



Resourcing Synods

Background

- 1 The United Reformed Church created Synods in 1972 of unequal sizes and has made little change to their boundaries since. Their inheritance in terms of financial assets was probably even more varied than their sizes in terms of geography or membership. A new Synod of Scotland was created as part of the union with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 2000 and had a smaller membership and larger geographical area than any of the English Synods. It had some limited financial resources under its control. Relatively low property prices in Wales and Scotland have constrained the opportunities for the national Synods to build up assets at Synod level.
- 2 Both English and national Synods have largely been left to devise their own ways of funding Synod activities. Only the Synod Moderator post has been consistently funded from the central URC budget. Synods have paid for other activities mainly from a local mixture of investment income, sales of property and levies on the Synod's churches. Not surprisingly, the level of Synod activity and number of Synod staff has evolved in significantly different ways in different Synods.
- 3 Alongside this devolved model, for a decade or more the United Reformed Church has also operated an Inter-Synod Resource Sharing (ISRS) system. This reflects a Biblical commitment to the Christian community sharing resources, so that those with means help those with needs. At the time it began it was clear that some Synods had internally generated resources which allowed them to support mission projects which other Synods could not begin to consider supporting. If the better endowed Synods gave some of their resources into a common pool, the chances of Synod funding for a visionary project could be more equal whether the location for the project was in a poor Synod or a rich one.
- 4 The ISRS process has resulted in several million pounds' worth of resources being moved around the URC over the years. Although always a smaller scale redistributive process than the M&M Fund, this has been much appreciated by the recipients and a good signal of denominational commitment by the givers. We should all be grateful for this.
- 5 However the October 2010 annual ISRS consultation of the Synods confirmed there are now several serious structural problems with this system. Behind these lay a view, shared by all present, that the current methods of funding the Synods themselves were not sustainable. This issue has since been discussed by the Finance Committee, the annual consultation of Synod Treasurers and a consultation between Assembly officers and the national Synods of Wales and Scotland in April 2011. This paper draws out some issues that merit the attention of Mission Council.

Key Issues

- 6 The data collected for ISRS, although not perfect, indicate that only one of the 13 Synods expects to be able to cover its 2011 expenditure out of income. That one Synod is only able to do so by including property sales as income. Across the 13 Synods property sales of £1.3m are expected to support ongoing expenditure and reserves be depleted by over £3m in 2011. If we are to sell the “family silver” to fund ongoing expenditure we should at least do so as a deliberate policy.
- 7 ISRS has done sterling work in comparing practices across the 13 Synods. However attitudes to the role of the Synod remain very different in different places. One Synod believes it can supply all that it needs to do within a budget of £300kpa while three others feel it is necessary to spend over £1mpa. The Wales and Scotland Synods are both well towards the lower end of this range. An earlier ISRS goal of achieving some sort of parity by 2013 is clearly impossible.
- 8 The money given to ISRS has not been enough to equalise capital resources across the Synods or to move anywhere near doing so. Synod capital ranges from £2m to £17m.
- 9 While ISRS has enabled valuable exchanges of experience across Synods about their various policies, these discussions are generally approached in a spirit of wanting to explain differences rather than to remove them.
- 10 The Synods who have been the main donors to ISRS have reduced markedly their contributions recently, in one case from £277k in 2010 to £100k in 2011. In practice the ISRS scheme now rests very heavily on just two donor Synods, which provided 80% of the money in 2010.
- 11 The money from ISRS now regularly goes predominantly to the two national Synods and it is clear that the money is not mainly used for special mission projects as the donor Synods have generally assumed. Instead the majority of it appears to be funding the regular Synod staffing: the Synod of Scotland is relying on its ISRS grant of £192k for paying 55% of its total costs in 2011; the Synod of Wales is receiving £150k which will pay 45% of its total costs.
- 12 Taken together, these issues demonstrate that ISRS is not going to be able to achieve parity between Synods, as may once have been envisaged, but for which there is little sign of current enthusiasm. More urgently, it is unclear that sufficient money will continue to be available to fund the ISRS system, leaving the national Synods in particular not just with less resource for special projects but without funding for their existing staff and running costs.

Legal Issues

- 13 One point of difference, and sometimes also of tension, between Synods is their approach to capital released by the sale of property. In some Synods resolutions have been passed which effectively give the Synods control of the proceeds of sale and which result in the sale proceeds appearing in the Synod accounts. In other Synods there is a strong conviction that property sales relating to continuing congregations should remain with the local church to use as they wish. In these latter Synods there may also be less pressure to sell redundant manses, which may explain the large number of manses being let out to support local church income.

- 14 At the ISRS Consultation in October 2010 the possibility of inviting Assembly to encourage all Synods to centralise proceeds of property sales was raised. This would, it was argued, give more strategic control of assets within the Synods. There was however feeling from some Synods that this would ultra vires. Informal advice has subsequently been taken from the principal URC draughtsman of the 1972 Act to clarify what power the Synods were intended to have over property sales. This confirmed that the Act was intended to protect the local congregation from the Synod being able to take its assets without clear consent. A blanket Synod policy to centralise these resources was not envisaged.
- 15 Given this formal position, Assembly might be on uncertain legal grounds if it were to encourage Synods to centralise resources beyond what they have themselves chosen to do, and for which they have presumably obtained legal advice.

Consultation with the National Synods

- 16 The April consultation with the two national Synods was held at Windermere over 24 hours, chaired by the General Secretary. Careful and sensitive discussions were held within a framework of worship and fellowship. The distinctive political, cultural and Church histories in Scotland and Wales were expounded briefly and noted. The participants all agreed that the points in the following paragraphs were key messages for Mission Council to consider.
- 17 As a Church in three nations, the United Reformed Church is not an English Church which needs to adapt its norm to work effectively in Scotland and Wales. Rather it is a Church which positively celebrates the possibilities of enrichment to the whole Church that comes from its diversity, and one dimension of its diversity is the difference between the contexts of English, Welsh and Scottish Synods. All thirteen Synods have a responsibility to create patterns of Church life that enable all thirteen Synods to be effective.
- 18 Like all the English Synods, the national Synods have particular opportunities and challenges distinctive to their settings. Discussion at the consultation suggested that the most important implication of this in terms of resources was the different ecumenical contexts in the national Synods. Therefore the consultation proposes to Mission Council that the central budget should in future fund a 50% ecumenical officer post in each of the two national synods, in addition to the current Assembly post covering ecumenical relations. Because of the attitudes of some partner Churches, it is felt essential that these two posts are filled by ministers and therefore should be deducted from the overall pool of stipendiary ministers available for deployment in local pastorates.
- 19 The consultation also felt that documents produced for governance bodies and wider circulation were often written too much from an English perspective. It would be helpful if such documents were “proofed” while in draft to ensure they took proper account of the different contexts in the national Synods. It was suggested that there might be volunteers in the national Synods willing to help with this so the extra work on Assembly staff would not be too great.
- 20 Much of the rest of the consultation highlighted issues which, although pertinent to the national Synods, were actually issues for all Synods. The discussions influenced the next section of this paper, which also takes account of earlier discussions with Synod Treasurers and the Finance Committee.

Possible Synod Support Structure

- 21 It is clear that existing processes do not provide a robust underpinning for current URC costs at Synod level. The risk of a major problem emerging in the near future is most obvious for the two national Synods but the issue applies to the English Synods as well. Currently there are, in addition to the Synod Moderators, nearly 100 paid posts in the Synods (both ministerial and lay and in full-time equivalent terms) at a total annual cost of around £4m. This compares with 100 posts under the auspices of the Assembly in Church House, the Resource Centres for Learning and elsewhere, and around 500 ministers and Church Related Community Workers in local ministry.
- 22 There is no doubt that the preferred response of many local church members would be to reduce drastically the Synod costs. Not everyone sees the benefits that flow from the hard work of Synod officers and staff and would see local church ministry as a higher priority. The consultation felt however that often this view takes too little account of the requirements laid on Synods by the law and the past decisions of the Assembly and their own Synod meetings. This pressure is exacerbated by a marked shortage of volunteers to do Synod work unpaid. The consultation did not incline towards a radical change in Synod costs but did not resist the Finance Committee's suggestion that each Synod might usefully consider its medium term finances and consider whether all the current costs were essential and sustainable.
- 23 If the Synod costs are not to be radically reduced, then the consultation and the Finance Committee believe that some central underpinning of those costs is now required. That wish does not create any extra money, so any central contribution to Synod costs would be at the cost of something else. Mission Council is asked to decide whether it supports the principle of underpinning Synod costs from the central budget, which is predominantly funded from the M&M Fund.
- 24 If the principle of central Synod support is agreed, the question becomes how much of the current Synod costs should be underwritten. The ISRS process has developed a hypothetical "Synod 14" as a template of the essential work of any Synod in the URC to help discussions about the variety of costs and posts adopted by different Synods. Its annual costs would amount to around £450k. Mission Council is invited to ask the Finance Committee to work on how some benchmark of Synod costs might be established as a basis for deciding what costs might be underwritten centrally. The ISRS work illustrates that this can only be an approximate process.
- 25 In considering any application from a Synod for support from the central budget, the Finance Committee would have to take account of several factors where practice has diverged amongst the Synods. For example, as noted above, some Synods draw on the proceeds of property sales within the Synod to help with Synod costs, others leave such money with local churches. In some Synods, current costs can only be covered by raising some form of levy from the local churches for the services the Synod provides for their benefit; in other Synods no levy is requested. It is hard to imagine any central support being provided to a Synod that did not demonstrate it had used local sources of funding first.
- 26 The consultation was also keen to note that there may be creative non-financial ways in which Synods can share resources, including the voluntary sharing of expertise and this was just as important in making the Church feel like one body as financial flows across Synod boundaries.

Recommendations

- 1 **Mission Council affirms the commitment of the United Reformed Church to be a Church in three nations, working through two national Synods and eleven English synods.**
- 2 **Mission Council agrees that from 2012 the central budget should include provision for a 50% ecumenical officer post to be held by a Minister of Word and Sacraments in each of the national Synods, with a corresponding reduction in the number of stipendiary ministers available for local deployment in the Church as a whole.**
- 3 **Mission Council welcomes the proposal that documents should be proof read to ensure the context and implications for all Synods are incorporated, as far as this is reasonable.**
- 4 **Mission Council agrees that in principle the unavoidable core costs of each Synod should be underpinned by a willingness to consider support from the Church's central budget, financed through the M&M Fund.**
- 5 **Mission Council requests the Finance Committee to bring to a future meeting of the Council proposals for how such a system of underpinning Synod finances might work in practice.**

John G Ellis
Treasurer

15 April 2011



Mind Advisory Group

The Advisory Group is working on a number of changes which will need to be made to both the Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure. Most of these changes will be presented to the General Assembly in 2012. There is, however, one matter which has urgency, and it would be most helpful if this could be dealt with by the Mission Council acting on behalf of the General Assembly.

Age limit for members of the Assembly Commission Panel (Disciplinary Process) and the Standing Panel (Incapacity Procedure)

At present there is an age limit of 70 for membership of these Panels; copied below are the relevant paragraphs from The Manual.

Disciplinary Process (Section O) Part II

A.6 A.6.1 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4, appointment to the Commission Panel shall be by Resolution of the General Assembly on the advice of the Nominations Committee (or such other committee as may in the future perform the functions of the Nominations Committee), who shall in considering persons for appointment take into account (i) the need for balance and for a variety of skills and specialisations, particularly in the following areas – experience in ministerial oversight, theology and doctrine, law, counselling, psychology, mental health, experience in conduct of meetings and tribunals, and (ii) the advantages of including on the Commission Panel persons from a variety of ethnic minority backgrounds.

A.6.2 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4, members of the Commission Panel shall be appointed for such term not exceeding five (5) years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit with power for the General Assembly to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms of five (5) years each, 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.

A.6.4 When any member of the Commission Panel reaches the age of seventy, s/he must forthwith resign from the Commission Panel and shall no longer be eligible to serve on any new Assembly Commission or Special Appeals Body, but any person who reaches his/her seventieth birthday whilst serving on an Assembly Commission or Special Appeals Body in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.

Incapacity Procedure (Section P) Part II

C.2 Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph C.3, members of the Standing Panel shall be appointed for a term not exceeding five years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit with power to the General Assembly to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms not exceeding five years each.

C.3 When any member of the Standing Panel reaches the age of seventy, s/he must forthwith resign from the Standing Panel and shall no longer be eligible to serve on any new Review Commission, but any person who reaches his/her seventieth birthday whilst serving on a Review Commission in a case in progress may continue so to serve until the conclusion of that case.

The MIND Advisory Group, having consulted the Synod Clerks and the Secretary of the Nominations Committee, proposes that this age limit be removed. Clearly we need younger people to be involved in this important, but often difficult, task but the pool of potential candidates is not large and it would be helpful in achieving a full Panel if the age limit were removed as there is evidence that in some Synods it has been difficult to find people who could serve for a reasonable period before reaching the age of 70. It will of course be right to consider each person individually. In some cases, it might well be appropriate for a person to withdraw from this work before the age of seventy. On the other hand, some are perfectly capable of continuing for some time beyond that point. In practice, we would not expect anyone who is over the age of seventy to be appointed for the first time.

It should be noted that there is no age limit for appointment to Synod Mandated Groups who undertake the demanding work of enquiring into allegations and, if necessary, presenting a case to an Assembly Commission.

The Group proposes the following resolution which would effect the changes to Sections O and P which are required to remove the age limit.

Resolution

Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, agrees to make the following changes to the Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure:

Disciplinary Process (Section O, Part II)

Paragraph A.6.1 Delete the words: "Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4," and begin the following word "appointment" with a capital letter.

Paragraph A.6.2 Delete the words: "Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph A.6.4," and begin the following word "members" with a capital letter.

Paragraph A.6.4 Delete.

Incapacity Procedure (Section P, Part II)

Paragraph C.2 Delete the words: "Subject to the age limit imposed by Paragraph C.3," and begin the following word "members" with a capital letter.

Paragraph C.3 Delete.



From *multicultural* to *intercultural*: Transforming Mission and Ministry

This paper is intended to enable exploration, discussion and response from Mission Council on the intercultural implications of our declaration that we are a multicultural church. The questions at the end are there to “frame” our discussion. They are not intended to be prescriptive.

Locating our Conversation

1. Declaring ourselves a multicultural church (2005) did not happen in vacuum. The stories of our isles tell of the movement of peoples to and from these shores for centuries. The movement of peoples continues to this day, though this reality has only become more prominent over recent decades. We now speak of our diverse landscape with terms, such as, multi-cultural, multi-religious, migrant communities, diversity, and ethnicities etc becoming operative in our discourse in political and ecclesial contexts. The contemporary conversations around multicultural societies tend to be based in western nation states (egs. USA, Canada, Australia & Europe, and Australia) and especially around ethno-religious mix and democratic citizenship in what is considered unusual for these societies. We need to remember, however, that many nation states of the majority world have had a long history of being multicultural. Distinguishing between the reality that we are a diverse and multicultural society and multiculturalism as a policy is important. As a policy, multiculturalism evolved from both central and local government as a conscious attempt to answer racial inequality (and especially the resistances to it after the ‘riots’ of 1981 and 1985) with cultural solutions.

‘Multiculturalism simply means cultural diversity and that diversity can either be a good thing, leading to integration, or a bad thing, leading to separatism. It is the social and political context that determines in which direction multiculturalism develops.’ [A. Sivanandan]

2. When we declared ourselves a multicultural church we did so against the backdrop of the above realities, wider political and societal developments and conversations related to the above and other shifting realities. Our

“Over the last decade multiculturalism, like political correctness, has come to mean whatever its opponents want it to, so long as they don’t like it...Its contemporary critics keep telling multiculturalism’s supporters to admit it has failed, without identifying what “it” is and who ever supported the lampooned version they present.” [Gary Younge, *The Guardian* March 14, 2011]

declaration in 2005 is especially located in the context of a New Labour government (from 1997) that sought to emphasize the plural and dynamic character of British society. Furthermore, we did so in the midst of critical voices from left-wing radicals, newer voices from the centre-left and from some

erstwhile supporters including anti-racist supporters. From 2001 there is a sense of a turning point for the idea of multiculturalism in Britain: it became common to read titles such as: “is multiculturalism dead?” “is multiculturalism over?” and “beyond

Multiculturalism” with the discourse perhaps reaching a peak with the London bombings of July 7, 2005. Religious leaders also joined in the critique that Britishness is being challenged by cultural separatism, self imposed segregation of Muslim communities, and politically correct multiculturalism. In itself multiculturalism simply means cultural diversity. But as practiced in that diversity can either be progressive leading to integration or regressive leading to separatism. Perhaps the secular discourse on multiculturalism has been guilty of over-racialising human relations, and in the process has placed too much emphasis on separate rather than common needs/vision which may have also contributed to further marginalization of minorities (for instance the internalizing of victimhood)

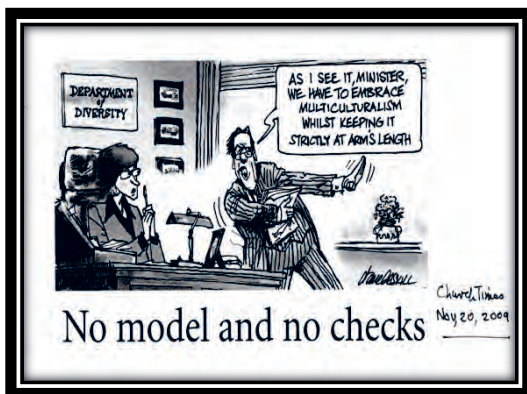
3. The URC’s adventurous and timely declaration evolved from its own story of formation in 1972. While the declaration is biblically and theological grounded¹, the URC’s *uniting, reforming, conciliar, non-conforming* and *marginal* characteristics were also crucial to our ability and willingness to make the declaration of our multicultural intent. *The Manual* states that the United Reformed Church is “catholic” as “Christ calls into it all people” and because “it proclaims the fullness of Christ’s Gospel to the whole world” (A3). Mindful that human ambiguities and failures are also part and parcel of Church, *The Manual* goes on to note that the generosity and grace of God in Christ “has taught the Church that its life must ever be renewed and reformed according to the Scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” (A6) The emphasis on renewing and reforming through promptings of the Holy Spirit is further reflected in its faith statement as the URC affirms its right “to make new declarations of its faith...as may from time to time be required by obedience to the same Spirit” (A18). It is this obedience that led us to the above declaration and to commit ourselves to intentionally live out this calling through lives of faith and faithfulness. And it is this same obedience that propels “Catch the Vision”, “Vision4Life”, “Vision2020” etc and the initiating of this paper and conversation.
4. Given historical and colonial links, many who came and are coming to these shores do find a home in Christian communities that once visited their own shores to share the gospel. The reality is that the number of minority ethnic Christians are growing, and new migrant churches are very much part of the vibrant and growing Christian story in the UK. Obedience to the movement of the Holy Spirit demands that the presence of sisters and brothers (in all their cultural, ethnic, and national diversity) among our ecclesial communities, urges us to intentionally practice our renewing and reforming commitment.

¹ A few references to the biblical/theological groundings: It is God’s intention and God’s promise from the beginning that diversity, not homogeneity is good. After creating a diverse world, God affirmed its goodness. Diversity is created, “of every kind” (Genesis 1); The writer of the book of Acts noted humanity’s one source of origin (Acts 17:26), implying that people of all nations, no matter the shade of their skin or the language they speak are equally included in the God’s blessing and will be equally accountable for their response to this blessing; ; Inclusion, not dissolution is the word from Jeremiah (Jer.29:4-8) who noted the need for balance between giving and receiving culture for in God’s sight we are no longer strangers or aliens but faithful sojourners; Acts of the Apostles is replete of stories of breaking boundaries and inclusion: we read of Peter’s transformation and his discovery of God who is inclusive and who shows no partiality (Acts 10:34-36); while Isaiah visions “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:6-8), John on the isle of Patmos sees an uncountable multicultural multitude (Rev 7:9) that makes the Pentecost gathering (Acts 2:5-13) look more like a small scale multicultural assembly; indeed, the world of Acts of the Apostles may have been small geographically, but it was a complex multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural one (see Acts 15 – 1st ecumenical council); And, Jesus-Christ, descendent of the lineage of Ruth (the Moabite who chose to become a stranger in the land of Israel) carried out a ministry of inclusion, giving value to diverse peoples. He strongly challenged laws and traditions of the dominant culture of his time and countered exclusionary theology. His whole ministry was geared towards an inclusive community: breaking geographical, cultural and religious boundaries. He died for it!

The Multicultural Vocation: Joys, Challenges & Limitations

1. Our initial understanding of a multicultural vision for the church is more about a proactive working towards valuing cultural diversity in all dimensions of our ecclesial (church) life. Our motivation is premised on the heart of the Good News: that Jesus’ offer of abundant life is for all people and nations. Herein is located the joy, urgency and hope of the Christian faith. Living out the declaration in an intentional way was never going to be cheap. It is demanding and costly. For starters, a multicultural vision of church means living a paradox or tension: on the one hand there is the unity of the church characterised by an open welcome to all and on the other hand there is the need to create spaces (cultural, ethnic, national) for multiplicity or diversity within that unity. The often quoted “we are one in Christ” ought to give agency to the multiplicity within that oneness. The issue is not about belonging. It is about how to re-negotiate belonging - how to adjust the fact of *belonging for all*.

2. While the joys of multiculturalism were and are being celebrated, the challenges and limitations have and are also evident. The challenges and limitations are often tied up with



the wider conversations in our society. Critical views on multiculturalism such as: “different ethnic communities living parallel lives” (Ted Cattle); “sleepwalking our way to segregation” (Trevor Phillips), “multiculturalism has run its course and it is time to move on” (Jonathan Sacks who also argues for “the dignity of difference”), multiculturalism enabling groups to “self-segregate” (David Blunkett), “the weakening of our collective identity” (David Cameron) and the call for “muscular liberalism”

(Angela Merkel) have opened up an ongoing and necessary scrutiny of multiculturalism. Notwithstanding the critical voices on ‘multiculturalism’ and the very fluid nature of the conversations, the term still functions to describe the reality of our landscape. Moreover, as a policy agenda the notion of “multiculturalism” continues to serve to redress the unequal treatment of cultural and minority groups.

3. There are also positive voices on the wider landscape One of these is that of Tariq Modood who suggests that now more than ever there is an urgent need to give more agency and content to the multicultural vision that “challenges certain ways of thinking and certain political positions but the challenge is of inclusion and adjustment, not of giving up one comprehensive politics for another.” In his view, *difference must also mean commonality* and that to emphasize and nurture what we hold in common is not to deny difference. Commonality that is “difference-friendly” calls us to move “beyond a focus on exclusion and minorities” to “a positive vision of society as a whole” but one that is reshaped to include the previously excluded or marginalised on the basis of equality and belonging. He sees the need to create spaces for “multi-logues that allow for views to qualify each other, overlap, synthesize, reshape etc in the light of having to co-exist with that of others so that newer conversations to take place.



4. The URC has employed the terms “multicultural Church” and “multicultural ministry” to express its search to be God’s diverse people. Mindful of the limited and various understandings of “multicultural” (largely influenced by secular conversations), I have

attempted (from September 2008) to explore and expand our understanding of “multicultural” in terms of what it means to be a *welcoming and inclusive church*, opting for a broadened understanding of culture. Yet, the challenges, misconceptions and limitations remain. This is evident, for example, from some of the Vision2020 responses in relation to question five, from my conversations with various groups in the URC, from some of the responses to the annual returns, and some of the ways we continue to articulate our theology and the practice our church life.

5. There are a number of connected issues related to the challenges and (mis)conceptions. Among them I note the following:
- a. the static use of multicultural to merely describe the presence of a multiplicity of cultures rather than speaking of how interactions should take place.
 - b. multiculturalism that emphasizes group difference at the expense of what people share in common.
 - c. cultural straitjacketing/stereotyping that forces those described as a minority ethnic group into a block identity/authenticity denying them to cross borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves. In a world of constant movement of peoples and ideas, the purist ideal or appeal is false for no culture is fixed.
 - d. evaluating a minority ethnic group predominantly through the lens of an homogenised culture and as an explanation of everything the group says and does – with one of the consequences being that the diversity and marginal voices within such groups are not given agency nor heard.
 - e. The tendency to redefine culture to mean something that characterises non-western or minority groups and unhelpful binaries such as: “they have cultural traditions – we have moral and democratic values”.
 - f. multiculturalism that is unable to see similarity in human experiences that enable people in different cultural contexts to formulate similar principles for governing the well being of their life together (how we negotiate universalist and relativists positions need revisiting). Variation of practices is not proof of differences of principle.
 - g. multicultural correctness that rules out someone from another culture being able to critique another cultural view or practice, effectively shutting down dialogue and interaction.
 - h. co-opting BME’s into the dominant ethos of the URC, by tolerating the former as long as they fit into the established rules and ethos. The flip side to this is that “minority-ness” can become internalised and a comfort zone for BME’s without wanting to become an integral part of our life together.
 - i. a form of inclusion that seems open to welcoming people from a variety of cultural backgrounds without any commitment to change or to be transformed.

A multicultural perspective comprises of the **creative interplay** of three complementary insights: “cultural embedded-ness of human beings; fact and necessity of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue; and the internal plurality of all cultures”. [Lord Bikhu Parekh]

Growing Deep & Wide: A Multicultural Vocation is necessarily Intercultural

1. The concern is that our declaration of being a multicultural church runs the risk of remaining stuck to a mere recognition of the presence of a multiplicity of cultures with little or no interaction beyond one's own group. This in turn can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices and lead to ignorance about, and indifferences to, the concerns and sensitivities of all who make up the body of Christ. The affirmation of ethnic diversity do give a sense of belonging; yet, if ethnicity becomes a primary criterion of defining identity, we risk marginalising ethnic minorities. At the same time marginal groups can remain locked in a "marginalised" mentality - impoverishing them from seeing the whole of which they are also a part. In effect we all end up with a diminished sense of our common vocation *together* around the table of Christ.
2. It is true that our use of multicultural not only affirms the presence of a multiplicity of cultures. It also envisions some form of engagement given this presence. To be more intentionally inter/cross cultural, however, points to: *a deeper, active and critical interaction and mutually reciprocal relationships among and between diverse groups* (entering the threshold of the other). Such a process will involve a *movement beyond a dialogical relationship towards transformation in all parts of the life of Church*.
3. An intercultural "habit" is important in managing multiple cultural affiliations in a multicultural environment. It is a means to constantly achieve a new identity balance, responding to new openings and experiences and adding new layers to identity without relinquishing one's roots. It helps us to avoid the pitfalls of identity policies and to remain open to the challenges of modern societies. While giving space to both individuals and the recognition of diversity it also offers a new dimension: dialogue premised on equal dignity and shared values – the vision of our common life together.
4. A multicultural church must be intercultural, inviting *all of us* to journey beyond our cultural comfort zones and boundaries to discover new insights of the Divine and what it means to be followers of the Jesus Way *together*, while allowing for multiplicity or many-ness in that vision of *togetherness*.
5. To this end, the vision of a multicultural vocation that nurtures and practices intercultural habits will embrace mission and ministry that:
 - a. joins with others in living out our life-long commitment to justice in solidarity with all marginalised people;
 - b. encourages deep engagement by taking the initiative to cross from familiar cultural spaces into an unfamiliar ones;
 - c. requires of us all to make adjustments as it challenges the established group to move out of their comfort zones and make connections, it also confronts the newer groups with a call to come over the bridge.
 - d. involves boundaries crossing, listening with the heart to one another, evaluating preconceptions of others, abandoning stereotypes and allowing others to be their true selves in our presence;
 - e. provides space for intra-cultural conversations so that people who share an identity can be empowered to find and express their voice, including the marginalised voices in that minority;
 - f. honestly and openly interrogates its own habits and attitudes that exclude and operate contrary to the fullness of life way of Christ.

An intercultural habit is grounded on **mutuality in giving and sharing**: where we are all in need; where we **all must be inconvenienced** for the sake of the other and the gospel.

A Luta Continua...An Ongoing Journey

1. We can reasonably argue that the story of the early Christian community has been among the oldest, largest and most complex border crossing and intercultural journeys with evidence of how efforts at homogeneity (through edicts and councils) not only stifled growth of the Body of Christ; it also gave birth in unsettling ways to reforming and non-conforming voices throughout this history.

The competences necessary for intercultural engagement are not automatically acquired: they need to be learned, practised and maintained throughout the whole of our life together as a Christian community. The growing of such a habit is largely a matter of intentionally cultivating spaces for dialogue.
6. In obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the church, *a multicultural community that practices an intercultural life style*, is a rehearsing Eucharistic community walking the way of a welcoming God who offers abundant life for all in Christ. Such a practice involves turning our lives towards this God and opening ourselves to sharing equally across all boundaries. This is the good news that enables us to be church in a missional framework – seeing “togetherness embracing multiplicity” as a powerful witness to the dawning of the new order of relationships in God’s fullness of life offer.

For Reflection/Discussion

1. Is the inter-cultural vocation as described, a helpful way/model for our present and future life together as a church?
2. Can an intercultural habit (way of life) open ways through some of the challenging conversations we need to have together?
3. What are some intentional steps that will enable churches/synods in new directions of intercultural engagement in mission and ministry?

Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry (rjmm)
 Michael N. Jagessar (Revd Dr)
 May 17-19, 2011



Communications and Editorial Committee

The United Reformed Church needs REFORM. REFORM needs the United Reformed Church

We believe REFORM is essential to the life, work and outreach of the URC. This paper describes the challenges facing the magazine and the opportunities it has to reach a wider readership within the church and beyond.

It outlines what we are already doing to increase subscribers and cut costs. The URC's subsidy of REFORM is of crucial importance to the magazine's future and we believe it should continue.

REFORM and the Future

The paper is set out as follows:

1. Introduction
2. REFORM's current position and plans - including strategies to reduce the subsidy it receives from the URC
3. Why REFORM needs subsidising - why the Committee is asking Mission Council to agree to the continuation of a substantial URC subsidy
4. New technology
5. Summary

Appendix 1 Financial scenarios/forecasts

Appendix 2 URC feedback

Appendix 3 Wider world feedback

1. Introduction

In the past three years, REFORM has changed from being a URC in-house magazine to becoming a much-respected Christian magazine, rooted in the Reformed and URC traditions. It focuses on thought-provoking commentary and debate around theological, ethical and spiritual questions, as well as reporting on developments about and of interest to the denomination. It reaches out and searches for a wider audience from whom we believe we can attract more subscribers, as well as strengthening the profile and influence of the URC. REFORM strives to embody the values and character of the URC seen in the Vision20/20 Mission statements. Among the many messages of thanks and appreciation received in the office each week, are regular ones saying: "REFORM makes me feel proud to belong to the URC".

REFORM recognises that the URC was, is and will continue to be the prime market for the magazine. It has listened to recent criticisms from some parts of the Church that, in its bid to gain broader appeal and grapple with substantial issues, coverage of denominational news had been reduced. In response, it has launched Digest, a four-page section of the magazine, which reports exclusively on local and national stories from the URC. The response to this has been overwhelmingly positive and encouraging.

The changes to REFORM since its re-launch in July 2008 have attracted new subscribers each month, perhaps for the first time in the magazine's history. However, there has been a serious falling away of subscribers within local URCs.

One of our key plans for the future is winning back and gaining new subscribers who like to read more denominational news. The other is raising our profile within United Reformed churches with no distributor or subscribers at all – more than half the total number of congregations. We have also embarked on a series of cost-cutting measures to bring down our URC subsidy.

2. REFORM's current position and plans

Mission Statement

REFORM magazine embodies and promotes the identity of the United Reformed Church through thought-provoking commentary and debate on theological, ethical, spiritual and interfaith questions. It communicates the work of the Church and the decisions of its councils through the Digest section. REFORM's feature articles offer commentary and analysis on the issues thrown up by the Church's work and decisions. True to the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitment, the magazine includes writing from within and beyond the denomination, encompassing a wide range of theological viewpoints.

The objectives of REFORM for the next three years are:

- to be widely known, respected and bought by United Reformed Church congregations, including those URCs that have not subscribed before
- to attract back lapsed United Reformed Church subscribers
- to gain and maintain an increase of 5% in subscriptions year-on-year
- to reduce the subsidy from the United Reformed Church (appendix 1)
- to continue making REFORM attractive to non-URC churches and those outside the Church who are interested in spiritual matters
- to address the younger market by developing an electronic version of Reform, available through the website.

