**A summary of the Revd Professor Alan Sell’s address**

**Mission Council March 2014**

Professor Sell addressed the question: “How does The United Reformed Church seek to discern the mind of Christ?”

It would be premature to consult our *Basis of Union* to seek a constitutional answer to this question, for we are a Church, and in a Church doctrines are prior to constitutions. The doctrines of the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Christ over the Church are particularly relevant in the present connection. On the ground of Christ’s saving work, and through the proclamation of the Word, the God Holy Spirit calls and gathers the saints into visible yet catholic companies of Christians who are by grace engrafted into Christ the Vine as members one of another, and who acknowledge the sole Lordship of Christ over their worship, witness and individual lives. In both its worship and its church order The United Reformed Church is under the guidance, tutorship and challenge of the Holy Spirit, and worship and church order cannot be disjoined.

In worship our praise, prayer and preaching are inspired by the Spirit, and in our councils—Church Meeting, Synod, and General Assembly—we seek the mind of Christ by the Spirit, through the Word, within the fellowship. Thus Church Meeting, for example, is a continuation of the service of worship. It is a credal (not a democratic) assembly in which the sole Lordship of Christ over the Church is confessed, and his will and unanimity in him (not majority rule) are sought. The supreme question for the Church Meeting, as for the other councils, is “What are we to do, by way of witness and service, with the Gospel we have received through the preaching and at the Lord’s Table?” Because we hold that all three councils are competent to seek and discern the mind of Christ, we understand them as being nearer and farther, not higher and lower*, foci* of churchly life, and they operate in a spirit of mutual *episcope*/oversight.

Should formal disagreements arise between them, these are considered in a spirit of mutual love and care, with any parting of the ways being the last resort. Since the saints are also sinners, our churches and councils hold their treasure in earthen vessels and they, like churches of all traditions, are liable to err; but the Church at large, remains the only agent of the Gospel, and that God should work through us at all is not the least testimony to his forgiving love, providence and patience. It behoves us as members of The United Reformed Church to stand for the Gospel of God’s free grace, to know our heritage, to uphold and witness to our catholic principle, and, by the help of God the Holy Spirit, to honour our saintly obligations of fellowship, worship, mission and service.

*Professor Alan Sell*

*March 2014*