

MISSION COUNCIL JANUARY 27TH 2007

MINUTES

Mission Council met at the Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh on Saturday January 27th. Present with the Moderator were 66 Voting members, 10 others in attendance.

Session One

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

07/01 Welcome

The Moderator welcomed everyone present, and especially those who were attending Mission Council for the first time or in a new capacity: Jane Campbell (East Midland's synod), Rowena Francis (Moderator, Northern synod), Kirsty Thorpe (Convener of Editorial and Communications committee), Cecil White (Eastern synod), Andrew Littlejohns, (Moderator Fury Assembly), Michael Lewis (Northern synod), Peter Pay (Wessex), Irene Wren (taking the minutes in place of Ken Forbes), Martin Hazell in his new role as Director of communication and Peter Poulter in his new role as Convener of Ministries Committee.

07/02 Apologies for Absence.

Apologies were sustained from:

Members of Mission Council: Revds Adrian Bulley, (Wessex Moderator), Peter Colwell (Convener of Interfaith Relations) Anthony Howells (West Midlands), John McCauley (Thames North synod), Dr David Peel (Past Moderator), Dr Andrew Prasad (Convener Racial Justice and Multicultural Committee) Ruth Whitehead (Wessex); Mrs Wilma Prentice (Mersey), and Mr Bill Robson (West Midlands).

Members of Staff: Karen Bulley, Michelle Marcano, Steve Summers, Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Jo Williams and Philip Woods.

07/03 Notification of Additional Business.

Three new papers were tabled:

D2 Election of Trustees

H Life and Witness Committee – Covenant Membership and Mission

A1 (yellow) Clerk's paper – Mission Council and Assembly (comments welcome before March Mission Council)

07/04 Minutes of the Mission Council held on October 3rd – 5th 2006.

The minutes were signed by the Moderator as a correct record, taking account of the corrections notified on the order paper.

07/05 Matters arising from the minutes.

06/42 Resolution 40. The Deputy General Secretary, Revd. Ray Adams introduced paper A1, which proposed an alternative way forward to the resolution, which sought to modify the Declaration for a Safe Church. He suggested that a group be set up to craft a new document setting forth the principles of Christian life together, encouraging churches to engage with it and linked to the resources

and information to help churches live up to those principles. The names of Rosemary Johnson, Barbara Shapland, Lesley Charlton with one or two members chosen by Fury Executive were suggested. Suggestions of other names were requested by the end of the day. Thereafter those mentioned would be approached to serve on the group.

Mission Council agreed to this course of action.

06/55 Consultation of YCWTD0 funding.

The Treasurer, Eric Chilton, reported on the consultation held in January with representatives of the synods. The group came to an interim decision, subject to confirmation, that no changes would be made in 2007. A wider review of the programme was due take place in 2008 initiated by the Youth and Children's Work committee. Until the completion of that review the General Assembly would continue to fund 25% of the salary and associated expenses. Synods would continue to pay and claim back their share of the costs.

07/06 Doctrine Prayer and Worship presented papers B and C.

Paper C – was introduced by Revd. Dr Susan Durber (with additional comments made by Revd Richard Mortimer). The paper reported the outcome of the Eldership Consultation held on October 23rd at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine. It was felt to be a helpful beginning to the understanding of Ordination and Eldership although there was still more work to be done. The paper could be used as a resource for training: leaders could be provided to assist discussions in churches or synods. A number of helpful comments were received.

Mission Council commended the paper for use in training.

Paper B –“What is the United Reformed Church?” was presented as part of a series on Ecclesiology, to be produced to stimulate group discussion about the nature of the Church. They would be particularly useful for membership classes but could be used more widely.

Mission Council commended the production and use of the document.

07/07 Consensus Decision Making in the United Reformed church.

Paper A2 was presented by Revd. Elizabeth Nash on behalf of the working group. She requested responses, comments or questions in time for updating the document for further discussion at the March Mission Council. A number of comments were received, mostly favourable, and Elizabeth thanked all who had contributed.

07/08 Mission council Advisory Group.

Review of the General Secretary.

The Deputy General Secretary reminded Mission Council of the elaborate process used in 1998 and brought suggestions from MCAG for a smaller group to undertake the task. He proposed that:

“Mission Council is invited

1. to agree the appointment of a Group to review Dr David Cornick in the post of General Secretary and to bring a proposal to the 2007 Assembly.

The Group charged with facilitating a widespread consultation, shall be convened by the Moderator of General Assembly, and shall consist of a former Assembly Moderator, a synod moderator, a synod clerk, and the Convener of

an Assembly committee. The Deputy General Secretary shall act as secretary and administer the process.

2. to appoint a Convener of an Assembly committee to serve on the group."

3. to agree MCAG's recommendations that the Revd. Dr. David Peel should serve on the group in the capacity of former Assembly Moderator.

Reminders about breadth, balance and perspective were offered by members of Mission Council and *the composition of the review group was agreed*. Suggestions of names were requested to be submitted before the end of Mission Council.

Appointment to the Resource Sharing Task Group.

Mission Council agreed to the appointment of Miss Margaret Atkinson (Yorkshire synod) to serve on the group.

Dates and venues for future meetings were listed and agreed.

07/09 Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church.

The Clerk, Revd. James Breslin, presented paper G.

Recent legislation meant that churches would lose their "excepted charity" status meaning that all the requirements of Charity legislation would fall upon Local Churches, but clear guidance regarding trusteeship was not yet available.

Mission Council agreed the following :

"Mission Council takes note of the report on Trusteeship and the implications for the Church of new Charity Legislation and appoints a working party of five people to produce the necessary documentation to facilitate the changes needed."

Resolution 1. on paper G was not put, as the time was not appropriate.

Not all Synod Trusts operated the same model, but the working group was aware of this.

07/10 Section 'O' and Mandated Groups.

Paper A5 presented by the Clerk

The following resolution was agreed:

"Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees to extend the Indemnity which covers those dealing with cases of Ministerial Discipline (Section O) to include the Revd Alison Davis for so long as she shall by appointment of the church act on behalf of the Church in providing advice to Mandated Groups and this shall be extended to any other person appointed to this role in future."

07/11 The Rural Officer.

The Moderator invited Revd. Graham Jones to address the Council on his work as Rural Officer for the Methodist and United Reformed Churches, his work being based at the Arthur Rank Centre.

Graham spoke of the work of the centre and the specific needs of rural communities in the current economic environment. He offered a helpful paper as well as personal help to Churches engaged in rural mission.

The Moderator thanked Graham for his input and wished him well in his future work.

07/12 Notices

The Deputy General Secretary reminded members of council of the nominations required and gave notice of the lunchtime arrangements. The Moderator invited the Chaplain to say Grace.

Afternoon Session.

07/13 Catch the Vision

The General Secretary Revd. Dr. David Cornick presented paper D.

This paper updated members of Council on the work of the Steering group in preparation for the March Mission Council.

It included:

A new committee structure; new proposals for the Moderator of General Assembly to be a shared leadership by a minister and an elder serving for a period of two years; and progress on work in preparation on 'Spirituality'.

David then presented paper D1, Restructuring, Governance and Organisation, which had been prepared by Revd. Philip Woods.

Discussion followed. Comments on paper D were mostly supportive, with little resistance to the suggested changes. A number of comments and questions and concerns were raised in response to D1, and what had been reported on the 'Spirituality' focus. David thanked everyone for their participation and agreed to take comments back to the steering group.

07/14 Post Moratorium Task Group.

Paper A3 was presented by Revd. Malcolm Hanson (Convener of Task Group).

He invited Mission Council to discuss the paper in small groups. Responses in the plenary session suggested that a majority felt that the direction of the report and its recommendations seemed 'about right'; that option five was probably the best way forward; and that the Catch the Vision process remains the more important element in the life of the Church at this time. Comments were received about the differing understanding of 'covenant'; clarification regarding the circumstances of someone recently ordained; a possible missing view in the report that there were those who were unable to come to a view after much prayer and consideration; the value of using consensus procedures to deal with the assembly debate; the length of the 'commitment' text; the need to continue to travel together; the status of paper A3.

Mission Council agreed that the task group should continue to consult as they saw fit but that the document discussed should remain confidential. Any who enquire should be told that 'work is in progress'.

Malcolm responded to the comments and the Moderator thanked the members of the task group for their careful work. She led the Council in Prayer.

07/14 Nominations Committee

Paper E was presented by Revd. Malcolm Hanson (Convener)

Nominations for Committee Conveners.

The following had accepted nomination.

Assembly Arrangements Committee – Mr Simon Rowntree.

Ministries – CRCW Programme sub-committee – Revd Paul Whittle

Ministries – Leadership in Worship sub-committee – Mrs Jan Harper

Westminster Board of Governors – Professor Anthony Bottoms

Review of Secretary of Training – Revd Rachel Poolman.

Revd. Pam Smith had resigned as Convener of the Pilots' Management Group.

He clarified that the group meeting to consider Synod nominees for Trustees would consist of the Revd. John Waller, Mr Eric Chilton from the present Board of Trustees and Revd. Liz Brown and himself, from the Nominations Committee.

Mission Council agreed the following resolution brought by the appointment group convened by Revd Sheila Maxey:

“ Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, appoints the Revd. Dr. Susan Durber as Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, from 1st August 2007 to 31st July 2014.”

The Moderator thanked the appointing group for its work then greeted Susan to the applause of Mission Council and wished her well in this new area of service.

07/15 Election of Trustees

The Treasurer, Mr Eric Chilton, presented paper D.

He recommended that the suggestions contained in the governing document presented to Mission Council October, be adopted: that there may be up to 20 Trustees. Mission Council endorsed his view.

07/16 Training Committee.

Revd. John Humphries reported that the final United Reformed Church ordinand at Mansfield College was due to complete training in 2009. Discussions had been held with the college about their proposal that the URC might fund a part time 'Research Coordinator' to make up a full-time equivalent post with the already funded 0.5 post as Chaplain to the college. The convener reported in detail the Training Committee's consideration of this request and the reasons it had been unable to support the proposal.

Discussions had also been held with The Queen's Foundation regarding a possible part-time URC appointment to specialise in 'Multi-cultural' ministry. The Training committee had also considered this proposal in detail and had declined to agree to it.

Mission Council received the Committee's report.

Mission Council adjourned for Tea.

Session 3

The Moderator clarified that the paper 'Post Moratorium' would remain confidential but that the Task Group would be free to consult further.

07/08 General Secretary's Review.

The Clerk announced that, following the request for nominations, the review group would consist of:

Moderator of General Assembly – Revd. Elizabeth Caswell

Past Moderator - Revd. Dr. David Peel

Synod Moderator – Revd. Elizabeth Welch

Synod Clerk – Dr Graham Campling

Committee Convener – Mr Simon Loveitt
Mission Council agreed and gave the committee power to co-opt up to two further people to seek appropriate balance in the group's membership.

07/17 Church & Society, Heritage Lottery Fund

Paper F was presented by the Convener Simon Loveitt.

He gave a thorough overview of the changes in funding available to assist Listed Buildings and brought an amended resolution from that on paper F.

“Having re-considered its position on Lottery funding, General Assembly accepts reluctantly, that some local churches will need to make application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to assist with the upkeep and repair of the listed church buildings and, in that respect, revises the advice contained in Resolution 20 of General Assembly 1995, which urged members and councils of the church to disassociate themselves from the lottery.”

Mission Council agreed that the resolution should be taken to the next General Assembly.

Thanks were offered for the clarity of the document and the committee's work.

07/18 Staffing Advisory Group

Paper A4 was presented by Val Morrison (Convener).

She outlined the Group's recent work and thinking on the posts listed and brought the following proposals relating to Assembly staff.

1. *Mission Council approves the continuation of the post of Pilot's Development Officer.*
2. *Mission Council approves:*
 - a. *the change of name for the post of Secretary for Training to Secretary for Education and Learning*
 - b. *the continuation of the post of Secretary for Education and Learning.*
3. *Mission Council:*
 - a. *approves the continuation of the post of Secretary for Ministries.*
 - b. *agrees that the Revd. Christine Craven be offered an extension of twelve months from July 2007, subject to structural changes throughout the church being agreed.*
4. *Mission council approves the continuation of the post of CRCW Development Officer.*
5. *Mission Council agrees that Revd. Philip Woods be offered an extension of Three months to his contract to the end of October 2007 to enable completion of work being undertaken relating to the shape of the Mission Policy and Theology Team following any decisions of General Assembly 2007.*
6. *Mission Council agrees that in future Staffing Advisory group should undertake the review of posts on a three yearly basis in team groups.*

Mission Council agreed to all six resolutions.

07/19 Covenant Membership and Mission

Revd. Peter Ball tabled paper H. which was one of three pieces of work in which the Committee had been involved, on eldership, membership and evangelism.

He asked for comments and responses by February 12th to be sent to himself and the Revd. Ray Adams.

07/20 Assembly Arrangements Committee.

William McVey (Convener) informed members of Mission Council that:

1. The statutory deadlines for resolutions for inclusion in the Assembly reports would be adhered to.
2. The wording of any Resolutions to General Assembly should wherever possible be checked with the Clerk in time for the March Mission Council
3. All material for inclusion in the Book of Reports must be ready before **16th April**, as there would be no second mailing this year.
4. In addition to those Committees which report annually the Committees which are due to report to Assembly are : Doctrine, Prayer and Worship; Life and Witness; Ecumenical; Interfaith Relations; and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry.
5. All should exercise restraint in the number of resolutions being brought to Assembly.
6. He reminded Members that the usual processes whereby late business can be brought to the Assembly and included on the Order Paper would still apply.

07/21 Thanks

The Moderator thanked everyone for their part the meeting and in particular thanked the staff of the Arthur Rank Centre, the local churches who supplied refreshments, Ray Adams and Krystyna Pullen for their preparations, James Breslin for his support and Irene Wren for writing up the minutes.

07/22 Closure.

The Chaplain led the closing worship at 4.25pm.

Mission Council stood adjourned until the next meeting at High Leigh on March 23rd-25th 2007.



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

15th December 2006

Mission Council: Saturday 27th January 2007
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire

Dear Colleague

I am writing to give notice of the next meeting of Mission Council which is to be held on Saturday 27th January 2007 at the Arthur Rank Centre, within the grounds of the National Agricultural Centre at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire.

You are welcome to arrive at Stoneleigh Park from 9.30 a.m. for registration and coffee 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 scheduled to finish by 4.45 p.m.

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) by Friday 5th January 2007, please, to Krystyna Pullen (krystyna.pullen@urc.org.uk) (tel: 020 7916 8646).

Our one-day meetings have to be quite crisp in their delivery and discussion, given the shortness of time available. Yet they have proved to be valuable in helping to relieve the pressure on the timetable for the March Council. They also allow Assembly Committees the benefit of testing proposals on a larger, more representative, group (appointed by synods) before finalising their reports and resolutions for General Assembly.

We anticipate the following matters will be presented to Mission Council:

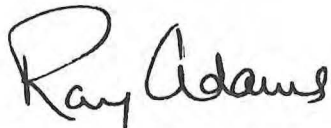
- Papers on the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church prepared by the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee
- A report on the inter-committee consultation on Eldership
- A paper on Membership from the Life and Witness Committee
- A paper on the Heritage Lottery, prepared by Church and Society Committee
- The next stage of the 'Catch the Vision' process, concerning the renewal of the Church
- Interim reports on consensus voting; and how we approach the end of the moratorium on decisions on issues of human sexuality

A second mailing, containing the agenda and related papers, will be sent to you about one week before the meeting.

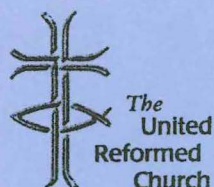
In the period between now and then, may we all have some space to enjoy Christmas, to appreciate for ourselves its themes of universal good news, hope and peace; and to consider our calling to connect the promises of God to the society and context in which we live.

With all good wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ray Adams". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Revd Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary



MISSION COUNCIL

27th JANUARY 2007

MEMBERS & REPRESENTATIVES

The Moderator
General Secretary
Deputy General Secretary
Clerk

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

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

Assembly Standing Committees

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

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

Fury Council

Andrew Littlejohn
Miss Isobel Simmons (Chair)
Miss Sara Paton

13 synod Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each synod

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

In attendance

Minute Secretary

Moderator's Chaplain

Ministries

Training

Youth Work

Children's Work Dev't Officer

Pilots Development Officer

Church & Society

Ecumenical Relations

International Church Rel's

Revd Ken Forbes
(apologies for Jan 07)

Revd Neil Thorogood

Revd Christine Craven

Revd Roy Lowes

Mr John Brown

Miss Jo Williams

Mrs Karen Bulley

Mr Stuart Dew

Revd Richard Mortimer

Revd Philip Woods

Church Related Community
Work

Grants & Loans Convener

Rural Consultant

Racial Justice

HR & Facilities Manager

Windermere Centre

Communications

Reform

Life & Witness

Mrs Suzanne Adofo/
Mr Stephen Summers

Dr Brian Woodhall

Revd Graham Jones

Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams

Ms Michelle Marcano

Mr Lawrence Moore

Revd Martin Hazell



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 ²⁷ 22nd January 2006
Arthur Rank Centre, National Agricultural Centre
Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire
Telephone 024 7685 3060

Dear Colleague,

16th January 2007

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

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

May I remind you to bring all the enclosed papers with you as well as the Minutes of the October 2006 Mission Council.

Enclosed please find the following papers:

The Agenda

Paper A: Mission Council Advisory Group report

Paper A1: Task Group report on Assembly Resolution 40 (2006)

Paper A2: Task Group report on Consensus Voting

Paper A3: Task Group report on the ending of the Moratorium

Paper A4: Staffing Advisory Group report

Paper A5: Section O Advisory Group report

Paper B: Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee: Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church -1: a study guide to the Nature Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church

Paper C: A report of the Consultation on Eldership (October 2006)

Paper D: Report of the 'Catch the Vision' process

Paper D1: Discussion paper: 'Restructuring, governance and organisation'

Paper E: Report from the Nominations Committee

Paper F: 'Heritage Lottery Funding': a report from the Church and Society Committee

Paper G: Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church

These papers represent a considerable amount of work put in by various committees and task groups. They also reveal the 'Spring blossom' (if not yet the fruit) of previous discussions, and we hope that the effort behind the preparation of these reports will encourage members of Mission Council to give them serious attention at our one-day meeting at Stoneleigh Park.

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

I look forward to a full and interesting day of discussion and discernment as we consider the future shape and direction of our Church.

With good wishes for the New Year.

Yours sincerely



The Revd Ray Adams
Deputy General Secretary



The
United
Reformed
Church

Mission Council 27 January 2007

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

Annotated Agenda for the Moderator and supporters

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 - led by the Moderator/Chaplain

10.15 a.m. Welcome (especially those present for the first time - Moderator)

The Revds Jane Campbell (East Midlands synod); Peter Colwell (Interfaith Committee Convener); Rowena Francis (Moderator of Northern synod); Kirsty Thorpe (Communications and Editorial Convener); Cecil White (Eastern synod);

Messrs Andrew Littlejohns (FURY Moderator) - replaces Isobel Simmons as a member of Mission Council; Michael Lewis (Northern synod); Peter Pay (Wessex synod)

Mrs Irene Wren (East Midlands' synod clerk) is taking the minutes in place of the Revd Ken Forbes who is unable to be present.

Please welcome also those whose role has changed but who are not new to Mission Council

The Revd Martin Hazell - no longer Communications and Editorial Convener, now Director of Communication;

The Revd Peter Poulter - retired as Northern Synod Moderator, now Convener of the Ministries Committee.

and apologies for absence (DepGenSec)

Apologies from:

- a) **Members of Mission Council:** Revds Adrian Bulley (Wessex Moderator), Anthony Howells (West Midlands), Dr David Peel (Past Moderator), Dr Andrew Prasad (RJ&MM Convener), Ruth Whitehead (Wessex); Mrs Wilma Prentice (Mersey), Mr Bill Robson (West Midlands).
- b) **Staff:** Mrs Karen Bulley, Ms Michelle Marcano, Mr Steve Summers, Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Ms Jo Williams, the Revd Philip Woods.

Notification of additional business: (Deputy General Secretary to lead)

Paper D2 was accidentally omitted from papers sent out - to be taken this afternoon under 'Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church'

Paper H will be introduced briefly but not discussed - comments to be sent to DGS (acting- Sec for L&W committee meetings) and introduced more fully at March Mission Council.

Paper A1 - (Yellow - for March Mission Council) is the Clerk's paper on Mission Council and Assembly - for reading in anticipation of that meeting. Any initial comments to be sent to James.

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 3-5 October 2006

Corrections and clarifications to the Minutes: (AS NOTIFIED)

06/43 (line 4) delete: 'bring proposals to the January Mission Council' and substitute "report back to Mission Council as soon as possible."

(line 5) delete 'was asked to' and substitute "(The meeting), having agreed to these proposals, undertook to appoint...."

06/51 (line 4): add for clarification the following at the end of the sentence:
'related to point 3 of the policy, which stated that positive action should be taken to counter attitudes and practices contrary to the statement of intent'.