SWOT analysis

These are the key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for REFORM:

Strengths:

- Recognised quality of product
- Regular positive feedback
(See Appendices 2 and 3)
- Average 30 new subs every month
- Unique selling points as a Reformed/ debating voice and the only United Reformed Church magazine
- Tool to promote United Reformed Church

Weaknesses:

- Core readership is elderly and dwindling year-on-year
- Readership is split: those who preferred "United Reformed Church news" v. "new mag" supporters
- Core URC subscriptions have dropped
- Inactive, elderly distributors
- Relatively unknown product – little to

identity and pride

- Increased interest from wider world outside United Reformed Church (see Appendix 3)

no marketing pre-2009

- Half United Reformed churches don't take REFORM at all
- High level of subsidy from URC

Opportunities:

- Chance to support United Reformed Church ad campaign
- Marketing campaign has got ball rolling in terms of growing brand awareness, which can be built on
- Website creates more exposure and new low-cost medium for marketing
- New monthly Digest of URC news to attract and win back URC readers
- Build on offers attached to complimentary copies
- New approaches to win subscriptions from non-REFORM churches

Threats:

- Adverse economic environment
- Dilemma re split readership unresolved
- Resources for marketing are limited
- Lack of clarity re. strategic United Reformed Church support.
- Finding a way in to non-subscribing churches
- Falling subs threaten print run, which will threaten advertising revenue
- Production costs increase

Cost Cutting

As well as working to expand its revenues through subscriptions and advertising, REFORM is cost-cutting to reduce its subsidy from the URC. Immediate cuts include:

- frequency reduced from 11 to 10 editions per year with effect from 2011;
- spend on images and contributors held at £400 per issue and £600 per issue respectively;
- new quotes requested for cheaper print prices and cheaper, lighter paper;
- provision for marketing expenditure of £15,000 in 2011 - 2014 from an actual spend in 2010 of £18,600.

We fully recognise the need to cut costs still further and will be making every effort to reduce the subsidy from our budget figures of £93,300 to £41,600 by 2014 (see Key Indicators). We would expect to undertake an annual financial review with the Finance Committee to set the subsidy for the coming year.

Marketing plans for 2011 and beyond

REFORM begins 2011 in difficult circumstances. The number of subscriptions bought at the end of 2010 is less than budgeted for. In order to help counter this shortfall, the magazine has dropped its frequency from 11 to 10 copies per year and raised its cover price from £1.80 per copy to £2. We now find ourselves at a point where continued investment and confidence about the future are needed. If subscriptions reduce further our print run costs will become a concern and advertising revenue will be threatened.

A number of marketing strategies have been put in place:

- DIGEST, the new monthly URC news section of REFORM, has been launched and is being promoted
- Contacting lapsed readers through letters announcing DIGEST, and offering new trial copies of magazine
- Approaching churches with no distributor to offer display stand with display copy
- Ensuring REFORM is displayed and, where possible, promoted at Synod meetings
- Seeking REFORM advocates in Synods to help ongoing promotion of REFORM
- Increasing regular communication with distributors; looking at distributor role and exploring whether in some cases REFORM promoters or advocates could supplement their work
- Expanding use of web and new media to generate much wider awareness of the magazine – through developing website and web links, Twitter, Facebook presence for a younger readership
- Approaching ministers who do not subscribe, encouraging them to do so
- Targeting key United Reformed Church and other Christian events with trial copies of REFORM, along with promotional subscription offers
- Including promotional subscription offers with regular trial copies at conference centres, colleges
- Building on awareness-raising letters already sent to new markets (Anglicans, libraries by sending sample copies

After 2011

- Reconsider pricing policy for Reform in Years 2 and 3 – up to 10% increase each year or every other year if necessary
- Continue/review approaches outlined above, depending on their success.

3. Why REFORM needs subsidising

There are two main reasons why we believe REFORM continues to justify substantial investment from the URC, even while we work to reduce the subsidy needed:

- 1: We believe the URC needs REFORM. REFORM occupies, and can increasingly occupy, a very important position in the life of the URC (see Section 2)
- 2: We have clear plans for marketing and budgeting in place and need time to make them work.

i. Investing in REFORM is an investment in the life and voice of the URC

REFORM makes a regular contribution to religious and social debate in Britain, helping to maximise the URC presence in those debates.

REFORM embodies Vision 20/20, as well as the URC's vision of ecumenism. It offers URC members a valuable medium within their tradition through which to wrestle with the meaning of faith in the contemporary world.

REFORM's challenge – to grow within a shrinking market is part of the challenge facing the URC. The URC itself is not contemplating winding down its operation even though membership is reducing each year. Instead we are reaching out to show that the URC has a worthwhile contribution to make and new conversations to have. By keeping REFORM well resourced, we are saying we are proving that we, the URC, are alive and can be taken seriously as a denomination.

ii. Supporting the URC advertising campaign

With the denomination investing in a major national advertising campaign, which we hope will bring new people into contact with the URC and wanting to learn more about us, it is essential to be able to offer REFORM as a shop window. The messages of the ad campaign about inclusiveness, tolerance, freedom of belief and social involvement are embodied by much of what REFORM is about. People who encounter the URC for the first time because of the ad campaign will want to know who we are and what we stand for. REFORM conveys that to them.

iii. Potential of Digest

We are encouraged by early feedback for the new DIGEST section of REFORM. During a recent data-checking exercise, at least 50 distributors expressed enthusiasm about the newsletter and said they expected it to assist their efforts to attract new subscribers or bring back some who missed hearing about local church initiatives. DIGEST also gives us a new reason to market to around 800 “non REFORM” churches, where no distributors are in place and awareness of the magazine is assumed to be very low. We have begun a new initiative: asking these churches to agree to display a free copy of REFORM each month; most have agreed to do so.

iv. Something to be proud of

Our feedback suggests REFORM has earned a great deal of respect from those in other denominations and Christian organisations (see Appendix 3). This makes REFORM an asset to the denomination, as many of our readers, including non-URC members, have told us (see Appendix 2). All of this increases self confidence and bolsters the image of the church.

vi. Working harder for the URC

The challenge is to make REFORM work harder for the URC by becoming known in more URC churches. A major new initiative is underway to ensure this happens. It is not something we have yet properly tested – we need time to make it happen.

Some people have even suggested that REFORM should be sent out free to all URC members. This may not be affordable or practicable for us, but it is important to remember that many organisations do find it worthwhile to invest in their publications to the extent of distributing them for free, because of the dividends that are reaped for the organisation's image, status and message. It can be argued that investment should be made to ensure REFORM does reach more people in the church.

4. New Technology

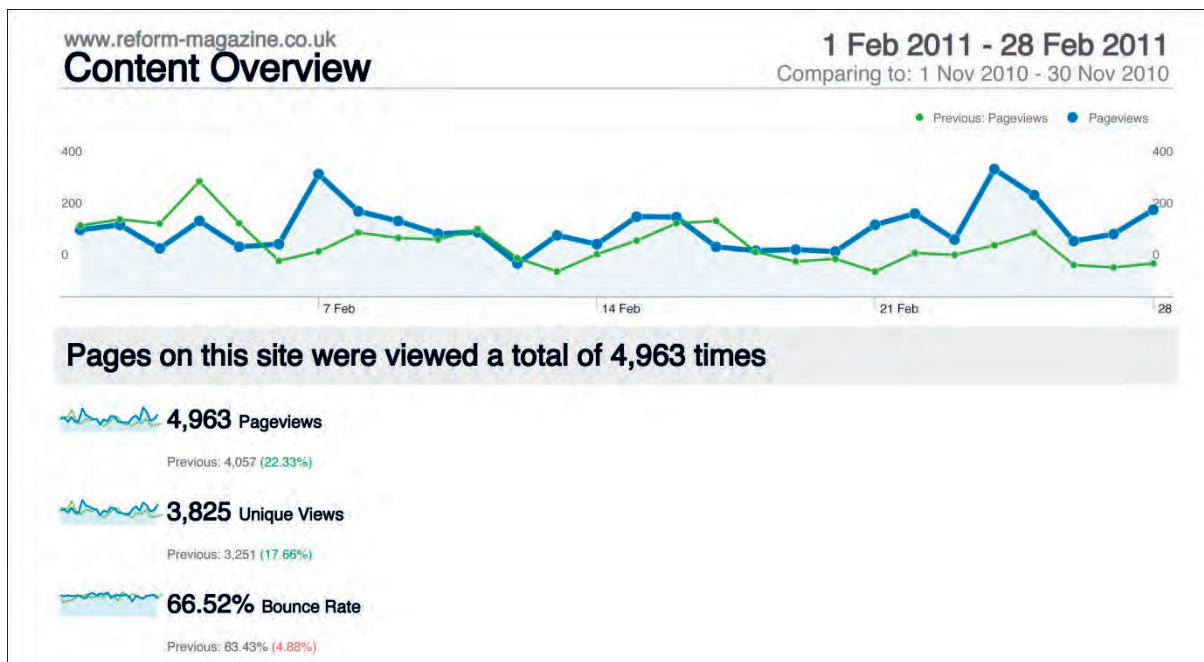
This is a very uncertain time for print communications. Most publications are struggling in an adverse economic environment but new media can work for as well as against printed publications. REFORM is learning to exploit and adapt to new technology.

We launched our own website in July 2010, to explore opportunities to increase the exposure of REFORM widely and cheaply. The website is attracting an increasing number of hits and we have a growing following on Twitter. Both complement one another to offer us a major new advertising platform for reaching new markets and potential readers at little or no cost.

Readers in other countries are beginning to write congratulating us on the website or on the messages they are picking up about us. This is a brand new area of work we hope to exploit fully over time.

We plan to explore options of charging for web content.

The challenge is to get viewers who don't know REFORM to land on the REFORM website. We have recently begun using Google facilities to optimise REFORM within web searches, and have joined Twitter, with a view to seeking potentially interested followers with the help of Tweet Adder. Within six weeks of joining Twitter, we had gained 700 followers, which means we have attracted 116 followers per week. We expect to have gained thousands of followers by the end of the year, a large proportion of whom will visit our website and learn about REFORM. Since enhancing our searches and joining Twitter in January, we have seen hits on the REFORM website (see graph below) and via-web subscriptions rise.



5. Summary

We have recognised the challenge REFORM faces both financially and in expanding the readership. Our costs are being cut back and we have embarked on a campaign to increase subscribers both within the church and among other denominations.

We believe the magazine is an essential mission tool for the URC. We have taken steps to address the understandable calls for more URC news. But REFORM also enhances the profile of the church and gives it a voice far beyond the URC community.

However, we know that, without the continuing subsidy from the URC, the magazine will not survive in its present form. We make the case that investment in REFORM is an investment in the life and voice of the URC.

**The United Reformed Church needs REFORM
REFORM needs the United Reformed Church.**

APPENDIX 2

A selection of URC reader feedback from the past 12 months

- [Irene Bound, reader, 9.03.11] “It’s an excellent magazine. I never used to read it straight away and pull out articles like I do now.”
- [Kim Fabricius, 5.02.11:] “Your work is absolutely superb; the URC has a magazine it can be really proud of.”
- [Joyce Perry, 29.01.11] “I have really appreciated recent editions of REFORM. The articles have been most interesting, informative and challenging. Keep it up.”
- [Jean Bancroft, 28.01.11:] “We are so pleased to see more space given to news from other churches! We find it very encouraging to see what is happening in other churches! So keep up the good work.”
- [Michael Hopkins, 27.01.11] “I greatly enjoyed REFORM in its re-launched format, and I am delighted with the Digest, which is a very welcome addition.”
- [Paul Fox, 23.11.10] “You have made it such an exciting, and interesting magazine. I always look forward to the next issue. It lives up to its statement on the cover - News, Comment, Inspiration, Debate.”
- [Brian Wren, 15.11.10:] “REFORM continues to shine. Thank you for your fine work as Editor. The October interview with Philip Pullman was especially helpful in adding a biblical scholar's voice to some of PP's viewpoints. Amid the realities of URC decline it is heartening to read REFORM's accounts of creative ministry and outreach. Thank you for sharing them.”
- [Davey Spens, 1.11.10:] “I love that you have created such a thoughtful publication, it feels genuinely refreshing.”
- [Donald Norwood, 29.10.10:] “Thanks again and as always for another sparkling issue of REFORM that arrived on our doorstep yesterday and has yet to be totally devoured!”
- [Odette Elliott 27.08.2010:] “Congratulations on REFORM. It is so full of interest these days.”
- [Brian King, 25.08.2010:] “REFORM is a reflection of a thoughtful, progressing denomination that values our inheritance and explores how we might progress to a contemporary deeper faith. Everyone I speak to about REFORM says how good it is now.”
- [Ken Pickering 14.06.2010:] “I hope I can begin by expressing my total admiration for what you have achieved with REFORM which I now read with enormous pleasure and use as a constant source of inspiration.”
- [Paul Fox and Brian King, 2.06.2010:] “the typography, the articles, everything! It's so good now it really is miles better than before.”
- [Kevin Snyman, URC training officer for South Wales 07.05.2010:] “REFORM is a shining light of fresh thinking and change in this Church.”
- [Richard Davis, retired URC minister, 09.04.2010] “May I take this opportunity to say ‘thank you’ for the regular high quality and breadth of the articles in REFORM. There was a time when I nearly despaired of it - I now actually look forward to its arrival.”

APPENDIX 3

Feedback from other denominations, conferences and the media

1. Anglicans

Where we have sent individual copies to Anglicans, when they contribute to the magazine for instance, we usually get positive responses:

- [Rob Shimwell, London, 27.02.11:] “I am a Church of England vicar in SE London who was sent a complimentary copy of Reform - which I greatly enjoyed.”
- [Stephen Cherry, Canon residentiary, Durham Cathedral, 25.2.11] “My copy of Reform arrived today. It is a very impressive magazine. Interesting, relevant content tremendously well presented.”
- [Andrew Clitherow, 03.09.2010, chaplain to the Queen:] “I am now a huge fan of the magazine. In a market where there is much mediocrity, your magazine shines out as an example of open minded, innovative, free-thinking excellence. I would imagine you attract readers by your strong inclusiveness.”
- [John Pritchard, bishop of Oxford 4.08.10:] “I’ve been very impressed with the magazine. You sent me two copies and I think the content, production values and substance are all excellent. I wish the CofE had something like it! Well done.”
- [Revd Dr Trystan Owain Hughes, Anglican Chaplain to Cardiff University, 25.08.10:] “I have been looking at the online editions, and I love the range of articles that you have in REFORM. I am, therefore, in the process of trying to persuade the Diocese to allow me to subscribe to it for the chaplaincy here at Cardiff University.”

2. Methodists and Baptists

We have had some positive anecdotal feedback from the Methodist Conference, where REFORM was displayed in 2009; congratulations on the magazine received from the editor of the Baptist Times, Mark Woods.

3. Colleges and conferences

Reference copies of REFORM have been requested by over 200 theology and religious education departments in schools, universities and teacher training colleges. Complimentary copies are also put into all URC training and resource centres. These copies help REFORM to extend its exposure and reach into new markets.

Copies of REFORM were requested by 16 major Christian conferences in 2010. So far in 2011, the magazine has gone to at least five (Student Christian Movement, World Council of Churches, two Spring Harvest events and JPIT) excluding URC Synod meetings, and Greenbelt this summer. This figure excludes smaller URC type events (approx 10 per year) such as those requested by individual churches.

Testimonials from conference organisers:

- [Hillary Topp, Student Christian Movement coordinator, 21.02.11:] “. We think it’s one of the best publications in the church press and we particularly like the diversity of contributors, the inclusion of younger voices, and the reflective theological content.”)

- From Clare Planner, Gold Key Media, 15.01.2010:] “The Business Director at Methodist International Conference Centre Hospitality said that they love REFORM magazine. They put copies in all the rooms and it is a really suitable title for their guests.”

4. Media

Many other Christian publications have recognized REFORM at various times.

Editors have:

- conveyed congratulations on particular articles or general praise (Baptist Times, Church Times, Inspire, Keep the Faith)
- reproduced whole articles or extracts or reported on them (Church Times, the Tablet, Ekklesia, Christianmagazineonline.com, many blogsites, many local URC magazines)
- reported our (one or two!) press releases (especially online mags and blogsites)
- asked us for interview contacts or photos after having read interviews in REFORM (Church Times, War Cry, Keep the Faith)

Recent media-related comments include:

- [4.1.11] We would like to do what we can to grow our contact with REFORM as we are in very many ways “fellow travellers”. I post URC news in our news brief section whenever I can (Jill Segger, Associate Editor, Ekklesia)
- [2.02.11] I am ...offering interviews to major Christian magazines with key authors. And, of course, you are one of the most major! (Ali Hull, publicist, Monarch Books)
- [7.02.11] Your magazine is by far the best quality of the Christian press. Plus you are willing to run items with a bit of gravitas... (Hazel Southam, journalist, freelance and journalist for the Bible Society)



F

MISSION COUNCIL 17TH – 19TH MAY 2011

Healing the past – Building the future

The report of the Church of England-United Reformed Church
joint study group on God's Reign and Our Unity

Introduction by the co-convenors

Jesus prayed 'may they all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.' John 17.21 NRSV

The Church of England and United Reformed Church agreed to explore their shared ecumenical commitment through the study of the international Anglican Reformed document, God's Reign and our Unity. A group of seven people, three Church of England, three United Reformed and one Methodist, met on seven occasions over the period 2007 – 2010.

This study group built on the insights of various conversations, both multi-lateral and bi-lateral, over the last seventy years, including most recently, an Anglican/United Reformed Church dialogue and a trilateral informal conversation between the Church of England, the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church.

The shared commitment to unity was re-visited through looking at the Church of England's Thirty-nine Articles and the United Reformed Church's Basis of Union. Scripture, the tradition of the church and God's mission imperative in a changing world are all drivers in the search for unity.

Within each of our two churches, there is a varied understanding of the role that Scripture plays in the Christian life. However, there is common agreement about the centrality of scripture in shaping the Christian life.

Our two churches have historically diverged from one another, as we have each sought to be shaped by the Holy Spirit, but discovered the Spirit leading us in different directions. However, we each affirm the activity of the Spirit in the life of the church and share a common desire to be shaped by the mind of Christ. We also gathered aware of the influence that the discrepancy in size of membership between our two churches has to play.

The context of the conversations undertaken by this study group has been one of challenge and change, in the church and in the world which the church seeks to witness to and to serve. Society has become more plural in terms of faith, whether in the major faith traditions, more contemporary outcrops of spirituality, or in the rise of atheism. Spirituality has become a watchword, but has not necessarily been interpreted within a Christian context. The post-Enlightenment rise of individualism has led to a point where each individual feels free to determine his or her own beliefs without need of a wider reference point.

In the main, church-going has been declining, apart from areas blessed by immigration and the rise of Pentecostalism. Mainstream churches have been faced with ageing congregations and reducing resources. External pressures have turned churches inwards in terms of their priority being their own renewal. Internal divisions have led to questions about unity being more widely debated within, rather than between, churches.

In this context, responding to Jesus' prayer that his followers might be one, has become more of a challenge. However, the study group believes that it is an essential challenge for the churches to respond to and a key part of the churches witness to a fragmented world.

The setting up of a Church of England/United Reformed study group, rather than formal conversations, has been a reflection of the diminution of the emphasis on unity across the churches.

However, the life of a study group has meant that discussion could happen more freely and under less pressure, than in a formal conversation which needed to lead to a specific agreement. The study group would like to offer this ecumenical methodology as a way forward in building relationships and reflecting on difficult issues between churches. This process has allowed nettles to be grasped without the pressure of decisions needing to be made.

It is our hope and our prayer that the Holy Spirit will continue to open up new possibilities of conversation with one another, conversations that lead us more closely to the mind of Christ and equip us better to engage in the wider mission conversations that lie before us in the world.

We have been grateful to the work of the two co-secretaries in drafting an extensive and valuable report, outlining the conversations that have already taken place over the last century, the particular issues that arise today and the setting of these issues within the context of other international agreements, such as Reuilly and Leuenberg and through the work of the World Council of Churches.

The Venerable Dr Joy Tetley, Church of England co-convenor
The Reverend Elizabeth Welch, United Reformed Church co-convenor

The shape of the report

The report is in three sections.

Section 1 (pages 3-16) explains the background to the meetings of the study group in the history of the relationship between the Church of England, the United Reformed Church and the Christian traditions out of which it was formed.

Section 2 (pages 17-32) describes the meetings of the study group and sets out the key areas of convergence and divergence between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church that emerged during these meetings.

Section 3 (pages 32-33) contains the study group's conclusions and recommendations. The key conclusions are that the two churches can and should take steps towards a closer relationship and the key recommendation is that there should be a joint service of recognition, penitence and mutual commitment at Westminster Abbey in 2012, the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the United Reformed Church and the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662, as a way of formally inaugurating this closer relationship.

Section 1. The background to the study group

1. During the period of the Civil War and the Commonwealth a series of Acts of Parliament abolished episcopacy, the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*, the *Thirty Nine Articles* and the traditional liturgical calendar from the life of the Church in England. Those who remained loyal to the Church of England as it had been before the Civil War looked for the day when all these changes could be reversed and those clergy who had lost their livings because of their loyalty to the bishops and the king could have their livings restored.
2. Their opportunity came with the failure of the Commonwealth and the restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 and their sense of bitterness over what had happened in the preceding years meant that they were not inclined to compromise with those who thought differently from them. The result was that when the Savoy Conference of 1661 failed to achieve agreement on the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* between those representing the newly restored bishops and those representing a Presbyterian approach to church polity, those clergy who were unwilling to promise to use only the rites and ceremonies of the Prayer Book or to receive episcopal ordination were given a choice of either conforming or being deprived of their livings on St Bartholomew's day, 24 August 1662. Many of those who felt they could not conform held to an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in worship which set them against a restriction to prescribed forms. Freedom of worship, an antipathy to prelacy and a rejection of Establishment were all theological issues involved in the early history of Dissent which continue to be alive today.¹
3. Nearly two thousand clergy were deprived and this 'Great Ejection' led to a division within English Christianity that has remained unhealed to this day. Many of these clergy formed their own separate 'nonconformist' or 'dissenting' churches² and in the course of time some of these churches, or churches descended from them, became the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Union.
4. Over the next two and a half centuries the Church of England and the churches in the Congregationalist and Presbyterian traditions maintained a separate existence, working and

witnessing for Christ, sometimes in opposition and sometimes in co-operation, against the background of inter alia, the growth of deism, the Evangelical Revival, the rise of Methodism, the Oxford Movement and the Missionary Societies and the social and intellectual challenges of the Victorian era. During this time Congregationalism increased greatly as a result of the Evangelical Revival, whilst Presbyterianism moved in the direction of Unitarianism but was revived in Southern England and spiced up and enhanced in the North of England by migration from Scotland.

5. By the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, although the Church of England remained the established church, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, along with the members of the other Protestant Free Churches, had come to play a very important part in the religious, cultural and political life of England. The civic penalties which had been imposed on dissenters after the restoration had largely been abolished and in cities like Birmingham the Free Churches played a dominant role in civic life. In the latter half of the nineteenth century it was said that the affairs of Birmingham were decided in the vestry of Carr's Lane Congregational Chapel whose minister, R. W. Dale, played a leading part in the political as well as the religious life of the city. There were continuing tensions between the Church of England and the Free Churches over issues such as tithes and the role of the Church of England in the education system, but overall relations between them were improving. However, the divisions between the churches remained.³

The Lambeth Appeal of 1920

6. The beginnings of modern attempts to heal the divisions between Anglicans, Congregationalists and Presbyterians resulting from the Civil War, the Great Ejection and the history that then followed go back to 1920. In that year the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops issued 'An Appeal to all Christian People.' This appeal declared that the 'the time has come...for all separated groups of Christians to agree in forgetting the things which are behind and reaching out to the goal of a reunited Catholic Church'⁴ and further stated that:

The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all Truth, and gathering into its fellowship all who 'profess and call themselves Christians', within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage of the past to the present, shall be possessed in common and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ.⁵

7. The appeal also suggested that a visibly united Church would need to involve the 'whole hearted acceptance' of the Holy Scriptures, the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion and what it described as:

A ministry acknowledged by every part of the church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body.⁶

8. The report then went on to contend that the episcopate 'is the one means of providing such a ministry' and that:

...we eagerly look forward to the day when through its acceptance in a united Church we may all share in that grace which is pledged to the members of the whole body in the apostolic rite of laying-on of hands, and in the joy and fellowship of a Eucharist in which as one Family we may together, without any doubtfulness of mind, offer to the one Lord our worship and service.⁷

9. Perhaps conscious that this stress on the significance of the episcopate would look to the other churches like a simple call for them to accept bishops and episcopal ordination, the appeal noted that ‘the truly equitable approach to union is by the way of mutual deference to each other’s consciences.’⁸ To this end it emphasised that no one should be seen as repudiating his past ministry and proposed that while ministers who were not episcopally ordained would ‘accept a commission through episcopal ordination,’ Anglican bishops would also accept from the authorities of other churches ‘a form of commission or recognition which would commend our ministry to their congregations, as having its place in the one family life.’⁹

The 1938 Outline Reunion Scheme

10. In response to this appeal and its further endorsement by the Lambeth Conference of 1930 there were a series of conversations between representatives of the Church of England and representatives of the Federal Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, including the Presbyterian Church of England and the Congregational Union, that eventually resulted in the publication in 1938 of the *Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Free Churches in England*.
11. This *Outline* proposed the coming together of the Church of England and the Evangelical Free Churches belonging to the Federal Council in a single united church along the lines set out in the 1920 appeal. Under this re-union scheme the existing ministers of the re-uniting churches would have retained their status in the new church without re-ordination and all presbyters, whether episcopally ordained or not, would have been able to celebrate Holy Communion in all churches, subject to the provisions of a pledge that no-one would have to accept ministry against their conscience. All existing Church of England bishops would have become bishops of the new united church and presbyters from the former Free Churches would have been consecrated as bishops through the laying on of hands by a combination of three Church of England bishops and those ministers who would formerly have administered ordination in the Free Churches.¹⁰
12. The Convocations of Canterbury and York in the Church of England commended the report for the ‘careful attention’ of those in the Church of England in 1938¹¹ and in 1941 the response of the Free Church Federal Council noted the hesitations about a number of aspects of the proposed re-union scheme from the Free Churches, hesitations that included, but were not limited to, the proposal that the re-united church should be episcopal in nature.¹²
13. There does not seem, however, to have been any attempt from either side to try to take forward work on the outline scheme or to think how it might be turned into reality, and the scheme was quietly shelved. The most plausible explanation for this is that the Second World War radically changed the focus to simple survival, local hospitality to the bombed out and displaced, and the effort to maintain contact with and support for continental Christian brothers and sisters. Significantly the two inter-Church matters which are referred to at length in the Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England from the war years are United Presbyterian-Congregational Churches and the process leading to the formation of the British Council of Churches.

Archbishop Fisher’s 1946 Sermon and the Free Church Response

14. After the Second World War, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, re-opened the issue of the steps that would be needed to move towards a re-united church in England in a sermon entitled ‘A Step Forward in Church Relations.’ This sermon was preached before the University of Cambridge on 3 November 1946. It suggested that as a step towards unity the

Free Churches might adopt episcopacy into their own systems of ministry prior to re-union with the Church of England.¹³ The sermon led to conversations between representatives of the Archbishop of Canterbury and representatives of the English Free Churches which resulted in the 1950 report *Church Relations in England*. This report surveyed the implications of the Archbishop's sermon and what would be involved in putting its suggestions into practice.

15. The report did not propose a re-union scheme along the lines suggested in 1938. It suggested instead that there should be negotiations for the establishment of intercommunion between individual Free Churches and the Church of England. It also suggested that there were six points that would need to be involved in the establishment of intercommunion. (1) Assurances with respect to doctrinal standards leading to a declaration that both churches maintained the apostolic faith and proclaimed the apostolic gospel. (2) The acceptance of the historic episcopate by the Free Church involved and a resolution of the status of the ministers of the Free church who had not been episcopally ordained. (3) Admission to Holy Communion by the Church of England of communicant members of the Free Church and the authorization of communicant members of the Church of England to receive Holy Communion from the ministers of the Free Church. (4) The hope by the Church of England that episcopal confirmation would come to be generally used in the Free Church. (5) The maintenance by the Free Church of its existing relationships with non-episcopal churches. (6) The acceptance by both churches that intercommunion 'ought not to be regarded as being more than a temporary stage on the road to full unity.'¹⁴

Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations 1954-1966

16. The 1950 report did not lead to negotiations for intercommunion between the Church of England and either the Presbyterian Church of England or the Congregational Union. However, from 1954-1957 the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England were involved in quadrilateral conversations involving the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church that eventually resulted in the 1957 report *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*.¹⁵ This report proposed a 'new approach toward unity through mutual adaptation' that would eventually lead to unity between Anglicans and Presbyterians in England and Scotland.
17. This approach would have meant that in the Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of England:

Bishops, chosen by each Presbytery, from its own membership or otherwise, would initially be consecrated by prayer with the laying on of hands by Bishops from one or more of the Episcopal churches and by the Presbytery acting through appointed representatives. Thus consecrated each Bishop would be within the apostolic succession as acknowledged by Anglicans on the one hand and as required by Presbyterians on the other. He would be the President of the Presbytery and would act as its principal minister in every ordination, and in the consecration of other Bishops. He would exercise pastoral oversight over his fellow-ministers in the Presbytery, and act as its spokesman to the community...The Presbytery would still retain its full and essential place in the life and government of the Church, except that a permanent Bishop-in-Presbytery would take the place of the changing Moderator. The General Assembly would retain its full existing authority in doctrine, administration, legislation, and judicature.¹⁶

Conversely, in the Church of England and the Scottish Episcopal Church:

Lay persons would be solemnly "set apart" for some measure of pastoral responsibility towards their fellow-Christians, in an office akin to the Presbyterian eldership. Lay people would be given appropriate participation in the government of the Church at all levels: parochial, diocesan, provincial, and national.¹⁷

18. The report recognised that other ‘fundamental modifications’ to the life of the churches involved would also be required, but it stated that these would come about ‘as the Churches grow in spiritual fellowship together’.
19. There was strong criticism of the 1957 report within the Church of Scotland. Nevertheless, it was agreed that the conversations should continue and that they should address four questions that reflected the concerns expressed by the Church of Scotland. These questions were:
- (a)...the meaning of unity as distinct from uniformity in Church order; (b) the meaning of “validity” as applied to ministerial orders; (c) the doctrine of Holy Communion; and (d) the meaning of “the Apostolic Succession” as related to all these matters.¹⁸
20. In 1962 the conversations between the four churches resumed, this time with observers from the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church in Wales and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. The agenda for the conversations was provided by the four questions identified by the Church of Scotland plus three additional issues suggested by the Church of England that were seen as arising out of, and relevant to, the discussion of the four previous questions. These issues were: the Church as Royal Priesthood, the Place of the Laity in the Church, and the Relations between Church, State and Society.
21. The conversations, which lasted from 1962-66, took place in four regional groups made up of representatives from each of the four participating churches. Each panel considered the first six topics on the agenda, with a special group being convened to consider the topic of the relations between Church, state and society. Two general conferences of members of all the regional groups were also held.
22. The report of the conversations was published in 1966 as *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations*.¹⁹ It covered the seven topics on the agenda of the conversations, but it also contained a proposal for bilateral conversations between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church and between the Church of England and the Presbyterian Church of England with the aim of creating united churches in Scotland and England that would be in full communion with each other.
23. After the publication of the report, bilateral conversations continued in Scotland between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church until 1974, but continuing concerns about episcopacy in the Church of Scotland meant they did not ultimately prove fruitful in terms of producing a union between the two churches. In England, meanwhile, the Church of England focussed on an ultimately unsuccessful scheme for unity with the Methodist Church while the Presbyterian Church of England focussed on the discussions with the Congregational Union that led to the formation of the United Reformed Church in 1972.²⁰
24. Underlying this formation was a stream of work which had been picked up after the Second World War in response to the petition of the Presbyterian Layman’s Conference of 1943 to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of England asking for it to re-commence conversations with the Congregational Union. Choosing the path of closer co-operation, a Joint Advisory Council was established in 1951. Against a wider background of deepening ecumenical relations, on which the impact of the pontificate of John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council should not be underestimated, the Joint Committee of the Congregationalists and Presbyterians met for the first time on New Year’s Day 1964. Both churches voted in favour of the Union Scheme in 1971, the United Reformed Church Bill was passed in June 1972, and the new Church came into being on the 5th of October in that year. At the time the formation of the United Reformed Church was seen more widely as a first step to wider unity

in England, as shown by the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster at the inaugural service in Westminster Abbey.

