

# Mission Council

## Minutes of the meeting

### 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> October 2005

Sixty-seven members of Mission Council were present with fifteen others in attendance, and seven guests.

#### **Session 1**

Worship was led by the Chaplain the Revd Jill Thornton.

#### **05/65 Welcome**

The Moderator welcomed the Revd Elizabeth Caswell (Moderator-elect); the Revd Sheilagh Kesting (Theological Reflector); Mrs Maranny Jones (Northern Synod); the Revd Alan Wickens (North Western Synod); the Revd Jennifer Morgan (Mersey Synod); Mrs Margaret Gateley (East Midlands Synod); the Revd Ruth Whitehead (Wessex Synod); Mr David Eldridge (Thames North Synod); Mrs Maureen Lawrence and Mr Nigel Macdonald (Southern Synod); Mrs Liz Tadd (Synod of Wales); Mr Patrick Smyth (Synod of Scotland) the Revd Mary Buchanan (substituting for Miss Irene Hudson, Synod of Scotland); the Revd John Macaulay (Thames North Synod); Dr Tony Jeans (West Midlands Synod).

#### **05/66 Attendance**

Apologies were received from:

Miss Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland); the Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland); Ms Fleur James (FURY); Mr Gareth Jones (FURY Chair); the Revd Wilf Bahadur (Equal Opportunities); Mr William McVey (Assembly Arrangements); the Revd Dr Stephen Orchard (Nominations); the Revd Dr John Parry (Interfaith); the Revd Andrew Prasad (Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministries) Mr Steve Summers (CRCW Development Worker); the Revd John Steele (Life and Witness); the Revd Yolande Burns (East Midlands Synod); the Revd Brian Jolly (Life and Witness); Mrs Karen Bulley (Pilots Development Officer).

#### **05/67 Notification of Additional Business**

The Deputy General Secretary reminded Mission Council of the ways in which the Council operates, noting that the October Mission Council is an opportunity for reflection. He referred to the report produced by the Theological Reflector from the March 2005 meeting of Mission Council, and outlined the intended shape of the present meeting.

#### **05/68 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> March 2005 were approved.

#### **05/69 Gambling Bill (ref. 05/28)**

Mr John Ellis reported on the progress of the government's Gambling Bill, noting that the Church's expression of its views had produced a Bill very different from that originally intended. He also stressed the importance and effectiveness of an ecumenical approach to such issues. The Moderator sought the consent of Mission Council for his writing to thank Ms Rachel Lampard of the Methodist Church and Mr Jonathan Lomax of the Salvation Army who had acted on behalf of the Churches in the negotiations with the government.

***Mission Council agreed.***

#### **05/70 Assembly Resolutions**

The Clerk informed Mission Council of the advice received from the Church's Legal Advisors that Resolutions 8,9, 10, and 11, which had been remitted to Mission Council for consideration and action, should not be dealt with by Mission Council, and therefore it was his recommendation that these matters be dealt with by General Assembly 2006.

***Mission Council agreed.***

The General Secretary notified Council that MCAG wished to nominate the Revd W.W. Mahood to convene the London Synod Group. The General Secretary also suggested that there be five members of the group, none of whom should be members of the two synods most likely to be affected by any changes.

***Mission Council accepted the nomination of the Revd W.W. Mahood.***

In response to a question, the General Secretary stated that, while the group would be required to report to Assembly 2006, this need not be a final report. He emphasised the care and consultation with which this task needed to be done, and that adequate time would be required.

Discussion took place about a survey of London churches' mission being done ecumenically and involving Thames North and Southern Synods, and its likely effect on the London Synod Group's work. The Revd Richard Mortimer reported on other ecumenical initiatives affecting London.

Mr David Eldridge proposed that:

One member of Thames North Synod and one member of Southern Synod should serve on the London Synod Group.

This was seconded by the Revd Victor Ridgewell

After discussion, the matter was put to the vote, and the Resolution fell.

#### **05/71 Treasurer (paper G)**

The Honorary Treasurer reported. He expressed satisfaction with the current financial situation. He reported on the temporary arrangements put in place following the resignation of the Financial Secretary and noted that the whole structure of the Church's financial governance was being reviewed.

He referred Council to Paper G, and presented the recommendation that ministerial stipends be increased by 3.2% for the year 2006/7. ***Mission Council agreed.***

In response to a question about "Compensation allowances" for Synod Moderators and Assembly-appointed ministers, Mr Chilton noted that the Ministries Committee would be looking at that along with other aspects of remuneration. The Revd Peter Brain asked that the matter of ministers remitting all fees to central funds be considered.

#### **05/72 MCAG (paper B)**

The Deputy General Secretary reported.

In discussion it was noted

- that issues of safeguarding and CRB disclosure were a matter for the whole church, not just Youth and Children's work;
- that some people questioned the need for a one-day Mission Council; and that meeting at Stoneleigh incurred travelling difficulties for some members.

The Deputy General Secretary undertook to address these concerns, where possible.

#### **05/73 Staffing Advisory Group**

Mrs Val Morrison reported on the review being undertaken of Church House and Synod staff. Assembly Committees had been asked to identify their essential tasks, and areas of overlap with the remit of other committees. SAG had met with Church House staff, and had identified three broad areas of work relationship: 1: Ministries and Training 2: Programmes 3: Resourcing

Mrs Morrison stated that SAG was about to ask Church House staff to look at the practicalities

of such groupings, (links which might be weakened or strengthened etc) and the implications of such new patterns of working. SAG hoped to bring recommendations through the Catch the Vision process.

Discussion of the report focussed on three areas; concern about overburdening staff during vacancies; the possibility of employing temporary staff; and the need for training to be available if necessary.

#### **05/74 Nominations**

In the absence of the Convener, the Deputy General Secretary reported. He moved,

**Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, appoints Mr Stuart Dew as Church and Society Secretary from 10<sup>th</sup> October 2005 until 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007.**

**Mission Council agreed.**

He further asked that Mission Council note the appointments of the Revd Graham Jones as joint URC/Methodist rural consultant; and Mrs Linda Mead as Programme co-ordinator for 'Commitment for Life'

#### **05/75 Doctrine, Prayer and Worship**

The Revd Richard Mortimer reported that the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee would be doing more work (as directed by January 2005 Mission Council) on a paper setting out the Ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church.

He proposed a contents list for the document, consisting of:

1. A short definitive statement on the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church
2. A commentary on the Basis of Union
3. A commentary on the Statement of Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church
4. A commentary on World Council of Churches' publication 'The Nature and Mission of the Church'

In response to a question about the target audience for this paper, it was emphasised that the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship should be allowed to get on with its work without Mission Council changing its mind about content, style and target audience. It was most important that a document be widely available as a resource within the United Reformed Church and for discussions with ecumenical partners.

The Clerk requested that he should be involved at some stage in the drafting of material relating to items found in the Basis and Structure. Mr Mortimer, on behalf of the Committee assured Council that this would be done.

**Mission Council agreed that the work should be undertaken as outlined.**

### **Session 2**

#### **05/73 Staffing Advisory Group (continued)**

Mrs Morrison, on behalf of the Staffing Advisory Group moved:

Mission Council resolves that no action should be taken before March 2006 to fill on a permanent basis any post which may be vacant during this time. Mission Council notes that

the Staffing Advisory Group is currently in discussion with the Youth and Children's Work Committee regarding the post of Children's Advocate.

Mr John Ellis proposed that the words 'on a permanent basis' be replaced with 'beyond 2007'.

It was moved from the floor that the words 'Assembly Appointed', be included before post:  
Both amendments were agreed:

**Mission Council resolves that no action should be taken before March 2006 to fill beyond 2007 any Assembly appointed post which may be vacant during this time. Mission Council notes that the Staffing Advisory Group is currently in discussion with the Youth and Children's Work Committee regarding the post of Children's Advocate.**

***Mission Council agreed***

**05/76 Catch the Vision**

The General Secretary reflected on the progress of the Catch the Vision process.

- i) New structures would have to take account of the balance between trust and accountability in decision-making. The possibility of holding a regular meeting of representatives from every local church was being considered. There were concerns about meeting the Charity Commission's requirements on trusteeship, e.g. the number and particular expertise of trustees.
- ii) Ministry and Mission. The Honorary Treasurer described current practice in setting and achieving M&M targets, and noted that this was not as described in the Plan for Partnership. He hoped that synod treasurers would become more involved in the process of drafting the annual budget, and that the M&M process would return to that described in the Plan for Partnership, which appeared to have worked effectively in the past.  
Mr Chilton emphasised the importance of advocacy, and the need to rationalise the position of LEPs.
- iii) The General secretary spoke about programmes and staffing, noting that the Church's Assembly-based work was about enabling local mission. If the Ministry and Mission fund enabled local ministry, and therefore had to be protected, then financial savings must be found elsewhere. The Steering Group intended to draw up and cost a variety of possible scenarios, and to ask Mission Council to decide whether the greatest proportion of the Church's resources should indeed continue to be concentrated on funding local ministry. A related area for consideration was the way in which synods would manage ministerial resources.

Brief discussion in informal groups followed, from which the following comments and questions emerged.

- Local churches most naturally relate to Assembly staff.
- In attempting to work smarter locally; do we assess the value of ministers?; Do we use resources shrewdly enough?;
- Some synod work could be devolved to local churches; local centres of excellence, which become training centres for others, should be encouraged. Synods will be impossible to support with fewer people supporting them;
- What can we do to get more people into local churches? By giving a higher priority to growth and evangelism, or holding a United Reformed Church Sunday?;
- There comes a point in the life of a local church when all its resources are used up by focussing on survival; there needs to be some mechanism for helping failing churches to consider other options;

- Ministries Committee has a working party looking at ministers' training and development; it is impossible to assess ministry without a job description or 'key objectives' - but ministers don't know this because their churches don't have key objectives;
- Should ministerial appraisal be compulsory? Synod training of ministers has been very effective in West Midlands; local churches may need to review their life and be aware of the impression they make on visitors.

The Session was closed in worship led by the Chaplain.

### Session 3

#### 05/77 Catch the Vision (paper E)

The General Secretary introduced paper E. He noted that the paper was a draft, and sought Mission Council's comments and criticisms in order that it might be improved. He suggested that two sorts of discussion needed to take place:

(i) Discussions within synods about the kind of church which would best serve the needs of local churches. He noted the importance of District Pastoral Committees - though they have no formal place in the present structure.

Appendix 2 illustrated the model of the North Western Synod. The General Secretary asked that other models should be offered and examined.

(ii) Discussions between synods: there were structures and procedures which needed uniformity of application and practice throughout the United Reformed Church: (Section O; the procedures for candidating, calling, ordaining and inducting ministers).

The General Secretary responded to a number of points of clarification before Mission Council divided into groups for consideration of the following questions:

What else would it be helpful to include?

How else may the discussion process be helped?

How best can we share news from synod discussions re the process?

The Groups responded as follows:

#### Group A

- Other models from other synods would be helpful (in outline for Districts, and in detail for synods);
- The paper needs to be available to Districts and Synods *now*, and there is little to be gained by amending it at this stage.

#### Group B

- Paragraph 4 needs expansion;
- Synods which have not begun to think about these matters will find the timetable very tight;
- The process might be helped by offering more information.

#### Group C

- There is no reference to United Areas;
- Where will *episkope* be exercised ?
- The language of the paper could be more accessible;
- The paper needs to be presented in the context of Catch the Vision (CtV statement and CtV prayer);

- There is unease about the term 'new synod';
- How will synod moderators work in the new structure?
- There is no mention of finance, or local trustees;
- There needs to be a reference to the need for church buildings to be fit for their purpose;
- The document should be attractively produced as a 'marketing' paper.

#### **Group D**

- There needs to be greater concentration on the spiritual renewal of local congregations;
- Para 3: are we starting with what we are trying to achieve?
- The language of the document needs to be clearer;
- The geographical and demographic differences between synods should be stated .

#### **Group E**

- The paper needs to start with vision, and the experiences of those who are already some way down the road;
- The paper concentrates too heavily on the councils of the church;
- The proposed structures may be impractical.
- The paper could be more 'district friendly'.
- Where is the discussion to take place between the role of synods and General Assembly?
- The proposed time scale seems to short. While fulfilling the decision of Assembly, little time is allowed to examine alternatives
- Communication within synods and between synods is increasingly important.

#### **Group F**

- The ecumenical implications of changed structures need to be identified and stated more explicitly;
- Pastoral care and the consultation process: there may be many for whom the proposals may seem threatening, disempowering and devaluing. Seeing endings without clear new beginnings being in sight makes some people anxious.
- The document is too open ended and needs a clearer set of options. There is a tension between bottom-up and top-down proposals;
- Coherence among synods and what it means to be the United Reformed Church: diversity and flexibility are good, but not when they lead to division and confusion.

#### **Group G**

- It will be difficult to steer change through consecutive Assemblies if Assembly only meets every two years;
- The document should say something more scriptural/theological;
- Pastoral care of churches exercised through a single synod pastoral committee seems too big and distant;
- Districts and churches should encourage a greater use of PowerPoint;
- Each church should have a mission statement, so that its effectiveness can be determined and monitored.

#### **Group H**

- Para 2: remove the first sentence;
- Para 5: explain explicitly the reasons for the changes;
- Remove notes 1 and 2 (page 2);
- Para 7: it would be helpful to separate the two different time scales;
- If districts or synods dissent, they should be allowed to give their reasons.

The General Secretary responded to a number of the points raised.

## Session 4

### 05/78 Report on 'Lessons to be Learnt'

The Moderator welcomed Dr Lesley Orr, the Revd Carla Grosch-Miller and the Revd Peter Poulter.

The Deputy General Secretary outlined the background to the presentation by Dr Orr. Mission Council received a report from an Assembly Commission in March 2003 concerning the history of a dispute between a minister and the councils of the Church, which had at its root a case of alleged historic sexual abuse. The Commission had been established to draw the threads of this protracted case together, to assess the options open to the minister and the Church, and to make recommendations. This it did. The last of several recommendations was that a review group should be set up to consider lessons the Church should learn from this case, and to make recommendations to Mission Council for future good practice.

The report was now complete, but because of the approach the authors had taken, the Deputy General Secretary (with advice from the legal adviser) had judged that Mission Council should understand the methodology of writing and reporting which the Group had requested, before releasing it to Mission Council.

Dr Orr (the principal author of the report) was invited to set out the parameters of the report for Mission Council.

Dr Orr stated that the task had been a privilege, a challenge and a journey. She said that many of her comments were made on her own behalf and were not necessarily the view of others in the group.

Sexual abuse in the context of the church ( in every tradition and denomination) was a very difficult and serious concern, especially by ministers or others with pastoral responsibilities against those within their care. Though it had been unacknowledged for a long time, in the past ten years people were coming forward and claiming recognition of their suffering at the hands of the church.

The particular case which had given cause to this report and had engaged the councils of the United Reformed Church over a long time was not unique. (Dr Orr had been involved in research in this area of study, acting as a consultant for the World Council of Churches, which was paying particular attention during this decade on abuse and violence in the church).

In Britain this concern has been raised in many traditions. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland had made a clear call for justice for survivors in the book 'Time for Action'. The worst thing for a survivor of sexual abuse was not to be believed or to be treated as if the matter were trivial. Abuse was deeply damaging to individuals and to the corporate life of the Church.

The Task Group had been immersed in the particularities of a single situation for some time; the matter will be unknown to many in Mission Council; yet there was a story which had been compounded by the ongoing responses of the various councils of the church.

There was need to look at the broad picture, and see how one case of abuse had 'rippled out' to affect individuals and the councils of the Church.

The group's work resulted from a report of an Assembly Commission, which was itself a flawed and inappropriate process. Even the work of the review group had been affected, shaped and had become part of a story of fear and hurt.

The group was asked to consider how the various parts of the church's structure had responded to the case. The group had done this, but these terms of reference were inadequate to provide appropriate recommendations for changes of policy and procedure. A deeper framework of understanding was needed, and this analysis was a major part of the report. The particular case and the general principles had to be considered together. The report therefore had woven together elements of the story of 'Minister A' with general conclusions, principles and proposals.

Dr Orr outlined the content of the report. The group started from a particular situation, a point of pastoral crisis, with stories and information that had to be related to underlying values, assumptions and realities.

The group had to discuss and consult with those involved in the story, including Minister A and her family, as well as those involved in Councils and others affected by similar cases. The Group had consulted resources available from other churches and elsewhere in the world.

There needed to be a systematic way of evaluating information, reflecting, followed by action. Action based on reflection was the task of Mission Council with the resource and support of the review group.

**Section B** of the report looked at the question of clergy sexual misconduct and abuse, noting that the term 'clergy' included more than ministers. There was often a confusion between an adult consensual relationship and a case of abuse, the responsibility always lying with the 'professional'. Abuse was not always physical, but could include remarks, jokes, gestures and comments.

The report addressed definitions; why it is wrong; clergy abuse in context; systems of oppression; their spiritual and theological impact; why don't people tell; its impact and consequences; pastoral justice – the church's response; abuse, injury and trauma; the determinants and effects of trauma; hope and healing: treatment and recovery

Some people can survive abuse effectively; for others the consequences are devastatingly traumatic. Trauma is contaminating, affecting relatives, friends and those who try to help; organisations also suffer the effects of trauma.

Symptoms of trauma in groups and individuals were described.

**Section C** examined The Church as Sanctuary – its failures and loss of safety; how right could be done. There were also recommendations specifically about Minister A.

**Section D** proposed a strategy for responding to sexual abuse, with recommendations for action and policy in the United Reformed Church; saying sorry

Dr Orr outlined her view on the direction the process should now take:

- that the whole report as prepared by review group be distributed to and read by Mission Council;
- that there should be no discussion prior to meeting;
- that a special day- long meeting be arranged to consider the report, the issues and the recommendations;
- that immediate action (where possible) be taken about Minister A;



- that a process be established to plan the meeting at which the report would be discussed, facilitated by an independent person with expertise on issues of sexual abuse and experience in group work and group dynamics.

