having the effect of adding the Chairperson of the URC Trust to the list of *ex officio* members of General Assembly.

The Resolution was carried.

vii) Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Mission Council ratified the appointment of Mr Peter West (LBAC Officer for the Eastern Synod) as Secretary of the new Appeals Commission.

08/12 Nominations Committee (Papers D and D2)

i) The Revd Malcolm Hanson presented the report, and moved adoption of the Resolution: that the following should serve on the Mission Committee:

The Revds Ed Cox (Convener), Elizabeth Caswell (Co-convener), the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the Assembly Moderator, Moderator-elect and past Moderator (ex-officio), an ecumenical representative nominated by CTBI, Representatives from Synods to consist of Mrs Chris Eddowes, the Revds Mike Walsh and Andrew Willett, Mrs Anne Parker, the Revds Clare Downing, Louise Franklin, Peter Ball and Tracey Lewis, Mr Peter Pay and Mr David Jonathan, the Revds Pauline Sparks, Simon Walkling and Mary Buchanan. Staff members in attendance would include the Secretaries for Mission, Ecumenical Relations and Faith and Order, Church and Society, Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, World Church Relations, and the Commitment for Life Programme Coordinator.

[Full details of the Faith and Order Reference Group were not included in the circulated papers. At the request of the Nominations Committee convener they are printed below:

Convener	The Revd Dr Robert Pope	2012
	The Revd Dr Susan Durber	2012
	The Revd Dr Sarah Hall	2014
	The Revd Fleur Houston	2012
	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	2014
	The Revd Neil Messer	2014
	The Revd Dr John Bradbury	2012]

Mission Council agrees to the composition of the Mission Committee and the Faith and Order Reference Group as set out in the Nominations Committee Report, with effect from 1st January 2008.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Reappointment of synod moderators (Paper D2)

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Nigel Uden as Moderator of the Southern Synod for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried

Mr Hanson moved adoption of the Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Peter Noble as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

The Resolution was carried.

Mr Hanson moved the Resolution

Mission Council agrees to increase the number of members on the Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators to twenty-four, and to limit their service to six years.

The Resolution was carried.

iii) Think Tank (Paper D1)

The General Secretary reflected on the Draft Remit and Composition of the proposed 'think-tank' on Mission and Spirituality.

Dr Cornick noted that meeting times and their duration should be flexible; feedback might be channelled through Mission Council rather than MCAG; and the composition and method of appointment might include the immediate past Moderator(s)

Noting the General Secretary's comments, Mission Council adopted Paper D1.

08/13 Ministries Committee

i) The Revd Peter Poulter presented paper E and moved the Resolution

Mission Council resolves to establish a Working Party on Housing Provision for Ministers and CRCWs with the following membership: Convener, Secretary and one minister in stipendiary service appointed by Mission Council plus two members nominated by both the Finance and Ministries Committees, and one nomination each from Retired Ministers Housing Sub-committee and PLATO. The Working Party will have power to co-opt further members as appropriate.

The Resolution was carried.

ii) Review of Ministerial Development

The Revd Terry Oakley outlined proposals for future patterns of Ministerial Appraisal. A pilot process would be trialled, and firm proposals would be brought in 2009.

08/14 Proposed inter-synod gathering

Mr Oakley outlined plans for a URC-wide event to take place in the years between General Assemblies. It would be possible to plan and organise such an event at the University of Loughborough in 2009. The moderators or synod clerks of West

Midlands, East Midlands, Eastern or Thames North synods could be contacted for further details. It was emphasised that such events would not be a charge on General Assembly funds, but would be organised and financially underwritten by the participating synods.

08/15 Setting the Compass

The General Secretary made a PowerPoint presentation called '*Setting the Compass - towards a long range plan for the central resources of the church 2010-2015*'. The presentation, which resulted from initial conversations between the General Secretary and the Treasurer, offered the following assertions and indicators:

- local congregations are the principal expression of our life, in community and dispersed;
- healthy churches share certain factors; small groups, clarity of purpose etc
- current decline equals about 1.5 members per church per year;
- at the current rate there will be 59,000 members in 2015; if we set the goal of increasing by 1%, that would make 78,000 members on 2015;
- the church can decide on levels and types of ministry and training;
- the church can give choice to ministers about manses and housing;
- its was possible to overhaul of M&M and stewardship;
- what do we want from central staffing?;
- explore options for ecumenical co-operation in administration;
- volunteers were needed with experience of scenario planning;

In response, members of Mission Council welcomed the presentation as offering serious, clear strategic thinking; it was suggested that synods might be similarly engaged; there was a plea for 'joined-up' thinking, and a request that theology, spirituality and prayer ought to undergird and inform strategic thinking about the future.

The General Secretary thanked members of Mission Council for their comments and said that he and the Treasurer would develop the ideas in the presentation.

08/16 Thanks

The Moderator thanked the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre for their hospitality to Mission Council during the past ten years.

He also greeted Arnold Harrison, who was attending his last Mission Council before retirement as Moderator of the Yorkshire synod, and paid tribute to his ministry within the United Reformed Church.

The Moderator requested prayer for those who would be involved in the appointment of a General Secretary.

The Chaplain conducted closing worship.

ELECTING THE MODERATOR

I have been asked to give a ruling on the apparent conflict between the decisions of the 2007 General Assembly concerning the election of Moderators and the decision of the Mission Council in January 2008, on receiving a report on implementation of these decisions, to call for the election of an Elder to serve as Co-moderator from the Assembly of 2008 as well as electing Co-moderators to serve from 2010.

The debate at Mission Council was carried out on the assumption that the General Assembly had provided for two Moderators from 2008 and the recommendations from the group on implementation had over-ridden this decision. Mission Council therefore regarded itself as re-asserting the will of Assembly. Unfortunately, no-one stopped to review the text of the General Assembly decisions and I regret that I did not suspend the debate until this had been clarified.

The resolutions of the 2007 General Assembly to be taken into account are the following:

Resolution 5

General Assembly resolves that as from 2008 it shall elect two Moderators at its biennial meeting, one a minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker, and one an Elder, to serve together for the following two years.

Resolution 5a

General Assembly asks Mission Council to review the whole process for the nomination and election of Moderators of General Assembly.

Resolution 25 refers to the election of Moderators of the General Assembly. Para 3.1. says '..... The Moderators shall serve jointly for two years commencing at the biennial Assembly following the Meeting at which the report of the election is received.'

Resolution 5 would be implemented by an election of two Moderators in 2008 to serve from 2010. The group also recommended, in relation to Resolution 25 that the two Moderators serve simultaneously and that the rules for finding candidates in the absence of nominations be revised, drawing in the Nominations Committee if necessary. Mission Council accepted the first of these proposals and will have opportunity to revisit the second and others in March.

The election of an elder to serve from 2008 at the 2008 Assembly is in contravention of Resolution 25. Anyone elected at the 2008 Assembly serves from the next biennial Assembly, i.e. 2010, the biennial Assembly following the Meeting at which the report of the election is received. Any elder serving as Co-moderator from 2008, if that is indeed a biennial Assembly, should have been elected in 2007. Unfortunately, this detail was overlooked in processing the many changes to our procedures.

Mission Council acted in good faith in its interpretation of Resolution 5 but should also have considered Resolution 25 before revising the recommendations before it. The matter would have been clearer if the recommendations had been headed with the Assembly resolutions which gave the group its mandate.

I conclude, with some reluctance, that the Mission Council decision to seek the election of an Elder to serve as Moderator from 2008 was out of order and that the matter will need to be reconsidered at the March meeting of Mission Council. In the meantime the General Secretary should remind synods of the procedures for nominations to come to the 2008 General Assembly with a view to electing Moderators to serve from 2010.

Stephen Orchard
1 February 2008



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

18th December 2007

Mission Council: Saturday 26th January 2008
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire

Dear Colleague

I am writing to give notice of the one-day meeting of Mission Council on Saturday 26th January 2008 at the Arthur Rank Centre, which is within the grounds of the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire.

Arrivals should be timed from 9.30 a.m. when coffee will be served before the first session begins at 10 a.m. A buffet lunch and a mid-afternoon cup of tea will be provided. The meeting is due to finish by 4.45 p.m. at the latest.

If there are any problems about travel, arrival or departure times, please let us know in advance. This will be the last time we plan to have a one-day January meeting at Stoneleigh Park, and we are grateful for the Centre's hospitality for the past ten years.

Please find enclosed with this letter:

- A map giving directions to the Centre
- A list of members (to enable you to arrange to travel together)
- An expenses slip (to be completed and left in the box provided on the day)
- A form to be returned (or information to be e-mailed or telephoned) to Krystyna Pullen (krystyna.pullen@urc.org.uk) (tel: 020 7916 8646) by Friday 4th January 2008, please.

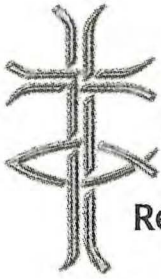
The agenda is shaping up at the moment, but will include more information about Vision4Life; a discussion of the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee's Paper 'Our Life Together: the Basis of Union' which was approved by October Mission Council; and the opportunity to be greeted by an international group representing the Council for World Mission's Community of Women and Men in Mission which is visiting the United Reformed Church in January.

A second mailing with all papers will be sent out about ten days before the meeting.

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

Yours sincerely,
Ray Adams

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

Mission Council: Saturday 26th January 2008
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire
Telephone 024 7685 3060

Dear Colleague,

15th January 2008

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

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

Please bring all the enclosed papers and Minutes of the October 2007 Mission Council. The papers should include an Agenda, Papers A, A1-A5; B, C, C1 and C2; D; E; and J1 (the latter being an updated version of Paper J which was accepted by the October Mission Council).

We shall take time to discuss Paper J1 in groups. This is part of the folio of documents on the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church which was undertaken by the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee. This paper 'Our Life Together', about the Basis of Union, was written by Dr Robert Pope.

The General Secretary will present some initial thoughts on a strategic plan for the Church for the next seven years under the title 'Setting the compass'.

Other papers enclosed reflect a range of urgent and ongoing matters which require Mission Council's attention and decision, sometimes on behalf of General Assembly.

We shall also welcome five visitors from partner churches of the Council for World Mission who come as a group representing the Community of Women and Men in Mission programme, and whose fact-finding visit to the United Reformed Church will result in a report to help us broaden our understanding of our corporate life and mission.

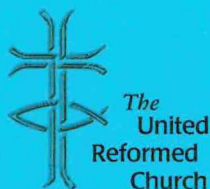
To practical matters: if you have any difficulties or queries about arrangements, please contact Krystyna Pullen (e-mail: krystyna.pullen@urc.org.uk; tel: 020 7916 8646) as soon as possible.

With prayers for a deeper discernment of God's presence and purpose for the Church in this New Year,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Adams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "R".

The Revd Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary



MISSION COUNCIL

26th JANUARY 2008

MEMBERS & REPRESENTATIVES

The Moderator
General Secretary
Deputy General Secretary
Clerk

Rev Prof Stephen **Orchard**
Rev Dr David **Cornick**
Rev Ray **Adams**
Rev James **Breslin**

Past Moderator
Moderator Elect
Treasurer
Legal Adviser

Rev Elizabeth **Caswell**
Rev John **Marsh**
Mr John **Ellis**
Mrs Janet **Knott**

Assembly Standing Committees

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

Mr William **McVey**
Mr Simon **Loveitt**
Rev Dr Kirsty **Thorpe**
Rev Dr Susan **Durber**
Rev Elizabeth **Nash**
Prof Malcolm **Johnson**
Ms Morag **McLintock**
Mr John **Ellis**
Rev Peter **Colwell**
Rev Peter **Ball**
Rev Peter **Poulter**
Rev Malcolm **Hanson**
Rev Carla **Grosch-Miller**
Rev Neil **Thorogood**

FURY Advisory Board Representatives

Mr James **Wickens** - Moderator
Ms Jane **Hoddinott**

13 synod Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each synod

1 N	Rev Rowena Francis	Miss Elaine Colechin	Rev John Durell	
2 N.W	Rev Richard Church	Rev Rachel Poolman	Ms Marie Trubic	Rev Alan Wickens
3 Mer	Rev Howard Sharp		Miss Emma Pugh	Mr Donald Swift
4 York	Rev Arnold Harrison	Mr Roderick Garthwaite	Rev Pauline Loosemore	Mrs Val Morrison
5 E.M	Rev Terry Oakley	Rev Jane Campbell	Mrs Margaret Gateley	Mrs Irene Wren
6 W.M	Rev Elizabeth Welch	Mrs Adella Pritchard	Rev Anthony Howells	Mr Bill Robson /Dr Tony Jeans
7 E	Rev Elizabeth Caswell	Mr Mick Barnes	Mrs Joan Turner	Rev Cecil White
8 S.W	Rev David Grosch-Miller	Mrs Janet Gray	Rev Roz Harrison	Rev Stephen Newell
9 Wex	Rev Adrian Bulley	Rev G Cliff Bembridge	Mrs Margaret Telfer	Mr Peter Pay
10 Th.N	Rev Roberta Rominger	Mr David Eldridge	Rev John Macaulay	Rev David Varcoe
11 S	Rev Nigel Uden	Dr Graham Campling	Mrs Maureen Lawrence	Mr Nigel Macdonald
12 Wal	Rev Peter Noble		Mrs Barbara Shapland	Mrs Liz Tadd
13 Scot	Rev John Humphreys	Ms Irene Hudson	Rev John Sanderson	Mr Patrick Smyth

In attendance

Minute Secretary
Moderator's Chaplain
Children's Work Dev't Officer
Church & Society
Church Related Community Work
Communications
Ecumenical Relations
Education & Learning
Finance
Grants & Loans

Rev Ken **Forbes**
Rev Lucy **Brierley**
Miss Jo **Williams**
Mr Frank **Kantor**
Mrs Suzanne **Adofo**/
Mr Stephen **Summers**
Rev Martin **Hazell**
Rev Richard **Mortimer**
Rev Roy **Lowes**
Mr Andrew **Grimwade**
Dr Brian **Woodhall**

HR & Facilities
Life & Witness
Ministries
Pilots Development
Press Officer

Racial Justice
Rural Consultancy
Windermere Centre
World Church Relations
Youth Work

Ms Michelle **Marcano**

Rev Christine **Craven**
Mrs Karen **Bulley**
Mr Stuart **Dew**

Rev Graham **Jones**
Mr Lawrence **Moore**
Rev Dale **Rominger**
Mr John **Brown**

Groups for Mission Council - 26th January 2008

Group A: (Nickerson Room)

David Grosch Miller
 Mick Barnes
 Cliff Bembridge
 Jane Campbell
 David Cornick
 Christine Craven
 John Durell
 Simon Fairmington
 Chong-Kai Lee
 Barbara Shapland 10

Group B: (Peter Butler Room)

Val Morrison
 Peter Colwell
 Stuart Dew
 David Eldridge
 Carla Grosch-Miller
 Arnold Harrison
 Frank Kantor
 Janet Knott
 Roy Lowes
 Rachel Poolman
 John Sanderson 11

Group C: (Peter Butler Room)

Terry Oakley
 Janet Gray
 Malcolm Johnson
 Richard Mortimer
 John Macaulay
 Morag McLintock
 Stephen Orchard
 Jyotsna Patro
 Peter Poulter
 Patrick Smyth 10

Group D: (Downstairs Meeting Room)

Kirsty Thorpe
 John Brown
 Richard Church
 Cheryl Dibeela
 Ken Forbes
 Malcolm Hanson
 Martin Hazell
 Irene Hudson
 Maureen Lawrence
 Pauline Loosemore 10

Group E: (Downstairs Foyer)

Roberta Rominger
 Lucy Brierley
 Rudolph Brown
 Elaine Colechin
 Margaret Gateley
 Jane Hoddinott
 Anthony Howells
 Simon Loveitt
 John Marsh
 Paul Whittle 10

Group F: (Council Chamber)

Elizabeth Caswell
 Graham Campling
 Roz Harrison
 James Breslin
 Peter Pay
 Bill Robson
 John Humphreys
 Donald Swift
 Marie Trubic 10

Group G: (Council Chamber)

Elizabeth Nash
 Ray Adams
 Susan Durber
 John Ellis
 Janet Gray
 William McVey
 Utia Manavaikai
 Stephen Newell
 Dale Rominger
 Howard Sharp 10

Group H: (Council Chamber)

Rowena Francis
 Roderick Garthwaite
 Adella Pritchard
 Duncan Smith
 Liz Tadd
 Peter Noble
 Jo Williams
 Neil Thorogood
 Joan Turner
 Cecil White
 Irene Wren 11



Mission Council 26 January 2008

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

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

9.30am Arrivals and coffee

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

Opening Worship The Moderator and Moderator's Chaplain
(to include the Induction of the Revd Dale Rominger as Secretary for World Church Relations)

Welcome and apologies for absence

Notification of any additional business

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 5-7 October 2007

Matters arising

- 07/37 Report from Group considering election of Moderators of Assembly **PAPER A1**
- 07/73 Law and polity Group
- 07/73 Draft terms of Reference of Human Sexuality Task Group **PAPER A2**
- 07/77 'Life Together' - Resolution 40 Task Group material - for information **PAPER A3**
- 07/82 Declaration of a Safe Church
 - i) 'Relating Together' Resolution 6 support material (Safe Church) for synods
- for information **PAPER A4**
 - ii) Pastoral Response Team
 - iii) Policy and Procedure
 - iv) Sexual Ethics Advisory Group

Resignation of the General Secretary and appointment process for a successor The Clerk
PAPER A5

Discussion on 'Our Life Together: the Basis of Union' Richard Mortimer
PAPER J1

Mission Council Advisory Group Deputy General Secretary
PAPER A

A Reflection Carla Grosch Miller
(Convener of Racial Justice and Multi-cultural ministry)

Greeting from a representative of the Council for World Mission visitors - the Community of Women and Men in Mission

Notices and lunchtime arrangements Deputy General Secretary
- followed by prayer The Moderator's Chaplain

12.30 - 1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 - 3.00p.m.

Vision4Life - a progress report

The General Secretary

Youth and Children's Work Report

Neil Thorogood (Convener)

Summary Report on the Review of the Youth and Children's Work
Training and Development Programme

PAPER B

Treasurer's Report

John Ellis

Policy on treatment of general Legacies
Pension Fund Rules
Pensions Executive membership
Leaflet on M&M

PAPER C

PAPER C1

PAPER C2

Report of the Nominations Committee

Malcolm Hanson (Convener)

PAPER D

Supplementary Nominations Report on Think Tank on Mission and Spirituality

PAPER D1

3.00 - 3.30 pm: Break for Tea

Ministries Committee Report

Peter Poulter (Convener)

Request for a working party on Manse policy
Progress report on the Ministerial Development Review

PAPER E

(Further information to be tabled)

'Setting the Compass': initial comments on a Strategic Plan for the Central Resources
of the United Reformed Church 2010-2015

The General Secretary
and the Treasurer

Closing Worship

The Moderator's Chaplain



Mission Council 26 January 2008

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

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

9.30am Arrivals and coffee

Dep Gen Sec to announce Emergency Evacuation Procedures

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

Opening Worship The Moderator and Moderator's Chaplain
(to include the Induction of the Revd Dale Rominger as Secretary for World Church Relations)

10.20 Welcome (those present for the first time) Moderator
The Revd John Sanderson (Synod of Scotland); Paul Whittle (deputising from West Midlands); Ms Jane Hoddinott (FURY Advisory Board), Mr Duncan Smith (East Midlands synod clerk).