06/63 Substitute the following for the first two lines of the Nominations Report:
"Following a report from the convener, the Revd Malcolm Hanson, **Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agreed that Martin Hazell be appointed as Director of Communications from January 1st 2007 until 31st December 2011**"

06/64 (at the end of the paragraph, add the following sentence) "Mission Council accepted the names of those proposed to serve on the task group, and the other details outlined by Dr Peel".

Matters arising:

06/42: Resolution 40

PAPER A1

Deputy General Secretary to lead
The Treasurer to report

06/55: Consultation on YCWTD funding

10.25 :Doctrine, Prayer and Worship

PAPERS B and C

Susan Durber (Convener of DPW)

11.05 :Consensus Voting Task Group

PAPER A2

Elizabeth Nash (Task Gp Convener)

11.25: Mission Council Advisory Group

PAPER A

Deputy General Secretary

(If time, the Clerk could lead on **PAPER G**; and possibly **PAPER A5**. If not, their appointed times are between 3.05 and 3.15 p.m.. If there is even more time, the Clerk could mention **March Mission Council's PAPER A1** - which is tabled today for information and for people to think about before the next meeting of MC)

11.50: Graham Jones - the United Reformed Church /Methodist Church's Rural Officer

12.20: Notices and lunchtime arrangements

Deputy General Secretary

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 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, Graham Jones is happy to show people around and describe work of the Arthur Rank Centre.
 - Make sure plates, cups, etc cleared from this room before start of afternoon session.
 - Resume meeting promptly at 1.15 p.m.

Prayer led by the Moderator/ or Chaplain

12.30 - 1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 - 3.15 p.m.

- 1.15 p.m.:** Catch the Vision **PAPERS D and D1** The General Secretary
- 2.00 p.m.:** Post Moratorium Task Group **PAPER A3** Malcolm Hanson (Task Gp Convener)
- 2.45 p.m.:** Report of the Nominations Committee **PAPER E** Malcolm Hanson (Task Gp Convener)
- 2.55 p.m.:** Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church
✓ **PAPERS D2** (*tabled this morning*) The Treasurer
and G The Clerk
✓ **PAPER A5** The Clerk
- 3.10 p.m.** Section O Advisory Group

* Training Cttee skatam

- John H.

* Ass'ly Ann's

3.15 - 3.45 pm: Break for Tea

Session 3: 3.45 - 4.45 p.m.

- 3.45 :** Church and Society: Heritage Lottery Fund **PAPER F** Simon Loveitt (C&S Convener)
- 4.10 :** Staffing Advisory Group **PAPER A4** Val Morrison (Convener)
- 4.20 :** Life and Witness Committee Report on Membership Peter Ball (L&W Convener)
PAPER H (*tabled*)

This paper will be discussed at the next meeting of Mission Council but members are invited to send any comments to the Deputy General Secretary within the next two weeks, for consideration before a final draft is brought to March Mission Council

- * **4.30:** Closing Worship The Moderators' Chaplain



Mission Council 27 January 2007

AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

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

9.30am Arrivals and coffee

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

Opening Worship

Welcome and apologies for absence

Notification of additional business

The Minutes of Mission Council meeting on 3-5 October 2006

Corrections and clarifications to the Minutes:

06/43 (line 4) delete: 'bring proposals to the January Mission Council' and substitute "report back to Mission Council as soon as possible."

(line 5) delete 'was asked to' and substitute "(The meeting), having agreed to these proposals, undertook to appoint...."

06/51 (line 4): add for clarification the following at the end of the sentence: 'related to point 3 of the policy, which stated that positive action should be taken to counter attitudes and practices contrary to the statement of intent'.

06/56 (line 2) The sentence beginning 'Three people...' should be rewritten to read "were willing to join the Trustees: Linda Austin (Catch the Vision steering group), John Ellis (Assistant Treasurer and Honorary Treasurer elect) and the Revd Dr David Thompson (former Moderator). Mission Council agreed these appointments".

06/59. (page 7 line 2) delete: 'A current trustee who is a member of the Charity Commission' and substitute: "A Synod Trust Officer, who was also a Charity Commissioner, had produced"
(page 8 line 9) add to "someone with human resources" the word "skills".

06/63 substitute the following for the first two lines of the Nominations Report:
"Following a report from the convener, the Revd Malcolm Hanson, **Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agreed that Martin Hazell be appointed as Director of Communications from January 1st 2007 until 31st December 2011**"

06/64 (at the end of the paragraph, add the following sentence) "Mission Council accepted the names of those proposed to serve on the task group, and the other details outlined by Dr Peel".

Matters arising

06/42: Resolution 40

06/55: Consultation on YCWTD funding

PAPER A1

The Treasurer

Doctrine, Prayer and Worship

PAPERS B and C

Consensus Voting Task Group

PAPER A2

Mission Council Advisory Group (1)

PAPER A

Graham Jones - the United Reformed Church /Methodist Rural Consultant

Notices and lunchtime arrangements - followed by prayer

12.30 - 1.15 pm: Buffet Lunch

Session 2: 1.15 - 3.15 p.m.

Catch the Vision

PAPERS D and D1

Post Moratorium Task Group

PAPER A3

Report of the Nominations Committee

PAPER E

Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church

PAPER G

Section O Advisory Group

PAPER A5

3.15 - 3.45 pm: Break for Tea

Session 3: 3.45 - 4.45 p.m.

Church and Society: Heritage Lottery Fund

PAPER F

Staffing Advisory Group

PAPER A4

Life and Witness Committee Report on Membership

PAPER H
(to be tabled)

Closing Worship



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

A

Mission Council Advisory Group

Matter from 2006 General Assembly - for information
Resolution 8 (about Section O - the ministerial disciplinary process) at the 2006 Assembly, being a constitutional amendment, was referred to synods for comment (i.e. if any wish to object to the proposal). This referral is recorded in the Minutes of General Assembly but was accidentally omitted from the Record of Assembly. The Clerk has written to synod clerks asking that this matter be included on the agenda of their Spring synods

Review of the General Secretary

The General Secretary's completes his first term of service at General Assembly in 2008, and therefore a proposal should be brought to the 2007 Assembly. MCAG considered the review process for the previous General Secretary which was undertaken in 1998. At that time it was agreed that

'The General Assembly shall constitute a special committee consisting of two representatives appointed by each provincial synod, the Moderator of the General Assembly, the Convener of the Nominations Committee and nine persons selected by the Mission Council, five of whom shall be Conveners of Assembly Standing Committees, with authority to make a nomination for appointment as Clerk of Assembly and General Secretary to the Assembly. In any emergency the Mission Council shall be empowered to set up this committee'.

In 1998 Mission Council Advisory Group approached synods, asking them to appoint their representatives to a review group.

The Moderator wrote to staff secretaries and invited them to send comments to him (sic).

The Clerk was appointed to act as secretary at the meetings of the Review Group and the Deputy General Secretary was asked to administer the arrangements before and after the meetings'.

It was felt by MCAG that a smaller group could be as effective, and therefore proposes that a group consisting of the Moderator of General Assembly, a synod moderator, a synod clerk and the convener of an Assembly committee should undertake this task on behalf of the whole church. After an initial meeting between

the Moderator and the General Secretary, the Group would meet for the first time immediately before the March Mission Council. From there, the views of the church would be sought by letter (e-mail, etc) and subsequently considered by the group. Consequently, a proposal would be brought to the 2007 Assembly. The Deputy General Secretary would act as secretary and would administer the consultative process.

Mission Council is therefore invited

1. to agree the appointment of a Group to review Dr David Cornick in the post of General Secretary and to bring a proposal to the 2007 Assembly.

The group charged with facilitating a widespread consultation, shall be convened by the Moderator of General Assembly, and shall consist of a former Assembly Moderator, a synod moderator, a synod clerk, and the convener of an Assembly committee. The Deputy General Secretary shall act as secretary and administer the process.

2. to appoint a convener of an Assembly committee to serve on the group.

3. to agree MCAG's recommendation that the Revd Dr David Peel should serve on the group in the capacity of a former Assembly Moderator.

Resource Sharing Task Group appointment

Mission Council is asked to agree the appointment of Miss Margaret Atkinson from Yorkshire Synod to serve on this group which co-ordinates inter-synod resource sharing.

Mission Council dates and venues

2007

Friday 23-Sunday 25 March

High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Herts

Friday 5 - October 7

Ushaw College, Durham

2008

Saturday 26 January

Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh

Friday 7-Sunday 9 March

All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney

Tuesday 2 - Thursday 4 December

The Hayes, Swanwick

2009

Friday 15-Sunday 17 May

Ushaw College, Durham

Monday 16-Wednesday 18 November

The Hayes, Swanwick



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

A1

Resolution 40 (General Assembly 2006)
seeking to modify the Declaration for a Safe Church

Resolution 40 seeks to extend the terms of the Safe Church Declaration (which relates to sexual harassment and abuse) to cover other areas of harmful human interaction, such as emotional and physical abuse. After considering whether the Safe Church Declaration could simply be amended to include the other areas, we concluded that such amendment would not be appropriate. A simple amendment would not give churches a positive vision of a caring, healing and just community; the resources to live that out; and the flexibility to craft responses that fit presenting issues in each congregation.¹ Therefore, we propose that the Declaration be left as it is and that another statement, titled something like *Life Together*, be crafted that sets forth the principles of Christian life together, encourages churches to engage with it, and links to resources and information that equip churches to live up to those principles.

Such a statement would articulate in clear and positive terms the Christian understanding of how we are to live together, rooted in our understanding of God and the Church. The goal of the new document would be to assist churches to become caring, healing and just communities that respond appropriately to things that violate human dignity -- emotional/spiritual/mental/physical abuse or neglect (which includes bullying) - within the faith community. Consultation with Equal Opportunities may clarify whether harassment/abuse based on race, gender, disability or sexual orientation should be included. The new statement may link to the Declaration as covering adult sexual harassment and abuse and to Good Practice as covering child protection.

We imagine that the statement would link to resources that provide:
Bible studies or other material about Christian community;
Awareness-raising material about forms of abuse/neglect;

¹ The Declaration requires churches to collect information, investigate complaints and put in place a reporting mechanism. Investigation and reporting mechanisms seem particularly problematic and even undesirable when it comes to what happens between lay members. Those matters are best dealt with pastorally, by the minister or Elders. It would be burdensome to churches to require some kind of formal... and would seem an imposition of a 'legal' requirement. Also, 'neglect' is also a term... when exactly is a minister or elder or member neglectful? Who would determine what would be the appropriate response? Moreover, 'legal procedures' do not belong in the Christian community, and should probably only be used in the egregious situations in which a minister or employee or Elder is involved.

Training materials aimed at equipping appropriate pastoral response (caring and justice-seeking), including conflict transformation;

Sample reporting and investigating procedures for egregious matters where someone in authority (minister, CRCW, Elder, YCW) employee has acted wrongly (perhaps clarification of Section 0 and employment practices).

We believe this proposed way forward would be a more sensitive, flexible and potentially more effective way of addressing the problem of human interactions that fall short of the mark.

We would like to suggest that the following people be invited to serve on the group that crafts the statement and assembles resources:

Rosemary Johnson

Barbara Shapland

One or two FURY members chosen by FURY Exec (Sara Paton is willing to serve)

Lesley Charlton



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

A2

Consensus Decision Making for the United Reformed Church

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

This is a first draft for Mission Council to look at in January 2007. We will be very grateful for comments and reflections at the meeting as well as from members of Mission Council before Monday 19 March 2007. We are proposing to bring an improved version to Mission Council in March for further discussion and to take a final version to Assembly in 2007. We suggest that Consensus is used at Mission Council and other Assembly committee meetings from autumn 2007 and for the first time in full at General Assembly 2008. Synods and other URC committees etc are welcome and encouraged to use these processes.

Introduction

'Let's Christ's peace be arbiter in your decisions, the peace to which you are called as members of a single body' Colossians 3:15

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

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

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

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

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

Forgive us those times when we have pushed our views,
haven't listened to others and
influenced a meeting to achieve our own ends

Help us to appreciate that
you are not in the wind, earthquake or fire
but in that small voice whispering in our ear
the way you wish us to go...

help us to listen to you...

Our Tradition

What we believe about the church and the United Reformed Church, in particular, influences the ways in which we organise ourselves as a denomination and the ways in which we make decisions. The strands which have been woven together to form the United Reformed Church belong to the conciliar model of church and as such authority within the church is located and dispersed within its designated Councils. These are the local church meeting; ecumenically designated areas; the Synod and the General Assembly. The authority that each exercises is 'under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit.' (*The Manual, The Structure of the United Reformed Church 1.(3)*)

Both the Conciliar model and a process of making decisions by consensus find their origins in the practice of the early church as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the letters to the first Christian communities.

In Acts 2 the early Christian community is epitomised by the sharing of meals and possessions, in caring for one another and expressing joy as they worshipped together and welcomed newcomers. For that community and for the church today, the image of the body is important. 1 Corinthians 12-27 reminds us that each person's gifts need to be valued and that each person's contribution is necessary if the whole body, with Christ as its head, is to live the fullness of life. Whilst Philippians 2:5-8 reminds us to act in humility, as is Christ's nature, and acknowledge our own vulnerability and weakness. On four occasions in the Acts of the Apostles we find a record of a communal decision making process. By looking at the issues addressed (appointing a replacement for Judas 1:14-26; the distribution to the Greek speaking widows 6:1-7; gentile acceptance 11:1-18; circumcision 15:1-33) we begin to see a pattern emerging of how the process was carried out.

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

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

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

Philippians 2:1-4

That emerging pattern will feel familiar to many of us in our experience of the councils of the United Reformed Church. The United Reformed Church believes that in the Councils of the Church we hear the voice of God mediated through human voices. Councils that encourage community and listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility, are more likely to discern the will of God. Through the process of opening ourselves in prayer, sharing what is on our hearts and minds and listening to one another we discern most acutely the leading of God. Christian community develops when members of a group share the life they have in Christ. Community is strengthened as members are open to each other's insights and feelings in pursuit of the ideals and practices around which the community is formed. The ideal of Community we seek to achieve in the Church finds its fulfilment in the relationships expressed in the Trinity where love binds Father, Son and Holy Spirit together. The first step towards creating Christian community is an acknowledgement of the primacy of Christ as head of the church to which all belong.

Whilst we can theologially justify consensus and provide a strong case for consensus procedures based on the bible, what use are these procedures to us? Why is that we should so radically change our method of debate when we appear to have been managing for so long, we have always made decisions. What is so good about the consensus method that we should go through this process with all its complexities?

Confrontation

As a church we would seek to work towards God's will and plan for us. However, being a community of individuals means that there will always be differences in the interpretation of God's plan. In the traditional approach this would be resolved by pitting opposing viewpoints against each other. Whilst a decision is usually made how can we be sure that this is what God wants? The traditional approach encourages the taking of one viewpoint or the other, when speaking, this allows people to become more and more stubborn, sticking ever more rigidly to the viewpoint they originally took. Changing your viewpoint implies that someone has 'lost' and another 'won'. Pride can get in the way of the process of discerning God's will. Consensus decision

making places the emphasis on seeking God's will, people still give their viewpoints but with the removal of the confrontational atmosphere. Changing one's mind after listening to various opinions and insights is not a source of embarrassment, as it is in an adversarial setting.

At the end of the process of consensus, presuming a firm decision is made, there follows a broader feeling of acceptance and ownership of the decision. While the adversarial approach can lead to up to 49% of those involved not agreeing and therefore not feeling listened to or feeling disillusioned, consensus decisions are passed only on the basis of the acceptance of the whole council, even from those who do not actively agree with the decision. Coupled with the removal of sides in debates, this helps to prevent splits within the community. As a community it is important that we do not split over issues and that we continue to work together towards a common aim – of fulfilling God's work.

Consensus

Moreover the basis of consensus is a far better structure upon which to attempt to seek God's will. It places equal validity on all insights and input. It takes all those involved into account, the emphasis really is on listening to all those present. The lack of a confrontational atmosphere means that those who are not as adept at debating, in the traditional sense, can speak without fear of being outspoken by those more adept or better experienced at this sort of debating. In addition the lack of detailed standing orders prevents those well versed in their use, from taking advantage of them and/or the situation in order to steer the debate in their direction. Once again this feeds into the ownership and acceptance, mentioned above. Put simply if a decision is made on the basis that everyone is of the same mind, with regards to an issue, and no-one feels left out, discriminated against or disillusioned by the process the decision will be better accepted and is more likely to be taken to heart by those concerned. Ownership of a decision, in turn, makes it more likely that those involved will work to turn the decision into practical action.

Implications for the church in taking this process forward

Introducing consensus decision making procedures will have profound implications for the way the United Reformed Church does its business. In many ways, though, it will be a return to the ideals that first shaped our councils.

It has been our tradition and understanding that each council of the Church 'comes to a mind' over a matter (rather than the present system of a show of hands or by taking a vote). The ideal is that the council reaches a unanimous agreement over a matter and that everyone feels heard and has had an opportunity to contribute, even those who have remained silent or have been not confident to voice a view, have been included and listened to. This ambition has not always been achieved in our present process of making decisions. Consensus decision making attempts to address this ambition and in doing so, suggests that the United Reformed Church should declare itself to be 'A Listening Church'.

The Church will be required to be much more open than we are now, to accept leadership and to be prepared to venture along a pilgrimage without knowing or prejudging the outcome.

Being 'open' will mean everyone will be expected to voice their opinions, hearing dissenting voices without ill feeling or a need to attack the other person. Where a view has been voiced there will be no need to repeat the same view by others. So on a practical level consensus may potentially reduce the length of meetings. Of course this is not to say that people will not have a chance to speak if they have something else to add.

There will need to be neutral (unbiased) leadership from the Moderator. This will require us to accept that not all Moderators naturally have the gifts that this process requires. In meetings the Moderator should be given support, through the facilitation group, which will offer guidance and suggestions for different ways forward. It will be important for the Moderator to be trained properly, as well as being given regular and appropriate feedback.

Assembly Committees will change too. They will use consensus in their own meetings so what they bring to Assembly will already have been through a listening process. The committee may come to consensus and bring that to Assembly or they may offer a raft of different proposals for the council to discuss. Either way they will expect that their ideas will be changed and developed in the decision making process at Assembly.

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

In all, we will need permission to fail.

Consensus decision making if used throughout the United Reformed Church will enable everyone to have a say in the Councils of the Church, be truly inclusive, and in the end will enjoy the support of everyone involved.

Resources

A Manual for Meetings 2000 The Uniting Church of Australia ISBN 1 86407 223 7
Coming to Consensus by Jill Tabart WCC 2003 ISBN 2-8254-1392-5

Consensus Procedures for the Councils of the United Reformed Church

The purpose of Council meetings of the URC include:

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

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

The process of consensus:

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

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

- 1) At each stage of the process the moderator will clarify the nature of the session, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.
- 2) **Worship** is a vital element in the meeting of every council of the church.
- 3) **Community building** is important to help the process of consensus to work.
- 4) **General Sessions** include ceremonial occasions, formal addresses and opening and closing ceremonies etc.
- 5) **The Information Session:** This session aims to inform the council on the issue to be considered. A range of options are presented to the council by different people who can speak in favour of their option. Members of the council are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek for clarification or further information.
- 6) **The Discussion Session:** This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. All those present may contribute.
- 7) The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole council, time for thinking during a break etc. The use of coloured cards is very helpful at this stage. In particular the moderator should ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- 8) The quality of discussion is significantly improved if the council meets around tables so that group discussion can happen quickly and easily.
- 9) As the discussion session proceeds proposals are developed until a specific proposal is reached.

- 10) **The Decision Session:** Only those council members present may participate in this session.
- 11) Discussion continues with speakers contributing to the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. Minor changes of wording can be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.
- 12) The proposal should be displayed in such a way that all can see the text and any changes to it.
- 13) If there is a major change in the proposal then it may be appropriate to move back into a discussion session.
- 14) After summing up where the assembly seems to be heading, the moderator checks whether the assembly is nearing consensus.
- 15) What is your response to this proposal?
 - a) Do you believe we have **consensus** in support of this proposal?
 - b) Do you believe we have **consensus** not to support this proposal?
 - c) There is strong but not unanimous support
 - i) Who supports the proposal?
 - ii) Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **consensus**?
 - iii) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?
 - (1) After further discussion accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome. Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by **agreement**?
 - (2) Are not prepared to accept the proposal. Look for **further possibilities** including:
 - (a) adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration
 - (b) refer the issue to another council or group to deal with
 - (c) decide the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with
 - (d) declare that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity.
 - (3) Only if the issue is urgent move to **majority decision**.

The Moderator

The role of the moderator is very important

The Moderator:

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

The council and moderator may be assisted by a **facilitation group** which will:

- enable group work and report back from group work.
- help and support the Moderator.
- be responsible for the display of the text under discussion.

Coloured Cards

Coloured cards are not essential for any of the procedures – but they can be helpful.

Each person is given two cards:

1. Orange – to indicate warmth towards a point of view, or approval of a proposal.
2. Blue – to indicate coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.
3. Cards held crossed indicate time to move on to the next subject.