Dr Orr maintained that empowerment and control were among the fundamental principles of recovery from trauma. Minister A therefore needed to be involved. An independent facilitator would allow this to happen in a safe environment. A 'wise person' needed to accompany this process; minister A needed an advocate and pastoral support. Dr Orr stressed her strong opinion that the process should be conducted in the way recommended by the group, and that was (in her opinion) non-negotiable.

The Moderator invited the other two members of the Group to express their own comments about the report and the proposed process. The Revd Carla Grosch-Miller emphasised that many lives had been touched by this case. The Revd Peter Poulter was concerned to ensure that what was brought to Mission Council was reasonable and deliverable.

Mrs Melanie Frew asked whether it was appropriate to meet in closed session at this point. The Moderator ruled that this was unnecessary.

The Legal adviser, Mr Andrew Middleton, was invited to comment. He stated his concerns about the recommended process, which, he hoped, would be taken into account before the report was considered by Mission Council.

The following comments were made during discussion:-

- that it was impossible now to interview the perpetrator, but in future cases it would be essential to interview the perpetrator;
- that the Church's leadership should address the matters in the report concerning a specific case in private; and the more general aspects of the matter should be dealt with in public

The Legal Adviser believed that, if the group felt the Terms of Reference, under which it was working, were too narrow, it should have gone back to the commissioning body for advice rather than go ahead on different terms. The Legal Adviser's understanding of the terms of reference was that details of Minister A's case should not be included in the report, and therefore the report in its present form should not be circulated; He was not convinced that the report presented a balanced view. Neither could he envisage this Council of the church being in dialogue with Minister A. The case of 'Minister A' needed to be separated from the more general issue.

In response, Peter Poulter said that an important element of the discussion was for the matter to be owned and accepted by a council of the church. Some of the people hurt in the past had been councils of the church. He was uncomfortable with the private/public distinction. Though dialogue between a council and minister A would be difficult, it would be a challenge facing the person invited to facilitate the Council if it was conducted in the manner which the report recommended.

Mr Poulter said that the remit of the Group had been to look at present practice and make recommendations about future improvements. The report represented a necessary and proper fulfilment of that remit. By agreeing to discuss the report, Mission Council was not automatically committing itself to accept the report's recommendations: they remained the views of the Group which had been formed through listening to and reflecting on the stories of those involved. The Group had been advised that the alleged perpetrator was no longer a member of the United Reformed Church and was therefore beyond reach. To come to a balanced view was almost impossible.

Mrs Grosch-Miller added that the Group had no business in establishing facts; nor was it in a position to evaluate medical advice, which had conflicted over the years. She believed it would serve the interests of Minister A and the church to separate the 'private' and the 'public'. The Church's pastoral responsibility must be dominant; there needed to be wider dissemination of the systemic recommendations, and injustice done to Minister A and others. It would be sensible for Mission Council to see the report and discuss it in closed session.

Mr Nigel Macdonald, seconded by Derek Hopkins, proposed that Mission Council should receive the report in its entirety, numbered copies to be handed back, and that the systemic recommendation be disseminated more widely, reference to Minister A having been removed as appropriate.

Mission Council agreed that the resolution be put in two parts

The Revd Arnold Harrison moved that the second half of the motion (on wider dissemination) be not put. The mover agreed to withdraw.

The Revd Roger Scopes moved that **Mission Council receives the report, reads it, and decide upon action then (with the help of a facilitator)**. This was seconded by Arnold Harrison.

The Honorary Treasurer sought assurances that the Legal Adviser would be present at a meeting where this report was received and such assurances were given by the Legal Adviser. Mr Chilton went on to comment that if acceptance of the report it would be our legal responsibility.

**Mission Council adopted the Resolution of Mr Scopes and agreed that the report would be received and discussed as the sole business of the January meeting of Mission Council.**

The Deputy General Secretary then moved the Resolution:

**Mission Council resolves to appoint a group of five people to act as the sole point of contact between Minister A and the Church on specified matters (e.g. Assembly matters, synod matters, district council matters, pastoral care, requests for grants, etc). The named contact individuals will be provided with relevant training about complex PTSD and its impact, and will negotiate and agree terms of the contact with Minister A. Together these people (with the advice where necessary of mental health professionals treating her) will establish a strategy for constructive communication with Minister A on a day-to-day basis and be responsible for the oversight of each stage of the church's participation in the process**

On an enquiry as to whether this had the agreement of Minister A, Mr Poulter stated that Minister A was aware of the proposal and was prepared to discuss it

**The resolution was carried.**

Mission Council expressed its appreciation to the members of the review group.

## **Session 5**

### **05/79 Aspects of training**

The Moderator introduced Hannah Middleton, Christ Eddoes, and Trevor Jamieson, (from the Northern Synod), each of whom was invited to speak of her/his experience of training in the United Reformed Church.

The session ended by the chaplain leading Mission Council in worship.

## **Session 6**

### **05/80 January Mission Council**

The Deputy General Secretary sought confirmation of the proposed arrangements for the meeting of Mission Council on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2006:

- that the day would be spent discussing the report written by Dr Lesley Orr, the Revd's Carla Grosch-Miller and Peter Poulter;
- that Mission Council would meet in closed session;
- that members of Mission Council would receive numbered copies of the report (with names removed) on arrival and return them at the end of the day;
- that a facilitator be invited to be present to help the Council understand and discuss the report and its implications;
- that no further decisions would be made on the content of the report ( as outlined in Dr Orr's presentation) until it had been received and discussed by the Council;
- that Minister A would not be present, but that those matters in the report which required a pastoral or therapeutic response did not have to wait until January Mission Council.
- those issues relating to Minister A's relationship with the United Reformed Church would not be discussed with her or anyone else until Mission Council had met;
- that others who had been affected by the history of minister A's case would (for the sake of justice and moving on) have the opportunity to express their views at a later date.

### **Mission Council confirmed these arrangements**

The Deputy General Secretary also advised that Mission Council Advisory Group might need to hold an additional meeting in January or February to deal with items which would normally be dealt with by the January Mission Council. It might also mean that MCAG would have to judge more strictly than usual the priority of business being brought to March Mission Council.

### **05/81 Nominations**

The Clerk notified Mission Council of nominations for the London Synod Group, and explained the ballot procedure.

### **05/82 Church and Society (paper C)**

The Revd Martin Camroux presented the resolution:

#### **Mission Council**

1. Expresses its support for our partner churches around the world who are actively engaged in reviewing their investments with the aim of a progressive engagement with companies which are impeding efforts to secure a just peace among Israelis and Palestinians including a process of phased, selective disinvestment of stock in companies whose operations support the occupation of Palestine.

2. Calls on the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to review our investments in like manner and report back to the January Mission Council.
3. Calls on other church bodies, including synods, and on individual members of the United Reformed Church, to engage in a similar review.

Mr John Ellis proposed the amendment:

(i) to revise the first line of "1" to read:

"...notes that some of our partner churches around the world are actively....."

(ii) to revise "2" to read:

'...calls on the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to advise a future Mission Council what actions the United Reformed Church should take.'

and

(iii) to delete "3"

This was seconded by Mr Eric Chilton

The Clerk left the table in order to speak to the amendment

Following discussion, the amendment was put to the vote. The amendment was carried.

Revd D Grosch-Miller proposed the replacement of 'should' with 'may', seconded by Dr Tony Jeans. This amendment was carried.

The substantive resolution was put to the vote:

#### **Mission Council**

1. notes that some of our partner churches around the world are actively engaged in reviewing their investments with the aim of a progressive engagement with companies which are impeding efforts to secure a just peace among Israelis and Palestinians including a process of phased, selective disinvestment of stock in companies whose operations support the occupation of Palestine.
2. calls on the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to advise a future Mission Council what actions the United Reformed Church should take.

**The Resolution was carried.**

The Clerk returned to the Table.

#### **05/83 Time for Action (paper F)**

The Revd Peter Poulter presented the paper, briefly outlining its contents, responded to a number of questions and comments, and undertook, with Mrs Sheila Brain to incorporate alterations in a final document to be sent to all local churches, districts and synods.

#### **05/84 Closed Session**

Mission Council moved into closed session. Two letters of complaint were reported to Mission Council, and, after discussion, were dismissed.

Members of Mission Council asked the General Secretary to pursue with the Legal Advisor legal questions relating to these complaints, and the possibility of routing all correspondence with the complainant through the Legal Advisor's office.

A number of members of Mission Council suggested a reconsideration of the plans for the January Mission Council.

Mission Council returned to open session.

**05/85 Catch the Vision**

The General Secretary spoke on the history and development of Reformed Spirituality.

**05/86 Nominations**

The Deputy General Secretary announced that the following had been elected, subject to their availability, to the London Synod Group: Revd Wilf Bahadur; Mrs Sheila Brain; Revd Heather Pencavel; Revd Malcolm Hanson; Ms Rachel Greening.

**05/87 Theological Reflector**

The theological reflector, the Revd Sheilagh Kesting, addressed Mission Council, outlining her impressions of the meeting.

**05/88 Close**

The Moderator thanked the Deputy General Secretary, his P.A. and Church House staff for their input and preparation. He also thanked the Chaplain for her support and leadership.

The meeting concluded with worship, which included the Sacrament of Holy Communion.



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

1<sup>st</sup> September 2005

Dear Colleague

**Mission Council: 4-6 October 2005**  
**Ushaw College, Durham**  
**Telephone 0191 373 8502**

I write to remind you that Mission Council will meet in Durham in less than five weeks' time. To ensure that our arrangements are completed in time, I would ask you to supply us with the information we need about your requirements for accommodation, meals and transport.

It would be very helpful if you could reply as soon, and certainly **within a week**, of your receiving this letter. Responses by telephone (020 7916 8646), fax (020 7916 2021) or e-mail ([krystyna.bilogan@urc.org.uk](mailto:krystyna.bilogan@urc.org.uk)) are very welcome.

Enclosed are some preliminary papers:

- directions to Ushaw College, Durham
- a list of members (to help people plan to share transport, where possible)
- an expense slip (to be completed and handed in at the meeting)
- background information about Mission Council
- a form about your accommodation and meal requests, and certain other necessary information.

1. Registration at Ushaw College will take place from 2.30 p.m. on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup>. Tea will be served from 3.30 p.m. and the first session of Mission Council will commence at 4 p.m. For those arriving in Durham by train, we plan to arrange for minibuses to meet the 14.17 from Edinburgh; and the 14.29 from London. Please indicate on the form if you wish to take advantage of the minibus service.

(If there are any problems caused by trains being late or people arriving by train at other times, you are asked to share a taxi to Ushaw College (about three miles from Durham railway station). Taxis and minibuses should be paid for directly, and claims should be submitted (with receipts) alongside other expense claims to Krystyna Pullen.

2. There are no bedrooms on the ground floor at Ushaw College, but there is a lift to the first floor. If you have a mobility problem, and would like to be allocated a room near the lift or a toilet, please indicate on the form.

We are assured that there is a sufficient number of single bedrooms to accommodate everybody, but (in case of unforeseen problems) we would be grateful to know of anyone who is prepared to share a room.

3. You are invited to volunteer to be a group leader and/or reporter for the year 2005-6. If a sufficient number of people take their turn, no one should have to volunteer for more than once in the year.

Although the agenda is still to be finalised, Mission Council will consider the next stage of the 'Catch the Vision' process after the clear endorsement of Mission Council's proposals at General Assembly. There is also a major report to be received and discussed on good practice in the church (and lessons to be learnt) concerning safety from sexual abuse. Papers on these and other matters shall be sent out in about three weeks' time.


4. Mission Council dates and venues already agreed for 2006 are:

Saturday 21 January 2006 at The Arthur Rank Centre, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire  
Friday 24 - Sunday 26 March at The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick  
Tuesday 3 - Thursday 5 October at All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney

I look forward to seeing you in Durham on October 4<sup>th</sup>.

With good wishes.

Yours sincerely

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

The Revd Raymond Adams  
Deputy General Secretary



## MISSION COUNCIL 4-6 October 2005

### What are we about in Mission Council?

This paper is written particularly with those new to Mission Council in mind.

#### The original vision

This was set out in the Reports to the Assembly of 1992.

*"The purpose of the Mission Council is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and the policy of the Church, to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the community.*

*Its service is directly towards the Assembly, but its concern is with the whole church and all its members, so it will seek to be aware of the pains and joys, the adventures and hopes of the whole body. As the Assembly is representative of the whole Church, so the Mission Council will listen to and will serve the local churches, to help them in their missionary vocation.*

*It is a Mission Council and so the aim it will have in mind is to ensure that all we undertake centrally and all we are as a denomination is directed towards the mission of God in the world, towards that Kingdom of justice, peace, forgiveness and hope which is true life and which Christ brings in his person.*

*The Council will ask, is this programme, this appointment, this budget, this grant, this statement designed to further the overall mission, or simply to maintain our human structures of institutional life? It is by such criteria that priorities will have to be assessed, not only when new work is proposed but as the existing work of the church is reviewed".*

#### The members

Each of the 13 synods are represented by 4 people, including its Moderator. These 52 people form the main body of the membership. The other significant group of members is the 14 Conveners of Assembly standing committees. FURY Council has 2 representatives. Finally, the Assembly officers and certain other officers of the Church are members. This currently adds up to a total of 77 but the actual membership is slightly less as a few people are members in more than one category.

#### In attendance

The number present at any Council meeting is usually around 90. This is because a number of members of staff and other consultants are present to advise the conveners and the Council itself. Whilst they do not have a vote and can only speak with permission, those in this category participate in group work and in many ways play a very important part in the life of the Council.



## Paper

There are normally 2 mailings before each Council. The first contains practical information about the Council and may include other reports if they are ready. The second contains the agenda and timetable, and (as far as possible) all other papers to be considered by the Council. You need to build reading time into your diary in the week before every meeting!

## Meetings

The Council meets 3 times a year, in October and March residentially for 48 hours, in January for a full Saturday. The meetings relate very much to the General Assembly: in October we take up any matters referred by Assembly, in January we begin to look ahead to the next one, and in March we focus on the Assembly in the following July. Our input also comes from committees of Assembly, which may want advice or decision, from the task groups we appoint and from the synods. In practice, time taken by the first two of these categories has often been to the detriment of the third. A conscious attempt is being made to discern the Church's mission agenda as much through the experience and insights of local churches, districts and synods as through Assembly committees and Mission Council task groups.

## Style of meeting

Worship and Bible Study are central to our meeting. They are the responsibility of the Moderator and her/his Chaplain. Much of the time we meet in plenary session, with the Moderator in the chair and the Clerk keeping us in order. Normal rules for the conduct of business apply, although hopefully we can usually be more informal than an Assembly. It helps if speakers identify themselves. We use small groups in a variety of ways: through fixed group sessions, and informal buzz groups. Our normal practice is to change the membership of groups for each meeting. The style of our working together is most affected by the opportunity for informal conversations at coffee breaks and meal times.

## Advice

Advice is welcome from all quarters but Mission Council has 3 standing Advisory Groups. Mission Council Advisory Group (MCAG) plans the agenda and necessary follow up, and provides support for the Moderator and General Secretary. The Staffing Advisory Group (SAG) considers staff posts due to become vacant and proposals for new posts, and brings appropriate recommendations to Mission Council through RPAG. The Grants and Loans Group considers and co-ordinates central grants. It makes an annual report to Mission Council. Elections to these groups normally take place at the March meeting, although casual vacancies have to be filled from time to time.

## Making Connections

All this is about what happens at Mission Council. Whilst at their best our meetings are "aware of the pains and joys, the adventures and hopes of the whole body", to many in the Church, Mission Council seems very remote. Therefore a key role of the synod representatives in particular is to act as channels of communication, before and after meetings, and in both directions.

## Administration

The administration and planning of Mission Council is the responsibility of the Deputy General Secretary, to whom all reasonable comments and questions may be addressed.

Ray Adams  
September 2005 revision



# MISSION COUNCIL

4 – 6 OCTOBER 2005

## MEMBERS AND REPRESENTATIVES

The Moderator  
General Secretary  
Deputy General Secretary  
Clerk

Revd Dr David Peel  
Revd Dr David Cornick  
Revd Ray Adams  
Revd James Breslin

Past Moderator  
Moderator Elect  
Treasurer  
Legal Adviser

Revd Sheila Maxey  
Revd Elizabeth Caswell  
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 Brian Jolly  
Revd Martin Camroux  
Revd Kathryn Price  
Revd Elizabeth Nash  
Mr John Ellis  
Revd John Humphreys  
Mr Eric Chilton  
Revd Martin Hazell  
Revd Dr Stephen Orchard  
Mr William McVey  
Revd Wilf Bahadur  
Revd Dr John Parry  
Revd Andrew Prasad

### Fury Council

Mr Gareth Jones  
Miss Fleur James

### 13 synod Moderators, plus 3 representatives from each synod

1 N	Revd Peter Poulter	Revd Colin Offor, Revd John Durell, Mrs Maranny Jones
2 N.W	Revd Peter Brain	Miss Kathleen Cross, Revd Alan Wickens Mr George Morton (temp)
3 Mer	Revd Howard Sharp	Mr Donald Swift, Revd Jenny Morgan, Mrs Wilma Prentice
4 York	Revd Arnold Harrison	Revd Pauline Loosemore, Mr Roderick Garthwaite, Mrs Val Morrison
5 E.M	Revd Terry Oakley	Mrs Irene Wren, Revd Yolande Burns, Mrs Margaret Gately
6 W.M	Revd Elizabeth Welch	Mrs Melanie Frew, Revd Anthony Howells, Mr Bill Robson (Dr Tony Jeans Oct05)
7 E	Revd Elizabeth Caswell	Revd Victor Ridgewell, Mr Mick Barnes, Mrs Joan Turner
8 S.W	Revd David Grosch-Miller	Revd Roz Harrison, Mrs Janet Gray, Revd Richard Pope
9 Wex	Revd Adrian Bulley	Revd Clive Sutcliffe, Mrs Glenis Massey, Mrs Ruth Whitehead
10 Th.N	Revd Roberta Rominger	Revd Dr Roger Scopes, Revd John Macaulay, Mr David Eldridge
11 S	Revd Nigel Uden	Dr Graham Campling, Mr Nigel Macdonald, Mrs Maureen Lawrence
12 Wal	Revd Peter Noble	Revd Stuart Jackson, Mrs Barbara Shapland, Mrs Liz Tadd
13 Scot	Revd John Humphreys	Revd Alan Paterson, Miss Irene Hudson, Mr Patrick Smyth

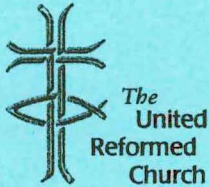
### In attendance

Minute Secretary  
Moderator's Chaplain  
Reform Editor  
Training  
International Church Relations  
Ministries  
Youth Work  
HR & Facilities Manager  
Church Related Community  
Work  
Theological Reflector

Revd Ken Forbes  
Revd Jill Thornton  
Revd David Lawrence  
Revd Roy Lowes  
Revd Philip Woods  
Revd Christine Craven  
Mr John Brown  
Miss Michelle Marcano  
Mrs Suzanne Adofo/  
Mr Stephen Summers  
Revd Sheilagh Kesting  
(Church of Scotland)

Rural Consultant -  
Grants & Loans Conv. Dr Brian Woodhall  
Church & Society -  
Pilots Dev'tment Officer Mrs Karen Bulley  
Ecumenical Relations Revd Richard Mortimer  
Windermere Cntr Dir. Mr Lawrence Moore  
Communications Mrs Carol Rogers  
Children's Advocate Mrs Rosemary Johnston  
Racial Justice Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams  
Life & Witness Revd John Steele





## MISSION COUNCIL 4-6 October 2005

## 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?

### TUESDAY 4th

3.00 p.m. onwards *Check in*

3.30p.m. *Tea*

4.00 p.m.