Guests from partner churches of the Council for World Mission: Dr Jyotsna Patro from the Church of North India; Revd Cheryl Dibeela from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa; Mr. Rudolph Brown from the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands; Mr Lee Chong Kai from the Presbyterian Church of Singapore; the Revd Utia Manavaikai from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.

and apologies for absence DepGenSec

Apologies from:

- a) **Members of Mission Council:** The Revds Peter Ball, Adrian Bulley, Nigel Uden, Elizabeth Welch, Alan Wickens. Mr Nigel McDonald, Miss Emma Pugh, Mrs Margaret Telfer, Mr James Wickens (new FURY Moderator - unable to be present).
- b) **Staff:** Suzanne Adofo, Karen Bulley, Andrew Grimwade, Graham Jones, Michelle Marcano, Lawrence Moore, Steve Summers.

Those who have completed their service or have resigned from Mission Council:

Mr Andrew Littlejohns (FURY Moderator); Miss Sara Paton (FURY representative); the Revd Jenny Morgan (has moved to another synod); the Revd Alan Paterson (resigned).

Notification of any additional business

Paper D1 - a supplementary report from the Nomination Committee - tabled

DepGenSec

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 5-7 October 2007

10.30 Matters arising

- 07/37 Report from Group considering election of Moderators of Assembly **PAPER A1**
- 07/73 Law and polity Group
- 07/73 Draft terms of Reference of Human Sexuality Task Group **PAPER A2**
- 07/77 'Life Together' - Resolution 40 Task Group material - for information **PAPER A3**
- 07/82 Declaration of a Safe Church

- i) 'Relating Together' Resolution 6 support material (Safe Church) for synods
- for information **PAPER A4**
- ii) Pastoral Response Team
- iii) Policy and Procedure
- iv) Sexual Ethics Advisory Group

Resignation of the General Secretary and appointment process for a successor **The Clerk**
PAPER A5

10.50 Discussion on 'Our Life Together: the Basis of Union' **Richard Mortimer**
PAPER J1

11.00 - 11.40 Groups

11.55 Mission Council Advisory Group **DepGenSec**
PAPER A

12.05 A Reflection **Carla Grosch Miller**
(Convener of Racial Justice and Multi-cultural ministry)

12.15 Greeting from a representative of the Council for World Mission visitors - the Community of Women and Men in Mission **Dr Jyotsna Patro**
(leader of the Group)

12.25 Notices and lunchtime arrangements **DepGenSec**

1. Sign names in blue book to register your attendance. Expenses should be put in the box on 1st floor landing.
2. Those wishing to share/order taxis - please sign sheet in ^{table on landy} Reception - during lunch break.
3. Lunch arrangements:
 - A finger buffet lunch will be provided at two locations- in neighbouring room (1-way flow of traffic, returning with plate to this room); and downstairs in the entrance hall (another room downstairs to sit to which people will be directed). Important that those requiring special diets collect food from downstairs where it has been ordered and set aside (not always collected) - plenty of ordinary diet food as well so (RH people of hall go downstairs).
 - In view of comparative short time, please keep moving when collecting food - room to talk clear of table areas).
 - Toilets on this floor ~~and downstairs~~.
 - During lunch break, open windows.
 - Locked rooms are clearly out of bounds.
 - Make sure plates, cups, etc cleared from this room before start of afternoon session.
 - Resume meeting promptly at 1.15 p.m.

- followed by prayer

The Chaplain

12.30 - 1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 - 3.00p.m.

1.15 Vision4Life - a progress report **General Secretary**

1.30 Youth and Children's Work Report **Neil Thorogood**
(Convener)

Summary Report on the Review of the Youth and Children's Work
Training and Development Programme **PAPER B**

1.55 Treasurer's Report

(Treasurer)

John Ellis

Policy on treatment of general Legacies
Pension Fund Rules
Pensions Executive membership
Leaflet on M&M

PAPER C
PAPER C1
PAPER C2

2.15 Report of the Nominations Committee

Malcolm Hanson (Convener)

Supplementary Nominations Report on Think Tank on Mission and Spirituality

PAPER D
PAPER D1

2.35 Ministries Committee Report

Peter Poulter (Convener)

Request for a working party on Manse policy
Progress report on the Ministerial Development Review
(Further information to be tabled)

PAPER E

3.00 - 3.30 pm: Break for Tea

3.30 'Setting the Compass': initial comments on a Strategic Plan for the Central Resources
of the United Reformed Church 2010-2015

The General Secretary and
the Treasurer

4.15 Thanks:

- a) to Arthur Rank Centre - this is our final meeting here - after 10 years
- b) Arnold Harrison retires soon as Moderator of Yorkshire synod. This is his last Mission Council

4.20 (can be earlier) Closing Worship

The Chaplain

John Marsh had prepared an outline note on the Moderator's role and nomination which was agreed with minor changes. This note will be circulated to Synod Clerks to be further circulated within Synods.

Leadership Team.

Discussion took place on the need for a Leadership Team to consist of the Moderators elect, the current Moderators and the Immediate Past Moderators, and its relationship with MCAG.

It was agreed that, if there is a leadership team the MCAG meetings would shrink slightly and probably only the current moderators would need to attend MCAG.

It was agreed to recommend that MCAG continue to meet to plan agendas.

It was agreed that the Church should seek to use the next year to discern the needs of a leadership team so that it might be in place for Jan 2010, but that further reflection on a leadership team should wait until a new General Secretary has been appointed.

Other Matters.

1. In discussion it was agreed to recommend that under the new patterns for the Assembly all members of Mission Council should be members of Assembly.
2. It was agreed that in the light of experience, and bearing in mind the possible difficulties in finding suitable candidates to serve as Co-Moderators, the emergency procedures for the nomination candidates to serve as Moderator should be rewritten to include some involvement by the Assembly Nominations Committee.

Actions

1. To recommend to Mission Council that the election of co-Moderators at Assembly 2008 be for the Assembly of 2010.
- AGREED
2. To recommend to Mission Council the creation of a Leadership Team consisting of the Moderators, current, elect and immediate past.
- NOT AGREED:
This was left for further discussion as the Methodist experience of doing this had been far from satisfactory, having confused lines of authority and accountability within the Methodist Connexion. The advantage of the proposal is to bring people together for reflection, prayer and guidance (provide spiritual leadership). (My own view is that even this is fraught with difficulty - see the Methodist experience).
3. The Clerk to amend the Rules of Procedure to allow for the election of two Moderators and to bring these changes to

Assembly 2008 for approval - This should be brought to the March Mission Council

4. To recommend to Mission Council the appointment of two Assembly Chaplains for 2010 and thereafter. No vote was taken on this, nor is it necessary. The Councils of the Church have never voted on the number or 'use' of Moderators' chaplains.
5. To recommend to Mission Council that all Members of Mission Council become members of Assembly - left for March Mission Council
6. To recommend to Mission Council a rewriting of the emergency procedures for the nomination of Moderator of Assembly - left for March Mission Council.

From the proposers

1. The intention was to have two Moderators: one Minister/CRCW and one Elder - to preside jointly at 2010 Assembly..
2. The prospect of electing three moderators at the 2008 Assembly was difficult.

Response:

1. People were unhappy with the delay in appointing a non-ministerial Moderator, and want a co-moderator to be appointed from 2008. .
2. There was no job description in the note that went out to local churches, and therefore they were unclear about what was being asked for.
3. The original plan was to overlap the appointment (appoint ministerial and elder moderators to take up office on alternate years). The response was that this would be difficult in the initial period hence the recommendation to appoint in 2008 for the period from 2010.

Mission Council asked to appoint an elder in 2008 to serve collaboratively 2008/10 (check resolution in Minutes) This will be a 6-year commitment (2 pre; 2 serving; 2 post)

Resolution: Mission Council requests synods to



MISSION COUNCIL 26 January 2008

A

Mission Council Advisory Group

The Group attempts to pick up concerns expressed by Mission Council on a number of matters, and to reflect if and how we can meet some of the expectations which other parts of the Church have of the Council. There is a genuine attempt (through bringing different groups together) to create opportunities for meeting, reflection and discernment. It is in that spirit that the routine list of requests and requirements set out below ought to be read:

- a) An ad hoc group is required (for the March Mission Council) so that the more careful scrutiny of financial matters can be given on behalf of Mission Council as a whole.
- b) Letters received about matters to do with the future composition of Mission Council (e.g. Ecumenical representation) and its agenda reflecting synod concerns, suggest that a small group should be set up to consider the different and various expectations of Mission Council in the light of the Catch the Vision process.
- c) Matters Arising from the October Mission Council include
 - o 07/73 Law and Polity Group. Suggested names will be reported to Mission Council
 - o 07/82 Declaration of a Safe Church: Papers E2 (The Pastoral Response Team) and E3 (Policy and Procedure in response to alleged incidents of sexual harassment and abuse against adults) from October Mission Council are now in the hands of the legal adviser and are to be considered by the Section O Advisory Group to ensure that those parts of the procedure which relates to the Section O process are consistent with that process.
 - o Sexual Ethics Advisory Group: It is proposed that this be convened by the Revd Carla Grosch Miller, with the Revds Roberta Rominger, Elizabeth Gray-King (Education and Learning), a representative from Ministries and two others (to be advised) to be members of the Group.
 - o The Section O Advisory Group brought a recommendation to the 2007 Assembly that Mission Council appoint an Advisory Group to oversee the operation of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure. Assuming that the 2008 General Assembly brings the MIP into being this new Advisory Group will be required from that point. Although the Section O and MIP Advisory Groups will need to coordinate their work to a certain extent, it is important that a separate Advisory Group be appointed in order to underline the fact that the MIP is not a disciplinary procedure. Mission Council is invited to consider this.

d) Business from the Clerk There is a question about the status of the URC Trustee body as a Committee of Assembly. Legally this is a grey area. Mission Council is invited to pass an enabling resolution which will enable the Chairman of the Trustees to serve on Mission Council and Assembly like all the other Committee Conveners.

Mission Council resolves that, for the avoidance of doubt, the Chairperson of the Trustees shall be classed as a Convener of an Assembly Committee.

e) Background information about our guests at Mission Council and the Community of Women and Men in Mission:

In 1991, the Council for World Mission (CWM) made a special commitment to building a Community of Women and Men in Mission. This programme seeks to promote equal partnership between women and men within all the CWM member churches, and to contribute to empowering women and ending discrimination and violence against women.

Since 1991, each CWM member has made its own journey in building a Community of Women and Men in Mission. Each experience is unique and there is much to be learned from the different contexts found within the CWM family. It was for these reasons that the idea for Community of Women and Men in Mission team visits was conceived at the global meeting in Goa in April 2001. The programme of team visits is a forum for mutual learning.

In 2004, the first team visits were completed. Teams visited the United Church of Zambia; the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand & Congregational Union of New Zealand; the Congregational Federation in Europe; the Presbyterian Church in Singapore & Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia; the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands; and the Church of North India. Insights were gleaned, and now a second set of team visits is planned, including the January 2008 visit to our Church.

The team visit to the URC is intended to provide a forum for sharing, learning and gaining greater mutual understanding of the different contexts of the CWM members and how that affects the building of a community of women and men in mission.

Through a variety of different forums - local church worship and meetings, the annual women's retreat, visits to educational institutions - the team and local hosts will discuss together the progress made and obstacles faced in achieving gender equality and empowerment.

At the end of the visit, the team will prepare a report that will be presented to the URC as a resource as we continue on our journey in building a community of women and men in mission. The team will also report back to their home churches, sharing

their experiences and encouraging those involved with gender issues in their home communities.

The final report will be fed into the mission priority conversations that will be taking place through March 2008, as the 2008 General Assembly will be deciding priorities for mission. It is hoped that the full report will be presented to Mission Council in October 2008.

The Group visiting the United Reformed Church (and Mission Council) is led by Dr Jyotsna Patro from the Church of North India. Other members include the Revd Cheryl Dibeela from the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa, Mr. Rudolph Brown from the United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, Mr Lee Chong Kai from the Presbyterian Church of Singapore, and the Revd Utia Manavaikai from the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

A(a)

Mission Council Advisory Group
Addendum to Report

The suggestion that for the purposes of membership of Mission Council and Assembly we treat the Chairperson of the URC Trust as though he or she were the Convener of an Assembly Standing Committee has given rise to some concern on the part of the Treasurer and the Convener of Nominations. While not objecting to the objective they feel that the method proposed is unsatisfactory.

Although the Assembly created the URC Trust it does not directly appoint the Trustees or the Trust Chairperson and it is important that the independence of the Trust be recognised by the Church. Nevertheless it is clearly advisable that the Chairperson of the Trust be a member of Mission Council and Assembly.

Two routes therefore are available to us. The first is to amend the Structure and add a category, to the list of members of Assembly.

This would be:

2(5) (k) The Chairperson of the United Reformed Church Trust.

However, such a change would involve the reference to Synods and could not be effected until July 2010.

An alternative and faster procedure, is to avail ourselves of the power contained under clause 2(5)(f) Such other Ministers and Elders of the United Reformed Church as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine, and simply resolve.

Mission Council, acting with the authority of General Assembly, appoints the Chairperson of the URC Trust to be a member of General Assembly and of Mission Council.



MISSION COUNCIL 26 January 2008

A1

Mission Council Working Party on the Election of the Moderator of Assembly

Constitution On Friday 9th November, the Mission Council Working Party on the election of the Moderator of Assembly met at 11.15 and was convened with prayer by the Moderator, the Revd Professor Stephen Orchard.

Sederunt Present with the Moderator were the Revd John Marsh, Moderator elect, the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, immediate past Moderator, the Revd James Breslin, Assembly Clerk, Mrs Val Morrison and Mrs Irene Wren, Synod Clerks.

The election of a second moderator 2008-2010.

It was recognised that the 2008 Assembly would be, to a degree, an interim Assembly as not all of the changes agreed under Catch the Vision would have been put in place by that point and that there was a very real danger that a second Moderator elected in 2008 to serve in 2008 would be seen as being "not the real thing". Considerable concern was expressed that the pattern to be adopted for the future not be seen as a copy of the Methodist model where an ordained President is assisted by a lay Vice-President.

John Marsh presented a paper suggesting that, rather than seeking to appoint a second Moderator at the 2008 Assembly, the 2008 Assembly should elect the co-Moderators for 2010-2012 and that he would be willing to serve as sole Moderator, with assistance from his predecessors, for the whole period 2008-2010.

It was agreed to propose this to Mission Council

The Role of the Moderator(s)

There followed a discussion on the role and function of the Moderator of Assembly, in which the following points were made.

1. The Moderator of Assembly has the duty of representing us to ourselves.
2. The Moderator of Assembly has a representative task to the wider Church and to the Secular world. This will include attending events, signings, comments on behalf of the church. Such comments to be made in consultation with the relevant officers of the Church
3. The Moderator of Assembly has a presiding function, Assembly, Mission Council and other committees.

4. The Moderator of Assembly is the final arbiter of the standing orders and other rules of the Church. In this capacity the Moderator will from time to time give rulings on questions referred by the Clerk or the General Secretary.
5. The Moderator has in the past, and increasingly in the future will be expected to give leadership to the Church as it seeks to change and adapt to present circumstances.
6. The office is an honorary role which is not expected to be full time and should as far as possible be fitted around the Moderator's present commitments and interests.
7. The Moderator is an ex-officio member of all Assembly Committees. It is suggested that attendance at these be co-ordinated between present and immediate past Moderators, noting that from 2012 this will be four people rather than the present two.
8. Once two Moderators are in place it will be for the two Moderators to work out their sharing of responsibilities.

Areas of overlap requiring co-ordination and agreement.

In discussion it was noted that:

For the avoidance of doubt and in the hope of reducing the capacity for error and confusion the co-Moderators will need, immediately after election or as soon after as may be convenient, to agree.

1. Which Moderator will preside at which session of the Assembly.
2. Which Moderator will preside at which Committee chaired by the Moderator.
3. Which Moderator will attend annual events, e.g. Remembrance Sunday. N.B. Invitations to such events tend to be addressed to the previous Moderator and therefore will need to be forwarded.
4. Which Moderator will issue rulings etc.
5. Which Moderator will write the letters to Jubilee Ministers.
6. How the Moderator's diary for the period of office is to be structured.
7. Which Moderator will be responsible for legal documents and writs issued under the terms of the 1972 URC Act.

The Chaplain to the Assembly.

With the move to co-Moderators it was agreed to recommend that two Chaplains be appointed, to serve jointly in their public functions but with the more personal functions specific to a particular Moderator.

Nomination of Moderators

John Marsh had prepared an outline note on the Moderator's role and nomination which was agreed with minor changes. This note will be circulated to Synod Clerks to be further circulated within Synods.

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MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

A1

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the Election of the Moderator of Assembly -
Amended and with notes from January Mission Council**

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There followed a discussion on the role and function of the Moderator of Assembly, in which the following points were made.

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7. The Moderator is an ex-officio member of all Assembly Committees. It is suggested that attendance at these be co-ordinated between present and immediate past Moderators, noting that from 2012 this will be four people rather than the present two.
8. Once two Moderators are in place it will be for the two Moderators to work out their sharing of responsibilities.

Areas of overlap requiring co-ordination and agreement.

In discussion it was noted that:

For the avoidance of doubt and in the hope of reducing the capacity for error and confusion the co-Moderators will need, immediately after election or as soon after as may be convenient, to agree.

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7. Which Moderator will be responsible for legal documents and writs issued under the terms of the 1972 URC Act.

The Chaplain to the Assembly.

With the move to co-Moderators it was agreed to recommend that two Chaplains be appointed, to serve jointly in their public functions but with the more personal functions specific to a particular Moderator.

Nomination of Moderators



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

A2

Report on proposed human sexuality task group

A Introduction

This paper relates to Document 2, the report presented to General Assembly 2007 under the title "Moratorium on policy decisions on homosexuality."

In resolution 47 (page 37 of Record) General Assembly asked 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."

B Proposed remit for task group:

1. With regard to the 2007 report to General Assembly, to disseminate the Commitment as appropriate, to listen carefully to different voices within the church, to seek to increase mutual understanding, and to strive to maintain the unity and integrity of the United Reformed Church.
2. To explore the suggested methods of working set out in section 8 of the Assembly Report, particularly in relation to the pace and manner in which different matters might be addressed.
3. To take up the questions raised in section 9 of the Assembly Report and to set in train processes for handling these issues whether by different means or grouped together, whether by the task group itself or by others, and then to enable wider discussion and decision on them as appropriate.
4. To gather and publish accessible materials as appropriate.
5. To report to Mission Council and, through Mission Council, to General Assembly regularly, so that interim progress reports are given, if appropriate, to each meeting of these bodies, and that a major, if not final, report for General Assembly is submitted by 2010.

C In doing its work, it is suggested that the task group will also want:

1. To work within the spirit of the Commitment made at General Assembly 2007.
2. To consider the implications of resolution 45, and particularly the outcomes of the Catch the Vision and Vision4Life processes.
3. To consider ways in which resolution 46 concerning "the continuing use of the earlier material" might be fulfilled.
4. To liaise with synods and local churches, as well as ecumenically and internationally, and to consult with individuals and groups and with legal advisers as appropriate.
5. Generally, to act as a reference point and to give leadership over issues to do with human sexuality.
6. To deal with all these matters sensitively but also as expeditiously as possible, with a view

to completing the remit within a reasonable number of years.

D Suggested composition of task group:

Convener

Secretary

Five further members so that the whole group includes -

- at least one who identifies in general terms with each of the three positions outlined in the Commitment;
- some people of different sexualities;
- one theologian or biblical scholar or ethicist;
- someone from an ecumenical partner church;
- a young person;
- if possible, someone with communications skills

All of these would need to have the ability to work with others and be sensitive to people of different views, preferably have some prior knowledge of some of the issues, and have the confidence of the church.

