

The United Reformed Church

Minutes of a meeting of Mission Council held on 3-5 November 2014, at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

Monday 3 November 2014

Session 1

The meeting of Mission Council began at 2.00 pm, with Worship led by the Moderator, Mr John Ellis. The General Secretary, the Revd John Proctor, preached on the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-12. The Moderator's Chaplain, the Revd Nigel Uden, presided at the sacrament of Holy Communion, assisted by Mr Ellis and Mr Proctor. Within the prayers of intercession, specific prayer was offered for the Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller, whose father Jim had recently died, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, and Mrs Jill Turner, a longstanding member of Mission Council representing the East Midlands Synod, who had died the previous day. Following worship, Mission Council adjourned.

Session 2

Mission Council resumed at 4.30 pm. The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair.

The Moderator introduced himself and the others on the platform: the Revd John Proctor (General Secretary), the Revd James Breslin (Clerk), and the Revd Michael Hopkins (Clerk-elect). He welcomed to Mission Council new members, people attending in a new capacity, visitors, and observers.

Those attending for the first time, or returning after a break in service:

Mrs Jane Baird	<i>Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)</i>
Mr Andy Braunston	<i>North Western Synod representative</i>
The Revd James Breslin	<i>Assembly Clerk</i>
Mrs Sue Brown	<i>Wessex Synod representative</i>
The Revd Elizabeth Clark	<i>National Rural Officer</i>
The Revd Richard Gray	<i>Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and Deputy Treasurer</i>
Mr David Greatorex	<i>East Midlands Synod representative</i>
The Revd Graham Hoslett	<i>Wessex Synod representative</i>
Mrs Helen Lidgett	<i>East Midlands Synod representative</i>
The Revd Helen Mee	<i>Equalities Committee Convener</i>
The Revd Dr David Pickering	<i>Yorkshire Synod representative</i>
The Revd John Proctor	<i>General Secretary</i>
Mr Bill Robson	<i>Minute Secretary</i>
The Revd Mike Walsh	<i>North Western Synod representative</i>
Mr Alan Yates	<i>Moderator-elect 2016-18</i>

Those present in a new capacity:

Ms Francis Brien	<i>Deputy General Secretary (Mission)</i>
The Revd Jacky Embrey	<i>Mersey Synod Moderator</i>
The Revd Michael Hopkins	<i>Assembly Arrangements Committee Convener</i>
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	<i>Immediate Past Moderator</i>
Ms Gill Nichol	<i>Head of Communications</i>
The Revd Gethin Rhys	<i>Ministries Committee Convener</i>
The Revd Kevin Watson	<i>Moderator-elect 2016-18</i>
Mrs Irene Wren	<i>Nominations Committee Convener</i>

Observers:

Mrs Melanie Campbell	<i>Northern Synod Clerk</i>
Dr Daleep Mukarji	<i>Methodist Church</i>
Mr Mathew Prett	<i>Research Student</i>

Apologies for absence:

The Revd David Grosch-Miller	<i>Moderator</i>
The Revd Dr Carla Grosch-Miller	<i>Chaplain to the Revd David Grosch-Miller</i>
The Revd Angela Gemmer-Snell	<i>West Midlands Synod representative</i>
The Revd Paul Robinson	<i>Synod of Wales representative</i>
Mr Vic Russell	<i>Thames North representative (alternate: the Revd Hugh Graham)</i>
Mrs Suzanne Adofo	<i>Church Related Community Work Development Officer</i>
The Revd Ruth Gee	<i>Methodist Church (alternate: Dr Daleep Mukarji)</i>
The Revd Connie Bonner	<i>Synod of Scotland representative</i>
The Revd Tracey Lewis	<i>Mission Committee Convener</i>
Mr Colin MacBean	<i>Wessex Synod representative (alternate: Ms Rosie Martin)</i>
The Revd Sheila Maxey	<i>Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee Convener</i>
The Revd Tim Meachin	<i>Children's and Youth Work Committee Convener</i>
Mr Steve Summers	<i>Church Related Community Work Development Worker</i>
The Revd Fiona Thomas	<i>Secretary for Education and Learning</i>
The Revd Professor David Thompson	<i>Law and Polity Advisory Group Convener</i>
Mr Andrew Weston	<i>FURY (alternate: Mr Dan Morrell)</i>
The Revd David Tatem	<i>Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Faith & Order</i>
Mr Keith Webster	<i>Human Resources Advisory Group Convener</i>

The Moderator greeted the Revd Richard Church, who had recently been appointed Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship). Mr Church will start work in this post in the spring, and be inducted at the May 2015 meeting of Mission Council. All four members of the General Secretariat were asked to stand, were greeted by the Council, and the Moderator led Mission Council in prayer for them.

The Moderator thanked everyone who had assisted him following his recent accident.

The Moderator reminded the Council of the use of consensus cards.

The Moderator advised that Paper P2 had already been removed en bloc business. A supplementary paper from the Nominations Committee, J1, was tabled. Should any more papers receive the support for removal from the en bloc business, the Council will be advised if there is a need to use Session 6 for business.

The General Secretary proposed that the Revd Derrick Dzandu-Heddidor, Mrs Linda Harrison, the Revd Roy Lowes, and the Revd Jenny Mills be appointed as members of the Facilitation Group, if one were to be needed. This was agreed unanimously.

14/29 Minutes of the previous meeting

The General Secretary presented the minutes of the meeting held on 10-12 March 2014, which were agreed unanimously, and signed by the Moderator.