#### Session 1

Opening Worship

Welcome to guests and new members

Apologies for absence

Notice of additional business

Minutes of Mission Council held 4-6 March 2005

Matters arising

Matters Arising from General Assembly (report by the clerk)

Reports

a) The Hon Treasurer

b) Advisory Groups:

Mission Council Advisory Group

(Paper B)

Staffing Advisory Group

c) Nominations Committee

d) Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee

e) Ministries Committee

(Paper G)

6.30 p.m.

*Dinner*

7.30 p.m.

#### Session 2

Catch the Vision - 1:

The General Secretary

followed by a discussion

8.40 p.m.

Evening Prayers

### WEDNESDAY 5th

8.00 a.m.

Morning Prayer

8.30a.m.

*Breakfast*

9.30 a.m.

#### Session 3

Bible Study

Catch the Vision – 2: Proposed guidance for synods and districts (Paper E)

10.30a.m.

*Coffee*

11.00a.m.

#### Session 4

Groups

Plenary session (starting by 11.45 a.m.)

- 1.00 p.m.                      *Lunch*
- 2.30 p.m.                      Session 5  
Introduction to the consideration of a report on 'Lessons to be learnt' by the United Reformed Church from the case of a particular minister and issues of sexual abuse
- 3.30p.m.                      *Tea*
4. 00p.m.                      Session 6  
Continuation of Session 5  
Church and Society Committee resolution on Progressive Engagement  
(Paper C)  
'Time for Action' – material for local churches  
(Paper F)
- followed by free time ( for some)  
(5.15 p.m. Meeting of Assembly Committee Conveners, chaired by the General Secretary)
- 6.30p.m.                      *Dinner*
- 7.30p.m.                      Session 7  
*Aspects of Training* - as background to the Training Review, three guests will speak about the way their participation in United Reformed Church training programmes have helped and equipped them for service. The session is introduced and chaired by the Moderator, Dr David Peel.
- 8.30p.m.                      Evening Prayers

**THURSDAY 6<sup>th</sup>**

- 8.00 a.m.                      Morning Prayer
- 8.30 a.m.                      *Breakfast*
- 9.15 a.m.                      Session 8  
Remaining business  
  
Catch the Vision – 3: A personal perspective of Reformed spirituality:  
Dr David Comick
- 10.30 a.m.                      *Coffee*
- 10.50 a.m.                      Session 9  
Continuation and final reflections
- 11.40 a.m.                      Service of Holy Communion in St Cuthbert's Chapel
- 12.30 p.m.                      *Lunch and Departures*



The  
United  
Reformed  
Church

## MISSION COUNCIL 4 – 6 October 2005

## AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

### TUESDAY 4th

#### Session 1

4 p.m. Opening Worship

**4.30 p.m.** Welcome to guests and new members

The Moderator welcomes

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell (Moderator –elect)

The Revd Sheilagh Kesting (theological reflector);

Mrs Maranny Jones representing Northern synod

The Revd Alan Wickens representing North Western synod

The Revd Jennifer Morgan representing Mersey synod

The Revd Yolande Burns and Mrs Margaret Gately representing East Midlands synod

The Revd Ruth Whitehead representing Wessex synod

Mr David Eldridge representing Thames North synod

Mrs Maureen Lawrence and Mr Nigel Macdonald representing Southern synod

Mrs Barbara Shapland and Mrs Liz Tadd representing Synod of Wales

Mr Patrick Smyth representing the Synod of Scotland

The Revd John Young (deputising for Alan Paterson) Synod of Scotland

The Revd Mary Buchanan (deputising for Irene Hudson) Synod of Scotland

The Revd Dr Susan Durber (Convener of Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee)

Ms Sara Paton ( deputising for Fleur James) FURY

Mr Derek Hopkins (deputising for Wilf Bahadur) convener of Equal Opportunities Committee.

The Revd Jill Thornton (Moderator's chaplain)

In view of the large number of new representatives, the Moderator may care to introduce those on the top table

#### Apologies for absence

The DGS leads: Apologies from

Mrs Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland)

The Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland)

Ms Fleur James (FURY)

Mr Gareth Jones (FURY Chair)

The Revd Wilf Bahadur (Equal Opportunities)

The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard (Nominations)

The Revd Dr John Parry (Interfaith)

The Revd Andrew Prasad ( Racial Justice and Multi-cultural Ministries)

Mr Steve Summers (CRCW Development Worker)

The Revd John Steele (Secretary for Life and Witness)

**4.40 p.m.** Notice of additional business and reflection on the agenda

The DGS leads – nothing additional except some thoughts about content and style of the agenda to be shared. Some reference to **(Paper A)** from March's Mission Council – could lead to a little time being given for further comments if people want to make them.

Minutes of Mission Council held 4-6 March 2005

Moderator to ask if there are any comments, before seeking agreement to sign minutes.

**Matters arising**

The DGS leads: - invite John Ellis to report on the progress of the Gambling Bill (05/29)

**Matters Arising from General Assembly**

The Clerk will explain why Resolutions 8,9,10,11 which Assembly remitted to Mission Council, cannot be brought.

The General Secretary will propose a way of progressing Resolution 42 (re London synod)

**4.50 p.m. Reports**

a) The Hon Treasurer

b) Advisory Groups:

Mission Council Advisory Group - The DGS will present the report **(Paper B)**

Staffing Advisory Group - Mrs Val Morrison (Convener) will report

c) Nominations Committee

In the absence of the convener (Dr Stephen Orchard),  
the Deputy General Secretary will report

a) The new URC/ Methodist joint post holder as Rural Consultant is **the Revd Graham Jones** (Methodist) from 1st January 2006 until 31st December 2010.

b) **Mr Stuart Dew** has been appointed as Church and Society Secretary from 10th October 2005 until 9th October 2007. (Mission Council will have to recognise this appointment, acting on behalf of General Assembly) .

c) **Mrs Linda Mead** has been appointed as Programme Co-ordinator for 'Commitment for Life' from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2005 until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2008 (to be noted - this post has not been an Assembly appointment up until now).

d) Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee

The convener (Dr Susan Durber) or Secretary (Richard Mortimer) will lead (Paper on Ecclesiology in process)

e) Ministries Committee

**(Paper G)**

The Treasurer will lead

**(Additional Business concerning appeals/ complaints by Minister A - could be taken here if Moderator decides this be brought directly to Mission Council)**

**The DGS - NOTICES**

a) any housekeeping notices

b) Meet Group leaders immediately after the end of the session

c) Draw attention to a proposed meeting of Assembly Committee conveners at 5.15 p.m. on Wednesday.

**6.30 p.m.** *Dinner*

**7.30 p.m.** Session 2

Catch the Vision - 1: The General Secretary to lead on this followed by a discussion. The timing of evening prayers is flexible.

8.40 p.m. Evening Prayers

### WEDNESDAY 5th

8.00 a.m. Morning Prayer

8.30a.m. *Breakfast*

9.30 a.m. Session 3  
Bible Study/theological reflection - *The Moderator*

**9.50 a.m.** Catch the Vision – 2: Proposed guidance for synods and districts (**Paper E**)  
*The General Secretary will lead on this*

**10.28 a.m.** *The DGS to give any notices, and arrangements and location for groups during the next session*

10.30a.m. *Coffee*

11.00a.m. Session 4  
Groups

**11.50 for 12** Plenary session

1.00 p.m. *Lunch*

2.30 p.m. Session 5  
Introduction to the consideration of a report on 'Lessons to be learnt' by the United Reformed Church from the case of a particular minister and issues of sexual abuse - *Dr Lesley Orr should be welcomed (also the Revds Carla Grosch-Miller and Peter Poulter who are also present, and members of the review group)*

3.30p.m. *Tea*

4. 00p.m. Session 6  
Continuation of Session 5  
Church and Society Committee resolution on Progressive Engagement  
**(Paper C)**  
'Time for Action' – material for local churches **(Paper F)**  
*(Peter Poulter may wish to make some comments, but subject to comments from Mission Council, this is ready for circulating to churches. Ray can announce when this will be done)*

*.....followed by free time ( for some)*

*(5.15 p.m. Meeting of Assembly Committee Conveners, chaired by the General Secretary)*

6.30p.m. *Dinner*

7.30p.m. Session 7  
*Aspects of Training* - as background to the Training Review, three guests will speak about the way their participation in United Reformed Church training programmes have helped and equipped them for service. The session is introduced and chaired by the Moderator, Dr David Peel.

8.30p.m. Evening Prayers



## THURSDAY 6<sup>th</sup>

8.00 a.m. Morning Prayer

8.30 a.m. *Breakfast*

9.15 a.m. Session 8  
Remaining business :  
e.g. *Nominations for GLG Group secretary – if any*

Catch the Vision – 3: A personal perspective of Reformed spirituality:  
Dr David Cornick

10.30 a.m. *Coffee*

10.50 a.m. Session 9  
Continuation of Catch the Vision 3 –  
and final reflections on the Council: (*The Revd Sheilagh Kesting – theological reflector – may wish to make some preliminary comments, before submitting a written reflection which will submit be sent out with the Minutes*)

*The Moderator may wish to thank various people*

11.40 a.m. Service of Holy Communion in St Cuthbert's Chapel

12.30 p.m. *Lunch and Departures*



# MISSION COUNCIL

4 - 6 October 2005

# AGENDA AND TIMETABLE

## TUESDAY 4th

### Session 1

4 p.m. Opening Worship

**4.30 p.m.** Welcome to guests and new members

The Moderator welcomes

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell (Moderator –elect)

The Revd Sheilagh Kesting (theological reflector);

Mrs Maranny Jones representing Northern synod

The Revd Alan Wickens representing North Western synod

The Revd Jennifer Morgan representing Mersey synod

~~The Revd Yolande Burns~~ and Mrs Margaret Gately representing East Midlands synod

The Revd Ruth Whitehead representing Wessex synod

Mr David Eldridge representing Thames North synod

Mrs Maureen Lawrence and Mr Nigel Macdonald representing Southern synod

Mrs Barbara Shapland and Mrs Liz Tadd representing Synod of Wales

Mr Patrick Smyth representing the Synod of Scotland

The Revd John Young (deputising for Alan Paterson) Synod of Scotland

The Revd Mary Buchanan (deputising for Irene Hudson) Synod of Scotland

apologos.

*Tony James rep. W. Midlands,  
John McAuley - Thames N.*

The Revd Dr Susan Durber (Convener of Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee)

Ms Sara Paton (deputising for Fleur James) FURY

Mr Derek Hopkins (deputising for Wilf Bahadur) convener of Equal Opportunities Committee.

The Revd Jill Thornton (Moderator's chaplain)

In view of the large number of new representatives, the Moderator may care to introduce those on the top table

### Apologies for absence

The DGS leads: Apologies from

Mrs Irene Hudson (Synod of Scotland)

The Revd Alan Paterson (Synod of Scotland)

Ms Fleur James (FURY)

Mr Gareth Jones (FURY Chair)

The Revd Wilf Bahadur (Equal Opportunities)

The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard (Nominations)

The Revd Dr John Parry (Interfaith)

The Revd Andrew Prasad (Racial Justice and Multi-cultural Ministries)

Mr Steve Summers (CRCW Development Worker)

The Revd John Steele (Secretary for Life and Witness)

*The Revd Yolande Burns, (E. Midland  
Mrs Karen Bulley (Pilots Devel. Work  
The Revd Brian Jolley (Life +  
Witness committee)  
(Peter Noble to be late)*

**4.40 p.m.** Notice of additional business and reflection on the agenda

The DGS leads – nothing additional except some thoughts about content and style of the agenda to be shared. Some reference to (Paper A) from March's Mission Council – could lead to a little time being given for further comments if people want to make them.

Minutes of Mission Council held 4-6 March 2005

Moderator to ask if there are any comments, before seeking agreement to sign minutes.

Matters arising

The DGS leads: - invite John Ellis to report on the progress of the Gambling Bill (05/29)

Matters Arising from General Assembly

The Clerk will explain why Resolutions 8,9,10,11 which Assembly remitted to Mission Council, cannot be brought. *to be remitted*

The General Secretary will propose a way of progressing Resolution 42 (re London synod)

**4.50 p.m.** Reports

a) The Hon Treasurer

b) Advisory Groups:

Mission Council Advisory Group - The DGS will present the report (Paper B)

Staffing Advisory Group - Mrs Val Morrison (Convener) will report

5.50 p.m.

c) Nominations Committee

In the absence of the convener (Dr Stephen Orchard), the Deputy General Secretary will report

a) The new URC/ Methodist joint post holder as Rural Consultant is the Revd Graham Jones (Methodist) from 1st January 2006 until 31st December 2010.

b) Mr Stuart Dew has been appointed as Church and Society Secretary from 10th October 2005 until 9th October 2007. (Mission Council will have to recognise this appointment, acting on behalf of General Assembly).

c) Mrs Linda Mead has been appointed as Programme Co-ordinator for 'Commitment for Life' from 1st October 2005 until 30th September 2008 (to be noted - this post has not been an Assembly appointment up until now).

- CJ Forum

5.55 p.m. (actual)

d) Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee

The convener (Dr Susan Durber) or Secretary (Richard Mortimer) will lead (Paper on Ecclesiology in process)

a) Short stat on eccl.  
b) Con on Basis of U

c) " " NFO

d) Con on WCC stat of nature of Ch. + mission (Paper G)

e) Ministries Committee

The Treasurer will lead

(Additional Business concerning appeals/ complaints by Minister A - could be taken here if Moderator decides this be brought directly to Mission Council)

The DGS - NOTICES

a) any housekeeping notices

b) Meet Group leaders immediately after the end of the session

c) Draw attention to a proposed meeting of Assembly Committee conveners at 5.15 p.m. on Wednesday.

6.30 p.m.

Dinner

7.30 p.m.

Resolu of S.A.G.  
Session 2

Catch the Vision - 1: The General Secretary to lead on this followed by a discussion. The timing of evening prayers is flexible.

8.40 p.m. Evening Prayers

**WEDNESDAY 5th**

8.00 a.m. Morning Prayer

8.30a.m. Breakfast

9.30 a.m. Session 3  
Bible Study/theological reflection - The Moderator

9.50 a.m. Catch the Vision – 2: Proposed guidance for synods and districts (Paper E)  
The General Secretary will lead on this

10.28 a.m. The DGS to give any notices, and arrangements and location for groups during the next session

10.30a.m. Coffee

11.00a.m. Session 4  
Groups  
Plenary session

> 11.45 for 12  
45

1.00 p.m. Lunch

2.30 p.m. Session 5  
Introduction to the consideration of a report on 'Lessons to be learnt' by the United Reformed Church from the case of a particular minister and issues of sexual abuse - Dr Lesley Orr should be welcomed (also the Revds Carla Grosch-Miller and Peter Poulter who are also present, and members of the review group)

3-45

3.30p.m. Tea

4.00p.m. Session 6  
Continuation of Session 5  
Church and Society Committee resolution on Progressive Engagement  
(Paper C)  
(Paper F)  
'Time for Action' – material for local churches  
(Peter Poulter may wish to make some comments, but subject to comments from Mission Council, this is ready for circulating to churches. Ray can announce when this will be done)

.....followed by free time ( for some) - disc for nomins. - [ Group 85 London SYN GLG.

(5.15 p.m. Meeting of Assembly Committee Conveners, chaired by the General Secretary)

6.30p.m. Dinner

7.30p.m. Session 7  
*Aspects of Training* - as background to the Training Review, three guests will speak about the way their participation in United Reformed Church training programmes have helped and equipped them for service. The session is introduced and chaired by the Moderator, Dr David Peel.

8.30p.m. Evening Prayers

THURSDAY 6<sup>th</sup>

8.00 a.m. Morning Prayer

8.30 a.m. Breakfast

9.15 a.m. Session 8

Remaining business :

e.g. Nominations for GLG Group secretary – if any

Names (5) to serve on 'Landon Synod' – (1 <sup>write</sup> as secretary)

Catch the Vision – 3: A personal perspective of Reformed spirituality:  
Dr David Cornick

10.30 a.m. Coffee

10.50 a.m. Session 9

Continuation of Catch the Vision 3 –

and final reflections on the Council: (The Revd Sheilagh Kesting – theological reflector – may wish to make some preliminary comments, before submitting a written reflection which will submit be sent out with the Minutes)

The Moderator may wish to thank various people

11.40 a.m. Service of Holy Communion in St Cuthbert's Chapel

12.30 p.m. Lunch and Departures

Recap

14. Nominations:

- (a) Landon Synod
- (b) 5 people – for Min A
- (c) GLG Sec

9.30 ✓ 2. C + S Resoln

✓ 3. T4A

9.15 - ~~4. Personal comments (see sheet)~~ ✓

9.30

10.25 – Ballot Paper.