25. Congregational churches had to vote on whether or not to be part of the United Reformed Church, whilst Presbyterian churches automatically became part of the new church unless they specifically voted not to be. This was because at this critical moment the decisive discernment of the mind of Christ was deemed to be in the individual Congregationalist Church Meetings and in the Presbyterian General Assembly. These very different ecclesiologies were reconciled more by reference to the experience of tradition rather than seeing tradition as a fixed yardstick against which all change had to be measured. Experience, leading to conviction, had taught Congregationalists that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer they gathered under the Word in local fellowship in a Church Meeting. In that Meeting the togetherness of all Church members in seeking to discern God's will was an expression of Catholicity. Experience, leading to conviction, had taught Presbyterians that the Holy Spirit was present and did guide the people of Christ when with prayer their representatives gathered under the Word in General Assembly. From all this experience was developed a conciliar church in which there is dispersed authority. That means that the authority to discern the mind of Christ is dispersed between the various councils of the church, depending on the nature of the matter to be determined. As part of its journey, the Congregational Union of England and Wales became prior to the formation of the United Reformed Church the Congregational Church in England and Wales, emphasising the acknowledgement of mutual interdependence and the conciliar nature of the whole church.
26. After the initial union of 1972 the United Reformed Church has expanded twice. In 1981 a union took place between the United Reformed Church and the Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ and in 2000 a union took place with the Congregational Union of Scotland.
27. It should be admitted that there has been a price to pay for the unions described in the previous three paragraphs. At each union there have been those who have felt unable on grounds of good conscience to join in. In 1972 Presbyterian congregations in Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Channel Islands joined the Church of Scotland and significant numbers of Congregational churches found homes in the Congregational Federation and the Evangelical Fellowship of Congregational Churches or asserted thorough going Independency. Following the unions in 1981 and 2000 there remains a Fellowship of Churches of Christ and there are continuing Congregational churches in Scotland.

Covenanting for Unity

28. From 1978-1980 the Church of England and the United Reformed Church were involved alongside the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church and the Moravian Church in the development of the multilateral *Covenanting for Unity* proposals. These proposals were intended to enable the churches concerned 'to demonstrate their unity, and thus to share more effectively in the one mission of Christ in the world.'²¹ The proposals involved these churches entering into a covenant with each other on the basis of which they would:

...be able to acknowledge one another as true Churches within the One Church of Christ, and to recognise and accept one another's sacraments, membership and ministries.²²
29. Issues about the mutual recognition of ministry had been one of the reasons why previous proposals for moving towards unity had come to nothing and in order to address this problem the intention was that the covenant would provide:

...an unambiguous way in which the ministries of all our churches may be incorporated in a new relationship within the historic ministry of the catholic Church to their mutual enrichment. Consecration to the historic episcopate by episcopal ordination and the joint ordination of presbyters according to a Common Ordinal will become the practice of all our Churches from the point of Covenant onwards, and this intention is sealed by the ordination of bishops and presbyters in the Covenant Service itself.²³

30. The *Covenanting for Unity* proposals eventually came to nothing after they narrowly failed to achieve the necessary two thirds majority in the House of Clergy of the Church of England's General Synod in 1982. As in the case of the previous Anglican-Methodist unity scheme, the major reason for the failure of the Covenant proposals in the Church of England was a fear amongst a number of those on the Church of England's Catholic wing that the proposals would undermine the Church of England's Catholic character by leading to the acceptance of ministers who had not been episcopally ordained.
31. Although the failures of the Anglican-Methodist scheme and the *Covenanting for Unity* proposals were major setbacks for the Church of England's ecumenical endeavours, the Church of England persisted in seeking to move towards unity with other churches and the result has been a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements from 1988 onwards with the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches, the Moravian Church in Great Britain, the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches and the Methodist Church in Great Britain.
32. Although the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church had voted in favour of the *Covenanting for Unity* proposals by 434 to 196, the matter caused some division and might have led to resignations and secessions had it gone forward. Some held that bishops were not in themselves foreign to the Reformed tradition, nor did they have to conform to the then current Church of England pattern, and that unity was an over-riding imperative, not only for its own sake but also for the sake of mission. Others argued that hierarchy of any sort was foreign to the United Reformed Church and its uniting traditions, that the same was true of any authority given to individuals rather than councils, and that principle should not be sacrificed for the sake of unity. In truth, a sizeable minority was deeply relieved when the proposal faltered elsewhere.
33. In the years that followed the failure of the Covenant proposals commitment to unity between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church was given expression through an emphasis on local ecumenism and a burgeoning number of Local Ecumenical Projects, renamed Local Ecumenical Partnerships from 1994.
34. A Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP) is a relationship between two or more denominations at the local level which affects their ministry, congregational life, buildings and/or mission projects. It involves a formal written agreement, is recognised by the 'sponsoring body' (Churches Together in a county or other local area) and is authorised by the appropriate denominational authorities. Six types of LEP are now recognised by Churches Together in England – shared building agreements, covenanted partnerships, single congregation partnerships, chaplaincy partnerships, mission partnerships and education partnerships. There are currently 308 LEPs in which the United Reformed Church and the Church of England are partners. They cover all six types of LEP. Seventy seven of them are bilateral and two hundred and thirty one of them involve at least one other denomination.
35. In addition to the development of LEPs, Regional and County ecumenical bodies were developed to give oversight to LEPs and ecumenical work more generally in the counties and regions. These bodies have also provided a meeting point for church leaders across different traditions.

The Church of England-United Reformed Church informal conversations 1995-1997

36. From 1995-1997 informal conversations took place between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.²⁴ They arose out of a common desire to explore the implications of respective European commitments for the United Kingdom ecumenical scene, issues raised by Local Ecumenical Partnerships, a sense of unfinished business around the *God's Reign and Our Unity* report, and a desire to reconcile memories relating to 1662. The report of these conversations is divided in eight sections.

37. The first section describes how the two churches fit into the growing network of ecumenical relationships in Europe and around the world and concludes that:

The Church of England and the United Reformed Church are challenged now to bring this growing experience of unity at a local, national, European and international level together with the theological convergence expressed in the theological dialogues, in order to discuss what next steps our churches might take officially on the way to visible unity.²⁵

38. The second describes the practical and theological issues raised by the involvement of the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in two hundred and twelve Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

39. The third looks at the 1984 Anglican-Reformed report *God's Reign and Our Unity* and its reception by the two churches. It notes that the report 'clearly sets before our two churches questions that should be explored together.'

40. The fourth explains the need for the reconciliation of memories between the two churches in order to overcome the memory of the Great Ejection of 1662 and subsequent tensions between the two traditions.

41. The fifth considers the issue of 'Apostolicity, Continuity and *Episkopé*' with reference to the Church of England, the United Reformed Church and developing patterns of ecumenical oversight.

42. The sixth contains reflections from a United Reformed Church and a Church of England perspective on the issue of the relationship between 'Church and Nation.'

43. The seventh summarises the discussions that have taken place between the two sides and declares:

In the light of all this we could see the promise of formulating together a common statement of our understanding of the nature and purpose of the Church, our existing agreements in faith and what sort of diversity would belong to a visibly united Church. This common statement could form the basis on which a declaration might be made, entailing the mutual recognition of each other as churches belonging to the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God. From this might follow commitments to take further steps to visible unity.

The formulation of such a common statement would help Anglicans and reformed in this country to contribute to the pilgrimage to the visible unity of all Christians. While it would be appropriate to work on a common statement in a bilateral conversation close contact should be kept and cross representation ensured, with any bilateral formal conversations either church is engaged in or may enter.²⁶

44. The eighth recommends to the Ecumenical Committee of the United Reformed Church and the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England ‘that informal conversations be continued to explore the formulation of a common statement.’

Conversations on the Way to Unity

45. The recommendations in section 8 of the 1997 report were never acted upon because by then the Church of England had decided to focus its ecumenical efforts on the formal conversations about closer unity with the Methodist Church that had already been proposed in the 1996 Anglican-Methodist report *Commitment to Mission and Unity* and that led to the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* of 2001.

46. Although the United Reformed Church would have liked to have been part of these formal conversations, the Church of England and the Methodist Church decided this would not be appropriate because there was a specific agenda between the two churches which they felt could best be dealt with bilaterally. They agreed instead to include the United Reformed Church in informal tri-lateral conversations running alongside the formal Anglican-Methodist conversations. *Conversations on the Way to Unity*²⁷ is the report of these informal trilateral conversations.

47. This report covers the topics of conciliarity, eldership, the goal of visible unity and membership and sets out the responses of those involved in the conversations to the Church of England report *Bishops in Communion* and to the Methodist reports *Called to Love and Praise* and *Episkope and Episcopacy*.

48. The report notes three areas of convergence. All three churches shared a common commitment to the full visible unity of the Church and recognised that they were facing the same urgent missionary situation. All three churches were ‘conciliar’ and connexional’ but in different ways. All three churches ‘were able to identify with the various pastoral and ecclesiological principles for local church leadership which had emerged from the discussion on eldership.’

49. The report also notes five areas requiring further work:

- (i) More work is needed to examine together how far the different ways in which personal *episkope* relates to apostolicity are contingent and how far they are a matter of theological principle.
- (ii) More work is needed on the place of ordination and authorisation [in relation to] ...eldership and the many forms of lay leadership in the three churches.
- (iii) More work is needed on a shared understanding of the nature of the Church. More work is also needed on the different understandings of the path to full visible unity.
- (iv) Further work is needed on the ways in which personal episkope is officially understood and actually practised in the three churches. Because the Methodist and United Reformed Churches are committed to Christian unity in three nations, it would be useful to include the episcopal churches in Scotland and Wales in this work.
- (v) More work is needed on the question of the relationship of baptism to membership, and membership to the ministry of the whole people of God.²⁸

50. The report concludes by declaring that all three churches believe that ‘the calling of the Church to be one is a gospel imperative’ and by recommending that further work should be undertaken on the outstanding ecclesiological issues noted and that the three churches should explore together ‘what further steps would be necessary to make an English covenantal relationship between them.’ That work was taken forward into the first Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican – Methodist Covenant. However the members of that body found that the sheer volume of Faith and Order matters which they had to cover necessitated giving priority to consolidation of the Covenant itself. As a result, the recommendation for further tri-partite work has never been followed up.²⁹

Areas of Ecumenical Overlap

51. Alongside this history of direct ecumenical relationships between the Church of England and the churches that became the United Reformed Church and then between the Church of England and United Reformed Church itself, there is also considerable overlap between the ecumenical commitments of the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.
52. Both churches are members of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Churches Together in England, The Council of European Churches and the World Council of Churches.
53. The Church of England has ecumenical agreements with the Evangelical Church in Germany under the *Meissen Agreement* of 1988, with the Church of Norway under the *Porvoo Common Statement* of 1993, with the French Lutheran and Reformed Churches under the *Reuilly Common Statement* of 1999³⁰ and with the Methodist Church under the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant*.
54. The United Reformed Church also has strong ecumenical relationships with these same churches through its membership of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its participation in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe under the terms of the *Leuenberg Agreement* of 1973. In addition, the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church are linked together through their joint participation in a large number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships.
55. The United Reformed Church and the Church of England are also jointly involved, alongside the Methodist Church and other churches as well, in training people for ministry through their participation in colleges, part-time courses and Regional Training Partnerships. In March 2010, the latest date for which figures are available, twenty seven United Reformed Church students were studying for ministry alongside students from the Church of England.

God’s Reign and Our Unity

56. *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, which was published in 1984,³¹ was the report of an International Commission of Anglican and Reformed theologians from around the world that included representatives of both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The purpose of the report was to encourage Anglican and Reformed churches to take local steps towards the unity of the Church as a whole. It was written against the background of sixty years of involvement by theologians of both traditions in ecumenical discussion of Faith and Order matters and the achievement of united churches in North and South India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, but also against the background of the failure or stalling of unity proposals in other parts of the world.

57. This report remains the most detailed agreed statement by Anglican and Reformed theologians on the issues of unity, ecclesiology, sacramental theology and the Church's ministry. Its key emphases are the inseparable connection between unity and mission, the connection between the unity of the Church and the unity of the wider human community and the fact that right theology needs to result in right practice ('orthodoxy' needs to lead to 'orthopraxis') not just in terms of Faith and Order, but in terms of social and political attitudes and actions. It consists of six chapters.
58. Chapter 1, 'Our Task,' sets out the origins of the report and then looks at what keeps Anglican and Reformed Christians apart before finishing by considering the relationship between the unity of the Church and the unity of the human race.
59. Chapter 2, 'The Church: God's Apostolic People,' describes how the grace of the Triune God has called the Church into being in order to bear witness to God's purpose of reconciling humanity and all creation to Himself.
60. Chapter 3, 'Life in the Church,' begins by looking at the integral relationship between right belief, right worship and right practice (what it calls 'orthodoxy' and 'orthopraxis') and then goes on to explore the nature of Baptism and the Eucharist and how they point us to the imperative of working for reconciliation and unity in both the Church and the world.
61. Chapter 4, 'Ministry in the Church,' looks at the relationship between the ministry of the Church as a whole and of individual ministers within it, the issues of ordination, authority and continuity in relation to the ministry, the patterns of ministry in the Anglican and Reformed traditions and the question of the ordination of women.
62. Chapter 5, 'Our Goal,' draws on material from the New Delhi, Uppsala and Vancouver assemblies of the World Council of Churches to set out a vision of a single visibly united worldwide Church, and then puts forward a series of practical suggestions about how the Anglican and Reformed traditions might become united as part of the achievement of this wider goal.
63. Chapter 6, 'Recommendations,' contains nine recommendations from the Commission, with the last recommendation being the study by both traditions (in joint groups if possible) of a series of questions arising from the report.
64. At the heart of *God's Reign and Our Unity* is the conviction, widely shared in contemporary theology, that the basis for the unity of the Church is the unity that exists within the life of God:

The goal of church unity is the reconciliation of humanity and the whole universe to God, and the source and impetus for that unity are to be found in God himself; for the Gospels testify to the unity between Jesus Christ and the Father (John 10.30; Matt. 11.27), and between the Father and the Spirit (John 15.26), and Jesus prays that his disciples may be drawn into that unity (John 17.21). The pattern of unity in diversity is thus in the Godhead. The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son's love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another. This is grace, and to reject one another is to reject God's grace.³²

65. As a result:

The reason why we can never rest content in our separation is the unlimited grace of God the Father, who has accepted us in the beloved Son and bound us together in his own life by the power of the Holy Spirit - a life in which we are called to reflect both the unity and

diversity of the Godhead. If then we refuse to accept one another in Christ we flout the grace by which he has accepted us and by which we live.³³

66. The report notes the concerns of those who see the search for unity as a distraction from evangelism or work for peace and justice, but it insists that it is a mistake to set these concerns over and against one another:

Too often the concern for evangelism, social justice and church unity are set against each other, different groups demanding that primary or exclusive attention be given to one or another of these concerns. The Father, however, sent his Son to preach the gospel, to proclaim justice for the oppressed and to draw together all his disciples into the unity of the Godhead. He has enlisted us to participate in his work through the power of the Spirit. He gives gifts so that all his disciples may perform their distinctive work as different members of his one body. Evangelism, social justice and church unity are not conflicting concerns, but are complementary aspects of the one mission of God in which we participate as accountable stewards. To restrict our concern to any one of them would be to abridge the gospel.³⁴

67. The specific form of unity that is recommended by the report is the coming together of the Anglican and Reformed traditions in a ‘family or fellowship’ of local³⁵ churches, each of which would:

...exhibit in each place the fullness of ministerial order, Eucharistic fellowship, pastoral care, and missionary commitment and which, through mutual communion and commitment, bear witness on the regional, national and even international levels.³⁶

68. These local churches would each have a bishop-in-presbytery who would be called to provide ‘ministerial leadership in the whole life of the Church in his area’³⁷ and at the congregational level the Anglican diaconate and the Reformed Eldership would be brought together through the appointment of:

...a number of elders in every congregation, normally non-stipendiary and not intending to serve later as priests, sharing with the priest in the pastoral care of the congregation in a manner which might follow in large measure the pattern offered by the present Reformed eldership.³⁸

69. *God’s Reign and Our Unity* was welcomed by the United Reformed Church although Assembly Records indicate that the focus of ecumenical theological thinking in the denomination at the time was *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the formal response to *God’s Reign and Our Unity* had a strong lens on that other document.

70. The Church of England’s General Synod debated *God’s Reign and Our Unity*, together with reports from the Anglican-Lutheran and Anglican-Orthodox dialogues, in July 1985. A motion was passed inviting the dioceses to commend all three reports for ‘study in appropriate situations’ and inviting the Church’s Faith and Order Advisory Group to study the report and ‘bring back to the General Synod any recommendations they may decide which might lead to a change in relationship between the Churches.’³⁹ This motion does not seem to have resulted in any specific action, but, as we have seen, *God’s Reign and Our Unity* fed into the informal conversations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church in 1995-1997 and the report has entered into the Church of England’s ecumenical bloodstream, being regularly drawn upon in subsequent ecumenical reports and agreements to which the Church of England has been party.

Section 2. The Meetings of the study group

(I) The origins, membership and meetings of the Study Group

71. As far back as the informal conversations of 1995 – 97 there was a sense that *God's Reign and Our Unity* represented unfinished business that needed to be explored more fully. Against this background, and as part of a desire to think further about its ecclesiology and ecumenical relations, the United Reformed Church asked the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity in 2006 whether representatives of the Church of England would be willing to join with representatives of the United Reformed Church for a joint study group on *God's Reign and Our Unity*.
72. The Council for Christian Unity accepted this invitation and six meetings of the study group were held. The meetings took place alternately at United Reformed Church House and at Church House, Westminster and took place on 5 March 2007, 13 September 2007, 19 February 2008, 4 September 2008, 18 March 2009 and 5 October 2009. A final meeting to sign off the study group's report was held at URC Church House on 8 June, 2010.
73. Those who took part were, from the Church of England, The Venerable Dr. Joy Tetley (co-convenor), The Revd Jonathan Baker and Dr Martin Davie (co-secretary) and, from the United Reformed Church, The Revd Elizabeth Welch (co-convenor), the Revd Richard Mortimer (co-secretary) and The Revd Dr David Peel. The Revd Dr John Emmett joined the group from its third meeting as a participant observer from the Methodist Church.
74. At the first meeting of the study group the participants shared their initial impressions of *God's Reign and Our Unity*. At the second meeting each side responded to paragraph 7 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* by presenting material relevant to its own understanding of its identity as a church. The United Reformed Church presented its *Basis of Union* and the report of its 2006 consultation on Eldership and the Church of England presented extracts from the *Articles of Religion*, the 1662 and *Common Worship* Ordinals and the Canons. The 1920 *Lambeth Appeal* and the 1938 *Outline Reunion Scheme* were also made available to the meeting.
75. These presentations led to a wide ranging discussion of the theology, ethos and organisation of the two churches, and the social context in which they were operating and this discussion led in turn to the discussion of three specific topics at subsequent meetings. These topics, which were explored on the basis of papers from the Church of England and the United Reformed Church, were 'The form of the ministry and its relation to God's will and calling,' 'Pneumatology and discernment' and Dr David Cornick's study of Reformed spirituality *Letting God be God*.
76. The consideration of these topics resulted in a wide ranging and creative exploration of both the topics themselves and a series of related theological and ecclesiological issues. As noted in the Introduction to this report, the members of the group found this free ranging approach to ecumenical conversations to be very stimulating and fruitful and want to commend it for the consideration of other ecumenical conversations in the future.
77. At its final meetings, the members of the study group also considered what they had learned from the conversations in terms of the current state of the two churches, the points of theological and ecclesiological convergence and divergence between them and how the relationship between them might now go forward.

(II) The key points of convergence and divergence that emerged from the meetings of the Study Group

78. As a result of the discussions outlined above, the members of the study group came to the conclusion that there is a large degree of convergence between the United Reformed Church and the Church of England. This convergence finds expression in agreement between them on a number of key issues. The ways in which they agree on these issues are set out in the main text below with reference to what has been said about the topics in question in *God's Reign and Our Unity* and in a number of other ecumenical statements.
- 79 The members of the Study Group also recognised that there are still genuine and important differences between the two churches that need to be acknowledged alongside the points of agreement. These differences are set out below in text boxes.

a.) Agreement on the unity of the Church

80. During the discussions in the Study Group it became clear that everyone agreed that while the context in both Church and society had changed since *God's Reign and Our Unity* was published what it said about the importance of the visible unity of the Church remained relevant today. In particular, it was noted that there is still a commitment to the unity of the Church in both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The Church of England's commitment to seeking the unity of the Church is laid out in Canon A8, which states:

Forasmuch as the Church of Christ has for a long time past been distressed by separations and schisms among Christian men, so that the unity for which our Lord prayed is impaired and the witness to his gospel is grievously hindered, it is the duty of clergy and people to do their utmost not only to avoid occasions of strife but also to seek in penitence and brotherly charity to heal such divisions.

81. A similar commitment to unity is contained in Article 8 of the United Reformed Church's Basis of Union, which declares:

The United Reformed Church has been formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled. It sees its formation and growth as a part of what God is doing to make his people one, and as a united church will take, wherever possible and with all speed, further steps towards the unity of all God's people.

82. Examples of how what is said in these statements is reflected in the actual lives of both churches are the way in which the Church of England continues to give a significant amount of its time and resources to the development of good bilateral and multilateral ecumenical relationships at the international, national and local levels and the placing of the question "What are the ecumenical implications of this agenda?" above agendas for meetings throughout the United Reformed Church.
83. Furthermore, for both churches the unity to which they are committed does not consist simply in the development of improved relations between individual Christians or in a form of reconciled diversity in which different churches continue to exist side by side in friendly co-operation. Rather, it consists in the development of a single visibly united Church and the ecumenical agreements entered into by both churches that are detailed above have been attempts to move towards this ultimate goal.

84. The members of the study group believe that both churches can echo what is said about the theological basis for unity in paragraph 25 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

In spite of all the factors which continue to keep our two traditions apart, we join with the whole Christian family in confessing one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The goal of church unity is the reconciliation of humanity and the whole universe to God, and the source and impetus for that unity are to be found in God himself; for the Gospels testify to the unity between Jesus Christ and the Father (John 10.30; Matt. 11.27), and between the Father and the Spirit (John 15.26), and Jesus prays that his disciples may be drawn into that unity (John 17.21). The pattern of unity in diversity is thus in the Godhead. The God whose being is holy love, uniting the Father, Son and Spirit, draws us by the work of the Spirit into participation in the Son's love and obedience to the Father. This same holy love draws us to one another. This is grace, and to reject one another is to reject God's grace. The reason why we can never rest content in our separation is the unlimited grace of God the Father, who has accepted us in the beloved Son and bound us together in his own life by the power of the Holy Spirit - a life in which we are called to reflect both the unity and diversity of the Godhead. If then we refuse to accept one another in Christ we flout the grace by which he has accepted us and by which we live.

85. They also believe that both churches accept the portrait of visible unity produced by the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961 that is contained in paragraph 107 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his People.

Difference on the Episcopate and the unity of the Church

86. The Church of England does not hold that the episcopate is of the essence of the Church in the sense that it believes that a body that does not possess the historic episcopate can nevertheless still be part of the one Church of Jesus Christ. That is why the Church of England has been able to give formal acknowledgement to non-episcopal churches in its ecumenical agreements. It is true, however, (as these same agreements make clear) that the Church of England believes that the existence of the historic episcopate is a necessary part of the visible unity of the Church. The United Reformed Church, on the other hand, in common with other Reformed churches, does not see the existence of any particular form of ministry as necessary for the Church's visible unity. This is an important difference that needs to be acknowledged, but it does not negate the agreement about the unity of the Church that has just been noted.

b) Agreement on appropriate diversity

87. In the course of the discussions of the study group it also became clear not only that there was diversity within the United Reformed Church and the Church of England as well as between them, but that both churches saw an appropriate degree of diversity within and between churches as something that was compatible with their commitment to the unity of the Church.

88. Accordingly, the members of the study group believe that both churches agree with the statement in paragraph 105 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* that:

...the Church –like the human family as a whole – is and always will be characterized by great diversity. People differ according to national and political allegiance, ethnic and cultural character, and the thought forms embodied in their various languages. These differences will always be present among Christians, both within denominations and between them. Because the Church is called to be a sign and the first-fruits of God's purpose to reconcile all things in Christ, its provisional character will only be truly represented if these diversities are also present in its life, and yet are at the same time held within a unity which bears witness to God's final purpose.

89. They also believe that they agree with what is said about the nature and limits of diversity in the following statement from the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1991:

Diversities which are rooted in theological traditions, various cultural, ethnic or historical contexts, are integral to the nature of communion; yet there are limits to diversity. Diversity is illegitimate when, for instance, it makes impossible the common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13.8); and salvation and the final destiny of humanity as proclaimed in Holy Scripture and preached by the apostolic community. In communion diversities are brought together in harmony as gifts of the Holy Spirit, contributing to the richness and fullness of the church of God.⁴⁰

c) Agreement on Scripture

90. It also became apparent in the course of the discussions that both churches share a common commitment to the theological authority of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. This commitment is expressed in Articles VI and XX of the Church of England's *Thirty Nine Articles* and Paragraph 12 of the United Reformed Church's *Basis of Union*.

91. Article VI states that: 'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.' Article XX declares: 'although the Church be a witness and a keeper of Holy Writ: yet, as it ought not to decree anything against the same, so besides the same ought it not to enforce anything to be believed for necessity of salvation.' Paragraph 12 of the *Basis of Union* states that the United Reformed Church: 'acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for faith and conduct of all God's people.'

92. It was noted that in both churches there were a variety of different views concerning the precise nature of the authority of the Bible and how it should be interpreted, but in spite of this variety the members of the study group consider that both churches are able to affirm the statement about Scripture contained in paragraph 31 of the *Reuilly* statement:

We accept the authority of the canonical scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We read the Scriptures liturgically in the course of the Church's year. We believe that through the gospel, God offers eternal life to all humanity, and that the Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation.⁴¹

Whilst the United Reformed Church would not necessarily use the language of 'canonical scriptures' or 'reading liturgically,' the members of the study group felt that it could endorse the substance of what is said in this quotation.

93. The members of the study group also consider that both churches are able to affirm the statement in paragraph 13 of the *Leuenberg Agreement*:

The fundamental witness to the Gospel is the testimony of the apostles and prophets in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. It is the task of the Church to spread this Gospel by the spoken word in preaching, by individual counselling, and by Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In preaching, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Jesus Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. Justification in Christ is thus imparted to men and in this way the Lord gathers his people.⁴²

94. It was noted during the course of the study group's discussions that there was a desire in both churches to encourage a greater knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures and a shared view of both the importance and the difficulty of ensuring that there was a regular provision of high quality preaching based on the exposition and application of the biblical text.
95. It was further observed that the academic study and interpretation of the Bible was a shared ecumenical enterprise to which both Anglican and Reformed scholars such as, for example, Richard Bauckham, N T Wright, George Caird and Graham Stanton had made, and continued to make, a significant contribution.

d) Agreement in faith

96. It was also agreed in the course of the discussions that there was a common understanding of the apostolic faith that was shared by both churches on the basis of their common commitment to the theological authority of the Scriptures.
97. In the case of the Church of England this faith is most authoritatively expressed in the 'historic formularies' referred to in Canons A5 and C15, *The Thirty Nine Articles*, *The Book of Common Prayer* and the 1662 *Ordinal*. In the case of the United Reformed Church it is most authoritatively expressed in the section of the *Basis of Union* on The Faith of the United Reformed Church.
98. On the basis of what is said in this material the members of the Study Group believe that both churches subscribe to the basic doctrinal beliefs of the Christian Church as set out in the following statements taken from the *Reuilly* and *Leuenberg* agreements:
99. *Concerning the Trinity and the person of Christ*

We accept the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and Apostles' Creed and confess the basic Trinitarian and Christological dogmas to which these creeds testify. That is, we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is true God and true Man, and that God is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This faith of the Church through the ages is borne witness to in the historic formularies of our churches. This faith has to be proclaimed afresh in each generation.⁴³

100. *Concerning justification by grace through faith*

Through his Word, God by his Holy Spirit calls all men to repent and believe, and assures the believing sinner of his righteousness in Jesus Christ. Whoever puts his trust in the Gospel is justified in God's sight for the sake of Jesus Christ and set free from the accusation of the law. In daily repentance and renewal he lives within the fellowship in praise of God and service to others, in the assurance that God will bring his kingdom in all its fullness. In this way God creates new life and plants in the midst of the world the seed of a new humanity.

This message sets Christians free for responsible service in the world and makes them ready to suffer in this service. They know that God's will, as demand and succour, embraces the whole world. They stand up for temporal justice and peace between individuals and nations. To do this they have to join with others in seeking rational and appropriate criteria and play their part in applying these criteria. They do so in the confidence that God sustains the world and as those who are accountable to him.⁴⁴

101. *Concerning the nature of the Church*

We believe that the Church is constituted and sustained by the Triune God through God's saving action in word and sacraments and is not the creation of individual believers. We believe that that the church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and foretaste of the kingdom of God. The Church is a divine reality, holy and transcending present finite reality. At the same time, being also a human institution, it shares all the ambiguity and frailty of the human condition and is always called to repentance, reform and renewal.⁴⁵

102. *Concerning eschatology and the mission of the Church*

We share a common hope in the final consummation of the kingdom of God, and believe that in this eschatological perspective we are called to engage now in mission and to work for the furtherance of justice and peace. The obligations of the kingdom are to govern our life in the church and our concern for the world. In this way that Church witnesses to the new humanity that has its origin and fulfilment in Christ.⁴⁶

Difference on the use of the ecumenical creeds

103. The Church of England regularly recites the Apostles and Nicene Creeds in its services of Morning and Evening Prayer and Holy Communion. By contrast, the United Reformed Church does not regularly recite these creeds in its public worship. However the United Reformed Church accepts the faith to which these creeds bear witness. As schedule D of the *Basis of Union* puts it 'The United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.'

e) Agreement on the Sacraments

104. Another area in which there was seen to be agreement between the two churches was the area of the sacraments. It was accepted that there was a diversity of views about the theology of the sacraments in both churches. However, in spite of this diversity it was noted that both churches were united in their use of the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper and that there was a shared understanding of the basic nature of these sacraments reflected in the *Articles* and *Prayer Book* on the one hand and the *Basis of Union* on the other.
105. On the basis of this shared understanding it seems to the members of the study group that the two churches can affirm together what is said about baptism in paragraphs 3, 5 and 6 of the World Council of Churches' 'Lima Statement', *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*:

Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus went down into the river Jordan and was baptized in solidarity with sinners in order to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). This baptism led Jesus along the way of the Suffering Servant, made manifest in his sufferings, death and resurrection (Mark 10:38-40, 45). By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the "old Adam" is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken. Thus those baptized are no longer slaves to sin, but free. Fully identified with the death of Christ, they are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:13,3:1; Eph. 2:5-6).

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. It is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mark 1:10-11) and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2). God bestows upon all baptized persons the anointing and the promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit nurtures the life of faith in their hearts until the final deliverance when they will enter into its full possession, to the praise of the glory of God (II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).

Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world.⁴⁷

106. The members of the study group believe that the two churches can also affirm together what is said in paragraph 61 of *God's Reign and Our Unity* about the 'practical consequences' of this shared understanding of baptism:

If we are as realistic about baptism as the apostolic writers are, then we are already by our baptism one body, and the continuing separation of our two communions is a public denial of what we are already in Christ. Moreover, there are consequences beyond these ecclesiastical ones. In the one man Jesus we see our common humanity taken up, redeemed and given back to us so that we can share it together- Jew and Gentile, man and woman, slave and free, white and black. Fidelity to our baptism commits us to affirm in word and practice the full, equal and God-given humanity of every person, to embody that affirmation in our public and political life, and to oppose all that denies this shared humanity. Our baptism commits us to follow Jesus on the way of the cross, in warfare against the world, the flesh and the devil, until everything will be subject to the Father and own Jesus as Lord.⁴⁸

Difference on infant and believers' baptism

107. It was acknowledged in the course of the discussions that one of the differences between the two churches is their official stance towards the issue whether baptism should be administered to infants or believers.
108. The United Reformed Church explicitly describes itself as a church which includes supporters of both approaches. In the words of the *Basis of Union*, 'The United Reformed Church includes within its membership both those whose conviction is that baptism can only be appropriately administered to a believer and those whose conviction it is that infant baptism also is in harmony with the mind of Christ.'⁴⁹ It is also a church that seeks to give both these convictions an equally honoured place within it.
109. The formularies of the Church of England do not contain any statement parallel to the statement just quoted from the *Basis of Union*. As Article XXVII indicates, at the time of the Reformation the Church of England rejected the arguments of those who called for infant baptism to be replaced by believers' baptism and in the centuries since then infant baptism has remained the most normal form of baptism within the Church of England. The Church of England has also tended to see infant baptism as the norm theologically. The differences between the two churches in this respect need to be acknowledged. However, there are a number of considerations which lessen this difference:
- (i) The Church of England has made official liturgical provision for adult baptism since the revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1662.
 - (ii) As the report of the informal conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, *Pushing at the boundaries of unity*, suggests, from a Church of England point of view it is possible to view both the infant baptism and the believer's baptism approaches as equally 'authentic' alternatives within an overall pattern of Christian initiation involving, in addition to baptism itself, 'instruction in the faith and formation for discipleship in some kind of catechumenate,' 'a liturgical opportunity for the individual to profess the faith for themselves,' 'the laying on of hands with prayer for the confirming and strengthening power of the Holy Spirit' and 'participation in the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion.'⁵⁰ A pattern of Christian initiation containing all these elements exists within the United Reformed Church⁵¹ and on this basis there seems to be no reason why the Church of England should have difficulties with recognising the authenticity of the believers' baptism strand of tradition within the United Reformed Church.
 - (iii) The recent decline in the number of infant baptisms in the Church of England has been matched by a relative increase in the number of teenagers and adults being baptised and so believer's baptism is in fact becoming an increasingly normal part of the Church of England's life.

110. As well as being able to make a shared affirmation about baptism, the members of the study group also consider that both churches can affirm what is said about the Eucharist/Lord's Supper in first the *Leuenberg* and second the *Reuilly* agreements:

In the Lord's Supper the risen Jesus Christ imparts himself in his body and blood, given up for all, through his word of promise with bread and wine. He thereby grants us forgiveness of sins and sets us free for a new life of faith. He enables us to experience anew that we are members of his body. He strengthens us for service to all men.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim the death of Christ through which God has reconciled the world with himself. We proclaim the presence of the risen Lord in our midst. Rejoicing that the Lord has come to us we await his future coming in glory.⁵²

We believe that the celebration of the Lord's Supper (the eucharist) is the feast of the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, in which the word of God is proclaimed and in which Christ crucified and risen gives his body and blood to the community under the visible signs of bread and wine. 'In the action of the Eucharist Christ is truly present in his self-offering to the Father, the one full, perfect and all sufficient sacrifice which he alone can offer and has offered once for all.' In this celebration we experience the love of God and the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ and proclaim his death and resurrection until he comes again and brings his kingdom to completion. The eucharistic memorial is no mere calling to mind of a past event or of its significance, but the Church's efficacious proclamation of God's mighty acts. Celebrating the eucharist, the Church is reconstituted and nourished, strengthened in Faith and hope and sent out for witness and service in daily life. Here we already have a foretaste of the eternal joy of God's kingdom.⁵³

111. In addition, both churches should also to be able to affirm what is said about the implications of participation in the Eucharist in paragraph 70 of *God's Reign and Our Unity*:

The Eucharist which unites us with Christ and feeds us with his own life in his body and blood, unites us at the same time with one another and with the whole company of Christ's people in every age and place. It is therefore a condition for participation in the Eucharist that we have forgiven one another and are in love and charity with our neighbours. Participation in the Eucharist commits us to the ceaseless search for reconciliation among all for whom Christ died, and is incompatible with the exclusion of any person on grounds of race, sex, social distinction or culture as well as with the refusal to share material resources given by God for the benefit of all.⁵⁴

Difference on the theology of the Eucharist

112. During the course of the discussions in the study group it was noted that there was a range of views of about the theology of the Eucharist in both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. This range extends from the views of those in the Church of England who emphasise the real presence of Christ in the consecrated elements and who view the Eucharist as a re-offering of the sacrifice of Christ to the views of those in the United Reformed Church who see the Eucharist in purely memorialist terms. It was also felt that the issue of the reception of ecumenical statements needed to be noted as it was not necessarily the case that everyone in either church would accept the Eucharistic theology contained in ecumenical agreements signed by their church. Nevertheless, the members of the study group felt that overall there was a convergence in the Eucharistic theology of the two churches which could be expressed in the language of *Leuenberg*, *Reuilly* and *God's Reign and Our Unity*.

f) **Agreement on ministry**

113. It also became clear in the course of the study group's discussions that there was substantial agreement about the issue of ministry between the two churches. In the view of the members of the study group this agreement means both churches are able to affirm together the following statements concerning the Church's ministry in paragraph 31 of the *Reuilly* statement:

We believe all members of the Church are called to participate in its apostolic mission. They are therefore given various ministries by the Holy Spirit. They are called to offer themselves as 'a living sacrifice' and to intercede for the Church and the salvation of the world. This is the corporate priesthood of the whole people of God, called to ministry and service (1 Peter 2:5). Within the community of the Church the ordained ministry exists to serve the ministry of the whole people of God. For that purpose the ordained ministry of word and sacraments is a gift of God to his church and may therefore be described as an office of divine institution.

We believe that a ministry of oversight (episcopate) exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways, at all levels of the Church's life, is necessary to witness to and safeguard the unity and apostolicity of the Church.⁵⁵

114. In discussion in the study group it was acknowledged that a ministry of oversight was exercised in both the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. The difference between them was that in the Church of England the key focus for the exercise of this ministry was the diocese and the key person exercising this ministry was the diocesan bishop in consultation with the diocesan synod and with the assistance of the suffragan bishop (or bishops), the archdeacons and other members of his senior staff, whereas for the United Reformed Church, regional oversight takes place in the Synod, through its meetings and committees, and it often becomes focussed in the ministry of the Moderator. Meanwhile, oversight of the local church is entrusted to the Elders' meeting, where Elders with Ministers work collaboratively among and beyond the congregation.
115. It was also noted that in addition to agreeing with what is said about ministry in the *Reuilly* statement both churches would also be able to agree with two key points about the character of Christian ministry made in *God's Reign and Our Unity*. The first point is that the primary ministry in the Church:

... is that of the risen Christ himself, and we are enabled to participate in it by the power of the Spirit. His ministry is entrusted to sinful men and women and it is only as debtors to grace that we can fulfil it. The mission of the Church is an overflow of the grace of God. It is only as those whose sins have been freely forgiven that we can be the bearers to others of God's gift of forgiveness. This ministry is exercised by and through the entire membership of the Church in the course of their daily work in the world. Every member of the Church, therefore, abiding in Christ, shares in this ministry.⁵⁶

116. The second point is that, in line with the pattern that can be seen in the lives of those disciples of Jesus who subsequently became apostles, leadership within the Church:

...means leading others into the company of Jesus so that - in him and by working of the Spirit - their lives may be offered to the Father, and also leading others into the world to challenge the dominion of evil in the name of Christ and in the power of the Spirit. This double calling finds unity in the cross which was at the same time Jesus' total offering of himself to the Father on behalf of humankind, and the decisive victory of God's Kingdom over the dominion of evil. Ministerial leadership in the Church may therefore be defined as following Jesus in the way of the cross so that others in turn may be enabled to follow in the same way.⁵⁷

Difference with regard to the ministry

117. Alongside these areas of convergence with regard to the ministry there are also areas of divergence.
118. Firstly, there are two distinct patterns of ministerial order. The Church of England has retained the traditional threefold order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons whereas the United Reformed Church's pattern of ministry, which has its roots in the pattern established by John Calvin in Geneva at the Reformation, is based on the existence of ordained Ministers of word and sacrament and ordained Elders who share with them in 'pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches.'⁵⁸
- 119 The continuing existence of these two distinct patterns of ministry reflects the fact that the Church of England has not followed up the suggestion made in earlier rounds of Anglican-Reformed dialogue that it should consider adopting some form of Eldership along Reformed lines.⁵⁹ It also reflects the fact that although, in connection with the Covenanting for Unity proposals and the proposal for an ecumenical bishop in Cardiff, the United Reformed Church has affirmed in principle its willingness to consider the adoption of episcopacy in a form consonant with its own traditions it has never actually adopted it and many in the United Reformed Church continue to have reservations about it doing so.
120. Furthermore, not only are there different patterns of ministerial order in the two churches, but there are also significant differences of practice with regard to who ordains and who is allowed to preside at the Eucharist/Lord's Supper.
121. In the Church of England it is Bishops who ordain. In the United Reformed Church Elders are ordained by the Minister acting on behalf of the congregation while ministers are ordained by the local Synod. In the case of the ordination of ministers it is the responsibility of a Synod Moderator to preside at an Ordination Service (or appoint such other person to preside as shall be appropriate) and to share with others, as shall be locally determined, in the laying on of hands and prayer for the person to be ordained.
122. In the Church of England only those who have been ordained Priest may preside at the Eucharist. In the United Reformed Church Ministers normally preside, but, Elders and Accredited Lay Preachers are permitted to preside at services of Baptism and Communion 'where pastoral necessity so requires' (*Basis of Union* paragraph 25). What exactly constitutes 'pastoral necessity' is debated within the United Reformed Church.
123. Underlying these differences of practice there are also important differences of theological principle over the issues of whether a single unified pattern of ministry can be discerned in the Bible and the life of the Early Church (and, if so, what this pattern is) and whether particular patterns of ministry are God given, and therefore necessary and immutable, or whether they have emerged in response to contingent historical circumstances and therefore can and should be changed under the guidance of the Spirit as new circumstances arise.
124. The importance of these differences of principle and practice should not be underestimated, particularly as their distinctive patterns of ministerial order are an important part of the identity of both churches. However, in the opinion of the members of the study group they do not negate the agreements between the two churches about the basic nature of Christian ministry previously outlined.

g) Convergence on discernment

125. Two further areas of convergence that were identified by the study group were the areas of discernment and spirituality.
126. The issue of discernment is the issue of how a church discerns the will of God for God's people. Discussion of this issue in the study group made it clear that in both churches the process of discernment involves the Spirit guided study of the teaching of Scripture in the light of biblical scholarship, the Tradition of the Church down the centuries, and contemporary thought and experience (including, where appropriate, the witness of natural theology). It would perhaps be true to say that the United Reformed Church gives relatively greater weight to the contemporary guidance of the Holy Spirit through the Word and that the Church of England gives relatively greater weight to the witness of the Holy Spirit through Tradition, but Tradition and the contemporary guidance of the Spirit are nonetheless important for both churches.
127. The ways in which discernment takes place vary in detail between the two churches because of their different structures of Church government. However, in both churches discernment is a conciliar process that involves the whole people of God, both clergy and laity alike (although with those who have the ministry of oversight having a particular responsibility for giving leadership to it) and in both churches it is something that takes place at all levels of the church's life from the parochial or congregational to the national.
128. As the Study Group considered the issue of discernment, it was noted that a key question raised in the process of discernment was how to decide whether a new development in the life of the Church was or was not legitimate. Underlying this question there was seen to be a further and more fundamental issue, relating to the character of God. God is revealed to us as unchanging (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) and yet also as the God who does new things (Is. 43:18-19; Rev. 21:5 – and focally, in the adventure of the Incarnation). As the Group engaged with this apparent paradox, it began to sense that perhaps central to this mystery is the creativity of divine love. Therein lies God's constancy – ever creative in the expression of absolute love. What might be the implications of this for the life and mission of the Church? The Study Group felt that this is a vital area, not least for both the Anglican and the Reformed traditions, and one, therefore, that theologians from both churches might fruitfully explore together.

h) Convergence in spirituality

129. Spirituality is concerned with what have been called the disciplines of the Christian life. That is to say, it is concerned with the ways in which Christians develop their understanding of and relationship to God and how these are reflected in the way they live their lives as individuals and as members of Christian communities.
130. In the course of its discussions the Study Group looked at *Letting God be God*, the recently published study of Reformed spirituality by the United Reformed Church theologian Dr David Cornick.⁶⁰ In this book Dr Cornick considers preaching, prayer, the influence of belief in divine election, the development of church architecture, Christian social and political involvement and a growing awareness amongst Reformed Christians of the importance of the catholicity and unity of the Church. In all these areas it was noted that there were striking parallels between Dr Cornick's account of the development of the Reformed spirituality and the way in which Anglicanism had developed during the same period. For example, the doctrine of election had been important within Anglicanism as well as within the Reformed tradition, the development of a concern for the aesthetics of worship and a belief in the religious significance of art had taken a parallel course in both traditions and both traditions had shared a conviction that the glory of God should be reflected in the social and political spheres. The recognition of these common elements in the development of Anglican and Reformed spirituality reinforced the conviction

within the study group that the two traditions were on convergent rather than divergent trajectories and that this fact needed to be reflected in closer relations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church.

131. The study group felt that further joint exploration of the spiritualities of the two traditions would be a fruitful way of helping to develop these closer relations.

i) Difference on establishment

132 It was recognised in the course of the study group's discussions that the issue of establishment was an unresolved point of difference between the two churches.

133. After the Great Ejection of 1662 the established Church of England with the monarch as its supreme Governor was the sole legal church in England. In the case of Trinitarian Protestant churches outside the Church of England this situation was eased by the Toleration Act of 1689 which gave them legal existence, but their members were still subject to legal disabilities with regard to matters such as participation in the political system or taking degrees at the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

134. As was noted in paragraph 5, these legal disabilities were largely abolished by the end of the nineteenth century. However, the Church of England, with the monarch as its supreme governor, has remained the established church in England, a position that carries with it legal privileges, such as the right to crown the monarch and automatic representation in the House of Lords and responsibilities, the most important of which is that it has spiritual responsibility for every place and to every person in England and that parish priests have the legal obligation to baptize, marry⁶¹ and to inter the body or ashes of those resident in their parishes when requested to do so.

135. It was agreed in the study group that objections to establishment in the United Reformed Church are partly due to perceptions of the wealth and privilege of the Church of England which for the most part no longer correspond to reality. However, they are also due to conscientious theological objections to the existence of established churches, objections that would apply as much to the establishment of a Reformed church such as the Church of Scotland as to the establishment of the Church of England. The key objections to the establishment of the Church of England are that the role of the monarch as supreme governor negates the sole headship of Christ over the Church, that it compromises the mission of the Church by leading Christians to identify too strongly with the existing political and social order and that it is inappropriate in a multi-faith society such as England is today.

136. It was acknowledged in the study group that there are those in the Church of England who also have problems with establishment. However, the view of the Church of England as a whole is that its established status is theologically defensible and is beneficial to its mission. From a Church of England view point the role of the monarch as supreme governor does not negate the sole headship of Christ, but reflects the belief that rulers have a God given authority which extends over all areas of society, ecclesiastical as well civil (see Article XXXVII). In addition the Church of England feels that its established status provides it with pastoral and prophetic opportunities that would otherwise be lost and enables it to represent in the public sphere not only its own interests, but also the interests of other churches and the members of other faiths.

137. Establishment is an important issue and one that requires further discussion between the two churches. However, in the view of the members of the study group difference over this issue should not prevent the two churches moving towards a closer relationship with each other, especially given that both churches already have existing ecumenical agreements with both established and non-established churches.

Section 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

138. As a result of its discussions the study group unanimously came to four conclusions.
139. First, as has already been noted, the members of the study group felt that the free and wide ranging nature of their discussions and their willingness to share with and learn from each other in a spirit of ‘receptive ecumenism’ provided a good example of ecumenical methodology which they wanted to offer to others engaged in ecumenical dialogue.
140. Secondly, in spite of the continuing differences between the two churches, the importance of which should not be minimised, there are large and significant areas of agreement and convergence between them as outlined above.
141. Thirdly, these areas of agreement and convergence mean that the Church of England and the United Reformed Church should each be able to acknowledge formally and reciprocally the existence of the one Church of Jesus Christ in the other church.
142. Fourthly, given that this is the case, given that both churches are committed to the furtherance of the visible unity of the Church, and given the inseparable link between unity and mission that has been accepted since the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910, it is important that the Church of England and the United Reformed Church should formally develop closer relations with each other. The study group recognised that there is a waning of ecumenical energy and enthusiasm in both churches at the moment. However this does not mean that we can avoid the obligation to give clearer expression to our unity in Christ.

Recommendations

143. On the basis of these conclusions the members of the study group make the following recommendations:
- a. The formal development of closer relations between the two churches should involve a statement of mutual recognition and commitment similar to those made between the Church of England and Reformed churches in Germany and France under the *Meissen* and *Reuilly* agreements. It also needs to involve both a celebration of what God has done in the lives of our two churches and what God has given to us and expressions of mutual penitence for those past failures of wisdom and charity which have contributed to the continuing division of the Church of Christ.
 - b. 2012 marks both the 350th anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662 and the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Reformed Church, an inauguration which took place at Westminster Abbey and at which the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, was a guest of honour. This would therefore be an appropriate symbolic date for an event which would enable the Church of England and the United Reformed Church to express publicly their penitence for the divisions of the past, their mutual recognition of each other in the present as churches belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ and their commitment to working together to develop a closer relationship between them in the future.
 - c. Following on from this event there should be discussion by representatives of the two churches on how the two churches can co-operate more effectively together for mission at the local level.

- d. There should also be further work on the range of topics for continuing study identified by this study group, the 1997 report and *Conversations on the Way to Unity*, namely, the reconciliation of memories, the structures of Church government, the forms of lay and ordained ministry, relations between Church and state, the relationship between Baptism and Church membership, the development of doctrine and practice in the Church and how this is related to the constancy and originality of God, the nature of discernment in our two churches and the exploration of the spiritualities of the Anglican and Reformed traditions.
- e. The covenantal relationship that exists between the Church of England and the Methodist Church of Great Britain and the close and developing relationship between the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church of Great Britain mean that there needs to be appropriate Methodist involvement in the development of closer relations between the Church of England and the United Reformed Church. There needs to be the development of a tri-lateral rather than simply a bi-lateral relationship.

144 a. The joint Church of England-United Reformed Church Study Group on God’s Reign and Our Unity therefore recommends to the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England and the Mission Council of the United Reformed Church that the necessary steps should be taken by both churches in order to bring about a joint event in 2012, marking both the 350th anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662 and the 40th anniversary of the inauguration of the United Reformed Church, which would involve a public declaration of their penitence for the divisions of the past, and their mutual recognition of each other in the present as churches belonging to the one Church of Jesus Christ.

- b It also recommends that, building on this service, further work should be undertaken on the range of topics for continuing study identified in 143 (d) above, namely, the reconciliation of memories, the structures of Church government, the forms of lay and ordained ministry, relations between Church and state, the relationship between Baptism and Church membership, the development of doctrine and practice in the Church and how this is related to the constancy and originality of God, the nature of discernment in our two churches and the exploration of the spiritualities of the Anglican and Reformed traditions.**

Endnotes

¹ It should be noted, however, that, although opposition to Establishment became an important part of the Dissenting tradition, not all those who were ejected in 1662 were opposed in principle to Establishment. The Presbyterians and at least some of the Independents, such as John Owen, wanted the establishment of their own polity; they were not against Establishment as such. The anti-establishment strand within Dissent came mainly from the Separatists of the 16th century who fed into the Baptists and thus eventually into the broad Dissenting tradition. The issues that led to the ejection of 1662 were concerned with episcopacy and the Prayer Book rather than the issue of Establishment.

² For details about the ministers who were deprived in 1662 see A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988. It was estimated by Richard Baxter that some 1,800 ministers who had been deprived continued to act as ministers of religion of some kind.

³ The combination of increasingly cordial personal relations in the context of continuing division is encapsulated in the account of the relationship between Dale and the first Bishop of Birmingham, Charles Gore, in the biography of the latter. ‘Dr Dale noticed one day that a friend betrayed some surprise on hearing that Gore was about to be his guest. ‘Oh,’ he replied, ‘I very much like entertaining him. We are very good friends. ‘You see, he knows I am wrong, and I know he is wrong; so we get on very well together.’ (G. L. Prestige, *The Life of Charles Gore*, London: William Heinemann, 1935, p. 142.).

⁴ G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity*, Oxford: OUP, 1930, p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

- 7 Ibid., p.4.
- 8 Ibid., p.4
- 9 Ibid., pp.4-5.
- 10 Details in G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity 3rd series 1930-1948*, Oxford: OUP, 1948, pp. 71-101.
- 11 Ibid., pp.101-102.
- 12 Ibid., pp.102-119.
- 13 G. Bell (ed.), *Documents on Christian Unity 4th series 1948-1957*, Oxford: OUP, 1958, pp.46-50.
- 14 For these points see Ibid., pp.58-60.
- 15 *Relations between Anglican and Presbyterian Churches*, London: SPCK, 1957.
- 16 Ibid., p.15.
- 17 Ibid., p.16.
- 18 *General Assembly Reports*, p. 77.
- 19 *The Anglican-Presbyterian Conversations*, Edinburgh & London: The St Andrew Press/SPCK, 1966.
- 20 The United Reformed Church has subsequently also been joined by the Churches of Christ and the Scottish Congregational Union.
- 21 *Towards Visible Unity: Proposals for a Covenant*, London: Churches' Council for Covenanting, 1980 p.10.
- 22 Ibid., p.9.
- 23 Ibid., p.9.
- 24 *Report of the Church of England United Reformed Church informal conversations 1995-1997*, CCU/FO/97/9.
- 25 Ibid., p.4.
- 26 Ibid., pp.13-14
- 27 *Conversations on the Way to Unity*, London: URC, 2001.
- 28 Ibid., pp.23-24.
- 29 Ibid., p.24. The Anglican Co-Chairman of the talks, Bishop Colin Buchanan added a 'personal proposal' as an alternative to the proposal for further tri-partite conversations in the main report. He proposed that United Reformed Church be asked to give a response to the report of the Anglican-Methodist conversations on the same timetable as the other two churches so that if it accepted the report the United Reformed Church would be able to join with them 'to pursue the next practical steps' in the implementation of the report (Ibid p.26). Like the recommendations of the main report, this proposal was not followed up.
- 30 Both the Meissen and the Porvoo relationships involve Church of England people in many different spheres of activity. Their most important expression is in the many parish, diocesan and individual links which these agreements encourage, and the opportunity to engage with issues of life and faith, European and global, with Christians from other countries. A network of diocesan European Officers sustains this work. At the national level, the agreements bring together church leaders, ordained and lay, in bishops' meetings, delegation visits, specialist consultations and theological conferences. Details of these activities are available via the website of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity and the monthly European bulletin issued by the Council. Because of the small size of the French Lutheran and Reformed churches it has not proved possible to develop the Reuilly relationship to the same extent, but regular meetings are held between the Church of England and these churches to seek ways in which the relationship can be developed and lived out.
- 31 *God's Reign and Our Unity*, London and Edinburgh: SPCK/St Andrew's Press, 1984.
- 32 Ibid., p.16.
- 33 Ibid., p.16.
- 34 Ibid., p.22.
- 35 While noting there is no simple definition of what the term 'local' means, GROU commends the definition of 'local church' produced by the WCC in 1977. This declared that 'the term refers to an area where Christians can easily meet and form one committed fellowship in witness and service' which will 'normally gather in one eucharistic service.' The area it serves 'should not be so large that the Christian community loses coherence, not yet so small that its homogeneity favours separatism in the human community. The area should be so chosen that the power of the Gospel to cross human barriers will be made manifest.' (Ibid., p.71)
- 36 Ibid., p.70.
- 37 Ibid., p.74.
- 38 Ibid., p.76.
- 39 *General Synod Proceedings*, Vol 16/2, July 1985, p.754. The report was also commended for 'study and synodical reception' by resolution 7 of the Lambeth Conference of 1988.
- 40 Text in M. Kinnamon and B. Cope (eds.) *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva & Grand Rapids: WCC/Eerdmans, 1997, p.125.
- 41 Ibid., p.25
- 42 *Leuenberg Agreement*, p. 39.
- 43 *The Reuilly Common Statement in Called to Witness and Service*, London: CHP, 1999, p.26.
- 44 *The Leuenberg Agreement*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Otto Lembeck. 1993, p.38.
- 45 *Reuilly Common Statement*, pp.26-27.
- 46 Ibid., p.29
- 47 *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: WCC, 1982, pp.2-3.
- 48 *God's Reign and Our Unit*, p.39

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- ⁴⁹ *Basis of Union*, para. 14.
- ⁵⁰ *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, London: CHP, 2005, p.31.
- ⁵¹ See paragraph 14 of the *Basis of Union*
- ⁵² *The Leuenberg Agreement*, pp.39-40.
- ⁵³ *Called to Witness and Service*, p.28.
- ⁵⁴ *God's Reign and Our Unity*, p.44.
- ⁵⁵ *Called to Witness and Service*, pp.28-29.
- ⁵⁶ *God's Reign and Our Unity*, p.47.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.47-48.
- ⁵⁸ *Basis of Union* 23.
- ⁵⁹ Elders had been introduced into the life of the Church of England in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, but this was an experiment that had not lasted and was in any case the exception that proved the rule.
- ⁶⁰ D. Cornick, *Letting God be God*, London: DLT, 2008.
- ⁶¹ Except in the case of divorced people whose former partner is still living, who clergy may decline to marry.



Nominations Committee

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nominations Committee has continued to try to make vacancies widely known as early as possible. Details of those to be filled at Assembly 2012 were circulated in March 2011 and should now be available throughout the church. Suggestions of suitable nominees have been invited from synods, FURY, central staff and committees.

The replies received from those approached by the Committee have continued to be monitored, in total and broken down into the four categories – male ordained, female ordained, male lay and female lay. The overall figures for 2010 showed no change from those for 2009 and the balances between the various categories only shifted slightly during 2009/2010. However, the percentage of those declining invitations – apart from male lay – dropped. The percentage of BAME membership is increasing slowly. Recruiting younger members was still a problem with a clear shortage of people under 36. The figures obtained from annual comparisons will form part of a five-year monitoring report for 2008-2012.

As a result of discussions with the Communications and Editorial Committee on the publication of the Nominations Committee report, particularly in those years when it is approved by Mission Council rather than General Assembly, arrangements are being made for it to appear on the main website as a separate item, with an appropriate link. This should make it more widely accessible.

In an effort to increase transparency, work has continued to identify members of advisory and task groups and representatives to other bodies.

II. ASSEMBLY STAFF APPOINTMENTS

1. NOMINATING GROUPS

- 1.1 The Nominating Group, convened by the Revd Cecil White and authorized by Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, to act on its behalf, appointed the **Revd Nicola Furley-Smith** to serve as **Moderator of the Southern Synod** for a period of seven years from 1 March 2011 to 28 February 2018.
- 1.2 The Nominating Group, convened by the Revd John Oldershaw and authorized by Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, to act on its behalf, appointed the **Revd Peter Meek** to serve as **Moderator of the East Midlands Synod** for a period of seven years from 1 September 2011 to 31 August 2018.

2. REVIEW GROUPS

- 2.1 The Review Group for the post of **Director of Communications** is being convened by the Revd Nanette Lewis-Head.

III. ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES AND OTHER APPOINTMENTS

Notes:

1. The moderators, the moderators elect, the immediate past moderator and the general secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee.
2. Symbols have been used as follows:
 - * denotes those appointed since the 2010 General Assembly report;
 - ** denotes those whom Mission Council is invited to appoint for the first time;
 - † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service;
 - # denotes a convener elect who will become convener in 2012;
 - / the name after the slash is the alternate for the one before it.
3. The number in round brackets following the name indicates the member's synod:
(1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.
4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category this is indicated in round brackets following the name.
5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes exceptionally be renewable. Committee conveners serve an additional preliminary year as convener elect. In sections 1–4 of the report appointments with a different term are noted.
6. The date in square brackets following the name indicates the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000 some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. In years when General Assembly meets, new committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of Assembly. In years when General Assembly does not meet, they normally begin on 1st July.

1 MISSION COUNCIL

Mission Council acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the synod moderators and three representatives from each synod together with the conveners of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and two FURY members, including the FURY moderator.