14/30 Matters Arising

The Convener of the Communications and Editorial Committee gave a verbal update on matters reported at the last meeting, and notified Mission Council that the United Reformed Church would be a partner in the Greenbelt Festival.

14/31 Paper M5 – Standing Orders

The Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee presented paper M5, proposing various changes to the Standing Orders. Mr Hopkins explained the need for changes: because the proposed changes had not been put to Assembly through lack of time we had been left with an unworkable set of Standing Orders. Mr Hopkins initially proposed those marked in red in the paper. After discussion, it was agreed to present further proposals later in the meeting for wording relating to urgency, and the changes originally proposed were then agreed by consensus.

The Convener then proposed the changes marked in green in the paper, and notified the Council of some minor typographical corrections. Mr Simon Peters proposed that the words "Assembly to ultimately decide if such

systems are to be used” to Standing Order 7d on electronic voting systems. Mr Hopkins replied, and the proposal was not adopted.

It was pointed out that the word “libel” in Standing Order 12b did not apply in Scotland, and the Council agreed to substitute the term “defamation”, which covered all jurisdictions.

The changes proposed in green, as amended, were agreed by consensus.

The Convener then proposed the first change marked in blue, to change the word “agreement” in Standing Orders 2b and 2b(7)a to “Passed, recognising disagreement”. The Revd Clare Downing explained the rationale of the word “agreement” in this context and advocated its retention. Neither consensus nor agreement was possible, and the Moderator, having previously given notice that this business was to be designated as urgent, ruled that the matter be decided by majority vote. The proposal was carried by a substantial majority.

The Revd Kevin Watson spoke of the urgency of the need for a rigorous review of decision-making procedures. The Clerk assured Mr Watson a review would take place as soon as practical.

The Convener then proposed that the rule at the end of Standing Order 2b(9)(vi), preventing a move to majority voting if urgency was discovered after the current notice requirement, be deleted. After debate, and an assurance that new wording would be brought later in the meeting, this was resolved by consensus.

Having indicated its mind on each section in turn, Mission Council then resolved by consensus to adopt the changes agreed with immediate effect, pending the further wording on urgency, after which a formal resolution would be proposed.

14/32 Paper X1 – Age of application for non-stipendiary ministry

The Revd Roy Lowes proposed the resolution on behalf of the West Midlands Synod:

Recognising that people are working longer in many occupations and that UK legislation has changed in recent years to enable people to work without fear of age discrimination, Mission Council acting on behalf of the General Assembly resolves to remove the age related entry qualifications with regard to non-stipendiary ministry.

Following discussion, it was not possible to find consensus or to pass the resolution recognising disagreement. The Moderator proposed that the matter be remitted to the Ministries Committee, and that they consult with the Education and Learning Committee, West Midlands Synod, and the Synod Moderators. This was agreed by consensus.

Mission Council then adjourned.

Session 3

Mission Council resumed at 8.00 pm.

14/33 Paper L1 - Church House Development

The Convener of the United Reformed Church Trust presented paper L1. Following questions, the Moderator invited Mission Council to discuss this in groups, and report their views to Mr Gray, who would report the conclusions to the Council on Wednesday.

Mission Council met in groups for thirty minutes, and then resumed plenary session.

14/34 Paper Q1 – Joint Property Strategy Group

Mr Clifford Patten presented Paper Q1. Mr Patten also proposed an additional resolution to extend the life of the group to complete the work proposed in the paper.

The Revd Martin Spain queried the exclusion of Wales from the proposed list of roadshow venues. Mr Patten stated that it had not been possible to find a suitable venue in Wales, but it was hoped that Manchester and Birmingham might be accessible to some from Wales.

Mr Patten proposed:

1. Mission Council accepts and supports the ongoing work of the Joint Property Strategy Group and the proposed training events.

This was agreed by consensus.

Mr Patten proposed:

Mission Council asks the Joint Property Strategy Group United Reformed Church members to consult further regarding a church buildings forum and developing our church building theology and report back to Mission Council.

The Clerk suggested an amendment to include a date for reporting back, and the amended resolution was moved:

2. Mission Council asks the Joint Property Strategy Group United Reformed Church members to consult further regarding a church buildings forum and developing our church building theology and report back to Mission Council in 2015.

This was agreed by consensus.

Mr Patten proposed:

Mission Council agrees to extend the term of the Joint Property Strategy Group and the appointment of the United Reformed Church members until February 2017.

Following questions, it was clarified that the existing members could all continue for the duration of the group, but the term of the staff member would not be extended, and the date was extended to May 2017 to allow the group to make a final report to Mission Council.

The amended resolution 3 was moved:

3. Mission Council agrees to extend the term of the Joint Property Strategy Group and the appointment of the United Reformed Church members until May 2017.

This was agreed by consensus

Evening worship was led by the Moderator's Chaplain, after which Mission Council adjourned.

Session 4

Mission Council resumed at 9.00 am, and the Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair. Morning prayers were led by the Moderator's Chaplain.

14/35 The Moderator proposed that for the discussion on paper P1 ("the Peel Commission") that the Revd Elizabeth Welch, a former Moderator, should chair that item, and that the Revd Michael Hopkins should act as Clerk for that item. This was agreed by consensus.

14/36 En bloc resolutions

The Moderator informed Mission Council that the following papers had been withdrawn from en bloc business:

F1 (Faith and Order Committee report)

G2 (Finance Committee – Pension Committee rules)

P2 (Law and Polity).