E Title of Task Group

Since this is not the first task group on the subject, a title needs to be found which either indicates the stage we have got to or otherwise provides a unique identification for this new group. Possible suggestions include:

Human sexuality 2008 task group

Human sexuality task group 2008

Post Commitment task group

Wider issues in human sexuality task group

Report on proposed human sexuality task group -
AMENDED at Jan Mission Council

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4. To gather and publish accessible materials as appropriate.
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3. To consider ways in which resolution 46 concerning "the continuing use of the earlier material" might be fulfilled.
4. To liaise with synods and local churches, as well as ecumenically and internationally, and to consult with individuals and groups and with legal advisers as appropriate.
5. Generally, to act as a reference point and to give leadership over issues to do with human sexuality **in consultation with the Sexual Ethics Advisory Group** .

6. To deal with all these matters sensitively but also as expeditiously as possible, with a view to completing the remit within a reasonable number of years.

D Suggested composition of task group (ensuring Gender balance):

Convener

Secretary

Five further members so that the whole group includes -

- at least one who identifies in general terms with each of the three positions outlined in the Commitment;
- some people of different sexualities;
- one theologian or biblical scholar or ethicist;
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Human sexuality task group 2008

Post Commitment task group

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MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2008

A3

The following material (for information) is the final version of work produced by the Resolution 40 Task Group (discussed at the October 2007 Mission Council)

General Assembly instructs Mission Council to revisit the 'Declaration of a Safe Church' and bring to the next Assembly proposals to extend its provisions to cover emotional, physical and domestic abuse and neglect (General Assembly 2006 Resolution 40)

This should be available in a final printed form in time for Spring synods

LIFE TOGETHER

Consider the following scenarios. What issues are raised?

Could it ever happen here that?

Someone is annoyed about something the minister has apparently done. They e mail the minister to say so, marking it STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL and copy it to seven other members of the congregation.

After a long ministerial vacancy a new minister arrives. They prove to be particularly talented at discovering and encouraging gifts in members of the congregation. Those previously exercising responsibility and feeling 'in control' find it hard that others are now more involved. They undermine the minister in a series of small but accumulative ways eg late paying of expenses, meetings arranged inconveniently without consultation, confrontational remarks in front of the minister's children.

Two members of the congregation decide 'the worship space is a complete mess'. They gather up and disposed of 'all the rubbish' including some tired dusty items which then proved to be of great sentimental value to another member of the congregation.

A large wall-hanging was organised and lovingly produced. It has now hung on a prominent wall of the church for some years and looks tired. Some members would like to remove it but suspect the original organiser will be extremely offended.

A member of the congregation always e mails a complaint about something on the Sunday to arrive in the minister's 'in box' first thing on Monday morning.

The children's half-term holiday club has been a great success. The children and their families have gone home delighted at 12.30. The tired leaders are summoning their remaining energy to put the hall straight. It is needed by the 'ladies fellowship' which meets at 2pm. The person who always sets up the room arrives, and 'hurumphs' that they should be gone. Their booking 'was till 12.30' and 'things needs to get done'.

A member of the congregation has been on a weekend course and returns convinced that no one can be a Christian who does not speak in tongues.

A member's wife has sometimes obvious bruising. He husband treats her dismissively publically.

An elder gets so steamed up over an item at church meeting that they fling their papers on the floor, overturn their chair and storm out.

A life-long active member of her church has become ill and housebound. She is rarely visited. She can't understand this and is deeply hurt.

A student at a theological college takes a service at his home church where he is still a member. Afterwards the Treasurer tells him that he will not be receiving a preaching fee as he is way behind with his FWOs.

A couple are dismayed to discover that it is generally assumed, and publically discussed, that they are on the verge of divorce because of their habit of sniping at each other.

During prayers of intercession the hope is expressed that single mothers would care for their children, and 'find purpose in life' in a tone that implies they should cease to be a drain on society. A young widow struggling to bring up three children is very hurt.

A new member offers to buy some decent cups for after church coffee. The catering committee members are offended. The best set is kept for important meetings.

A member has the habit of criticising ungenerously the actions of those not present .

A group exercise: Place a selection of objects on a table - eg keys, cups and saucers, chalice, five pound notes, an e mail, a rota list, a church magazine, etc. How might these be points of difficulty and how can they be points of encouragement in our life together in this church?

Some issues arising from the scenarios and exercise above – the local group may suggest others -

How do we treat each other?

Do we 'tell the truth in love'? [Ephesians 4:15]

When we see something of concern how do we to decide whether to act or not?

How do we respect the boundaries of people's personal lives?

How do we carry our responsibilities and to whom are we accountable?

This material is intended for use by groups of adults in local

congregations responding to Resolution 40, of General Assembly 2006, to broaden the Declaration of a Safe Church – which referred specifically to the sexual abuse of adults in the church – to extend its provisions to include '*emotional, physical, domestic abuse and neglect*' regarding adults in local churches.

Who should have it? - Church officers, ministers and elders consider how best it might be used.

What might they do with it? - Bin it as not relevant? Or . . .

Recognise it could provoke useful conversation. Photocopy for decision from elders' meeting as how best to proceed. Acknowledge that this may give members of the congregation permission to talk about things they have wanted to air for a very long time.

LIFE TOGETHER – How might it be? THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION –

Church and Covenant: One key biblical motif for understanding what it means to be 'church' is 'Covenant'. This is a term that describes the very special relationship that is created 'vertically' between God and the community of God's special people, and 'horizontally' between members of that community.

Features: 'Covenant' is a relationship of belonging that is characterized, especially in the story of God and Israel, by

- commitment
- risk
- trust
- holding on through failure
- privilege
- responsibility
- accountability
- vulnerability
- security
- forgiveness
- truth-telling

Love: All the above can be summed up by one word: love. It is however a particular kind of love. There are two particular biblical words that lie at the heart of God's covenant, one an Old Testament Hebrew word and one a New Testament Greek

word. The former is *hesed*. *Hesed* is often translated as 'steadfast love' and it is the love that refuses to let go. At times in Israel's story God is tempted to divorce Israel and cast off this chosen nation, but it is *hesed* that hangs on. The New Testament word is *agape* which is a particularly self-sacrificing love that seeks to good of the other at the expense of the self.

Covenant not Contract: There are important differences between a covenant and a contract, a difference which is significant in a social context which might be described as a 'contract culture' and which renders the church 'counter-cultural'. The purpose of a contract is to minimise risk, protect self-interest and penalise failure. A covenant differs, but does not lead to 'cheap grace' where 'anything goes'.

A Distinctive Community: As a community bounded by covenant the church combines grace with discipline, inclusion with repentance, and offers to the world a distinctive community fashioned in the image of the God who has called us into being.

What bible passages or Christ-like attitudes might underpin our 'life together'?
The process of arriving at a covenant, declaration, understanding is important.
Keeping it in practice takes constant attention. What questions arise, from the above, for your church community?

As the congregations tackles VISION4LIFE material the context in which this is done is important.

*'May the spirit of the Lord rest upon us,
may the call of God sustain us, as we seek to be god's people,
transformed by the gospel, announcing God's news to the poor,
proclaiming freedom for those in prisons of wealth, poverty, disease and disorder,
committed to making a difference to the world's kingdom.'* From the 'Catch
the Vision' prayer.

Annotated **RESOURCES** for LIFE TOGETHER

Promoting a Safe Church – House of Bishops – Church House Publishing – gives useful overall institutional intent regarding how people are to be treated in the church and a parish view. 'We' acting towards 'them'. Could make a good starting point for a local congregation wishing to agree some points about 'how we will treat each other'.

The *Peacebuilders* material, produced ecumenically by Youth and Children's work, for use with children and young people has ideas which could be used by all ages. <http://www.peacebuilders.info>

Adult bullying, Peter Randall, Routledge (1997) also *Bullying in adulthood* (2001)
Clergy Killers, G Lloyd Rediger (1997) Logos, Minneapolis

Christian Council on Ageing <http://www.ccoa.org.uk>

In a strange land . . . People with Dementia and the local church – Malcolm Goldsmith . A guide and encouragement for carers and for ministry.

Is there anyone there? This professional twenty-minute video is concerned with the spiritual needs of people with dementia and won an award for its producer Vin Arthey. It is designed to be used as a training aid which will promote discussion. Review of this and both the above on ccoa website.

The Big Book of Blobs – Pip Wilson. Suitable to help all ages talk, in a group, about their feelings as part of a church. Photocopyable. There is also a CD Rom. Details on YMCA website <http://www.ymca.org.uk>

Domestic violence – finding support/advice – www.womensaid.org.uk

Racial Justice - Toolkit – United Reformed Church

Conflict resolution courses. *Dealing with your Alligator*. Harry Undy and Marion Morling.

Further support on resources and advice can be had from Synod Officers via Synod Offices.

The 2005 [Resolution 6] General Assembly *Declaration of a Safe Church*, on the sexual abuse of adults in the church, was sent to all churches. It is on the United Reformed Church website

http://www.urc.org.uk/assembly/assembly2005/mission_council.html

The Synods' Group working to support the use of this is producing companion resource material to these sheets. A *developed Declaration* to include reference to 'emotional, physical, domestic abuse and neglect' and which improves on the wording of the original, in the light of experience, is planned to be brought by Mission Council to General Assembly 2008

Suggestions for activities alongside these pages -

Small discussion groups at Church Meeting. Use in neighbourhood/house groups.

Write your own 'covenant' – 'Ways we try to live together'

Some questions – What does 'We are a very friendly church mean?'

Select an appropriate novel for a Book Group.

Watch a film – eg Babette's Feast.



MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2008

A4

The following material (for information) is the final version of work produced by the inter-synod Group responding to section c of Assembly 2005 Resolution 6:

General Assembly a) accepts the Declaration of a Safe Church

b) instructs all General Assembly committees to operate within it;

c) urges synods, district councils and local churches to affirm the declaration, resolve to apply it in all aspects of their life and work; and synods to report their response to Mission Council by March 2006.

Those working on this material and on Resolution 40 (see PAPER A3) hope that both pieces of work should be available at the same time for the Spring synods, and ought to complement each other.

Relating Together

This document is a response to 2005 General Assembly Resolution 6 which accepted a *Declaration of a Safe Church* and which urged all local churches to act to prevent sexual abuse and harassment. *Relating Together* is designed to help churches think through the implications of Resolution 6 for their congregations, along with a companion resource *Life Together*, which focuses on areas of adult abuse which are not necessarily sexual.

Note: *Life Together* and *Relating Together* should be read as resources which stand alongside 'Good Practice – Safeguarding Children and Young People in the Church'. They are not alternatives.

Scenarios for discussion –

The person leading the session might change the gender of the examples given below, as appropriate.

If there are sufficient numbers divide into threes or fours – give each group a scenario and decide on a length of time to consider the scenario.

Allow time for each group in turn to give their considered response to the whole group.

As responses are made, note any key points.

- At a church meeting/gathering someone is upset and weeping – in making a caring response do you touch the person?

- A member of the congregation insists on greeting people at the door on Sunday with a kiss. Some do not like it. What should happen?

- Someone regularly makes sexual innuendos in conversation through joking. What should happen?
- A woman regularly turns up at the church when the minister is working in his study. Is this a cause for concern? Would your response be different if the gender were reversed or the same?
- On the way home from a meeting the driver suggests to his woman passenger that they stop for a coffee. What should she say?
- The young people's group practise and share a liturgical dance in worship. The girls are fashionably dressed with bare mid-riffs and short skirts. Afterwards an older member expresses outrage at such 'overtly sexual' dancing. What might happen next?
- A young mother turns up at church meeting looking stunning. Two older men comment, 'I could do with a bit of that!' What could happen next?
- A junior church mother is receiving frequent visits during the day from the family's male elder who has recently retired. She was glad of the interest he was taking in her children and knew he was lonely. He then began sharing details of his marriage troubles. She confides in you that this week he shared explicit details of his sexual life. How would you respond?
- At a church family day, in the midst of an all-age game, you observe one of the female youth leaders give a playful pat on the bottom to a male leader. What do you do?
- A single woman in her thirties alleges, several weeks after the church weekend away, that someone came to her room late at night 'needing to talk' and that hugs and patting ended up with some sexual activity about which she is now very unhappy. She feels 'unclean'. What should happen?
- A father is at home looking after the children when his wife arrives back late and flustered from the church badminton group. She says one of the members propositioned her in the kitchen while they were washing up the coffee cups. She had trouble getting away. The husband immediately goes to the man's house, has a row on the doorstep and punches him. 'Did you hear what happened?' rustles through the congregation. The next week, as his elder, you visit the home of the man who was punched. He confides that 'she made all the running'. What do you do?
- Church meeting decides to discuss the Declaration of a Safe Church in an hour at its next meeting. A member of the congregation tells you that this is an over-reaction. There is too much talk of sex nowadays. Sex is a private matter and nothing to do with what goes on in church. How do you respond?

A time line for a local church addressing the Declaration of a Safe Church

Note:- this is not the same as *Good Practice — Safeguarding Children and young people in the church*. It stands alongside.

- The church has a copy of the current Declaration as agreed by General Assembly.
- Elders plan a **timetable for response** [discussion, plans, action].
On elders' meeting agenda, date:
- **Church meeting** is reminded of the resolution and alerted to planned timetable.
On church meeting agenda, date:
- At a church meeting the **issues are discussed**.
On church meeting agenda, date:
or specially arranged meeting, date:

Agreement is reached on how

- it will be acknowledged that the sexual abuse of adults in churches within the United Reformed Church has happened and could happen
- awareness of this issue will be raised in this congregation
- action will be taken to encourage an attitude in this church which prevents hurt to one another
- planning and knowing how to act if an allegation were made will happen
- to find and use further resources including local information
- Church **Safe Church designated person/people** is/are to be identified
Name(s) sent to Synod Office
- Church designated person/people receive Synod/URC info and has/have opportunities for **regional training/networking/support**

Progress will be noted and further actions taken on _____ [month/year]

The aim is that we can all say **'We will do all we can to make sure that won't happen here and if it does we will act promptly.'**

For a local church member who asks 'What if?' – a complaint is made to me or I have concerns . . .

- 1) Unless someone is in immediate danger – pause – recall previous discussion and advice
- 2) Speak with your local designated person or elder – who can contact the synod adviser.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual Harassment is unwanted and unwelcome behaviour, or attention, of a sexual nature that interferes with your life. Sexual advances, forced sexual activity, statements about sexual orientation or sexuality, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature all constitute sexual harassment. The behaviour may be direct or implied. Sexual harassment can affect an individual's work, and school performance and it can also affect an individual's church attendance and participation in church related activities. Sexual harassment can create an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment can occur in a number of ways such as:

- The victim as well as the harasser can be either male or female. The harasser does not have to be of the opposite gender.
- The harasser can be anyone: the victim's supervisor, a co-worker, a minister, youth worker, family member, or fellow church attendee.
- The harasser's behaviour must be unwelcome
- The victim does not have to be only the person directly harassed but can be anyone who finds the behaviour offensive and is affected by it.
- While adverse effects on the victim are common, this does not have to be the case for the behaviour to be unlawful.
- The harasser may be completely unaware that their behaviour is offensive or constitutes sexual harassment.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT – could include:

- any behaviour which patronises, intimidates or offends, e.g. remarks, looks, jokes or offensive language any behaviour which makes people feel viewed as sexual objects and which causes offence, even if unintended.
- provocative suggestions, propositioning people.
- the display of pornographic, semi-pornographic or suggestive material - electronic or paper
- deliberate, potentially objectionable, physical contact to which the person has not consented or had the opportunity to object.
- threats, or promises of success or other rewards, in exchange for sexual favours.

Some steps to prevent and deal with sexual harassment

- Be clear with yourself and others about your personal boundaries – what sort of closeness with others feels comfortable and appropriate for you?
- Refuse any inappropriate gesture or contact.
- Respect other's personal boundaries. If you are not sure ask first (i.e. would it be okay if I gave you a hug?)
- If you experience harassment, make it clear that the behaviour is unwelcome. You can say 'no' with a look, words or gestures.
- Harassment is never the fault of the person being harassed. By its nature, harassment is unwanted attention or behaviour. It is not consensual.
- If harassment persists, and you are in a public place, make your protests louder so that the public notices the harasser.
- If harassment is where you are alone with each other move immediately into a public space.
- Trust your intuition and feelings if someone's behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable. People who experience harassment sometimes try to rationalise or deny what is really going on.
- Talk about it with people you trust, so that the name of the harasser and the kind of objectionable things done are known. This is important so that others are not subjected to the same treatment. Silence may only provoke more harassment.
- In serious cases where legal or other follow-up action is necessary, a verbal and written record of events is helpful.
- If you see someone being harassed don't keep silent. You could approach the person being harassed to see how you can help. Tell the person doing the harassment that their actions or words are inappropriate and make everyone feel uncomfortable. If the case is severe call for help.
- If you have experienced harassment, your local church designated person, or elder, can provide a safe place to talk about the situation and your feelings. They can also support you with what ever follow-up measures might be appropriate, in liaison with your synod adviser.
- If someone challenges your behaviour as uncomfortable for them. Respect their view and stop immediately.

Adapted From World Council of Churches material 2006

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH'S POLICY AND PROCEDURE IN RESPONSE TO ALLEGED INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE AGAINST ADULTS -

[full version accepted by Mission Council at its meeting in October 2007 and available via the Synod Office]

1) Summary of policy and procedures document

The United Reformed Church recognises that there are occasions when unwanted sexualised conduct may occur within the context of church life. When this involves the behaviour of ordained ministers or Church Related Community Workers towards people in their care, it is a breach of professional ethics and the vows of ordination. Others in leadership and pastoral positions in the church should also ensure that their own conduct does not breach ethical standards and betray the trust given to them. Whilst it is recognised that any abusive behaviour is a matter of pastoral concern, this policy concentrates on sexual abuse, an area requiring particular discretion and sensitivity because of the nature of the allegations and the need to exercise care in dealing with the people concerned. Although some forms of sexual harassment or abuse against adults may not necessarily constitute a criminal offence (as it would with children or vulnerable adults as defined by the law), nevertheless if an offence has been committed, then there is a responsibility to refer this to the appropriate legal procedures and not to attempt to cover it up.

Please refer to the full document for definitions and examples of sexual harassment and abuse.

2) Synod Advisers

Each Synod will appoint at least two Advisers, whose names will be made known via the Synod yearbook/directory. They will be available to help churches deal with any situation involving a complaint [from a member or adherent] of sexual misconduct by someone in a position of ministerial or pastoral leadership within the church, other paid employees or volunteers.

3) Principles to be recognised

Complaints will be taken seriously, whilst upholding the practice of an assumption of innocence until proven guilty, alongside the need to safeguard the rights and reputation of victims, witnesses and the accused, as well as their confidentiality. Pastoral support will be offered separately to both the complainant and the accused ('the respondent') and their families.

4) Procedures to be followed

- a) It is assumed that any complaint will be made initially by the person concerned to their minister, elder, or to a third party who may be a person who has been specially designated by the local church as a contact for such matters.
- b) **The person receiving the complaint should contact a Synod Adviser without delay in order to seek advice on the appropriate action to take.**
- c) If it is considered that the complaint falls within the framework set out in the full policy and procedures document of the United Reformed Church, the Synod Adviser will take responsibility for ensuring that those procedures are implemented.
- d) If the complaint is between church members or adherents of equal standing in the church, or involves an outside person, then this is primarily a matter of pastoral concern within that congregation and the Synod Adviser will not normally intervene directly, although advice may be offered on proper procedures to follow.
- e) When the Adviser takes up a case, the complainant will be contacted and informed of all aspects of the procedure, including their right to lay a formal written complaint, which will then be dealt with through a formal process. There are three possible outcomes:
 - (i) If it is agreed with the complainant that the incident(s) did not amount to sexual harassment or abuse as defined in the policy, then no further action will be taken by the Adviser.
 - (ii) If there is evidence of sexual harassment or abuse, but the complainant does not wish to lay a formal complaint, then the Adviser will seek to identify if any undue pressure was brought to bear in relation to this decision and whether any further follow-up process is still appropriate.
 - (iii) If it is decided to make a formal written complaint, this will be passed to the respondent, together with a copy of the full URC policy document, which sets out their rights in relation to the procedure and to pastoral support.
- f) In the case of a formal complaint made against an ordained minister or a Church Related Community Worker, a copy of the complaint will also be sent to the person responsible for starting the disciplinary procedures under 'Section O' (normally the Synod Moderator).
- g) In the case of a formal complaint against a lay employee of the church, disciplinary measures may need to be invoked in the case of serious misconduct.
- h) In the case of a formal complaint against a lay volunteer worker or leader, they may be advised to make a temporary withdrawal without prejudice from the situation until the matter is resolved according to the Synod's procedure, after which it may be that some longer-term sanction may be appropriate.