## Notice of Additional Business and reflection on the agenda

New representatives might find the way we operate in Mission Council a bit unusual – and wonder what kind of meeting this is:

1. As the orange paper sent out with the first mailing said – we operate in a number of modes : -
  - a Council seeking to take a **comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church** – deciding priorities and encouraging outreach.
  - a Council concerned about the **whole church** in its **internal** relationships – between churches, districts and synods of the United Reformed Church – and its **interdependent** relationships with ecumenical and international partners)
  - a Mission Council tries to ensure that **the resources and programmes of the Assembly are directed towards the world** (- as we are concerned about justice and peace, forgiveness and hope.
  - a Mission Council which (hopes to hear from local experience), and turn towards **local churches** so as to support them in their local work and missionary life.
  - Our decisions– about programmes, budgets, statements, policies – should be considered in terms of the overall mission of the church. Mission Council is the cross roads or point of connection between all these concerns and relationships.
  - We have a common responsibility to remind each other of those principles as we go through Mission Council
2. October Mission Council – opportunity and space to consider outcome of General Assembly.
  - a) some who feel timing is too early in year – only just time for committees to have met since Assembly – on the other hand some connection with meeting times of synods. In other ways issues brought to this MC are too late for synod meetings – so unsatisfactory.
  - b) some people may find the speed of the agenda a little leisurely. But we take seriously that we have come away and given time to reflect on some far-reaching matters. It is important that MC has time to make relationships – because our community has to be established especially at the beginning of a new year ( after Assembly – when several new representatives. Group work helps that – as well as conversations which go on at other times out of session).

MC has an important role especially at this meeting to give a steer to committees (and others) about their work (or first reactions) – by January MC material for Assembly is being formulated – and by March MC it is almost in its final form.

### 3. This agenda

**FB' s theological reflection at March MC spoke of our need for clarity and discernment (MC agenda ' all felt rather frenzied' ) Is our mission about 'being or doing'? – plenty of evidence of an active church responding rapidly to changing social trends, though CtV's theology of relatedness – suggests ' being'**

In the last 18 months – been trying to ensure MC has opportunity to reflect on issues rather than just make decisions about them.

Three sessions on CtV: a) this evening – where next with CtV  
b) tomorrow morning – proposed guidelines for synods and districts - principle of ' one council' agreed by Assembly – opportunity to consider some of the issues in groups.  
c) Thursday morning – DC – Reformed spirituality - his own work rather than group's – one of those nurturing sessions to help us prepare for a key component of the CtV process.

**FB: ' Ambivalence in our mind (in CtV) as to what vision is about – the church's or God's future? A rather stark distinction – yet the order of MC agenda suggested we were concerned about the Church**

**If our vision is a 'path to God's future' – i.e. God's reign – then need to start with the world – and how we respond to that – what kind of a church is needed – shaped by the rapidly changing needs of the world; and is the church able to respond to it?**

I made reference in the letter which went out to members of MC – about the ' Training Review' – report and recommendations were brought to March MC and withdrawn for further consideration by the Training Committee. The Committee has decided not to bring

anything to this Mission Council but to one of the others – in time for next year's Assembly.

However – following our recent pattern, we are inviting one or two people to visit tomorrow evening to give us some local experience (reference to one of the purposes of MC mentioned earlier) to make sure our policies and decisions are enabling for local churches. There is no direct connection to the Training Review – but simply that Training issues are on our broad agenda this year.

On another tack – being the Church in the world, and as part of the world can be perplexing and painful

**In her theological reflection FB reminded us that 'for Paul the church is the world in obedience to God' – church is that community of people who are involved in creating new relationships among themselves and in society at large – and in doing this, bearing witness to Christ'.**

- Proposal from Church and Society about investments
- 'Time for Action' – papers have been prepared for local churches – and we will be asked (subject to any comments) to authorize their distribution to local churches – after General Assembly's acceptance
- MC is also asked to give its corporate wisdom to difficult and at times seemingly intractable problems – we should have received a report from a group set up at the end of a long process to consider lessons to be learnt from cases involving sexual abuse (or alleged sexual abuse) within the church.
- For reasons which we will explain later, our legal advice (and the view of MCAG) was that the report could not come to Mission Council as it stands – and so tomorrow, the convener of the group (Dr Lesley Orr – from Church of Scotland) will set the background for MC.

It may be that we set before you the particular difficulties the officers of Assembly (and others) dealing with a particular case have had to face (not only over many years) but in the last few days – and ask MC's guidance.

This matter caused the delay in sending out MC papers; and the reason that the agenda (even now) is a little flexible – because there has to be a space between the lines of the text .



The most important comments I found in the theological reflection was about the way we conduct ourselves between the being and doing – (which our theological reflector expressed in terms of a '**missionary' lifestyle rather than a 'missionising' one – which ( in the context of last Sunday's gospel reading) reminds us that that the true and the false prophets are discerned by their fruits and fruitfulness ( being more rather than necessarily doing more) - - more in offering presence, welcome, hospitality.... and truth-telling)**

Moderator – kind of reflection on a reflection – but also an explanation of the shape of the agenda as we have it – but it is no more than a map – for the journey of the next two days which we are here to make together.

*(Opportunity for further thoughts on Theological reflection – Paper A)*



## MISSION COUNCIL 4-6 October 2005

# A

### Theological Reflection on the March 2005 Mission Council

The task to be a reflector at Mission Council is not an easy one. Many told me at the beginning of the meeting that they did not envy my task. As it was I enjoyed myself and thank you for your kind invitation.

I tried to look at matters with this question in mind: *“What is perceived of God moving or challenging us in our meeting and among the issues we are wrestling with?”* It is very difficult to discern God, if we can do so at all. So it is with caution that I approach this task.

This was a unique meeting. The results of two years of hard work at all levels of the church were coming together. Your dreams were being turned into reality, to paraphrase the General Secretary. It was the kind of meeting for which it seems the Mission Council was created.

The atmosphere was impressive: contributions from the floor were knowledgeable and constructive; facilitation of the plenary sessions was expert and done with good humour; worship and Bible Studies were relevant and inspired the proceedings throughout. This was a Mission Council willing to wrestle with the big, difficult issues (e.g. ethical investment, abuse in the church, how to be an inclusive church) and with quite a bit of detail too.

#### **Catch the Vision**

So how is God moving and challenging us? I would like to point at three areas. They relate to the vision, to how we see the world and to how we see ourselves.

##### **1. To clarify the vision.**

For a few years now you have engaged with the Catch the Vision Process. The first challenge is to clarify (and communicate!) the vision. But before doing so perhaps we should ask ourselves if we have a vision at all. There is a danger that Catch the Vision is becoming a catch phrase for what in reality is managing decline. Our decline is a sad fact and managing it a necessity, but if that is what we are doing then let us just say so and get on with the job.

Calling this process Catch the Vision, however, raises expectations – as was demonstrated by regular expressions of disappointment from the floor that proposals were not radical enough – and it suggests that the process is about more than merely managing decline. If that is the case, then what is the vision and what or who is it for?

#### **To clarify what the vision is. Is it a vision of the church?**

In his interim report to Mission Council the General Secretary described the vision as “a path to God’s future which leads...

- Towards new ways of being church
- Towards deeper engagement in mission
- Towards a new spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> century

- Towards a slimmer, more rigorous organisation
- Towards renewed ecumenical engagement”.

This suggests some ambivalence in the URC’s mind as to what the vision is about. Is it a vision about the church or is it one about God’s future? The order of the proceedings seemed to suggest the first: we started with a vision of the church and this led us to discussing finance, structures, training, ministries, and spirituality – in that order. The Catch the Vision logo (with the URC logo in the middle) and prayer further seem to suggest that the church is both subject and object of the process.

However, the vision is also described as a “path to God’s future”. It is a vision of God’s reign, which embraces the whole world, the whole oikoumene. If the vision is about God’s future, then perhaps our starting point for discussion and action is different. The starting point would be God’s world, its needs and how we respond to them. Then, what kind of church is required for that? It is a church shaped by the rapidly changing needs of the world it lives in and by its ability to respond to those; a church with a different kind of leadership, trained in a different way.

Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive. A vision of God’s future will include a vision of the church. However, the two parts of the vision need to be held in creative tension. Ultimately, it is a vision of God’s reign for the world, for all creation; and the Catch the Vision process should be about no less than that.

## **2. To clarify our relationship with the world**

The challenge to clarify our vision will require us to decide how we view the world. It seemed quite appropriate that we studied passages from the Gospel according to John, whose view of the world is ambivalent at best. It is for the world that Jesus came, but at the same time it is the world that does not understand, that hates the followers of Jesus and so on. This view has deeply influenced our Christian tradition, as was clear in our discussions about spirituality and about the culture we live in.

However, does catching a vision of God’s future not require a view of the world that is more embracing? With boundaries between church and world that are more fluid? Instead of looking at John’s Gospel perhaps we should look at the writings of Paul. For Paul, the church is “the world in obedience to God” (Bosch, 1992: 167). The church is that community of people who are involved in creating new relationships among themselves and in society at large and, in doing this, bearing witness to Christ. The church is the church in and for the world. It is not to be other-worldly.

So, even though we are living in a culture in crisis - a crisis that extends to the church and to our faith - we need to engage with the world that we live in. That is where God calls us to be. The General Secretary called us a tiny minority in an alien land. We are in the wilderness, in the desert, as Dutch theologian Bernard Rootmensen (1988) argues, where life is hard and sometimes God is hidden. But the desert is also a place full of life and beauty; and moreover, it is a place of encounter with God and of preparation for a new way of being.

## **3. To clarify what kind of church we will be.**

Lastly, we may be challenged to determine what kind of church we will be. Coming into the Mission Council for the first time, and dealing with a number of major papers all proposing significant changes, it all felt rather frenzied. (I am aware that someone who has been involved in the Catch the Vision process in the last two years would probably say the opposite.) And it raises the question about what church we hope to be and what our mission is about. Is it about being or doing? Views in the reports and discussions seemed at times conflicting. The Ministries report spoke about making

people more active members of the Church focused outwards into the world, moving them from disciples to apostles. The Training paper noted that the aim of education and training is to equip the church, so that it can better continue the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ in and for the world. There is an image of an active church, responding to rapidly changing social trends. The Catch the Vision paper's theology of relatedness emphasised being rather than doing. The church is before it is for anything. The doing flows out of the being. The Racial Justice paper emphasised both. So what kind of church will the URC aim to be?

Again the writings of Paul may be helpful. According to Paul the believers should be "missionary" rather than "missionising". They should practice a missionary lifestyle, one that is attractive and winsome, one that gives credibility to the missionary outreach in which Paul and his fellow-workers are involved. The primary responsibility of "ordinary" Christians is not to go out and preach, but to support the mission project through their appealing conduct and by making "outsiders" feel welcome in their midst.

So the life and witness of the church involve both being and doing. It is not an either-or. The church's identity sustains its relevance and involvement (Moltmann, 1975). The church is both a sign and an instrument of God's kingdom. But we are challenged to hold both in creative tension as we seek new ways of being church. The story of Princess Street URC in Norwich provided a good illustration. When it decided it should *do more* to make more of its mission context it decided to *be more*, offering presence, welcome and hospitality.

#### **Do you want to be made well?**

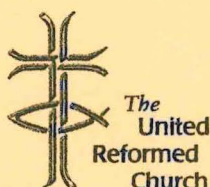
"Do you want to be made well?" Jesus asked the man at the well in John 5. It was this question the Moderator posed to the URC in her first Bible Study. This Mission Council was a clear sign that there is a deep desire to be made well. How this will happen and how long it will take is hard to discern at this stage. I am in no doubt, however, that the Catch the Vision process will be crucial, even if much visioning and communication of the vision still need to be done. The process may take longer than we think. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions. What is important to remember, however, is that we are called to be faithful, not to be successful. In John 5, 17 Jesus says, "My Father still goes on working and I am at work too". May you draw strength from that as you continue to catch the vision.

Francis Brien  
CWM Europe Mission Enabler  
March/April 2005

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## MISSION COUNCIL 4 – 6 October 2005

# B

### Mission Council Advisory Group

#### 1. MCAG acting as Charity Trustee of the United Reformed Church

**a) The Churches Agency for Safeguarding** (an ecumenical body comprising Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Churches) has been in existence for several years to process applications for volunteers seeking clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau. The CAS sought to become a Limited Company by Guarantee, and MCAG agreed, appointing John Brown (Secretary for Youth Work) as a director. Subsequently, the Agency decided not to proceed as a Limited Company, but to retain its present status under the umbrella of the Methodist Church. John Brown will continue to represent the United Reformed Church on the CAS's management committee.

**b) Ecclesiastical Exemption:** The United Reformed Church Liaison Group chaired by Hartley Oldham is drawing up an appeals process by which local churches can appeal against decisions of their Listed Buildings Advisory Committees. This may involve some minor changes to the Manual, but further details will be brought (as necessary) to a future Mission Council en route to General Assembly..

It was noted that Historic Chapels Trust was concerned that the Free Churches rarely used the HCT when disposing of redundant churches and chapels. It was agreed that synod moderators and clerks ought also to be reminded of the HCT's terms of reference.

**c) Risk Management:** MCAG is required, as charity trustee, to ensure that every reasonable step has been taken to assess and monitor risks within the Assembly operation of the United Reformed Church, and have processes in place to deal with them. MCAG agreed a document in May which assessed risk and identified existing processes for dealing with them. Assembly committees and others have been asked to respond with further details and comments by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005, so that MCAG can complete its first annual review of the document early in 2006.

#### 2. MCAG acting as advisory group to Mission Council

##### **a) Appointments and Vacancies:**

- i) March Mission Council authorized MCAG to fill the remaining vacancy on the Resource Sharing Task Group. The Revd Dick Gray (South Western synod) was duly appointed by MCAG acting on behalf of Mission Council.
- ii) The Revd Sandra Lloydlangston has indicated that she is unable to continue as Secretary of the Grants and Loans Group (GLG) beyond the end of 2005. Mission Council is asked to appoint a successor.

##### **b) The following dates and locations have been booked for future Mission Council meetings:**

**2006 :** January 21<sup>st</sup> Stoneleigh Park; March 24-26 The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick; October 3-5 All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney.

**2007:** January 27<sup>th</sup> Stoneleigh Park; March 23-25 High Leigh; October 5-7 Ushaw College, Durham.

**2008:** January 26 Stoneleigh Park; March 7-9 All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney; October 7-9 The Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick.



MISSION COUNCIL  
4 – 6 October 2005

C

**Progressive Engagement:  
A resolution from Church and Society Committee  
with a background paper provided by 'Commitment for Life'**

**1. Resolution**

**Mission Council**

**1. Expresses its support for our partner churches around the world who are actively engaged in reviewing their investments with the aim of a progressive engagement with companies which are impeding efforts to secure a just peace among Israelis and Palestinians including a process of phased, selective divestment of stock in companies whose operations support the occupation of Palestine.**

**2. Calls on the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to review our investments in like manner and report back to the ~~January~~ <sup>a future</sup> Mission Council.**

**3. Calls on other church bodies, including synods and on individual members of the United Reformed Church, to engage in a similar review.**

**2. Background Paper**

**Disinvestment [Divestment]<sup>1</sup> – revisiting the debate.**

**Preamble**

Under international law, Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories are illegal (the settlements and the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian land). Diplomatic and political efforts to bring about Israel's compliance with international law have failed. Israel has continued to consolidate its occupation – declaring its plans to further expand settlements in the West Bank even as the last of the settlements from Gaza is removed.

Accordingly, new strategies are needed to bring about this compliance and to bring peace with justice. Across the world, civil society has concluded that inaction is no longer an option and are taking, or proposing, direct action against Israel. The momentum is growing for action for significant change to Israel's occupation, expansion and stranglehold on life of the Palestinian people, lest hope itself will be extinguished. Calls for economic pressure to be applied are coming from a great variety of sources, including Israelis, Palestinian, international organisations and solidarity groups, churches, unions, universities and influential individuals.

The proposals are for 'sanctions' of some sort; or civil society to engage in boycott and divestment as tools of moral and economic pressure on Israel. The leadership of the Presbyterian Church (USA) has been instrumental in galvanising other churches into action

<sup>1</sup> The American word is very prevalently used on this issue.

since first passing a resolution on divestment in July 2004. Notwithstanding the considerable hostility it faced, PCUSA announced in early August 2005 that in addition to Caterpillar, it would press four other American corporations to stop providing military equipment and technology to Israel for use in the occupation of the Palestinian territories.

A Churches' Divestment Group now exists in the UK to galvanise the UK churches towards a concerted response in response to the partner organisations and sister churches, including the indigenous churches in Israel/Palestine. This was made all the more pressing by the discovery that the Church of England (and others?) have investment in Caterpillar Corporation. Christian Aid are researching into this and have provided some of the detailed information below.

#### The position of the United Reformed Church

The Church may be summarised as being deeply concerned about the oppression of the Palestinian people under occupation over many years. Several gestures of solidarity have been made. The URC organised a large pilgrimage to Israel/Palestine in 2000, it has maintained strong contacts through the Commitment for Life partner, PARC, and through other church links, mainly with the Episcopal (Anglican) Diocese of Jerusalem, the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, and the Church of Scotland ministry in Jerusalem. General Assembly passed a resolution condemning the Wall in 2004.

A church leaders' visit was organised October 2004, which witnessed for itself the gravity of the situation. Many local United Reformed churches and church members have links or contact with indigenous Palestinian churches and an activists day was organised in October 2004 in London to which the grassroots of the United Reformed Church responded to the invitation to attend and move the debate forward. Divestment/boycott was on the agenda but there was not time to debate it. Some disappointment was expressed that more decisive action was not forthcoming from that day. Grassroots support and activism remains strong as all the evidence from 'Moving Stories' has indicated. Recently the United Reformed Church has hosted a visit of young people from the Episcopal church in Ramallah and a return visit of URC young people is planned for summer 2006.