14/37 Paper X3 - Marriage of same sex couples

The General Secretary updated Mission Council on developments since the General Assembly concluded. To date, twenty-four local churches and one Synod have responded. Analysis of the returns has been arranged, and a recommendation will be brought to Mission Council in May 2015. The Law and Polity Advisory Group have agreed to provide advice on doctrinal and constitutional matters by Christmas 2014, to which the Faith and Order Committee has provided input.

The General Secretary suggested that Mission Council be a forum to allow respectful discussion as an example to the wider Church.

The Moderator invited the Revd Stephen Brown to propose the resolutions brought by the Synod of Scotland. In doing so, Mr Brown stated that the intention of the resolutions was to clarify the current situation as it exists in Scotland, not to short circuit the consultation process or speed up decision-making. Mr Brown sought the permission of Mission Council, which was given, to propose the resolutions in an amended form:

Recognising:

- that the Synod of Scotland, living with difference itself, is and remains a convinced party to the 2007 Commitment, which calls the United Reformed Church to stay together, to work and pray together, to treat one another with respect, and to seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding;
- the different legal situation in Scotland in regard to marriage, which means that Church Meeting decisions in Scotland in relation to marriage are subject to fewer constraints of civil law than in England and Wales, given that requirements for a valid marriage focus on the celebrant rather than on the building;
- that church buildings held for the purposes of the United Reformed Church are subject to trust constraints on their use

Mission Council further recognises aspects of the distinctive situation for the Synod of Scotland, not acknowledged during the formulation of the same-sex marriage resolutions considered at General Assembly 2014, and for reasons of clarity notes that:

- A) in Scotland it is for local churches and their trustees to decide on the use of their buildings within the applicable trusts, which may enable them to extend ecumenical hospitality to ministers of other religious traditions who are approved celebrants within Scots law to solemnise same-sex marriages in those buildings;
- B) if a future Assembly allows for ministers or members of the United Reformed Church in Scotland to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the United Reformed Church to approach the Registrar General for Scotland.

During discussion questions were raised over the appropriateness of the timing of these resolutions, and the sensitivity towards other parts of the United Reformed Church.

Mission Council was not able to reach consensus or to pass recognising disagreement, so the resolutions were referred to a facilitation group.

14/38 Paper M3 Possible Recall of Assembly

The Moderator invited the General Secretary to propose the resolutions. The General Secretary advised that if Mission Council wished to keep open the possibility of a special meeting of the General Assembly, contingency arrangements needed to be initiated now. Mr Proctor further recommended that a final decision be left until after the results of the consultation were known, as that alone would be the factor determining how helpful a special meeting of Assembly would be. Mr Proctor moved:

- a) Mission Council directs the Assembly Arrangements Committee to make contingency plans for a one-day recalled meeting of the General Assembly on 27 June 2015 in Birmingham.
- b) Mission Council resolves to consider in May 2015 whether to recall General Assembly, in the light of returns from the Church-wide consultation on the marriage of same-sex couples.

In response to a question, the Clerk advised that ecumenical guests who were Members of Assembly would be invited at the expense of the Assembly funds.

After further discussion, part (a) was passed, recognising disagreement:

Mission Council directs the Assembly Arrangements Committee to make contingency plans for a one-day recalled meeting of the General Assembly on 27 June 2015 in Birmingham.

It was not possible to reach consensus or to pass recognising disagreement on part (b), so this was deferred to a later session.

The Moderator's Chaplain closed the session with silence and prayer. Mission Council adjourned.

Session 5

Mission Council resumed after a brief break. The Immediate Past Moderator, the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, was in the chair.

The Moderator notified Mission Council that the matters in papers D2 and G1 were urgent and would require a majority vote if consensus was not possible.

14/39 Paper D2 - Education and Learning Budget

The Moderator called upon the Convener of the Education and Learning Committee to speak to paper D2 and propose the resolutions. Mr Smith reminded Mission Council that since there had been no decision at the recent General Assembly on EM1 funding, budgets needed to be adjusted to cover requirements. A proposal that EM1 training should be a core element of the Budget formed part of the thinking leading to the resolutions:

- 1. Mission Council recognises the priority given to the funding of ministers in stipendiary service and students preparing for such service expressed during the discussion of the subsequently withdrawn resolution 16 at General Assembly 2014.**
2. Mission Council resolves that the education and learning budget for 2015 should be increased by up to £130,000 and kept at that level for the foreseeable future to enable the numbers of full-time students to be maintained at current levels.

In the discussion the Treasurer expressed understanding for the resolution, but reminded Mission Council that all decisions were in the context of falling income from 2012 (£22.3m) to 2015 (£20.7m), and any "ring fencing" meant that cuts elsewhere had to be more severe in order to balance the books.

Resolution 1 was passed by Consensus.

Following discussion, Resolution 2 was amended:

2. Mission Council resolves that the Education and Learning budget for 2015 should be increased by up to £130,000 and kept at that level for three years to enable the numbers of full-time students to be maintained at current levels.

Resolution 2 was passed by Consensus.

The Revd Dr Catherine Ball then proposed, and a number of members of Mission Council indicated willingness to second:

Mission Council instructs the Education and Learning Committee to research further areas where they could making savings.

This was left on the table as it related to the next item

14/40 Paper Y2 EM2/3 Provision

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith proposed, and the Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor seconded:

Mission Council asks the Education and Learning and Finance Committees to confer, and to bring forward recommendations about financial priorities for education and learning that will support the well-being and future vitality of the Church's ministry.