Cards should be held up so that they are visible to all. They indicate response to what is being or has just been said. It helps the moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, prevent repetitious speeches and invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

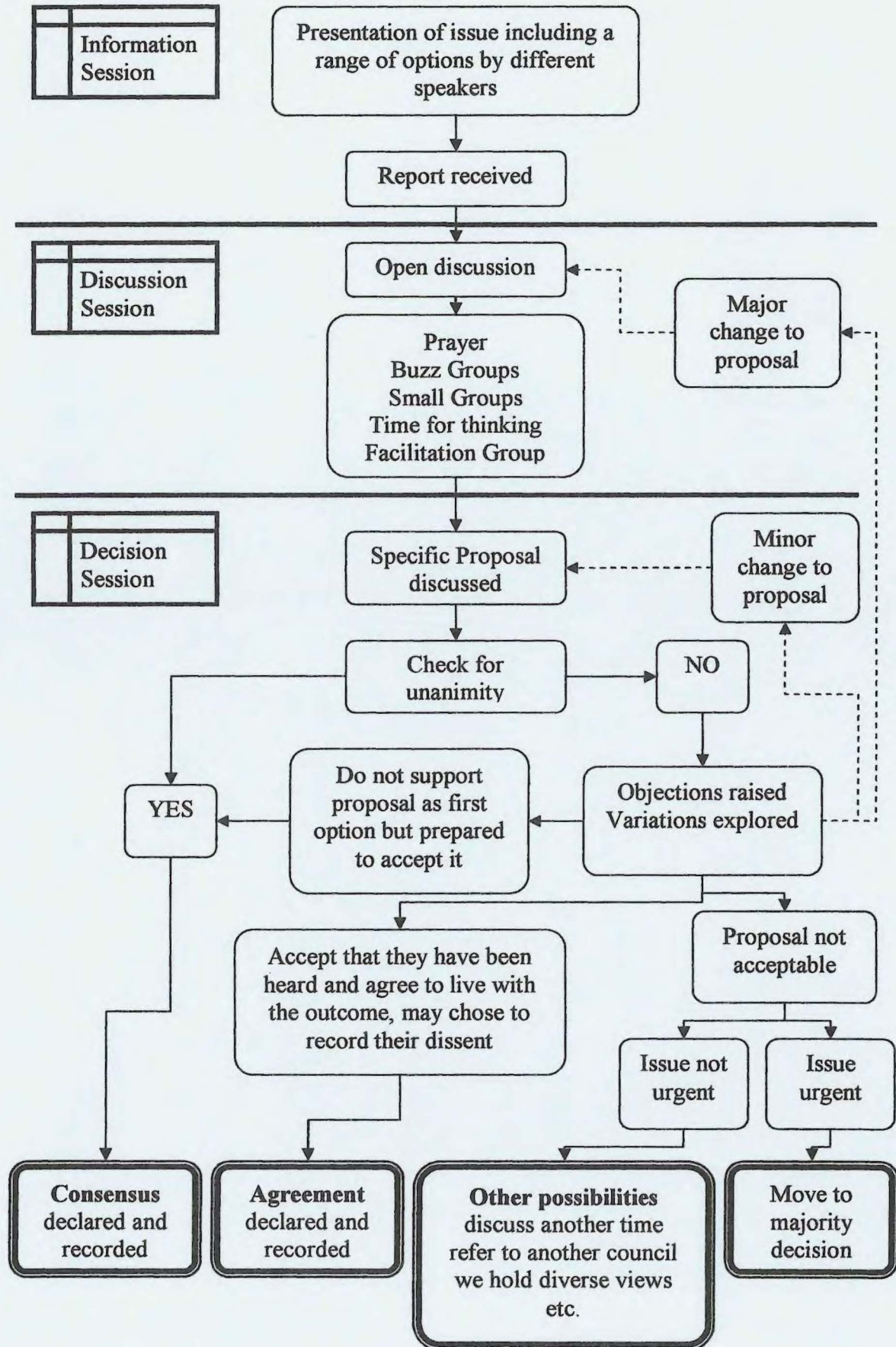
Points of Order

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

Points of order include:

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

Consensus Procedures for the Councils of the URC





MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

A3

‘Post-Moratorium’ Task Group: Interim Report

Introduction and Summary

The question is – what will happen when the moratorium on resolutions concerning human sexuality expires at General Assembly 2007?

There are two relevant resolutions, which were agreed at Assembly 2000. They said:

“**Resolution 14.** General Assembly, recognising that the statement contained within Resolution 34 of 1999 has received a measure of support in the councils of the church, but not sufficient to allow it to proceed:

(a) accepts that there is a lack of agreement relating to issues of human sexuality, and that any further resolution attempting to declare the mind of the church on this subject would be unlikely to find sufficient support at this time;

(b) affirms that the process the church uses to assess candidates and to call ministers is the means by which the church seeks to discern the call of God; and

(c) acknowledges that discussion on these matters will continue within as well as beyond the church and encourages the United Reformed Church to base its consideration on the Human Sexuality Report 1999, wherever possible within an ecumenical context.

“**Resolution 15.** General Assembly asks that for a period of seven years, during which reflection, prayer and sharing continue, no resolutions attempting to define the policy of the church on homosexuality should be proposed in any of the councils of the church.”

The Task Group suggests to Mission Council that it -

1. remind the church of the very considerable, detailed and valuable work which was carried out in relation to the Human Sexuality Report 1999, acknowledging that discussions have not in fact been continued or developed in the intervening time.
2. call the church to a recognition of the continuing diversity and disagreement that exists over these issues and also to a recommitment to stay together and work together.
3. emphasise the value and place of the current Catch the Vision and Evangelism Consultation process, and set the next phase of discussions within that context.
4. outline a process for the consideration of issues that need further exploration.
5. invite General Assembly to encourage continuing restraint over attempts to define policy.

The Task Group would now be grateful for Mission Council's guidance in relation to the following questions:

1. Does the general direction of the report and the recommendations above seem right?
2. Does Mission Council share the view that option 5 (see section 7 of this report) offers the best way forward at this stage?
3. How might these issues be carried forward in the context of the Catch the Vision process?

Interim Report

1. The Task Group

1.1 The Task Group was set up by Mission Council in October 2006. Its members are Mr Ben Beke, Revd Dr John Bradbury, Mrs Janet Eccles, Revd Malcolm Hanson (Convener), Mrs Margaret Carrick Smith and Revd Sally Willett. It has met on three occasions, in November, December and January.

1.2 The Group's remit is -

"a) to consider the paper [a paper previously prepared by Malcolm Hanson and seen by Mission Council Advisory Group - and now incorporated in this report in a revised form]

b) to decide whether it could be the basis of agreement for the Church in its present context of living with diversity; or to identify an alternative workable process

c) to consult ecumenical colleagues where appropriate, and to refer to the process which led to the recent discussion on this at the Methodist Conference

d) to report back to Mission Council as soon as possible (ie January or March 2007)."

2. Background to moratorium

2.1 A paper has been prepared summarising the background to the moratorium. This might be included in the final report (in March) so that it would be available for Mission Council's report to General Assembly if desired.

2.2 This paper (withheld for the moment) also reconsiders aspects of the Human Sexuality Report 1999. What emerges is that a lot of useful and costly work was done by a considerable number of people in the preparation of that report. It would be instructive now to revisit some of that material and take it forward into the life of the church – as was clearly the intention at the time. The Task Group has not yet had time to look at this in more detail, but wishes to highlight the need to return to that earlier work.

3. Present situation

3.1 Since the last report to General Assembly on Human Sexuality in 1999, there have been some developments in the perception of same-sex relationships within society as a whole. There have also been changes in the law, notably in relation to Civil Partnerships.

3.2 Within the church, opinions and attitudes seem to have changed very little. The church has, however, not taken the opportunity that was envisaged and encouraged in the Assembly resolutions in 1999 and 2000 to continue open and constructive discussion of matters of human sexuality.

3.3 Assembly affirmed in 2000 that the normal assessment procedure was the way decisions were to be taken. There has been at least one instance of someone in an openly homosexual relationship being ordained to ministry.

3.4 General Assembly has, however, not made any formal decisions against or in favour of the ordination of people in committed homosexual relationships. It is reaching a

common mind on this that has so far proved impossible. While some have felt that it was always legitimate for such people to be ordained if they fulfilled other criteria acceptably, others have seen such a step as a new and unacceptable departure from the traditions of the church.

3.5 For some, this absence of a declared policy has meant freedom to make decisions locally and in the councils and committees of the church according to best Christian judgment. For others, the absence of a policy has seemed to become a policy in itself, in that it has allowed actions which were not acceptable to sections of the church.

3.6 While therefore there has not been any real progress in terms of understanding or agreement within the church, we are in a new situation in several respects -

- civil partnerships have been introduced by the government;
- tensions within the Anglican World Communion as presented in the media have raised the profile of this issue within the life of the church and society;
- the media has heightened the general awareness of issues of homosexuality within society;
- we are now in the midst of re-evaluating our life as a church through the Catch the Vision process;
- there is reluctance in many parts of the church to re-engage in a discussion which was so distracting, distressing and divisive.

3.7 It is the last two points which seem to the Task Group to be particularly relevant at this moment. As the moratorium comes to an end at General Assembly 2007, we cannot simply revert to where we were seven years ago. As part of the CtV process, a series of "Evangelism Consultations" has been set up. These involve people from across the theological traditions of the church and have already been the means of establishing excellent relationships and a desire to explore a number of issues together in some depth. This part of the CtV process will be reported directly to Mission Council and General Assembly. It is sufficient to note here that this is an ongoing process which is expected to make major contributions to the life and atmosphere of the United Reformed Church during 2007, and that the reopening of the sexuality discussion at this stage could overshadow that work in an unhelpful way, particularly as the consultations so far have been leading towards a greater sense of unity and cooperation. It would be constructive to build upon the fruits of this work over the coming months and as it reaches completion.

4. The ecumenical context

4.1 The Task Group has not so far consulted any ecumenical partners directly. It seemed premature to do so and more time would have been needed. However, the Group has looked at some of the Anglican and Methodist material and considered some recent international developments. Our general reflection is that while the painful tensions, particularly over the ordination of people in homosexual relationships, are very similar, the paths and processes being followed in other churches are not necessarily the same as ours nor are they routes which we would necessarily want to emulate. But there are valuable lessons to be learned, particularly concerning processes and means of communication.

4.2 The most striking feature of the Anglican situation is the international nature of the dispute. As the United Reformed Church we need at least to be aware of our place in the Reformed tradition and our relationships with sister churches and also to be aware of the distinctive resources within our own tradition that are at our disposal.

4.3 The Methodist Church has embarked on a "Pilgrimage of Faith" since its key decisions at the Derby Conference in 1993. Opinion seems mixed as to whether there has been any real progress on that journey. Some of the questions being asked however are ones which we shall need to face as well. It would be helpful to keep in touch with this process as it unfolds.

5. Task Group's convictions

5.1 The Task Group has come to a number of convictions relating to the nature of this discussion and how it might be handled. Among these are the following.

1. In order to maintain its *integrity*, the church must honestly face its present internal realities and what is actually happening in its life.
2. The church's life is built on *relationships*. It is vital to meet one another within the life of fellowship and common discipleship. It is also vital to be committed to exploration and dialogue together. Bringing people of differing understandings together for discussion has always proved to be fruitful. Engaging in the process is as important as its conclusions.
3. The *unity* of the church is a gospel priority and a divine gift, to be responded to in human terms through the struggle of living together.
4. Nothing should be done precipitately which would interfere with the completion of the *Catch the Vision* process. It would be most helpful if the next steps could be taken in the light of this process.
5. Meanwhile more work is needed on a wide *range of issues* which have not been adequately addressed so far or which need to be looked at afresh in the changing circumstances. There are complexities in what might appear at first sight to be simple issues – such as the fact that civil partnerships do not necessarily imply sexual activity. Some of these are fundamental to discerning the way forward.
6. This work is important and the church must commit itself to this continuing process with all that that means concerning resources and time.

6. The Covenant suggestion

6.1 The Task Group was called together initially to consider a proposed covenant that might be adopted when the moratorium ends in 2007. We felt that the paper offered a reasonably comprehensive and honest summary of the main positions held and was useful in emphasising that these views needed to be heard and acknowledged. It offered a constructive basis for the next stage and for future discussions. But it was felt that while 'covenant' might be an appropriate word in the context, it carried too many serious overtones to be justifiable. The title was therefore changed to 'Commitment.'

6.2 The proposed Commitment as amended is set out below. Its purpose is to create a framework within which future discussions and the life of the church can be conducted. The suggestion is that the General Assembly make such a commitment at its meeting in 2007, and possibly invite synods and local churches to do likewise.

6.3 The object of this approach is:

- (a) to ensure that all within the United Reformed Church can feel that their voice and views have been heard and are accepted as having their own integrity,
- (b) to agree to continue in fellowship together even though deeply divided in understanding and practice on this issue, and
- (c) to commit ourselves to travel this path together.

Draft Commitment on Human Sexuality

As the General Assembly (or synod/congregation) of the United Reformed Church,

1. We recognise that
 - many of the issues and views surrounding human sexuality seem to be intractable and irreconcilable;
 - despite lengthy debates, much study and many reports, opinions have not changed sufficiently for us to be of one mind;
 - this is a deeply emotive and divisive issue which nonetheless must not be allowed to divide us;
 - there are within it many complexities to do with sexuality and the language we use as well as over biblical interpretation.

2. While it is difficult to do full justice to the variety of views represented within the church, we recognise that -
 - A for some this is a passionately held matter of holiness, purity and obedience to God's commands in scripture; and that within this view is the belief that:
 - God's creation plan is for the complementarity of man and woman, and that sexual relations apart from that are by nature disordered;
 - the only legitimate pattern for sexual relations is between a man and woman within the commitment of marriage;
 - scriptural references to homosexual activity are explicit in their condemnation;
 - homosexual activity is an affront to Christian morality and offensive to many people of other faiths and of none;
 - people in same sex relationships should not be accepted for ministry;
 - the acceptance of people in same sex (civil) partnerships on the part of society and the state is a matter to be resisted;
 - working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates a very painful tension.

 - B some have an equally passionately held conviction of God's intention that some people are called into loving homosexual relationships; and that within this view is the belief that:
 - God's creative plan is for a newness of life for all people within Christ, regardless of any human distinctions, including sexual orientation;
 - homosexual relationships, including their sexual consummation, can be a vocation from God to be judged by the fruits of the Spirit that result;
 - scriptural references to homosexual activity are not relevant to the contemporary experience of homosexual relationships;
 - to deny a call by God to ordained ministry, issued and tested by the Church, is to commit a sin against the Holy Spirit;
 - this is a justice issue and the church should be supportive of loving, long-term homosexual relationships within society;
 - resistance to the grace of God in the inclusion of homosexual persons within the Church is a perversion of the gospel;
 - working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates a very painful tension.

 - C there are others for whom this, though important, is not an over-riding issue for the church at this time and is not a matter upon which they would wish to take a

policy decision which would impose a universal rule. They are content to allow the normal assessment procedures to be the means by which the church seeks to discern the call of God.

3. For many people in each of these categories, there is a shared concern that the human sexuality discussion has sometimes dominated the church in a destructive way, and has been a distraction from the proper work of mission. Many also share a conviction that Christian people are under obligation to seek to maintain their unity and to live and work together despite their disagreements and diversity.
4. Given this irreconcilable range of views and the unlikely prospect of finding agreement, we
 - agree to acknowledge this diversity;
 - accept that these views are all held with integrity and passion;
 - believe that somehow, in Christ, we have to learn to live together within one church and with these tensions;
 - realise that this can only be done by mutual respect, tolerance and continuing exploration together;
 - agree to continue to explore these differences in the light of our understanding of Scripture and under the Holy Spirit's guidance for our individual and shared life in today's world.
5. In love and submission to Christ who holds us together, we therefore commit ourselves to stay together and work together with this understanding, to treat one another with respect, and to pray for unity, harmony and deeper understanding.

6.4 It is acknowledged that this wording is only provisional and still needs to be checked with a wide variety of people to see whether the wording and language are acceptable and whether it represents their views adequately enough.

6.5 In accepting that the three positions outlined under A, B and C are roughly representative of different views held within the church, it would need to be emphasised that none of these should be regarded as settled positions that cannot be reviewed and revised as understanding develops.

7. Options

7.1 In considering the question – what happens when the moratorium expires at General Assembly 2007? - the Task Group recognised a number of options. These have been considered in some detail. In summary they are as follows. (A fuller version can be made available.)

Option 1 Extending the moratorium

Recognising that the moratorium has brought a welcome relief from controversy, there would be something to be said for extending it. Moreover, work is currently under way within the Catch the Vision process which is focussing on key areas of life such as Bible, prayer and evangelism. This is not a good moment to disrupt that process. It should be given time to develop patterns of common thinking and action without being diverted by less essential issues.

However, one result could well be continuing unease about the lack of decisions and guidance over some controversial matters. Some people might want to campaign in

General Assembly and elsewhere for their views to be adopted or might simply make their own decisions.

Option 2 Allowing the moratorium to end

This would be do nothing at this stage apart from simply allowing the moratorium to expire. This would be a low key approach based on the belief that the church at large has little heart for an intense debate at this stage. Many would feel relieved.

However this option could suffer the same disadvantages as option 1.

Option 3 Defining a policy

This would be to try to define the church's policy firmly in one direction or another. Assembly would need to come to a majority mind about which policy was to be followed and what its implications might be. That would inevitably require an extended period of further study and discussion before a resolution could be brought to Assembly.

However, defining a policy which gains the support of the majority of the church has so far proved totally impossible. There is no indication that it would be any more achievable in the foreseeable future than in the past.

Option 4 Endorsing a "commitment"

Assembly would commit itself to a set of principles within which there would be mutual recognition of the variety of views and practices, and discussion could continue. This would provide open recognition of diversity and an atmosphere of respect; it would emphasise the significance of unity with diversity, and encourage a continuing journey together. It would represent a healthy and necessary living with tension and difference.

However, some might feel that a commitment of this nature compelled them, against their will, to acknowledge the legitimacy of the ordination of people in homosexual relationships or to recognise the legitimacy of a refusal to take such action. While a commitment of this nature would provide an umbrella under which relationships and discussions could continue, it would, in itself, resolve nothing and might be seen as simply deferring the day when difficult decisions had to be made. It might also be a step towards the partitioning of the church and some painful encounters. A fragmented church could emerge in which some people's candidating, training and ministry was acceptable in some places and not in others – a situation which the Assembly would in effect not only tolerate but encourage as the only viable *modus vivendi*.

Option 5 Enabling a continuing process

This would mean first of all accepting a commitment as set out in option 4 – which accepts honestly that there is a diversity of views. Steps would then be taken towards resolving the outstanding issues. A timetable might be set for this process which would acknowledge that we are still in the midst of the Catch the Vision and Evangelism Consultation process and that the outcome of this is expected to equip us to better deal with these issues in a constructive manner. This would recognise where we are at this stage in our journey. Some issues might be tackled ecumenically.

While this might defer some of the potential disadvantages of option 4, it does not carry with it any certainty of finding agreement or resolving all the difficult issues.

What it would offer is a basis for continuing in fellowship together and a commitment to working together honestly, openly, and with some sensitivity and mutual respect. No set outcome could be anticipated; we would be on a journey which might lead us all to places of new understanding.

Conclusion: The Task Group is of the view that the last of these options offers the best way forward at this stage.

8. Some issues to be explored further

8.1 The Task Group felt that as well as the range of issues considered in the report of 1999, there were still a number of related issues which need to be explored in more depth and in a constructive atmosphere. The implications of some of these are complex and significant. They deserve some rigorous and relatively urgent treatment, perhaps by specialist groups. We have already begun defining and exploring these. In summary some of these are -

1. Theology

Among several theological issues to be addressed, a coherent and comprehensive theology of same-sex partnerships is urgently needed as a basis for any further decisions. (A number of the following points depend on establishing a clear theological framework.)

2. Advocacy

Related to this is the need for clarity about the church's teaching on matters of sexual relationships. And within this, how does the church cope with two incompatible sets of teaching, one of which says that homosexual practice is wrong and the other of which says that it can be life affirming? Do we say that our church teaches both?

3. Standards in ministry

What then are acceptable patterns of life within ordained ministry? What standards are expected of ministers and members, in relation to different expressions of sexuality? In this regard, how are we to understand a minister's promise to lead a holy life?

4. Discipline

Recognising that there are ordained ministers within the church in openly homosexual relationships, are they under similar disciplinary constraints as heterosexual and single ministers? If so, what do we understand those constraints to be?

5. Legal implications

Some recent legislation carries implications for the church. These need to be reviewed both in terms of what is required of the church and the church's own response in the light of its continuing discussions. It would be good to do this work ecumenically.

6. Conscience

What are the implications of personal conscience in this area? For example, what freedom do individuals and congregations have to reject the ministries of those whose attitudes or lifestyles are not acceptable to them?

7. Blessing of partnerships

What attitude should the United Reformed Church take? Do the present guidelines

need to be developed?