In very brief: It is the policy of the United Reformed Church that local churches seek advice from their Synod on any issues of alleged sexual abuse or harassment.

Synod Advisers appointed by the Synod are concerned representatives of the United Reformed Church who have volunteered and been trained to undertake this role. They will be prepared to discuss any relevant matter with individuals, however sensitive. Some matters may be dealt with at the local level. A Synod Adviser can give advice as to whether this is appropriate or if the matter should be referred to a wider church body.

A Synod Adviser will listen carefully to the issues presented and provide information about alternative actions and whether a formal complaint is appropriate. The information given to the

Synod Adviser will be treated in the strictest confidence. Care will be taken to respect and support all persons involved.

Resources – a more comprehensive resource pack is available via the synod office.

This is a list that is not exhaustive – but may give some indication of what to look for in your locality.

If you have access to a computer, putting an organisation name in a web search will bring up national and local telephone numbers.

Your local Library may have information; many have computers which you can use.

Safe in Church - www.safeinchurch.co.uk - website to help survivors of abuse by churches

Christian Survivors of Sexual Abuse (CSSA) 38 Sydenham Villas Road, Cheltenham GL52 6DZ

Whole Person Care - www.wholepersoncare.org.uk - Christian networking and information site

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre (RASASC) Helpline 020 8683 3300 Counselling 020 8683 3311
www.bbc.co.uk/crime/support/rape.shtml

Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC) - www.acc-uk.org - national network of counsellors, churches and organisations

Books:

Time for Action: Sexual Abuse, the Churches and a new dawn for survivors – a report to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI 2002)

Preserving the Integrity of the Body: Sexual Ethics within the United Reformed Church – a report detailing the impact of clergy sexual misconduct, with an extensive bibliography (The United Reformed Church 2006).

Bullying and Sexual Harassment, Stephen and Hallas (2006) Oxford: Chandos House Publishing

Appropriate Worship Material is being prepared.

Theological reflection on this theme, with suggested discussion, is in the companion document to this material *LIFE TOGETHER*.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

A5

Report on the appointment of a *General Secretary*

The Committee of Assembly consisting of The Moderator, the Revd Professor Stephen Orchard, the Revd James Breslin (Clerk), the Revd Malcolm Hanson, (Convener of Nominations,) Dr Graham Campling, Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith, the Revd Elizabeth Caswell, Mr Eric Chilton, the Revd Principal Susan Durber, the Revd John Durell, Mr John Ellis, the Revd David Fox, the Revd Louise Franklin, Mrs Janet Gray, the Revd Kate Gray, the Revd Carla Grosch-Miller, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, Mrs Linda Harrison, the Revd Sue Henderson, Mr Andrew Littlejohns, Mr Simon Loveitt, the Revd John Marsh, Mr Rod Morrison, Mrs Val Morrison, Mr Tom Murray, the Revd Elizabeth Nash, the Revd Peter Noble, Mr Peter Pay, the Revd Kathryn Price, Miss Emma Pugh, Mr William Robson, Mr Patrick Smyth, Mr Donald Swift, the Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe, Ms Janet Turner, Mr Keith Webster, the Revd Cecil White, Mrs Irene Wren and Mrs Joan Young,

appointed to nominate the General Secretary met on Wednesday December 12th 2007 at 1.30 p.m. in the Isaac Watts Room of Church House.

Ms Michelle Marcano (Church House Human Resources and Facilities Manager) was in attendance.

The Moderator introduced the business before the Committee, reminding it that it was a Committee of Assembly, appointed under rule 4.2 of the Rules of Procedure and meeting at the call of the Moderator to receive the resignation of the General Secretary and to nominate a successor.

The Clerk moved.

The Committee, acting on behalf of General Assembly receives and approves the resignation of the Revd Dr David Cornick from the post of General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, from March 14th 2008 or such other date as may subsequently be agreed.

This was seconded by the Revd David Grosch-Miller and agreed unanimously.

It was agreed to appoint a group of 12 to shortlist and interview but that the group may proceed so long as it did not shrink below eight and remained balanced.

The procedure to be adopted was that an application form would be prepared and sent to candidates who might either apply directly or be nominated by others.

The Group appointed to carry this forward was agreed to be Stephen Orchard, (Moderator), Malcolm Hanson (Nominations Committee Convener), John Ellis Treasurer

Elizabeth Caswell, Patrick Smyth, Andy Littlejohns, Joan Young, Sue Henderson, Val Morrison, Keith Webster, Peter Pay, Susan Durber, Peter Noble, with the Clerk in attendance to Clerk the Meetings.

It was agreed that the Group might draw from the major panel to interview if needed.

The Clerk was asked to seek relevant comments from Ecumenical Partners



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

B

**Review of the Youth and Children's Work
Training and Development (YCWTD) Programme**

Summary of the Findings and Recommendations for Discussion

Findings in Brief

1. Much excellent work has been achieved
2. Children and young people are being encouraged to grow in faith and play a fuller part in the URC's life, and many of their leaders have been trained and supported
3. Statutory work is being covered by the team across most synods
4. A gifted team of dedicated staff are enabling much good practice to flourish
5. Ecumenical work is greatly enhanced by the team's presence
6. The URC is getting value for money
7. But there is room for real improvement through clearer strategic vision, oversight and management
8. There is less focus upon children compared to young people
9. There is a need to make full use of the team's potential to help the URC serve in its changing contexts

Recommendations in Brief

1. The Programme be continued
2. Coordination and management be improved and appropriately funded
3. An action plan be approved to ensure the right changes happen and are overseen
4. Standards of appraisal and development be agreed and used across synods
5. The Programme be integrated into the ongoing developments of the URC subsequent to Catch the Vision

The remit of this review

This review group was asked to answer the crucial question:

"What value is the Church gaining from the YCWTD programme?" and it was also asked to:

- look at the whole YCWTD programme; and
- compare and contrast ways of working across the Synods.

The main findings of this review

1. Has the Church gained from the YCWTD programme?

- 1.1. Much has been achieved in children and young people's ministry through the work of the YCWTD Officers and Synods are generally very supportive of their work although there are significant variations.

- 1.2. At its best, the programme has had a very positive impact on the work of the URC. A large number of adults working with children's and youth groups have received training. 'What do you think' has been a very successful way of helping young people to have their voices heard. FURY Assembly has helped young people to think about key issues and frame resolutions for Assembly. The first Children's Assembly in 2007, although the initiative of the Children's Work development Officer, utilized the skills of some YCWTDOS.
 - 1.3. The work of the YCWTDOS in their Synods has helped to build up the confidence of younger people as well as the leaders and other volunteers in local churches. Work that was already good has flourished and developed further. Leaders have been well resourced and have received support, guidance and encouragement.
 - 1.4. Very valuable work has been carried out in Synods in relation to statutory work and, if the YCWTDOS were not employed, the URC would have to pay others to carry out the work – or rely on very good volunteers whose work would need monitoring. The YCWTDOS carry a heavy responsibility in this respect on behalf of the whole Church.
 - 1.5. Work with local churches has usually been appreciated, but many churches are not touched by the work in spite of publicity. This is probably because the churches say that they have very few or no children and young people on Sundays.
 - 1.6. YCWTDOS are valued for their involvement in the whole life of the church and have used their individual skills, for example in ICT, to help their Synods.
 - 1.7. The YCWT Programme is the envy of ecumenical partners and the wider church has gained much from the cooperative working. The YCWTDOS have helped to show churches in other denominations that the URC takes youth and children's ministry seriously and some local churches have said that they have been given a wider ecumenical dimension through the work led by YCWTDOS.
- 2. Has the Church obtained 'value for money?'**
- 2.1. This is not easy to evaluate but, because of the many positive responses, the answer must be 'yes'. However, there is scope for improvement in the way the group of YCWTDOS work together for the URC as a whole and how their work in Synods relates to agreed strategies there.
 - 2.2. Individual officers have many skills and talents and the potential for outstanding work through greater team work is there, but nobody has an overview of their skills and talents, or of areas for development, in spite of the production of three-yearly appraisal reports which are sent to Church House.
 - 2.3. Pilots has been very successful and continues to grow. The 2002 Review acknowledged that one Assembly staff was not sufficient and that there should be more paid resources as the work developed. Additional support has been provided by the YCWTDOS but this has not been done in a systematic way. More could be achieved if the Pilots Development Officer could call on dedicated time from some YCWTDOS.
 - 2.4. Overall, the work of the YCWTDOS for the whole church has not been as efficient or effective as it could have been mainly because of a lack of strategic planning at both Synod and Assembly level and because earlier recommendations about the management (in the 2002 report) of the Assembly programme had not been implemented. As a consequence, the YCWTDOS do not function as a team.

- 2.5. The strength of having such professional officers in Synods is that they are able to come together to work for the whole church but there is a lack of clarity about what constitutes Assembly work. While it is inevitable in some respects that the boundary between Synod and Assembly work is fuzzy, greater clarity would be helpful. Not all YCWTDOS spend the same proportion of time on Assembly work so some Synods make greater contributions than others. There are questions about how tasks are allocated to, or chosen by, the YCWTDOS and how the work is co-ordinated.
- 2.6. The YCWTDOS' 'team' meetings are self-managed and time is not used as effectively as it could be for training or sharing ideas. Are the three residential meetings a year, as currently organised, justified from a time and financial point of view?
- 2.7. Several Synods have spoken of the difficulty of finding appropriate people as Synod Managers because of pressures on their time. Particular Synod structures also affect the way they operate; some managers are more involved in the general life and decisions in the Synod than others. The recommendation that new Synod managers receive some training has not been implemented.
- 2.8. The YCWTDOS are Assembly appointments and they are a relatively expensive resource. The URC, however, has not made as much use of their experience and skills as it could have done. For example, they are not asked to make a report to General Assembly; they were not involved in early 'Catch the Vision' discussions; and in a recent edition of 'Reform' about the learning church they were not invited to contribute. Recent offers to help to produce child-friendly material for Vision4Life have not yet been taken up.
- 2.9. It has been suggested by some that the URC does not get 'value for money' in its ecumenical work as "we give more than we receive".

3. Other Issues

- 3.1. Most of the current workers have a background in youth rather than children's work and there is a need to address this imbalance in any future work/appointments. With good overall management and planning, development opportunities could easily be provided within the Assembly programme of work.
- 3.2. The budget for the whole programme is held by the Secretary for Youth. At present there is an imbalance in the funding of children's and youth work, but there is no clear identification of how the money is split. It has been argued that more should be spent on children's work because there are more under-10s linked to the churches.
- 3.3. Two Synods do not have YCWTDOS. One Synod (Northern) has chosen not to be part of the programme because of dissatisfaction in the past and, therefore, does not receive any funding for its (part-time) children's worker and, consequently, she is not involved in the YCWTDOS team meetings or in other communications. Young people from the Synod have, however, been involved in sessions led by the Secretary for Youth, have shared in Youth Executive meetings with the North Western Synod, and benefited from attending FURY Assembly and other events led by YCWTDOS.
- 3.4. The Synod of Wales is currently reviewing the situation but, again, activities have been organised at the request of the Synod by other officers.
- 3.5. The title of Youth and Childrens' Work Development Officer is too complicated; something like Youth and Children's Officer (YCO) would be more helpful.
- 3.6. There is no system in place to ensure that the policy on Safeguarding is up to date, or that the quality of training given in Synods is of an acceptable standard.

- 3.7. The URC has a very helpful Staff Handbook to guide YCWTDOS and their managers. This includes information about appraisals and reviews as well as a generic job description which Synods use as a basis for their own. There is a need to review this handbook.
- 3.8. There is a need to have systems that try to ensure that the Church has work of a consistently high quality, and to support colleagues when it is not of the required standard.
- 3.9. The role of a YCO should be considered and recognised as a ministry.

4. Vision for the Future

- 4.1. Most respondents were in favour of continuing with the programme but suggested that this was a time for a significant change because of the evolving needs and priorities of the Church and because of the management problems highlighted earlier. There would need to be changes to current job descriptions and related training and development.
- 4.2. Part of the change would be to explore how the faith is passed on to the next generation, and how adults, even in churches where there are currently no children, can be challenged to think about theology and culture etc. as it affects people of all ages.
- 4.3. The work of YCWTDOS initially involved working with adults (youth and children's workers) rather than directly working with the children and young people. Many respondents have suggested that there should be more 'hands on' work in the future.
- 4.4. Professional officers are needed to provide inspirational leadership and show others new ways of being church. They are said by some to be "vital if the church is to grow" and "central to the life of the church".
- 4.5. Increasing statutory requirements will be placed on voluntary workers in the near future and professionals are needed to ensure that the Church and its policies are up to date. Could the URC afford to rely on well meaning volunteers instead of paid officers?

5. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: for the future mission of the URC, the Review Group recommends the continuation of a central programme with certain provisos. They are that:

- there is a clear focus and strategy for youth and children's ministry from the Youth and Children's Work Committee, to which Synods can link; and
- current ineffective leadership and management issues are resolved.

As part of 'Catch the Vision', and now 'Vision4Life', as well as the new education and learning strategy, it is essential that the URC employs professionals to lead work with children and young people in Synods and across the whole church. It is also essential if the URC is to keep abreast of new and changing statutory requirements. However, there needs to be a rethink of current practice because of changes since the start of the YCWT programme - and because of the changing needs as the URC seek to be a missionary church in this part of the 21st century.

Recommendation 2: a simpler title is used, such as Youth and Children's Officer (YCO)

Recommendation 3: the URC takes seriously the need for co-ordinated leadership and management of all youth and children's work and accepts Scenario 1 and discusses with Synods the possible funding arrangements

To be effective, Assembly driven work must be co-ordinated and managed centrally with clear lines of accountability. The work must be shared across the YCOs so that their existing skills and experience are used, and also to provide developmental opportunities for them. The Review Group discussed several options (see Annex A) but concluded that the best option (Scenario 1) was that all the staff employed by the URC for youth and children's work, be managed by one person, and that this should not be one of the existing Church House staff because of their existing work loads. The cost of an overall manager could be shared by Synods, as suggested in Annex A.

Synod management would continue as now with clear links to the Assembly appointed manager, and with relevant induction and training.

Recommendation 4: in order that recommendations which are accepted by the Church are actually implemented, an action plan be drawn up, giving deadlines and naming responsible people. Progress on its implementation should be monitored.

Recommendation 5: there should be one such officer in each Synod, working to Synod priorities but contributing to the whole church on an agreed basis.

There is no reason why the URC should hold on to the historical reasons for the YCWTD group so it makes sense to involve all employed in Synod's for youth and children's ministry to come together as an Assembly team.

Recommendation 6: a regular system of updating and training for the YCOs be developed as well as a system of monitoring and evaluating the training on safeguarding issues.

Recommendation 7: a small group of, say, three (including a HR person) is asked to draw up a set of minimal standards to be used in the appraisal/review process and sets out a clear mechanism for dealing with work which is not of the required quality.

Recommendation 8: the systems being developed in the Church with its new committee structure ensure that there is joined-up thinking across the various departments/committees of the Church so that YCOs are seen as an integral part of the resources for the Church.

The URC has stated that it wants to be a learning church and the YCWTDs need to feel and be seen as part of the overall provision that the URC has for education and learning. The team's role should be integral to the whole life of the church; it should be central not sidelined. This means there should be more joined-up thinking across the various departments/committees of the Church.

Recommendation 9: there is more openness about the budget for youth and children's work.

Recommendation 10: that the URC and individual Synods decide on the commitment to working with ecumenical partners. Should other Churches pay for the use of the URC's personnel?

6. Evidence Base

- 6.1. The review group looked at the whole YCWTD programme and compared and contrasted ways of working across the Synods. It also sought the views of those Synods which do not have a YCWTD or its equivalent.
- 6.2. Evidence was sought in a variety of ways. Letters were sent to Synods, FURY Executive, ecumenical partners, Synod Pilot Development Officers, the three Resource Centres for Learning and one was placed in Reform inviting responses.
- 6.3. Members of the group have:
 - met with the three Assembly appointed staff in July
 - attended a meeting of Synod Moderators in September
 - attended a meeting of YCWTDs in September, and later met with small groups of YCWTDs in October
 - attended a meeting of the Synod managers in October, which was also attended for part of the time by the Human Resources and Facilities Manager
 - met with the Secretary for Education and Learning in November
 - met with the Deputy General Secretary in December
 - examined the recommendations of the previous review group
 - compared the job descriptions of YCWTDs in different Synods and read responses in a questionnaire from YCWTDs and their managers about work carried out in the previous year
 - read the written responses from Synods, FURY Executive, some ecumenical partners, some Synod Pilot Development Officers, the three Resource Centres for Learning, and some individuals both ministers and lay people

The Review Group

Kathleen Cross Manager	Convener	NW Synod YCWTD
Suzanne Adofo Anthea Coates Manager	Church House Member of YCWC	CRCW (Assembly Staff) SW Synod YCWTD
Revd Jack Dyce College	Synod of Scotland	Principal of the Scottish
Anne Hatch Peter Pay Doug Swanney Revd Stephen Thornton	NW Synod Wessex Synod Clerk Methodist Church Wessex Synod	Pilots Development Officer Wessex YCWTD Manager Youth and Children's Worker
Revd Neil Thorogood	Convener of the YCWC	

Annex A

Possible future scenarios

This is time for a rethink. These different scenarios assume that the URC has a continued commitment and vision to work with children and young people as part of its mission in the next 10 or so years, and there is a clear strategy for the work and related accountability.

In all cases, scrap the 'team' as now - the YCWT programme as it was created no longer exists and Government funding disappeared many years ago. Ideally involve all Synods.

Use a simpler title such as Youth and Children's Officer (YCO) for Synod officers. (Drop 'work' as this should be seen as a ministry.)

Scenario 1

Build a new team with clear management which includes all officers appointed in Synods (including Northern Synod's Children's officer) plus the three Church House officers, who would be seen as Project Managers for particular pieces of Assembly work. This would involve amending job descriptions but should not be difficult.

Each Synod officer would be involved in work for the Church outside their Synod, with an agreed proportion. These specific tasks would normally be managed (on a project management basis) by one of the three Church House based officers if the tasks were part of their agreed programmes. Synods would be consulted/informed before the work was undertaken setting out expectations in terms of objectives, role, timescales and time requirements together with reasons for their involvement; for example, existing expertise or personal development. Reports would also be sent at the end of the project on outcomes and performance. This would build in some level of accountability.

BUT this will only work (and the URC gets value for money) if someone is appointed to lead and manage the team, ensuring that Assembly work is carried out as requested; that the strengths of members of the team are fully utilised for the wider church, and that personal and professional development of the officers takes place. This manager should have a good overview of work with both children and young people and would work closely with the Y&CW Committee which determines the overall strategy. Sound management should ensure that the URC as a whole gets very good value for money.

YCOs would have a manager in their Synod, as now, who would also link to the Assembly appointed manager. The Synod line manager would need to ensure that the work and priorities of the YCO are in line with Synod strategies. This probably means that the manager should be closely integrated into the Synod structure.