After discussion, it was agreed that a small group would discuss both resolutions and bring a proposal back to a later session.

14/41 Communications Review

The Convener reported on ongoing work. The Prayer handbook for 2015 is now available, and work for the 2016 version is underway. A policy on publications is drawn up. The Convener expressed thanks and appreciation to Gill Nichol.

14/42 Paper C4 - Yearbook

The Convener reported that the paper version of the yearbook would continue, as there was no desire for an on-line version.

14/43 Paper C3 - Reform

The Convener proposed the resolution:

Mission Council notes that the Communications and Editorial Committee and staff team are focussed on increasing the number of subscriptions to the magazine, and committed to developing, and monitoring the use of, *Reform* within the United Reformed Church over the three-year period from January 2015 to December 2017. Mission Council therefore resolves to support *Reform* by continuing with the current annual subsidy – not to exceed £90,000 in any one budget year – for the next three budget years; and asks the Communications and Editorial Committee to present up-to-date subscription numbers to Mission Council in March 2016.

During discussion concern was expressed at the number of additional copies of *Reform* freely available.

The resolution was agreed by consensus.

14/44 Paper G1 - Budget 2015 and beyond

The Treasurer presented the budget as in Paper G1, acknowledging the support provided by Mr Andrew Grimwade. Mr Ellis advised that the 1% called for by the General Assembly in Ministry and Mission Fund contributions has not been included, while the additional funding for Education and Learning and REFORM budgets have been. Mr Ellis reminded Mission Council that the deficits projected beyond 2015 are unsustainable, though if the churches respond to the appeal for an additional 1%, there would be a surplus. Mr Ellis proposed:

1. Mission Council notes with gratitude the continuing pensions support from the synods and requests synods to continue this support in 2015 at the same level as in 2014, yielding a total contribution of £300,000.

This was passed by consensus.

Mr Ellis then proposed:

2. Mission Council adopts the budget for 2015 set out in the Appendix.

This was passed by consensus.

14/45 Paper G2 – Ministerial Pension Fund Trust Deed and Rules

The Treasurer proposed the resolutions as set out in paper G2.

The Convener of the Equalities Committee queried the position on spouse benefits to same sex marriage partners being different to opposite sex partners. The Treasurer stated that the proposal met the current law and the decision of General Assembly in 2006 on the treatment of civil partnerships, but would need to be reviewed if the law changes in future or the Church reaches a policy position on same sex marriage.

Mission Council adjourned.

Session 6

Mission Council resumed with Dr Jagessar in the chair.

The Moderator stated that the resolutions required a counted majority vote.

1. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees that the new United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund Trust Deed and Rules be signed on behalf of the United Reformed Church by the Moderator and Clerk of Assembly.

There voted for the motion 57, none against.

2. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, delegates the actions specified in Appendix 1.1.

There voted for the motion 57, none against.

3. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, adopts the practice for early leavers from the United Reformed Church Ministers Pension Fund specified in Appendix 2.

There voted for the motion 58, none against.

14/46 Resource Sharing Task group

The Convener, the Revd Paul Whittle, gave an oral report to Mission Council. Initial responses among Synod financial officers indicated that the system of voluntary giving should continue. Mission Council representatives of Synods are asked to consult with Synod financial officers given the different position adopted by Mission Council.

The Revd Helen Mee expressed disappointment that the idea of “guaranteed minimum funding” of Synods is unlikely to be achieved.

14/47 Mr John Ellis resumed the chair. Mission Council was advised that the facilitation group reviewing the Synod of Scotland resolution X3 would be reporting back the following morning. The material removed from en bloc, F1, P2, M3 and M5, as well as the Education and Learning matters still unresolved, would be considered in this session.

14/48 Paper F1 - Faith and Order Committee report

The Convener presented her report. The Revd John Humphreys asked if the statement in paragraph 4 on “nature of doctrine” could be made more widely available, to which the Convener agreed.

14/49 Paper P2 - Law & Polity Advisory Group report

The Secretary of the Law and Polity Advisory Group moved the resolutions in paper P2, noting that the form of resolution 5 had changed since the paper was circulated. Mission Council agreed to its being put in the revised form.

1. Mission Council resolves to receive the report of the Law and Polity Advisory Group.

This was passed by consensus.

2. Mission Council resolves that the following terms of reference shall replace the original function of the Law and Polity Advisory Group:

(a) Polity functions

To assist the Clerk of Assembly, when required,

(i) in giving advice to the General Assembly, or rulings and guidance between sessions of Assembly, on questions of the interpretation and application of the Basis of Union, Structure, and other constitutional documents of the United Reformed Church, including ecumenical instruments and agreements which sanction deviation from the church’s normal practice; and

(ii) in scrutiny of legislative proposals (meaning thereby proposals for new constitutional and ecumenical documents or amendment of existing texts) for their coherence with each other, and with existing constitutional provisions or usage.

(b) General legal functions

(i) To assist the Legal Adviser on questions on which he may invite such assistance and which lie within the experience or expertise of one or more other members of the group

(ii) To give an opinion, when so invited by the General Assembly, Mission Council or the General Secretary, on any question of the application of the law of England and Wales, of Scotland, of Jersey, of Guernsey, of the Isle of Man or of any one or more of such territories to the life of the United Reformed Church, and to assist in the

preparation of guidance on such questions to be distributed by authority of the general secretary to synods or local churches; provided, in either case, that the question raised lies within the experience or expertise of one or more members of the group.