8. Unity

Believing that the unity of the church is a gospel priority, how much internal diversity is tolerable before that unity is contradicted? Clearly there is much diversity within the present church over many issues, but would it ever be acceptable in the name of unity to have such a diversity of beliefs and practices that members and ministers denied the actions and beliefs of others and where some ministers were totally unacceptable in some parts of the church? In other words, is fragmentation still coherent with our understanding of unity? And how far might such fragmentation be acceptable as a way forward for those who adopt views A or B? (Methodist Conference in 2005 asked that its "Faith and Order Committee should reflect upon the theological implications of being a Church that has to live or contend with different and mutually contradictory convictions." That process is presumably still under way.)

9. Stereotyping and pastoral sensitivity

How do we overcome the dangers of stereotyping, which need to be challenged wherever they come from? How should the church respond to those of homosexual orientation and those in homosexual relationships and civil partnerships? How should the church respond to those who find such relationships and partnerships unacceptable and offensive in a Christian context?

9. Next steps

9.1 The Task Group would now appreciate Mission Council's response and guidance. Attention is drawn to the questions set out in the Introduction and Summary. Comments on other aspects of the report would also be welcome.

9.2 The process now being envisaged would need to be coordinated with the Catch the Vision process and the Evangelism Consultations. It perhaps needs to become a 'sub-programme' within one of these or under MCAG's guidance.

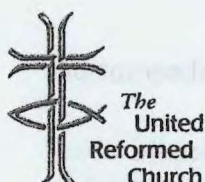
9.3 The Task Group has two further meetings planned before the March meeting of Mission Council. If necessary it will use these to continue consultation and prepare a final report.

9.4 More work will be needed on the wording and presentation of the "Commitment", on resolutions for Assembly and on the process for carrying issues forward.

Appendix

The Task Group has also produced provisional papers on

1. The background to the moratorium, including a brief review of the Human Sexuality Report 1999.
2. Whether "homosexuality is a church dividing issue".
3. A brief review of processes followed by the Church of Sweden and the French Reformed Church.
4. A more detailed reflection on the five perceived options.
5. How local congregations might be drawn into the process envisaged in option 5.



MISSION COUNCIL 27 January 2007

A4

Report of the Mission Council Staffing Advisory Group

Meetings

The task for the Staffing Advisory Group during this autumn has been to review the Job Descriptions of all Assembly appointed posts in the light of the agreement made by General Assembly in July 2006 to the CtV proposals relating to restructuring and staffing. Those proposals were to organise the work of Assembly into three teams/areas:

- Ministries of the Church - covering ministry (lay and ordained), training, youth and children's work.
- Mission Policy and Theology - five posts covering the areas of mission, interfaith relations, racial justice, international relations, church and society, theology, ecumenical.
- Administration and resources - including human resources, finance and communications.

Our reviews have therefore been related to the content rather than the continuance of the posts.

There have been four meetings - one in each of the months of September, November, December and January.

Posts Reviewed

For each review Staffing Advisory Group receive papers which

- outline the achievements to date,
- give future objectives for the post,
- detail the ways in which the work links with the five marks of mission
- state ecumenical priorities and links with Synods and churches

these, together with Job Description and Person Specification give the basis for the discussion which is then held with the relevant Committee Convener/s.

Following that discussion Staffing Advisory Group consider what they have read and heard and make recommendations to the Convener where changes are required and/or bring recommendations to Mission Council regarding the post.

In the work this autumn we have been mindful of the changes which are taking place and the fact that the detailed final shape of the new structure has yet to be

agreed. In reviewing the five posts we would make the following observations relating to all the posts:

- we have staff who are dedicated to their jobs and passionate about the work they do and who have worked in a climate of uncertainty during recent years.
- there has been a concern over the 'size' of the jobs which staff are expected to undertake and we have asked Committee Conveners to prioritize work carefully to ensure that it is manageable.
- Job Descriptions were agreed with the understanding that adjustments may be necessary as the new working arrangements unfold

Five posts have now been reviewed:

1. Pilot's Development Officer - there were particular difficulties for the Youth and Children's Work Committee in making proposals for this post since the task of exploring ecumenically the development of the work of the United Reformed Church with children is not due to be completed until March 2007. Staffing Advisory Group were happy to accept that the papers presented reflected the current position, though they were concerned that the priorities for the postholder should be clarified to ensure that the content of the job was manageable. Amendments have subsequently been made to the Job Description and Staffing Advisory Group recommend that commitment to the post is confirmed in the knowledge that this is an area of growth and mission which requires the sustained attention of the post. (Resolution 1)
2. Secretary for Education and Learning - (formerly Secretary for Training). The committee had asked for a change of title for this post to better reflect the work to be undertaken in the light of the Training Review. Staffing Advisory Group were concerned about the lack of clarity over the priorities for this post and asked for this to be addressed. An amended Job Description has now been agreed which ensures a balance between leadership and implementation within the role, with priorities relating to the implementation of the training review being set. Staffing Advisory Group recommend support for the continuation of this post in recognition of the importance of this area of work in the light of the assembly decisions and the future life of the church. (Resolution 2)
3. Secretary for Ministries. The major task for this committee and post related to the implementation of the Equipping the Saints proposals together with introducing the changes which would ensue from the changing structures of the United Reformed Church. Staffing Advisory Group felt

that the Job Description as presented did not reflect the exciting and dynamic nature of the job and asked that changes were made to rectify this. These changes have not been received at the time of writing this report. The committee also requested an extension to the current postholder's contract to enable her to see through the changes required as a result of the changes to the church structures. Staffing Advisory Group recommend (a) support for the continuation of this post, subject to changes to the Job Description being agreed (b) the current postholder be offered an extension of twelve months on her contract providing agreed targets are identified relating to the structural changes throughout the church. (Resolution 3)

4. CRCW Development Workers. In discussion of this post it was recognised that the post was essential for the delivery of accreditation, consistency, quality assurance and good practice. Staffing Advisory Group felt that there should be some alterations to the Job Description to reflect the changing nature of the job from developmental to central support. These alterations have been agreed and Staffing Advisory Group recommend the continuation of the post. (Resolution 4)

5. Secretary for International Relations. We have begun to look at how this work will fit into the new Mission Policy and Theology Team and proposals will be brought to March Mission Council. However the present postholder is due to complete his term of service in July 2007 and is currently involved in work on developing the future shape of the Mission Policy and Theology Team. Staffing Advisory Group therefore recommend that Philip Wood's contract be extended to the end of October 2007 to enable the completion of that work following any decisions made at General Assembly 2007. (Resolution 5)

Contracts

In accordance with Employment Legislation and the decisions of Mission Council in October 2000 all lay Assembly appointees will be offered permanent open ended contracts to run from the date of the termination of their current contracts. Exceptions to this are the contracts of Stuart Dew (Secretary for Church and Society) and Jo Williams (Children's Work Development Officer) both of whom were appointed on short term contracts to undertake specific pieces of work, the results of which will be reported to Mission Council in due course. The current policy with regard to fixed term contracts (two terms of 5 years for Assembly appointees) for Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacrament as office holders will remain in place.

Future Reviews

Since its inception in 1992 the Staffing Advisory Group have undertaken reviews of individual Assembly posts as they have become vacant or at the point of the five year review determined by the contract dates of the postholder. This post review has been followed by a review of the postholder undertaken by a group set up by the Nominations Committee. This method of working has resulted in the specific areas of work being seen in isolation. The new structures in the central operation aim to result in greater collaborative working and to review posts in isolation would be contrary to that aim. Staffing Advisory Group therefore propose that in future posts should be reviewed, on a three yearly basis as team groups i.e. Ministries of the Church, Mission Policy and Theology so that the progress and plans for the work can be seen as a whole. Continual performance management and appraisal will ensure that staff are supported and encouraged in an appropriate ongoing programme. (Resolution 6)

Resolutions

1. Mission Council approves the continuation of the post of Pilot's Development Officer.
2. Mission Council approves:
 - a. the change of name for the post of Secretary for Training to Secretary for Education and Learning
 - b. the continuation of the post of Secretary for Education and Learning.
3. Mission Council:
 - a. approves the continuation of the post of Secretary for Ministries - subject to changes to the Job Description being agreed.
 - b. agrees that the Rev Christine Craven be offered an extension to her contract of twelve months from July 2007, subject to identified targets relating to the structural changes throughout the church being agreed.
4. Mission Council approves the continuation of the post of CRCW Development Officer.
5. Mission Council agrees that Rev Philip Wood be offered an extension of three months to his contract to the end of October 2007 to enable the completion of the work being undertaken relating to the shape of the Mission Policy and Theology Team following any decisions made at General Assembly 2007.
6. Mission Council agrees that in future Staffing Advisory Group should undertake the review of posts on a three yearly basis in team groups.



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

A5

Section O and Mandated Groups

The Section O Advisory Group in the course of running this year's Training Sessions identified a particular need for someone to whom Mandated Groups could turn for technical advice as they sought to carry out their responsibilities. This advisor would deal with general legal and technical questions and not with the details of particular cases. Because they have a similar function with regard to the Assembly Commission the Legal Advisors to the Church, Towns, Needham & Co, are not available for this purpose but the Advisory Group has identified the Revd Alison Davis, Training Officer for the Welsh Synod, as someone with the necessary skills.

Ms Davis has agreed to assist the Advisory Group by undertaking this responsibility but has imposed a condition, namely that she assured in writing that she will be included within the Indemnity Cover provided by the Church for those who act on its behalf.

Mission Council is therefore asked to resolve.

Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees to extend the Indemnity Insurance which covers those dealing with cases of Ministerial Discipline (Section O) to include the Revd Alison Davis for so long as she shall act on behalf of the Church in providing advice to Mandated Groups.



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

B

Doctrine Prayer and Worship

What is the United Reformed Church?

Five discussion sessions
based on the Statement of Nature, Faith and Order of the United
Reformed Church

The following suggestions for a five session course are designed for small groups of young people or adults in local churches; those preparing for church membership, those who are new to the United Reformed Church or for those who, for whatever reason, want to deepen their understanding of our tradition and ways. The Statement of Nature, Faith and Order is the one we say together on some of our big public occasions and it provides a vivid snapshot of what we are about. Those with well-tuned historical antennae will be able to pick up all sorts of references to our sometimes turbulent past and to issues that are still divisive among us. For some who say these words, some commentary may be helpful, along with an invitation to enter the debates. When the deeper implications of these phrases are appreciated they become not empty words to be parroted, or the 'boring bit' at an induction service, but spine-tingling testimony to the kind of church we are or hope to be. The sessions are based on the responsive form of the Statement, since this is the version with which most people will be familiar.

Session One: A faithful church

"With the whole Christian Church

the United Reformed Church believes in one God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The living God, the only God,

ever to be praised.

The life of faith to which we are called

is the Spirit's gift,

continually received
through the Word, the Sacraments
and our Christian life together.

*We acknowledge the gift,
and answer the call,
giving thanks for the means of grace."*

Many people in contemporary Britain have no idea what the United Reformed Church is or what we stand for. Our title is often mis-spelt and misunderstood and, no doubt, there are many who assume we are some kind of 'sect' – the Unification Church? But it is possible to explain who we are! This is what the Statement of Nature, Faith and Order does.

The Statement begins by saying loud and clear that we are part of the whole Christian Church, and we are glad to say that. We don't believe we are the only true Church or that we are the ones who have got it right above all others. We're part of the whole Church – we are not the whole Church ourselves. Saying that alone makes us different from some other Christian churches.

We also say that we believe the Christian faith as it is proclaimed by the whole Church,. Of course there are differences of opinion about some things between different churches (and between different Christians!), but it remains true to say that whatever our differences from some other Christians on some secondary matters, we believe and proclaim in the United Reformed Church the Christian faith, the faith that the Apostles proclaimed. We might have to find new ways of saying it in our times, but it is very important to us that we stand in faithful continuity with the whole Church. This is what we mean when we say that we believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In what we call the doctrine of the Trinity, we try to put into words what cannot be adequately conveyed in language, the mystery and wonder of God. You could describe the Trinity as one way of talking about the Christian faith as a kind of story. From the creation of all things by God who is the source of all that is made, to Jesus who was God's Son and who taught us all that God is our loving Father, to the hope and promise of the Holy Spirit who is present and active in the world today and in the days to come – in this story of our faith we believe that we have encountered and still encounter the reality of God who reaches out to us in love. The Trinity is also a beautiful way of expressing what Christians believe ; that at the very heart of the truth and reality of God is a loving, personal relationship,- the three persons of Father, Son and Spirit are a picture of the perfect love of God which reaches out towards us too and which invites us to join in. We believe that the Trinity is the

primary way Christians have been given to talk about the mystery of God's presence with us and purpose for us. And this we share with the whole Church.

The second part of the Statement describes the important things about our life together as Christian people. We believe that we are called to this life by the Holy Spirit and that it is a joy and gift. 'Calling' is an important word in our tradition, because we believe that God is not an abstract idea or a distant force, but a living presence with whom we can enter into a close relationship. We believe that God lovingly calls us, each one, into the community of the church, that there's something personal and very special about this. But being a Christian is not only about this personal and individual relationship. It is also about being part of God's community in the Church and none of us can live well apart from the community of faith. We are like a vine which thrives on connection and which withers when cut. We all benefit from the corporate life of the Church, as we hear the Bible read and interpreted, as we receive God's gifts to us through the sacraments (of Baptism and the Lord's Supper) and as we share life together. This means that being a Christian in the United Reformed Church will involve being part of a local church where these things can happen and where we can learn from other Christians and help one another grow in faith and understanding. Notice that this part of the Statement says nothing about the necessity for there to be bishops, priests or even ministers! The church benefits greatly from being well led by our ministers (servants of the church!), but their role is to enable the Church to be what it needs to be. Notice too the simplicity of this section - the Church needs just a few things to 'be church'. This is an important witness of our tradition.

Questions for discussion:

How would you describe the core of the Christian faith? Try writing 'the Gospel in fifty words'. (Compare your answers!)

What do you say to those who find 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' too male?

Imagine that you have landed on a desert island. What are the essential things about practising the Christian faith that you will want to find a way to do as soon as possible?

Think further about the image of the vine. How does it help you understand belonging to a Christian community? What other biblical metaphors open up the corporate life of the Church and why?

Which do you think is the most important part of a Sunday service?

Which things about the Christian faith do you think need restating for today?

Session Two: A church based on the Bible

"The highest authority for what we believe and do
is God's Word in the Bible,
alive for his people today
through the help of the Holy Spirit.

*We respond to this Word,
whose servants we are
with all God's people
through the years."*

The Bible is very important for every kind of Christian church. But our own particular church traditions were shaped out of a time when there was a great renewal of interest in the Bible. Through a time called the Reformation (which stretched over a long period from the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the seventeenth) some Christians began again to study the Bible texts in their original languages (Greek and Hebrew) and to make new discoveries about them. Some also argued, at a time when literacy was expanding, that everyone should be able to read the Bible in his or her own language and so translations began to be made. Some feared that 'ignorant' people reading the Bible would lead to no good and wanted to protect the Bible from being misinterpreted, but our particular forebears were firmly on the side of opening it up to everyone. At the same time they wanted ministers to be well educated in the things of God so that they could help people understand the Bible. It happened amazingly quickly, and even at the beginning of the development of the printing press, that printed Bibles in local languages became available in many homes and churches. Though it remained controversial in some countries and in some time-periods for quite a while, amongst the church communities from which we have come Bibles, Psalm books and commentaries were highly valued.

With this emphasis on reading and seeking to understand the Bible goes the strong principle that the 'highest authority' for our believing and living is 'God's Word in the Bible'. Notice that the Statement does not simply say that 'the Bible' is the authority, but 'God's Word in the Bible'. Jesus, described in John's Gospel as 'the Word made flesh' is the supreme authority. We believe that reading and interpreting the Bible is not necessarily straightforward, that God speaks to us as

we interpret and that we need the help of the Holy Spirit. It is this reading under the Holy Spirit that we believe offers our surest hope of working out what is God's will for us. We know, from looking back over history, that faithful people have not always read with wisdom and insight (we see with sadness how some Reformed Christians in South Africa believed that the Bible taught them authoritatively that apartheid was God's will). So we do not assume that we can read without having to work and pray as we do so. But we trust that it is reading the Bible in a prayerful spirit and with God's help, above all else, that will help us to work out what we should believe and do. We would listen to what other Christians have said and still say as well. We would listen hard for the witness of our own experience and to what our own thinking and puzzling suggest – but God's Word in the Bible is the first source of wisdom for us and we would turn to it first.

What would it be like not to have your own copy of the Bible, but to depend on memory (your own and others)? Work together as a group at remembering a Bible story. See if you can put together the parable of the Prodigal Son from your corporate memory. Remember the shape of the story, as many particular phrases as possible, and what you can about the context and any kind of interpretation given in the Bible. Then look up the parable (Luke 15:11-32) – Reflect on the exercise, on why you remembered what you did, and how this story might have been remembered and then written down by the early Christians.

Move on to talk about the parable. What part has it played in your own Christian life? What does it mean? Does it remind you of any other stories in the Bible? Does it remind you of any other stories anywhere else? How does it connect with the central story of the Gospels, of Jesus who died on the cross and who rose again?

Questions for discussion:

What are your earliest memories of reading the Bible or of hearing Bible stories?

Are there any bits of the Bible you really struggle with? If so, what helps you in your struggle?

If you have a difficult decision to make, in what ways might reading the Bible help you?

Do you have any suggestions for how the Bible might become more central to the life of your local church?

If you could add a book to the Bible what would it be? (If you could take a book away which might you choose?) - you might like to compare your answers!

What can be said in favour of keeping the Bible just as it is? (the gory bits, the sublime poetry...)

Session 3: Part of the one great Church, with a particular story of our own

“We accept with thanksgiving to God

the witness to the catholic faith

in the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds.

we acknowledge the declarations

Made in our own tradition

by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ

in which they stated the faith

and sought to make its implications clear.

*Faith alive and active:
gift of an eternal source,
renewed for every generation.”*

Sometimes people have described us a ‘non-credal’ church, believing that we rarely, if ever, say creeds in our worship and that we want to give individuals freedom to state the faith in their own words. However, it’s not quite as simple as that! It is true that the saying of creeds has not generally played a regular part in worship at most of our churches and it is true that we have placed a high value on freedom of conscience, but it is not true that we have no sense of the faith we can hold together or that ‘you can believe what you like in the URC’. The Statement offers thanksgiving for the witness to the faith given by the Apostles and Nicene Creeds. (Note that ‘catholic faith’ here refers to the faith of the whole Church – and does not mean the same as Roman Catholic). These two creeds, both from the early centuries of the Church’s life, are important to us because of their great age, because they are honoured by churches throughout the world and through many centuries, and because they were framed at critical times when the Christian faith was being shaped. You can find them both in *Rejoice and Sing* and there are fascinating stories to tell about them. We often think of attention to the Virgin Mary as a rather late development in the Church’s

life, so it's fascinating to notices that she is named in the (comparatively brief) Apostles Creed! And it's worth finding out the long story behind the brackets around one phrase in the Nicene Creed! We give thanks to God for these two creeds, not because they are exactly the words we would want to use today, but because they represent early attempts by the whole Church, meeting together, to say what the Christian faith is really about. From our own times, when Christians often find it hard to agree or to make joint statements, their achievement in framing these creeds seems a cause of thankfulness and even amazement. These creeds have some power and resonance, and as we write contemporary creeds and affirmations for today, or as we write hymns or offer prayers, it's worth asking how far what we say is 'in continuity' with this particular honoured past. It's true that creeds in the early Church were often formed as part of a war against 'untruth', in battles we would not want to fight in the same ways. However they provide good testing grounds for our own attempts to speak the faith for today.

The Statement also acknowledges declarations of faith made by our particular forebears and give thanks for them. We recognise what they were trying to do in their own time in terms of redescribing the faith and remaking the church - and we honour them. But we do not believe that we honour them only by repeating their words exactly, but rather by doing in our time what they were trying to do in theirs; to be faithful to the Apostolic faith and making it clear for today. You can read about the history of these three traditions (in an excellent leaflet written by David Thompson, entitled *Where do we come from?: The origins of the United Reformed Church*).

The congregational response to this part of the Statement affirms that we believe that our faith comes from the same source as the early Church and as our historical forebears, but we also believe that faith has to be renewed for every generation. This is something that really does stand out about the United Reformed Church. We are ceaselessly working and praying to find ways of living and speaking our faith that will resonate with the times. Faith is not to be lived in a museum, but is for life today. Some would criticise us for this or at least warn us of the dangers. We could become so identified with our present culture that we do not recognise how Christ speaks to it to challenge and renew it. If we sit too light to the history of the Church we might miss out on a great wealth of wisdom and spiritual depth. Perhaps we make the mistake of thinking we have to 'start again' in every generation and we forget that we are not on our own in being Christians, that countless generations have gone before us and can offer us the witness of their faith. However, there are also plenty of voices who will cry that the Church is too often stuck in the past and that the world needs brave Christians who have the courage to let the Holy Spirit renew them in faith for their own times.

Questions for discussion:

Do you think that the Church is either too tied to the past or too swayed by present trends?

What would a local congregation look like if it had the balance about right?