The cost could be met in several ways; for example... if the central time were reduced from 25% to 20% (and the Synod paid the extra 5%) 11 x 5% (or even 13 x 5%) would release money to fund 55 - 65% of a post. This management post could probably be done by a part-time person with suitable experience and qualifications. Assuming that the URC budgets for 13 YCWTDO posts at present, 50% (2x25%) of a post would already be in the budget.

Scenario 2

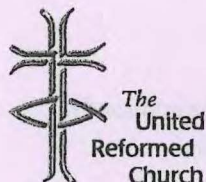
If the management post for the team cannot be resolved, or afforded, then scrap the notion of an Assembly team and leave it to Synods. YCOs would work in Synods, according to Synod strategies, contributing to Assembly work as requested and with the Synod's agreement. YCOs would carry out work linked to safeguarding and other legal requirements in their Synods but on behalf of the whole church (URC). [The URC would have to buy in expertise –which would be costly - for such work if it were not carried out by these Synod officers.]

It is probable that some Synods would not release their Officers for Assembly tasks. There would no longer be much chance of URC-wide strategic planning, oversight, development and accountability. Synods have not always found it easy to provide adequate management and support internally and many have called for stronger (not less) central oversight and support. The whole church would lose out as YCOs may not be available for important work or events which rely on good knowledge of the URC.

Scenario 3

Leave as now, but ask one of the three Church House based officers to manage the team and the central work, as originally suggested in the 2002 Review of Youth and Children's Work. Management training would be vital for this change of role and emphasis and new job descriptions would need to be drawn up. [It is noted that the Children's Work DO's post expires at the end of 2009 and the Secretary for Youth Work's post will be reviewed in 2008.]

Some may see this as an easy solution but if one of the officers were to carry out the management role there would need to be on-going leadership and management training. The relationship between the manager and the YCO team will be very different from that which currently exists, so there need to be very significant changes. The task, if done properly, could take up a significant amount of time. Where does this time come from – and at what cost to the existing, and proposed, tasks?



MISSION COUNCIL 26 January 2008

C

Policy on Treatment of General Legacies

Key Point

1 Mission Council is invited to establish a Legacy Fund within the central accounts of the Church.

Background

2 Over the five years 2002-2006, the United Reformed Church centrally recorded a total of £4.3million of legacy income. Of this, £2.4million was specified for particular funds, with the Retired Ministers' Housing Society the main beneficiary at £1.9million. The remaining £1.9million of 'general purpose' legacies was allocated to our general fund and used to offset budget deficits or to create a surplus for the year.

3 Finance Committee believes that the above approach has had a distorting effect on the budgeting process, leading to an expectation that deficits will be funded by legacies. It removes the discipline that regular expenditure commitments should be funded from regular and predictable income. The current approach also denies the Church the opportunity, used by many charities, of using legacy receipts to fund projects that cannot be supported from normal budget resources.

4 Finance Committee would prefer funds from legacies to be available principally for imaginative and innovative mission projects, and to give us stories for use in future legacy appeals.

Proposal

5 Finance Committee therefore proposes to Mission Council a change in the treatment of legacies bequeathed for URC general purposes with effect from the 2007 accounts:

- To hold such legacies in a designated Legacy Fund, which would be able to support specific projects or on occasion to allocate sums to general fund.
- To make the existence of the Legacy Fund widely known, in order to encourage bequests.
- To invite Mission Council from time to time to propose particular priorities for the use of the Legacy Fund.
- To invite the new Mission Committee and other Assembly Committees to propose expenditure from the Legacy Fund for otherwise unfunded projects.
- To ask the Finance Committee to administer the Fund and to bring forward expenditure proposals to Mission Council as part of the annual budget round.

6 The proposal to launch the fund with 2007 general legacy income would introduce the concept gently as general legacies are likely to amount to about £50,000 only.

Resolution

Mission Council agrees to the creation of a designated Legacy Fund.

John G Ellis
Treasurer

4 January 2008

Ministers Pension Fund: Clarification of Investment Options

Key Point

1 Mission Council is invited to amend the Ministers Pension Fund Trust Deed and Rules to clarify its bond market investment options.

Background

2 The United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund invests around £75m to ensure it can provide present and future pensions to ministers and their eligible dependents.

3 Around £45m of this is invested in index-linked UK Government stock (often known as "gilts"). This provides a predictable income stream and protects the Fund against inflation. A recent review by the Fund's Board of its investment choices confirmed that investing in these gilts continues to be in the best interests of the Fund's members. However the financial returns would generally be better if the Investment Manager had the flexibility to invest a small share of this capital in more complex instruments based on Government and company bonds, known as "futures" and "swaps".

4 The Fund's Board has considered professional advice on the subject and is satisfied that our bond Investment Manager (HSBC Investments (UK) Ltd) is fully competent to use these instruments responsibly and to the Fund's benefit. But their legal advisers have queried whether the current wording of the Pension Fund Trust Deed and Rules allows for this form of investment. A clarification of the Rules is therefore required.

5 Within the overall framework set by the Rules, the Board would continue to provide a detailed mandate to the Investment Manager. This includes the restrictions implied by the current Assembly ethical investment guidelines.

Proposal

6 Paragraph 6.4 of the Pension Fund Rules sets out the investment options open to the Fund. The Board proposes that the introductory section and sub-paragraph 6.4.4 should be revised.

7 The existing wording of the introductory section to 6.4 is:

"Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions trust money may be invested or applied as follows:"

8 The existing wording of sub-paragraph 6.4.4 is:

"In the purchase of assets of a non-income producing nature and any transaction calculated in the opinion of the Pension Trustee to offset or reduce any risk of loss to the Fund and so that the Pension Trustee may deal in foreign currencies (either at the official rate of exchange or any other rates) options traded options and traded futures whether for present or future settlement."

Resolution

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, amends paragraphs 6.4 and 6.4.4 of the Rules of the United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund so that they read as follows:

6.4

"The Pension Trustee may, in the manner which it thinks fit and as if it were absolutely and beneficially entitled, use the whole or any part of the Fund to invest in, acquire, dispose of, lend or otherwise deal in or undertake to deal in any property, assets, rights, options, assurances, contracts or interests (whether or not such transactions involve liability, produce income or are authorised by law as investments for trust assets). Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing provisions trust money may be invested or applied as follows:"

6.4.4

"In the purchase of assets of a non-income producing nature and any transaction calculated in the opinion of the Pension Trustee to offset or reduce any risk of loss to the Fund, or to facilitate efficient portfolio management (including the reduction of cost or the generation of additional capital or income with an acceptable level of risk), and so that the Pension Trustee may deal in foreign currencies (either at the official rate of exchange or any other rates), contracts for differences and other derivatives (exchange traded and non-exchange traded) for present or future settlement."

John G Ellis

Treasurer

2 January 2008



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

C2

Membership of the Pensions Executive

Key Point

1 Mission Council is asked to agree the pattern of Assembly appointments to the Pensions Executive.

Background

2 The Pensions Executive is a small group which provides technical advice on pensions matters to other bodies within the United Reformed Church and, when requested, acts on their behalf. It is mainly concerned with policy and implementation questions relating to the pension arrangements for Stipendiary Ministers, CRCWs and for lay staff. Its principal internal relationships are with the Ministries Committee, the Finance Committee and the URC Ministers Pension Fund.

3 The Convener of the Pensions Executive is appointed by General Assembly and has always been a professional actuary. The Treasurer is an ex officio member of the Executive. The Executive also seeks suitable representatives of the Church's two main pension schemes to serve.

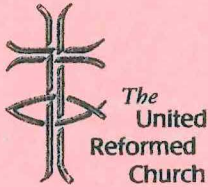
4 Arrangements concerning the remaining members of the Executive have not always been crystal clear. Having recently reviewed its membership, the Executive believes it would be helpful to have two other members appointed by Assembly via the Nominations Committee. The Nominations Committee has asked for a formal endorsement of this proposal.

5 As Mission Council noted in 2004, the technical nature of the Executive's business means that although appointments should not be indefinite, they might usefully have the potential to be extended beyond the standard maximum of four years.

Resolution

Mission Council resolves that the Pensions Executive should include within its membership three people appointed by the General Assembly, one of whom should be appointed as the Convener.

John G Ellis
Treasurer
10 January 2008



MISSION COUNCIL

26 January 2008

D

Nominations Committee

1. **Mission Committee** The following is the membership of the Mission Committee as finally agreed:

Convener	Revd Ed Cox	2012
Deputy Convener	Revd Elizabeth Caswell	2010
General Secretary		
Deputy General Secretary		
<i>Ex-officio: General Assembly Moderator, Moderator-elect and past Moderator</i>		
Ecumenical representative nominated by CTBI		

Representatives from Synods:

Northern	Mrs Chris Eddowes	2011
North Western	Revd Mike Walsh	2012
Mersey	Revd Andrew Willett	2010
Yorkshire	Mrs Anne Parker	2011
East Midlands	Revd Clare Downing	2012
West Midlands	Revd Louise Franklin	2010
Eastern	Revd Peter Ball	2011
South Western	Revd Tracey Lewis	2012
Wessex	Mr Peter Pay	2010
Thames North	Mr David Jonathan	2011
Southern	Revd Pauline Sparks	2012
Wales	Revd Simon Walkling	2010
Scotland	Revd Mary Buchanan	2011

Staff members in attendance:

Secretary for Mission
Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith and Order
Secretary for Church and Society
Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry
Secretary for World Church Relations
Commitment for Life Programme Co-ordinator

The potential membership of the committee is therefore 27, with the possibility of this increasing slightly when Assembly Moderators span six years.

2. Faith and Order Reference Group

The Revd Dr Robert Pope has agreed to be Convener.

The following have agreed to be members of the Group:

Revd Dr Susan Durber, Revd Dr Sarah Hall, Revd Fleur Houston, Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, Revd Neil Messer, Revd Dr John Bradbury.

3. Report of Review Group for the Moderator of Wessex Synod

The Review Group for the Moderator of Wessex Synod, convened by the Revd Mary Buchanan, recommends the reappointment of the Revd Adrian Bulley for a further five years (1.2.09 - 31.8.14). A resolution will be brought to General Assembly.

4. Appointing and Review Group conveners

The Revd Raymond Singh has agreed to convene the Appointing Group for the Moderator of the West Midlands Synod.

The Revd Lesley Charlton has agreed to convene the Review Group for the Moderator of the East Midlands Synod.

The Revd Francis Ackroyd has agreed to convene the Appointing Group for the Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry.

The Revd Dr David Peel has agreed to convene the Appointing Group for the Secretary for Ministries.

5. Conveners Elect (for appointment at General Assembly 2008)

The following have agreed to serve as Conveners Elect from Assembly 2008 -

Windermere Advisory Group

Revd Jan Berry

Ministries Accreditation Sub-Committee

Revd Geoffrey Townsend

Maintenance of Ministry Sub-Committee

Assessment Board

6. Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators

At present no terms are set for those serving on this Panel, and all 18 of the present members have been asked to serve at least once and sometimes twice or three times in the last year. It is suggested therefore that a term of six years might be set and that the number of Panel members be increased by six.

Resolution: Mission Council agrees to increase the number of members on the Panel for the Appointment and Review of Synod Moderators to twenty-four, and to limit their service to six years.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

D1

Nominations Committee

'Think-tank' on Mission and Spirituality

(a) BACKGROUND

Extract from the 2007 Reports to Assembly, "Catch the Vision" page 11:

"...we need space for dreaming dreams and seeing visions... We need a '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 at least twice a year for 24 hours at Windermere (maybe at the end of July and the following April), to turn their minds to the ongoing renewal and spiritual refreshment of the church. There would be a mix of theologians and Biblical scholars and practitioners, both lay and ordained, representing the theological and cultural diversity of the church, along with ecumenical participants. It would be serviced by the Central Secretariat and convened by the Moderator.

"We suggest it should initially be selected by the Moderator, in consultation with the Nominations Committee. Members would serve for a period of three years, with one third of the membership changing each year."

And from page 12:

RESOLUTION 1: 'THINK-TANK' ON MISSION AND SPIRITUALITY

"General Assembly instructs Mission Council and the Nominations Committee to do such further work as is necessary to create a 'think-tank' on mission and spirituality."

The following suggestions are offered for discussion in Mission Council.

(b) DRAFT REMIT

- The think tank meets at least twice a year for 24 hours at Windermere (possibly at the end of July and in April).
- Its task is to worship, pray and reflect together without any prescribed agenda, but with the object of dreaming dreams, seeing visions, listening to prophetic voices and seeking God's direction for the life of the Church.
- It seeks to offer fresh thinking on the ongoing renewal and spiritual refreshment of the church in the context of the mission of the Church.
- Any feedback from these meetings is channelled into the wider life of the church through MCAG and other appropriate routes.
- The think tank has no formal authority within the structures of the Church, but is a means to encouraging fresh thinking and supporting the leadership of the Church.

(c) DRAFT COMPOSITION

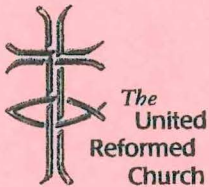
Convener Moderator of General Assembly (ex officio)
Secretary General Secretary or Deputy General Secretary
plus up to five new people per year chosen by the incoming Moderator of General Assembly in consultation with Nominations Committee and serving for a period of three years; any incidental vacancies to be filled on the same basis.

Members might be nominated by the Moderator to reflect the diversity of the church, because of their knowledge of the church or the world, or because of their ability to reflect creatively on the life of the church. People appointed might come with some particular insights and from such backgrounds as:

*biblical scholar or theologian
young person
minister
lay person
ecumenical representative
someone from a black or ethnic minority
someone with international experience
someone with experience of alternative ways of being church*

(d) SUGGESTED METHOD OF APPOINTMENT

To establish the think tank, the immediate past Moderator, the present Moderator and the Moderator Elect, might each be asked to suggest say seven or eight names, from which Nominations Committee would select a balanced group of fifteen - if necessary going beyond the list of names initially suggested. In subsequent years the Moderator Elect would be invited to offer seven or eight fresh names. Further thought will need to be given to this process once the pattern of two Moderators Elect comes into being.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

D2

Nominations Committee - Supplementary

In relation to items 1 and 2 of the Nominations Committee report (Paper D) -

Resolution:

Mission Council agrees to the composition of the Mission Committee and the Faith and Order Reference Group as set out in the Nominations Committee report, with effect from 1 January 2008.

Moderator of the Southern Synod

The Nominating Group, convened by Mrs Helen Brown, recommends the re-appointment of the Revd Nigel Uden to serve as Moderator of the Southern Synod for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Nigel Uden as Moderator of the Southern Synod for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

Moderator of the National Synod of Wales

The Nominating Group, convened by Dr Graham Campling, recommends the re-appointment of the Revd Peter Noble to serve as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.

Resolution:

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the re-appointment of the Revd Peter Noble as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales for a period of five years from 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2013.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

E

Ministries Committee:
Housing Provision for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers: a proposed review of the manse system

In May 2007 the Ministries Committee agreed to begin a review of the manse system as the housing provision element of ministerial remuneration. As a first step a small working party was constituted to consider whether in principle a full scale review of the system was justifiable and was asked to report to the November 2007 Ministries Committee. The report from that working party is attached to offer background information to Mission Council as it considers this request from the Ministries committee.

The paper received a positive response from the Ministries Committee whilst the Committee also recognised the force of section 4 'The restricted nature of the Working Party's decision'. In order for General Assembly to consider such a radical change to the total provision which Ministers and Church Related Community Workers receive, a detailed proposal setting out the financial, practical and pastoral implications of such a change together with a full implementation programme is essential. This requires work from those with relevant knowledge of the systems already in place and those who can report on the whole range of financial implications which range from consequences for local churches to the impact on the Pension Fund. This involves the participation of representatives from more than one Department of the Church.

The Ministries Committee therefore asks Mission Council to approve the following resolution;

Mission Council resolves to establish a Working Party on Housing Provision for Ministers and CRCWs with the following membership; Convener, Secretary and one minister in stipendiary service appointed by Mission council plus two members nominated by both the Finance and Ministries Committees, and one nomination each from Retired Ministers Housing Sub-Committee and PLATO. The working party will have power to co-opt further members as appropriate.

Manse System Working Party autumn 2007

Members: Geoffrey Roper, Ruth Whitehead, Helen Matthews, Guy Morfett and John Ellis (who was present for the second meeting only)
Staff: Christine Craven

1 The background to the setting up of the working party

In recent years two major concerns have been identified:

- 1) the financial costs of the policy of providing retired minister's housing to those who would not otherwise be adequately housed in retirement.
- 2) 'trapped ministers', that is those who have lost their sense of vocation and would choose to leave the ministry if it were not for the fact that the tied housing which is the manse system means they and their families would be rendered homeless.

2 The principal conclusion

The Working Party took the view that there are grounds for a detailed plan to be prepared for a new system in which it would not be the norm for ministers to be housed in manses. A sufficient period for its implementation would have to elapse to allow for those currently in manses and approaching retirement with the expectation that the denomination would find them retirement homes.

The Working Party favours a change to paying stipends sufficient for ministers/CRCWs to arrange their own housing (by renting or on a mortgage) while pastorates/poss would be responsible for providing the minister's office.

The pros and cons of minister-arranged housing (rented or owner occupied) are set out as follows:-

Pros	Cons
Living 'off the patch' allows ministers/CRCWs to detach from any stress in the pastorate, reflect and recharge and so may prevent 'burnout'.	The minister/CRCW may be less inclined, less financially able to move to pastorates/posts anywhere in the URC
Owning one's own house removes the dependency culture that the manse system can engender.	Ministers'/CRCWs' houses may no longer be a perceived as such a welcoming meeting place for others.
The family has its own space.	
Minister/CRCW and family may be more secure from unwelcome visitors.	
Ministers/CRCWs are no longer the victims of the vagaries of local practice.	
Minister/CRCW and family have property provision for retirement.	
Terms and conditions for stipendiary ministers/CRCWs approximate more closely to those for all the other ministries in the URC	With the manse system, stipendiary ministers/CRCWs can allow the sense of call to predominate because they are free to move to any locality.

3 A Sine Qua Non

It was agreed that when church does not provide a manse it must provide an office for the minister and meeting rooms to replace any at a manse.

4 Restricted nature of the Working Party's decision

Although the Working Party included people with various kinds of experience and expertise, the members did not all feel capable of the further work involved in designing a new system nor of planning the transition phase (which would necessarily be a long one). They therefore request that the further consideration they recommend should be carried forward by a differently constituted group, or groups. The group's conclusion is quite clear: that a detailed plan should be prepared and the denomination ought to then to be asked for agreement to implementing it. The group recognized that the decision would not simply require a resolution of Assembly and action from the centre but widespread support from Synods and churches, the places where trusteeship and care of manses is currently exercised.

5 Some Synods have recently changed the manse System

Some Synods (four to our knowledge) have in recent years taken a new approach to their trusteeship of manses. This means they

- take more control over the manse funds and proceeds,
- enforce manse guidelines and where necessary purchase new manses which meet guidelines
- in some cases pay pastorate regular sums to keep maintenance up to date
- re-allocate manses to meet current deployment to pastorate groups and
- forbid pastorates to 'live off' manse fund interest or rentals.

6 Disparities between regions and Synods need bearing in mind

In addition to the obvious differences between prices of residential property in different parts of Britain there is also the variation between the wealth of Synods, which is addressed by Resource Sharing. A change to minister-arranged housing could require further attention to this aspect. As far as the obvious problem of ministers confronting a big problem when considering a call to an area of more expensive housing, the Working Party suggest ministers/CRCWs and their families should face it as do others who move from one area to another. They may decide to reduce their requirement for residential space when moving to an expensive area. Given that the minister will not be expected to provide a study/office not to give 'church hospitality' or hold interviews at home, a couple in ministry might decide to move to a flat rather than live in a typical manse-style property. The Working Party assume that Synods would offer shared-equity arrangements to ministers/CRCWs so one option when moving to a more expensive area would be to increase the church share of the equity and reduce the minister/CRCW's. Synod resources to finance such arrangements would accrue from manse sales. Some couples including ministers/CRCWs might decide to rent rather than buy - which would be their personal decision.