(Synods appoint and decide terms for their representatives)

Northern Synod	Mrs Rhona Dunn, Revd Ann Jackson, Mr Robert Jones
North Western Synod	Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Rev Alistair Smeaton, Revd Sally Thomas
Mersey Synod	Mr Arthur Swift, Miss Emma Pugh, Revd A. Gordon Smith
Yorkshire Synod	Mr Chris Reed, Revd Kay Alberg, Mrs Jenny Poulter
East Midlands Synod	Mr Duncan Smith, Mrs Jill Turner, Revd Gillian Poucher
West Midlands Synod	Mr Bill Robson, Mrs Adella Pritchard, Mrs Val Phillips
Eastern Synod	Revd Dr Catherine Ball, Mrs Linda Harrison, Mr Clifford Patten
South Western Synod	Revd Roz Harrison, Revd Stephen Newell, Mrs Sarah Lane Cawte
Wessex Synod	Mr Peter Pay, Mrs Margaret Telfer, Revd Mary Thomas
Thames North Synod	Mr Simon Fairnington, Ms Elizabeth Lawson, Revd Edward Sanniez
Southern Synod	Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor, Revd John Gordon, Mr Alistair Wilson
National Synod of Wales	Revd Shelagh Pollard, Vacancy, Vacancy
National Synod of Scotland	Miss Irene Hudson, Mrs Barbara Bruce, Vacancy
<i>[In attendance: Minute Secretary: Mrs Irene Wren [2012]</i>	
<i>Consensus Adviser: Revd Pauline Barnes [2014]</i>	
<i>together with staff secretaries, moderators' chaplains and others as appropriate]</i>	

1.1 Mission Council Advisory Group

Convener: Moderator of General Assembly

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary

Revd David Grosch-Miller [2011] Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor [2014]

Revd Elizabeth Nash [2014] Moderators elect of General Assembly

[*ex officio*: General Secretary Honorary Treasurer]

1.2 Staffing Advisory Group

Convener: Revd Rowena Francis

Secretary: General Secretary

Revd Ann Jack Mr Peter Pay Mr Keith Webster

Head of Human Resources

1.3 Law and Polity Advisory Group

Convener: Revd Prof David Thompson [2012]

Dr Augur Pearce [2012] Mr David Eldridge [2012] Ms Morag McLintock [2012]

Mr Duncan Smith** (Synod Clerk) [2015]

[*ex officio*: Clerk to General Assembly Legal Adviser]

1.4 Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Convener: Mr Peter West * [2015]

Secretary: Mr David Figures

Correspondent for each synod

1.5 Ethical Investment Advisory Group

Convener: Revd Raymond Singh

Secretary: Secretary for Church and Society

Mr Mark Chaloner Mr Simon Loveitt Mr Richard Nunn (Investment Committee)

Mr Simon Peters Chief Finance Officer Deputy General Secretary

[*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer]

1.6 Sexual Ethics Advisory Group

Convener: Revd David A L Jenkins [2014]

Revd Rowena Francis (Synod Moderator)

Revd Elizabeth Gray-King (Education and Learning) Revd David Skitt

[*ex officio*: Deputy General Secretary Coordinator Pastoral Response Team]

1.7 MIND (Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline) Advisory Group

Convener: Revd Julian Macro [2012]

Convener elect: #Revd Peter Poulter** [2016]

Secretary: Revd Hugh Graham [2014]

General Secretary Clerk to Assembly Secretary for Ministries

Convener of the Assembly Commission: Mrs Kathleen Cross

Secretary of the Assembly Commission: Mrs Wilma Frew

Convener of the Review Commission of the Incapacity Procedure: Mr Donald Swift

Secretary of the Review Commission of the Incapacity Procedure: Revd Heather Kent

Legal Adviser Consultant for Mandated Groups: Revd Alison Davis

Consultant for Ministers and CRCWs: Revd David Skitt

Training Coordinator: Mr Hartley Oldham

1.8 Resource Sharing Task Group

Convener: Revd David Grosch-Miller

Secretary: Mr John Rea

Treasurer: Revd Dick Gray

Miss Margaret Atkinson Mr Richard Turnbull Mrs Rachel Wakeman

[*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer]

1.9 Human Sexuality Task Group (2008)

Convener: Revd John Waller

Secretary: Revd Lucy Brierley

Revd Dr John Bradbury

Revd Richard Church

Ms Doreen Daley

Sr M Cecily Boulding OP

Revd Claire Gouldthorp

Mrs Val Morrison

1.10 London Synod Task Group

Convener: Revd Bill Mahood

Secretary: Mrs Sheila Brain

Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (11)

Revd Raymond Singh (11)

Revd David Varco (10)

Mr Keith Webster (10)

2 MISSION DEPARTMENT**2.1 Mission Committee**

Convener: Revd Ed Cox [2012]

Convener elect: #Revd Tracey Lewis** [2016]

Deputy Convener: Mr Peter Pay [2012]

Mrs Pat Poinen** (1) [2015]

Revd Michael Walsh (2) [2012]

Revd Andrew Willett (3) [2014]

Revd Bob Jones** (4) [2015]

Vacancy (5) [2015]

Revd Louise Franklin (6) [2014]

Revd Sam White** (7) [2015]

Revd Tracey Lewis (8) [2012]

Revd Peter Hurter (9) [2014]

Revd John Macauley† (10) [2015]

Mr Martin Hayward** (11) [2015]

Revd Nick Stanyon* (12) [2014]

Revd Lindsey Sanderson† (13) [2015]

2.1.1 International Exchange Reference Group

Convener: Mr Chris Wright [2015]

Secretary: Secretary for World Church Relations

Members: Revd Dr Andrew Prasad (Synod Moderator) [2014]

Miss Angela Quinn (13) [2014]

2.1.2 Commitment for Life Reference Group

Convener: Mrs Helen Lidgett [2012]

Convener elect: Vacancy

2.1.3 Methodist/URC Interfaith Reference Group*(Members normally serve for six years - in parallel with Methodist terms)*

Co-Convener: Revd Peter Brain [2013]

Revd Clare Downing (9) [2013]

Mr David Jonathan (10) [2014]

Revd Bill Burgess (3) [2015]

Revd Tim Clarke (10) [2015]

2.1.4 Joint Public Issues Team Strategy and Policy Group

Mr Simon Loveitt (Spokesperson on Public Issues for the URC)

*(Other members appointed by the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union of Great Britain.)***2.1.5 Rural Strategy Group (URC/Methodist)**

Revd Elizabeth Caswell (Co-Chair)

Revd Peter Ball

Revd David Herbert

2.1.6 Vision4Life Steering Group

Revd Dr John Hall (Co-Chair)

Revd Roberta Rominger (Co-Chair)

Ms Francis Brienen (Secretary)

Revd Dr Janet Lees (Co-ordinator)

Mr John Brown

Revd Dr Susan Durber

Revd Brian Harley

Revd Dr Michael Jagessar

Mr Lawrence Moore

Revd John Proctor

Revd Paul Snell

Mr Steve Summers

Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe

Revd Michael Walsh

Revd Sally Willett

2.1.7 *Marketing Campaign Steering Group*

Revd Roberta Rominger (Co-Chair) Mr Lawrence Moore (Co-Chair)
 Ms Lucy Berry (10) Ms Denese Chikwendu Ms Francis Brien
 Revd Martin Hazell Mr Graham Law (6) Revd Peter Noble (12)
 Miss Victoria Paulding (7) Mr Simon Peters (13) Revd Michael Walsh (2)

3 MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH DEPARTMENT

3.1 Ministries Committee

Convener: Revd Ruth Whitehead [2014]
 Secretary: Secretary for Ministries
 Revd Yolande Burns (2) [2012] Ms Brenda Jesse (8) [2013]
 Revd David Skitt (11) [2013] Revd John Cox (7) [2014]
 Mr Andy Buxton (12) [2014] Revd Heather Pencavel** (8) [2015]
 Mrs Judith Johnson (Assembly Lay Preaching Advocate) [2015]
 Convener, Assessment Board

3.1.1 Ministries - Accreditation Sub-committee

Convener: Revd Geoffrey Townsend [2013]
 Secretary: Secretary for Ministries
 Revd Malcolm Fife (5) [2013] Revd Richard Church** (Synod Moderator) [2015]
 Mrs Tessa Henry-Robinson (7) [2013] Mr Jim Murison (4) [2014]
 Revd Helga Cornell** (6) [2015]

3.1.2 Ministries - CRCW Programme Sub-committee

Convener: Revd Paul Whittle [2012] Convener elect: #Revd Jacky Embrey** [2016]
 Secretaries: CRCW Development Workers
 Ms Janine Atkinson (CRCW) [2012] Revd Susan Macbeth (4) [2012]
 Ms Christine Smalligan (10) [2012] Prof John Mellor (9) [2013]
 Ms Marie Trubic* (CRCW) [2014]

3.1.3 Ministries - Maintenance of Ministry Sub-committee

Convener: Revd Dr Anthony Haws [2013]
 Miss Margaret Atkinson (4) [2012] Revd Catey Morrison (1) [2012]
 Mr Andrew Martlew (3) [2014] Revd Alison Hall (3) [2014]
 Revd Richard Turnbull** (5) [2015]
 [*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer Convener, Pensions Executive]

3.1.4 Ministries - Retired Ministers' Housing Sub-committee

(Members will normally serve for four years but appointments may be extended for a further two years.)
 Convener: Revd David Bedford [2015]
 Secretary: Secretary, Retired Ministers' Housing Society Ltd
 Revd Nanette Lewis-Head (12) [2012] Revd Anne Bedford (3) [2015]
 Revd John Humphreys (Synod Moderator) [2013] Mr Peter West** (7) [2015]
 [*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer]
*(Properties are managed by a Company viz: **Retired Ministers' Housing Society Ltd**. Details of the Members of the board etc may be obtained from the secretary, Mr Tony Bayley, at Church House.)*

3.1.5 Assessment Board

(Members normally serve for five years as training is required.)
 Convener: Dr Graham Campling [2014]
 Retiring 2012 Mr James Horton (4), Mrs Margaret Jenkins (2), Revd Janet Maxwell (1), Revd William Young (6)
 Retiring 2013 Mrs Irene Wren (5), Revd Lis Mullen (2), Revd Gary McGowan (3), Revd Val Towler (1)
 Retiring 2014 Mr Mark Hayes (7), Mr Robin Pencavel (8), Revd Jamie Kissack (4), Revd Paul Floe (12)
 Retiring 2015 Mrs Judith Garthwaite (4), Mr Rod Morrison (4), Ms Mercy Nimako (11),
 Mrs Maureen Campbell (10)
 Retiring 2016 Mrs Adella Pritchard** (6), Revd Franziska Herring** (6), Revd Sue Kirkbride** (13)

3.2 Education and Learning Committee

Convener: Revd John Smith [2015]

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Revd Jennifer Snashall (11) [2012]

Mrs Fiona Weighton-Smith (4) [2012]

Revd Dr David Whiting (1) [2013]

Mrs Lindsey Cole (5) [2014]

Mrs Liz Bird** (7) [2015]

Revd Dr James Coleman (4) [2012]

Revd Dr Susan Durber (Resource Centre) [2013]

Mr Celvon Binns (6) [2014]

Ms Sue Matthews (6) [2014]

3.2.1 Windermere Management Committee

Convener: Revd Howard Sharp [2013]

Minute Secretary: Mrs Jenny Poulter (4) [2013]

Mr Graham Law (6) [2013] Dr Peter Clarke† (1) [2015] Mr Peter Farrand** (2) [2015]

Mrs Joan Stocker (representative of Carver URC) [2013]

Secretary for Education and Learning

*(The number of members may change in the light of future experience.)***3.2.2 Education for Ministry Phase 2 and 3 (EM2/3) Sub-committee**

Convener: Dr Ian Morrison

Minute Secretary: Revd Elizabeth Gray-King (EM2/3 Officer)

Revd David Poulton (EM3 minister) Revd Zam Walker (EM2 minister)

Ms Pat Oliver (CRCW)

Revd Stephen Collinson (Training and Development Officer)

Ms Sandra Wellington (Training and Development Officer)

Vacancy (Resource Centre) Secretary for Education and Learning

*[ex officio: Convener, Education and Learning Committee Secretary for Ministries]***3.2.3 Education and Learning Finance Sub-committee**

Convener: Mr Mike Downing

Minute Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Convener, Education and Learning Committee

Mr Graham Law

*[ex officio: Honorary Treasurer In attendance: Chief Finance Officer]***3.3 Youth and Children's Work Committee**

Convener: Revd Robert Weston [2013]

Secretary: Children's Work Development Officer

Mrs Memona Shahbaz (10) [2012] Revd Stuart Radcliffe (2) [2012]

Mr Phillip Timson (5) [2013] Revd Shirley Knibbs (4) [2013]

Revd Meg Robb (1) [2013] Miss Tamara Oates (5) [2013]

Ms Angela Such (10) [2014] Revd Tim Lowe** (6) [2015]

Revd Sue McKenzie** (10) [2015] Ms Alison Hadley** (5) [2015]

FURY moderator FURY moderator elect

3.3.1 Pilots Management Sub-committee

Convener: Mrs Soo Webster [2015]

Member: Mrs Tric Legge* (5) [2014]

*(Other members of the sub-committee are appointed by the Youth and Children's Work Committee. The Congregational Federation also has two representatives.)***4 ADMINISTRATION AND RESOURCES DEPARTMENT****4.1 Assembly Arrangements Committee**

Convener: Dr David Robinson [2014]

Secretary: Facilities Manager

Moderators Moderators elect General Secretary Clerk to General Assembly

Convener, Local Arrangements Committee

4.2 Communications and Editorial Committee

Convener: Revd Richard Bittleston [2015]

Secretary: Director of Communications

Ms Lucy Berry (10) [2012]	Mr Justin Brierley (11) [2012]
Mr Stanley Hazell (8) [2012]	Revd Peter Lyth (3) [2013]
Mr Peter Ranscombe (13) [2013]	Mr Orin Stephens (10) [2013]
Mrs Helen Jones (6) [2013]	Revd Heather Whyte** (8) [2105]
Vacancy [2015]	

4.3 Equal Opportunities Committee

Convener: Revd Elizabeth Nash [2014]

Secretary: Mr Andrew Jack (10) [2013]

Ms Mary Jeremiah (12) [2012]	Revd Barbara Exley (11) [2012]
Mrs Gwynneth Tilley (7) [2013]	Mrs Tina Ashitey (10) [2013]
Revd Tom Arthur (12) [2013]	Mr Tunde Biyi (7) [2014]

4.4 Faith and Order Reference Group

(Members normally serve for six years.)

Convener: Revd Dr Robert Pope [2012]

Convener elect: #Revd Elizabeth Welch** [2018]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary

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

4.5 Finance Committee

Convener: Honorary Treasurer

Chief Finance Officer

Revd David Walton (13) [2012]	Mr Angus Massie (10) [2012]
Dr Harry Potter OBE (3) [2013]	Mr Richard Dewar (9) [2013]
Revd David Aplin (10) [2013]	Revd Edward Sanniez (10) [2014]
Ms Mary Martin** (6) [2015]	Mr Andrew Mackenzie** (7) [2015]
Chair of the Trustees	

4.5.1 Stewardship Sub-committee

Convener: Mrs Faith Paulding [2013]

Mr Keith Berry (10) [2012]	Revd Dick Gray (8) [2013]
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Revd Leslie Morrison (13) [2014]	Vacancy [2015]
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(The members of this sub-committee are appointed by the Finance Committee.)

4.6 Nominations Committee

(Synods appoint and decide terms for their representative.)

Convener: Revd John Durell [2014]

Secretary: Miss Sarah Dodds [2013]

Synod Representatives:

Revd Val Towler (1)	Revd Chris Weddle (2)	Revd John Oldershaw (3)
Mr Chris Reed (4)	Mr Duncan Smith (5)	Mrs Margaret Marshall (6)
Mr Mick Barnes (7)	Revd Roz Harrison (8)	Mr Peter Pay (9)
Mr Simon Fairnington (10)	Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor (11)	
Dr Jean Silvan-Evans (12)	Miss Myra Rose (13)	
General Secretary.		

4.6.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

(Members normally serve for five years as training is required.)

Retiring 2012 Revd Raymond Singh (11), Revd Lesley Charlton (11),
Mrs Sally Abbott (10), Mr Simon Rowntree (6), Dr Jean Silvan Evans (12),
Mr Alun Jones (4)

- Retiring 2013 Revd John Durell (1), Revd Roz Harrison (8), Revd John Oldershaw (3),
Revd Deborah McVey (7), Revd Robert Street (9), Mrs Susan Wilkinson (2),
Mrs Carol Dixon (1), Revd John Young (13)
- Retiring 2015 Revd Terry Hinks (9), Mr Chris Maple (3), Mr Duncan Smith (5),
Ms Helen Stenson (13)
- Retiring 2016 Mrs Joan Turner** (7), Mr Peter Pay** (9), Revd Pauline Barnes** (5),
Revd Alison Termie** (4), Ms Angela Quinn** (13), Mr Phil Knott** (2)

4.7 Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Convener: Revd Sheila Maxey [2015]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary

Revd Birgit Ewald (7) [2012]

Dr Paul Ashitey (10) [2013]

Mrs Irene Wren** (5) [2105]

Revd Howard Sharp** (Synod Moderator) [2015]

[*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer

General Secretary Secretary for Welfare]

4.8 Disciplinary Process - Commission Panel

(Members serve for five years as regular training is required. They may be invited to continue serving beyond this as experience is especially valuable on this panel. Members may not serve beyond the age of 70 for legal reasons.)

Convener: Miss Kathleen Cross [2014]

Deputy Convener: Dr Jim Merrilees* [2014]

Secretary: Mrs Wilma Frew [2012]

Secretary elect: Mrs Jane Woods-Scawen** [2017]

Members:

- Retiring 2012 Revd Nicholas Adlem (8), Revd Kay Cattell (5),
Revd Kenneth Chippindale (6), Revd Alison Davis (7),
Revd John Du Bois (11), Miss Judith Haughton (2), Miss Elizabeth Lawson QC (10),
Revd Julian Macro (9), Dr Jim Merrilees (13), Revd Colin Offor (1),
Mr Nicholas Pye (3), Revd Raymond Singh (11), Revd Carolyn Smyth (13),
Revd Prof David Thompson (7), Vacancy, Vacancy
- Retiring 2013 Revd Pauline Calderwood (4), Revd Bill Bowman (11),
Dr Peter Campbell Smith (11), Mr Roger Tucker (9)
- Retiring 2014 Revd Hazel Allen (8), Mr Mick Barnes (7), Revd James Brown (6),
Revd Mary Burgess (8), Miss Kathleen Cross (2), Mrs Mary Cummings (6),
Mr Peter Etwell (1), Revd Christine Fowler (8), Mrs Barbara Groom (8),
Mr Andrew Harvey (8), Revd Naison Hove (10), Mr Peter Jolly (9),
Mrs Barbara Lancaster (2), Mrs Barbara Madge (8), Revd Nicholas Mark (5),
Mrs Pat Poinen (1), Revd Shelagh Pollard (12), Mrs Lynne Upsdell (12),
Ms Elizabeth Whitten (7)
- Retiring 2015 Revd Meryl Court (10), Mrs Pat Crozier (3), Dr Fiona Liddell (12),
Mr Colin Macbean (9), Mrs Pamela Sharp (3), Mr Patrick Smyth (13)
- Retiring 2016 Mr Geoffrey Milnes† (5), Revd David Pattie† (8), Mr Neil Robinson† (4),
Revd Yvonne Stone† (6)

4.9 Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure

(This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience.)

Secretary: Revd Heather Kent [2012]

Secretary elect: #Revd Ray Adams** [2017]

Revd Bill Mahood (Past Moderator of General Assembly) [2012]

Revd Rowena Francis (Synod Moderator) [2013]

Mr Donald Swift (Legal experience) [2013]

Dr Gillian Patterson (GP) [2013]

Commission Officer for the Incapacity Procedure: Dr David Westwood* [2016]

4.10 Criminal Records Bureau (Churches' Agency for Safeguarding) Advisory Group

Revd Paul Whittle** (Synod Moderator)

Ms Liz Crocker (Child Care Specialist)

Mrs Wilma Frew (Magistrate)

Youth Work Development Officer

Children's Work Development Officer

Deputy General Secretary

4.11 United Reformed Church Trust

(Members normally serve for six years. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number and appoint a secretary and deputy ssecretary.)

Chair: Mr Alan Small

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr Tony Bayley

Members:

Group 1

Mr Alan Small (3) [2012]

Dr David Robinson (4) [2014]

Mr Andrew Atkinson (1) [2016]

Group 2

Dr Augur Pearce (12) [2012]

Mrs Rachel Wakeman (6) [2014]

Revd Richard Gray (8) [2016]

Group 3

Revd Prof David Thompson (7) [2012]

Mr John Woodman (7) [2014]

Revd Michael Davies (11) [2014]

Mission Council nominated members:

Mrs Claudette Binns [2014]

Mr Andy Littlejohns (FURY) [2016]

Co-opted members:

Miss Joyce Bain [2014]

Mr Brian Woodhall [2014]

[*ex officio*: Moderator(s) of General Assembly General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary Honorary Treasurer Clerk to General Assembly

In attendance: Convener, Investment Committee]

4.11.1 Church House Management Group

Convener: Mr Donald Swift

Revd Meryl Court

Mr Mike Gould

Mr John Woodman

Head of Human Resources

[*ex officio*: General Secretary Chief Finance Officer Director of Communications]

4.11.2 Remuneration Sub-committee

Convener: Deputy General Secretary

Secretary: Head of Human Resources

Ms Carmila Legarda (Methodist HR)

Mr William McVey (URC elder)

Mrs Mary Steele (Church House Staff representative)

Honorary Treasurer

Chief Finance Officer

4.12 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

(Members normally serve for six years. Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company ssecretary.)

Chair: Revd Rowena Francis [2014]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Members of URC:

Mr Andrew Perkins [2012]

Revd Dr John Dyce [2014]

Revd Rowena Francis [2014]

Revd Roger Woodall [2016]

Members of Fund:

Revd Kate Gartside [2015]

Revd Duncan Wilson [2012]

Revd David Bedford [2012]

Revd Jacky Embrey [2014]

[*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer

Convener, Maintenance of Ministry Sub-Committee

Convener, Pensions Executive

In attendance: Convener, Investment Committee]

4.13 Pensions Executive

Convener: Mr Maurice Dyson [2012]

Convener elect: #Revd Roger Woodall** [2016]

Secretary: Mrs Judy Stockings

Members: Revd Kathryn Taylor [2012]

Mrs Liz Tadd** [2015]

[*ex officio*: Convener, Maintenance of Ministry Sub-Committee

Honorary Treasurer]

(The Pensions Executive reports to the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pensions Trust Board, the Maintenance of Ministry Sub-committee and to the Finance Committee.)

4.14 Investment Committee

Convener:	Mr Richard Nunn [2012]	
Secretary:	Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones	
Members:	Dr Brian Woodhall [2012]	Mr Malcolm Littlefair [2013]
	Mr Andrew Perkins [2013]	Vacancy [2015]

5 REPRESENTATIVES TO MEETINGS OF SISTER CHURCHES

5.1	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2012] Revd Rachel Poolman [2012]
5.2	General Synod of Church of England	Revd Graham Maskery [2013]
5.3	Methodist Conference	Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
5.4	Congregational Federation	Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
5.5	General Assembly of Church of Scotland [note 7]	Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2012] Revd Rachel Poolman [2012] Revd Mitchell Bunting [2012]
5.6	United Free Church of Scotland [note 7]	Revd John Humphreys
5.7	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation [note 7]	Revd John Humphreys
5.8	Scottish Episcopal Church [note 7]	Revd Mitchell Bunting
5.9	Methodist Church in Scotland [note 7]	Revd J Ross McLaren
5.10	Baptist Union of Scotland [note 7]	Revd John Humphreys
5.11	Presbyterian Church of Wales [note 7]	Revd Peter Noble/Vacancy
5.12	Union of Welsh Independents [note 7]	Revd Peter Noble/Vacancy
5.13	Church in Wales Governing Board [note 7]	Revd Peter Noble/Vacancy
5.14	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	To be decided

6 REPRESENTATIVES ON ECUMENICAL CHURCH BODIES

The following have been nominated as URC representatives at the major gatherings of the Ecumenical Bodies listed.

6.1 Council for World Mission (CWM) From Assembly 2008-2011

Revd Dr John Parry, Ms Patricia Akoli, Revd John Sanderson, Secretary for World Church Relations

6.1.1 CWM European Region Meeting 2008-2011

Revd Dr John Parry, Ms Patricia Akoli, Revd John Sanderson, Secretary for World Church Relations, Secretary for Mission

6.2 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Revd Dr Sarah Hall, Ms Emma Pugh, Revd Dr David Pickering, Secretary for World Church Relations, General Secretary

6.3 World Council of Churches (WCC) Central Committee

Represented indirectly

6.4 WCC Faith and Order Commission

Represented indirectly

6.5 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.6 The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

Revd Rowena Francis, Rev Prof David Thompson, Secretary for World Church Relations

6.7 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church Leaders' Meeting

General Secretary

6.7.1 CTBI Senior Representatives' Forum

General Secretary, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.7.2 CTBI Environmental Issues Network

Revd David Coaker, Revd Dr David Pickering

6.7.3 CTBI Church and Public Issues Network

Mr Simon Loveitt, Secretary for Church and Society

6.7.4 CTBI Churches' Criminal Justice Forum

Mrs Wilma Frew

6.7.5 CTBI Stewardship Network

Mrs Faith Paulding

6.7.6 CTBI Churches' International Students' Network

Ms Eleri Evans [2014]

6.7.7 CTBI Consultative Group on Ministry amongst Children (CGMC)

Mrs Karen Bulley, Ms Jo Williams

6.7.8 CTBI Inter-Religious Network

Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.7.9 CTBI Racial Justice Network

Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

6.7.10 CTBI Churches' Network for Mission

Secretary for Mission

6.7.11 CTBI China Forum

Revd Dr Walter Houston

6.8 Churches Together in England (CTE) - from Forum 2009-2012

Mrs Val Morrison, Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe, Revd Bernie Collins, Revd Ian Smith, Revd Stephen Wilkins, General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary, Secretary for Ministries, Secretary for Mission, Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.8.1 CTE - Enabling Group

Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.8.2 CTE - Coordinating Group for Local Unity

Revd Terry Oakley, Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.8.3 CTE - Churches Together for Healing

Revd Deborah McVey, Revd Vivien Henderson [2014]

6.8.4 CTE – Churches' Joint Education Policy Committee

Mr Graham Handscomb

6.8.5 CTE Churches' Theology and Unity Group

Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

6.8.6 CTE – Group for Evangelisation

Secretary for Mission

6.8.7 CTE – Spirituality Coordinating Group

Revd Sue Henderson

6.8.8 CTE – Churches’ Rural Group

Revd David Herbert

6.8.9 CTE – Minority Ethnic Affairs Group

Revd John Danso, Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry

6.8.10 CTE Youth Work Matters Group

Secretary for Youth Work

6.9 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) Members Meeting [see note 7]

Revd John Humphreys, Revd Mitchell Bunting/Revd Sue Kirkbride

6.10 National Sponsoring Body for Scotland [see note 7]

Revd John Humphreys, Revd Mitchell Bunting

6.11 Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN) [see note 7]

Revd Peter Noble/Vacancy

6.12 Commission of Covenanted Churches [see note 7]

Revd Peter Noble/ Vacancy

6.13 Joint Liturgical Group

Secretary for Mission

6.14 Free Church Education Committee

Mr Graham Handscomb, Mrs Gillian Kingston

6.15 Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education

Revd Clare Davison [2012]

6.16 European Churches’ Environmental Network

Revd David Coaker

6.17 Churches’ Refugee Network

Mr Geoff Duncan, Revd Fleur Houston

6.18 Churches’ Committee on Funerals and Crematoria

Revd Sally Thomas, Revd Kate Hackett [2014]

6.19 Churches’ Agency for Safeguarding

Secretary for Youth Work

6.20 Churches’ Forum for Safeguarding

Secretary for Youth Work

6.21 Churches’ Network for Non-Violence

Secretary for Youth Work

6.22 Fresh Expressions

(Still under discussion)

7 REPRESENTATIVES ON FORMAL BI-LATERAL AND MULTI-LATERAL COMMITTEES

7.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Committee

Co-Convener: Revd Terry Oakley (Synod Moderator)

Revd Kay Alberg, Miss Emma Pugh, Vacancy, Vacancy, Revd Peter Rand (co-opted)

Secretary for Ecumenical Relations

7.2 Roman Catholic – United Reformed Church Bilateral Dialogue in England and Wales

Revd Prof David Thompson, Revd Dr John Bradbury, Revd Dr Sarah Hall, Mrs Ann Shillaker,

Mr Malcolm Townsend

Staff Secretary responsible to be decided.

7.3 Church of England – United Reformed Church Bilateral Dialogue (“God’s Reign and our Unity”)

Revd Elizabeth Welch, Revd Dr David Peel

Deputy General Secretary

7.4 Partnership Conversations of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church and the National Synod of the United Reformed Church

Revd John Humphreys, Revd Mary Buchanan, Revd John Young

8 URC REPRESENTATIVES ON GOVERNING BODIES OF THEOLOGICAL COLLEGES, ETC

8.1 Northern College

Revd David Jenkins [2013]

Mr Steve Wood [2013]

Miss Margaret Atkinson† [2015]

Revd Dr Robert Pope† [2015]

Mr Mark Williams** [2015]

Secretary for Education and Learning

8.1.1 Luther King House Educational Trust

Secretary for Education and Learning

8.2 Westminster College: Board of Governors

Convener: Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms [2014]

Clerk: Revd Cecil White [2012]

Honorary College Treasurer: Mr Anthony Williams [2016]

Members: Dr Jean Stevenson [2013]

Revd Craig Muir [2015]

Revd Nigel Appleton [2015]

Mr Brian Long MBE [2016]

Revd Kristin Ofstad [2016]

Secretary for Education and Learning

(together with other Governors appointed by other bodies)

8.2.1 Cheshunt Foundation

Mr Guy Morfett [2013]

Revd Craig Muir† [2014]

8.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation

Convener, Westminster College Governors

8.3 The Queen's Foundation

Revd Roy Lowes

Mr Simon Rowntree

[In attendance: Secretary for Education and Learning]

9 GOVERNORS OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS WITH WHICH THE URC IS ASSOCIATED

- 9.1 Caterham School** Revd Nicola Furley-Smith** [2015]
- 9.2 Eltham College** Revd Terry Sparks† [2015]
- 9.3 Walthamstow Hall** Mrs Isabel Heald† [2015]
- 9.4 Milton Mount Foundation**
 Ms Hilary Miles [2013] Revd David Cuckson [2013] Vacancy [2014]
 Vacancy [2014] Vacancy [2014]
- 9.5 Silcoates School**
 Dr Peter Clarke [2013] Dr Moira Gallagher [2013] Revd Dr Janet Lees [2013]
 Revd Steven Knapton [2014] Vacancy [2015] Vacancy [2015]
- 9.6 Taunton School**
 Revd David Grosch-Miller (Moderator, South Western Synod)
- 9.7 Bishops Stortford College**
 Mr Anthony Trigg† [2015]

10 MISCELLANEOUS

The URC is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

- 10.1 Arthur Rank Centre**
 Revd Elizabeth Caswell* [2013]
- 10.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service**
 Mrs Sheila Duncan/General Secretary/Deputy General Secretary
- 10.3 Congregational Fund Board**
 Revd Margaret Taylor [2012] Revd Eric Allen [2012] Mrs Jackie Haws [2013]
 Mr Anthony Bayley† [2014] Revd Geoffrey Roper† [2014]
- 10.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust**
 Dr John Thompson [2012] Dr Brian Woodhall [2012]
 Revd Derek Wales [2013] Mrs Margaret Thompson [2014]
 Mr Hartley Oldham [2015] Mr Graham Stacy [2015]
- 10.5 Discipleship and Witness Board of Trustees**
 Mrs Patricia Hubbard [from before 1999]
- 10.5.1 Publications Development Group**
 Ms Jo Williams [from 2008]
- 10.6 English Heritage's Places of Worship Forum**
 Convener of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group
- 10.7 Lord Wharton's Charity**
 Dr John Thompson [2013]
- 10.8 Methodist Faith and Order Committee**
 Revd Anne Sardeson [2014]

10.9 Retired Ministers' and Widows' Fund

Mr Ken Meekison [from before 1999] Mrs Jill Strong [from 1999]
Revd Julian Macro [from 2004]

10.10 Samuel Robinson's Charities

Mr Tony Alderman [from 2004]

10.11 Scout Association – URC Faith Adviser

Revd David Marshall-Jones

10.12 United Reformed Church History Society Council

Revd Michael Hopkins [2012] Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2013] Revd Prof David Thompson [2014]
Revd Fleur Houston [2014] Dr David Robinson† [2015]

10.13 United Reformed Church Guide and Scout Active Support Unit

Revd David Marshall-Jones

10.14 Westhill Endowment Fund

Mr Howard Bridge, Revd Dr Stephen Orchard, Revd Elizabeth Welch (co-opted)

Resolutions

1. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, appoints committee members and representatives of the Church as set out in the Nominations Committee report, subject to additions and corrections contained in the Supplementary Report.
2. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, records its appreciation for all the work done by those who serve as committee members and representatives.



G1

MISSION COUNCIL 17TH – 19TH MAY 2011

Nominations Committee Supplementary Report

1. Director of Pastoral Studies, Westminster College

The review group for the post of Director of Pastoral Studies at Westminster College, Cambridge, convened by Professor Sir Anthony Bottoms, recommends the reappointment of the Revd Neil Thorogood for a further term from July 2012 until 2019.

Resolution:

Mission Council, on behalf of General Assembly, reappoints the Revd Neil Thorogood to serve as Director of Pastoral Studies at Westminster College, Cambridge, from 1 July 2012 until 30 June 2019.

2. Faith and Order Reference Group

As indicated in the main report, the Convener of the Faith and Order Reference Group, the Revd Dr Robert Pope, was appointed to serve until General Assembly 2012. Nominations Committee agreed to recommend that the Revd Elizabeth Welch be appointed Convener elect from 1 July 2011, becoming Convener at General Assembly 2012.

However, Robert Pope has now expressed the wish to relinquish the post one year earlier ie on 30 June 2011. Elizabeth Welch would be content to become Convener on 1 July 2011 without serving a year as Convener elect. Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, is therefore asked to appoint her to serve as Convener of the Faith and Order Reference Group from 1 July 2011 until 30 June 2017 (members of the Group normally serve six years).



The United Reformed Church and the Equality Act 2010

1. How does the Act relate to the Church?

The Act amends part of the Civil Partnerships Act 2004 so that, from a date to be agreed, it will be possible for Civil Partnerships to be registered in church buildings approved for the purpose and for that registration to take place within an act of worship, provided the actual registration is distinguished from any religious language or content. There is a requirement that the Registrar must be present for the registration but not for the worship.

2. The Church's attitude to Civil Partnerships to date

Following the passing of the Civil Partnerships Act 2004, which came into effect in December 2005, some local churches sought advice as to how they should respond to any request for a service of blessing of a Civil Partnership in church. Mission Council considered this request in the light of a paper that was presented to it and authorised the paper as a resource which could be offered to any local churches seeking advice in future. In essence the paper advised that the response to any request was the responsibility of the local church concerned, taking full account of all the circumstances in each case. This action was reported to General Assembly in 2006. When the Assembly passed its Commitment on human sexuality in 2007 it asked a new task group, inter alia, to consider whether the paper needed updating. In 2009 the task group advised Mission Council that, apart from a few details, the only change needed was to base the advice on the Commitment so that it remained consistent with Assembly policy.

3. How should the Church respond to the Act?

The Act provides that any local decision on whether to seek approval for the registration of Civil Partnerships on church premises will require the prior permission of the parent body of each denomination. In other words, the Assembly has to decide whether or not to allow applications. Given that (a) the Assembly Commitment recognises that different convictions are held within the church on the matter of same-sex partnerships and that the difference should be respected, and (b) the Mission Council advice on blessing of Civil Partnerships was that this was a matter for each local church to decide, it seems logical to advise the Assembly in 2012 to pass an enabling resolution allowing each local church to reach its own decision on whether or not to seek approval for Civil Partnerships to be registered within its buildings.

If this advice is followed, it is suggested that the resolution should be accompanied by guidelines for any local church considering this matter. The task group is happy to draft such guidelines if required, and it would endeavour to make them as close as possible to those already issued for those considering services of blessing of Civil Partnerships. In fact it would be possible to base them on sections 3 and 4 of the 2009 version. Guidelines would encourage a level of consistency throughout the church.

4. Some legal issues

The main pieces of legislation to be borne in mind are (a) the Marriage Act 1949 which governs marriages within United Reformed Churches, (b) the Civil Partnerships Act 2004, referred to above, which excluded religious premises from being used for registration, and (c) the Equality Act 2010 which inter alia removed the latter exclusion.