Look at the Apostles' Creed and have a go at editing it to produce a 'creed for the 21st century'. What factors would you take into account as you did it?

Have a go at writing a new statement of faith from scratch. (Please send your final text to the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship committee!)

Can you imagine other ways of 'stating the faith' than by writing or saying a creed?

How does your local congregation express its faith?

Session 4: A church that affirms freedom

"We conduct our life together
according to the Basis of Union
in which we give expression to our faith
in forms which we believe contain
the essential elements of the Church's life,
both catholic and reformed;
But we affirm our right and readiness,
if the need arises,
to change the Basis of Union
and to make new statements of faith
in ever new obedience to the Living Christ.

*Our crucified and risen Lord,
who leads us in our faith*

in ever new obedience to the Living Christ.

Held together in the Body of Christ
through the freedom of the Spirit,
we rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit's gifts
and uphold the rights of personal conviction.

For the sake of unity and fellowship
it shall be for the church to decide when differences of conviction
hurt our unity and peace.

*We commit ourselves
to speak the truth in love
and grow together
in the peace of Christ.*

We believe that
Christ gives his Church a government
distinct from the government of the state.
In the things that affect obedience to God
the Church is not subordinate to the state,
but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ,
its only Ruler and Head.

Civil authorities are called
to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind,
And to respect the rights of conscience and belief.

*While we ourselves
are servants in the world*

as citizens of God's eternal kingdom."

You may have noticed the part in that section where we talk of the Church being 'both Catholic and reformed'. We have already seen (in earlier sessions) that the United Reformed belongs to the whole catholic Church. The catholic Church is all those in heaven and on earth who have been called by the Holy Spirit to be Christ's friends and followers. The local congregations to which we all belong are the whole Church in microcosm. When we are received into membership within a congregation we are received as member of the universal Church in one of its local expressions. The 'reformed' part of our title refers to our particular roots in the period called the Reformation and, in particular, our links with the particular communities who, like John Calvin's church in Geneva, came to call themselves Reformed. It's worth remembering that we come from those who never wanted to set up a separate "Reformed' church, but who wanted to reform the whole (catholic) Church. You might say that the Reformers did not want to be anything but good catholic Christians. Of course we also believe that reformation is a continual process and that we do not reach a point of being 'reformed'. (Perhaps those who call us the United Reform Church make a good point, through their mistake!). God's Spirit is continually reaching out to change us and to make us more like Christ.

Because of our particular inheritance through our history, the United Reformed Church has things to say about freedom. We say boldly that we are ready to take up the freedom to state the faith in new ways, to change the way we structure our life and to seek new ways of living in obedience to Christ. We also affirm the rights of personal conviction and conscience, and the right of the church, in things that affect obedience to God, to be independent ('free') of the state. Both these freedoms, of conscience and from the state, are anchored in the gospel.

This valuing of freedom, in these different ways, we have learned through sometimes bitter experience. We also shouldn't be deceived into thinking that we have always lived up to our aspirations and proclaimed the importance of freedom, allowed it to others or lived it to the glory of God. Through the turbulent years of the Reformation, there were those amongst the Reformed who had no qualms about compelling everyone in a nation to share their views, there are Reformed churches which do have a close relationship with the state, and respect for freedom of conscience has sometimes been hard won. Equally, there are those who would argue that although we make much noise about the freedom we have in Christ, it proves very difficult indeed to persuade us to stand up and exercise it!

We need to be careful not to idealise our own history in retrospect. However, it remains true that 'we' have known what it means to face persecution. In the reign of Elizabeth 1, some who we can number among our predecessors were

executed for believing that it was not in the power of the monarch or parliament to tell the church what to pray, how to worship, or how to order its life. In 1660-62, when the Church of England 'ejected' those they called Dissenters (some others of our forebears), 'we' were nearly wiped out through various forms of social exclusion. We were excluded from the universities and the professions and not able to worship in the ways of our choosing in the parish churches. We learned over centuries the harsh lessons of coming out on the losing side of history. This experience has taught us the importance of certain freedoms and the desirability of a society that allows more than one form of faith expression. When we acquired the name 'nonconformist' (in England and Wales) we turned this often to positive value as a label that suggests the kind of courage required sometimes to resist or to question the status quo. We also had considerable political impact as those who spoke from somewhere else than the 'ruling' class. As many of the freedoms for which we have stood are now commonly accepted, and since many in the Church of England now question the rightness of an 'established' church, these stances are not ours alone. However, in a culture which is increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith they have new force and importance. We have experience of weighing in the balance questions of freedom of speech with the need to be careful of causing offence. We have experience of living in a society where we are not the dominant voice. We have experience of thinking about the proper relationship between church and state. As we think today about such things as blasphemy laws, faith schools and 'defender of faith' versus 'defender of faiths', we have something to offer into the discussion.

Questions for discussion:

If it were your decision alone, how would you use your freedom to change the local church you belong to? What restraints are there, or should there be, on your own individual freedom?

Is there anything that your local church (or the whole URC) might decide to declare or do that would mean you would personally feel compelled to leave?

Think further about the origins of our freedom. P.T.Forsyth said that ours is a "founded freedom" - what do you think he meant? Are there limits to 'freedom of speech'?

How does your local church handle conflict? How do you think churches should hold together different views - and how can we know when it might be right to separate?

Do you think that the Church of England should be separate from the state? What arguments might there be in favour of a state church?

What do you think are the particular obligations of a Christian politician?

Session Five: A church praying and working for unity

"We affirm our intention
to go on praying and working,
with all our fellow Christians,
for the visible unity of the Church
in the way Christ chooses,
so that people and nations
may be led to love and serve God
and praise him more and more for ever.

Source, Guide and Goal

of all that is:

to God be eternal glory.

Amen."

The Church has always been a very diverse community and there have been debates, arguments and divisions since the beginning. You only have to read the New Testament to see that there never was a golden age when perfect peace reigned among and between Christians! However there have been some major divisions in the Church which have caused great pain and damage, not only to the witness of the Church, but to its very life. Near the end of the first millennium the Church separated into East and West (not quite, but almost, equivalent to the churches we would now describe as Orthodox and Roman Catholic). The Reformation period led to further separations among the churches (and there have been more since!) and these divisions been a great sadness to many over the centuries. The United Reformed Church believes that the Church is one, and that the unity which God gives us should be real and evident among us, there for all to see. The fragmentation and disunity of the Church is a terrible contradiction of the Gospel of God's reconciling love. We believe that it is God's purpose that the Church should be in visible unity and also that God will's to bring the whole creation into a harmonious and flourishing peace. This is why the 'United' part of our title is also important and significant. We can celebrate that in 1972 (and then in 1981 and 2000), those formerly separated have come

into union. The United Reformed Church has, as part of its very reason for being, a giving of itself in prayer and work for the visible unity of the Church. We recognise that the unity of the Church may not come about in the way we first envisaged (through national institutional union), but we remain committed to seeking ways to deepen and express the unity which Christ is bringing to his Church. So, we are involved in many local unity projects, we are thoroughly committed to dialogue with other Christian traditions and churches, we are always present and active in international and national ecumenical work, and we are committed to finding ways to bridge new divides which cut across even single denominations or local churches (like the so-called evangelical/liberal divide). This strong commitment to unity seems particularly striking in us now, when ecumenism is at something of a low ebb, after the high tide of the 1960s. It may be that we have a particular vocation in this, though it is proving testing to work out how to live it. For the URC, prayer for the unity of the church is very much at the heart of what it means for us to be the church. In a world which is finding it hard to know how to live with so much 'difference', a community so committed to building unity and peace has a significant mission.

Questions for discussion:

Where have you experienced disunity between Christians? And where have you seen examples of unity becoming real and visible?

Some people say that we've spent too much time on ecumenism while forgetting mission. What do you think is the relationship between the two?

If we are in an 'ecumenical Winter' do you think Spring will come and if so what might it look like?

If all the churches came together overnight, what contributions would the United Reformed Church bring to it? And what things would we gain from other Christian traditions?

Is there a difference between work to build unity between Christians and work to build peace between faiths?



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

C

The United Reformed Church
Consultation on Eldership
The Royal Foundation of St Katharine
October 24th to 26th 2006.

1) At General Assembly 2005 the Catch the Vision Core Group requested a piece of work on Eldership which would bring together various pieces of work undertaken by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship, Ministries, and Life and Witness Committees as well as ongoing questions from Conversations on the Way to Unity. Doctrine, Prayer and Worship offered to act as lead Committee in putting together a major Conference and this duly took place on October 24th to 26th 2006 at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine in London.

2) At the Conference striking agreement emerged on the following. The ministry of the Elder is deeply valuable. It should be exercised co-operatively with Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Greater attention is needed to the following matters of real concern: the meaning of calling and election, preparation for ordination, ongoing training and development, support and accountability. In many ways all this is a significant endorsement of resolutions passed at General Assembly 2005 on the calling, training, equipping and personal development of Elders.

3) As the Conference progressed, amid a real sense of listening for God's leading, the view emerged that Elders should continue to be ordained. We were not unanimous. Most of the Elders present were initially drawn to the idea of commissioning, or were of the view that the terminology was not as important as the occasion itself. However over the three days there was a general movement and change of mind for some in the direction of ordination, which resulted in a clear majority among those present. What was significant was that the strong desire of several to progress ecumenically by moving from ordination to commissioning was answered powerfully by the representatives of our ecumenical partners, who urged an agenda based not on convenience but on clarity and theological rigour as we engaged in ecumenical debate. Ecumenism proceeds better when people are allowed to be themselves and honour their traditions by producing reasoned justifications

for their practice. We therefore present what transpired in our struggle to articulate why we believe Elders should be ordained and a list of new work which we believe needs to be undertaken.

4) The Church of Jesus Christ comprises those who have been called by the grace of the Covenant God, who creates a community of disciples. To this divine act the Word and Sacraments bear witness. The Church is called to worship the triune God, to proclaim God's saving love, and to be a sign and instrument of God's Kingdom of love and justice in the world. "The whole membership of the Church, the clergy included, is primarily *laikos* (from which the word 'lay' derives) , because the Church is the *laos*, the people of God". (i) By their baptism all the members of the Church have their unique role to play in this common task, their diverse gifting leading to their respective vocations. Within this community, often called the Priesthood of all Believers, some are particularly called to exercise ministerial offices. So that the Church might be equipped to be the Church, God summons men and women to be set apart for the ministry of Word and Sacrament and pastoral oversight. In the Reformed tradition Ministers of Word and Sacrament share that ministry with Elders, who are called to ensure that the faith is passed from generation to generation for the building up of the body of Christ (Basis of Union Paragraph 19). Together they are responsible for the Church of God in its councils, local, regional and national. Together they are accountable for the worship and mission of the Church. Together they exercise pastoral oversight and take responsibility for the discernment and nurture of God-given gifts and talents in others. Together they share a ministry at the Lord's Table. Those ministries remain crucial to the nature and purpose of the Church.

5) The Elders are called and committed to undertake, in partnership with Ministers of Word and Sacrament, responsibility for the life of the congregation in every aspect but particularly in relation to worship, fellowship, mission and service in the world. Just as the members of the body of Christ act corporately in their ministry and mission, so the Elders work collegially with Ministers of Word and Sacrament in carrying out their ministry. The Elders form a collective body whose work within the Church enables the Body of Christ to develop and extend its influence in society. As a team, the Elders' Meeting possesses diversity of gifts and exercises a collaborative ministry. It has particular responsibility for enabling the nurture and discipleship of the church members so that they in turn can be effective witnesses for Christ in their daily lives. As in all Christian ministry, the model of Eldership flows from the pattern of ministry we have seen in Jesus, rooted as it was in servanthood (Mark 10, 45).

6) Elders are called from within the membership, ordained for life and commonly inducted to serve for fixed terms. All these elements are important. Different times and contexts have shaped different models of Eldership, informed by Scripture, tradition and experience. We have found important models of ministry from the Bible. However we must take note of the growing ecumenical consensus, as indicated in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches report on the 1990 Consultation on Eldership (ii) :

"We believe that Scripture does not point to one single church order, and that the effort to impose such an order on Scripture should be abandoned.

This does not mean that Scripture offers no guidance for us as to the faithful ordering of the church and its offices of leadership. On the subject of elders, for example, there is solid evidence for the continued existence of collegial bodies of elders both in the Old and New Testaments.....However, as soon as we begin to enquire about the specific responsibilities of elders and their relation to other offices of the Church, we have to recognise that much of the biblical evidence used in the past can no longer be definitively maintained.....

We must therefore find another approach if we are to be guided by the whole witness of God's Word in Scripture in the ordering of the Church and its leadership. A more faithful and productive starting point will be God's great message of salvation for the world, and the divine calling of the Church for mission. Within that context, we may then enquire: [what tasks of ministry and leadership are necessary if the Church is to fulfil that calling?] How is that leadership to be chosen and to work together - with the whole Church - to the glory of God, for the building up of the Church and the salvation of the world?"

7) Sometimes secular models have benefited our understanding. However, we are concerned lest we simply baptize the spirit of the age. In every way we must seek a model of Eldership which is appropriate to particular Churches in their context, and not assume that one size fits all. There are however, some general principles which are applicable across the board. The Basis of Union is a helpful access point for those principles.

8) Regarding the lifelong nature of Eldership we would do well to heed the words of David Thompson:

"Being an Elder is not something you just drop into for a few years and then drop out of; it is not like serving on a committee. If you have the gifts and qualities which mark you out for the eldership, then other Christians will continue to turn to

you for spiritual advice and counsel, whether or not you happen to be 'a serving Elder'; what does cease is the representative function of Elders in the wider councils of the Church." (iii)

All too often membership of the Elders' Meeting has come to mean membership of a committee rather than part of the local church's ministerial team.

Regarding the fixed term aspect of Eldership, the opportunity to stand down when personal and work commitments necessitate is commendable practice, and the simple opportunity of having a sabbatical is an important provision.

9) Care needs to be given to spelling out the responsibilities of the wider Church to the local church and vice versa in the matter of Eldership. A strong case can be made for increasing the involvement of the wider Church in the recognition and preparation of Elders for ordination and their support during their service. The United Reformed Church should know who its Elders are in the same way that it knows about its other ministers. The Elder's gifts and graces will develop, and emphases may change as their personal pilgrimage moves forward.

10) Experience in the United Reformed Church is mixed when it comes to Eldership. There are churches, whether large or small, in which the oversight of the Elders' Meeting brings the best out of the congregation, enabling the vocation of the members and hence the mission of the church. In other situations things are less rosy, and one sometimes hears of enthusiastic church members who feel blocked or disabled by their church's Elders' Meeting. The crux of the matter is that the Church's ministry exists to enable and empower the Church in mission. We do not believe that some of the negative experiences should devalue the positive possibilities.

11) The United Reformed Church is made up of diverse churches, the majority of which are small in number of members, but often great in spirit. Nevertheless a common ethos generally prevails. The size of the Eldership needs to reflect the size of the congregation, but perhaps we have limited the work of the Elders' Meeting by making it an overcrowded place, when a much smaller group might have been more effective. This tendency has perhaps been associated with historical precedent - 'we always must have 12 Elders,' or a literal interpretation of the Basis of Union's requirement concerning the pastoral office of the Elder. In many congregations pastoral care is devolved from the Elders' Meeting to pastoral care teams; it is regrettable that some churches insist on having large unwieldy Elderships in order to reduce the pastoral visitation load of each elder! It may well be that the way forward outlined in this paper leads to smaller but better prepared

Elders' Meetings.

12) There are a variety of tasks which all churches need to have carried out effectively. These may be broadly grouped under three headings: those related to the Church's sacramental life as it gathers to encounter God's Word in worship, prayer, and obedience; secondly there is the diaconal function whereby the church seeks to follow in the footsteps of the servant Christ in the world; and thirdly there is the managerial task of servicing the necessary structures of the Church (e.g. becoming managing trustees in response to changes in charity law). Each of these is important and the Elders' Meeting should make sure that each is addressed fully in the life of the congregation. It is all too easy for Elders to get trapped into concentrating on management, even if good management is necessary for effective mission. The United Reformed Church has a good track record when it comes to service: for example Make Poverty History, Commitment for Life, Peacemaking etc. Perhaps the emphasis for our spiritually driven age should be on the sacramental?

13) In a church where Ministers of Word and Sacrament are scarce, and vacancies long, we will increasingly need a dedicated and equipped Eldership to maintain and enhance the life and mission of the congregation. In churches of increasingly elderly members, the pastoral care burden will change. In a society which is bypassing the mainline churches, our Elders will need to play their part in enabling the Church to communicate to a non-churched population. All this points to a need for a well prepared and adequately supported Eldership. We regard the question of identification of new elders and the training and continuing development of all Elders as crucial.

14) Ordination sets the newly ordained person in a fresh relationship to the congregation, and this needs understanding humbly and positively. It is important that the local church, in fellowship with the wider Church, marks that passage in a refreshing liturgical manner. Ordination is that setting apart appropriate for ministries which have been established, through testing over time, as central to the life of the Church. In principle we are not averse to extending ordination to include other ministries which prove themselves in this way.

15) For the Reformers, following the pattern of the Apostolic Church, Minister and Elders first focussed around the Word and Sacraments as the means by which God in Christ drew near and fed the people. These days that starting point continues to inspire ideas of Minister and Elders working together so that through them God may equip and enable God's people for service. To this end there will be those set

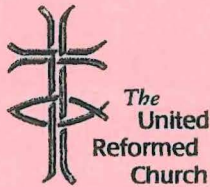
apart to particular Ministries of Word and Sacraments and those called Elders who will share with them in oversight in order to equip the whole Church. Together they will feed the people of God and take responsibility for pastoral care, spiritual health and the discernment and nurture of God-given gifts and talents in others. Through this shared ministry they also have a representative role in the wider councils of the Church and ecumenically. Out of this equipping many other ministries have emerged and will emerge. We wish particularly to affirm those of Church Related Community Workers and Lay Preachers.

16) We ask for further work on the following:

- Models of good practice in identification of new elders, their preparation before and continuing development after ordination
- Models of good practice in the conduct, content and oversight of Elders' Meetings
- Teasing out theologically the differences between ordination and commissioning
- The biblical roots of the language and practice of particular ministries
- The consequences of the fact that the whole membership of the Church, including the clergy, is primarily "lay", and the effects of making distinctions between "lay" and "ordained"
- Continuity and change in ecumenical understandings of ordination
- What our liturgies of induction and ordination reveal about our theological intentions and ecclesiology
- The role of Ministers and Elders together in Christian initiation

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- i) "The training of Laymen in the Church" from *Concerns of the Churches*, preparation study for the Amsterdam Assembly of the World Council of Churches 1948, p 16
- ii) "Evidence for a Reformed Order in Scripture" in *Eldership in the Reformed Churches Today*, World Alliance of Reformed Churches Geneva 1990, pp 8 & 9
- iii) David M. Thompson "Understanding the Eldership", background paper for the St Katharine's Consultation October 2006



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

D

Catch the Vision Steering Group Report

1. CTV is at an important stage of its development. Possible patterns for the future are beginning to emerge.

1.1 (a) The road map of the new committee structure

1.2 We are grateful to Phillip Woods for the detailed work that he is putting into this. A separate initial paper (see Paper D1) deals with how the proposed 'Mission Policy and Theology' department might relate to Mission Council. Consultation on the ways in which various pieces of work will be taken forward in the new department is continuing and a full report will be available to the March Mission Council.

1.3 The re-alignment of our work to give a sharper focus to mission has staffing implications, and Mission Council's Staffing Advisory Group are working on this. This work is still in process, but the suggestion that we are bringing forward is as follows. The Revd Phillip Woods completes two terms of service as International Relations Secretary this year. He will therefore be moving on to new forms of service. It is therefore proposed that the International Relations component of the church's work be worked out differently, focusing particularly on 'Belonging to the World Church' and its programme officer. In effect that will reduce staffing on international relations from two to one. That will then give us the room to appoint a Secretary for Mission who will focus on domestic mission, but also bring to domestic mission the missiological understandings of the world church.

2.0 (b) The implications of switching to a biennial Assembly.

2.1 The Steering Group have undertaken a good deal of work on the role of the Moderator of General Assembly. We are grateful to the Revd Dr David Peel who has worked with us as a theological consultant on this. David presented us with a paper entitled 'The Moderator of General Assembly: a theological reflection'. It drew on his own experience, discussion with past Moderators, and the experience of our British and European Reformed partners.

2.2 His suggestion, which commended itself to the Group is that we adopt a different model of leadership. In alternate years we would elect a minister and elder respectively, each of whom will serve for two years. So, at any one time there would be two Moderators (one elder, one minister) operating collegially. Together with the immediate past Moderator and the Moderator Elect, and with the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, they would form a leadership group who would meet (say) three times a year.

2.3 We believe this to be commendable for several reasons. First, it makes a two year commitment to Moderatorship manageable, because the task is shared collegially. Second, it honours our theological commitment to the complementarity of the ministries of minister and elder. Third, it will provide more stability within Assembly's leadership team, which will consist of the two serving Moderators, the Moderator Elect, the immediate past Moderator and the two General Secretaries. Fourth, that group in itself will provide a point of accountability and support for the Moderators. Fifth, it would cement the relationship between Assembly and the Trustee body, not least because of the considerable overlap of personnel.