7 The pros and cons of the present manse system

While the Working Party believe the balance of argument favours a change to minister-arranged housing, they set out the pros and cons of the present system before reaching that view. They also took account of the fact that the manse system was

devised when the assumption was that the minister would be the sole 'breadwinner' of the family:-

Pros	Cons
Removing the financial considerations of house prices allows the minister to live in the local community whatever the status of that community.	It can produce a dependency culture amongst the ministers and their families.
The manse is a 'public space' which can enrich and broaden the horizons of a ministers family.	May be a negative factor in times of ministerial bereavement or marital breakdown.
The 'manse' allows the community outside the church to identify where the minister lives.	May be less relevant to the practice of ministry to a group pastorate when a minister needs to relate to several communities.
The manse system will allow churches in a group pastorate to decide the most strategic location for the minister to live.	Having a manse can lead a church into set ways of thinking about ministry.
There are positive tax implications for ministers who live in manses.	Church is obliged to provide retired ministers housing for those who will not be adequately housed when they leave active service.
	Because ministers and churches may have different perceptions about the adequacy of the manse provided, ministers may be identified as 'difficult' if they complain about the house.

8 Retired Ministers' Housing

The Retired Ministers Housing scheme is perhaps a victim of its own success. It has given great security to those ministers who at retirement have had no resources of their own with which to purchase a house. However the demand for retired ministers housing might be fed by the fact that those going into ministry have not always been given the best advice about houses they might own. The question of how mortgages are to be maintained during years of residential training needs to be addressed. Ordinands should be discouraged rather than encouraged (as they often have been) over selling their houses. No more new ministers should be given the false impression that retirement housing is a right (sometimes wrongly assumed to apply regardless of what years or type of service given to the United Reformed Church).

9 Issues the Working Party have addressed

The policy for ministerial housing ought to:-

- serve the needs of the ministers and local churches of URC.
- serve the contemporary and future mission of the Church,
- be flexible related to the context of each pastorate/post, therefore in some cases where presence at a particular place has high priority exceptions could be made and housing provided

In the light of all the above considerations the Working Party recommend future detailed work on the finances and practicalities of a change to the present system of manse provision be undertaken.

The above report relates equally to the housing of ministers and CRCWs. Those statements in the report which only use the words 'minister' or 'ministerial' are so phrased for stylistic reasons and are not intended to exclude application to CRCWs as appropriate.



MISSION COUNCIL
26 January 2008

J1

Our Life Together
The United Reformed Church's
Basis of Union
by Robert Pope

Preface

Although it might rarely be appreciated as such, the United Reformed Church's Basis of Union is one of the more extraordinary documents of twentieth-century church history. In it we see how a remarkable generation of ecumenists managed to bring together two very different communions into a single denomination and how they did so while keeping their eyes on a future that, they hoped, would bring further organic union (something that did occur in 1981 and in 2000, with both subsequent unions resulting in changes to the original document). Those involved in the negotiations for union, and those responsible for drafting the Basis of Union, all sought to be faithful to their own tradition while also remaining open to the insights of other communions in order to seek that greater visible unity which they believed to be the will of their Lord (cf. Jn 17:11). That their hopes and aspirations for the full organic unity of the Church in Britain have remained largely unfulfilled is hardly the point. They demonstrated more fully than any other group in Britain since the sixteenth-century Reformation that the Church *can* be reformed, but only when its members are prepared to go through what John Huxtable referred to as a 'death and resurrection sequence',¹ allowing some practices to cease that more appropriate forms may take their place (i.e. forms which grow from scripture and the prompting of the Holy Spirit). The following pages attempt to explain how their ideas about what it means to be Church, what it is to be Reformed and how the commitment to be United all require the quest for constant reformation and how all this is encapsulated in the document which still governs the life of the United Reformed Church.

Two things should be said by way of explanation. First, the references in brackets which begin with the symbol § refer to sections in the Manual. While, strictly speaking, the Basis of Union is found in Section A, it is only really understood in reference to the other sections. Second, the use of Church with the first letter in upper case refers to the one Church of Jesus Christ; church in lower case refers either generally to a congregation or a denomination, or specifically to the United Reformed Church.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to put these thoughts together and I have been assisted by a host of people whose comments on earlier drafts have been incorporated here. I offer sincere thanks to the following: Revd Jason Askew, Revd Dr Susan Durber, Mr John Ellis, Revd Keith Forecast (who certainly went beyond the call of duty and read through the document on two occasions), Revd Richard Mortimer, Revd Professor Alan Sell, Mrs Margery Stephenson and the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee. I am grateful to all who gave of their time and insight and for the encouragement and support I received in undertaking this task. However, none of these friends and colleagues bears any responsibility for the interpretative

stance taken here and any misrepresentation that has consequently arisen. That responsibility is mine alone. I should also mention my debt to Mrs Margaret Thompson who made available to me the papers of the Basis of Union's drafting committee and the collection of letters received in response to the scheme of union. They constitute a corpus of material, housed at Westminster College, Cambridge, that is far more interesting than one might think. An understanding of Reformed principles can be gained from Donald K. McKim (ed.), *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), and it has been extensively used here.

Robert Pope
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Introduction

After many years of prayerful consideration and careful negotiation, the United Reformed Church (URC) came into being on 5 October 1972 when its inaugural, uniting assembly was held at the Central Hall, Westminster, followed by an ecumenical celebration in Westminster Abbey.² Originally the union of the Congregational Church (formerly Union) of England and Wales³ and the Presbyterian Church of England, subsequent union has occurred with the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in 1981 and with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000.⁴ At the time of writing (2007), the URC remains the only product of cross-denominational union in Britain,⁵ though each of the 'denominations' which formed it and shaped its life belonged to a particular theological and ecclesiastical tradition.

These brief comments highlight two significant aspects of the URC's ecclesiology (what we believe to be true about the Church). First, the URC is committed to ecumenism and specifically to the manifestation in history of the essential unity of the Church. Second, the URC has emerged from those denominations which hail primarily from the sixteenth-century Reformation, specifically those in the Calvinist and Dissenting traditions.⁶

Faith and Order in the URC are understood according to the Basis of Union.⁷ Although it is not a statement of systematic theology, the Basis of Union nevertheless outlines what the URC believes the Church to be. Inevitably, then, the Basis of Union reflects theological convictions (what we hold to be true about God) because the Church's central concern is how God relates to human beings and how human beings relate to each other as a result of their relationship with God. Consequently, the belief in the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit (§A12, 17) who has redeemed humankind, who has reconciled the world to himself, who calls the Church into being and empowers it for continued witness in the world (§A1) is essential to all other claims in the Basis of Union. Based on an understanding of God's nature revealed through his historical acts, the Basis of Union expresses what the URC means when it claims to be a Church both *Catholic* and *Reformed*.

1 Ecclesiology

Catholicity

Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed (accepted with thanksgiving in the Basis of Union §A18) affirm that there is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. This Church is not the product of human activity. Instead, it is *creatura verbi divini* (the creature of the divine Word),⁸ existing as a direct result of God's call, spoken in (and not merely by) Jesus Christ – the Word made flesh (Jn 1:14) – and made effective by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Church is not primarily a sociological entity but a theological one, called into being, given its mission and ultimately

sustained by the Trinitarian God. Because God's prevenient (prior) and gracious (electing) activity gives rise to the Church's existence, its unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are not defined in terms of human morality, belief and activity. As a result, these 'marks' refer people not to speculative propositions about God, but to the record of his action in history.

- The Church's holiness is bestowed on it by God who has reconciled the world to himself through the life, death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:19), and is present among his people by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Church is consecrated (called and set apart) by God's historical action and his ongoing presence. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is holy, i.e. he wills that justice and righteousness prevail and that sin is overcome and destroyed. The Church's holiness derives from God's holy nature and action. It is sanctified and consecrated by his presence and because it witnesses to the holy God. In this way it is the biblical promise of the presence of Christ (Mt 18:20; 28:20) as Lord and Saviour, and not the morality of its members, that accounts for the holiness of the Church (§A2). The living of life as Christ's disciples certainly entails moral decision-making, but this in itself can never constitute the Church's holiness. Instead, the Church's holiness is a corollary of God's – the God who brings it into being in the first place.
- During the fifth century, Vincent of Lérins, a monk and author of theological tracts who lived in Gaul (modern-day France), defined catholicity as 'that which is believed everywhere, at all times by all people' (*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*). Such a definition emphasizes the unchanging nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Heb 13:8) and the need for Christians of all ages to follow him as Lord. However, the Dissenting wing of the Reformed tradition,⁹ particularly as it developed in England and Wales, has tended to emphasize the call of Christ rather than common credal confession as the source of unity. This is because incorporation into the Church is predicated on being incorporated into Christ. The Church is catholic, then, because all are bound together as one in Christ (Acts 4:32; Eph 4:4).¹⁰ This proclaims the theological truth that all who are in Christ constitute an eternal fellowship unconstrained by time and space. Catholicity means that the Church in any particular place and time is continuous with the Church in all places and at all times. This continuity finds its source in the invisible church, the communion of all the saints, which is prior to any historical and contextual manifestation of it. Nevertheless, the invisible must become visible. In the Reformed tradition, the one Church is made manifest in history through the sharing of a common faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, the worship of the Trinitarian God and the continuation of Christ's mission in the world. As a result, the Church's catholicity is also revealed in its mission in which it discloses that it *exists for* all people in all times. Catholicity requires that the Church reach out in love to all people because it derives from God's love revealed in Christ which is to be proclaimed and shown to all (Jn 3:16; §A3).
- Neither the presence of the so-called apostolic gifts nor the evangelistic activity of its members define the Church's apostolicity. Furthermore, it is not defined, as in other communions, according to an unbroken, episcopal line stretching back to the apostles themselves. Instead, apostolicity is located in the fact that God continues graciously to entrust to the Church the task of proclaiming to the world the same gospel as that committed to the first

apostles. In other words, the Church is apostolic as it fulfils its mission to increase on earth the love of God and of neighbour.¹¹ Like catholicity, apostolicity is also a matter of continuity between Christ's historical mission in first century Palestine and his continuing ministry throughout history and in the contemporary Church. As the Church is engaged in this mission and makes it visible in time and space, so it shares in the apostolic witness and calling. Within the Reformed tradition, it is the responsibility of the Councils of the Church, and not specific individuals, to maintain its apostolic calling (§A4).

There is, then, only one Church of Jesus Christ which is revealed in each age and in each place. This has two important implications.

- First, the universal, catholic Church is made visible through the historical, the contextual and the local (§A16). However, this means that we do not know the Church in its fullness; we know it only through its partial revelation (as 'in a mirror dimly', 1 Cor 13:12, NRSV). Consequently, there is no single way to be catholic. Because the means of structuring or institutionalising catholicity depend on historical and contextual factors, they can be changed as theological understanding grows and develops in each age. As a result, the Basis of Union affirms that the form and structure of the Church is not a theological datum, but that it is an expression of obedient discipleship which must be open to the prompting of the Spirit and thus to the possibility of change (§A9). In other words, structure, or order, can be said to be essential both in making the Church visible in history and sustaining its life in the world. However, there is no particular form that this structure must take.
- Secondly, catholicity reminds us that there is always that beyond a single congregation, and even a particular denomination, which belongs to Christ. Consequently, other denominations are recognized to be manifestations of the one Church, because all who are by grace united to Christ are necessarily related to one another (Jn 15:1-8). For the URC, this is given concrete expression in the commitment to 'take wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people' (§A8). For the Reformed, the holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church, established through the call and presence of Christ, require the quest for unity (or oneness) in the present even though it will finally be received in fullness only in the future (when God is 'all in all' – 1 Cor 15:28). Those who drafted the Basis of Union stated that 'We hope that our attempt to provide an open-ended church order will make evident our keen desire to become one with other Christian communions.' Given the empirical fragmentation of the Church, ecumenism, and the search for the manifestation of genuine unity, is the natural consequence of catholicity (§A8, 9).

Reformed

Both the sixteenth-century Reformers and their spiritual offspring claimed that they had not ceased to be Catholic, merely that they had broken away from the practices of the medieval church which they perceived to be corrupt. In essence, to be Catholic *and* Reformed requires both continuity with the apostolic church and a rejection of non-biblical practices.

The word 'Reformed' has little historical currency in English and Welsh ecclesiology, a fact which has, at times, led to some confusion over its meaning. Yet the Reformed have, perhaps, spilled more ink than most over the question of identity. Most definitions seem to hold in common one or more of the following: the sovereignty of God, the authority of scripture (*sola scriptura*), salvation by grace through faith (*sola*

gratia, sola fide), the need for order in a church which is constantly discerning God's will and responding to it (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*) and the call to do all things to the glory of God alone (*solus Dei Gloria*). The debate about the Reformed tradition re-emerged in English Nonconformity during the mid-twentieth century. Within Presbyterianism this renaissance was associated with the names of two of its most profound thinkers, Carnegie Simpson and Charles Anderson Scott. In Congregationalism it could be traced back to the work of P. T. Forsyth, though it owed much to the later contribution of Nathaniel Micklem, J. S. Whale, John Marsh and Daniel T. Jenkins.¹² Within both communions, the result was a renewed emphasis on order in church life and worship, and a high view of the office of ordained ministry.

While not all the classic characteristics of the Reformed tradition are mentioned in the Basis of Union, they lie implicitly behind the explicit references to (1) the presence of the Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments (*sola scriptura*) and (2) the dynamic nature of this Word which is to be discovered in each age and inspires constant reformation of the church (*semper reformanda*).

The Scriptures

While the scriptures are acknowledged to be the primary authority in all matters of faith and conduct (§A12), they do not constitute a closed book but vital, working documents which paradoxically *contain* the Word of God but do not *constrain* it. The recognition of the authority of scripture and of the dynamic nature of God's Word are essential components of Reformed and Dissenting thought. According to John Robinson, in his farewell speech to the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, 'the Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from his holy word'. According to John Calvin, the scriptures had to be interpreted, and their authority recognized, by the witness of the Holy Spirit (*testimonium Spiritus Sancti*) which is located externally in the scriptures but becomes internal in the hearts of believers in order to confirm to them the truth of the gospel.¹³ According to Karl Barth, the Word of God is primarily the reconciling Incarnate Word (*logos ensarkos*) or Jesus Christ, who is witnessed to in the scriptures and is present when the Word is proclaimed. We could refer, then, to a 'biblical' or 'biblicist' element to Reformed ecclesiology which confirms the authority of scripture, but we must also recognize a 'pentecostal' or 'charismatic' element which enables the Spirit to speak or to lead the Church in its mission specifically as new light pours forth from the scriptures (§A6, 12) and generally as knowledge continues to advance.

Discerning the will of God arises from knowledge of the scriptures *and* the guidance of the Spirit. While biblical interpretation and the proclamation of the gospel are both properly the task of individuals, and often of ordained individuals, the Reformed tradition tends not to conceive the discernment of God's will as the task of individuals alone. Instead, this is the task of the whole Church meeting in council (see below). Reformed ecclesiology fundamentally affirms the place of each one in the whole Body of Christ. When the saints gather together, then the 'priesthood of all believers' (cf. 1 Pet 2:9-10; Rev 1:6; 5:10) can be perceived.

Constant Reformation

The belief that the life of faith in each age has yet more to discover of the truth of God and his purpose for the whole creation leads to the conclusion that a 'Reformed church is always being reformed' (*ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*). Consequently, the visible form which it currently takes can never be the only one in which the Church can be made manifest. Rather the Church is forever able to be renewed and to change its form when, under the Word of God, the Spirit prompts it to do so.¹⁴ Thus a church which is both *Catholic* and *Reformed* recognizes its essential

continuity with Christ's people in all places and at all times alongside its divine calling to seek continual renewal and rejuvenation in fulfilling its mission in each age. Such a church is characterized by a zeal for continuity and a willingness to accept change. This applies even to the Basis of Union which is more a working document than a fixed one; it can be 'altered', 'added to', 'modified' and even 'superseded' in order to facilitate the Church's mission – providing that any amendment conforms with the mind of Christ (discerned when the church meets in Council), and that it does not contradict the catholicity of the church or the Reformed principles which constitute its foundation (§A9).

A Dissenting Voice

While influenced by many social and political factors, both Presbyterianism and Congregationalism emerged initially because of the belief held by some that reform in the English church had not gone far enough. This was the view of the Separatist harbingers of Congregationalism and of such sixteenth-century Presbyterians as Thomas Cartwright. From the early days of the English Reformation to the end of the Commonwealth in 1660 the distinct possibility remained that either the Established Church would adopt a Presbyterian polity (rather than an Episcopalian one) or that a comprehensive settlement would be achieved incorporating all forms of ecclesiastical practice. However, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 heralded a period of exclusion and persecution for those who refused to conform to the requirements laid down by monarch and parliament or to the *Book of Common Prayer*. In the course of the following two centuries, Dissenting traditions developed into organised communions which denied to the state the right to interfere in matters spiritual. It was not external force but churchly conviction which was to govern in matters of faith. This had two important ramifications in the development of Nonconformist thought. One was the importance given to individual conscience; the other was the advocacy of the separation of ecclesiastical authority from that of the state (§Schedule D).

It is hardly surprising that a tradition that was marginalized and excluded as well as persecuted for its nonconformity should develop respect for personal conscience. Yet a history of suffering does not, in itself, account for this; it also has theological resonance with the fact that each person voluntarily confesses faith when he or she joins the body of Christ at baptism or confirmation. The Church, as understood in the Basis of Union, is formed by the Spirit to be a free community in which personal conviction is respected. But because the Church is more than merely the sum of its constituent parts (i.e. it is more than simply a group of individuals who agree to gather together so long as they are in agreement with each other), the Basis of Union also allows for the restriction of personal freedom when it is deemed to threaten the unity and peace of the whole body. Thus, while individuals have the right to dissent, it is the whole church, meeting in Council, which determines when individual rights 'are asserted to the injury of its unity and peace' (§A10).

Summary

Although not included in the final document, the following definitions were agreed upon by the drafting committee.

Catholicity – 'sharing the faith and worship of the Universal Church and responding with it to God's call to offer the Gospel for the life and well-being of mankind [*sic*].'

Reformed – 'recognizing the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be both the creative stimulus to Christian living and service and the continuing criterion for judging the forms and traditions of the Church's life.'

These definitions reflect the URC's understanding of what constitutes the Church and demonstrate that its essence is inextricably linked to its mission in and to the world.

But because God is actively engaged in the Church on earth in revealing his will anew in each age, the URC recognizes that the Church is only ever the Church *in via*. Thus its order and its mission are never eternally fixed. Furthermore, it recognizes that even among its members there will be differences in understanding and conviction. The task which faces the URC, then, is to enable flexibility in its structures and its forms in order to equip its members to live not merely in agreement with certain beliefs and practices but to remain together even in the midst of disagreement over their implications and implementation. Without this commitment to be together under God's providence (known in early Dissent through the notion of Covenant¹⁵) it becomes impossible for the Church to fulfil its mission.

2

Faith and Order

Faith

According to the Basis of Union, God's will is revealed in history, in the proclamation of the gospel, and when the 'saints' gather in council. This is a matter primarily of the Church's faith, namely the apostolic faith as held by the gathered community of those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and seek to follow him in the world. But alongside this, God's will is inextricably bound up with the Church's order whose purpose it is to enable the revelation of God and his will to take place continually.