***Are we approaching a kairos moment – the moment of truth and challenge for decisive action?*** Is it time to show that we hear and support the call of sister churches, including the Churches in Israel/Palestine and the Presbyterian Church USA and others, for a programme of divestment from companies which contribute to the occupation of the Palestinian Territories, by bringing forward a resolution that adds our weight to the disinvestment debate.

#### Actions by Churches in US and UK

July 2004     **The Presbyterian Church (USA)** General Assembly passed a resolution initiating "a process of phased selective divestment" of its funds from companies "whose business in Israel is found to be directly or indirectly causing harm to innocent people". In so doing it became the first church to take such action in the context of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, but it also reflects the growing momentum in the US for divestment of funds from Israel or corporations that do business with Israel. See appendix below.

Note there are overlaps between campaigns calling for divestment, and those calling for Boycott. The UK BIG (Boycott Israeli Goods) Campaign was launched in the House of Commons in July 2001 which also supports an end to UK firms investment in Israel.)

22 Sep 2004: **The Anglican Peace Justice Network** issued a statement following a visit to Jerusalem, highlighting the challenge facing Christians to find a way of achieving peace. The APGN represents 75 million Anglicans and Episcopalians worldwide. In an interview for Haaretz the leader of the APJN delegation said "we will return home and recommend that the Anglican Consultative Council adopt a resolution calling for divestment from Israel"

- 1 Oct 2004: **The Episcopal Church** issued a statement to clarify its position regarding investments in Israel, following the statement by the Anglican Peace and Justice Network : The Network would make a recommendation to the Anglican Consultative Council after further research. Divestment is seen as a way of negotiating in the first instance.
- Jan 2005: **The Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church** are reported to be conducting reviews on the issue of divestment.  
[<http://anglicanjournal.com/131/01/canada19.html> ]
- Feb 2005: **The World Council of Churches** issued a statement encouraging its member churches to consider "economic measures for peace in Israel/Palestine" and specifically commends the actions proposed by the Presbyterian Church. Peter Weiderud of the WCC told the Jerusalem Post that the statement was the result of a "grassroots initiative" from its membership.
- March 2005: **Sabeel**, a Palestinian Christian peace advocacy organization, issued their report entitled 'A Nonviolent Response to the Occupation: A Call for Morally Responsible Investment'.
- April 2005 York and Hull District Synod carried a motion for the **Methodist Church** to divest from companies supporting the occupation. The motion was then taken to Methodist Conference in June 2005. It was noted that the Church Investors Group had discussed this with particular reference to the US Caterpillar company though the Joint Advisory Group on the Ethics of Investment held that they did not own shares in Caterpillar. The decision was to continue the dialogue with the Church's ecumenical partners on this issue.
- May 2005 **the Church of England** was also reported to be considering whether to retain its shares in Caterpillar Inc. in light of the church's ethical investment policy.
- June 2005 **The Anglican Consultative Council** passed a resolution welcoming the Sept 2004 statement by the Anglican Peace and Justice Network on Israel/Palestine and commended the resolve of the Episcopal Church (USA) to take appropriate action where it finds that its corporate investments support the occupation of Palestinian lands or violence against innocent Israelis, and i) commends such a process to other Provinces having such investments, to be considered in line with their adopted ethical investment strategies.
- August 2005 **Presbyterian Church USA** announced that it would press four American corporations, in addition to Caterpillar, to stop providing military equipment and technology to Israel for use in the occupation of the Palestinian territories, and that if the companies did not comply, the church would take a vote to divest its stock in them. The Companies are Motorola, ITT Industries, Citigroup, and United Technologies which sell helicopters, cellphones, night vision equipment and other items Israel uses to enforce its occupation.

**Conclusion:**

In the first instance we need to register our concern with Mission Council in a resolution which:

- expresses our support for our partner churches around the world who are actively engaged in reviewing their investments and divesting from companies which are contributing to the occupation of Palestinian Territories.



- calls on the Ethical Investment Advisory Group to review our investments in the light of emerging information
- calls on other church bodies, and individuals, to engage in a similar review and action.

## Appendix

### In the US

The lead taken by the **PCUSA** has had widespread ramifications. The Episcopal Church U.S.A., the United Church of Christ, and two regions of the United Methodist Church have all urged consideration of divestment or economic pressure in recent months, though the tone and emphasis of each resolution varies.

The **United Church of Christ** brought two resolutions to General Synod July 2005. One resolution proposes they conduct a study of divestment of church funds invested in companies that may be profiting from the perpetuation of violence and injustice in Israel and Palestine. The second resolution "requires the United Church of Christ's Corporate Social Responsibility Ministry to begin the process of divestment from companies involved with Israel's illegal occupations of the West Bank and Gaza, the building of the 'security fence' and the Israeli settlements within Palestinian Territory."

Additionally, the Global Ministries website posts the following document: [The Palestinians, Israel, and the churches' economic leverage](#), described as being "For people throughout the UCC and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as we think about the issue of economic involvements and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has been developed in consultation with our Palestinian Christian partners as well as our American Jewish dialogue partners, and their viewpoints have been included prominently."

The **Disciples of Christ** passed a resolution in July calling on Israel to tear down the barrier it has built to wall off the occupied territories, and other churches are considering similar resolutions.

The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)** at its General Assembly in August is to vote on a "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine." While no action is planned on a specific divestment proposal, "the assembly can change that," says John Brooks, ELCA spokesman.

The lead taken by the **Presbyterian Church USA** has received a large amount of vilification for the stance it has taken. But rather than back down, it has actually progressed with its research into companies within its portfolio. In early August 2005 it announced that it would press four American corporations, in addition to Caterpillar, to stop providing military equipment and technology to Israel for use in the occupation of the Palestinian territories, and that if the companies did not comply, the church would take a vote to divest its stock in them.

The companies - Caterpillar, Motorola, ITT Industries, Citigroup and United Technologies - were selected from a list of several dozen possibilities by a church investment committee that met Friday in Seattle.

The Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., said: "It's not a campaign to divest from the state of Israel. We're fully committed to the state of Israel. But it is a campaign to divest from particular activities that are doing damage and creating injustice and violence, whether that's the building of the separation barrier, construction related to the occupation, or weapons and materials that lead to suicide bombings."

"Despite the bitterness the divestment moves have evoked among Jewish organizations, Christian and Jewish leaders alike said these developments had prompted intensive and productive dialogue sessions both at the national level and between "hundreds" of churches

and synagogues nationwide. A delegation of prominent Jewish and Christian leaders is set to travel to Jerusalem in September." New York Times, 6 August 2005

### **Other organisations**

In addition to Church based initiatives to promote divestment, the following organisations have also made public statements (details of which are recorded in "Current Proposals for Civil Society Action relating to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories" – a research document of one of our major partners):

Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)

Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative – Call for action presented to the 2005 World Social Forum

Not in My Name (predominantly Jewish group)

Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions (ICAHN). The ICAHN statement lists a number of Jewish and Israeli organisation that "support the idea of selection sanctions on Israel"

The Network of Christian Organisation in Bethlehem district

New Profile: Movement for the Civilisation of Israeli society.

Sabeel – with its document "A call for morally responsible investment"

End the Occupation – the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

International Solidarity Movement

East Jerusalem YWCA and YMCA. The leaders wrote an open letter to Global Ministries on Socially Responsible Investment in Israel/Palestine

### **Organisation against disinvestment**

There are a number of organisation which are against the divestment movement. Some churches recognise the "serious strain" placed on relationships with the Jewish community as a result of the PCUSA action. Some argue that at this fragile time in Middle East peace negotiations, all who seek peace should be focused on continued economic and political engagement.

### **Boycott of Israeli products /Caterpillar Boycott**

Yet another list of organisations are in favour of boycotts of products and companies in connection with Israel. Gush Shalom, the Israeli peace organisation, started a national boycott of settlement products within Israel. The most widespread boycott movement has in recent months been focused on Caterpillar Company.

War on Want's "Caterpillar: the Alternative Report" calls on its supporters to boycott Caterpillar boots and clothes, and to pressurise companies which sell these clothes, such as John Lewis.

**War on Want** – and others – focus on the EU-Israel Association Agreement and the trading preferences it confers on Israel. "Israel's violation of Palestinian human rights is a clear breach of Article 2 of the EU-Israel Association Agreement and is the direct cause of the massive increase in poverty currently recorded in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The UK government must honour its obligations under international humanitarian law and take action to enforce the will of the International Court of Justice and the United Nations..."

War on Want notes that the EU is Israel's principal trading partner, with approximately 30% of Israeli exports sold into EU markets.

**SPEAK** – an evangelical network of students and young adults praying and campaigning on issues of global injustice – have a campaign action cards focused on UK arms trade with Israel, which, they believe, are fuelling conflict .

Anne Martin 05/09/2005  
(Director of 'Commitment for Life')



MISSION COUNCIL  
4 – 6 October 2005

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D

## Matters from the 2005 General Assembly

Pressure of time led the General Assembly to remit four resolutions to Mission Council.

**“General Assembly remits Resolutions 8, 9, 10 and 11 (Section O and Ministerial Incapacity) to Mission Council for consideration and such action as it deems necessary.”**

All four Resolutions were “Mission Council Resolutions” having their origins in the work of the Section O advisory Group.

**Resolution 8** is a resolution to make changes to Part II of the Section O Process and contains three proposals. The first is to make changes to Mandated Groups, the second to address the problems caused when Ministers convicted of a criminal offence claim to be lodging an appeal but delay in so doing and the third is to instruct Mandated Groups to produce a confidential report on their conduct of cases. Resolution 9 is a resolution to reduce the length and scope of Part I of Section O. This is a constitutional change requiring a 2/3rds vote of the Assembly and a subsequent simple majority in the following Assembly. It was intended that a resolution to insert much of the material removed from Part I into Part II should be moved at the Assembly of 2006.

**Resolution 10** is a Resolution to introduce a new procedure to deal with situations where Ministers have become unfit to exercise Ministry for reasons outwith the competence of the Section O process.

**Resolution 11** is a logical follow on to Resolution 10 and begins the process of making those changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church required to introduce a Ministerial Incapacity Procedure. Resolutions 10 and 11 like Resolution 9 are constitutional changes requiring 2/3rds majorities.

Resolution 8 was subject to a Reference Back Motion which was to be moved by the Revd Roberta Rominger and the Revd Malcolm Hanson.

Mr Hanson had also raised with the Clerk a query concerning the wording of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.

The Reference Back Resolution related only to one of the three proposals contained in Resolution 8 and Mr Hanson’s query has been passed to the Section O Advisory Group for its consideration.

The first question to which Mission Council must address itself in dealing with the Resolution of General Assembly is how it wishes to proceed.

There is no doubt that Mission Council has been empowered to act on behalf of the General Assembly in dealing with these four Resolutions. If it chooses to do so, it

may adopt, amend or reject the Resolutions. With regard to Resolutions 9, 10 & 11 adoption would require a 2/3rds majority of Mission Council and the General Secretary would then move their referral to Synods. However, Mission Council is not required to consider the resolutions and come to a decision. It may decide that those Resolutions which were known to be contentious or which created new policy should still be exposed to the scrutiny of the whole Assembly. Should Mission Council take that view there will inevitably be a year's delay in adopting the measures outlined above. The Section O Advisory Group is of the view that such a delay would be unfortunate.

There is no clear answer to the problems set out above. Mission Council must seek to weight the arguments concerning inclusivity of debate against un-necessary delay and decide what it wishes to do with these four Resolutions.

James A. Breslin (Clerk)

### 5.3 Section O Advisory Group

5.3.1 During the year the Section O Advisory Group continued its detailed consideration of the Section O Process of Ministerial Discipline. In particular, the Advisory Group has responded to concerns expressed about the role of the Mandated Group which has the responsibility of investigating the case against the minister and presenting it at the Hearing before the Assembly Commission. As a result the Advisory Group is recommending significant changes in the manner of selection of the Mandated Groups in order that they may be strengthened for their task. These are set out in **Resolution 8** and involve a series of amendments to Section B of Part II. That resolution also proposes an important amendment to Section E of Part II designed to improve the procedure in a Section O case which remains adjourned because the minister is appealing against the decision made against him/her in a criminal case.

5.3.2 Section O remains under the overall control of General Assembly and all changes to it, large and small, require Assembly approval. This is stated in Part I, which also contains other fundamental provisions, such as the criteria to be applied when judging a case, the right of appeal, the exclusive nature of the Process and the fact that decisions made in accordance with the Process are final and binding. Recognising the importance of these matters and also of course the serious consequences of removal from the Roll for a minister, the core provisions of Part I must remain subject to the rule that any changes take two years to implement. Having said that, however, the Advisory Group considers that the remainder of the existing Part I can be moved into Part II, to which changes can be made by a single Assembly. **Resolution 9** brings a proposal to replace the existing Part I with a reduced Part I, the text of which is set out in the resolution. If passed, this will be referred to Synod and, hopefully, come to next year's Assembly for ratification. The consequential changes to Part II will also be brought forward next year.

5.3.3 During the year the Church's legal advisers were asked to prepare a procedure (to be known as the 'Ministerial Incapacity Procedure') to enable the Church to take effective action in respect of those ministers regarded as unfit to exercise ministry on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons where the minister cannot be considered blameworthy or at fault in any conventional sense. The Advisory Group has been working closely with the lawyers as this has progressed and has been advised that the new procedure should be divided into two parts in similar manner to the Section O Process, i.e. Part I subject to the "two year" rule and Part II which can be changed by resolution of a single Assembly. In the course of the ongoing work on this, the Section O Advisory Group has consulted the Mission Council

Advisory Group, the Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee and the Synod Moderators and has reported to Mission Council.

5.3.4 Consequently Mission Council now brings to the 2005 Assembly Part I of the new Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (Resolution 10). If the resolution approving this is passed, it will be referred back to Synods and presented at next year's Assembly for ratification. The Rules of Procedure are being prepared and will be placed before Assembly next year as Part II and thus the aim is to bring the whole of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure into operation in 2006.

5.3.5 The introduction of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure will involve changes to the Structure and to the Section O Process since, although the two procedures are entirely separate, there will be some inter-relation between them, where the evidence indicates a possible need to refer a case from one procedure to the other (**Resolution 11**).

5.3.6 Two resolutions come to Assembly for ratification: both were agreed by General Assembly in 2004. **Resolution 12** ratifies changes to Section O, Part 1 (2004 Assembly Resolution 11); and **Resolution 13** ratifies changes to the Structure regarding the resignation of ministers (2004 Assembly Resolution 13).

5.3.7 During the year the Section O Advisory Group has maintained a dialogue with the Synod Moderators on a variety of issues of common concern, but particularly about their role in the Section O Process and about the importance of the work of the Mandated Groups. A need for continual training for the Mandated Groups has been identified and the Advisory Group has established an ongoing training programme. The close liaison between the Section O Advisory Group and the Moderators will continue.

5.3.8 Mr Brian Evans, the present Secretary of the Assembly Commission, completes his term of service at Assembly this year and we express our grateful thanks to him for his work in this demanding position and also for his wise counsel on the Section O Advisory Group. We welcome the Reverend Alison Hall as his replacement.

### 5.4 Grants and Loans Group

5.4.1 The following is an extract from the report of this Group to Mission Council:

5.4.2 "The Grants and Loans Group (GLG) has now been in existence for nearly 5 years, having incorporated the work of the former Church Buildings Fund (CBF), Advisory Group on Grants and Loans (AGOGAL) and the Council for World Mission (CWM) Self Support Fund. The Group has continued the policy of giving grants only to Synods and Churches with the greatest need.

**Resolution 6****Declaration of a Safe Church  
– a Charter for Action**

(report paragraph 4.1)

**General Assembly**

- a) accepts the Declaration of a Safe Church
- b) instructs all General Assembly committees to operate within it;
- c) urges synods, district councils and local churches to affirm the declaration, resolve to apply it in all aspects of their life and work; and synods to report their response to Mission Council by March 2006.

**Resolution 7****Revised Ethical Investment Policy**

(report paragraphs 5.2.5– 5.2.16)

General Assembly recommends that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the United Reformed Church should avoid any investment in:

- a) companies directly engaged in the manufacture or supply of weapons of destruction;
- b) companies a significant part of whose business is in the supply of alcoholic drinks or tobacco products or military equipment (other than weapons of destruction); or the provision of gambling facilities; or the publication or distribution of pornography.

General Assembly notes that the definition of these activities, or of what constitutes a significant part of a company's business, requires judgement and the Ethical Investment Advisory Group (EIAG) of Mission Council is available to offer advice. In general, EIAG will deem "significant" to mean where the share of turnover derived from the activity concerned is more than around 10-20% of the company's total turnover.

General Assembly recognises that this policy can only be advisory as the responsibility <sup>for</sup> of specific investment decisions remains with each body of trustees.

**Resolution 8****Changes to Section O Part II**

(report paragraph 5.3.1)

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

**Paragraph B.1.1**

Replace the word 'three' with the word 'four'.

**Paragraph B.2**

Replace the existing Paragraph B.2 with the following:

**B.2** 'The Mandated Groups charged with the responsibilities ascribed to them under these Rules of Procedure shall be constituted in the following manner:

**B.2.1** Two members thereof shall be appointed by each District Council on a standing basis from a Synod Panel itself appointed and maintained by each Synod, there normally being on such panel at least one, and preferably two, persons from each District within the Synod.

## **Resolution 8**

**B.2.2** The two remaining persons shall be appointed on to the Mandated Group for that case by the Deputy General Secretary from the Joint Panel in accordance with the procedure set out in Paragraph B.3.'

### **Paragraph B.3**

Replace the existing Paragraph B.3 with the following:

**B.3.1** 'Mission Council shall constitute and maintain a Standing Panel ('the Joint Panel') consisting of a maximum of twenty-six persons, of whom two shall be nominated by each Synod and selected preferably on account of some legal or tribunal or similar experience or expertise.