2.4 Our report to the March Mission Council will include more detail. At present we note that if an elder presently in employment were elected, although we could not match their salary, we might be able to provide the equivalent of a stipend as a generous honorarium for their term of office. Second, the paper suggests that we should move the election of the Moderator from the Assembly to Synods. This process happens in other Reformed churches, and we are presently consulting with them about this.

3.0 (c) Spirituality

This is the central part of our work at the moment.

3.1 DVD

We are planning to produce a 20 minute DVD of churches telling stories of their spiritual journeys. We are grateful to the Moderators for identifying a range of diverse congregations who might feature in this. We are equally grateful to the group of people with media expertise who met last week to consider the practicalities of this project. A great deal of work remains to be done on this, but our aim is to launch the DVD in 2008 and circulate it free to all churches in the hope that it might encourage and stimulate new insights and open up new possibilities, and help churches see that they have stories to tell.

3.2 Hothorpe consultation

The core proposals which we wish to bring from the Hothorpe Consultation is to ask Mission Council to endorse the decision to ask John Campbell to use his sabbatical in Spring 2007 to develop (in dialogue with others and working co-operatively) a programme for the renewal of the United Reformed Church (deliverable at local church level) under the headings:

- *Living the story...* (Mission and personal faith)
- *Loving the story* (Prayer and a life of engagement with God)
- *Telling the story...*(Bible and the response of personal faith)

3.3 This would seek to challenge the whole denomination to make a significant re-engagement in Bible, prayer and evangelism that was rooted in story and storytelling.

3.4 This is very much an interim report. We are not yet sure of the format we will want to adopt, or indeed of the titles. 'Story' is our shorthand: we are not yet sure that we will launch that into the public sphere because it can be misunderstood as a narrative that is fictional rather than factual, and we (obviously) do not wish to take that baggage with us. However, we believe this project to be full of potential to bear rich fruit, and the group are due to meet again in the early summer to hear of John's progress and to move matters forward.

3.5 We never believed that the 'spirituality and mission' part of our programme would be a quick fix. It needs rather to be a change of focus within the church at all levels. This is a beginning, which will run in tandem with the DVD, and we hope that it will be launched during 2008. Synods have been asked to clear a gap in their October 07 meetings for further information.

4. Infectious visions consultation

4.1 The Windermere Centre showed how it can contribute to the life of the church by organising an informal colloquium on 'Infectious Visions' in November. Those who were invited were amazed and delighted at the mix of long-term vision and short-term ways of moving the church forward that emerged. The meeting was conducted under the Chatham House rule, but the group felt that they wanted to share their work with the wider councils of the church, and an agreed statement is appended to this report as Appendix 2.

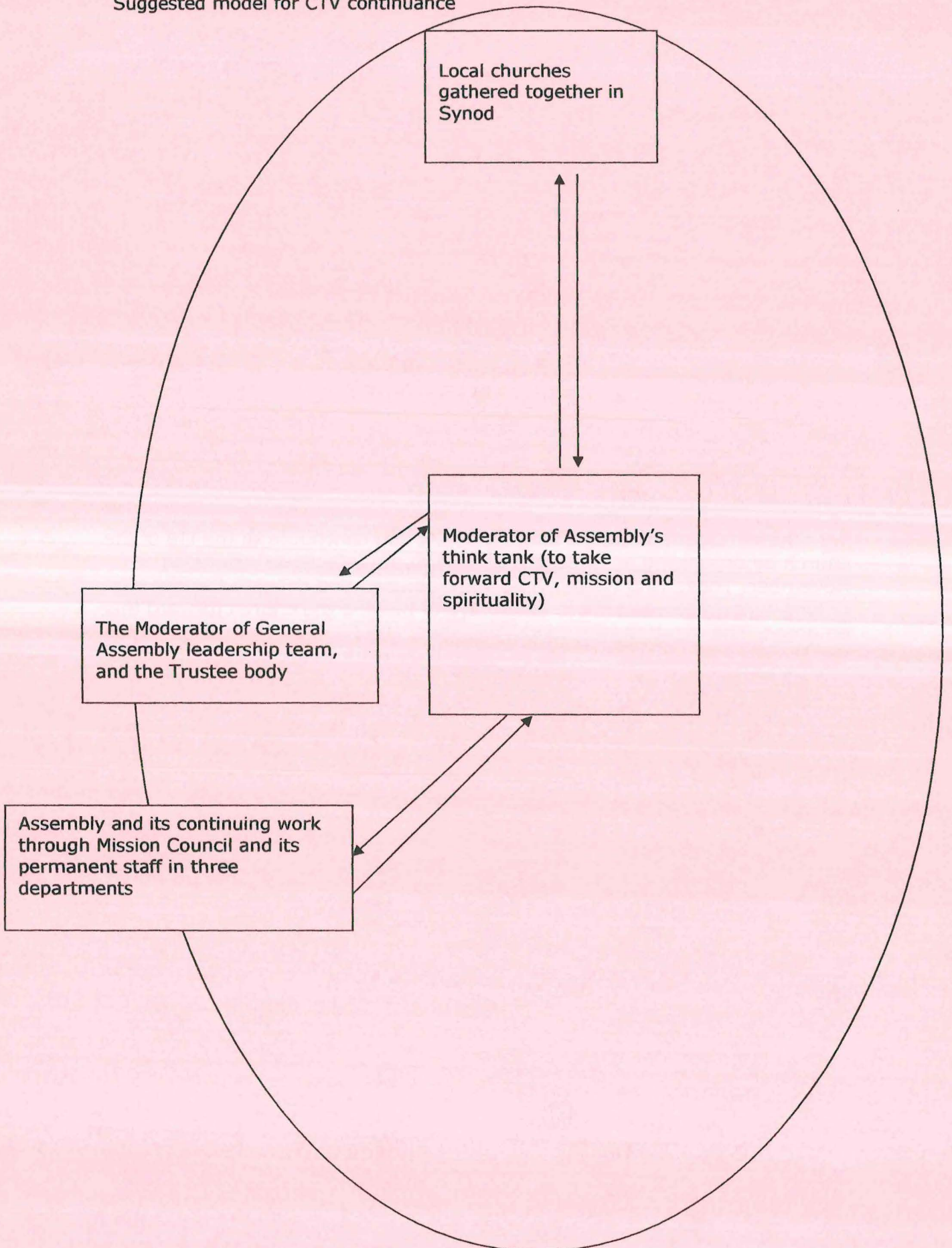
4.2 The future management of CTV

The Steering Group continue to believe that they should ask the 07 Assembly to demit them from their task. However, they are quite clear that the 'Catch the vision' brand needs to be nurtured and continued, not least because it has now seeped into the consciousness of the church. We believe that the structural and resourcing work has now been completed, and that the focus from now on must be on renewal, regeneration and mission. That work has begun, but that is just the beginning, and wider ownership and leadership of that dimension of our work is now needed.

4.3 The suggestion we bring is the creation of a Moderator's think-tank of c.15-20 people who would advise the Assembly Moderatorial leadership team. Their task would be to excite and enthuse the life of the church about spirituality, renewal and mission. The proposal is presented in diagrammatic form in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

Suggested model for CTV continuance



Appendix 2: Infectious visions

An informal colloquium at the invitation of the Windermere Centre

November 20-23 2006

Participants: Philip Woods, Peter Noble, Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Leo Roberts, Carole Gotham (for the first day only), Kate Gray, Kirsty Thorpe, Richard Church, Catherine Ball, Sheila Maxey, Richard Mortimer, Elizabeth Welch, John Campbell, Carla Grosch-Miller, Lawrence Moore, Lance Stone, Roberta Rominger, Peter Ball, David Grosch-Miller, Paul Snell, Elizabeth Gray-King; David Cornick (respondent), Lis Mullen (chaplain)

The colloquium was carried out under the Chatham House rule, and each participant was asked to present a 'provocation paper' of an 'infectious vision' for the United Reformed Church, for about 10 minutes, followed by discussion.

At the end of the colloquium it became clear to the participants that they wished to share the findings of their discussions with the wider church, most particularly with the CTV Steering Group, but also in other councils and gatherings. It was therefore suggested that an agreed statement be produced.

We believe that we are at a crossroads in the life of the Western European church, caught (as Christians always are) between what we have now, and what God is calling us to become. On the one hand we are asking, 'Can we start a gentle beat of a new way of being church?' whilst on the other not losing our nerve or our belief in what is (after all) God's church. We explored various Biblical metaphors – exile, wilderness, resurrection, the Emmaus walk – all of which shed partial light. One contributor asked if we were at a 'Stephen moment' (Acts 7 – where Stephen realised that everything that had come before was irrelevant and needed to be understood anew in the light of Jesus).

We do not know what the future will bring, but we believe that the evidence before us at the moment suggests:

- that our age profile means that we will probably be half the size we are now by about 2015 (that is Peter Brierley's prediction in his report on the 2005 Church Census, Coming out of the nose dive).
- that we need to develop a 'mixed economy' of church life, and encourage new ways of being church alongside traditional church life, which in some places is flourishing. That said, we should not be seduced by a model of exile which promises restoration. The future is God's, and may be completely new and different to what we know now. God is a God of resurrection! A practical outworking of that understanding is that we need to give people permission to experiment, and to fail, for we can only learn new ways through trial and error. We need to escape from our 'blame' culture.

- that a commitment to being a multicultural church commits us to 'radical inclusion' and to unity, despite deep and painful differences. (we worked in the awareness that the moratorium on decisions about human sexuality and the church is not yet ended. Members of the colloquium reflected the diversity of views seen in the wider church)
- that our prophetic activism needs to be balanced by deliberate renewal of worship, and the creation of new opportunities of spiritual encounter and growth
- that we need to manage our resources cannily to ensure that our responsibility to proclaim the gospel can be handed on to future generations.
- that the stories that churches and individuals have to tell about their travels with and experience of God are of genuine importance, and can open up conversations with others in a way that telling the 'grand doctrinal narrative of the faith' doesn't.

We wish to pass to the wider church some of the questions and ideas that occurred as we met, discussed, prayed and laughed together. Some are dreams, visions of a far future. Others are about how we might take the next step on our pilgrimage together.

a) Worship

Worship emerged as a central theme of our consultation, not only as food for a journey of activism, but as what one participant called 'a right royal waste of time'. God is God, and God is to be worshipped, and as we worship we discover who we really are. Worship is an end in itself, and it demands the very best that we have to offer.

That awareness was balanced by frustration that in many places for many reasons it is not so. There were calls for a recovery of the centrality of the Lord's Supper, and for a simple, small-group midweek act of worship:

A group of 12 or fewer meets. They need two rooms. Everyone brings two things with them, one from their personal life, the other from the life of the world. One by one each person places their items on a tray and explains briefly why these things are on their hearts. There is no spoken response, and above all no pastoral care, just receptive silence. A Bible reading is then shared, and members respond.

The group then move to the second room, where there are stations for confession, thanksgiving and intercession, where candles are lit. The gathering ends with a prayer of commitment.

b) New ways of being church

We had a dream, of a people joyful in God's presence, at ease with God-talk, engaged with the Bible's conversation. And we realised that for some this will not happen within the structures as we know them. Several participants offered visions of new ways of Christian discipleship and community:

- intentional missional communities – experimental, playful, maybe based on life-style, or perhaps geography, meeting in both private and public spaces, coming together particularly in the class and age gaps left by traditional church; networked, somehow accountable to the Christ in each other, and to Christian supporters in the traditional church
- a 'monasticism of the heart' which can cultivate silence and foster simple life styles, which (again) might create networks across and amongst and beyond congregations.
- a purpose filled congregation, freed from the worries of buildings and the demands of 'public religion', probably small communities '...where relationships matter and where an authentic faith is seen in self-giving and self-sacrificing lives.'

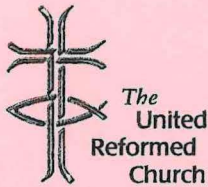
c) Addressing the immediate

The colloquium was not all dreams. Members articulated only too clearly the problems we face – resources in the wrong place, ministers overstretched, key workers exhausted, moribund congregations that no-one has the courage to close – and that is the tip of an iceberg.

But we did not stay there. We saw ways of moving on, and we offer them. Some are new, some have been thought of elsewhere, some are traditional, but each of them could make a difference. They deserve further consideration:

1. Regenerating building can bring new life, engagement in mission, and (if properly managed) income for the things we long to do for the kingdom.
2. Reducing the number of church buildings we have by combining congregations. The Church of Scotland offer an interesting parallel to our practice. We simply cannot go on as we are, and need to encourage Synods to adopt realistic strategies for using their resources of people, money and buildings.
3. Re-fashioning ministry by encouraging and stimulating local leadership (preferably one local leader per congregation) and using ministers 'apostolically' as area leaders, troubleshooters, trainers, encouragers – the world church offers many helpful models, not least the Presbyterian Church in Ghana
4. Freeing 'trapped' ministers by getting rid of the manse system but enabling the transition from manses to minister owned homes.

5. Moving strategically to increasing the number of non-stipendiary ministers whilst decreasing the number of stipendiaries
6. Developing and re-designing buildings as income generating community resources which incorporate worship spaces managed by professionals who are not the church.
7. Looking again at the ways in which we classify congregations. We already have a category of 'mission projects' which allows for operation without officers, elders and church meetings. For some congregations which are still spiritually viable, but hopelessly burdened by the institutional package, some version of this might offer new hope and new life. (Prepared by Elizabeth Gray-King, Richard Mortimer and David Cornick on behalf of the colloquium.)



MISSION COUNCIL 27 January 2007

D1

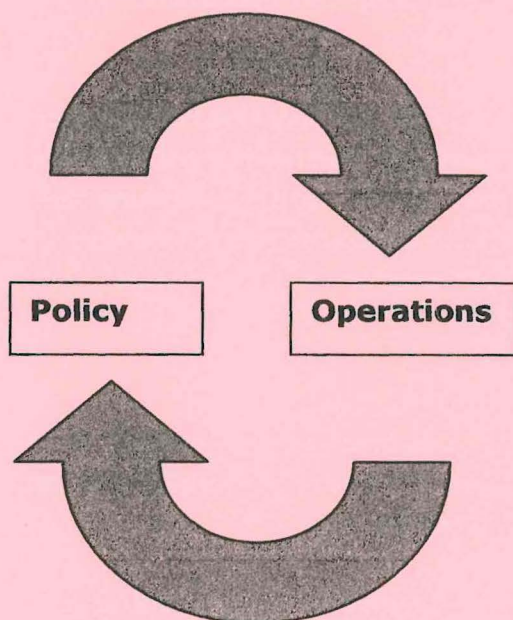
Catch the Vision: Discussion Paper

Restructuring, Governance and Organisation

General Assembly 2006 proposed that the central operation of the church should be restructured into three departments - Ministries of the Church, Administration and Resources, and Mission Policy and Theology - with the request that a more detailed proposal be brought to the 2007 Assembly. This paper forms part of the process of shaping that proposal, which will be considered in more detail at the March Mission Council.

My brief has been to work in consultation with my colleagues and the existing committees on those aspects of the proposal which relate to Mission Policy and Theology, but a significant aspect of this cannot be considered in isolation from the other departments and hence this paper commissioned by the CTV steering group to test thinking on how we can best effect governance and joined-up thinking/action in such a restructuring.

For any organisation the challenge is to draw the line between governance (setting and managing policy) and operations (carrying out the policies and fulfilling the purpose of the organisation). Inevitably there is a dialectic between the two - operational experience informs policy and policy shapes operations.



Originally Mission Council was conceived to be the place where this would be held together - a partnership of synods (representing the more local councils of the church) and Assembly committees. For a variety of reasons it has not worked out like this, but it does not follow that the idea itself is flawed. Restructuring gives us a new opportunity to realise its potential, but to do so requires some changes in how we work, and hence some reflection on how we manage the policy/operations divide in the United Reformed Church.

Generally speaking policies are the broad outlines which shape how we intend to achieve our purpose (as outlined by *Catch the Vision* 'being Christ's people, transformed by the gospel, making a difference to the world'). In our context, therefore, they cover such things as the provision of ministry, the sharing of the costs of ministry and mission, and our engagement with the world beyond ourselves (e.g. our three ecumenical principles). Clearly this is a whole church exercise, drawing on experience and expertise.

In restructuring it is envisaged that Mission Council (and General Assembly) should develop as a council of synods, i.e. drawing together our experience of being church ('being Christ's people'), and enable us to reflect together ('be transformed') so that we can make a difference. This suggests a more unified approach than the present situation in which Assembly committees are free to present their own priorities to Assembly without necessarily going through a more holistic discernment process balancing needs and capabilities. However, the question remains, how might this be achieved in practice?

One way would be to structure Mission Council so that it enables the partnership originally envisaged (between synods and central operations) and to be clear that its primary function is in managing and developing policy. To do this it would need to have an overview of the work of the three departments, ensuring that their efforts meet the needs of local churches (enable the mission of the church) and that their efforts complement each other (build up the whole mission of the church). By the same token it would need to ensure that our policies are informed by the experience of the church (what really are the pressing priorities and needs as we seek to minister in a changing environment - both our own and the world we seek to serve). Thus Mission Council (rather than committees) should become the place to initiate policy development (although a committee, like a synod) might make the case for some work to be undertaken in the light of operational experience.

At first sight this might seem to slow down processes, but meeting roughly every six months there is no reason why it should. Equally, understanding policy as the overarching framework for any particular action it should not be something that we are constantly meddling with; rather we need to be monitoring it to ensure its effectiveness, and learning from each other best practice in its operation.

In practice things might work like this:

1. Each residential Mission Council would include brief activity reports from each department, covering the areas of work they are responsible for and highlighting any issues which may need attending to.
2. Mission Council could receive these reports in plenary session and/or in committee (i.e. divide up into the three departmental committees - this

might be the better option with synods appointing people appropriate to each departmental area as their representatives on Mission Council, enabling in one session of Mission Council some deeper scrutiny, but not losing the plenary reporting back to hold the overview).

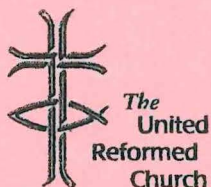
3. Each department would have a Convenor, who with the Moderator, General Secretary, Deputy-General Secretary, Treasurer, and Chair of the Trustees would be responsible for shaping Mission Council's agenda.
4. Mission Council itself would also have time in responding to the reports to identify those issues and concerns which need more work, either to be done in a subsequent meeting or between meetings.
5. Where the work was done outside Mission Council it could be done in a number of ways, depending on its nature. For example, if it is more technical it might be delegated to an existing committee, or a task group bringing together the relevant experts/interested parties. On the other hand if it is likely to have far-reaching implications (e.g. a policy on church buildings, or our ecumenical policy) then it might be more appropriate to establish a 'consulting group' comprising someone from every synod who would facilitate a consultation process throughout the church, enabling us to draw on the widest range of experience and expertise and to build ownership for the resulting recommendations, which would come to Mission Council and/or General Assembly.
6. Between meetings of Mission Council the three departments and the synods would be responsible for the operation of the church's policies. Inevitably they will approach this differently with different pieces of work and different contexts all requiring different approaches.
7. Some areas of the church's life will still require committees to effectively implement our policies (e.g. Ministries, where for example collective decisions are called for in respect of selection of candidates, special category ministries, etc.). Others though may have less need. In the area of Mission Policy and Theology most of the collective decision-making matters concern the broad policy of the church (e.g. ecumenical policy, partner relations, approach to mission, being a multicultural church, etc.) and much of the operational work is done through synod-based networks (*Commitment for Life*, racial justice, church & society, ecumenical officers, *Belonging to the World Church*, etc.). Thus it is conceivable that for Mission Policy and Theology there is little added value in having another standing committee as the policies which direct its priorities should naturally flow from Mission Council and that it is to Mission Council that it should be demonstrating how particular programmes are building up the life and witness of the church.

8. Operationally some areas of the church's life might be best developed by the networks charged with that work (as noted above), reporting through the relevant department to Mission Council as required.
9. The *General Secretary* and *Deputy-General Secretary* as the departmental coordinators would be expected to ensure operational coherence, making connections between the work of the three departments and bringing staff and others together in the necessary configurations where operational experience, policies and priorities overlap.

In taking this approach the intention would be to build greater dynamism (making better use of networks and consulting processes to inform our priorities and how we pursue them) as well as more coherence in what we do, moving away from an approach which sees programmes and decisions come and go without any serious evaluation of (learning from) what was achieved. Mission Council, bringing together local experience and central expertise, would become the forum where we wrestle with the most pressing questions we face and shape a way forward drawing on the full resources of the church. If, as may be felt, our agenda is already too full to allow us to move in this direction, then we should be asking ourselves why? What could be delegated or abandoned? What is preventing us from giving time to serious holistic consideration of what we are about as a church and how we can best achieve it?

This paper points to some ways forward. *Mission Council's view is sought on whether this is the direction to be going.* A much fuller paper will be brought to Mission Council in March setting out in detail a proposal for General Assembly, taking into account any comments received now.