(c) General

to undertake such other tasks in the field of church polity or the law affecting the church (provided that any question of the general law lies within the experience or expertise of one or more members of the group) as may be entrusted to it by the General Assembly, Mission Council or the General Secretary.

This was passed by consensus.

3. Mission Council resolves, on behalf of the General Assembly, that the United Reformed Church will hold the members of the Law and Polity Advisory Group (including the Legal Adviser, except when he personally endorses an opinion as his professional advice) indemnified against liability for any error or omission in the discharge of their functions relating to the law of any territory.

This was passed by consensus.

4. Mission Council requests the Clerk of Assembly, in collaboration with the Assembly Arrangements Committee and the Law and Polity Advisory Group, to prepare, and submit to Mission Council as soon as possible, amendments to the Rules of Procedure and/or the Standing Orders of Assembly to provide for scrutiny of legislative proposals in accordance with resolution 2(a)(ii), and for the attendance and function at sessions of the General Assembly and Mission Council of a sub-group of the Law and Polity Advisory Group for the purpose outlined in paragraph 11 of the Group's accompanying report.

This was passed by consensus.

5. [A] That the Law and Polity Advisory Group henceforth consist of:

- (i) a Convener and Secretary, each for a term of four years;**
- (ii) the Clerk of the General Assembly, the General Secretary and the Legal Adviser to the Church *ex officio* (each being at liberty to attend the Group's meetings by a deputy);**
- (iii) One Synod Clerk nominated by the other Synod Clerks – normally for a term of four years (even if no longer a Synod Clerk throughout this term);**
- (iv) two other members, normally for a term of four years.**

The members in categories (i) and (iv) shall be appointed by General Assembly (or Mission Council on General Assembly's behalf), via the Nominations Committee. As this is a specialist and technical area of work, the Nominations Committee is instructed to consult with the current members of LPAG before making any nominations. All members are eligible for renewal for further term(s).

[B] The current Convener to serve until the end of General Assembly 2018, and the current Secretary to the end of General Assembly 2016. The members in category (iv) shall serve until the end of General Assembly 2016 (Morag McLintock) and 2018 (Denise Fitzpatrick) respectively. This is to update the information reported by the Nominations Committee to the 2014 General Assembly.

This was passed by consensus.

6. That so far as possible, future appointments to the Group shall secure that:

- (a) at least one member appointed under category (i) of resolution 5 and at least one member appointed under category (iv) of resolution 5 possesses a legal qualification in one of the territories in which the United Reformed Church exists; and that**
- (b) the other members appointed under categories (i) and (iv) have expertise in the history, polity or administration of the United Reformed Church or in ecumenical constitutional issues.**

This was passed by consensus.

7. Mission Council resolves that the group be at liberty to invite other committees and groups established by the General Assembly, by the Provincial Legal and Trust Officers (PLATO), or (where an issue of Scots law arises) by the Synod of Scotland, to send representatives to the group's meetings to contribute knowledge or expertise required by particular anticipated business.

This was passed by consensus.

14/50 Paper M3 - Recall of General Assembly

The Moderator returned to the outstanding part of the resolution:

Mission Council resolves to consider in May 2015 whether to recall General Assembly, in the light of returns from the Church-wide consultation on the marriage of same-sex couples.

This was passed, recognising disagreement.

14/51 Paper M5 - Standing Order

The Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee brought further wording as requested by Mission Council:

At the end of SO 1b insert an additional sentence: "At the same time the grouping of draft motions is published any matters already known to be urgent under Standing Order 2b(2) shall also be published, with reasons given."

At the end of paragraph 2b(9), amend (vi) and add a new (vii), thus:

2b.(9) Continuing disagreement

Assembly may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including:

- i) adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration;
- ii) asking the Moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly;
- iii) referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;
- iv) deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;
- v) declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;
- vi) *if the issue has previously been notified as urgent, moving to majority decision;*
- vii) *in the event of urgency not previously notified, moving to majority decision; in that event, the Moderator shall give her/his reasons, and test the mind of Assembly in forming her/his judgement.*

These amendments were passed, recognising disagreement.

Mission Council gave its consent to the substantive resolution being moved in an amended form, which the Convener then proposed:

Mission Council recognising the urgent need to clarify the Standing Orders which will apply to all ongoing and future business of Assembly, caused as a result of the failure of General Assembly 2014 to approve changes to the Standing Orders made by Mission Council in May 2013, resolves in the name of General Assembly and in accordance with Standing Order 13b to change the Standing Orders as detailed in paper M5 of November 2014, as amended by Mission Council, with immediate effect.

This was passed by consensus.

14/52 Education and Learning Priorities

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith proposed an amended resolution:

Mission Council asks the Ministries Committee, the Education and Learning, and Finance Committees to bring forward recommendations about priorities for education and learning that will support the well-being and future vitality of the church's recognised ministries.

During discussion, it was queried who would take the lead, and the General Secretary proposed that this be the Ministries Committee. In the light of this, Mrs Furley-Smith proposed a further amended resolution:

Mission Council asks the Ministries Committee, conferring with the Education and Learning, and Finance Committees, and West Midlands Synod, to bring forward recommendations about priorities for education and learning that will support the well-being and future vitality of the church's recognised ministries.

The Resolution was passed, recognising disagreement.

Mission Council adjourned.

Session 7

After a break, Mission Council resumed. The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair.

14/53 Lobbying Act - Paper M2

The Moderator announced that although this business would be considered by consensus process, it is urgent and requires resolution.