Those who formulated the Basis of Union wrote under the conviction that it was in faith and order that the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church was made visible in the world. The two central affirmations of faith are that, first, God, as he has been revealed in the history of Israel and supremely in Jesus Christ, is Trinity and, second, that we know this God by means of the Word of God and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (§A12, 13). Revelation enables God to be 'known' (Jn 1:18). This revelation has been recorded in the scriptures and becomes real in the present when the Word is proclaimed, through the power of the Holy Spirit. As Calvin confirmed, it is in preaching the gospel that 'Christ is depicted before our eyes as crucified'.¹⁶ In this way, preaching has a *sacramental* nature, even if it is not a *sacrament*.¹⁷

Sacraments

The URC observes the two 'gospel sacraments' (i.e. the sacraments which can be found in the New Testament) of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, in which ordinary materials become the means by which the extraordinary grace of God is made known (§A14, 15).¹⁸ On the whole, the Reformed have rejected the notion that the sacraments are *signa nuda* (bare signs) and adopted the belief that they are real means of grace through which the Spirit nurtures believers. Consequently, both sacraments declare in action and through created properties the grace of God, his reconciliation of the world to himself and the forgiveness of sins which God accomplishes for all people and for all time in Jesus Christ. In this way the sacraments transcend the time and place in which they are celebrated and draw the local church into communion with the catholic Church, visible and invisible.

Baptism

Baptism is 'the sacrament of entry into the Church' (§A14) and the Christian life.¹⁹ It is, as Jürgen Moltmann declares, the 'door to grace' which a person receives only once. It can be celebrated in infancy in which case promises are made to raise the child in the Christian faith and within the covenant family of the Church, encouraging him or her to make a personal confession and enter into Church membership. It can also be celebrated in adulthood, following personal confession of faith, providing the person concerned has not previously been baptized. As a means of grace, baptism's effectiveness is not grounded in any of the promises made. Instead, baptism, whether of a child or of an adult, is a sign of God's grace towards us in our

helplessness (Rom 5:6; §Schedule A). This does not mean that confession of faith is unimportant. Instead, it reminds us that we only ever respond to God's prevenient, gracious action towards us. Nevertheless, the URC upholds the belief that the form of baptism may be a matter of personal conviction. As such, it affirms that neither 'the person administering baptism' nor 'the person seeking it', nor 'the parent(s) requesting it for an infant' shall be forced to act against conscience (§A14).

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper, Moltmann tells us, is 'the path of grace'. As such it is continually celebrated throughout the Christian life,²⁰ though it is the local church which decides on how frequently it should be celebrated. It has a contentious history, and there was little agreement even among the Reformers over what occurs during the meal. Luther rejected transubstantiation (that the bread and wine physically become the body and blood of Christ) but, through an appeal to scripture (e.g. Mt 26:26), he claimed that Christ is physically present in the elements. If Christ could not be believed to be literally there, as the scriptures suggested, then, he concluded, the scriptures were not trustworthy at all. For Zwingli, the material and the spiritual were to be kept separate. Thus no material entity could affect the soul. When we share in the meal we rise above the physical in order to contemplate the spiritual and it is there that God's grace becomes effective through recalling (*anamnesis*) Christ and his sacrifice. Calvin accepted that Zwingli was right to reject the physical presence of Christ in the meal, but if there was no presence, then there was no real communion. Consequently he believed that, by the gracious and mysterious action of the Holy Spirit, those who partake in the meal do in fact receive of the body and blood of Christ even though the elements themselves do not transform into other substances. The Basis of Union affirms this Calvinistic stance, that Christ is present in the celebration of the meal, without attempting to explain how this may come to be (except to confirm that it is the consequence of God's grace).

Although not explicitly cited in the Basis of Union, it is worth mentioning that the Reformed tradition, especially in its Dissenting form, tends to place less significance on understanding the sacrament, on the words spoken by the president or on the person of the president (as other traditions do), than on the faith of the gathered community. It is as God's people, the saints, gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper that the presence of Christ finds its locus and guarantor. This is, of course, equally true of all gatherings of the saints regardless of the celebration of the sacraments, and it is this that ultimately validates the councils of the church as the context in which God's will is discerned.²¹

Availability of the Sacraments

As the means of grace, baptism should be available to all who are committed to Christian discipleship whether through personal confession of faith or because they will be nurtured in the faith as children of the new covenant. As a sacrament of the Church catholic, the Lord's Supper should be available to all in good standing with the Christian Church in any of its branches. While historically the Lord's Supper was celebrated within the founding denominations only by those who were members of the local church, in recent years the practice of an open table has become common throughout the URC. This may be the result of theological reflection as well as pragmatic concern. On the one hand, there has been a growing sense that the sacrament is a gift of the grace of God and thus access to it cannot be restricted by the Church. On the other hand, the mechanics of refusal within the context of divine worship would appear difficult to implement to say the least.

The Basis of Union itself offers little advice concerning the openness of table or otherwise at the Lord's Supper. It tells us that it is the celebration of the Lord's people

(§A15), and while it could be that this refers to 'members', this is not explicitly stated. It is for the local church, through its Elders' and Church Meeting to decide on frequency and openness of table. It may be that one of the corollaries of an open table in current church life has been a tendency to undermine the significance given to the process of Christian initiation through baptism and confirmation into church membership and full participation in the Church Meeting. It is possible that the open table (a notion that tends to place the onus of discipline on members of the congregation rather than on the church's ministers and officers) may now take precedence over some other fundamental aspects of the URC's ecclesiology.

Presidency at the Sacraments

The Basis of Union affirms that an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament would normally preside at the sacraments not because ordination imbues the person concerned with special gifts or status to enable her or him to perform the rite, but because of the need for order in the Church. This order is primarily maintained through the way in which the councils of the church authorise and oversee those who have been set apart and recognized to serve throughout the denomination, namely – in this context – Ministers of Word and Sacrament. The need for *orderliness* gives rise to an *order* of ministry where the church recognizes the vocation of certain people to undertake a proclaiming and presiding ministry. This is their role in the Church, and the URC would expect them, in the first instance, to be responsible for performing it.

However, as Calvin pointed out, God does not require ministers, but we do. God graciously calls men and women into ministry in order to open the channels of grace in the Gospel through its proclamation in Word and Sacraments and to instruct his people in the mysteries of the divine will. Consequently, church *order* is linked to the *order of salvation* made known in Christ. Nevertheless, the Minister is not singled out as a special individual enabled to preside as a result of her or his particular status – there is no 'indelible character' conveyed as a result of ordination. Rather ordination, too, constitutes the recognition that the Church's worship, that which makes its presence visible as Church, is subject to proper order and conveys to us God's order of salvation.

This does not mean that those who are not ordained may never preside at the Sacraments, but that their presidency must be confirmed by the church because it is through order and not by chaos that the church's well-being is secured. It is the need to secure order alongside the imperative to ensure that the sacraments are available to all local churches that has given rise to the authorization, by the Councils of the church, of those other than ordained Ministers to preside under exceptional circumstances. Initially, this task belonged to the District Councils (Area Councils in Scotland) which were able to authorise certain members of the URC to preside 'where pastoral necessity so requires' (§A25). This clause was interpreted in different ways, though testimony suggests that most District Councils would annually approve a list of names offered from the eldership of the local churches to preside within that congregation if that congregation were denied the sacraments for want of an ordained Minister. It is not clear that this was the intention of the drafting committee, especially as the Basis of Union stated that the District Council's oversight of the local church requires a regular review of pastoral need rather than the provision of a list of names for approval.²² Following the decision of General Assembly in 2006 to disband the District Councils, leaving one level of Council (the Synod) between the local church and the General Assembly (see below), it has not yet become clear how the Councils of the church will exercise this oversight in future. The need to exercise oversight for order's sake will mean that the Synods will have to make such provision. At the time of writing, it remains to be seen whether a common policy

throughout the denomination would ensure order or whether due process with greater flexibility at local level will suffice.

Creeds and Statements

As an active and dynamic entity, rather than a simple matter of belief or a checklist of doctrinal points, faith responds to the changing conditions found in the world. Consequently, all confessions of faith are considered to be historical documents belonging to particular thought patterns and expressing the gospel in the philosophical preconceptions of their own day. The statement of faith included in the Basis of Union (§A17) is deemed to be a confession 'at the date of formation'. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are affirmed as having proclaimed the apostolic faith in their time, as are the historic formulations of the founding denominations.²³ The Basis of Union recognizes the right of the church to formulate new expressions of faith as and when they are required. Since 1972, this has occurred only once when the General Assembly agreed, in 1997, to include, in the Basis of Union, a statement of faith written in gender-neutral language (§A18). However, it is important to remember that this new statement was intended not to replace the previous statement but to stand alongside it as an attempt in a particular time and place to give expression to the main tenets of the Christian faith.

It is difficult to assess the status of the creeds within the practice of the URC. It seems that neither confession of faith (§A17 and A18) is used with any regularity while some congregations do confess faith during worship according to the traditional creeds. More common use is made of one or other version of the 'statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church' (§Schedule D). Indeed, its use is required at ordination services for Ministers and Elders. This is not a credal statement; its doctrinal content is restricted to belief, with the whole Church, in the Trinitarian God. The statement goes on to testify to the renewal of the Christian life by the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments, the authority of scripture as discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the status of credal statements, the importance of the Basis of Union, a commitment to change when necessary (*semper reformanda*), the rights and limits associated with personal conscience, the distinction between the government of the Church and that of the state, and the intention to pursue visible unity. The emphasis in this 'statement' is placed on the living out of faith rather than on the delineation and elucidation of belief. While this rightly confirms that the living of the Christian life takes precedence over the meditation on and consideration of credal claims, it is not merely a form of ecclesiastical pragmatism but, in fact, it confirms the historical and theological claims of the traditions which constitute the URC.

In the Dissenting tradition of England and Wales,²⁴ faith was conceived of primarily as a matter of the heart, of the conscience and of the will. Such an understanding emerged because of the belief that God deals graciously and directly with the human 'soul', with the scriptures as the sole authority for discerning and understanding God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As a result, creeds tended to be eschewed as secondary and even sectarian devices imposed by intermediaries who had no right to exist between the saints and God. What is clear is that the Basis of Union affirms (1) that Christian faith can be expressed in credal formulations; (2) that creeds can be employed during worship; (3) that those formulated by the Church Catholic and by the denomination and its antecedents all possess a certain authority. Nevertheless, the Basis of Union does not require conformity to a particular set of words as proof of membership and discipleship of Christ, as confirmation of Christ's presence within the Church or as the validating factor in any act of worship. Instead, the Basis of Union implicitly attests that communicating the Christian gospel and expressing faith in Christ is the task of each generation. Words enable this to

happen, but they have the potential to develop and to change their meaning not to mention mislead and entrap those who are unaware of such changes. It is not that *meaning* and the *expression of meaning* are always to be divorced from each other. Instead, it affirms that all linguistic expression has to be understood according to the historical context in which it arose. (In other words, even familiar words may have slightly different or nuanced meanings in antiquity which have been long forgotten.) Consequently, these formulations have a use as credal confessions which declare faith rather than as credal checks which are perceived to prescribe it.

Order

John Calvin and his followers insisted that the Church exists visibly when the scriptures are purely preached and heard and where the sacraments are administered 'according to Christ's institution',²⁵ which tends to suggest that there ought to be an association between faith and order. Once again, 'order' in the Church is conceived of as a gospel ordinance: it is contained in Paul's words to the Corinthians that 'all things should be done decently and in order' (1 Cor 14:40). It is partly this need for order which gives rise to the orders of ministry, particularly because 'order' here is not merely concerned with good management but instead relates to the order of salvation as revealed in Jesus Christ and in his Church. As a result of this, for the Basis of Union, ministry is of the *esse* ('being' or essence) of the Church: one cannot exist without the other. Nevertheless, the exact form which ministry should take is able to change according to context and according to the well-being (*bene esse*) of the church. In other words, while the proclamation of the gospel in Word and Sacraments is essential to the life of the Church, the form of ordained ministry may not be (as witnessed in the abandoning of the three-fold order of Bishop, Presbyter and Deacon by the Reformers during the sixteenth century). Such a view arises for two reasons. First, no explicit and eternal form can be discerned in the New Testament, the result of which is an understanding of ministry as both a theological truth and a practical matter. Second, belief in the dynamic relationship between God and his people means that more 'light and truth' are available in each generation. The form of ministry is, then, open to change.

Ministry

There is but one ministry, namely the ministry of Jesus Christ which he continues through the Church. This ministry belongs to all the people whom he calls out of the world and consecrates, through baptism, into a life of discipleship, witness and service. They continue this ministry through worship, prayer, proclamation of the gospel and Christian witness, pastoral care and responsibility, and obedient discipleship (§A19).

In order to assist in continuing Christ's ministry, there exist certain ministries which are duly recognized by the church, mainly through ordination but also through commissioning.²⁶

- Ministers of Word and Sacrament are called by God, trained and ordained by the church in order to 'conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world' (§A21). They exercise this ministry alongside Elders.
- While the early church differentiated between the presbyteral (eldership) ministry of proclamation and leadership with the diaconal one of service, subsequent developments, particularly in the Dissenting tradition, saw the emergence of a tendency to blur the distinction between the two orders. By the time of union in 1972, most Presbyterian churches had Deacons who

were responsible for matters of management and stewardship and Elders who were responsible for spiritual leadership. Most Congregational churches had Deacons who were similar in function to Presbyterian Elders, but who were not ordained. A small number of Congregational churches also had Elders. At union of the two churches, the functions of the two orders were elided into one and a number of titles were considered for this lay ministry in the local church: 'Deacon' was deemed to be ambiguous; 'manager' was considered and rejected while 'steward' was also mooted. The committee finally agreed upon 'Elder' and those called to serve in this way were to be ordained. This ordination has been practised differently from that of the Minister of Word and Sacrament because, hitherto, it has been solely the responsibility of the local church. In 2007, the General Assembly heard a report on Eldership which suggested that representatives from the wider church should be present at the ordination of Elders and that a national list of Elders should be established. Given the nature of the ministry of eldership, neither point really suggests a significant divergence from the URC's formal understanding of eldership as found in the Basis of Union.

- Although its practice suggests a certain difference, the ordination of Elders, like that of Ministers, is recognized throughout the URC regardless of where or when it occurred (giving rise to the call for a national list, mentioned in the point above). It can be justified in the Dissenting and Reformed traditions by reference to the Westminster Confession (1647) which defined ordination as 'the solemn setting apart to some publick office in the church',²⁷ where 'publick' means the recognition of the office throughout the church rather than just locally. Elders are only ordained once and subsequently inducted to further periods of service. What perhaps is most worthy of note is that Elders share with Ministers in pastoral oversight and leadership of local churches and thus the principle was established in the Basis of Union that the leadership of the local church should be in the hands of those who know it pastorally.
- Elders are elected by the Church Meeting and are able to advise and make recommendations to that meeting. However, the Elder is not merely a managerial consultant. Instead, in council, Elders are responsible for pastoral, spiritual and missionary leadership in the local church. Initially this ministry was conceived of in terms of partnership with Ministers, but in recent years the URC has encouraged a wider variety of patterns. The reduction in the number of Ministers of Word and Sacrament has prompted the URC to recognize that it can no longer promise to supply a Minister of Word and Sacrament to every local church (§A25) and thus to consider the imaginative and flexible deployment of Ministers. Synods are expected to identify leadership resources and needs in each congregation and guidelines have been agreed for the appointment of 'Local Church Leaders', who will work within the context of the Elders' Meeting. This focus on wise deployment of Ministers in order to serve the church's mission as effectively as possible has led to the development of Special Category Ministries which allow Ministers freedom to work, often ecumenically, on the boundaries of traditional church life and in pioneering settings such as chaplaincy in industry, hospitals, universities and colleges and in special projects (§K7).
- Two, 'non-ordained' ministries are recognized in the Basis of Union. Because of the centrality of the Word, the church recognizes the ministry of 'lay preachers'. Lay preachers are not ordained but commissioned, and they are

not automatically authorized to preside at the sacraments. Lay preachers, often identified by local reputation, have always played a significant role in the worship-life of the URC and authorised training courses and Assembly accreditation has been provided for them by the church.

- Alongside this, the church also trains and commissions Church-Related Community Workers (CRCW). They exist within the church in order to make connections with secular groups and organisations and, through working in partnership with the community, they continue Christ's ministry through service rather than through proclamation. Their focus, according to the Basis of Union, is to act as a link between the church and the community, drawing the one into a full and fruitful relationship with the other. Through care, challenge and prayer, they are commissioned to make the Kingdom known through drawing the church into co-operative action with the community which enables God's will of peace and justice for the world, in some measure, to be actualized (§A22). The CRCW's role in the life of the URC is therefore unique. For while recognized as a particular ministry within the life of the church, the CRCW has no formal role or responsibility for worship (which is one point that links the other three 'particular ministries' of Minister, Elder and lay preacher).

These are sometimes, mistakenly, seen as the only 'ministries' to be exercised in the church. However, they exist in the wider context of Christ's continued ministry which is the role of the whole Body of Christ.

Structure

The recognition that all the baptized are involved in Christ's ongoing ministry is reflected in the church's structure which, at first glance, appears to be democratic. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to believe that the URC merely affirms majority rule. Instead, the structure of the church is intended to demonstrate that all members of the Body of Christ are involved in discerning the will of God, witnessing to the gospel and continuing the ministry of Christ in the world. As a result, the life of the URC is governed by its councils where church members meet together to discuss and to implement the church's mission prayerfully under the Word of God and in light of the issues of the day. The initial place for discernment is the Church Meeting. The local church also elects representatives to act in council alongside the representatives of other local churches at Synod and General Assembly. Each Council has a responsibility of oversight of the church, its worship, mission and service. This oversight has two foci, the local congregation, its nurture in the faith and the maintenance of its witness, and the World Church with its wider concerns. This is not to suggest that the role of the church councils is to be inward looking, because oversight and mission both involve the recognition of the Church's existence in and for the world. Issues of context and of human need are thus brought before the URC through its Councils. While the General Assembly is the 'central organ' and 'final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit' (§B2(5)), it does not implement its decisions in an autocratic way but does so in consultation with the whole church.

While majority decisions have tended to become the norm at the church's Councils, in principle the gathered representatives are expected to reach 'unanimity in Christ'. It is the Councils of the church that remind the local congregations that they belong to the one Church of Christ (catholicity) and it is they that bear the responsibility of maintaining the purity of its faith and its mission (apostolicity). It is the fact that Councils and not individuals hold this responsibility that locates the URC within the Reformed tradition.

An Ordered Faith and a Faithful Order

From this discussion, it should be clear that the URC's faith and order are inextricably linked. Its belief that the Trinitarian God calls each person to take full part in discernment of God's will in turn gives rise to its conciliar structure in which all the baptized can participate and from which the whole people of God are charged with and enabled to continue Christ's mission in and for the world.

3

What might we do differently today?

The Basis of Union is a document produced at a particular point in history. If it were to be rewritten today, then it might well include different emphases or even completely different clauses.

- For good reasons, it seems that those who formulated the Basis of Union sought to promote a high and dignified view of the office of ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament. The URC inherited and developed an understanding of Ministry which associated preaching the Word and sharing the Sacraments with those known personally and pastorally by the Minister. As the URC has to deal with fewer ministers, increasing demands on their time, and the attempt to deploy them creatively this understanding of ministry may be displaced for purely pragmatic reasons. We ought to beware lest our theological understanding of ministry be lost by default and *ad hoc* arrangements put in its place.
- The years since 1972 have seen cruel and relentless decline in church membership and the recognition that commitment to supply Ministers of Word and Sacrament to every congregation has proved to be an impossible ideal (§A25). This has already led the URC to consider the role of Local Church Leader and to re-emphasize the role of Elders, leading the church to adopt policies concerning their selection and training. Nevertheless, it could be that the time is right to look again at the insights brought to the URC by the union with the Churches of Christ. While this union enabled the development of various categories of Non-Stipendiary Ministry (§K7) it is possible that the real implications of the former practice of local leadership in the Churches of Christ were neither adopted nor really understood.
- The particular ministry of Elders complements the involvement of all the baptized in the ministry of Christ. Nevertheless, apart from recognizing a process of initiation, the Basis of Union says remarkably little about the way in which members engage in that Ministry. Indeed, little is said about either the role of the church member or about what membership entails. Furthermore, there is nothing in the Basis of Union which demonstrates the attractiveness of membership as the means of making visible the personal decision to follow Christ through commitment to his people in a particular time and place. This could be because, in 1972, the idea of 'membership' could itself be taken for granted. This is no longer the case, and a stronger, theological justification for membership might well occupy more attention were the document to be rewritten today.
- Following on from this, it is interesting to note that John Marsh (at one time Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford) made the point to the drafting committee that the Church was made visible not just in its faith and order but also in the 'whole pattern of daily life' of its members. Little of this made it into

the Basis of Union, and this may have been to the detriment of the URC's ecclesiology, its understanding of ministry and its engagement in mission.