**B.3.2** The function of those serving on the Joint Panel shall be to participate as members of Mandated Groups, in cases arising either under Paragraph B.6.1 (District Council) or Paragraph B.9.1 (Synod) (in both of which cases two members of the Joint Panel will be required to serve) or under Paragraph B.9.3 (General Assembly or Mission Council on its behalf) (in which case all four members of the Mandated Group will be drawn from the Joint Panel).

**B.3.3** The Deputy General Secretary, in consultation with such other officers of General Assembly as s/he considers appropriate, shall select persons from the Joint Panel to serve on Mandated Groups as required and shall liaise with those persons and with the person calling in the Mandated Group and such other persons as may be necessary.'

### **Paragraph B.4**

After the words 'Synod Panel' add the words 'or the Joint Panel'.

### **Paragraph B.5.1**

On every occasion when the expression 'Standing Mandated Group' appears, delete the word 'Standing'.

Replace the words '...the Standing Mandated Group...' (the first time they appear) with the words '...either of the Panels...'

Replace the words '...the Moderator of the Synod shall appoint another member of the Synod Panel...' with the words '...then, if the disqualified person is a member of the Synod Panel, the Moderator of the Synod shall appoint another member of that Panel and, if the disqualified person is a member of the Joint Panel, the Deputy General Secretary shall appoint another member of that Panel...'

Replace the words '...the remaining members of the Standing Mandated Group...' with the words '...its remaining members...'

### **Paragraph B.6.1**

The existing B.6.1 to become B.6.1.1 and a new B.6.1.2 to be added as follows:

**B.6.1.2** 'The person calling in the Mandated Group shall in so doing take the following steps (with the participation at the appropriate time of the Deputy General Secretary):

- (i) s/he shall notify those two persons who, as members of the Synod Panel, will form part of the Mandated Group by virtue of Paragraph B.2.1 that they are called upon so to participate, advising them of the identity of the minister but giving no further information at that point;
- (ii) s/he shall request the Deputy General Secretary to appoint two persons onto the Mandated Group from the Joint Panel, advising him/her of the identity of the minister but giving no further information at that point;
- (iii) whereupon the Deputy General Secretary shall select two persons from the Joint Panel to form part of the said Mandated Group, notifying them of their participation and advising

them of the identity of the minister but giving no further information at that point and shall notify the person responsible for calling in the Mandated Group of the names of the persons who will serve;

- (iv) in the event that any of the proposed appointees on to the Mandated Group is unable or unwilling to act, the process(es) of appointment from the Synod Panel and/or the Joint Panel shall continue until a Mandated Group consisting of four members has been duly constituted;
- (v) as soon as the above steps have all been taken, the person calling in the Mandated Group shall issue to each member thereof a written statement setting out the reasons for the calling in of the Mandated Group, the names of possible informants and any other sources of information at that time available. To avoid prejudice, that statement must not contain any assumptions or inferences or any personal reflections or opinions.'

#### Paragraph B.8.1

After the word 'concludes' insert the words 'unanimously or by a majority'.

#### Paragraph B.9

Make the following changes at Paragraph B.9:

**B.9.1** Replace the word '...three...' with the word '...four...'.

**B.9.2** Replace the existing B.9.2 with the following:

**B.9.2** 'In connection with any such steps under Paragraph B.9.1 as are required to be taken by a Synod, if at any time the Moderator of the Synod, in consultation with such officers of the Synod as s/he considers appropriate, believes that there is or may be a disciplinary issue in respect of any minister in membership of that Synod, s/he shall forthwith in the name of the Synod appoint two persons from the Synod Panel for that Synod to form part of the Mandated Group for the particular case, at the same time informing the minister that this step has been taken and requesting the Deputy General Secretary to appoint two persons onto the Mandated Group from the Joint Panel, whereupon the procedure for the constitution of the Mandated Group shall follow that laid down in Paragraph B.6.1.2. The Mandated Group so appointed shall be deemed to be called in and vested with authority in like manner to a Mandated Group called in under Paragraph B.6.1.'

**B.9.3** Replace the words '...a Mandated Group for the particular case drawn from the Panel of Synods other than that of the Synod out of which the case arises...' with the words '...a Mandated Group of four persons for the particular case all drawn from the Joint Panel...'.

Replace the words '...the Standing Mandated Group of a District Council...' with the words '...a Mandated Group...'.

**B.9.4** Replace the words '..B.10 and B.11..' with the words '..B.10, B.11 and B.12'.

Delete the Paragraph which begins with the words 'In Paragraph B.5.1...'.

Replace the paragraph beginning 'In Paragraph B.7.1...' with:

'In Paragraph B.7.1, in the case of a Mandated Group appointed in the name of General Assembly the words 'Deputy General Secretary' shall replace 'Moderator of the Synod'.

#### Paragraph E.7.4

At the end of the paragraph add the words - '...unless the Minister shall have lodged with the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, within twentyeight days of the passing of the sentence in the criminal case, written evidence that s/he has lodged an appeal against the decision of the criminal court, whether it be against the conviction itself or the sentence imposed.'



## Resolution 9

### Paragraph E.7.6

Add a new Paragraph E.7.6 as follows:

**E.7.6 'If the Minister has given to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission the written evidence of appeal in the criminal case referred to in Paragraph E.7.4, it shall be his/her responsibility to notify the Secretary of the Assembly Commission of the outcome of his/her appeal in the criminal case as soon as s/he becomes aware of it and to supply to the said Secretary a duly certified court record or memorandum of the decision on the said appeal, whereupon the Section O Process shall be reactivated and the case brought to a hearing as soon as possible. Meanwhile the Minister shall respond promptly to any requests for information from the Secretary of the Assembly Commission as to the progress of the appeal in the criminal case. If the Minister fails to comply with the provisions of this Paragraph, the said Secretary may him/herself seek and obtain the required information as to the progress and outcome of the appeal in the criminal case.'**

### Paragraph E.8.5

Add a new Paragraph E.8.5 as follows:

**E.8.5 'Any failure, unnecessary delay or obstruction on the part of the Minister in complying with the requirements of Part II, Paragraph E.7.6.'**

### Paragraph H.4

Add a new Paragraph H.4 as follows:

**H.4 'Within one month of the conclusion of each case as provided in Part I, Paragraph 17, the Mandated Group shall prepare a written report of its conduct of the case and submit it to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission, who shall, in order to preserve confidentiality, remove from the report the name and address of the minister, the name of the minister's church(es) and any other information which might lead to the identification of any individuals involved in the case. The sole purpose of the report shall be to help those charged with the ongoing review of the operation of the Section O Process to monitor the performance of Mandated Groups and thus to ensure that all appropriate training and assistance is provided and the highest standards are maintained.'**

## Resolution 9 Replacement of the existing Section O, Part I

(report paragraph 5.3.2)

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

### SECTION O

#### Process for dealing with cases of Ministerial Discipline

#### **PART I - Substantive Provisions**

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

1. 1.1 Under the provisions of this Section O an Assembly Commission (as defined in Section A of Part II) shall operate under the authority of the General Assembly for the purpose of deciding (in cases properly referred to it) the questions as to whether a Minister has committed a breach of discipline and, if the Assembly Commission should so decide, whether on that account his/her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers or alternatively whether a written warning should be issued to him/her. The Assembly Commission may also decide to make a recommendation/referral in accordance with provisions of Paragraph 1.3. Under the Section O Process the Assembly Commission is also able to make recommendations (other than recommendations under Paragraph 1.3) and offer guidance but only within the limits prescribed in Section F of Part II.

- 1.2 Subject only to Paragraph 1.3, once the disciplinary case of any Minister is being dealt with under the Section O Process, it shall be conducted and concluded entirely in accordance with that Process and not through any other procedure or process of the Church.
- 1.3.1 If it considers that the situation concerning a Minister involved in a case within the Section O Process relates to or involves a perceived incapacity on the part of that Minister which might render him/her unfit to exercise, or to continue to exercise, ministry on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons, the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Commission may make an Order in accordance with the Rules of Procedure referring the case back to the Synod Moderator/Deputy General Secretary who called in the Mandated Group with a recommendation that the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure (as defined in Section A of Part II) be initiated in respect of the Minister concerned, whereupon the Ministerial Disciplinary proceedings shall stand adjourned pending the outcome of such recommendation.
- 1.3.2 The Rules of Procedure contained in Part II shall provide for the service of the above Order (and any accompanying documentation if appropriate) on the Synod Moderator/Deputy General Secretary and under those Rules that person shall be required, within the time therein specified, to notify the Secretary of the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission in writing whether the recommendation has been accepted or rejected.
- 1.3.3 If the recommendation has been accepted, the notification shall specify the date on which the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure was initiated, whereupon the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall make a further Order declaring the Ministerial Disciplinary case to be concluded, subject only to the continuation of the Minister's suspension until the issue of his/her suspension has been resolved in accordance with the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.
- 1.3.4 If the recommendation has been rejected, the notification shall state the reasons and the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission shall forthwith reactivate the Ministerial Disciplinary case.
2. The Assembly Commission, the Commission Panel, the Appeals Commission and all aspects of the Section O Process shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of the Section O Process, save only that, so long as it remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with this Section O Process shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister and on all the councils of the Church.
3. 3.1 Subject only to Paragraph 3.2, the Ministerial Disciplinary Process shall not be initiated in respect of any Minister if his/her case is currently being dealt with under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.
- 3.2 The Ministerial Disciplinary Process may be initiated in respect of a Minister as a result of a recommendation issuing from the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, in which case there may be a short transitional overlap between the commencement of the Ministerial Disciplinary case and the conclusion of the case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.
4. 4.1 In considering the evidence and reaching its decision, the Assembly Commission or (in the case of an appeal) the Appeals Commission shall in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union and in particular Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto which states the responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers of the United Reformed Church and the criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministry.
- 4.2 As part of such consideration, the Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission shall be entitled to have regard to any conduct on the part of a Minister occurring prior to his/her ordination to the ministry which, in the Commission's view and when viewed in the light of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, would have prevented, or was likely to have prevented, him/her from becoming ordained, where such conduct was not disclosed by the Minister to those responsible for assessing his/her candidacy for ordination.

5. 5.1 A Minister may appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission to delete his/her name from the Roll of Ministers under Section F of Part II or to issue a written warning under that Section by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, stating the ground/s of such appeal.
- 5.2 The Mandated Group of the Council which lodged the Referral Notice in any case may in the name of that Council appeal against the decision of the Assembly Commission not to delete the name of the Minister from the Roll of Ministers by lodging a Notice of Appeal in accordance with the Rules of Procedure stating the ground/s of such appeal. In any case, where no written warning is attached to the decision not to delete, the Notice may state, if the Mandated Group so desires, that the appeal is limited to the question of the issue of a written warning to the Minister.
- 5.3 No-one other than the Parties has any right of appeal from the decision of the Assembly Commission.
6. Procedural matters arising under the Section O Process shall in every case be dealt with in accordance with the Rules of Procedure as contained in Part II.
7. 7.1 Save only as provided in Paragraph 7.2, this Part I of the Section O Process is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.
- 7.2 Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to Part I as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the United Reformed Church, required to bring the Section O Process into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law.
- 7.3 All such changes to the Section O Process as are made by Mission Council under Paragraph 7.2 shall be reported to the next meeting of the General Assembly.

## **Resolution 10 Introduction of a new procedure to be known as the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure**

(report paragraph 5.3.3-5.3.4)

### **General Assembly**

- a) **resolves to introduce a procedure (to be known as the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure) designed for dealing with cases involving Ministers of Word and Sacrament who are regarded as being unfit to exercise ministry on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons and**
- b) **approves Part I of that Procedure in the form set out below and**
- c) **notes the intention to introduce Part II thereof to coincide with the intended ratification of this resolution at the General Assembly of 2006:**

**SECTION [ to be inserted ]**

### **PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CASES OF MINISTERIAL INCAPACITY**

#### **PART I – SUBSTANTIVE PROVISIONS (governed by General Assembly Function 2(5))(xi) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church)**

**Note:** The words and expressions marked \* are defined in the Rules of Procedure contained in Part II of this Procedure.

1. Under the provisions of this Ministerial Incapacity Procedure\* a Review Commission\* and, in the event of an appeal, an Appeals Review Commission\* shall operate under the authority of the General Assembly for the purpose of considering and deciding upon cases properly referred to it in which Ministers, whilst not perceived to have committed any breach of ministerial discipline, are nevertheless regarded as being unfit to exercise, or to continue to exercise, ministry on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons.
2. The Review Commission, the Standing Panel\* the Appeals Review Commission, and all aspects of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall at all times remain under the jurisdiction and control of the General Assembly which has the authority through the exercise of its functions as contained in Paragraph 2(5) of the Structure\* to amend, enlarge or revoke the whole or any part of this Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, save only that, as long as it remains in force, the decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) and any orders made in accordance with the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding on the Minister and on all the councils of the Church.
3.
  - 3.1 Subject only to the provisions of Paragraph 3.2, when the case of any Minister is being dealt with under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, it must be conducted and concluded entirely in accordance with that procedure and not through any other procedure or process of the Church.
  - 3.2.1 If it considers that, in a case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, an issue of Ministerial Discipline is or may be involved, the Review Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Review Commission may make a Referral Order\* in accordance with the Rules of Procedure\* referring the case back to the council of the Church which initiated it with the recommendation that the Ministerial Disciplinary Process\* should be initiated in respect of the Minister concerned, whereupon the proceedings under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall stand adjourned pending the outcome of such recommendation.
  - 3.2.2 The Rules of Procedure contained in Part II shall provide for the service of the Referral Order (and any accompanying documentation if appropriate) on a person properly representing the council of the Church referred to in Paragraph 3.2.1 and under those Rules that person shall be required, within the time therein specified, to notify the Secretary of the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission in writing whether the recommendation has been accepted or rejected.
  - 3.2.3 If the recommendation has been accepted, the notification shall specify the date on which the Ministerial Disciplinary Process was initiated, whereupon the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission shall make a further Order declaring the case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure to be concluded, subject only, if the Minister has already been suspended under that Procedure, to the continuation of his/her suspension until the issue of the Minister's suspension has been resolved in accordance with the Ministerial Disciplinary Process.
  - 3.2.4 If the recommendation has been rejected, the notification shall state the reasons and the Review Commission or the Appeals Review Commission shall forthwith reactivate the case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.
4.
  - 4.1 Subject only to Paragraph 4.2, the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall not be initiated in respect of any Minister if his/her case is currently being dealt with under the Ministerial Disciplinary Process.
  - 4.2 The Ministerial Incapacity Procedure may be initiated in respect of a Minister as a result of a recommendation issuing from the Ministerial Disciplinary Process, in which case there may be a short transitional overlap between the commencement of the case within the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure and the conclusion of the Ministerial Disciplinary case.
5. Although the operation of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure is not based upon the conscious breach by the Minister of the promises made at ordination, the Review Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Review Commission shall, in considering the evidence and reaching its decision, in every case have full regard to the Basis of Union\* and in particular Paragraph 2 of Schedule E thereto which states the responsibilities undertaken by those who become Ministers of the United Reformed Church and the criteria which they must apply in the exercise of their ministry.

## Resolution II

6. The Review Commission or, in the event of an appeal, the Appeals Review Commission shall have the authority to make orders and decisions in the terms specified in the Rules of Procedure.
7. The Minister who is the subject of a case, but no-one else, may appeal against any decision of the Review Commission but not against an order of an interim nature only. An appeal must be made in writing within the time limit specified in the Rules of Procedure and in accordance with those rules and the grounds of appeal must be stated in the notice.
8. Procedural matters arising under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure shall in every case be dealt with under the Rules of Procedure.
9. 9.1 Save only as provided in Paragraph 9.2, this Part I of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure is subject to Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.  
  
9.2 Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly has authority by a single resolution of that Council to make as and when necessary and with immediate effect such changes to any part of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure as are, on the advice of the legal advisers to the United Reformed Church, required to bring that procedure into line with the general law of the land consequent upon any changes in legislation and/or case law.  
  
9.3 All such changes to the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure as are made by Mission Council under Paragraph 9.2 shall be reported to the next annual meeting of the General Assembly.

## Resolution II Amendments to the Structure to introduce the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure

(report paragraph 5.3.5)

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

### Paragraph 2(3)(A)(xix)

Add a new Paragraph 2(3)(A)(xix) as follows:

**'where the district council considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and perceives the issue as relating to the incapacity of the minister on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons, to initiate the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure of the United Reformed Church in respect of that minister and to follow the procedure laid down therein with regard to the suspension of the minister during the continuance of the incapacity proceedings.'**

The existing district council Functions (xix) and (xx) to become (xx) and (xxi).

### Paragraph 2(3)(C)

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

**'No appeal shall lie against a decision by the district council to initiate the Ministerial Disciplinary Process in accordance with Function (xviii) above or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure in accordance with Function (xix) above in respect of any minister.'**

### Paragraph 2(3)(E)

Add a new Paragraph 2(3)(E) as follows:

**'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, the district council shall not exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'**

**Paragraph 2(4)(A)(viii)**

Replace the words 'the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xv) below' with the words 'the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xiv) below or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Function (xv) below'.

**Paragraph 2(4)(A)(xv)**

Add a new Paragraph 2(4)(A)(xv) as follows:

**'In the absence of any reference into the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure by the appropriate district council and where, either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party, the synod considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and perceives the issue as relating to the incapacity of the minister on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons to initiate the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure in respect of that minister and to follow the procedure laid down therein with regard to the suspension of the minister during the continuance of the incapacity proceedings.'**

The existing synod Functions (xv) and (xvi) to become (xvi) and (xvii) and alter the reference in the renumbered (xvi) from 'para. 2.3(xix)' to 'para. 2(3)(A)(xx)'.

**Paragraph 2(4)(C)**

Replace the existing Paragraph 2(4)(C) of the Structure with the following:

**'No appeal shall lie against a decision by the synod to initiate the Ministerial Disciplinary Process in accordance with Function (xiv) above or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure in accordance with Function (xv) above in respect of any minister.'**

**Paragraph 2(4)(E)**

Add a new Paragraph 2(4)(E) as follows:

**'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, the synod shall not exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'**

**Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xi)**

Add the words '..... and Part I of the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Function (xxiv) below'.

**Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xviii)**

Replace the words 'the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below' with the words 'the Ministerial Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (xxiii) below or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure referred to in Function (xxiv) below'.

**Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxii)**

Replace the existing paragraph with the following:

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

**Paragraphs 2(5)(A)(xxiv), (xxv) and (xxvi)**

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

**Paragraph 2(5)(xxiv)**

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

**Paragraph 2(5)(xxv)**

**'to provide for the setting up of an Appeals Review Commission in accordance with the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure for the hearing of appeals under that Procedure.'**

**Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxvi)**

**'In the absence of any reference into the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure by the appropriate district council or synod and where either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party, the General Assembly (or Mission Council acting on its behalf) considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union and perceives the issue as relating to the incapacity of the minister on account of medical, psychological or other similar or related reasons, to initiate the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure in respect of that minister and to follow the procedure laid down therein with regard to the suspension of the minister during the continuance of the incapacity proceedings. (The case of any minister who is a moderator of synod shall necessarily be dealt with under this provision).'**

Renumber the existing Paragraph 2(5)(A)(xxiv) as (xxvii).

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

**Paragraph 2(5)(C)**

Add a new Paragraph 2(5)(C) as follows:

**'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case under the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, neither General Assembly nor Mission Council on its behalf shall exercise any of General Assembly's functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'**

**Paragraph 5(1)**

Replace the existing Paragraph 5(1) with the following:

**'No right of Appeal shall lie against the decision of any council of the Church (acting with due authority) to initiate a case within either the Ministerial Disciplinary Process or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, and once a case is properly within either of such procedures it shall be resolved in accordance therewith and not under Paragraph 5(2) below. Any decision reached in accordance with either the Ministerial Disciplinary Process or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure has the status of a decision of the General Assembly and is final and binding.'**

**Section C – Rules of Procedure on Appeals**

Replace the existing Paragraph 10 with the following:

**'The provisions of this Section "Rules of Procedure on Appeals" shall not apply to cases which are being determined within either the Ministerial Disciplinary Process or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure.'**

## Resolution 12 Ratification of changes to Section O, Part I approved in 2004 (Resolution 11 of 2004)

(report paragraph 5.3.6)

**General Assembly agrees to ratify its decision to make the following changes to Part I of the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline:**

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

### Paragraph 4.2

Add the following words at the end of this Paragraph: **'...but any person who reaches the end of the term of his/her appointment on the Commission Panel whilst serving as a member of an Assembly Commission in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.'**

### Paragraph 9

The existing Paragraph 9 to become 9.1 and a new paragraph to be added as 9.2:

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

## Resolution 13 Ratification of changes to the Structure regarding the resignation of ministers (Resolution 13 of 2004)

(report paragraph 5.3.6)

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

### Paragraph 2(3)A(viii)

Insert the words **'not currently the subject of any case within the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline referred to in Function (xviii) below'** after the word **'ministers'**.

### Paragraphs 2(3)A(xviii), 2(4)A(xiv) and 2(5)A(xxiii)

In all these paragraphs, delete the words **'following initial enquiry'** on the first line and add the words **'at the appropriate time as specified in that Process'** at the end of the paragraph.

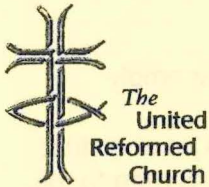
### Paragraph 2(3)(B)

Delete the existing Paragraph 2(3)(B) and replace it with the following:

**B.1 'As soon as any minister becomes the subject of a case under the Section O Process for Ministerial Discipline, the District Council shall not exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case, provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this Paragraph.'**

**B.2 'The responsibility for calling in the District Council's Mandated Group to conduct an Initial Enquiry which marks the beginning of the Disciplinary Process rests with the Synod Moderator acting in consultation with such officers of the District Council as s/he considers appropriate.'**





MISSION COUNCIL  
4 – 6 October 2005

E

**Catch the Vision  
Guidance Paper for Synods and Districts**

1. The Assembly decisions that 'there shall be one level of council between the General Assembly and the local church', and that that council shall be the thirteen 'new Synods' have been referred to Synods and districts to be discussed and voted on. Replies should be returned to the General Secretary by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006.

2. The votes in Assembly reflect the widespread view in the church that the present system is not delivering what we want it to deliver. The decisions therefore provide us with a unique opportunity to fashion systems that will work in the thirteen very different Synodical contexts in which we find ourselves. If the voting in the councils of the church is to be meaningful, those explorations need to happen within each Synod in consultation with their districts. Only once a possible new pattern is available to be compared with the old will a vote be possible.

3. There is abroad a widespread misunderstanding about what is proposed. What is proposed is a reduction in the level of councils. That does not mean that there will be no structure in the church beyond the 13 new Synods. It means rather that each of the thirteen Synods will be able to produce systems of pastoral care and support, mission and service delivery which will be appropriate to their circumstances.

4. Discussions within Synods

Each Synod needs to consult with its churches and existing districts about what kind of shape would best serve the needs of local churches. In some cases that might be the provision of an 'area pastoral committee', but in other cases it might be something very different. An example is offered as Appendix 2 to this paper (nb. It is hoped to add other examples). It comes from the North West, and is intended not as a template, but rather as an example of what can be done. What is important is that solutions are found that are appropriate to each Synod, and which meet the pastoral needs of the churches and ministers in those Synods. We would encourage each Synod to consult as fully as possible in the ways they consider most appropriate. If change is to work it needs to be owned, understood and accepted. Once that process has happened, and a structure is worked out, it would be helpful if a copy could be forwarded to me so that the solutions of the various Synods can be compared.

5. Discussions between Synods

The second set of discussions that need to happen are between the thirteen Synods. Those conversations need to ensure that there are mechanisms for proper national standards where Assembly-wide standards are required. This will be in the operation of things like ministerial assessment and Section O procedures.

To assist both sets of conversations, Appendix 1 sets out the functions of the 'new Synods'. The following are the areas which on which Assembly-wide standards are required:

- The calling, induction and ordination of ministers

- Representation to Assembly (which will be determined in consultation with the Assembly Arrangements Committee)
- Candidature for ministry and the assessment of ministerial candidates. The removal of district councils from the process suggests that recommendation should be made by the Synod to the National Assessment Panel, and the Panel's decision be final. Clearly there is need for consultation between the Ministries Committee and the Synods about this before March.

Note: 1. This would imply that the recommendation of the Assessment Conference would be the final decision. Synods (having already recommended the candidate before Assessment Conference) would then simply forward the recommendation of Assessment Conference to the agreed training institution.

Note 2. In order that the judgement of the candidate's own church is validated there would need to be some means of taking into account the views of other churches. This would probably mean the Ministries Committee guidelines on candidating need to be revised. Perhaps in addition to references from the local church and its minister there might be a requirement for references for at least two other churches and their ministers. An alternative might be a recommendation from the area Pastoral Committee if New Synods decide to have them.

- Section O processes
- The accreditation of local preachers and worship leaders
- Appeals procedures

One way in which this conversation can be advanced is through the Moderators' meeting. Another is the meeting of Synod Clerks. However, it may well be that a consultation needs to be called in the early new year to deal with any difficulties which may arise.

## 6. Legal opinion

As promised at Assembly, counsel's opinion is being sought on the proposed changes in the light of the URC Act. Once that opinion is known, it will be shared with all synod and district officers.

## 7. Voting on the new structures

Given the volume of work that needs to be undertaken before a clear view of the alternative possibilities for each Synod is available, it is hoped that voting will be delayed until such clarity is obtained.

David Cornick  
September 2005

APPENDIX 1

Newly defined functions for newly defined structure

		Newly defined Synod Functions
a) The United Reformed Church and its constituent churches	(i)	To take action which supports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the spreading of the Gospel at home and abroad,</li> <li>• the life and witness of the United Reformed Church,</li> <li>• the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole</li> <li>• the well-being of the community in which the church is placed</li> </ul>
	(ii)	To encourage church extension within the province or nation decide upon the establishment of new causes and the recognition of mission projects.
	(iii)	To decide upon all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of local churches.
	(iv)	To take appropriate action on matters referred to the council by the General Assembly or other competent body.
	(v)	To provide a forum for concerns brought forward by local churches and to advise thereon
	(vi)	To make proposals to and raise concerns for consideration by the General Assembly
	(vii)	To give (or, where deep pastoral concern for the church requires it, to withhold) concurrence in calls to ministers and, with the moderator of the synod or the moderator's deputy presiding to conduct, in fellowship with the local church, any ordinations and /or inductions of ministers within the synod.
	(viii)	To appoint, in consultation with the local church and the moderator of the synod, an interim moderator during a pastoral vacancy, such interim moderator normally being a serving minister, a retired minister or an elder.
	(ix)	To care for all the churches of the synod ensuring that visits are made at regular intervals for consultation concerning their life and work.
(x) normally elders	(x)	To appoint from time to time such number of representatives to General Assembly (ministerial and lay in equal numbers) as the General Assembly shall determine. This shall include, when possible, a representative under the age of 26. As far as possible all appointments shall be made in rotation from local churches. <i>including representatives under the age of 26.</i>
	(xi)	To consider the appointment to service on synod of: (I) United Reformed Church ministers/lay people serving as (a) full-time chaplains to universities,

		<p>colleges, hospitals, factories, where their work is seen to be an extension of the ministry of the synod concerned, (b) secretaries and other full-time officials of ecumenical bodies with which the United Reformed Church is in relationship;</p> <p>(II) United Reformed Church ministers giving significant oversight to local churches, under the general direction of the council concerned</p> <p>(III) Ministers of other churches appointed to serve on behalf of the United Reformed Church in charge of a United Reformed Church or in an Ecumenical group including United Reformed Church interests;</p> <p>(IV) Ministers not in pastoral charge who perform duties within the synod in respect of which the council has some direct responsibility.</p>
	(xii)	To devise strategies which enable and support the exploration of mission opportunities in the region and to encourage in the local churches concern for service and a sense of responsibility for the wider work of the Church at home and abroad.
b) Ministers, candidates for ministry and local preachers	(xiii)	To exercise oversight of all ministers falling within any of the categories 2(3)(a), (b), (f) and (g) except moderators of synods who are responsible to the General Assembly.
	(xiv)	To consider on the recommendation of local churches applications for recognition as candidates for the ministry and transmit them, if approved, to the National Assessment Conference.
	(xv)	To give oversight to candidates for the ministry and to candidates for any form of full time service in the Church at home and abroad, and, in the case of candidates for the ministry determine their eligibility for a call.
	(xvi)	To receive and forward with a recommendation through the moderator of the synod to the General Assembly applications for admission into the United Reformed Church from ministers, probationers or congregations.
	(xvii)	To consider questions regarding inclusion on the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church and make recommendations thereon to General Assembly (but excluding consideration of any matter which is being dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process referred to in Function (XV) below)
	(xviii)	Where following initial enquiry either on its own initiative or on a reference or appeal brought by any other party the synod considers that a minister is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union, to refer the case of that minister to be dealt with in accordance with the

		Disciplinary Process contained in Section 0 of the Manual of the United Reformed Church and in every such case to suspend the minister concerned pending the resolution of the matter under this process.
	(xix)	To appoint, or to concur in the appointment of, non-stipendiary ministers to their particular service and to review this service at stated intervals.
	(xx)	To accredit and provide support and training for local preachers and worship leaders and, in consultation with the local churches concerned and the moderator of the synod, to give authority for appropriate lay persons to preside at the sacraments.
	(xxi)	To receive the resignation of ministers and, in consultation with the moderator of the synod, to decide upon appropriate action (see also paragraphs 2.4.viii and 2.5.xviii).
Ecumenical	(xxii)	To seek to expand the range and deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness in each local community, and in Scotland and Wales to undertake responsibility for national ecumenical relationships on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church, subject to the final authority of the General Assembly
Buildings	(xxiii)	To decide upon all matters regarding erection, major reconstruction or disposal of buildings.
Other	(xxiv)	To receive, hear and decide upon references and appeals duly submitted
	(xxv)	To do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the church.

## Appendix 2

### RENEWED FOR WITNESS AND SERVICE

#### *Recent developments in North Western Synod*

It is no coincidence that the Synods which have already tried out some changes and spent time debating possibilities are those across the north of England, for whom the problems caused by trying to make the present system work have been more than ordinarily demanding.

The difficulty of finding people to fill District and Synod posts and committee places, the sense of doing several things twice and some more important things not at all, the agonising over deployment of stipendiary ministers, the tensions between District and Synod as organisational levels, and the need to put more energy into ecumenical initiatives – these are common to all Synods but maybe felt more sharply further north.

In the North Western Synod we have made some changes to our structure within the parameters of the current Manual. These changes certainly will not suit everybody – and we do not yet know for sure whether they will suit us – but in good faith we are embarked on the journey because we needed to.

We started from an analysis of the tasks which intermediate bodies in a conciliar church need to fulfil, for the sake of what happens at local 'level'. To use the language of accounting, there are 'supply side' tasks: resourcing local churches with ministry and funding, offering legal, financial and other professional advice, employing training staff. These tasks we will expect the Synod (or Assembly) to do and you need to be as large as a Synod to sustain them. But policy must not be determined by the 'supply side'. For there are 'demand side' tasks, the ministry and mission of the local churches: caring for people and congregations, running many kinds of programmes on all aspects of mission, developing ecumenical partnerships, etc. These tasks need to be done at what we have known as District level (or more locally still) as the Synod is too remote to do them.

But then we realised – as anyone could have done by reading the Manual! – that we are not talking about two different or rival sets of people. The same individuals can comprise the District Council and the Synod, give or take some finessing of the co-options. This in effect means that the Synod can be the joint meeting of District Councils and the District Council meetings the 'Synod in dispersal'. Ministers already belong to both and we have asked that the same lay people shall represent their churches and pastorates on both bodies. And we are supporting the new Districts officers with Synod staff.

This realisation came half-way through a lengthy consultation process on plans for re-ordering the Districts from 8 to 4. Personally I felt that we had stumbled on a way through the 'two-decker dilemma'. It means that we recognise that both sets of tasks can be addressed by the same people.

From first draft to ratification the proposals were two years in gestation. There were ten meetings across the Synod to which all serving elders were invited, plus written enquiries to each church. We believe that this consultation, which of course produced changes in the proposals, was the reason for votes at two Synods which were almost unanimous.

Our new larger Districts are intentionally (though not quite) coterminous with Anglican and Methodist boundaries: in fact the new Cumbria District was formed with the clear intention of working more ecumenically across that county.

Two other changes are being introduced which we hope will be welcomed more for what they say about the style of church life as its organisation. We are following some other Synods in seeking to remove the last vestige of 'inspection' from District consultations, moving to a process more akin to 'accompanied self-appraisal' which ministers already know. And, second, we are trying to encourage local partnerships between churches, either ecumenically and denominationally, on things which one local church cannot do best on its own; a 'menu' of such things has been circulated. In stressing the flexibility of any local arrangements or partnerships we are hoping to break down the fear of the domino effect whereby cooperation leads to grouping which leads to closure. These changes would have happened anyway without the structural ones, but they are part of the general attempt to refresh church life.

Thus we interpret the Assembly resolutions to mean that members of Synod will still be able to meet 'in dispersal' from time to time to reflect together and decide on more local needs, and that several Pastoral Committees will be required for the care and oversight of churches and ministry which the larger Synod cannot offer from a distance.

Of course it looks clearer and better on paper than what will be done and experienced. Has that not been the case since New Testament times! But if we have a supportive framework and a sense of faithful togetherness, our living God (who has "not finished with us yet") will by grace allow us to witness and serve for some time to come.

*Peter Brain*



MISSION COUNCIL  
4 – 6 October 2005

F

'Time for Action' material for local churches  
(for information)

## DECLARATION OF A SAFE CHURCH

### A Charter for Action

General Assembly 2005 Resolution 6: *General Assembly*

- 1 *accepts The Declaration for a Safe Church*
- 2 *instructs all General Assembly committees to operate within it*
- 3 *urges Synods, District Councils and Local Churches to affirm the declaration, resolve to apply in all aspects of their life and work, and report their response to Mission Council by March 2006.*

The publication of the report '*Time for Action: on sexual abuse and the church*' by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (Autumn 2002) marked an important step forward in its challenge to the Churches to acknowledge that sexual abuse is a real issue within church life. It can no longer be swept under the carpet and we need to put serious measures in place to help us to know how to deal with any incidents that may occur. The United Reformed Church welcomed the report and considered how we might respond to it at all levels of our church life. The result is the '*Declaration of a Safe Church*', which seeks to ensure that high standards of protection and care are implemented throughout the Church, so that everyone (but particularly children and vulnerable adults) can have confidence that the United Reformed Church in all its activities and relationships is a safe place to be. It is Mission Council's intention that training material will be made available so that local churches, other groups and committees within the Church can be helped to implement the Declaration. This paper, offering practical Guidelines for local churches, is part of that process.

We have already had to come to terms with this difficult subject in relation to work with children – but we have to recognise that the risks of abuse go far wider than this, and can and does affect adults too. We need to be constantly alert to possible situations, to protect both those at risk and those in positions of authority and leadership, especially those in pastoral relationships with vulnerable people.

Most important, we need to know how to deal with situations that may arise, recognising the sensitivity of coping with accusations which may be directed at respected members of our community.

Some of this should already be in place in reality, if your church has taken on board the Guidelines on Good Practice in relation to children in the church. So in some ways, this is just an extension of what we have already accepted as necessary for us in this day and age. We are not asking you to take on something huge and new and questionable. It is a development from existing good practice. However, please note that it is not exactly the same thing and you are being asked to be alert in new ways, covering a much wider range of circumstances that could involve any of us at any time.