Because the regulations governing the regulations of Civil Partnerships do not easily apply to religious premises, the Government has begun a consultation process with the churches and others with a view to replacing or amending the Marriage and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005. The United Reformed Church will be able to share in that consultation and, until it is complete, some questions of practice and detail that may occur to Mission Council members cannot be answered. It is likely, therefore, that a further report will need to be made to the November meeting, but that should not prevent the Council from agreeing a direction and a process now.

The likely process for a local church wishing its premises to be approved would be a resolution of its Church Meeting which would be forwarded to the trustees, who would then need to make the application. In most cases this would be the responsibility of the synod trust body; in a few cases private trustees would need to act. The advice given is that trustees appointed under the URCA Acts would not have discretion to go against the wishes of a Church Meeting in a matter regarding public worship if the Assembly had passed an enabling resolution.

In making an application the trustees would have to ensure that a senior responsible person(s), distinct from the authorised person, had been designated in each case to ensure compliance with the legal regulations. Such a person would have to be present on the premises for an hour before and during the Civil Partnership registration.

Three situations have been identified in which people might fear prosecution under the Equality Act. (a) A church which does not seek to be approved for Civil Partnerships is accused of discrimination against gay and lesbian people. This is not seen as a problem, since the owners of property (religious or otherwise) are not **obliged** to seek approval for the registration of marriages or Civil Partnerships. (b) A church building is approved and then the Church Meeting changes its mind and refuses any couple seeking registration of their Civil Partnership. This has the potential to be a problem but it is hoped that the present discussions with the Government will result in some kind of conscience clause whereby a church could seek for its approval to be rescinded. (c) A church is approved for the registration of Civil Partnerships but wishes to reserve the right to consider each application on a case-by-case basis. Most churches operate such a policy in regard to marriages and there is no reason why they should not do so in regard to Civil Partnerships, provided the discrimination is not on the grounds of something like a particular ethnic group.

No minister or worship leader can be compelled to preside at a service if, on grounds of conscience, s/he feels unable to do so. A church which wishes such a service to continue must arrange for someone else to lead it.

The above is a summary of advice given by the Law and Polity Advisory Group to the task group. It does not claim to include all relevant legal issues and in particular does not go into some minority situations such as that of those churches with private trustees or united churches with trusts under the authority of other denominations. A full copy of the LPAG advice will be available at Mission Council for those who wish to see it, and it is hoped that a paper on the situation of locally united churches will also be available.

5. Preparing for the decision

Mission Council is advised to recognise that if this matter comes to Assembly in 2012, it will by then be some five years since there has been any discussion of human sexuality in that council. Many members of that Assembly will not be aware of the various stages taken by the sexuality debate in recent years. Some who are aware are already expressing the view that in this five-year period certain things have been decided without their being able to comment. There is a danger that what could be a relatively straightforward decision on a single issue becomes a major debate ranging over a number of different and divisive issues.

The task group therefore recommends that thought is given to ways in which the issues can be given wider discussion before the matter gets to Assembly.

One possibility is to invite synods to have an initial discussion, without reaching any conclusion, at their meetings in the autumn of 2011. As part of that, or as a separate exercise, a one-off meeting of (three) representatives of each synod could be called, at which members of the task group might explain the background to the matter. The representatives could then use the following months to raise awareness in their synods. Yet another possibility is for Mission Council to make a decision on behalf of Assembly, and then decide to remit it to the synods as if it was a constitutional resolution which would then come to the 2012 Assembly provided not more than one third of the synods had voted against it. Or the 2012 Assembly could represent the first decision, which would then be referred to synods, and the final decision would be made at Assembly 2014.

The reason for these suggestions is that the Assembly should not come to this matter ill-prepared, or with a sense that it was being rushed into a decision. This may be made even more important by the sense that on matters of human sexuality Mission Council does not reflect in its membership the full range of views that will be present in an Assembly.

This paper now goes on to look at some wider issues that may need clarifying for those coming new to the subject.

6. Concerning services of marriage and civil partnership

If the advice above is followed, and if a local church decides to seek to be approved for the registration of Civil Partnerships, both kinds of service would contain two distinct elements. On the one hand there is the civil element, in which certain statements and promises required by law are made and documents are signed. The other is the religious element in which the covenant between two people is surrounded by prayer and related to Scripture and in which God's blessing is sought.

In some countries it is not allowed for the two elements to take place at the same time and place. And indeed there are some people in this country who prefer first to be married in a registry office and then to come to church for a blessing.

The distinction is important because it makes clear what is involved in passing an enabling resolution in response to the Equality Act. First it enables local churches to allow the legal part of a Civil Partnership to be registered on their premises. Second, it enables local churches to decide that it is in order to surround the making of a Civil Partnership with prayer and Scripture in church. The resolution would only enable such things to happen: it would leave each local church to decide on each occasion whether or not a particular Civil Partnership could be registered in worship on its premises.

7. Inconsistency

There is a significant theological inconsistency in the advice accepted by Mission Council in 2006 and 2009, and now in this paper. The task group believes it should be named. The inconsistency lies in the fact that, while one church may believe that God blesses Civil Partnerships and another may believe the opposite, they cannot both be right. Reflection shows that theological inconsistency is not something new among us. One church may pray for God's blessing on a particular armed conflict while another will not because it believes that the conflict is contrary to God's purpose. Of more obvious relevance, one church may allow a couple who have both previously been divorced to marry in church and so offer God's blessing, while another will refuse because it believes God does not bless such a union. To remove all the inconsistencies would lead to the fragmentation of the church, but the task group believes it is healthy for them to be named, recognised and wrestled with – but not fought over. It is by the grace of God, not by human conflict, that the church finds its way through inconsistencies.

It is also undeniable that an enabling resolution would lead to inconsistency between one church and another. In some places Civil Partnerships would be registered in worship while in others they would not. That is inevitable so long as the Assembly stands by a Commitment which recognises significant differences of conviction. The hard question has to be faced: which is better, inconsistency or the sort of pain and sense of injustice which has accompanied previous attempts to find a common mind on same-sex relationships? A further question is, given the variety of human life and relationships, is it not inevitable that sometimes people have to accept things with which they do not agree for the sake of fellowship? That in turn can lead to inconsistency.

8. Common ground

The issue of same-sex relationships divides, not only the United Reformed Church, but the whole of Christendom. Yet this is not an absolute division. There is common ground between those on both sides (and in the middle) of the debate. All agree that at the heart of God's nature, the Trinity, there is relationship. All agree that within God's purpose human beings have a sexual identity. All agree that deep personal relationships can give immense value to human life. All agree that bad personal relationships can be very damaging to human life. All agree that the best relationships are based on love, trust and faithfulness. All agree that such relationships are the best basis for the family and for society. It is easy to follow these statements with the comment, yes, but we don't agree on same-sex relationships. True though that is, the common ground has a significance that cannot be ignored.

9. Is that it?

Yes, so long as we all recognise that adopting this proposal leaves us in exactly the same situation of differing convictions regarding same-sex relationships. Because we have those convictions, some will see this as a step too far, and others as a step not far enough. We can only continue to walk together so long as we trust each other to consider each decision before us in a prayerful and sensitive spirit. We will need to respect one another's integrity as disciples of Jesus.



J

MISSION COUNCIL 17TH – 19TH MAY 2011

Draft Model Governing Documents for URC / Methodist United Area Associations

Model Governing Documents

(Constitution and Schedule)

for
a
United Area Association
Methodist/United Reformed Church

Model Constitution for a Methodist / United Reformed Church United Area Association

This Constitution was adopted on [date] [and amended on [date(s)]] and relates to the charitable unincorporated association governed by this Constitution and known as [name].

Introduction

- 1) In this Constitution (including the Schedule to it) the following expressions have the following meanings:
 - a) ‘the Area of Benefit’ means the area specified in paragraph 2 of the Schedule;
 - b) ‘the Charity’ means the charity constituted by this Constitution;
 - c) ‘Area Meeting’ means a meeting of the Members;
 - d) ‘Co-opted Trustees’ means Trustees appointed by the Trustees under clause 22(c);
 - e) ‘Elected Trustees’ means Trustees elected under clause 22(b);
 - f) ‘the Area’ means the United Area specified in paragraph 1 of the Schedule;
 - g) ‘the Members’ means the members of the Charity;
 - h) ‘the Participating Churches’ means the Churches specified in paragraph 4 of the Schedule;
 - i) ‘the Participating Denominations’ means the denominations specified in paragraph 3 of the Schedule;
 - j) ‘the Schedule’ means the Schedule to this Constitution;
 - k) ‘the Sponsoring Body’ means the body specified in paragraph 5 of the Schedule;
 - l) ‘the Trustees’ means the body of trustees constituted by clause 22 of this Constitution (who are the charity trustees of the Charity for the purposes of the Charities Act 1993).

Purpose of the Charity

- 2) The purpose of the Charity is to advance the Christian faith for the public benefit in the Area of Benefit in accordance with the principles and practices of the Participating Churches.
- 3) In achieving its purpose, the Charity will engage in a range of activities, either on its own or with others, including (but not restricted to):
 - a) the celebration of public worship;
 - b) the teaching of the Christian faith;
 - c) mission and evangelism;
 - d) pastoral work, including visiting the sick and the bereaved;
 - e) the provision of other facilities with a Christian ethos for the local community, including (but not restricted to) the elderly, the young and other groups with special needs; and
 - f) the support of other charities in the UK and overseas.

Membership of the Charity

- 4) The duly authorised ministers for the time being of the Area as defined in paras 6a and b of the schedule.
- 5) Other persons in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6 the Schedule.
- 6) The Trustees must keep a register of Members, which must be made available to any Member upon request. The register must record the name, address and denominational affiliation within the Area of each Member.

- 7) Membership of the Charity shall be terminated if the Member concerned:-
- a) gives written notice of his or her resignation to the Trustees;
 - b) ceases to be entitled to membership of the charity / association (including as a result of any disciplinary procedure conducted by either the Methodist or United Reformed Church); or
 - c) dies.
- 8) Membership of the Charity is personal and not transferable.

Area Association meetings

- 9) There shall be the following kinds of Meeting of the Charity:
- a) Annual Area Meetings;
 - b) Ordinary Area Meetings;
 - c) Special Area Meetings;
- 10) Area Association Meetings shall be convened by or on behalf of the Trustees, either:
- a) by giving 14 days' (or, in the case of a Special Area Meeting, 21 days') notice in writing sent to the addresses recorded for the Members in the register of Members; or
 - b) by giving verbal notice given at each service of public worship of the participating churches held in the Area on the two Sundays (or, in the case of a Special Area meeting, the three Sundays) immediately preceding the date of the Area Meeting.
- 11) An Annual Area Meeting must be held within 12 months of the adoption of this Constitution and once in every subsequent calendar year.
- 12) The business of an Annual Area Meeting is to:
- a) receive the report of the Trustees on the Charity's activities since the previous Annual Area Meeting;
 - b) review the life and witness of the Charity;
 - c) elect Trustees from among the Members by processes that are clear and open and explicitly provided for in this constitution;
 - d) receive the accounts of the Charity for the previous financial year;
 - e) appoint an auditor or independent examiner for the Charity; and
 - f) consider any other business put before it by the Trustees.
- 13) An Ordinary Area Meeting shall be convened on not less than two occasions in each calendar year.
- 14) The business of an Ordinary Area Meeting is to:
- a) review the life and witness of the Charity;
 - b) consider topics relevant to the local and wider witness of the Charity;
 - c) receive reports covering all aspects of the life of the area;
 - d) consider matters brought to it by the Trustees, so as to offer advice or guidance (to which the Trustees must have regard), and to indicate support as required;
 - e) help to shape the life, work and vision of the area.]

- 15) A Special Area Meeting may be called at any time by the Trustees and must be called by them within 21 days after receiving a written request from at least one-tenth of the Members for the time being.
- 16) In the case of a Special Area Meeting the notice of the meeting must include an indication of the business to be transacted.
- 17) The business of a Special Area Meeting shall comprise that referred to in the notice convening it and no other.
- 18) No business shall be conducted at any Area Meeting unless at least *[number]*, or *[one-third]* of the number of Members for the time being (if greater), are present.
- 19) The chair of the Trustees or (if the chair is unable or unwilling to do so) some other Member elected by those present shall preside at any Area Meeting.
- 20) Except as otherwise provided in this Constitution, every issue at an Area Meeting shall be determined by a simple majority of votes cast by the Members present and voting.
- 21) Except for the chair of the meeting, who in the case of an equality of votes has a second or casting vote, every Member present in person at any Area Meeting is entitled to one vote on every issue.

Trustees

- 22) The Charity shall be administered and managed by a body of trustees consisting of:
 - a) *ex officio* Trustees, being the ministers as defined in clause 4 of the Area for the time being;
 - b) *[insert]* Elected Trustees elected at the Annual Area Meeting; and
 - c) not more than *[insert]* Co-opted Trustees appointed by the Trustees.
 - d) The Chair of the *[insert]* Methodist District and the Moderator of the *[insert]* United Reformed Church Synod
- 23) The first Elected Trustees shall be elected at the meeting at which this Constitution is adopted.
- 24) Elected Trustees shall hold office from the end of the Annual Area Meeting at which they are elected until the end of the third such meeting after their appointment, but shall be eligible for re-election at that meeting.
- 25) No person may be elected as an Elected Trustee or appointed as a Co-opted Trustee unless he or she:
 - a) is a Member;
 - b) is aged 18 or above;
 - c) is not disqualified from acting as a Trustee by virtue of section 72 Charities Act 1993 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision); and
 - d) has indicated his or her willingness to serve as a Trustee.

- 26) Co-opted Trustees serve until the end of the next Annual Area Meeting following their appointment.
- 27) A Trustee shall cease to hold office if he or she:
 - a) is disqualified from acting as a Trustee by virtue of section 72 Charities Act 1993 (or any statutory re-enactment or modification of that provision);
 - b) ceases to be a Member;
 - c) dies or becomes incapable by reason of mental disorder, illness or injury of managing and administering his or her own affairs;
 - d) resigns as trustee by notice to the Trustees (but only if at least two Trustees will remain in office when the notice of resignation takes effect); or
 - e) is absent without the permission of the Trustees from all their meetings held within a period of six consecutive months and the Trustees resolve that his or her office be vacated.

Proceedings of the Trustees

- 28) The Trustees may regulate their proceedings as they think fit, subject to the provisions of this constitution.
- 29) The Trustees must hold at least two meetings in each calendar year.
- 30) At their first meeting after an Annual Area Meeting the Trustees shall elect the following officers from amongst their number:
 - a) a chairman
 - b) a secretary; and
 - c) a treasurer.
- 31) Any Trustee may request a meeting of the Trustees and the secretary must convene a meeting of the Trustees if requested to do so by a Trustee.
- 32) Questions arising at a meeting must be decided by a majority of votes.
- 33) In the case of an equality of votes, the person who chairs the meeting shall have a second or casting vote.
- 34) No decision may be made by a meeting of the Trustees unless a quorum is present at the time the decision is purported to be made.
- 35) The quorum shall be either:
 - a) two or the number nearest to one third of the total number of Trustees, whichever is the greater; or
 - b) such larger number as may be decided from time to time by the Trustees.
- 36) A Trustee shall not be counted in the quorum present when any decision is made about a matter upon which that Trustee is not entitled to vote.
- 37) If the number of Trustees is less than the number fixed as the quorum, the continuing Trustees or Trustee may act for the purpose of filling vacancies or of calling an Area Meeting but for no other purpose.

- 38) According to the provisions of Clause 7 of the schedule, the person elected as chair shall chair the meetings of trustees.
- 39) If the chair is unable or unwilling to preside or is not present within ten minutes after the time appointed for the meeting, the Trustees present may appoint one of their number to chair that meeting.
- 40) Any person appointed to chair meetings of the Trustees shall have no functions or powers except those conferred by this Constitution or delegated to him or her in writing by the Trustees.
- 41) A resolution in writing signed by all the Trustees entitled to receive notice of a meeting of Trustees or of a committee of the Trustees and to vote upon the resolution shall be as valid and effectual as if it had been passed at a meeting of the Trustees or (as the case may be) a committee of Trustees duly convened and held.
- 42) The resolution in writing may comprise several documents, each containing the text of the resolution in like form and each signed by one or more Trustees.
- 43) The Trustees may delegate any of their powers or functions to a committee of two or more persons, all or a majority of whom shall be Trustees, subject to such conditions (if any) as they think fit. All acts and proceedings of any such committee must be reported promptly to the Trustees.
- 44) The Trustees must keep minutes of all:
- a) appointments of officers and Co-opted Trustees made by the Trustees;
 - b) proceedings at Area Meetings; and
 - c) meetings of the Trustees and committees of the Trustees, including:
 - i) the names of the Trustees or committee members present at the meeting;
 - ii) the decisions made at the meeting; and
 - iii) where appropriate, the reasons for the decisions.

Accounting and reporting

- 45) The Trustees must comply with their obligations under charity law with regard to:
- a) the keeping of accounting records for the Charity;
 - b) the preparation of annual statements of account for the Charity;
 - c) the transmission of the statements of account to the Charity; and
 - d) the preparation of an Annual Report and an Annual Return and their submission to the Charity Commission.

Powers of Trustees

- 46) In order to further the purpose of the Charity the Trustees may:
- a) raise funds, provided that in doing so the Trustees must not undertake any substantial permanent trading activity and must comply with any relevant statutory regulations;

- b) apply for and accept grants and provide security in respect of obligations under grant agreements;
- c) buy, take on lease or in exchange, hire or otherwise acquire any property and maintain and equip it for use;
- d) where the Charity owns property, sell, lease or otherwise dispose of all or any part of the property, subject to such consents as are required by law;
- e) borrow money and charge the whole or any part of the property belonging to the Charity as security for repayment of the money borrowed, subject to such consents as are required by law;
- f) co-operate with other charities, voluntary bodies and statutory authorities and exchange information and advice with them;
- g) establish or support any charitable trusts, associations or institutions formed for any purpose connected with the purpose of the Charity;
- h) acquire, merge with or enter into any partnership or joint venture arrangement with any other charity formed for any purpose connected with the purpose of the Charity subject to such consents as are required by law;
- i) set aside income as a reserve against future expenditure but only in accordance with a written policy about reserves;
- j) obtain and pay for such goods and services as are necessary for carrying out the work of the Charity;
- k) open and operate such bank and other accounts as the Trustees consider necessary and invest funds and delegate the management of funds in the same manner and subject to the same conditions as the Trustees of a trust are permitted to do by the Trustee Act 2000; and
- l) do all such other lawful things as are necessary for the achievement of the purpose of the Charity.

Application of funds

- 47) The Trustees shall pay out of the income and property of the Charity all the proper costs and expenses of administering the Charity.

Trustee benefits

- 48) No Trustee or any person connected with a Trustee may receive from the Charity any payment of money or other material benefit (whether direct or indirect) except by way of:
- a) reasonable remuneration or stipend paid to any Trustee who is a paid employee of either denomination working within the Area;
 - b) reimbursement of reasonable out of pocket expenses (including hotel and travel costs) actually incurred in the administration of the Charity;
 - c) interest at a reasonable rate on money lent to the Charity;
 - d) a reasonable rent or hiring fee for property let or hired to the Charity;
 - e) an indemnity in respect of any liabilities properly incurred in or about the administration of the Charity (including the costs of a successful defence to criminal proceedings);
 - f) benefits received by the Trustee as a Member where such benefits are no different in nature or extent from those received by other Members; and
 - g) payment for employment or services authorised under clause 49.

- 49) The Trustees may employ, or engage under a contract for services, such of their number or any person connected to a Trustee as they may determine provided that:
- the procedure set out in clause 50 is followed;
 - the Trustees are satisfied that it is in the interests of the Charity to employ or engage under a contract for services (as the case may be) the Trustee or connected person concerned;
 - the Trustees are satisfied that the terms of employment or engagement are reasonable and will be subject to regular and objective review; and
 - at no time may a majority of Trustees benefit directly or indirectly from payments made under this or the preceding clause.
- 50) Whenever a Trustee or a person connected to a Trustee has a personal interest in a matter to be discussed at a meeting of the Trustees or any committee, the Trustee or connected person concerned must:
- declare an interest before discussion on the matter begins;
 - withdraw from the meeting for that item unless expressly invited by the chair to remain solely in order to provide information;
 - not be counted in the quorum during that part of the meeting; and
 - withdraw during the vote and have no vote on the matter.
- 51) For the purpose of clauses 48 to 50 a person is connected with a Trustee if that person is, amongst others:
- a child, parent, grandchild, grandparent, brother or sister of the Trustee; or
 - a spouse, civil partner or co-habitee of the Trustee or of any person falling within (a) above.

Investment

- 52) Funds which are not required for immediate use must be placed on deposit or invested.
- 53) Investments and other property of the Charity may be held:
- in the names of the Trustees;
 - in the name of a nominee (being a corporate body registered or having an established place of business in England and Wales) under the control of the Trustees or of a financial expert acting on their instructions;
 - in the name of a trust corporation as a holding trustee for the Charity which must be appointed (and may be removed) by deed executed by the Trustees; or
 - in the case of land, by the Official Custodian for Charities under an order of the Charity Commission or the Court.

Amendment of Constitution

- 54) This Constitution (including the Schedule) may be amended at either an Annual or a Special Area Meeting provided that:

- a) No amendment may be made to this constitution that would have the effect of making the Charity cease to be a charity at law (or altering the purpose of the Charity if the change would not be within the reasonable contemplation of the Members);
 - b) Clauses 48 to 51 may not be amended without the prior written consent of the Charity Commission;
 - c) Members are given 21 days' written notice and resolve by not less than two-thirds majority of the Members present and voting; and
 - d) the resolution receives the approval of the Sponsoring Body and of the appropriate authority of each of the Participating Denominations.
- 55) A copy of any resolution amending this Constitution must be sent to the Charity Commission within 21 days of its being passed.

Dissolution of Charity

- 56) The Charity may be dissolved only with the approval of the Sponsoring Body, and the appropriate authority of each of the Participating Denominations.
- 57) If the members resolve to dissolve the Charity the Trustees will remain in office as charity trustees and be responsible for winding up the affairs of the Charity in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.
- 58) The Trustees must collect in all the assets of the Charity and must pay or make provision for all the liabilities of the Charity.
- 59) The Trustees must apply any remaining property or money:
- a) directly for the purpose of the Charity;
 - b) by transfer to any charity or charities for purposes the same as, or similar, to the purpose of the Charity as they in their association may decide; or
 - c) in such other manner as the Charity Commission may approve in writing in advance.
- 60) The Members may pass a resolution before or at the same time as the resolution to dissolve the Charity specifying the manner in which the Trustees are to apply the remaining property or assets of the Charity, in which event the Trustees must comply with the resolution if it is consistent with clause 60.
- 61) In no circumstances shall the net assets of the Charity be paid to or distributed among the members of the Charity.
- 62) The Trustees must notify the Charity Commission promptly that the Charity has been dissolved. If the Trustees are obliged to send the Charity's accounts to the Commission for the accounting period which ended before its dissolution, they must send the Charity Commission the Charity's final accounts.

Schedule

The United Area

- 1) The Charity:
 - a) gives effect to the *[insert name....]* United Area Association approved for the Area of Benefit by the Methodist and United Reformed Churches;
 - b) comprises the Participating Churches; and
 - c) looks to the [insert] District of the Methodist Church, the [insert] Synod of the United Reformed Church and the Sponsoring Body for support, encouragement and advice.

The Area of Benefit

- 2) The Area of Benefit is the area covered by the [insert] Circuit of the Methodist Church together with any wider area or areas served by churches of the [insert] Synod of the United Reformed Churches situated within the area of that circuit. A complete list of participating churches is contained in paragraph 3 of this schedule.

The Participating Churches

- 3) The Participating Churches are as follows:

The churches of the Methodist Church of the [insert] circuit, namely [list]

The following congregations of the [insert] United Reformed Church Synod [list]

The following LEP's between the URC and Methodist Church [list]

The following wider LEP's within which there is URC and Methodist involvement [list]

- 4) The Appropriate Authority for each Participating Church is:

A The Methodist District

B The United Reformed Church Synod

The Sponsoring Body

- 5) The Sponsoring Body is *[name]*.

Membership of the Area Meeting

- 6) The Area Meeting combines as far as possible, the functions of the Methodist Circuit Meeting, and the devolved functions of the United Reformed Church Synod.

Membership of the Area Meeting shall comprise:

- a) URC and Methodist Ministers in pastoral charge within the Area (including Probationers). Ordained ministers of other Christian churches authorised by either the URC or the Methodist Church to serve within the area. Retired and supernumerary Methodist or URC ministers residing within the area. Members of the Methodist Diaconal Order and Ministers and Deacons residing in the Circuit for the purposes of Methodist stations.
- b) Church Related Community Workers (CRCW's) of the URC and lay workers having pastoral or leadership roles in and having been appointed by the Association.
- c) Representatives from each local congregation, who shall normally be Elders or Church Council members. The number of representatives for each congregation shall be determined from time to time by the United Area Meeting, and may depend upon the size of the congregation, but shall normally vary between one and three.
- d) One representative from each of the Area Committees designated by the Association Trustees, except the Preachers' Committee which has six lay representatives.
- e) The leader or co-leaders, Secretary and Treasurer, and up to eight Area Officers, who shall be appointed by the Annual Area Meeting..
- f) The URC Synod Moderator; members of the United Reformed Church Synod Committees who are church members in the Area; the Chairman of the [insert] Methodist District; members of the Methodist District standing committees who are church members in the Area. or their nominees
- g) Two young people, (aged 18-25 years), being members of an Area Church, nominated by the Area youth committee if such exists and otherwise at the invitation of the area meeting.
- h) A representative of the Sponsoring body; and representatives of other Christian churches operating within the area of benefit as the Area Meeting may from time to time determine.
- i) Additional members of the Area meeting may be co-opted as deemed appropriate by the Annual Meeting or a meeting of the Trustees.

(Delete whichever of the following clauses in paras 7 and 8 are inappropriate)

- 7) The United Area Meeting shall confirm the appointment of two Co-Leaders, at least one of whom shall be ordained. The Methodist Conference shall designate a suitable Methodist Minister as the Superintendent Minister. The Co-Leaders shall normally serve for a period of three years, with the possibility of an extension.
- 7) The Area meeting shall elect one of the ministers to be the chair of the Area Association for a term of three years who may then be appointed for a further term.

Where the person appointed is a United Reformed Church Minister, the Methodist Conference shall designate a suitable Methodist Minister as the Superintendent Minister to carry out necessary Methodist administration and oversight. If the chairman is a Methodist minister, the Methodist Conference shall designate the minister as the Superintendent Minister.

- 8) The Co-Leaders shall act as co-chairs of the Pastoral Committee.
- 8) The leader shall also act as the chair of the Pastoral Committee.
- 9) The United Area Meeting shall appoint Area Officers either from its own membership or from the membership of the Local Churches, who shall also carry out the legal responsibilities of Circuit Stewards (Methodist Standing Order 531 (2005)). They shall be appointed for a term of three years, and shall be eligible for immediate reappointment for one further term.

- 10) The United Area Meeting shall appoint such Working Groups and Advocates as are necessary for its work. Those appointed shall consider material from both denominations and avoid unnecessary duplication. They shall initiate action within any guidelines laid down by the United Area Meeting.
- 11) A Pastoral Committee shall normally be formed which shall have pastoral oversight of the ministers and churches. It shall consist of the Co-Leaders, four ministers elected by the Area meeting, the Area Officers and the URC Moderator and Methodist District Chair or their nominees. The Pastoral Committee shall, when necessary appoint a Methodist invitation committee and its Chair who shall be an Area Officer. Where an association chooses not to form a pastoral committee the responsibilities described in this constitution and schedule shall be the responsibility of an executive group to execute or delegate.
- 12) The Pastoral Committee may from time to time devolve some of its functions to another existing committee of the area or to a group formed for the specific purpose of fulfilling that responsibility.
- 13) All Area Ministers, members of the Diaconal Order, CRCW's and Lay Workers called or appointed to the United Area shall meet regularly for fellowship, prayer, mutual support and consultation about the affairs of the Area.
- 14) The United Area Meeting, acting as both the Methodist Circuit Meeting and taking responsibility for the devolved functions of the United Reformed Church Synod, shall fulfil the legal requirements and responsibilities of both these bodies, including Managing Trusteeship of Circuit property (Methodist Standing Order 512 (2005)).
- 15) The United Area Meeting shall appoint representatives to:
 - a The District Synod of the Methodist Church
 - b The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, the Synod Pastoral Committee and whatever other Synod committees may require representation from the Area..
 - c Other bodies as required.
- 16) Local United Reformed churches (and LEPs with URC involvement), in accordance with the Manual of the United Reformed Church, shall continue to appoint and send lay representatives directly to meetings of the Synod. Ministers of such churches will be members of the Synod by virtue of their appointment.

J1

The Revd. Graham R. Jones

To continue as Rural Officer (Methodist/URC) for five years from 1st September 2011

Graham Jones was appointed as Rural Officer by both the Methodist Church and United Reformed Church with effect from 1st January 2006. For the past five and a half years he has served both churches with distinction and become a recognised figure within rural work and a valued member of the Connexional Team, the URC Mission Team and the Arthur Rank Centre.

Graham is appreciated for his ecumenical work and the projects he has developed. He has led on a new understanding of Local Collaborative Ministry that draws on expertise from New Zealand and Canada; in partnership with the Churches' Regional Commission for Yorkshire and the Humber he is developing a leadership development programme for Rural Church Entrepreneurs and has ensured that good placements in rural ministry are on offer via our theological colleges. He supports and resources the network of District Rural Officers.

Graham is a gifted communicator who is committed to the rural church in all its various forms and guises. He is realistic about the challenges facing the Church today and is committed to playing a full part in developing and reshaping the church in rural settings.

He is a person of prayer who is passionate about the worship and mission of the Church. He wants the Church to be relevant, effective and faithful. He is an excellent colleague and committed to his own personal development and the fulfilment of God's call upon his life as both a Methodist minister and a rural specialist.

The Rural Strategy Group - acting on behalf of both denominations - is unanimous in recommending the extension of the Revd. Graham Jones appointment as Rural Officer (Methodist/URC) for five years from 1st September 2011.



Assembly Arrangements Committee Reports to and the Record of Assembly

The Issue

The response to Assembly 2010 was positive and encouraging. The one aspect that appears to have caused real distress for some at least was the fact that we circulated Reports to and the Record of Assembly to Church Secretaries in the form of disks and not by means of hard copy.

A number of Synods (4?) and individuals have expressed disquiet about us adopting this practice. In part the argument is that not all the recipients of the disk are computer literate and that in any case reading long documents on screen is tiresome. More importantly, however, is that it is perceived to demonstrate a breakdown in the essential link between Assembly and local churches.

The North Western Synod passed the following resolution:

‘North Western Synod meeting at its Autumn Synod on 13 November 2010 requested Assembly Arrangements to reconsider the decision (a) not to send printed copies of the Assembly Reports and Record to each local church and serving minister and (b) not to send the Reports and Record in any form to serving ministers, and is concerned that this decision has increased still further the gulf between local churches and General Assembly.’

It should be noted that we ceased sending the Reports to and Record of Assembly to serving ministers some years ago. Both documents are sent to serving ministers who request it and automatically are sent to serving ministers who are members of Assembly.

A Possible Way Forward

There was a full discussion of the issue at the Assembly Arrangements meeting in March when it was noted there was a very substantial cost difference between the different methods of circulating the Reports to and Record of Assembly. Whilst hard copies need to be available for Assembly members and those requiring to work with a permanent record, it was suggested it was not necessarily justified to print and distribute these to all local churches in the electronic age.

It was agreed that Mission Council be presented with three options

- 1) to return to the previous practice of sending hard copies to all parties (including local churches). Preliminary estimates suggest that the cost of circulating hard copies of the reports and record to all Church Secretaries might be in the region of £40,000 – a non-trivial sum in the context of the overall budget for Assembly (£300,000).

- 2) to send full hard copies just to Assembly members and other essential recipients and prepare and distribute summary versions to others. This is being costed and it is hoped to report further on this to the meeting of Mission Council in May.
- 3) to send full hard copies just to Assembly members and other essential recipients and send a CD to all others (including local churches). CDs containing the Reports to and the Record of Assembly cost £1.40 each.

Mission Council is invited to circulate these options to Synods with confirmed costings for comment at their Autumn meetings in time for Mission Council to consider responses and make a decision at its next meeting.