- For a variety of reasons, practice in the URC now tends to militate against an orderly progression in Christian initiation from baptism to confirmation and entry into membership. Indeed, it is commonly claimed that one of the things that our 'post-modern' culture rejects is the commitment to join and be part of any organization on anything but the thinnest of voluntary bases. Perhaps more should be said today of the importance of leading people (including children) into membership and encouraging them to play a full part in the life of the church, including the Church Meeting.
- Alternatively, our current practice sees regular and committed levels of involvement from those who may not have been baptized and have not formally entered membership of a local church. While it would be inappropriate for the Basis of Union to suggest anything other than an orderly series of initiation events, it might be that the URC would have to recognize the contemporary situation and to offer guidance as to how the path from baptism to confession of faith and acceptance into membership might sit alongside full participation by those who have not made such a journey (while also encouraging them to be baptized and enter into full membership of the local church).
- Apart from the recognition that mission is the task of the local church, overseen by the church meeting (§B2(1)(i)), and that the Minister of Word and Sacrament exercises leadership in the Church's 'mission to the world' (§A21), the Basis of Union says very little about mission *per se*, neither understanding what mission is nor how it is engaged in, nor what the expectations that arise from it might be. The Church's mission is to be a focus for the continuing mission of Christ in the world, namely the revealing of the Kingdom of God in our midst. Such a mission must include aspects of service and of evangelism, of spreading God's love, justice, peace and righteousness as well as proclamation of the good news. The Basis of Union, quite properly, leaves the detail to the Councils of the church, but the lack of clear definition and appropriate guidelines may have contributed to the tendency in the Councils of the church often to concentrate more on business than on Christ's mission. Perhaps more explicit mention of the Church's mission, and the part played in it by all its members, would find greater prominence in any contemporary document.
- The previous point arises from the fact that the Basis of Union has a strongly institutional feel to it. Perhaps this is inevitable in a document whose purpose, at least in part, is to outline structures and procedures. Nevertheless, it can give the impression that the URC's mission revolves around safeguarding the institution rather than recognizing its structures and procedures as means of enabling the Church's mission in the world. If the document were to be rewritten today, perhaps more emphasis would be placed on relationships between people and between people and God as the foundational aspect of our ecclesiology. God has called *people* into the Church. It is those *people* who continue Christ's mission. It is through the way in which those *people* relate to God and to each other and to those who are in 'the world' that the Church becomes visible. Our structures, it could be argued, should flow from this especially in a church that claims constant reformation under the Word of God and by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps more emphasis on

relationships would confirm that the Church is something we are, rather than a place to which we go.

- This last point has particular relevance in contemporary western society which, in general, is witnessing the rapid decline of established religious forms with their dignified and ordered worship and the emergence of 'new' or 'fresh expressions' of church which tend to emphasize informality even when they have been keen to adopt liturgical and traditional approaches to worship. Those who have analysed the 'emerging church' believe that it 'expresses Church' in a relevant way to a culture that is both post-modern and 'post-Christendom' instead of imposing an ecclesiology which was relevant within a cultural milieu that appears to be foreign to the contemporary mind.²⁸ In a church that has mission as a priority, such cultural exploration is both inevitable and essential and reflection on cultural change may well impact on a modern rewrite of the Basis of Union. The church would still require a structure, but the question would remain concerning how order copes with informality and how the latter can exist alongside the former.
- Alongside this, 'emerging church' and 'alternative worship' movements challenge us to think more clearly about the link between worship of the Trinitarian God and the actualization of the Church in our midst. In other words, the primary means of demonstrating our existence as Church is our worship. Perhaps more would be said in a contemporary re-write of the Basis of Union about the challenges which come to the traditional denominations from 'fresh expressions' especially regarding the extent to which the gospel may be enculturated without compromising its truth. We might also find ourselves challenging these 'fresh expressions' to demonstrate how their enculturated messages and structures constitute *Church*, especially when worship is not given priority by them.
- In 1972, there existed a genuine belief that the union of Presbyterians and Congregationalists would be the first step along a road that would lead to further and wider union among the denominations.²⁹ Not only did this not materialize (apart from the further union involving the URC and the Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ in 1981 and the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000), but subsequent ecumenical conversations have moved away from the imperative for organic union. Over this period, the URC's official commitment to organic union has remained constant, but given the differences in understanding which now exist, largely among ecumenical partners but to some extent within the denomination too, it could be that a different ecumenical approach would now be expressed in the Basis of Union. Nevertheless, many in the URC would regret any renunciation of full organic unity because this is considered to be the best way of living in obedience to Christ's prayer (Jn 17:11) and thus of making the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church visible on earth.
- Since 1972, there has been continual debate regarding the exercise of personal *episcopate* in the church. It should be remembered that 'personal oversight' is exercised by many in the URC, from Moderators to Ministers in local congregations and often to Elders and lay preachers (as well as CRCWs and members, one of another). Some of this might receive more attention if the Basis of Union were to be rewritten. Yet it ought not be forgotten that part of what is distinctive about the Reformed tradition is its location of authority and oversight in church Councils. To overemphasize personal *episcopate* may

mean forfeiting this distinctive witness and may also militate against encouraging wider engagement in Christ's ministry by the whole body of the baptized.

- A more explicitly theological point surrounds the ambiguous view of ordination contained in the Basis of Union. There is no clear reason why Ministers and Elders should be ordained but CRCWs and lay preachers, though recognized, are not (especially when appeal is made – as earlier in this discussion – to the Westminster Confession). It is not clear that Elders truly constitute an 'order' of ministry in the church, while it seems (at least empirically) that CRCWs do. The recognition of church-related community work as a 'particular ministry' could give rise to a degree of uncertainty in the future where the CRCW is the 'minister' within a congregation that has no Minister of Word and Sacrament. Furthermore, in a tradition which recognizes the central importance of the Word, it seems possible that more stewardship could be exercised over this aspect of ministry, while the clear understanding that Word and Sacrament belong together calls into question their separation through the commissioning of lay preachers from whom the privilege of presiding at the sacraments is withheld (or at least it is the subject of special licence).
- Finally, the Basis of Union is possessed of a sense of a church emerging from an ecumenical past. While its attitude to the future is open-ended, it seems that this open-endedness applies only to the institution of the church. There is little here which encapsulates the 'eschatological hope', or the power in the present age of God's promises regarding the future consummation of all things. Eschatology (the 'doctrine of the last things') can appear esoteric and rather abstract at times. Nevertheless, the Church exists as a sign and the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things to God in Christ. It is, then, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God, making known in part that which will only be known in fullness at the 'end' (*telos* or goal) of time. While Christ's cross and resurrection declare to us the triumph of God's will over sinful spiritual and physical forces, it is eschatology which demonstrates how the cross and resurrection in fact point us to a future in which God's will is finally going to be victorious and he is 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28). Such hope inspires us to see the potential for sanctification in all aspects of the creation as it moves towards its final consummation and, as a result, it provides us with strength to face the present and inspiration to create a new future. Eschatology provides us with hope to see beyond the story of decline which has gripped our churches as well as to see beyond the narrative of ecological disaster and terrorist threat which the secular world provides. Were the Basis of Union to be re-written today, this sense of the Church as the promise of God's future located in the present may be given greater prominence as the source of hope and vision for the saints which possesses the potential to provide hope and vision, as well as good news, to the world.

These are only some suggestions: doubtless there could be many more. They arise not because the Basis of Union is a deficient document, but because faith is dynamic and works itself out in each generation in order to reveal the will of God for the Church and for creation, while also working specifically within Christ's people to inspire us to see God's will 'done on earth as it is in heaven.' The Basis of Union remains a remarkable document because it seeks to incorporate this dynamism, the sense of being penultimate rather than finalized, the need to continue to grow and discover while remaining rooted firmly in the gospel and dedicated to the service of the Kingdom until God makes 'all things well'. It stands as an expression of what it

means to be a church both Catholic and Reformed in an ecumenical age. Our task today is to translate this into mission in a secular one.

Some questions for discussion

1. What is the Church and what is it for? Is it possible to be a Christian without the Church? Try to think about the reasons which give rise to your answers to these questions.

The tradition

2. What, if anything, do you see as being distinctive about the URC?
3. What do you understand by terms such as Nonconformist and Dissenter? What do you think it means, within church life, to be Reformed? How important is it that, in its own life and in its ecumenical relationships, the URC maintains a link with its Dissenting and Reformation roots?

Ecumenism

4. How does your church relate to other churches in your area and to the worldwide church? How should churches relate to each other? Is organic union important?
5. What do you think would constitute ecumenical progress? What, if anything, would you be prepared to give up if, by doing so, you could achieve ecumenical progress?

Faith and order

6. Which do you think should have priority, conviction of belief and practice or the desire to remain together in a loving fellowship? What do you think is the role of the creeds and of statements of faith?
7. How important is worship in church life?
8. Is it better to be dignified or informal in worship? Are the two mutually exclusive?
9. How would you define the value of (1) preaching; (2) the sacraments? Could you make do without either?
10. How often do you read the Bible? Do you believe it has authority? If so, how do you work out the Bible's authority in your life? How is it used in the Church? How should it be employed in the world?
11. Should the table at the Lord's Supper be open to all? Bear in mind Paul's warning in 1 Cor 11:29 ('For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves' NRSV). How do you understand this to relate to your practice at the Lord's Supper?

Mission

12. What do you understand by mission? How does your local church engage in mission? How do you personally engage in mission?

13. What does it mean to be a church member? Is it part of mission? Is it important? Whether you think it is or isn't, try to identify the reasons behind your answer.
14. Have you ever invited someone to come to church with you? If you have not, can you think why you haven't? Do you think it is part of the Christian mission to 'get people to come to church'?
15. What would you say to someone in order to attract them (1) to Christian faith; (2) to attend church?
16. Would you encourage an apparently committed adherent of your local church to become an official member? Why? If you would, how would you go about encouraging her or him to do so?
17. Is there anything that the Church should do in order to be more attractive to people?
18. If you had to identify one thing that the church should emphasize in its life in the present day, what would it be? Why? (Try to see whether your reasons relate back to the Bible or to your understanding of Christian faith or both.)
19. How do the church and world relate to each other? How *should* they relate?

Ministry

20. What do you understand the word 'ministry' to mean? Is it separate from, or inherently connected to, mission? Is it concerned with 'building up the saints' or 'service in the world'? If both, how does it do so?
21. How important is the ministry of Word and Sacraments? Can, and should, the *Ministry* in any way be divorced from the presence of a *minister*?
22. What is the responsibility of (a) the Minister of Word and Sacraments (2) the Church-Related Community Worker (3) the Elder (4) the church member in 'ministry'?
23. Is it essential that the church has a dedicated ministry? If it is, should our ministry be shaped as it is at present? If it is not, why would that be the case? What shape should an organised ministry take in the twenty-first century?
24. What do you think happens at ordination? Who ordains? Who should be ordained?

The future

25. Can you envisage different forms of being church? Do you think we need bishops? Why? If you were to 'reform' the church, where would you begin? What kind of thing would you hope to accomplish?
26. Do you have hope for the future? If you do, what is it that gives you hope? If you do not, why do you think that is the case?

¹ W. John F. Huxtable, *A New Hope for Christian Unity* (London: Fount, 1977), pp.38-39. John Huxtable was the General Secretary of the Congregational Union (later Church) of England and Wales and joint General Secretary of the URC with Arthur L. MacArthur, who held a similar position in the Presbyterian Church of England. For more on Huxtable, see his autobiography, *As it Seemed to Me* (London: URC, 1990). For MacArthur, see his autobiography, *Setting up Signs: Memoirs of an Ecumenical Pilgrim* (London: URC, 1997).

² The story of the church's institution and its antecedents is told in David G. Cornick, *Under God's Good Hand: A History of the Traditions which have come together in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom* (London: URC, 1998).

³ Not all churches of the Union joined the Church, and not all congregations of the Church joined the URC.

⁴ As with the Congregational Church of England and Wales, not all congregations of the Churches of Christ or of the Congregational Union of Scotland joined the union. Keith Forecast pointed out to me that: 'There is a general point here about how church union is actually furthered when an act of union creates more denominations rather than less.'

⁵ See D. M. Thompson, *Where do we come from? The origins of the United Reformed Church* (London: URC, n.d.), p.1.

⁶ The Churches of Christ emerged in the nineteenth century from a strand of Irish Presbyterianism, heavily influenced by the Scottish version, which soon established a presence in Scotland, England, Wales and the United States of America. The Congregational Union of Scotland also came into existence during the nineteenth century in order to facilitate mission among those who had previous connections with strands of Presbyterianism. Despite the date of their particular institution, both emerged from Presbyterianism and thus their roots are firmly grounded in the Calvinist and Presbyterian traditions.

⁷ A Joint Committee of Congregationalists and Presbyterians was convened on New Year's Day 1964 to consider the possible shape of a new, united church.

⁸ P. T. Forsyth, for example, says: 'In so far as the Church is a creature, it is the creature of the preached Gospel of God's Grace, forgiving, redeeming and creating anew by Christ's Cross. The Church was created by the preaching of that solidary Gospel, and fortified by the Sacraments of it, which are, indeed, but other ways of receiving, confessing, and preaching it.' See Forsyth, *Lectures on the Church and the Sacraments* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1917), p.31.

⁹ The differences between 'Reformed' and 'Dissenting' traditions are not easily pinpointed. In this paper, it is suggested that early Congregationalists and Presbyterians grew out of reform movements that were Calvinistic, but not self-consciously 'Reformed' or Genevan. They were, however, self-consciously 'Dissenting' because they refused to allow the interference of the state in matters spiritual. Some refused to acknowledge the interference of ecclesiastical bodies beyond the local congregation. In some ways the Congregationalists (and the Baptists) best encapsulated Dissent and ultimately became 'Nonconformists' and 'Free Churchmen'. Because the Presbyterian Church of England had its roots in Scottish (rather than English) Presbyterianism, its awareness of being Reformed was generally greater, though its self-consciously Reformed identity was also revived during the inter-war years of the twentieth century. There were some congregations, particularly in Northumberland and North-East England which were not the products of Scottish migration and traced their origins back to the Reformation. Some Presbyterian congregations were more conscious of a Dissenting than a Reformed past.

¹⁰ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill (London: SCM, 1960), II, p.1015; T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), p.129.

¹¹ See H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams and James M. Gustafson, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1956), p.31.

¹² For a short biography and assessment of the contribution of these men, see John Taylor and Clyde Binfield (eds), *Who They Were in the Reformed Churches of England and Wales, 1901-2000* (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007).

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, pp.78-80.

¹⁴ Consequently, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church could remind the other denominations that 'it is not clear why the Spirit might not have been as much at work in the breakdown of the threefold pattern in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as in the creation of it in the second and third.' Response to WCC's *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry. Churches respond to BEM*, I, p.104.

¹⁵ Vavasor Powell (1617-1670), the seventeenth-century Welsh Puritan (of Baptist sympathies) noted in his book, *Spirituell Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* (London, 1653) that when a church was constituted, then the congregation was tested for its orthodoxy and sincerity of faith and its uprightness of moral character. A day would then be set aside for its solemn submission to the will of God at which representatives of surrounding churches would be present (to ensure catholicity and apostolicity), the names of all intended members would be read out and each one in turn would say something about her or his spiritual experience. Then the congregation would enter into a solemn covenant with words such as the following: 'We doe promise and covenant in the presence of the Lord, that the Almighty Jehovah shall be our God; we doe give up our selves to serve him in spirit and in truth, and doe promise to walke together as a Church, according to the rule of the Gospell, and to watch over one another, and continue in fellowship together, and be helpful to each other, as God shall enable us, according to our duties expressed in the word of God.' See R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in Wales*, ed. Robert Pope (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp.37-38.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, p.107. See Galatians 3:1.

¹⁷ Luther taught that the Word was the sacrament and that Baptism and the Lord's Supper were pictorial forms of that one sacrament. Although the Calvinists have never explicitly stated this, there would seem to be little real objection to it from within the Reformed tradition.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, p.1277

¹⁹ Forsyth calls it 'the sacrament of destination'. See his *Lectures on the Church and the Sacraments*, p.193.

²⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (2nd ed. London: SCM, 1992), p.227.

²¹ Take, for example, the words of Albert Peel: 'only one thing makes a church – not officers, not creeds, not sacraments, but believing men and women, those who have been saved by Christ and gathered together into a fellowship of the Divine life.' Peel, *Inevitable Congregationalism* (London: Independent Press, 1937), p.70.

²² Over the years, the interpretation of this clause has caused consternation for many. As a result, a paragraph has been added to the Basis of Union stating: 'The provisions of paragraph 25 are intended to establish the principle that worship should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as by the local church. The provisions do not prevent the congregation assembled for baptismal or communion service from themselves appointing, as a church meeting, a suitable person to preside at the celebration of the sacrament in a case of emergency, for example if the expected president is taken ill or held up in travel. The provisions do not require such an action rather than a postponement of the baptismal or communion service if that seems preferable.' This paragraph confirms the principle that the sacraments should be celebrated with due order rather than specifically demanding that *only* the ordained should preside.

²³ The Basis of Union lists the following: among Presbyterians, the Westminster Confession (1647), A Statement of the Christian Faith (1956); among Congregationalists in England and Wales, the Savoy Declaration (1658), A Declaration of Faith (1967); among Congregationalists in Scotland, A Statement of Faith (1949); among Churches of Christ, Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address (1809).

²⁴ The Dissenting tradition is highlighted here because there exists, in the Reformed tradition, a preponderance of catechisms which imply that credal conformity is more of an aspiration in the Continental Reformed world than it has been in the English and Welsh traditions. Many congregations in the Presbyterian Church of England shared this Dissenting view. However, it might be worth pondering whether in fact the extensive number of catechisms has produced unity around formal credal confession or whether it has, in reality, added to the diversity and plurality of the Reformed family.

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, p.1023

²⁶ The Congregational Union of Scotland had within its number 'Registered Pastors'. Those serving as such at the time of union were permitted to continue ministry under such a title. They were recognized as members of Area Councils and were eligible to be authorized by those councils to preside at the sacraments. No provision exists within the Basis of Union to continue to recognize this ministry (§A21). Also, not all officers of the local church in Scotland were identified under the title of Elder. Those who fulfilled the function of the Elder were recognized as such by the wider councils of the URC but were also permitted to retain their previous title (§A23).

²⁷ The full text can be found in D. M. Thompson (ed.), *Stating the Gospel: Formulations and Declarations of Faith from the Heritage of the United Reformed Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), pp.10-60.

²⁸ See, e.g., Stuart Murray, *Church After Christendom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, and Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). For a somewhat critical view, see D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

²⁹ Anglican-Methodist conversations had been taking place for many years. However, despite the willingness of the Methodists to enter into union, the Anglican convocations failed to endorse the scheme for union in July 1969 and the General Synod of the Church of England rejected the scheme again in May 1972. It had been considered that further subsequent union would have occurred had this scheme been successful.