Philip Woods
2007-01-03



MISSION COUNCIL 27 January 2007

D2

Election of Trustees

Following the meeting of Mission Council in October, the detailed procedures for the nomination of Trustees for election at General Assembly 2007 have been developed. If these procedures prove satisfactory, the process in the Governing Document be refined accordingly. The procedure would allow for the selection of one per Synod, three from a group of Synods (as outlined in the Governing Document), or an agreed overall number (say 6) irrespective of Synod. There thus remains the outstanding issue of the size of the Trustee body and the number of Synod nominations.

It is important to recognise that the Charity Trustees are individually responsible for carrying out their responsibilities for which they are covered by indemnity insurance. Thus in the role of Trustee the person should be informed and qualified but independent. The aim of Synod nominations is to ensure that there is, as far as possible, a wide awareness of the whole life of the Church. They are not representatives although collectively they should be fully conversant with the life of the Church and as "representative" of it as possible. They should be church members and, hopefully, many Synod nominated Trustees will have roles in both the local church and the wider Church.

The essential skill set of the Charity Trustee is of prime importance. Collectively this includes financial management, investment, and human resources; as well as an appreciation of current accountancy practice and charity law. Thus overall the Trustee body should be competent and have the range of skills necessary to be effective.

A Charity Commissioner drafted the original Governing Document for us and it included nominations from each Synod. The proposed body would have had up to 20 Trustees i.e. Moderator of General Assembly, General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary, Honorary Treasurer, 13 from Synods, a FURY representative and possibly 2 from Mission Council. However the Charity Commissioners advice was that ideally there should be about 10 Trustees.

In considering this advice, a number of additional disadvantages came to mind:

- a) To achieve the necessary rotation (to avoid all the original Trustees reaching the end of their service at the same time) meant having initial terms of service of 2, 4 or 6 years. Asking prospective Trustees to serve for only 2 years did not seem practicable.

- b) Limiting the number of Trustees from a Synod was inflexible as it could exclude a second excellent candidate from that Synod
- c) It could give the impression that Synod nominees were "representatives".

The Governing Document presented to Mission Council attempted to overcome to some measure these disadvantages although the Trustee body could still be 16. Discussion ranged over the number of Trustees and the groups suggested in the Governing Document. The option of each Synod nominating a Trustee was, therefore, suggested. A further option to have less than 9 Synod nominated Trustees was then suggested.

The arguments against the option of each Synod having a nomination are stated above. The option of Synods collectively nominating less than 9 Trustees is attractive for a number of reasons:

- a) Reduced size of the Trustee body
- b) Gives the flexibility of being able to have more than one Trustee from an individual Synod
- c) Totally avoids the idea that Trustees are Synod "representatives".

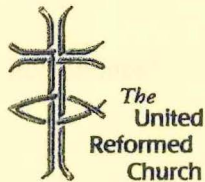
However it would further reduce the experience of the whole life of the Church and some Synods might only rarely offer a Trustee contribution.

Although the option in the Governing Document could be seen as a compromise between the two further suggestions, it nevertheless has its own obvious advantages.

It therefore remains my recommendation.

Eric Chilton

15th December 2006



MISSION COUNCIL 27 January 2007

E

Nominations Committee

1. Nomination of Committee Conveners

The following have agreed to be nominated as committee conveners. Their names will be brought to General Assembly 2007 for appointment to serve from 2007 to 2008 as Conveners-Elect and then from 2008 to 2012 as Conveners.

- Assembly Arrangements Committee - Mr Simon Rowntree
- Ministries - CRCW Programme Sub-Committee - Revd Paul Whittle
- Ministries - Leadership in Worship Sub-Committee - Mrs Jan Harper
- Westminster College Board of Governors - Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms

2. Monitoring

Representatives of the Nominations, Equal Opportunities and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministries Committees have now had a very useful meeting to consider issues about the representation of ethnic minorities on Assembly Boards and Panels as well as committees, and equal opportunity monitoring. Steps have been taken to implement strategies for tackling these issues. Procedures for eliciting names of potential committee members are also being reviewed. These matters will be reported at a later meeting of Mission Council.

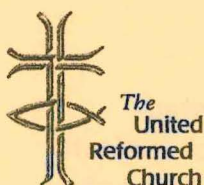
3. Appointment of URC Trustees

The procedures for nominating Trustees to serve from Assembly 2007, as agreed at last Mission Council, are currently being followed through. By the deadline of 31.12.06 for Synod nominations to be received, 14 names had been put forward. No names had been received at that stage from East Midlands, Wessex and Thames North. Further decisions on matters of principle will need to be taken by this meeting of Mission Council. In the light of those decisions and further consultations between representatives of the present Board and Nominations Committee, and following further work in the Nominations Committee, a list of suggested nominees will be brought to the March Mission Council.

In order to achieve the desired balance within the Board it may be necessary to consider some further names - beyond those submitted by Synods. In practice these may have to come from or through the representatives charged with

producing the initial draft list and then further vetted by the Nominations Committee.

Further work will be needed to ascertain how these procedures will need to be modified for use in future years.



MISSION COUNCIL
27 January 2007

F

Heritage Lottery Funding
a report by the Church and Society Committee

1. Introduction

1.1. A resolution carried at General Assembly 2006 asked that Assembly re-consider its position in respect of applications for Lottery funding, in the light of diminishing government funding available for the upkeep and repair of historic church buildings - especially buildings formally listed as being of special historic or architectural interest - and the diverse way in which the Lottery is now being used to fund other agencies and sources of financial support. The Church and Society Committee was asked to prepare a briefing with a recommendation for Mission Council and Assembly 2007.

1.2. In September 2006, the Church and Society committee expressed the provisional view that the committee should propose that the Church alter its stance to allow applications for lottery funding for this specific purpose and asked that a more detailed paper be prepared for its meeting on 16 & 17 January. If approved this will go to Mission Council on 27 January.

1.3. Assistance has been given by a number of people, but particularly by members of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group, the Church and Society Committee and the Joint Public Issues Team (Baptist, Methodist and United Reformed).

2. History

2.1. 1995: Assembly urged members and councils of the Church to disassociate themselves from the Lottery by refusing to buy tickets and by declining to apply for Lottery-generated funds for church purposes.

2.2. 1997: The Church and Society Committee was asked to interpret the 1995 resolution. It suggested that where an application for lottery funding was more broadly based than from a single church, and where it sought funding for projects to benefit the whole community (and not merely or primarily the church and its organisations) this did not breach the spirit of what Assembly had determined.

2.3. June 2004: Synod moderators received a letter from Assembly Listed Buildings Advisory Group with an enclosure from English Heritage, which made it clear that Public funding for Grade 2 listed buildings now came entirely from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2.4. November 2004: Church and Society Committee felt the English Heritage position gave the Church little room to manoeuvre and that it might be time for the 1995 resolution to be re-visited - albeit after a protest had been lodged with English Heritage - but that this should be a decision for Assembly, with advice from Mission Council.

2.5. January 2005: Mission Council noted that the 1995 resolution merely "urged" and did not "require" churches to disassociate themselves from the Lottery and that there was no need, at present, to alter the Church's 1995 policy.

2.6. February 2005: Church and Society Committee decided that Mission Council's view should be noted in the Church and Society report to Assembly, together with a re-statement of general opposition to proposed new gambling legislation. In the event, this appears not to have happened, probably because there was no Church and Society Secretary in post.

3. Listed Churches

3.1. Anyone can request that a building be listed. The application for listing is dealt with by English Heritage (or in Wales and Scotland by Cadw or Historic Scotland). Recommendations are confirmed by the relevant Secretary of State. An order cannot be contested, which is a source of concern to some, who believe that the owners of the building should be able to make representations. Once a building is listed, it cannot be demolished, or altered in any way that would change its character, without consent; the owners are required to keep it in good repair. In the case of URC church buildings, consent is (except in the case of total demolition) sought through the Church's ecclesiastical exemption control procedure. There are three categories of listing:

Grade 1	Buildings of exceptional interest
Grade 2*	Particularly important buildings of more than special interest
Grade 2	Buildings of special interest, warranting every effort to preserve them

For details see <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.2422>

In Scotland, the three categories are:

- Cat. A: Buildings of national or international importance
- Cat. B: Buildings of regional or more than local importance
- Cat. C(S): Buildings of local importance

For details see <http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk/index/historicbuildings/hsandlistedbuildings.htm>

3.2. Under the authority of Mission Council, the URC's Listed Buildings Advisory Group works with synod property committees in England and Wales to ensure that aspects of conservation and planning law are properly observed in relation to listed buildings. (In Scotland, the URC works through the Scottish Churches' Committee). Although practices may differ within synods as to the duties exercised by the local church, the Listed Buildings Advisory Group believes that in most cases it would be the elders of a local church, who would have responsibility for ensuring that a listed church was protected and properly maintained - and more generally for ensuring that a local church complies with the legislation. Synod trustees are required to ensure that local churches are aware of their responsibilities, that information is dispersed to local churches, and to be available to give advice. Appendix Three on page 182 & 183 of the General Assembly Book of Reports 2006 sets out the responsibilities of the different councils of the Church. It states:

It is a function of the elders' meeting to recommend to the church meeting, arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings, and of the church meeting to make, or provide for the making of, such arrangements.

3.3. A complete figure for the number of listed URC church buildings is:

England and Wales:		Scotland	
Grade 1	3 (see footnote) ¹	Category A	2 (see footnote) ²
Grade 2*	25	Category B	12
Grade 2	309	Category C(S)	5

¹ The Grade 1 churches are Saltaire (Yorkshire), Monks Chapel (South Western) and Maesyronnen (Wales)

² The Category A churches are St. Nicholas (Scotland – Church of Scotland/URC) Oakshaw (Scotland – URC/Church of Scotland)

3.4. Whilst, it is sometimes possible to obtain funding from other sources to maintain Grade 1 buildings, Heritage Lottery funding represents virtually the only source of public finance for those listed as Grade 2.

4. Local churches

4.1. For some listed local churches this is a live and pressing issue. It is clear that some are not only listed - but also *listing!* Here are comments from three:

The church is a Georgian meeting house. The windows need renewing but because the building is listed, an architect has had to be employed to ensure that the replacements are appropriate. This has made the job much more expensive.

Our listing severely limits any change to the fabric or usage. We are presently holding our breath that the winter weather will not blow in a huge stained glass window, which is held in place by rust and lead that is 145 years old. The last rough estimate we had for this repair was five years ago and was in the region of £150,000 plus the cost of scaffolding. For a congregation of under sixty, a repair bill of that nature is beyond contemplation.

Our (Grade 1) Church is of Italianate design. This virtually rules out any change to the fabric of the building. Even panes of glass must be replaced like for like. But we cannot get the glass, so it would have to be specially made. We need £2 million over the next four or five years.

5. The debate

5.1. There is a range of views about the Lottery, and applications for Lottery funding, which I have attempted to summarise:

5.2. The Listed Buildings Advisory Group, whilst understanding the spirit of the 1995 resolution, expresses concern that, if the URC does not accept Lottery funding, it increasingly puts pressure on other sources of funding within the Church to maintain listed buildings. The Group believes that a change to the Church's stance would allow a more straightforward relationship with English Heritage, which might secure a larger slice of available funding for United Reformed churches and allow more use of English Heritage's considerable expertise. There is also a more general concern expressed, that the Church will simply not be able to fulfil its obligation to care for listed buildings, and that local elders may find themselves in

an increasingly uncomfortable position. Accepting Lottery funding for this purpose, it is argued, will allow the church to spend more of its own money on Mission.

5.3. Some say that Lottery funding is often used for dubious purposes, so it would be much better that some of it should be used for furthering the work of God's kingdom. Some are able to make a distinction between gambling as such (and benefiting from it by spending the winnings) and drawing on national funds derived from money raised as a tax levied on gambling.

5.4. Others say the world has moved on since 1995; Lottery funding is now effectively government funding, and we inflict unnecessary self-harm on ourselves by exercising our conscience over the issue. Other denominations have by and large come to that conclusion. If we were to inquire, it is argued, we would often discover that funding from other sources, such as local authorities, for youth or community work, came originally, from the Lottery.

5.5. In making a case for involvement with the Lottery or other forms of gambling, some would contend that they can see no difference between this and financial investment. Neither gamblers nor investors are immune from the sin of greed and covetousness. Others do make a distinction: the investment gains of one do not depend on the losses of another; Lottery wins are at the expense of someone else's losses.

5.6. Some would also contend that gambling is not *malum in se* (not bad in itself) - that it is a legitimate consumer pursuit. This means that freedom of will requires a right to freely choose to participate; to say otherwise would be to interfere with consumer sovereignty, and could smack of paternalism. Others counter that freedom carries with it a responsibility that attends to the common good and the well being of all.

5.7. Some contend that to sanction applications for Lottery funding, whilst at the same time discouraging church members from buying Lottery tickets is hypocritical. However, it might be said to be equally hypocritical to visit a theatre, museum or art gallery, or attend the 2012 Olympic Games (all of which are benefiting from Lottery funding) whilst resisting an approach for similar funding to maintain a historic church building. This, perhaps, illustrates the extent to which the Lottery has become part of national life.

5.8. For some, put simply, the Lottery is gambling and gambling remains a social evil. The URC, in common with other Free Churches, has for long recognised that gambling can be harmful, and can blight the lives both of gamblers and their family members. Although research suggests that the Lottery is played fairly equally

across social classes, some spend money they cannot afford to spend, partly for fun, but also, sometimes, in pursuit of the big win that will solve their financial problems. Instead, they may be driven further into poverty and despair.

5.9. Whilst many see a small sum spent on the Lottery as harmless enjoyment, and say that the Lottery may be less readily addictive, and therefore less dangerous than some other forms of gambling, it may nevertheless normalise gambling for those who play. For some it becomes an addiction, which disrupts or destroys family life, and leads to debt, crime, unemployment, homelessness and mental ill-health. A Gambling Prevalence Survey in 2000 estimated that there could be up to 350,000 problem gamblers in Britain. A further Gambling Prevalence Study is to be published in 2007. See www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk. Last year Britain spent about £53 billion on gambling, 20 per cent more than eight years previously. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/gambling/story/0,1827082,00.html>. Recent research by the BBC Panorama programme, suggested that 5.8 million people, many of them teenagers - visited internet gambling sites in one six month period during 2006. In 2005 20% of those calling the GamCare helpline had gambling debts of more than £10,000 - some in excess of £100,000
<http://www.gamcare.org.uk/publications.php>

5.10. Another approach has it that - however urgent the need to repair our buildings, or however convincing the argument about the evils of gambling - any decision should be based upon what we are about as the body of Christ or as the household of God. The *oikonomia* (the economy) of God in Christ is an offering of abundant life in which all are able to participate. Full life, not chance or wealth, is the ultimate goal of the gospel by which we are called to live.

6. Theological reflections

6.1. One message that the Lottery suggests is that life, work and living is about chance. As a national ritual, with the symbol of crossed fingers ingrained in the imagination, the message of a superstitious dependence on the economy of the world, and chance, rather than God, is not difficult to deduce. How do we respond to this? From a biblical/theological perspective can we discern possible guidelines, as there is no Christian blueprint to guide?

6.2. Our baptism in Christ demands that we lead godly lives, bearing witness to our common faith in the "God in Christ" economy (Phil.1:27). It can be contended that the Lottery may lead us away from godly lives as it promotes the sins of greed and covetousness - the obsessive desire for material gain, motivated by images of great wealth. The tendency towards *pleonexia* (annexing what does not belong to us) runs

counter to God's liturgy of abundance for all. This can lead to a misdirection of these gifts for selfish means and ultimately idolatry, and a failing to live out our responsibilities as good stewards of what God has given us.

6.3. Involvement in a game of chance may also be inconsistent with trust in God's providence. The Lottery trivializes and attempts to manipulate God's providence and care of creation. A Reformed perspective, with its strong sense of God's guidance of the world, ought to be particularly critical of activities that make God an accomplice in any economy of chance. In a situation of despair and hopelessness, the Lottery may invite people to place their trust in a false god, fortune, rather than the counter claim of "Give us this day our daily bread".

6.4. If as a Church we hold to God's preferential option for the poor, then the fact that some choose, or are drawn to, spend money they cannot afford becomes a matter of concern. If the National Lottery is conducted as a means to raise public funds for the common good, then should not the costs be progressive, so that those who are better able, bear a greater portion of the public burden. Should the cost of maintaining heritage sites fall disproportionately on the poor? Is this another form of "grinding the poor" against which Scripture offers harsh words?

6.5. Whilst these may be pointers to us being wary of participation in the Lottery, the question at issue is not whether the Church should relax its advice to members not to buy Lottery tickets, but whether Lottery funding should be sought for one specific purpose. While greed and covetousness can be what motivates much of the ethos of the Lottery, the same may be said of much in of our lives. There are so many other things that we do that are motivated by obsessive material gain. Why, then, should the Lottery be singled out?

6.6. Our Christian understanding of the economic common good sharpens the dilemma of faith and faithfulness that these issues place before us. What is more, it underscores our human state: the contradictions and the ambiguities that humans have to live with and in spite of which, God in Christ will not abandon humankind. Grace still abounds.

7. Views of other churches

7.1. Methodist churches are able to consider applying for Lottery funding. In 1999, Methodist Conference agreed that any decision was for local managing trustees. The Church has around 620 listed churches in England, Scotland, Wales and the Channel Islands. Three or four applications have been made each year since 2000; the majority have been successful, realising, on average, something in the region of

£100,000. Some local trustees have declined to apply. (While this paper was being drafted, there was debate within the Methodist Church about whether the trustees of the Old Rectory, Epworth - Wesley's birthplace - should accept Lottery money to fund restoration). The Methodist Church's general approach to the Lottery, as with other forms of gambling, is to press for safeguards to protect people from harm. For more details see www.methodist.org.uk/static/factsheets/fs_lottery.htm

7.2. The Salvation Army says it does not knowingly apply for lottery funding for any purpose. However, it acknowledges that it is possible that it has received money that has its origins in the Lottery, because it does not question donors about where their money came from.

7.3. The Church of England sees no basis on which Lottery money should be used to finance worship, evangelism and pastoral care. However, the repair and maintenance of historic churches and cathedrals is seen as being a responsibility which the Church undertakes, in part, on behalf of the nation as a whole. The Church's bishops therefore decided that it would be acceptable for individual Church of England bodies to decide whether to apply for Lottery funds for projects connected with these purposes - and many have done so. The Church of England has 4,200 parish churches that are Grade 1 listed, representing 45% of all Grade 1 buildings in England.

7.4. Despite a distaste for the Lottery, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted in 1998 to permit congregations to make application for Lottery funds as they saw fit, recognising that public funding was increasingly financed by Lottery revenue.

8. Commentary

8.1 It is, perhaps fitting, that the Church should be considering the issue of Lottery funding, as it commemorates the 200th anniversary of the ending of Britain's involvement in the Transatlantic slave trade. When the Act of abolition was passed in 1806, William Wilberforce apparently turned to another abolitionist and said exultantly: *What shall be abolish next?* The other is said to have replied: *The Lottery, I think.* The task for our Church currently, is much less ambitious than that!

8.2. It has been suggested that a more appropriate way forward would be to protest to English Heritage that non-Lottery funding is not available to Churches that object to seeking Lottery money, and/or to urge government to make other

funds available from state sources. The Listed Buildings Advisory Group is clear that this would not change the government's decision and could damage increasingly warm relations which the URC enjoys with English Heritage, which is said to be increasingly sympathetic to the position of Churches. An approach to government would not be easy to mount, as colleague churches are accepting Lottery funding. Another suggestion is to encourage application to other independent sources of funding. Again, the advice of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group is that this is becoming increasingly difficult - except, perhaps, in the case of Grade 1 listed buildings; for other listed buildings, independent trusts refer applicants to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

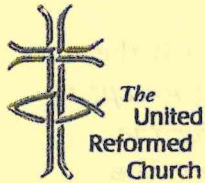
8.3. The Church and Society committee re-affirms its concern about the impact of the Lottery and will continue to work with other denominations to express this. The committee recognises that it is readily accessible to those for whom gambling is, or may become, addictive, and that it may normalise gambling for people, some of whom may be driven further into poverty as a consequence. However, taking into account all the circumstances, the committee believes it is now right to recommend to General Assembly that it should allow the elders and church meeting of churches which are *listed* buildings, to make application for Heritage Lottery funding, for the upkeep of the building, if they wish to do so. This should not be taken as a more general endorsement of the Lottery. The committee does not recommend that this relief be extended to other "historic" church buildings which are not listed, as the same arguments do not necessarily apply.

9. Suggested Resolution

9.1. Having re-considered its position on Lottery funding, General Assembly accepts, reluctantly, that some local churches will need to make application to the Heritage Lottery Fund to assist with the upkeep and repair of their *listed* church buildings and, in that respect, revises the advice contained in Resolution 20 of General Assembly 1995, regarding applications for lottery funding.