David Robinson
Assembly Arrangements Convenor



Ministries Committee Assessment Board

Resolution

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, adopts the process for medical and psychological screening of candidates for the ministry as set out below, with immediate effect.

Phase of training and/or calling
Pre-Training & Training
<p>Stage 1 – Candidate Application</p> <p>Candidate makes an application to be accepted for training.</p>
<p>Stage 2 – Candidating Process</p> <p>Candidate goes through the Candidating Process. Includes interviews by local church and synod, along with the completion of some reflective work and, for candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, leading worship.</p>
<p>Stage 3 – Assembly Assessment Conference</p> <p>Candidate attends an Assembly Assessment Conference which includes interviews with assessors (who ultimately make the decision to accept or not), an Education & Learning panel (who decide on length and nature of training), and a Personal Development Officer, which includes a group exercise and a one-to-one interview, (whose role is to provide support/information for the assessors but has no decision-making function.)</p>
<p>Stage 4 – Offer & Pre-training Screening</p> <p>The Candidate is accepted and provided with a written offer of training subject to medical and psychological screening.</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries will provide InterHealth with an outline of the expected training programme for this candidate (including expected duration, schedule of study, i.e. at home, evenings, full time, residential, etc).</p> <p>The Candidate completes a Pre-Training Health Screening Form which is returned to InterHealth. Further consultation between the Candidate and InterHealth will occur in following up pre-existing health conditions. For Pre-Training Health Screening, a fitness for training certificate, with any recommendations for reasonable adjustment, will be provided.</p> <p>The Candidate is requested to book and undertake a Psychological Clearance Appointment at InterHealth. For Psychological Clearance purposes, a report will be provided to the Secretary for Ministries giving an opinion on the individual’s psychological wellbeing at the date of the appointment, and advising on any areas of risk affecting the individual’s ability to fulfil their training. In the case of any uncertainty the Assessment Board would need to evaluate the report and make a decision.</p>
<p>Stage 5 – Training confirmation & commencement</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries confirms the offer to the candidate of the training post. The candidate commences their training. Subject to the United Reformed Church Assessment Board approval, in their last year they seek a call to ministry from a church/pastorate.</p>

Upon ordination or acceptance of a call

Stage 6 – Acceptance of a call

A trainee has sought a call from a church and has been successful in identifying a role for their future ministry. The trainee is provided with a written offer of a ministry position subject to satisfactory medical clearance.

Stage 7 – Pre-Ministry Screening / Pre-Employment screening

A full medical with InterHealth is required. A report on fitness for ministry as well as any reasonable adjustments for the role are provided.

Phase of training and/or calling	Additional Notes pertaining including Equality Act 2010 requirements
Pre-training & Training	
<p>Stage 1 – Candidate Application Candidate makes an application to be trained.</p>	<p>No medical forms are filled in at this time. The Equality Act 2010 requires that any screening can only be undertaken after a person has received an offer of employment. In this case it would pertain to a written offer of training or ministry.</p>
<p>Stage 2 – Candidating Process Candidate goes through the Candidating Process - includes interviews by local church and synod, along with completion of some reflective work and leading worship.</p>	
<p>Stage 3 – Assembly Assessment Conference Candidate attends Assembly Assessment Conference which includes interviews by assessors (who ultimately make the decision to accept or not), Education & Learning panel (who decide on length and nature of training), {and with a Personal Development Officer (which includes a group exercise and a one-to-one interview) whose role is to provide support/information for the assessors but has no decision-making function.}</p>	
<p>Stage 4 – Offer & Pre-training Screening The Candidate is accepted and provided with a written offer of training subject to medical & psychological screening.</p> <p>URC will provide InterHealth with an outline of the expected training programme for this candidate (including expected duration, schedule of study, i.e. at home, evenings, full time, residential etc).</p> <p>The Candidate completes a Pre-Training Health Screening Form which is returned to InterHealth. Further consultation between the Candidate and InterHealth will occur in following up pre-existing health conditions. For Pre-Training Health Screening, a fitness for training certificate with any recommendations for reasonable adjustment will be provided.</p> <p>The Candidate is requested to book and undertake a Psychological Clearance Appointment at InterHealth. Please see the additional protocols and service descriptions provided. For Psychological Clearance purposes, a report will be provided to URC giving an opinion on the individuals psychological wellbeing at the date of the appointment, and advising on any areas of risk affecting the individuals’ ability to fulfil their training.</p>	<p>As above, a written offer must be provided to be in line with new legislation.</p> <p>Code of conducts and general training outlines would be helpful.</p> <p>From our experience, we anticipate that approximately 30% of forms will need additional follow up in the form of telephone consultations with our OH team.</p> <p>Please note that a key requirement of the Equality Act is for the employing organisation to be able to thoroughly justify that their health screening processes are “reasonable”.</p>

<p>Stage 5 – Training confirmation & commencement URC offer the candidate the training post. The candidate commences their training. Subject to URC approval, in their last year they seek a call to ministry from a church.</p>	
<p>Upon ordination or acceptance of a call</p>	
<p>Stage 6 – Acceptance of a call A trainee has sought a call from a church and has been successful in identifying a role for their future ministry. The trainee is provided with a written offer of a ministry position subject to satisfactory medical clearance.</p>	
<p>Stage 7 – Pre-Ministry Screening / Pre-Employment screening A full medical with InterHealth is required. A report on fitness for ministry as well as any reasonable adjustments for the role are provided.</p>	<p>This medical sets the pace for proactive ministerial care and wellbeing throughout the life of the minister.</p>



Training in Equal Opportunities to help Interim Moderators work with local churches in vacancy

Offering people equal opportunities means making decisions about them based primarily on relevant criteria, not on incidental details, like their gender, ethnic origin, age or marital status.

To hold irrelevant details against a person is to discriminate. In our society, increasingly, forms of discrimination are unlawful and in the Church they are also unethical.

Anti-discrimination legislation includes gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, marital status and disability.

Equal Opportunities applies to Ministers, Church Related Community Workers and any other employees of the local church such as cleaners, youth workers, secretaries etc.

Why does it matter?

1. Because the URC is committed to equal opportunities. See page 3 Equal Opportunities Policy (Appendix 8 in The Movement of Ministers)
2. Because discrimination does happen. In 2001 there was some research into the URC which showed that while about 30% of the church membership was male, 43% of the eldership was male, that 32% of our congregations include black and minority ethnic people who are underrepresented in leadership positions and that while 72% of churches had wheelchair access to their buildings only 52% had accessible toilets.
3. There has not been any research into the movement of ministers, but anecdotal evidence suggests that black and minority ethnic people and women have more difficulty moving than white men. Of course some women have no difficulty and some men have a lot of difficulty.
4. Though discrimination is difficult to eradicate, people can be helped to consider their prejudices in the light of the gospel. As churches prepare to meet potential new ministers, Interim Moderators are well-placed to promote the URC Equal Opportunities policy and have a responsibility to do so.

What can Interim Moderators do?

You can reflect on your own position. What is your attitude to equal opportunities? Are you ever prejudiced or patronising? Do you make excuses for your behaviour? It is likely that God is calling you to transcend your weaknesses and, as an Interim Moderator, the Church is asking you to do so.

In the Church, people are rarely blatant about their prejudices and often do not recognise when they discriminate. So they may not acknowledge their prejudice as wrong and, if they do, may keep this attitude to themselves, wishing to avoid confrontation. Although this does not excuse unjust behaviour, it is important to be sensitive in encouraging people to reflect upon their attitudes; otherwise their prejudices will be buried and continue to have an unexamined influence upon their decision-making.

An Interim Moderator can be proactive about discrimination before actual cases arise by running a training session with the church meeting (see the Training Session below), and by challenging people to recognise their own prejudices whenever these appear by being attentive for the assumptions that people are making about their next minister. For example watch out for male language when referring to the next minister. Always say 'he or she'. And remind others to do so too. Try asking the question, 'you have decided that you want this particular kind of leadership - how will you know if a woman is exercising it or if a man is exercising it or if a person with a disability is exercising it?' If you do not wish to run the training session yourself, contact your Synod Training and Development Officer.

Give all church members a copy of the URC statement – page 5. But note that it is important to ensure that the discussion at the training session includes the whole range of possible discrimination and does not spend most of the time discussing sexuality.

Running a Training Session

Discussions about the kind of minister that a church might seek in principle are best conducted at a Church Meeting so that as many people as possible are present and no-one is excluded.

It is natural for people to want the sort of minister who they could imagine fitting in well with their social groupings, but the Pastorate Profile should give indications of the type of leadership that is sought; the draft Minister's Role Description will do this in some detail. Focussing upon leadership gifts and tasks will promote objectivity and put into a proper context thoughts about the sort of person the church hopes for.

Similar objectivity can then be applied to a discussion of hypothetical candidates using sample cases. These help people to move away from loose generalities, to think positively about a variety of possible ministers, and therefore to be more open to the leading of the Spirit.

Make sure you have set enough time for the training session – at least 2 hours. Don't try to add it on after the business of a church meeting.

Training Session

Opening Worship

Use the Introduction and the Statement of intent (para's 1 & 2) from the Equal Opportunities Policy to create opening worship which sets the scene for the session.

Exercise 1 – Thinking about our church

The Equality Opportunity and Diversity statement says that the URC will endeavour to:

Build inclusive communities where all will be treated with dignity and respect and have equality of opportunity to contribute their gifts to the common life;

Who are the “all” that are welcome?

Do this as a whole group and put up the answers on a flip chart so that you can refer back to them throughout.

What does it mean to be or to build an inclusive community? – depending on the size of the group do this all together or in groups.

Exercise 2 – Thinking about ourselves

Get people into groups to discuss the following

“What are the experiences of discrimination that you know of (personal or wider) from employment/community/church?”

Exercise 3 – Thinking about our Ministers

In groups discuss the following range of ministers. Get each group to begin with illustration 1.

You may find that people do not feel they need to do anything to enable the ministry of 1, but that minister also needs to be enabled. Then move each group to a different illustration. Allow 30 mins for this exercise and ensure that all the illustrations are considered by at least one group.

What are the advantages and disadvantages for calling each of these ministers? What can the church do to enable their ministry?

1. A skilled, experienced and able white man of 35 with three small children and a wife who is committed and active in the church.
2. A skilled, experienced and able white woman of 35 with three small children whose husband is not a Christian nor engaged in the church in any way.
3. A bright, lively and energetic single black woman of 28.
4. A wise and caring white man of 61 who had a heart attack followed by a bypass operation four years ago.
5. An experienced and caring white woman who has twice in the past needed time off work for depression.

6. A black Caribbean man of 35 with one successful ministry behind him; with a wife and two children aged 6 and 8.
7. A white woman with walking difficulties – cannot do stairs, needs accessible toilet facilities, but drives and is very able.

A white man with visual difficulties – cannot drive, needs large print to read. He has a warm and caring personality.

8. A married man of Indian origin aged 58, with nine years of good ministry behind him.
9. A lesbian woman who has been together with her partner for 20 years and is now in a civil partnership. Has been in ministry for 30 years and is much loved by her present congregation.
10. A gay man who has been together with his partner for 20 years and is now in a civil partnership. Has been in ministry for 30 years (aged 59) and is much loved by his present congregation.
11. A recently divorced man of 60 who has been out of ministry for the last two years and is looking to be in a different area of the country.
12. A minister for whom English is a second language. e.g. someone coming to the UK from Korea, with good ministerial experience, good English skills but an accent which is not always easy to understand.

(This list is not exhaustive so feel free to add to it.)

Get the groups to come back together and share their findings.

Exercise 4 – Ending Positively

Look at the Policy Statement and ask the whole group.

What positive actions can we take to reinforce this policy? Come back to the flip chart from exercise 1.

Closing Prayers

This material has been produced by:
Elizabeth Nash
Peter Henderson
Equal Opportunities Committee
February 2011

Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction

The United Reformed Church believes that all people are created in God's image and are loved by God. In his ministry Jesus showed God's love by his openness to all people, including those who were marginalised in his day.

Statement of intent

The United Reformed Church affirms its commitment to show the same openness to all people in today's world. It intends in spirit and in deed to promote equality of opportunity and diversity in all spheres of its activity and is committed to behaving as an equal opportunity organisation. It acknowledges that people are called to be diverse and lively, inclusive and flexible through the sharing of the gospel.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy Statement

Exclusion and discrimination can occur on many grounds including those recognised in law, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, marital status and disability. The United Reformed Church seeks to eradicate less favourable treatment in these areas by endeavouring to:

- Build inclusive communities where all will be treated with dignity and respect and have equality of opportunity to contribute their gifts to the common life;
- Identify and remove barriers to participation in employment, training, promotion, leadership and representation on church committees and in the attitudes and actions of every congregation;
- Take positive action to counter attitudes and practices contrary to this statement of intent;
- Define within the law when being of a particular religion or belief is or is not a requirement for any post within the church.
- Develop detailed policies to give effect to these requirements; and monitor and report on progress in fulfilling these requirements.

This policy is the overarching equality and diversity direction of the United Reformed Church and should be read in conjunction with The United Reformed Church's declaration that it is a multicultural church and its equality policies on employment, church activities, membership, committees and councils.

Adopted by Mission Council 2006 and reported to General Assembly 2008



Ministries Committee Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-committee

Resolution

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly adopts the amendments to The Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration as detailed below.

1. General Assembly 2010 approved the following as the principles governing the ministerial working week:
 - a) there should be more clarity in defining working hours;
 - b) the working week, translated into hours in a four week period, is recommended to be not less than 160 hours and not more than 192;
 - c) a note on the working week should be included in the Plan for Partnership and the rationale for the working week, set out as supporting text for this resolution, should be available on request from the Ministries office.
2. The Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee meeting 18 June 2009 agreed that, as the Overseas Recruitment Programme ended some years ago, the second paragraph of Appendix C – Removal Costs be deleted.
3. Mission Council is asked to consider two further clarifying amendments as follows:
 - revise the wording of existing para.7.2 and set out the holiday provision for part-time ministers;
 - Appendix B – Housing Allowance Guidelines Note to include the reference for ministers serving in Scotland that both Council Tax and Water Rates should be paid directly by the local church.

The proposed amendments are set out below. Insertions are shown (*italics*) and deletions are shown [**bold**].

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

1. (7. **MINISTERIAL WORKING WEEK**

The 2010 General Assembly resolved that there should be more clarity in defining working hours and recommended that the ministerial working week, translated into hours in a four week period, should be not less than 160 hours and not more than 192 hours.)

Re-number paragraphs 7 - 10 to read 8 – 11

2. APPENDIX C – REMOVAL COSTS

The receiving local church is responsible for paying the costs of removal (see para 6.3.3). Where the removal is within the United Kingdom reimbursement of up to 50% of the cost incurred (subject to a maximum reimbursement of £1,500) is available from the Ministry and Mission Fund and application should be made via the MoM Office. Where a minister/CRCW is called from abroad reimbursement from that Fund to the local church will be based on the removal costs from the port of entry.

[For ministers/CRCWs called to the URC under the Overseas Recruitment programme in conjunction with the Ministries Committee, 75% of the cost of removal of themselves, their families, and their baggage from abroad to the pastorate in the UK, up to a maximum of £2,000, will be reimbursed from the Ministry and Mission Fund. A similar reimbursement will be made for their return on termination provided that the period of service has continued for more than three years.]

3. 8. HOLIDAY ENTITLEMENT

8.1 Ministers/CRCWs are entitled to 5 weeks holiday in each calendar year and one further Sunday away from the pastorate. When a minister/CRCW only serves for part of a year the holiday provision should be pro rata. One week of holiday may be carried forward to the following year. Holiday entitlement is not affected by sick leave, parental leave, Jury Service, in-service training courses or sabbatical leave. Such periods of leave/absence may result in more than one week's holiday being carried forward into the following year.

8.2 If a minister/CRCW resigns(/retires) from a pastorate or post **[immediately following any such period of leave/absence,]** stipend should be paid for any outstanding holiday entitlement untaken at the date of resignation(/retirement), which may include outstanding holiday entitlement from the previous year, always provided that Synod concurs with the arrangements. *(For part-time ministers untaken holiday will be calculated based on the proportion of stipend paid).*

APPENDIX B - GUIDELINES FOR HOUSING ALLOWANCES

2. Allowance specifically 'in lieu of manse accommodation'

When calculating housing allowances the following should be taken into consideration:

- i. rates (where payable), Council Tax
- ii. water/sewage charges
- iii. interior and exterior re-decorations (estimated yearly average)
- iv. repairs (estimated yearly average)
- v. property insurance.

Note: The reference above to Council Tax (*and Water Rates*) does not apply in Scotland where (*they are*) **[Council Tax is]** the responsibility of the local church even if the minister/CRCW owns the property.



The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund

Resolution

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, agrees to the changes to the rules of the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund as detailed below.

Resolution of the General Assembly of the URC to amend the rules of the Fund relating to:

- (i) statutory debt arrangements;
- (ii) deleting an obsolete cross-reference under Rule 26.2 (Commutation of Pension);
- (iii) the interaction of Rule 43 (Overriding Tax Rules and Maximum Benefits) and the Schedule to the Rules; and
- (iv) the transfer-in of benefits to the Fund.

Background

- (A) The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund (the "**Fund**") was established by an interim trust deed dated 29 May 1980 between the United Reformed Church (the "**URC**") acting by signatories duly authorised by General Assembly of the URC (the "**Assembly**") to execute the deed and the United Reformed Church Trust to provide retirement and other benefits for Ministers and other employees of the United Reformed Church.
- (B) The United Reformed Church Ministers Pensions' Trust Limited (company number 02821011), the trustee for the time being of the Fund (the "**Pension Trustee**").
- (C) The Fund is currently governed by a trust deed and rules amended and approved by the Assembly 1993, as further amended (the "**Trust Deed**" and "**Rules**").
- (D) Under Rule 34 (Alteration of Rules), the Rules of the Fund (and any other rules made pursuant to that power) may subject to certain restrictions set out in Rule 34, from time to time be revoked, added to, or altered by the authority of the Assembly but no such change shall be made until a report on its financial effect on the Fund has been obtained from the Actuary.
- (E) The Assembly of the URC wishes to amend the Rules of the Fund as set out below and does not consider that any of the restrictions in Rule 34 are infringed by these amendments.

- (F) All changes made by this resolution, save in respect of the proposed amendment to include Rule 28A (Transfers from other pension schemes and arrangements), shall take effect from the date of this resolution. The amendment to include new Rule 28A (Transfers from other pension schemes and arrangements) shall take effect on and from 6 April 2006. However, where any transfers may have been received into the Scheme before that date, the Pension Trustee shall be regarded as having operated as if the terms of new Rule 28A applied to those transfers and shall provide benefits (or continue to provide benefits) in respect of those transfers as if they were subject to that Rule even though those transfers may have been received into the Scheme (and benefits may be payable from the Scheme in respect of those transfers) by operation of some other legal duty to which the Pension Trustee was subject at that time.
- (G) In accordance with the requirements of Rule 34, a report on the financial effects on the Fund of the Rule amendments set out below has been obtained from the Actuary.
- (H) The amendments set out below are not "regulated modification" within the meaning of Section 67A(2) of the Pensions Act 1995 (the subsisting rights provisions: interpretation).
- (I) Capitalised words and phrases used below but are not defined have the meaning given to them in the Trust Deed and Rules.

Rule Amendments

1. In exercise of the power under Rule 34, the Rules of the Fund are amended by authority of the Assembly from the date of this resolution by the insertion of a new Rule 50 as follows:

"50 Statutory Debt Legislation
 The Pension Trustee may enter into any arrangement it thinks fit to modify any amount that might otherwise be treated as a debt due from a Participating Body under Sections 75 and 75A of the Pensions Act 1995 (deficiencies in the assets) and any regulations made under those sections (the "**Statutory Debt Legislation**"). However, the modification cannot reduce the amount of any debt to less than £10. The Pension Trustee may enter into an arrangement under this Rule before, on or after the time as at which the debt would otherwise have been calculated and certified. However, the arrangement must comply with the Statutory Debt Legislation and the Pension Trustee must comply with the Statutory Debt Legislation when entering into the arrangement."
2. The Assembly resolves that the Pension Trustee may exercise the power under this new Rule 50 regardless of whether the time as at which the debt would otherwise have been calculated and certified is before, on or after the date of this resolution. However, the Pension Trustee cannot exercise this power if the time is before 6 April 2008 (which is when the Statutory Debt Legislation were amended expressly to allow arrangements of the kind to which this new Rule refers).
3. In exercise of the power under Rule 34, the Rules of the Fund are further amended by authority of the Assembly **with effect on and from the date of this resolution** as follows:
 - 3.1 by deleting Rule 26.2 of Rule 26 (Commutation of Pensions), and

3.2 Rule 43 (Overriding Tax Rules and Maximum Benefits) is amended as marked in double-underline and strikethrough below:

"43.1 The Schedule hereto has effect as part of the Rules and sets out the Tax Rules and the Inland Revenue Limits on benefits that apply to the Fund.

43.2 The benefits payable under the Fund shall in no circumstances exceed the Inland Revenue limits set out in Part II of the Schedule to these rules but nothing in Part II of the Schedule shall operate to increase any of the benefits or entitlements conferred under any of the provisions of the rules and shall not operate to confer any benefit or entitlement not thereby granted."

4. In exercise of the power under Rule 34, the Rules of the Fund are amended by authority of the Assembly **with effect on and from 6 April 2006** on the basis described in recital (D) above by inserting a new Rule 28A after Rule 28 (Transfer to Other Churches) as follows:

"28A Transfers from other pension schemes and arrangements

The Pension Trustee may accept a transfer of assets or surrender value in respect of any person from another pension scheme or arrangement and will provide such benefits consistent with the Fund's tax status as a registered pension scheme under Part 4 of the Finance Act 2004 and with the requirements of Part IV of the Pension Schemes Act 1993 as the Pension Trustee determines to be appropriate after considering the advice of the Actuary."

This resolution is signed by the following persons having due authority to sign this resolution for and on behalf of the Assembly

.....

[Moderator of the General Assembly]

.....

[Clerk of the General Assembly]



Ministries Committee Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee Pensions Executive

Resolution

Mission Council supports the recommendations set out in the document *The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund, Proposals for Change* and asks the Pensions Executive and Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee to arrange a consultation with the members of the Fund, and a discussion within the councils of the church, in order that the General Assembly can make a decision on the matter 2012.

The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund (URCMPF)

Proposals for change

In the light of the deficiency arising in recent valuations of the Fund the Pensions Executive has been considering whether any changes should be made to the benefit structure of the Fund, and if so what these should be. This paper summarises the conclusions of the Pensions Executive which are endorsed by (MoM/Ministries). It should be noted that these proposals are based on our current understanding of the funding position and if accepted would be incorporated into the next valuation of the Fund on 1 January 2012 with a view to amending the Rules at General Assembly in 2012. Should that valuation reveal an unfavourable result compared to our expectations then further changes may need to be brought to Assembly. It should further be noted that some of the proposals are subject to a further consultation with Fund members which could lead to additional revisions.

1 Introduction

The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund has fallen into deficit in recent years through a number of factors. The principal ones being an improvement in the life expectancy of our ministers, which whilst welcomed does represent a greater pension cost as pensions are paid longer, disappointing investment returns over recent years as the economic situation has deteriorated and the need for greater reserves to be held to satisfy a regulatory view of prudence.

We are not alone in facing these challenges and they are being addressed in different ways by all the major denominations in the UK, as they have been by many of the country's private sector employers and latterly by the government as an employer.

2 Over-riding context

In the light of General Assembly's recognition of the Church's responsibility towards its ministers and CRCWs and its continuing tangible expressions of support for ministers to be provided with stipends, pensions and housing at an adequate level we have assumed that this will continue to be the case.

3 Method of pension provision

In the private sector to meet the challenges of funding pension schemes many pension arrangements have now been established on a money-purchase basis. Whilst this limits the contributions to a known amount it transfers risk to individuals and so the deficiencies that we have faced as a Church by reference to improvements in longevity and stock-market fluctuations, are borne by the individual. This does not guarantee that an adequate pension can be provided. The Church's obligation is to care for its ministers unlike those private sector employers whose duty also includes improving the position of shareholders as well as their obligations to their employees. Whilst we have considered other models of pension provision we have concluded that the present approach of providing a final salary pension scheme remains the most equitable and cost effective way of providing adequate income to our ministers and their dependants at a time when they are unable to support themselves. ***We, therefore, at this time recommend the retention of the current scheme.***

This means that a minister retiring after a full career in ministry (say 40 years) will receive a pension from the URCMPF of 50% of stipend together with a state pension comprising the basic state pension and the additional state pension. Allowing for housing we believe that this will aim to provide a total net retirement income after also allowing for tax, national insurance, pension contributions etc. of between 85% and 90% of pre-retirement disposable income. Whilst the Government at the time of writing has not clarified its intentions going forward it seems probable that changes will result in a reduction of the state element in the longer term by say 5%.

4 Cost issues

Notwithstanding the comments above the Church does face cost pressures. Much of the URCMPF liability is in respect of current pensioners for whom benefits cannot be changed unilaterally. Similarly no change in benefits can be made in respect of service already completed by current members. The only changes that can be made are to the provision of pensions for new entrants to ministry and the Fund and for the future accrual of benefits by current members. We have looked at a range of options having regard not only to the cost issues but also to the needs of the Church and those likely to have meaningful financial impact are discussed in the following sections.

5 Accrual Rate

The pension entitlement currently accrues at the rate of 1.25% (one eightieth) of stipend for each year of membership, leading to a pension of 50% of stipend after 40 years of ministry. We have considered whether this should be reduced but have concluded that the income replacement ratios described in 3 above represent a fair interpretation of the Church's obligations to its ministers. Whilst this may need to be reviewed in the future depending upon the level of State benefit and/or the Church's financial capability we have concluded and hence ***we recommend that no change should be made to the accrual rate at this time.***

6 Pension Age

The concept of a set age of retirement has now largely disappeared as the government no longer permits (*current pension regulations before parliament*) the compulsory retirement of employees at a specific age. Nevertheless the availability of pension income will remain the main driver behind the individual's choice of a retirement age.

Both the state and non-state pensions have seen the effects of rising longevity. We have seen an increase in the life expectancy of ministers retiring at age 65 of perhaps 8 years over the existence of the URC. Not surprisingly this has proved to be a significant additional cost. The state retirement age is now due to increase for both sexes to 66 by 2020 and currently to 68 by 2046. It is our view that increase to age 68 will occur much earlier. It will certainly be at least that for younger entrants to ministry going forward.

In the past the Church has not slavishly followed the State in its Pension Age and there is no necessity to do so now. We have considered various possible pension ages for the URCMPF and have concluded that the most appropriate is age 68. This would only apply to future service and it would continue to be possible to retire at an earlier age e.g. 65 with a reduction being made in the future service element to reflect the fact that the pension will be payable for longer. This would have a minimal impact on the pension of ministers retiring in the next few years at the current age of 65.

It should be understood that the Pension Age is only the pivotal age at which benefits are calculated. As stated above there is nothing in these proposals which compels a minister to retire at that age. Under the rules a minister can retire either at an earlier age or at a later age with an appropriate adjustment to the pension payable.

For example, if we take the case of a minister who has 30 years membership at age 65 of which 5 years is after the date of change, then should the minister decides to retire at age 65 the pension calculation (using the current stipend of £ 23,232) would be

5 years at 80'ths	5/80 times £23,232 =	£1,452
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This would be reduced by some 18% as it would be payable for three years longer to give:

£1,452 times 82% =	£1,190
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plus

25 Years at 80'ths	25/80 times £23,232 =	<u>£7,260</u>
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Total pension	£8,450 per annum
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This may be compared with the current pension when no reduction is applied of £8,712 per annum.

Consequently *we recommend that a Pension Age of 68 be adopted for the accrual of benefits in the future.*

7 Ill-health early retirement

Currently the URCMPF provides a pension on ill-health based on full prospective service to Pension Age, so that, for example, an individual awarded an ill-health pension at age 40 with 10 years membership will receive a pension based on not just the ten years completed but also the 25 years that will not be served until age 65. The pension will similarly be payable for life.

Our current rules ensure that a minister is eligible for an ill-health pension if they are permanently unable to carry out the duties of a stipendiary URC minister or CRCW. There are provisions for the pension to be reduced or to cease if the member recovers. These eligibility rules are unfortunately difficult to follow and can be interpreted to the effect that in some rare cases ministers not in pastoral charge may not be eligible. We therefore propose to rewrite these eligibility rules for current members to make them clearer, there will be no change in their intent.

We do believe, however, that the eligibility rules should be tightened up in one respect. We believe that the URCMPF should not be required to pay an ill-health pension at the full level if the minister is able to carry out a different occupation. In practice we do not see this as materially different in intent from the present rule but will remove a perceived ambiguity. We propose this change should apply to future members only.

Whilst many ill-health retirements occur close to Pension Age a number occur within a relatively short time in ministry. We believe that it is in the interests of the Church that this particular benefit should reflect to a greater degree the experience of a stipendiary minister or CRCW within the URC.

We therefore propose that in the future this benefit shall only be calculated by reference to full prospective service once twenty years of service has been completed. Where less than ten years of service has been completed the pension would only be based on accrued service. For ill-health retirement at intermediate points a uniform sliding scale would apply, so that in the example above the ill health pension would be based on only the ten years served. If ill-health retirement occurred at age 45, i.e. with a further five years service, then a credit of half of the prospective future service would be given. In this case the pension would therefore be based on a service of 25 years being the 15 years completed and ten years being half of the future service. We also propose that in calculating the prospective service this will be not be changed but will continue to be calculated by reference to service to age 65.

This new formula will apply to existing members but they will also be provided with an underpin which will protect the accrued pension. The underpin will continue to be linked to stipend increases in the future and will be calculated as a proportion of the current full prospective pension. The proportion will be the ratio of service at the date the changes commence to the total service completed at the date an ill-health pension commences.

In relation to existing members at the date of change we also propose a further underpin that the ill-health pension will be subject to a minimum of the pension based on the current rules but with the stipend fixed at the level applying at the date of change. In this way there will be no diminution in the ill-health pension that would be payable to a minister retiring on account of ill-health on the day after the change. There would be a gradual reduction depending on service completed and the absence of future stipend increases applying to this underpin as time progresses.

Whilst this paper is primarily concerned with the Pension aspects of the Church's obligations, we note that there is a continuing obligation on the councils of the Church both locally and centrally to provide ongoing support and care to ministers to minimise the likelihood of needing to provide a pension on ill-health whilst also ensuring that in appropriate circumstances application for a pension is made.

We, therefore, recommend a modification to the rules covering eligibility for an ill-health retirement pension in respect of new members.

We further recommend a reduction in the amount of ill-health pension subject to an underpin for existing members.

8 Death benefits

In conjunction with the change of Pension Age to 68 there will be an improvement in benefit levels payable on death before age 68.

The Fund provides a lump sum on death in service before retirement of either two or three times stipend depending upon personal circumstances (three times if there are dependants). At present, therefore, a minister who remains in contributory service after age 65 continues to enjoy this benefit. This will continue to be the case.

The level of a spouse's pension payable on death in service is based on the prospective service of the minister to Pension Age. If the Pension Age increases then this pension will also increase.

We consider the levels of benefit currently payable as doing no more than meeting our obligation to ministers to care for their dependants should they die prematurely, hence we do not advocate a change in these benefit levels.

We note that the financial implications of the small improvement in benefits for an unfortunate few are equally small and that the improvements are a logical consequence of the move to a pension age of 68.

We therefore recommend no change in the calculation of death benefits, accepting the cost of the slight additional benefit to be provided on death.

9 Pension Increase after retirement

Our current rules provide for pensions in payment to increase each year by reference to the previous year's increase in the Retail Prices Index subject to a 5% maximum. This is broadly in line with historic legislation.

The government has amended the provisions surrounding state pension increases to reflect not the Retail Prices Index (RPI) but the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). It is generally accepted that due to both the composition of this latter index and its method of calculation the result will be a lower level of increases applying to pensions going forward.

Legislation is being amended so that it will be lawful for any scheme to calculate increases by reference to CPI rather than RPI as at present.

Whilst the legislation is, therefore, permissive it is not over-riding. Each pension scheme must abide with its own constitution and rules. In our case the present rule came into force as part of a previous cost reduction exercise whereby each minister individually consented to the change and the provisions are hard-wired into our rules. Our legal advice is that we cannot change this for current members. In any event we consider it appropriate to seek to maintain an adequate pension throughout retirement and are therefore not of a view that we should seek to curtail this benefit.