The Deputy General Secretary (Mission) sought the permission of Mission Council, which was given, to move the resolution in an amended form:

Mission Council directs the Officers of General Assembly:

- 1) to consider the guidance of the Electoral Commission, and of the Church's Legal Adviser;
- 2) to consult as fully as possible with our partner churches in the Joint Public Issues Team;
- 3) to report progress to the United Reformed Church Trust in December;
- 4) to decide thereafter, on the United Reformed Church's behalf, on whether or not to register.

Mission Council further directs the General Secretariat:

- 5) to implement any decision that is taken about registration;
- 6) to give all necessary information to synods and local churches.

Ms Brienen explained that there was uncertainty among our partners in the Joint Public Issues Team, and she wished the United Reformed Church to keep all options open at this time, while recognising that a decision will be needed very soon.

During discussion it became clear that some of the Church's activity almost certainly comes under the Act. It was also clarified that it is likely to be the Church at Assembly level which would be the appropriate expression of the Church to register. Several speakers expressed concerns at the implications of registration gradually eroding democratic freedom.

As a result of discussion, an item 7) was added to the resolution:

Mission Council directs the officers of General Assembly:

- 1) to consider guidance of the Electoral Commission, and of the Church's Legal Advisor;**
- 2) to consult as fully as possible including with our partner churches in the Joint Public Issues Team;**
- 3) to report progress to the United Reformed Church Trust in December;**
- 4) to decide thereafter, on the United Reformed Church's behalf, whether or not to register.**

Mission Council further directs the General Secretariat:

- 5) to implement any decision that is taken about registration;**
- 6) to give all necessary information to synod and local churches;**
- 7) to express our concerns about the Act.**

The Legal Advisor stated there were ways we could register and also express concerns without breaching the Act.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Ms Morag McLintock's formal abstention, on professional grounds, was recorded.

14/54 Response to the Peel Commission - Paper P1

As previously agreed by Mission Council, the Revd Elizabeth Welch took the chair, and the Revd Michael Hopkins acted as Clerk. Mrs Welch stated that she had not been a member of Mission Council at the time the matters generating this business occurred. She requested Mission Council to consider this business in the spirit of looking to the future and learning from the past, rather than going over events again.

The Moderator's chaplain led Mission Council in prayer.

The Secretary of the Law and Polity Advisory Group, Dr Augur Pearce, presented the report on behalf the Convener, the Revd Professor David Thompson, who had sent his apologies.

Dr Pearce proposed:

1. Mission Council receives the report of the Law and Polity Advisory Group;

The Convener of the Equalities Committee queried the use of male pronouns in a number of places. Where these referred to an individual they were correct. Instances referring to a post, rather than the post holder, were amended.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Dr Pearce proposed:

2. Mission Council commends to the General Secretary the group's recommendations at paragraphs 8 (introductory briefing for Mission Council members), 26 (introductory briefing for denominational staff) and 45 (compromise agreements) of the Report;

During discussion, the General Secretary stated that paragraph 45 could not be treated in a prescriptive way. The Clerk advised that the commendation of a suggestion could not be considering binding.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Dr Pearce proposed:

3. Mission Council requests the General Secretary to convene a working group to prepare a code of good practice for employee-volunteer relations at the denominational level (para 30);

During discussion, the Revd Gethin Rhys suggested that codes of practice already available in the voluntary sector might provide a helpful starting point.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Dr Pearce proposed:

4. Mission Council requests the Clerk, in consultation with the Law and Polity Advisory Group, to formulate, and to submit to Mission Council not later than its autumn meeting in 2015,

- a) amendments to the Standing Orders of General Assembly establishing a formal procedure for moving in or out of closed session (para 7);
- b) amendments to the Rules of Procedure establishing panels to consider the suspension and removal of volunteers serving the church at denominational level (on the principles set out in paras 31-33), with special provisions for removal of a Moderator, Moderator-elect, immediate former Moderator, or Clerk of Assembly, or the General Secretary (paras 14, 20) (if necessary with supporting amendments to the Structure of the United Reformed Church);
- c) amendments to the Rules of Procedure allowing for the replacement of a Moderator-elect of Assembly who resigns or is removed from that position when there is insufficient time for the current provisions of Rule 3.14 to be followed (para 22); and
- d) a written disciplinary procedure for denominational staff (para 35).

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Dr Pearce proposed, with the consent of Mission Council, in an amended form:

5. Mission Council requests the Law and Polity Advisory Group to consult with the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretaries (once the new and recent appointees are all settled in post) on an appropriate line-management mechanism in the light of considerations at paragraph 14.

The Convener of the Human Resources Advisory Group was unable to be present, and the General Secretary indicated Mr Webster's desire that HRAG be consulted as part of this resolution. Dr Pearce undertook to so consult.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

Mission Council adjourned.

Session 8

14/55 Mission Council resumed at 8.00 pm. The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair. The Moderator advised Mission Council of administrative arrangements for the following day. The Moderator then addressed Mission Council under the title: **"Two Copper Coins"** or **"Archbishop, there's a baby elephant on my trampoline"**, reflecting upon his visit to Anglo American copper mines in Chile, and subsequent discussions between various denominations and multinational mining companies at Lambeth Palace.

Following the address, evening prayers were led by the Moderator's Chaplain. After this, Mission Council adjourned.

Session 9

Prayers were led by the Moderator's Chaplain. The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair.

14/56 The Clerk advised Mission Council that a letter had been received after General Assembly pointing out a lack of courtesy to members of the staff at St. David's Hall. The General Secretary had responded on behalf of the United Reformed Church, but Mission Council was reminded of the importance of appropriate behaviour.