Stuart Dew

Secretary for Church and Society
December 2006



MISSION COUNCIL 27 January 2007

G

Trusteeship and the United Reformed Church

This is the report of a meeting convened by the Clerk of the Assembly and attended by , Janet Knott, Legal Adviser, Andrew Grimwade, URC Trust, Rachael Greening, Trust Officer West Midlands Synod, David Cornick, General Secretary.

In recent years there have been several attempts to clarify the position of Trustees within the United Reformed Church. While none of these have met with total agreement, there has been a general acceptance that while practice has varied slightly across the Synods there is a duty of care for all of our properties and that the responsibility for this is shared between several different groups in the Church. Trustees, Church Meetings, Elders and sometimes others.

However recent changes to Trust and Charity Legislation and in particular the decision to abolish "Exempted Charity" status have resulted in the question of Trusteeship becoming much more pressing.

Reference will frequently be made to several different types of Trustees. Custodian Trustees; Managing Trustees; Charity Trustees; Corporate Trustees and Private Trustees. The last two refer to different ways of serving as Trustees and the first three to different types of Trusteeship.

In the United Reformed Church Local Churches appoint their Trustees and may appoint either Corporate Trustees, that is Trust Companies set up by the denomination for the purpose of serving as Trustees for URC property, or they may appoint Private Trustees, that is named individuals who jointly serve as trustees of URC property. The general advice of the denomination is that a Local Church is best served by having one of the URC Trust Bodies as its Trustees rather than using Private Trustees but several Local Churches have not agreed with this advice and it will always be the case that some Local Churches are prevented, either because they are outwith the United Kingdom or because they have particular restrictions imposed upon them by their Trust Deeds which prevent their appointing one of the Trust Bodies to serve as Trustees.

The three terms "Custodian" "Managing" and "Charity" used to distinguish between different types of Trustee are not contained within the United Reformed Church

Acts, which referee throughout simply to "Trustees". They do however limit the responsibility of these Trustees by stating that. "*The trustees shall not, except to the extent of funds supplied to them for that purpose, be responsible for the repair and upkeep of the premises.*" *Second Schedule Parts 1 & 2 Clause 4.* The Trustees not being responsible somebody else must be. This is generally understood to be the Elders or in some cases the Management Committee of the Local Church and the members of the Elders Meeting or of the Management Committee will be regarded as the Charity Trustees in that, on a day to day basis, the duty of care for the building and of the assets of the Congregation falls upon them. The term "Managing Trustees" as used in some denominations applies only to groups or individuals formally appointed either by their denominational authorities, usually by means of legislation or a statutory instrument or by the actions of the original donor. While it is probable that prior to 1972 many of those Churches and congregations which formed the URC had managing Trustees the most up to date advice we have is that the URC Acts overrule any pre-union constitutions and as they do not provide for Managing Trustees this term should be avoided in discussions of Trusteeship.

The URC Acts in several places require the Trustees to obtain the authority of the Church Meeting and sometimes that of other councils of the Church before acting on several matters. They also require the Church Meeting to take note of the recommendations of the Elders Meeting, and the Structure of the URC states that the Elders have the responsibility "*to recommend to the church meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church;*" *Structure 2(2)(x)* while the Church Meeting has the responsibility "*on the recommendation of the elders' meeting to make or provide for the making of arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church.*" *Structure 2(1)(xiii)* It is therefore possible to argue that the Church Meeting is the Charity Trustees of the Local Church, but a Local Church wishing to regard its Church Meeting as the Charity Trustees should be aware that this would mean that only individuals eligible to serve as Charity Trustees could become Church Members. Bankrupts, minors and several other groups are excluded from serving as Trustees.

This has become much more important because the abolition of Exempted Charities, will mean that gradually all of the requirements of Charity legislation will fall upon Local Churches. While initially only those with an annual income in excess of £100,000 will be affected it is intended to lower the figure so that relatively soon almost all of our Local Churches will be required to provide Accounts, Annual Reports and Trustees Reports to the Charity Commissioners. Currently annual

reports and accounts are produced by all Local Churches and it is envisaged that these will as they stand or with minor modification serve as the Accounts and annual report for the Charity Commission. The Trustees Report is new and will be the responsibility of whichever body has been agreed will serve as the Charity Trustees.

Some thought has been given as to how best to assist Local Churches in drafting these reports. Initially it was thought that it might be possible to create a basic draft report or template such that Local Churches needed only to insert a limited amount of local information into a general report. However the preferred solution of the group looking at this has been to produce a short series of questions, the answers to which should enable a report to be drafted.

Part of the Trustees Report will be devoted to showing the "beneficiary acts" of the Charity. In other words, what has the Church done in the past year to qualify as a Charity? One obvious answer to this, so obvious as quite possibly to be overlooked is that every Local Church should be able to state and should put at number one in its list. "The Church has maintained the public worship of God according to the principles and usages for the time being of the United Reformed Church".

At present the value of Churches, Halls and Manses is frequently omitted from our accounts. This will no longer be possible under the new regime and two questions were asked. One, what value do we put on our properties? And two, in which set of accounts should they appear. Accounting conventions allow for three values to be put on property. The original cost, the replacement cost or the likely sale value. So long as which valuation is being used any of these would be acceptable to the Charity Commissioners, but simplicity, consistency and ease of management it is recommended that the replacement cost is used in every case. This should be the figure for which the buildings are insured! Where Churches have Private Trustees or properties not covered by the Scheduled Trusts the value of these properties will need to be shown in their Accounts but where property is held by an Incorporated Trust Body it will be in these accounts that the property and its value will appear. This will remain the case whether or not the Local Church derives an income from its Halls.

Although the process of abolishing excepted charity status is planned to take several years it is probable that once begun those Local Churches still not required to register will find that not having a Charity Number becomes increasingly problematic. Already there is a steady trickle of requests from Churches asking for help as they apply to join bodies like Local Councils of Voluntary Service and find themselves being asked for copies of their Constitution etc. For this purpose a short summary document was produced. The Changes being brought about by the

Catch the Vision Process have rendered this document out of date and it is being re-written. and hopefully abbreviated further. It is probably safe to assume that although in the first stage of registration only a few Local Churches will be required to register as Charities in their own right all of our Churches will find themselves having to do so very soon and therefore steps should be taken to enable Churches to move as easily as possible into this new era.

Resolutions.

- Not
tabled
today
prob in future
1. Mission Council recommends that, for the avoidance of doubt, all Local Churches that have not already done so be invited to pass a Church Meeting Resolution stating that the Elders Meeting be considered as the Charity Trustees of that Local Church.
 2. Mission Council takes note of the report on Trusteeship and the implications for the Church of new Charity Legislation and appoints a working party of five people to produce the necessary documentation to facilitate the changes needed.



MISSION COUNCIL
27th January 2007

H

Life and Witness Committee
Covenant Membership and Mission

1. Understanding Covenant

The Church is the body of Christ, a people gathered by God to become a sign, expression and foretaste of God's reign in the world. It is a community called into being by God's grace to play its part in keeping the Covenant God has made with all creation (Gen 9:12). We neither merited this special covenantal relationship with God, nor have we always been faithful in keeping our side of the Covenant; but God graciously and amazingly has repeatedly ratified the Covenant with those frail folk whom God has invited to play a leading part in the divine mission, e.g. Abraham and Sara (Gen 17:7), Moses (Exodus 34.10) and the followers of Jesus (Gal 3: 14, 26-29; I Peter 2: 9-10). Christians, therefore, are drawn into relationships with God and one another which are rooted in the promises God has made with the whole creation since the foundation of the world.

As church members we join with the communion of saints who have gone before us, as well as all the gathered saints worldwide, who sit under Word and around Table in order to be equipped for God's service in society. Out of gratitude for what God has done for us we open ourselves to all those who lay claim upon our lives. In joy and with thanksgiving for God's gifts we are strengthened to stand up for the values of God in the world. Our ongoing challenge and obligation therefore is the sometimes complex and always demanding business of keeping our side of the Covenant.

In the Reformed heritage we find fascinating and impressive forebears who built their church life upon this central idea of Covenant. They stressed their obligations to one another in the light of the gracious way they had found God dealing with them through the divine human Covenant. Freely they had received, so freely they had to give; as Christ had laid down his life for them, so they had sacrificially to be of service to one another. Membership in such churches was not a matter of fulfilling the contractual obligations attached to membership of a club; rather it was akin to belonging to a people's movement whose life had become devoted to responding faithfully to what God willed them to be and do. When these churches met for decision making they were not concerned with democratic transactions so much as with theocratic obedience. From such exciting yet exacting traditions we can still learn vital principles about what it means for us to be church members today.

Church membership then is a person's response in gratitude for the Covenant God has made with us and involves the ensuing invitation to covenant together in common service to God and our neighbours. It is a commitment to engage in a shared journey of faith and mission with the Church catholic as well as reformed, world wide as well as local, individually as well as through the councils of the church.

Locally, membership is an expression of a relationship with a local congregation in which one exercises one's gifts and is nurtured by the gifts of fellow members. It involves time, energy and money being given for the mission of the local church; it means playing one's part in making the life of the local church a sacrament of the Kingdom through worship and service to the community.

More widely, membership expresses a relationship with the United Reformed Church in its shared life, mission and journey of faith. It is an endorsement of the ownership of shared vision, priorities and spirituality, as well as a means of becoming involved in practical engagement in support of the vision of the Kingdom as something that extends 'from Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1.8); it is a participation in the wider work and mission of the entire community of faith through the denomination's programmes and people. In an ecumenical context this relationship extends to the other participating denominations. In short, membership is to choose to be part of that particular worshipping community called Church, those sinful saints and saintly sinners who are seeking to make a difference in and to the world for Christ's sake, with fellow Christians from other churches and all people of 'good will'.

2. Changing attitudes to membership and its practice

Our response to God's grace is worked out in a changing social context. How ought we to think of membership within the United Reformed Church now? The question is important because our answers have different emphases than when the Church was formed in 1972. The scene has changed both outside and inside the church.

Sociological Changes

Changes in society have affected the way people see membership and belonging, and these affect how people see the way they belong to the church. These include:

- increased mobility
- the increased number of separate communities to which people belong (work, home, social life, the internet),
- growing individualism
- people do not, as a rule, make long-term commitments to groups and institutions, be they churches, political parties or local clubs.
- postmodern consumers ask "What's in it for me?" rather than "What can I offer?"
- the "what's in it for me?" attitude means that people are quick to move away and out of groups when there are difficulties or when things happen that don't suit them.
- the widespread phenomenon of customisation - "making it fit me exactly" - extends to membership and involvement in groups.
- the increasing gap between faith (understood primarily in terms of private spirituality) and its expression in institutional Christianity - a tendency to "believe but not belong".

Church Pressures

Although the church has not always found it easy to respond quickly to sociological changes, there have been changes within the United Reformed Church which have affected how people see membership. These include:

- an increasing number of congregations which are local ecumenical partnerships, where people see no need for organizational membership or see their membership as being of 'the Church'.

- disillusionment with patterns of church life and reduced participation in church meetings. The eligibility to vote at church meeting is not seen as a privilege or a responsibility.
- a shift in emphasis from infant baptism to thanksgiving and dedication services with believers baptism as the point of commitment. Fewer people grow up through the church, absorbing the ethos of being a member.
- a more open approach to communion, with it being an integral part of the service and open to 'non members', including children. People feel that they can participate fully without becoming 'members'.
- the practice of parts of the United Reformed Church to determine commitments to the Ministry and Mission Fund as if there were a head tax. There are stories that some people have been discouraged from becoming members because of the cost to the local church, and other stories that some congregations with few members have low assessments even though they have large reserves.

Reacting to the Pressures

These pressures contribute to the new context in which membership is considered. This is a complex situation: for while there is evidence of increased attendance at cathedral worship, which offers a personal and corporate spiritual experience without requiring a commitment to membership, those churches and communities which require a high level of personal commitment are also growing. It is not, then, a matter of simply decreasing or increasing the 'barriers to entry'.

Two changes are suggested as a response to these pressures:

i) Breaking the tie between membership and assessment would remove any unhealthy pressure which may deter people from becoming members and the inequity that sometimes results. We therefore ask Mission Council to devise a process for agreeing local church contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund which do not primarily focus on membership numbers, and to work on it being implemented throughout the United Reformed Church.

ii) A few categories of people would benefit from the flexibility of being able to be members of more than one local congregation or denomination at once. These include:

- A student who spends half of each year in his/her home congregation and half in a congregation in the place of study
- A weekly commuter, or a family with a holiday home they go to frequently, who are active in churches in both places
- A person who retains a commitment, perhaps for family reasons, to a former church, after moving to another
- A minister who has pastoral charge of more than one congregation; possibly also his/her spouse and family
- An elder or other person who makes a commitment to help a neighbouring church
- Members of Local Ecumenical Partnerships

We would seek to provide the option of having multiple membership that is recognized by the local and the wider church.

The person would be a recognised part of each of the congregations in which s/he and the congregation make commitments to each other within the Covenant relationship. This would support mutual caring, sharing in decision making, contributing to costs, and holding responsibility, while recognising that the person is also involved in similar commitments elsewhere for clear reasons.

We would therefore ask for administrative work to be done on how the wider church would count such members so as not to disadvantage the local church or the member.

3. Deepening our personal experience of membership

The Believers' Baptism service in *Worship: from the United Reformed Church* shows a clear distinction between two aspects of membership, expressed in two stages of the process during the service:

- i) An affirmation of Trinitarian faith with repentance and turning to Christ followed by baptism and the declaration "God receives you by baptism into the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church"
- ii) Reception into full privileges and responsibilities of church membership through making promises of commitment to a life of worship and fellowship; accepting the gift and cost of following Christ; and proclaiming the good news of God in Christ. A promise, made by the congregation, is followed by "... we welcome you into membership of this congregation of the United Reformed Church".

The first of these stages is the unrepeatable entry into the universal Church of Jesus Christ. The second stage has long been recognised as transferable between congregations when a person goes to live somewhere else, or for other reasons wants to join another fellowship.

Membership of the United Reformed Church, in this Baptism service (and in the Confirmation service for someone who was baptised as an infant), is attained through becoming a member of the local congregation, which is a congregation of the United Reformed Church. The only way to become a member of the United Reformed Church is through becoming a member of a local congregation, by believer's baptism, confirmation, or transfer from another church. Denominational membership is an automatic consequence of and part of the commitment of local membership.

Among the reasons some people have been reluctant to become members are

- feeling it doesn't make a difference
- being too shy to stand up in public
- not having seen it done before because it happens so rarely in that church
- their acceptance of a cultural assumption that belief is inward and personal rather than outward and corporate
- not wanting to make a permanent commitment
- having been active in church life for so long that it is embarrassing to make a new member's commitment
- not being part of the 'main' Sunday congregation even though active in the local church in other ways, because of time availability, preferred worship style, or other reason
- the church would have to increase its annual levy
- the requirement to attend preparation classes
- feeling "not good enough"
- feeling unable to commit to being more involved in church life
- being unwilling to withdraw from membership in another church
- not wanting to go through another ceremony when transferring church
- being so active regionally, denominationally, or ecumenically that local involvement can't be great

Some of these concerns could be answered by holding an annual Covenant Renewal, which would have other advantages for the whole congregation

- all members would reaffirm their faith and renew their covenant promises together
- new members would be welcomed and their contribution recognised with thanksgiving
- there would be opportunity for baptism, confirmation or transfer as appropriate, but within the corporate occasion rather than focusing solely on the individual
- it would be a regular part of the congregation's life and so newcomers would see it happening
- preparation of the whole congregation in the weeks beforehand could be supplemented by individual or group preparation as appropriate
- there would be room within the corporate expression of the covenant to embrace the different stages individuals had reached in personal commitment on their own spiritual journey
- in local churches where there is more than one congregation or worshipping group meeting at different times or in different styles of worship or spirituality, the covenant renewal could be celebrated in one special joint event, or in a series of events
- people would be affirmed for their Christian life and witness even if their attendance and service to the local church is limited by other responsibilities. It would be an opportunity to recognise the many who have not become members who already make major contributions through, for example sacrificing their own desire or comfort for the sake of others, putting the common good before their own, and through their loyalty and faithfulness.

Existing material and resources to support local churches preparing people to renew their covenants or to make them afresh, include

- *'Worship: from the United Reformed Church'* (2003)
 - *Renewal of Baptismal Promises by the Congregation (pages 315-318)*
 - *A Service for Rededication Sunday based on the Five Marks of Mission (pages 319-324)*
 - *Service of Rededication on the theme of unity (pages 325-334)*
- *The Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (Rejoice and Sing number 761)* and a recently prepared study guide.
- *'Talking about God'* - a short five-unit TLS LITE course
- Parts of *'A Gift Box'*
- *'Let's Discover the United Reformed Church'*
- *'The Methodist Worship Book'* (1999)
 - *The Covenant Service (pages 281-296)*

4. Covenant membership and mission

A fundamental question to be asked about membership is how it serves the people of faith while also helping to bridge the gap between a church and its local community. All our churches need to be outward looking and engage with the community around them, while enriching those who have chosen to commit themselves to the Church. How does the United Reformed Church's understanding of membership help or hinder this process?

We believe that a better understanding and fuller participation in the idea of covenant will help create a more positive and wider understanding of membership. The bible records how God's covenant with Israel was made and renewed at various points throughout their history. That experience invites the Church today, living in the face of individualism, social fragmentation, and

global challenges affecting everyone, to act counterculturally by living an intentional, shared life which embraces relationships and responsibilities from a personal level to a global scale. Specifically, membership of the United Reformed Church is a commitment to a shared journey of faith and mission, expressed locally and through the wider councils of the Church.

In each place, it is a covenant commitment to the local congregation to offer and exercise one's gifts and be nurtured by the gifts of others. It is a commitment of time, prayer, energy and money to the mission of the local Church and to play one's part in making that local community of Christians a sign and manifestation of the Kingdom of God, in the fellowship of believers throughout the world.

Draft Resolutions

General Assembly

1. reaffirms local church membership as an expression of faithful and committed response to God's covenant with creation and Christ's call to discipleship within the fellowship of the Church.
2. encourages all churches to initiate conversations within their congregations and with other partners on renewing their understanding of covenant membership and to explore the importance of personal faith and commitment in creating flourishing communities.
3. asks Mission Council to examine the feasibility of providing the option of multiple membership within the United Reformed Church, and between the United Reformed Church and ecumenical partners, which is recognised by local churches and the wider Church
4. asks Mission Council to devise a process for agreeing local church contributions towards the Ministry and Mission Fund which do not primarily focus on membership numbers, with a view to implementing it throughout the United Reformed Church.
5. invites local churches to explore holding an annual Covenant Service as a way of renewing the corporate commitment of existing members, welcoming new members and providing a regular focus for discussion about the meaning and context of membership within the United Reformed Church.

The next Principal of Westminster College.

Revd Dr Stephen Orchard retires as Principal of Westminster College on 31 July 2007.

The 2006 General Assembly invited Revd Sheila Maxey to convene the appointment group for the next principal. Under Sheila's guidance an appointment group was assembled which represented the following interested parties:

Two members of the Training Committee

One representative of Cambridge University who also represented the Board of Governors of Westminster College.

One representative of Anglia-Ruskin University.

One representative of the Cambridge Federation of Theological Colleges

One representative of the Cheshunt Foundation

One representative of the Senatus

One representative of the student body

The appointment group was serviced by the Secretary for Training who was also a full member of the group.

The group met in September to rewrite the job description and the person specification especially in the light of the Training Review. It also prepared the advertisement which was placed in the October issue of *Reform*. It was also placed on the web-sites of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Council for World Mission.

The group met in November make a short-list. Two candidates were short-listed from the four completed application forms. The group planned the interview process so that, apart from making a presentation to and being interviewed by the whole group, each candidate would meet a sub-group of the appointment group to discuss various aspects of the role in more detail. The group also made arrangements, with the assistance of Westminster College, for the candidates to meet the other teaching staff, representatives of the other colleges in the Federation, and many of the students in an informal setting.

Throughout the process the group was advised by the URC's Human Resources Manager and communication with the applicants was handled by her office.

Interviews were held on Monday 15 January and as a result the appointment group wish to recommend that the Nominations Committee propose to Mission Council that Revd Dr Susan Durber be appointed Principal of Westminster College from 1 August 2007.

Revd Dr Susan Durber has been minister of St Columba's United Reformed Church since September 1995 and of Cumnor URC since April 2001. In the early 1990s Susan was Mona Powell Research Fellow at Northern College and was a part-time tutor at the Northern Baptist College. Her doctorate, awarded by the University of Manchester in 1995, was in Biblical studies with special reference to the interpretation of the Parables. She is currently a member of the Standing Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. Susan is, at present, Convener of the URC Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee. She has served as a local tutor on the STETS course and served on its Board of Studies. Susan is particularly widely known and appreciated as an outstanding preacher and a Bible

study leader who can engage groups as varied as the WCC Faith and Order Plenary Commission meeting in Kuala Lumpur, a URC Ministers' Summer School, and a local church group in the next town. She chaired the editing committee of, and was a major contributor to *Worship from the United Reformed Church 2004* and has contributed articles and chapters to many publications, most but not all of them about preaching.

Sheila Maxey.