**NOTE: Examples of what constitutes sexual harassment and abuse**

*Kinds of behaviour which constitute sexual harassment and abuse: Suggestive looks or leers, obscene gestures, sexual remarks, comments, teasing or telling jokes with sexual content, letters, calls or materials of a sexual nature, imposed touching or closeness, pressure for dates or activities with a sexual overtone, or offer to influence in return for sexual favour, endangerment of minors, sexual abuse of children, abuse of vulnerable persons and those in distress. In extreme cases it can involve direct sexual assault and rape. These are only some examples; the list given is not exhaustive, but it should be noted that even apparently small incidents are still offensive and can easily lead on to more serious abuse if left unchallenged.*

**Guidelines for Churches – Preventing Sexual Harassment and Abuse**

The church acknowledges the following principles and ensures they are part of its life and work.

*Note* • The vulnerability of all people coming for pastoral help and the possibility of sexual harassment and abuse in the church setting.

- The power of persons in the pastoral relationship, especially the minister, that comes:
  - (i) with advanced training and professional credentials;
  - (ii) with the charisma of strong or attractive personalities;
  - (iii) with certain social roles within the structures of society;
  - (iv) and the real danger that this power may be used abusively.
- The need for strong boundaries to protect both the person seeking care and the person offering pastoral support. (For example: This will probably involve not touching or embracing vulnerable people. The more appropriate – and more difficult - empathic response may be to sit quietly with a crying person, being present during the tears and to the pain that causes them.)
- The inappropriateness of starting a sexual relationship with anyone seeking, undergoing or recovering from a period of pastoral care. This is particularly true for survivors of sexual abuse for whom authentic consent is almost impossible.
- The importance of ministers and pastoral carers to know themselves and their responsibilities to the vulnerable and the need for guidance through supervision. The first criterion is “do no harm”. The recognition of the need for systems of support for all those involved in offering pastoral care and that sometimes it may be best to refer people in appropriate ways to other agencies.
- The need to avoid sexualising relationships by physical contact or by suggestive verbal abuse or innuendo.
- The professional nature of the caring relationship that used properly and respectfully is the power to heal.
- The need for education and training (for members, elders, workers and ministers) on the issues of adult emotional, physical and sexual abuse in the church setting.
- The importance of each minister, elder and worker being aware of the URC policies and procedures pertaining to sexual harassment and the good practice guide in relation to

children. The promotion of a wide awareness of the need for good practice within the church community and all the organisations that use the church premises.

### **Procedures for dealing with possible allegations or suspicions of abuse**

- Be alert to possibilities and try to minimise risk situations.
- Take allegations seriously but do not jump to conclusions.
- Appoint 1 or 2 'link people' to act as initial recipients of any complaint (use the existing child protection guidelines for doing this – they could be the same people, but do not necessarily have to be so; in many cases it may be appropriate to have a different person. Ensure that they attend any training which is offered – such training will be open to elders, ministers and others involved in pastoral care.
- Have a clear and well publicised system in place for people to know that they may talk to an independent person and ensure that such a person is available and willing (could be from another church). Initial contact should preferably be by phone.
- Do not confront the accused person directly – it is not the role of the link person or supporter to carry out an investigation – concentrate initially on gathering the information and being able to present it clearly. Keep an account of what is being said and make sure this is accurate and factual.
- Be aware that the harassment or abuse may not constitute an actual criminal offence (as may be the case if a child is involved), but is still to be regarded as a serious matter and could in some cases lead to court action.
- Be aware that the accuser may be being threatened.
- If appropriate, ensure support for the accused also, who is also in a vulnerable position. This support should NOT be offered by the same person who is dealing with the accuser.

#### **Summary:**

- (a) initially offer support and a listening ear, ready to refer on to an independent adviser as appropriate.
- (b) recognise that the accused may also need to be offered support – either as a victim of false accusation, or as someone in need of help and counselling because of the actions they have committed (but may be in denial about). Any such support must be from a different person to the one dealing with the accuser.

#### **Further Action:**

It will be for the Synod to decide the most appropriate way of identifying independent advisers who can be appointed to take up responsibility within a particular District, Area, or other groupings of local churches. Each Synod will need to establish a clear system for dealing with complaints and offering support to all parties involved, in accordance with the Policy and Procedures on sexual harassment and abuse currently being drawn up by the United Reformed Church.

# **Declaration of a Safe Church**

## **A Charter for Action**

***This church accepts*** that sexual harassment and abuse is a serious problem which occurs in the family of the church as well as in wider society, and recognises that sexual harassment and abuse is always unacceptable and must be stopped.

We are all made in the image of God and Christ came that we should have life in all its fullness. Therefore everyone has the right to find nourishment for their Christian pilgrimage in a safe place.

***This means that:***

- dignity should be respected
- abusive behaviour will not be tolerated
- there will be sufficient support for those who need it
- allegations will be taken seriously

This church is rightly the place of loving pastoral care and concern which, by its very nature, makes it possible for inappropriate behaviour to go unrecognised and unacknowledged. It is, therefore, the responsibility of everyone in this church to challenge inappropriate sexual behaviour.

***This church will:***

- inform itself about support agencies available locally, publicise them and learn from them
- in all areas of its life, by teaching and example, emphasise that sexual harassment and abuse is a sin. This sin must be repented of on an individual and community level before healing can begin
- take the necessary steps to investigate all allegations of sexual harassment or abuse and ensure that appropriate action is taken
- put in place a reporting mechanism to receive any allegation or complaint and take appropriate action

***Every church will operate this Charter For A Safe Church.***



**MISSION COUNCIL**  
**4 – 6 October 2005**

**G**

## **MINISTERIAL REMUNERATION 2006**

### **Recommendation to Mission Council concerning the stipend level for 2006**

The Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee has reviewed the latest available inflation indices and has also considered the levels and rates of increase of stipends in the other major denominations in the United Kingdom.

In September 2005, the RPI was 2.9 % (the same as in August) and the RPIX (excluding mortgage interest) was 2.3 %. The sub-committee considers the RPIX to be the more relevant index in relation to stipend levels. The latest average earnings index was 4.2 %.

The various denominations review their stipends at different times in the year. The highest recent agreed increase by other Churches is 3.3 %. The basic stipend paid by the United Reformed Church is higher than the current minimum / basic stipends of the Anglican, Baptist and Methodist Churches.

The basic stipend in 2005 is £19,176. Taking all the above factors into consideration, the recommendation is that this should be increased by 3.2 % to £19,788 in 2006. Although the sub-committee is not persuaded to rely on a single index or formula, it notes that 3.2 % is almost midway between the latest RPIX and average earnings index.

The Church's budget for 2006 has not been used in arriving at this recommendation. Financial constraints in the Church might affect the number of ministers that the Church could afford to pay but it should not affect what is paid to individual ministers. The 2006 budget assumes a 3.0 % increase in the stipend level.

### **Recommendation to Finance Committee concerning the stipend level for 2007**

The process of setting the budget of the United Reformed Church begins almost a year before the stipend for that year is set by Mission Council. The Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee decided that it should in future advise on the level of the stipend to be included in the budget. The sub-committee does not consider that any special action is necessary at this time concerning the level of the basic stipend and recommends that the budget for 2007 should include an increase in the basic stipend of 3.5 %. The Finance Committee will want to review this recommendation against the latest inflation indices when the budget for 2006 is finalised. The sub-committee emphasises that the budget does not imply a commitment to pay stipends at the budgeted level.

### **Other grants and allowances**

The Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee has approved increases to the child allowances and associated income limits at the same rate as stipends are increased. It has approved increases to resettlement grants and ordination loans of 2.3 % in line with the latest RPIX.

For the fourth year in a row, the sub-committee has decided to freeze the compensation allowances paid to ministers in Assembly appointments. The sub-committee is in favour of phasing out these allowances. However, it recognises that this should be dealt with as part of a wider review of the amounts paid to ministers and church related community workers from all Church sources. The possibility of such a wider review, including the aims and objectives, is a matter that needs consideration by Ministries Committee.

**Resolution: Mission Council sets the basic stipend for 2006 at £19,788.**



MISSION COUNCIL  
4 - 6 October 2005

withheld  
H

## Additional Business

### Commentary on and proposed amendments to RESOLUTION 8 (2005 Assembly) from the Section O Advisory Group (see Paper D)

The purpose of the above resolution is to make certain changes to Part II of Section O. One such change is a proposal to increase the number of members of a Mandated Group from three to four, two coming from the Synod Panel as at present and the other two to be appointed from a wider Panel composed of persons with legal or similar experience or expertise.

Since this resolution was remitted by Assembly to Mission Council for consideration and action, the Advisory Group has had the opportunity of considering comment on some of the changes to Part II of Section O which the resolution was proposing. As a result, the Group wishes to recommend that the Resolution be amended in the following ways.

First, the number of members on a Mandated Group would remain at three, of whom only one would be appointed from the wider Panel. Secondly, nomination to that Panel would not be limited to those with legal experience, but would be extended to include those with professional experience or other similar background.

To implement these changes, the Advisory Group requests Mission Council to amend the Resolution as follows:

**Paragraph B.1.1** Remove this reference. This Paragraph remains unchanged.

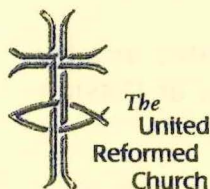
**Paragraph B.2.2** Replace 'the two remaining persons' with 'the remaining person'.

**Paragraph B.3.1** Replace the existing paragraph with the following:

**Paragraph B.3.1** 'Mission Council shall constitute and maintain a Standing Panel ('the Joint Panel') consisting of a maximum of thirteen persons, of whom one shall be nominated by each Synod and selected preferably on account of some legal, tribunal or professional experience or other similar background, which would equip them for assuming a role as part of a Mandated Group.'

**Paragraph B.3.2** Replace 'two members' with 'one member' and replace 'all four members' with 'all three members'.

**Paragraphs B.6.1.2(iii),(iv) and (v)** Renumber these as Paragraphs B.6.1.3, B.6.1.4 and B.6.1.5 and make the following changes to them:



## MISSION COUNCIL 4-6 October 2005

### Theological Reflection by the Revd Sheilagh M Kesting, Ecumenical Officer of the Church of Scotland

1. It was with some trepidation that I accepted the invitation to be the theological reflector for Mission Council. I am the Ecumenical Officer in the Church of Scotland and so in some ways I know the United Reformed Church well. We are sister churches in the Reformed Tradition and over the years I have had the pleasure of meeting with and getting to know a number of you. Indeed, I was an observer on the negotiating group that brought the Scottish Congregational Church into the United Reformed Church in 2000. In addition, the Church of Scotland is a little further along the road of a radical restructuring with the help of our 'vision' document which is entitled 'A Church Without Walls'. I have watched those in my Church who have the responsibility of managing change. I have been consulted in the process and I have worked in an environment affected by the uncertainty of change. And now, perhaps a little scarred, the Church of Scotland is settling down into its new structure and there is new energy for the task, for the one thing that does not go away is God's call to equip the people of God for service in God's mission. New staff groupings have now led to new councils and supporting departments with a hope that there will be a willingness to engage in joint work across the councils where appropriate. These are some of the credentials I bring to this task of theological reflector.
  
2. One way to approach the task of theological reflector is to ask, 'Where is God in this?' Were there signs of God's presence at Mission Council? Well, yes, of course there were! There was much that was creative – not least in the worship, the introduction to 'pendulum theology', and the reflection on Reformed Spirituality. Already I have added other dimensions to the pendulum – local and universal, growth and vulnerability, diversity and unity and there must be many more! There was also much evidence of the 'crucified God' as Mission Council wrestled with reports from local churches and districts about their reactions to the proposed loss of the district level, not least the question of what would happen to the much appreciated pastoral committees, and, of course, the issue of clergy sexual abuse. The theology of relatedness that emerges from 'Catch the Vision' and clearly relates to our understanding of God as Trinity and all that flows from that by way of the church as community and communion was also evident throughout and at various levels: relatedness to God; relatedness to one another; relatedness of Mission Council and the committees of the church to local churches, to districts and synods; relatedness of the United Reformed Church to the past; and relatedness to other churches. If the church is 'local and relational', then there was plenty evidence of an emerging shared ecclesiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In many ways it is the theology of the

moment, but I know of no place where it is so thoroughly integrated into the life of a denomination as it appeared to be from what I witnessed at Mission Council.

3. I'm pleased to say that I felt you avoided some of the traps the Church of Scotland fell into as it spelt out its vision of local and relational in A Church Without Walls. Specifically, the decision to do the ecclesiological work proposed by the Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee ensured that the seeking of structures suited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not going to be about abandoning the story thus far. Doing it in 'bite sizes' and targeting specific audiences is undoubtedly useful, but the whole exercise will be an important one in maintaining your relationship with the past and helping people both inside and outside of the United Reformed Church to understand who you are and where you have come from. In the words of the Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine, "We need to affirm the significance of those who have gone before us as well as the energies of those who dream for the future. The beauty of the historic tradition is its appreciation of the catholicity and universality of the church, its unity as the Body of Christ, and the life-creating, community-shaping (Spirit-)power of word and sacrament... (T)he principle of the unity of the Body of Christ is such that the experience of the early church includes not only growth (cf. 2 Cor 4:15) but suffering and weakness (cf 2 Cor 4:11,12), as a participation in the cross of Jesus Christ. If one part suffers than *all* suffer..." (General Assembly 2005 p13/14)
4. I am not sure, however, how the United Reformed Church sees itself in relation to the universality of the church. It was not a dimension that emerged from the discussion, and yet it is surely vital in any restructuring that there is a clear sense of how we relate to the church catholic. It was perhaps this that lay behind the concern to identify how *episcopate* was being affected by the proposed changes in structure. And it will perhaps be clarified as the Committee on Doctrine, Prayer and Worship fulfils its tasks. As we discovered in the Church of Scotland too big a focus on the local and you lose the sense of universality and too big a focus on universality and the church creates structures that float free of the local – there's that pendulum again! Clarity here would be good not just for the United Reformed Church but for other churches in the Reformed tradition.
5. I have a sense from Mission Council that you are better than most at valuing the contribution of small, often struggling local churches, although there was just a hint from time to time of a mind-set that sees the task of local mission as one of primarily increasing numbers. And of course it will be in some instances as that passage from 2 Corinthians 4 makes clear. But with a faith that is focused on death and resurrection we should also expect to give a valued place to those who witness in circumstances of vulnerability, decline or even death, in the context of a changed society in which fragmentation of relationships has become the norm and social values that used to hold communities together have dissolved. Is the local sacrosanct? The question was asked. The fact that it is being protected at the moment does say something about how the local as 'the theatre of mission' is understood and valued. How that question is addressed, though, will be crucial.



6. Ecumenical relationships were not just a strap line at the head of the agenda but were clearly at the heart of much of the discussion - from the effect of the proposed groupings of staff in Church House, to the discussion on the London Synods, to the ecclesiological work of Doctrine, Prayer and Worship, to the beneficial work done on the gambling bill by the Church of England and the Salvation Army working on behalf of all the churches. Concern about ecumenical relations was there in the question that was asked in relation to the proposal to do away with district councils and form new synods: where is *episcopate* in this? Without an answer to that question, churches in the Reformed tradition are hampered in ecumenical dialogue. It will be interesting to see how the related discussions also undertaken for ecumenical purposes with the Anglicans in England, Scotland and Wales on *God's Reign and Our Unity* will feed into the shaping of this aspect of your church life. (On a personal note, not only was I saddened by the fact that the Church of Scotland was not invited to be part of these discussions, having been part of the group that produced the report, but even more so by the fact that had we been invited we would have had to decline, given the current attitude in the Church of Scotland to anything smacking of episcopacy.) Concern for ecumenical relations was also there in the discussion on the implications for regional relations of restructuring synods. This is relational theology at its ecumenical best.
7. There was no avoiding the fact that this was a very difficult Mission Council and none more so than the sessions on the report on 'Lessons to be learnt' from the case of a particular minister and issues of sexual abuse. What is clear is that struggling with these deeply disturbing issues is what we are called to do. Avoiding the issues is not an option. As the discussion went on I began to notice who were silent and who spoke. I also began to notice the nature of the contributions made, the tone of voice, the particular aspects highlighted. Few women felt able to speak - even to voice helplessness in the face of the issues. Some of the contributions made in the discussion, I suspect, compounded that situation. This is one area where women and men have a tendency to react differently, which can easily lead to further misunderstanding. Having a facilitator at the next meeting should help each to listen to the other. Not to have one would, I fear, could lead to a less good outcome than your courage in seeking to learn from this experience deserves. I would encourage you to read, or re-read, *Time for Action* with a sensitivity to how you react to it in preparation for the next meeting. Put within the context of a theological reflection, this process is one that fits well with your concern for good relationships. A church that is concerned about relationship and agonises where these break down, is a church that is concerned to witness faithfully to a loving God. A church that seeks to learn lessons from past failure is a church that is prepared to witness from a position of vulnerability, itself a God-filled place. In retrospect you might have handled the presentation of the report differently but that will no doubt become part of the learning process. What is not in question is the way you are seeking to learn more about how God relates to us, individually and corporately, and how we relate to God and to each other in situations of great distress. Learning lessons for the church may also mean moving to a different place as individuals as you are asked to reflect on what kind of God the church reflects and represents as it seeks to address these deeply emotional issues.

8. If the agenda in the March meeting of Mission Council was found to be 'frenzied', that cannot be said about this agenda. Although there was a backlog of business to be dealt with on the final morning, which led to the regrettable curtailing of the General Secretary's reflection on Reformed Spirituality, there was nonetheless a feeling that the matters of restructuring and those relating to sexual abuse were so crucial that it was important to give them the time they needed. I liked the balance between time for discussion and time for reflection and worship. It meant there was an in-built discipline that kept drawing the meeting back to reflect on what it means to be the church in this part of the world at this time, in faithful continuity with those who have gone before and with eyes fixed on a vision of the Kingdom of God both of which energise the engagement of the church in the mission of God to the world.
9. I realise that this was not a typical meeting of Mission Council. People told me that there was 'usually much more business'. I suppose that will be inevitable at times. But I was grateful that at least on this occasion it was possible to experience a meeting where business and reflection were well balanced, where there was space for small group discussion and where worship and pastoral care were offered with sensitivity. Thank you for the privilege of sharing these days with you.

Sheilagh M Kesting  
October 2005