14/57 The General Secretary formally moved the items in en bloc business:

Paper A1 - Assembly Arrangements: committee report

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper C1 - Communications Committee: mission statement

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper C2 - Communications Committee: guidelines for using social media

Resolution:

1. Mission Council endorses the social media guidelines submitted by the Communications and Editorial Committee, and directs the committee (a) to make these guidelines widely available across the denomination as the official social media policy of the United Reformed Church, and (b) to review and, where necessary, to update this policy every 18 months (or more frequently in line with legislative changes).

Paper D1 - Education and learning: ministerial student grants

Resolution:

2. Mission Council agrees to adopt the revised scheme for EM1 student grants from September 2015 as outlined in paper D1 of Mission Council November 2014

Paper D3 - Governors of Westminster College: trading arrangements

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper H1 - Ministries Accreditation: Special Category Ministries

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper I1 - Mission Committee: Fresh Expressions post

Resolution:

3. Mission Council resolves to request the Council for World Mission to de-designate the unused funds of the Mission Programme Support Fund phase 2 (MSP2) and to allocate the funds towards the expansion of the post of Co-ordinator for Fresh Expressions.

Paper I2 - Mission Committee: Environmental policy

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper J1 - Nominations: report on Committee work

Resolution:

4. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council appoints with immediate effect:

- a) Mr Andy Guthrie to serve as a member of the Windermere Management Committee;**
- b) The Revd Jacky Embrey to serve as Moderator of Mersey Synod from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2021;**
- c) The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad to extend his service as Moderator of Thames North Synod from 30 September 2020 to 28 February 2021;**
- d) The Revd James Breslin to serve as Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee until General Assembly 2020;**
- e) Mr Alan Kendall to serve as a member of the Children's and Youth Work Committee until General Assembly 2018;**
- f) The Revd Alan Spence to serve as a member of the Faith and Order Committee until General Assembly 2020.**
- g) The Revd Jennifer Millington to serve as a member of the Education and Learning Committee until General Assembly 2018; and**
- h) Miss Elizabeth Whitten to serve as a member of the Mission Committee representing Eastern Synod. (The ending date for this appointment is to be clarified.)**

Paper J2 - Nominations: Synod Moderator review process

Resolution:

5. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council directs the Assembly Appointments Panel to operate the process outlined in paper J2 of November 2014 Mission Council, for the tenure review of Synod Moderators.

Paper M1 - General Assembly Representative for the disciplinary process

Resolution:

6. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council extends the term of the Revd Professor David Thompson as General Assembly Representative for the Ministerial Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure until 10 May 2015.

Paper M4 - Handling of resolution 19 from GA2014

Resolutions:

- 7. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council extends the consultation period on resolutions 19 B2, B3, B4 and 19E of the 2014 General Assembly from 31 March 2015 to 31 March 2016**
- 8. Mission Council resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church by adding the words 'members of the United Reformed Church (save for those in categories (g), (k), (l), (m) and (n)) as follows' to the first sentence of paragraph 2(6).**
- 9. Mission Council resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church by deleting the words 'being members of the United Reformed Church' from Paragraph 2(6)(k)**

Paper M6 - Reporting Closure of a local church

Resolution:

10. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council notes the recent closure of Chapel End United Reformed Church, and gives thanks to God for its worship, witness and service.

Paper O1 - Human Resources Advisory Group: report on group's work

Information paper, with no resolution.

Paper X1 - Nestlé

Resolution:

11. Mission Council asks the Mission Committee to confirm that the monitoring of Nestlé's response to the issues raised in the Price Waterhouse Cooper Assessment Report and its compliance with the FTSE's BMS criteria in higher risk countries has been on-going. If it has, it requests to know the outcome of that monitoring and whether any changes have been noted, and if monitoring has not happened asks that an urgent review takes place.

Paper X4 - Tenure of Synod Moderator

Resolution:

12. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves to extend the term of the Revd Lis Mullen as Moderator of Northern Synod until July 2016.

Paper Y1 - General Assembly 2014

Resolution:

13. Because much concern was expressed by representatives attending the 2014 General Assembly regarding three issues:

- a) the amount of time that was spent at Assembly discussing detailed procedural matters, many of which should, and could, have been resolved before Assembly;**
- b) the pastoral and other issues arising from the way in which Assembly operated Consensus Decision Making and;**
- c) the dispersed accommodation meant a lack of informal opportunities for fellowship (and more work for the Synod in arranging this itself),**

Mission Council therefore asks the Assembly Arrangements Committee to consider:

- a) whether some procedural matters should be dealt with by Mission Council even during the year of a General Assembly, just because that is a better forum for that sort of technical discussion;**
- b) whether, in the absence of genuine consensus, the final stage of consensus decision making should always be a decision by majority voting – in order to provide clarity, to avoid the bullying of a minority, and to ensure that a decision is taken;**
- c) whether the Assembly Arrangements Committee should make a block booking for, at least, bed and breakfast for all those at General Assembly.**

All of this business was accepted by unanimous vote, thereby including the requisite two-thirds majority for the changes to the Structure proposed in paper M4.

The Moderator greeted the Revd Lis Mullen as Moderator of Northern Synod (being no longer "interim").

The General Secretary moved that under paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, the proposed changes to the Structure be referred to Synods with responses by 31 March 2016. This was agreed by majority vote.

The Moderator's Chaplain offered prayer for the life and witness of Chapel End United Reformed Church.

14/58 Paper X3 - Marriage of same sex couples

The Revd Roy Lowes presented a revised resolution. In doing so, he brought Mission Council's attention to several points:

1. It is accepted that the Synod of Scotland does not wish to change anything within the rest of the United Reformed Church.
2. Recognising that General Assembly failed to recognise the situation in Scotland, the resolution is for better awareness in the future.

3. The Synod of Scotland intends to wait for current process of consultation to be completed as for the rest of the United Reformed Church.
4. Although containing recognition of what a Church Meeting in Scotland can do, the questions remain open.
5. The motivation of the Synod of Scotland is for clarity and recognition.
6. Part B of the revised resolution is administrative, Part A wording does not commit the church.

Mr Lowes proposed:

Recognising:

- that the Synod of Scotland, living with difference itself, is and remains a convinced party to the 2007 Commitment, which calls the United Reformed Church to stay together, to work and pray together, to treat one another with respect, and to seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding;
- the different legal situation in Scotland in regard to marriage, which means that Church Meeting decisions in Scotland in relation to marriage are subject to fewer constraints of civil law than in England and Wales, given that requirements for a valid marriage focus on the celebrant rather than on the building;
- that church buildings held for the purposes of the United Reformed Church are subject to trust constraints on their use

Mission Council further recognises aspects of the distinctive situation for the Synod of Scotland, not acknowledged during the formulation of the same-sex marriage resolutions considered at General Assembly 2014 and on this matter notes that in Scotland it is for Local Churches and their trustees to decide on the use of their buildings within the applicable trusts. This may enable them to extend ecumenical hospitality to ministers of other religious traditions who are approved celebrants within Scots law to solemnise same-sex marriages in those buildings.

Mission Council agrees that if a future Assembly allows for ministers or members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the United Reformed Church to approach the Registrar General for Scotland.

The Revd Helen Mee queried "other religious traditions", and Mr Lowes clarified that this was intended to include other Christian traditions.

The Revd Clare Downing expressed a concern that if a celebrant of another denomination presided at a wedding of two members of the United Reformed Church in a United Reformed Church building, the public would reasonably think it was a United Reformed Church wedding.

In answer to a query, Mr Lowes indicated that ecumenical hospitality did not cover Ministers of other denominations who were also members of the United Reformed Church.

The use of the word "may" continued to cause concern.

The facilitation group was asked to meet again over the coffee break, and try to bring a revised version in the next session.

14/59 Paper L1 - Church House Development

The Convener of the United Reformed Church Trust reported the results of the group discussions. Two groups questioned the wisdom of remaining in London, while the other six groups preferred London, but sought more information on possibilities for development of our building. Mr Gray summarised the majority view as a desire to stay in London, but more work is needed on possibilities for development.

Mission Council adjourned.

Session 10

After a brief break, Mission Council resumed. The Moderator, Mr John Ellis, was in the chair.

14/60 Synod of Scotland Same-Sex Marriage

The Revd Roy Lowes presented a revised wording of the proposed resolution:

1. Recognising:

- that the Synod of Scotland, living with difference itself, is and remains a convinced party to the 2007 Commitment, which calls the United Reformed Church to stay together, to work and pray together, to treat one another with respect, and to seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding;
- the different legal situation in Scotland in regard to marriage, which means that Church Meeting decisions in Scotland in relation to marriage are subject to fewer constraints of civil law than in England and Wales, given that requirements for a valid marriage focus on the celebrant rather than on the building;
- that church buildings held for the purposes of the United Reformed Church are subject to trust constraints on their use.

Mission Council further recognises aspects of the distinctive situation for the Synod of Scotland, not acknowledged during the formulation of the same-sex marriage resolutions considered at General Assembly 2014 and on this matter notes that in Scotland it is for Local Churches and their trustees to decide on the use of their buildings within the applicable trusts. This will enable them to extend ecumenical hospitality to ministers of other religious traditions who are approved celebrants within Scots law to solemnise same-sex marriages in those buildings.

2. Mission Council trusts that Local Churches in Scotland will make any such decision with sensitivity in the light of the consultation now under way throughout the Church.

3. Mission Council agrees that if a future Assembly allows for ministers or members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the United Reformed Church to approach the Registrar General for Scotland.

The resolution was passed by consensus.

The Moderator thanked the facilitation group.

14/61 Personalia

The Moderator advised that the following were due to complete their term on Mission Council:

Mrs Suzanne Adofo – leaving after fifteen years as Church Related Community Work Development Worker. Her job share partner, Mr Steve Summers, will continue and become full-time.

The Revd Dr Catherine Ball

Mr Mathew Barkley

Miss Judith Haughton

Mr Simon Peters

All were thanked for their contribution to Mission Council.

The Revd James Breslin had completed his current service as Clerk, and the Moderator thanked him and presented a gift. Mr Breslin made suitable reply.

The Moderator thanked the following for their contribution and support before and during Mission Council:

Ms Sara Foyle, Ms Gill Nichol, Miss Eve Parker, Dr Steve Tomkins, his Chaplain the Revd Nigel Uden, Mrs Rita Griffiths as pianist, the Revd John Proctor, and Mrs Krystyna Pullen.

The General Secretary offered thanks to the Moderator for leading Mission Council and "coping single-handed".

The business completed, Mission Council adjourned, to meet again on 8 May 2015 at The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

The Moderator and his Chaplain led closing worship, which included the Induction of Ms Gill Nichol as Head of Communications.