10 Pensions increases between leaving the Fund and reaching retirement age (Deferred pensions)

Similar to increases to pensions in payment the government has introduced legislation changing the increase we must provide over this period to retirement to be calculated by reference to CPI rather than as at present RPI.

In practice we have relatively few deferred pensioners, representing less than 3% of our liabilities. Should any deferred member return to active membership of the Fund there are provisions in our rules permitting previous periods of membership to be re-instated, as they invariably are.

Unlike the case of pensioner members our rules are hard-wired in the opposite direction so that if we do nothing we will need to use CPI going forward.

Considering the points above we recommend that no action be taken in respect of Deferred pensions, in consequence the new legislative minimum will apply.

11 Contributions

Following each of the last two valuations the Church has asked active members to increase their contribution to the Fund. This has been to share the cost of the improving longevity which directly benefits members between the Church and serving ministers. A consequence of raising the Pension Age will be that such contributions are payable for a longer period. In view of the proposed increase in Pension Age we have considered whether a corresponding reduction should be made to the members' contribution rate.

We have concluded that since the financial effects of the proposed change in Pension Age will only gradually be reflected in members' benefits, and in view of the continuing financial pressures on the Church that it would be inappropriate to adjust members' contributions for this reason as part of this review.

Similarly we have considered whether it would be appropriate to recommend an increase in members' contributions to more adequately reflect the value of the pension and to share the cost to a greater extent with the Church. At present members contribute at the rate of 7.5% of stipend compared to almost 25% of stipend being contributed by the Church.

We have concluded that a further increase should not be recommended at this time but that this may need to be re-visited depending upon the results of the next actuarial valuation.

We therefore recommend no change be made to the members' contribution rate.

12 Membership

Following a previous review driven by financial pressures it was decided not to permit membership of the Fund to ministers over the age of 55 at the date of entry. This was done since it was perceived that pensions cost more the older one is. Instead of providing scheme membership a contribution of 10% of stipend has been made to personal pension arrangements in the few cases to which this applied. The government has now introduced legislation whereby we must provide a pension arrangement of a suitable standard for every minister over the age of 22. Our present arrangements for mature entrants will therefore need to change.

We believe it is appropriate to allow such late entrants into stipendiary ministry to enter the Fund in the normal way. In so doing we;

- Meet our obligation set out in 2 above, which the present approach does not
- Reduces discrimination on the grounds of age
- Recognise the changes in work practice whereby a default set retirement age no longer applies
- Reduce the administrative burden (and associated cost) on the Church of running another pension arrangement.

We, therefore, recommend that the Fund admission policy be revised so that membership is available to all stipendiary ministers/CRCWs, regardless of age.

Existing ministers who have not been admitted because of age would be permitted to enter should they wish for their future service. No credit would be given for historic service covered by their personal arrangements.

13 Financial Implications

As discussed above the proposals do not in any way affect benefits which have already accrued to serving ministers or pensioners. The Fund deficit is in respect of such accrued benefits and hence the proposals have a negligible effect on the deficit.

Financial savings arise from the reduction in benefits for future service primarily in respect of the proposed change in Pension Age.

We are advised by our actuary that the proposals above will lead to a reduction in the annual contribution made by the Church to the Pension Fund in the region of £300,000 - £ 350,000. This is a reduction of some 10% in the Church's annual contribution to the URCMPF.

14 Conclusion

Whilst we are aware that more radical proposals could have been made to the nature of the scheme, the retirement age or the accrual rate, we believe the above proposals are appropriate at the present time. In particular we believe that they provide a way to reduce the Church's contribution to the Fund whilst continuing to meet the Church's moral obligation to care for its ministers when they or their dependants are not in a position to care for themselves.

We accept that it may be necessary to carry out further reviews in the future but commend the results of this review to Mission Council for their further consideration.

Pensions Executive, 10 March 2011

Summary of recommendations

1. **The retention of the current scheme.**
2. **No change should be made to the accrual rate.**
3. **A pension age of 68 be adopted for the accrual of benefits in the future.**
4. **A modification to the rules covering eligibility for an ill-health retirement pension in respect of new members.**
5. **A reduction in the amount of ill-health pension subject to an underpin for existing members.**
6. **No change in the calculation of death benefits.**
7. **No action to be taken in respect of deferred pensions, in consequence the new legislative minimum will apply.**
8. **No change be made to the members' contribution rate.**
9. **The Fund admission policy be revised so that membership is available to all stipendiary ministers/CRCWs of the URC, regardless of age.**



Listed Buildings Advisory Group

1. Convenership

At the November 2010 meeting of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group, Hartley Oldham, who had convened the Group since 1994 indicated his wish to retire from the position. Noting that he had led the group with distinction since the introduction of the Ecclesiastical Exemption scheme, the Group expressed its warm appreciation: 16 years represented a substantial piece of service to the group and for the United Reformed Church.

The group resolved to nominate Peter West to Mission Council for appointment as Convener of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group.

2. United Reformed Church Control document:

a. Procedure

Currently the procedure states:

5. Lodging and Processing of the Application

5.1 In order to apply for consent for the carrying out of any Works under this Statement of Procedure, the applicants shall:

5.1.1 Submit to the Secretary of the S.P.C. a completed application form in Form 1 and

5.1.2 At the same time deliver to the Secretary of the L.B.A.C. a copy of the completed application form, together with copies of all necessary designs, photographs, reports and documents giving particulars of the proposed Works and

However, in light of changed government policy which required pre-application consultation in all listed buildings applications, paragraph 5.1 should be deleted and the following inserted:

5.1 In order to apply for consent for carrying out of any Works under this statement of procedure, the Applicants, after the necessary pre-application procedures shall:

b. Appeals

The procedure governing the operation of the Ecclesiastical Exemption arrangements for listed church buildings contains a procedure for managing appeals against Synod decisions.

Currently the appeals procedure states:

“4.4. The name and address of the Appeals Secretary shall appear in the Annual Church Year Book and on the Church’s website. “

This formulation is proving inflexible in practice and it is proposed that the paragraph be extended to read:

“4.4. The name and address of the Appeals Secretary shall appear in the Annual Church Year Book and on the Church’s website, or failing that from the office of the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church.”

3. National Synod of Wales: Withdrawal from Ecclesiastical Exemption

The Listed Buildings Advisory Group has noted with regret the decision of the National Synod of Wales to withdraw from the Ecclesiastical Exemption arrangements.

4. The disposal of fittings, furnishings and other historical objects from churches

The group understands that the United Reformed Church, unlike other organisations with similar responsibilities, has no protocol guiding the disposal of objects of historical significance from churches, after appropriate research and record-making. These could include communion silver, war memorials or furniture, some of which may have intrinsic value, others historical significance.

They note this as a matter of concern, and propose to consider how local churches might be supported in appreciating the historical significance of such objects, and in making suitable records before disposal.

5. General

The Listed Buildings Advisory Group which normally meets twice a year continues to co-ordinate a common approach within the United Reformed Church to the application of Ecclesiastical Exemption. Its officers and other members provide the link between the Church and other organisations, in particular English Heritage and the Department of Culture Media and Sport ensuring a two-way transmission of information, to the benefit of the churches.

The time is right to formalise the Group’s role and adopt terms of reference which recognise the developing prominence of heritage matters in the life of the Church and in public life generally. The proposed Terms are attached. (Annex A)

Mission Council is invited to:

- Note the retirement on 23 November 2010 of Hartley Oldham from the position of convener of the Listed Buildings Advisory Committee after sixteen years outstanding service to the Group.
- Confirm the nomination of Peter West for appointment as Convener with effect from 23 November 2010 (this will be dealt with in the Nominations Committee Report)
- Confirm the changes to the United Reformed Church Procedure for the control of works to buildings detailed at 2 above.
- Confirm Terms of Reference for the Listed Buildings Advisory Group as set out at Annex A.

Annex A

The United Reformed Church
Listed Buildings Advisory Group

Terms of reference

Listed Buildings Advisory Group

As a group accountable to Mission Council:

Role

- To advise Mission Council and Synods on operational matters relating to the Ecclesiastical Exemption, with particular reference to The Ecclesiastical Exemption (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (England) Order 2010 or any subsequent re-enactment or variation thereof.
- To enable representatives from all Synods in England and Wales to meet together to co-ordinate a common approach to the application of the Ecclesiastical Exemption.
- To provide a platform for dissemination and discussion of information provided by English Heritage and other heritage bodies related to historic places of worship.
- To advise Mission Council, Synods and churches generally on matters relating to historic church buildings.
- To represent the United Reformed Church in discussions and negotiations with government and public bodies and other exempt denominations, including appointments to Heritage Groups and Forums.

Officers

1. **Convener.** The Convener will be appointed by the Mission Council on the recommendation of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group. Appointments will normally be for a term of three years; two successive terms being normally the maximum that may be served.
2. **Secretary.** The Secretary will be appointed by the Listed Buildings Advisory Group from within its membership. Appointments will normally be for a term of three years; two successive terms being normally the maximum that may be served.

Membership

Membership of the Group is open to the following persons:

- The Chairman/Convener and/or Secretary of the Listed Building Advisory Committee and Committee members from each Synod

- The Synod Property Officer and/or Trust Officer from each Synod
- Any Consultant (Legal or Technical) appointed by the Group
- A representative appointed by Mission Council and/or the General Secretary of the United Reformed Church.

It is anticipated that at least one representative of each Synod will attend each meeting.

Quorum

The quorum of the meeting will be representatives of 5 Synods.

Frequency of Meetings

The Group will normally meet twice a year, which might include a guest speaker. Between meetings information will be sent to members of any developments, information, issues of concern or papers requiring consultation via electronic communication.

Proposed change for seeking consensus and agreement

- Do we have consensus on this?
 - **If all orange** – I declare we have consensus
 - **If some blue** – Has your point of view been heard? Would anyone like to speak to explain their concerns?
- **When all have spoken and no one wishes to speak**

We will show cards again. If you consider that your point of view has been heard, even if this resolution is not your first preference, then if you feel that you can agree to consensus being declared as the mind of the meeting please show an orange card. If all cards are orange we will have reached consensus.

If you do not agree, please show your blue card. We do not wish to press you to show orange if you feel it is not right. If there are blue cards I will then invite you to record your objection, so that we can proceed with what is the general mind of the meeting and declare an agreement. You may then bring your name to the minute taker at the close of this session

 - **If all orange** – I declare we have consensus
 - **If some blue** – I declare that this is resolved by agreement. Those who choose to do so may record their objection by giving their name to the minute taker at the close of the session
- **If there is neither consensus nor agreement**
 - Adjourn the discussion to report back to Council/Committee later
 - Ask a group to do some more work on it.
 - Only if it is urgent move to majority decision.

Consensus decision-making in the United Reformed Church: a review of experience to date with some recommendations for the future



Pauline Barnes and Elizabeth Nash
(current and immediate past consensus advisors)

February 2011

- ▶ Check with minute taker that the correct wording is on the screen – including changes
- ▶ Try one of the following:
 - A few minutes of quiet reflection
 - Prayer
 - Discussion in buzz groups
 - Refer to a small group to take the issue forward, either at next meeting or later in that meeting
 - Ask for a discussion on whether the issue needs to be resolved at this meeting
 - Summarise the views you have heard.

As we move toward consensus use these questions asking people to show their cards in response:

- ▶ Do we have consensus in support of this proposal?
- ▶ Do we have consensus not to support this proposal?
- ▶ If strong but not unanimous support:
 - Who supports this proposal?
 - Who does not support this proposal as your first choice but is prepared to accept it. Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by consensus?
 - Who is not prepared to accept this proposal? Do you accept that your views have been heard and that you agree to live with the outcome? Are you prepared to have the result declared by agreement? If so you may choose to record your dissent.
 - Who is not prepared to accept this proposal?
 - look for further possibilities
 - adjourn discussion to another time or place
 - ask a task group to do some more work on it
 - refer the issue to another council or group
 - decide the issue is unnecessary or inappropriate
 - declare there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity
 - Only if the issue is urgent move to majority decision.



Suggested wording to reflect back what you see in the card response

- There is not a lot of support for that point of view
- Those remarks were not very well supported
- There was quite a mixed response to that speech
- There is strengthening support for this direction but there is more work to be done
- Many people agreed with that speech
- There seems to be support for that possibility – can anyone offer a form of words that will help us to move forward taking these insights into account?
- There is a growing number of crossed cards so we need to move on from this discussion. Please show your cards to respond to the following questions:
 1. Are there any different and important points which we need to hear? (orange – there is more to hear; blue – we have heard the main points)
 2. Are you ready to make the decision? (orange – we are ready to make the decision; blue – we are not yet ready to make the decision).

Decision Session

- Remind everyone that only members of the council or committee may speak and vote
- 3 mins each speaker
- Announce the issue and call the presenters
- Invite speakers to queue at the microphone
- Encourage speakers to keep seeking a way forward that respects all contributors' opinions
- From time to time sum up what you hear to be the predominant view
- Call for speakers with a different perspective

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Introduction

We have been asked to bring together the experience of the URC with consensus decision-making since 2007. In that year General Assembly agreed that all decision-making (with the exception of certain specified matters) should start by using consensus procedures and encouraged other councils and committees to use them. We hope that this brief review will allow everyone involved in using consensus decision-making to see:

- the position the URC has reached,
- what immediate actions and practices will make good outcomes more likely whenever consensus decision-making is used,
- the questions we need to address in the longer term in order to extend good practice and embed consensus decision-making in the URC's thought and practice.

This document contains valuable practical information so we hope it will be distributed and used widely among the councils of the church.

A note on terminology:

We recommend using the phrase 'consensus decision-making', whereas in the past we have talked mostly of 'consensus'. The phrase makes it clearer that we are talking about the decision-making process, and gets round a tendency we have noted to speak of 'consensus voting'. In this document we use the abbreviation CDM for brevity. To make the document generally applicable, we have used the terms 'chair' for whoever is in direct control of the conduct of a council or committee session, 'presenters' for those introducing substantive matter on which a decision is to be taken, and 'participants' for those members of a particular council or committee involved in decision-making.

- Try to encourage a balance of speakers with orange and blue cards, although it is important to hear from those who have reservations or uncertainties or who wish to suggest changes.
- Look for other balances in the speakers. Call for a speaker with a different perspective, or ask for a young person, or a woman or ... Summarise what you have heard every now and then
- Pray
- Use buzz groups – share with your neighbour your views, questions and ideas
- If there is a wide divergence of views, invite everyone who wishes to join the facilitation group at a specific time and place to discuss this further and try to produce a resolution on which they can all agree. This should be done as soon as the Moderator feels that all the main issues have been raised. It does not have to wait for everyone to speak.
- When the discussion session is at an end (and it may come to an end because you have run out of time), sum up what you believe to be the mind of the meeting, including any changes to the proposals (if they were strongly supported) and ask for cards to check if you have summarised accurately.

Suggested wording when asking to see the indicator cards

- What is your response to that speech?
- Please show your response to that point of view
- Please show your indicator cards so that I can see your reaction to what has been said.

- After each speech ask to see the cards:
 - How do you respond
 - What is your response to that speech
 - Please show me your indicator cards to show your reaction to that speech
 - Then tell the participants what you can see.
- Treat all contributions as valuable, respecting different opinions. Be careful to be impartial at all times
- Be confident that the Holy Spirit is guiding the work of the meeting – if you are eager to discover the discerned outcome of the meeting, the meeting will respond expectantly
- If the discussion gets polarised or confrontational, encourage a few minutes of buzz groups or prayer with neighbours, to seek a way forward which is respectful of all views.

Information and Discussion Session

- Announce the business of the whole session including which reports are to be considered
- Call the presenters for the first item of business (they have 5 mins for presentation)
- Invite questions for clarification
- Explain that everything may be discussed, but in a later Decision session we will be determining specific proposals
- Ask speakers to queue at the microphones – anyone may speak, but encourage them to build on what has been said before; we are moving together towards discerning a common mind, not coming with a previously prepared speech. Speakers have 3 mins.
- Call the speakers to the microphone – it is not necessarily first come first served!!!! If speakers carry the card appropriate to their view, the chair will be able to make sure both supportive views and reservations, opposition and uncertainty are heard

Where we are

CDM is used by some but not all councils of the URC: Children's Assembly, FURY, General Assembly, Mission Council, some Synods, some Assembly and Synod committees and some church meetings for specific tasks such as calling a new minister. Where it is used, it may not be used for the conduct of all decision-making.

We have found CDM not to be a process that can be implemented with little thought or preparation, rather that it has to be worked at. Where meetings are infrequent and participants change frequently, it may be difficult to build up a body of experience in the workings of CDM. The result for some is that it continues to feel unfamiliar. Some individuals either do not want to implement CDM or feel uncomfortable with its workings.

The most common criticisms are that CDM takes too much time and is clumsy at the final point of decision-making when there are a very small number of people who do not favour the proposal. We would like to try to improve this and in the next section suggest two changes which we could experiment with to see if they make the process better.

Where CDM has been adopted and used consistently, there has been acceptance, even enthusiasm! Councils are not so confrontational as hitherto. CDM has provided a framework for dealing with complex and possibly contentious issues, such as human sexuality, while still retaining and, moreover, building community. CDM makes sense to younger participants who have not experienced majority voting as the only route to decision-making. Even where people are not necessarily at ease with the consensus procedures, CDM has allowed new and/or unexpected solutions to be found to some issues.

As we gain experience as a church, it has become apparent that there is a deeper layer of CDM to be explored beneath the surface processes which could be seen as just 'orange and blue cards'.

Several aspects have yet to be fully understood and appropriated. There is the underlying process of eliciting a wide range of views and listening respectfully to them all for the movement of the creator Spirit which lies within. There is also the need for every stage of planning of councils and committees to be carried out with CDM in mind.

We have come to understand what successful use of CDM looks like in the URC environment. When CDM is used successfully:

- It is energy-giving rather than energy-draining
- Communication amongst all participants and between the participants and the chair is helped by the environment in which the council takes place, or at least is not hindered by it. We include within ‘the environment’ both the spirit in which the council takes place and the physical conditions
- There is time to explore all the dimensions of an issue, the apparently positive and the apparently negative, but decision-making is not unnecessarily protracted
- All are encouraged and feel able to make a contribution to the discussion as it unfolds and are able to follow the course of the discussion
- Everyone feels that their views have been heard and understood
- The outcome (not necessarily consensus) is recognised by all, even if it is not their first choice.

We have some way to go in internalising consensus values and changing our procedures to embody those values to greatest effect. In the remainder of this document we suggest actions, practices and questions for consideration which will make a successful outcome more likely and which should help embed CDM values and practices in URC councils and committees. Our aim is have a church which is informed, confident and consistent in using CDM.

APPENDIX

Check List for Chairs

Beforehand

- Check that the agenda gives enough time for issues which may be difficult and need to be worked on outside the meeting and brought back later
- Check the resolutions to see if there are any which need a majority vote if consensus cannot be reached
- Think what methods may be useful for different discussions e.g. would buzz groups be useful?

For All Sessions

- Announce what the session is: Information and Discussion or Decision
- Announce if a majority vote will be needed if consensus cannot be reached
- Note time limit on speeches 3 mins – this is different from the procedure under majority voting, so it needs reminding and highlighting
- Explain the cards:
 - **Orange** – warmth towards an idea or argument
 - **Blue** – reservations, opposition or uncertainty towards an idea or argument.
 Only hold up one card at a time or those sitting behind you will think you are holding up the opposite colour.

of the meeting please show an orange card. If all cards are orange we will have reached consensus. If you do not agree, please show your blue card. We do not wish to press you to show orange if you feel it is not right. If there are blue cards I will then invite you to record your objection, so that we can proceed with what is the general mind of the meeting and declare an agreement. You may then bring your name to the minute taker at the close of this session.”

Questions for the longer term

- Consider what training should be available for chairs and participants and how this might be delivered
- Moderators of General Assembly have an important and visible role in making CDM work: at what stage is training most helpful for them?
- Consensus procedures have been successfully used in local churches for calling a new minister. Could training in CDM for local churches be built round this specific use?
- Using CDM makes extra demands of a chair. Is there advantage in having training available in how to chair meetings as a precursor for more specific training in CDM? Or issuing good practice guidelines and checklists?
- Would a system of visual cues for use with all types of display system (PowerPoint to flip charts) help to embed CDM session types and other aspects of consensus procedures in our understanding? eg when we see a green triangle we know we're in an information session
- Would it be helpful for a wider group of people to offer ideas and ways to improve the way we do consensus? It should include those who are critical of it.

Recommended actions in the short term

Information

- Make the existing information on CDM (resolution to 2007 General Assembly and Consensus Procedures for the Councils of the United Reformed Church) easily identifiable and locatable on the URC website
- Add Check List for Moderators (appended to this document) to the URC website and make it easily locatable as above
- Include a reference to the location of this information with all agendas for councils and committees that use CDM at any point
- Build in to councils and committees a brief time to reflect on the processes used to make decisions (What went well? Even better if....?) so that we accumulate understanding about CDM
- Distribute this document to General Assembly Moderators, General Secretariat, Synod moderators and clerks, General Assembly Arrangements Committee, Committee convenors, relevant Church House and Synod staff.

Planning

- All councils and committees to consider CDM implications at planning stages
- Work with consensus advisor when deciding facilities needed and setting agenda for General Assembly and Mission Council
- In agenda planning, consider not just the 'what' but also the 'when', as this is important for effective CDM (eg timetable complex or contentious issues near the beginning of the council/committee so that there is time for further work, if needed, and a second opportunity for decision-making)
- In planning the conduct of each session, consider what kind of activities might help participants to hear and understand each other (eg be prepared for buzz groups or more extensive group consultations)

- Presenters to be made aware of 5 minute rule for their planning of presentations
- Those planning conduct of sessions to be aware of the kind of outcome needed by presenters (eg a majority vote may be needed if consensus not reached within a certain time limit; constitutional requirements in specified areas for a majority vote)
- Consider beforehand who out of those present may be able to act as CDM facilitators if needed.

Practicalities

- The physical set up for the council/committee to promote communication between chair, presenters and participants so that all can see and hear each other and be aware of the progress of the decision-making process
- Seating to be inclusive (no one marginalised from the main group or disadvantaged in the CDM process because of their position)
- Seating to allow discussion in small groups (if using tables, these must not be so big that people at the same table can't hear each other)
- Chair to be alert to possibilities of 'interest groups' becoming fixed in particular locations (with the result that small group discussion does not achieve its aim of allowing people to listen to a diversity of views) and be able to counter this
- Possibilities for break-out groups to be identified if these are likely to be needed
- Lighting and positions of chair and participants to allow chair to identify easily those wishing to contribute and to gauge easily the responses of the participants
- Everyone to be clearly heard by everyone else when making a contribution to plenary discussion
- Everyone able to move easily in order to access microphones
- Chair to be able to communicate with participants the progress of the discussion. A visual method, which can be easily and quickly updated, will help

- Chair and consensus advisor (if being used) to be able to communicate with each other easily
- Participants to receive indicator cards and voting cards (for use in majority voting) before the start of the council/committee
- Have means of timing contributions and someone to operate and communicate with chair and/or presenters/participants.

Procedures

- The Chair to explain clearly at the start of each session where we are in the process
- Using the Check List for Moderators which is appended to this document will provide a consistent model for the CDM process
- All contributions to be timed and limited to the announced timings
- Recognising that consensus procedures as we have operated them may tend to privilege those who oppose a proposal, we suggest that chairs make positive efforts to elicit all perspectives that support the proposal. This is an equally important part of ensuring that we really have heard all the views that there are
- The use of crossed orange and blue cards has been discouraged in some councils because they were wrongly used by some to indicate that a particular contribution was not valued. Their correct use is to show that participants think that it is time to move on to another perspective and to finish that discussion. We are now proposing to make use of crossed cards in all councils in order to improve the flow of discussion, stop it from becoming too protracted and maintain consistency of practice
- We have now produced a shortened version of the final part of the process for when there are only a small number of people who show a blue card. After checking that everyone has been heard we propose that the chair says the following and that there is a single showing of cards:
 - “If you consider that your point of view has been heard, even if this resolution is not your first preference, then if you feel that you can agree to consensus being declared as the mind



URC Ad Campaign

1. Progress at the advertising agency, ‘This is Real Art’

TiRA has now produced the artwork for six ads based on headlines approved by the steering group. Five of the ads are directed at the primary target group of people who need to be convinced that the church’s welcome includes them. One has been developed to address a secondary target audience: those who do not themselves feel excluded but would be attracted to a church that proclaimed and embodied the message of radical welcome. These poster-type ads will be adaptable for a variety of media, including merchandise, and in addition, TiRA will produce a film suitable for the internet. In rural areas where print or poster coverage proves problematic, local radio may be considered.

2. The brand

Over the months various people had said that to give high profile to the campaign as an exclusively URC project would be anti-ecumenical. It is not the URC that should be advertised, but the existence of churches which offer the welcome of God in Christ. The steering group considered this and felt that the ecumenical challenge would best be met by giving the initiative its own name and integrity, thus enabling wider ownership. This means that the URC logo does not appear on the ads. Instead there is a credit line reading, “An initiative by the United Reformed Church”. A discrete logo, look and name have been developed and these will appear on the ads. This leaves the door open to churches of other denominations who wish to join the campaign. It has meant that some LEPs have already felt confident to sign up.

3. Strategic Consultant

The Rev. Lucy Berry is a member of the steering group, the Communications & Editorial Committee and the Reform Editorial Board. She has a professional background in advertising and broadcasting and her expertise has been invaluable in developing the steering group’s brief for the campaign and liaising with TiRA. Over the months this involvement was taking up more and more of Lucy’s time. The steering group is grateful to the URC Finance Committee who authorised a grant from URC Legacy Fund to enable payment of a consultancy fee to Lucy. She is now putting substantial time into the campaign both as Strategic Consultant and Campaign Advocate. One of her priorities has been collaboration with the Communications Department to help with the designing and producing of materials and the integration of the campaign with the wider communications strategy of the church.

4. Internal launch

All of the synods allocated time at their March Synod meetings so that the campaign could be presented. This included unveiling of the brand and showing of the six ads. The Communications Department produced a PowerPoint presentation and an introductory DVD which have since been made available for church meetings. Copies of an introductory booklet for church members including pictures of the six ads and explanation of the rationale behind the campaign were posted to churches and synod offices.

5. Training materials

A group drawn from the Synod Training and Development Officers, Mission Enablers and CYDOs worked through the autumn under the leadership of the Rev. Fiona Thomas, Secretary for Education & Learning, to produce material for local churches as they prepare to offer the welcome promised by the campaign. Helpful, existing, preliminary resources have been identified which churches can begin to explore immediately. However, highly specific original material needed for profound conversations on the nature and extent of radical welcome (and the messages contained in the campaign) continues in development. Subjects such as “Remembering exclusion”, “Dealing with boundaries”, “What is inappropriate behaviour”, “Children’s radical welcome “and “Radical Jesus” are either finished or in development. Training materials echo the challenging themes of the ads to help deepen the understanding of local churches about the internal changes which may be required for them to live up to the gospel they proclaim.

6. Local church opt-in

The process of affiliation will look like this.

- a) Local churches need to understand and embrace the core values of the campaign. An introductory pack has been created including a range of resources to enable church meeting discussions.
- b) They also need a Companion, an ‘outside’ person whose role is to walk with the congregation and help them grasp clearly and prayerfully the challenges of being affiliated with the campaign.
- c) Participating churches need their own website (assistance will be given where necessary).
- d) Each church needs to engage with some core tools for development:
 - i. A discussion to identify what we value about belonging to *this* church.
 - ii. Discussions engaging with questions about ‘*Radical Welcome*’
 - iii. A facilitated workshop tackling the question of Boundaries
 - iv. Working through either ‘*Creating a Culture of Welcome*’ or ‘*Everybody Welcome*’
 - v. Receiving and engaging with feedback from a Mystery Worshipper
- e) The church needs to covenant to:
 - i. Continue practicing the values of radical welcome
 - ii. Continue to grow in the welcome they offer, asking “what can we look at next in order to continue developing?” This may involve such outcomes as working towards the “Child Friendly Church Award” or undertaking improvements to disability access.

Churches and their Companions will set their own routines and will travel at their own pace, pausing, if needed, to address the issues which exercise them most.

7. Take-up

As of this writing, 81 churches have requested introductory packs, either for discussions at their elders and church meetings. A few churches have already voted to become campaign churches and are beginning their preparations.

8. Companions and synod advocates

Each synod is asked to appoint one person to be the point of contact with the campaign. It will be through consultation with these contact people plus Training Officers, Mission Enablers, CYDOs and synod officers that potential Companions will be identified. Five sessions have provisionally been booked at Windermere for training of the first Companions.

9. Confidentiality

Thirty six ‘research & development’ churches participated in development of the campaign – thanks to each of them! On 28 November to 2 December 2010 two conferences took place at the Windermere Centre for presentation of the ads and opportunities to engage with training and worship materials. Alongside representatives of the R&D churches there were Training and Development Officers, Mission Enablers, CYDOs, and synod moderators and clerks.

The ads were shown to several other groups as well: a creative group involved in producing art and worship materials to enhance the campaign, the Communications and Editorial Committee, the Moderators Meeting, the Education & Learning Conference (December), and the staff at Church House. FURY Assembly was given a presentation on 29th January after they had passed a resolution affirming the objects of the campaign. The Youth & Children’s Work Committee was also brought into the circle of confidentiality in order that they could give support through the period of internal launch.

Throughout the internal launch it has been emphasized that the brand and the content of the ads must be held in confidence. A media leak prior to launch could significantly weaken the impact of the campaign. Gill Nichol, URC Media Officer, has given invaluable advice on this and other public relations issues. Media training will be given to those individuals designated by steering group to speak officially about the campaign.

10. External launch

The date for the external launch will be 9th January 2012. Although the steering group had preparations in hand for the September launch promised at General Assembly, there was a strong plea from the Training and Development Officers that local churches should be given more time to prepare. Gill Nichol also pointed out the public relations wisdom of a clear, uncomplicated New Year launch, rather than the split focus of a launch at Advent. This new timing allows for the completion of the three-year Vision4Life cycle before the campaign goes live.



Follow-up to ‘buildings opportunities’

[work commissioned by the October 2010 joint meeting of the Methodist Council and URC Mission Council in response to the report of the Church Buildings Think Tank]

Introduction

- 1) The 2008 Methodist Conference resolution 62/2 and Resolution 16 of the 2008 URC General Assembly directed the governance bodies to find out how the Methodist and United Reformed Churches could work more closely together to use resources more efficiently. This resulted in the Better Together joint meeting which took place in October 2010 between the Methodist Council and the Mission Council
- 2) In order to take the 2008 Conference resolution forward regarding buildings, the URC-Methodist Strategic Oversight Group commissioned a Think Tank which consisted of three representatives from each denomination with local and national experience in property matters to do work on:
 - how church buildings may best fulfil their role as places of worship and centres of mission;
 - how we can ensure our buildings are fit for purpose, especially in light of ‘Hope in God’s Future’; and
 - how we may become better stewards in handling the complex resourcing issues involved.
- 3) The buildings Think Tank began its work, and prior to the report being presented at the Methodist Council in October 2010, the URC reaffirmed its commitment to working closely with the Methodist Church, in particular on property matters, by instructing officers at the July 2010 URC General Assembly with the resolution:

‘...to explore the possibility of collaboration in the area of property advice to local churches’
- 4) The *Better Together* joint Council meeting received ‘Building Opportunities – Report of the Church Buildings Think Tank’ in October 2010. The two Councils agreed the resolution requesting the formation of a follow on group. This paper proposes that resources should be dedicated to set up the follow on group and sets out terms of reference for the group.
- 5) The resolution agreed by the Councils read:

‘The Councils call for the formation of a follow on group to facilitate the next stage of this work, following the dissolution of the Church Buildings Think Tank’.

Strategic Oversight Group

- 6) At the Strategic Oversight Group meeting in January 2011, the SOG agreed that a brief should be written for the buildings group following on from the buildings report for the April 2011 Methodist Council and May 2011 URC Mission Council for decision.

Terms of Reference & Membership for Buildings Follow on Group

7) **Aim**

The aim of the follow on group is to combine URC and Methodist expertise, creativity and resources to address issues concerning the use for the whole Church's mission of church buildings, recognising that they represent a major investment of capital, running costs and time.

8) **Vision**

In cases where a Christian community needs a building, it should serve effectively the Christian mission in the locality by being attractive, accessible and flexible, as well as being sustainable and efficient in terms both of financial and environmental implications.

9) **Objectives**

- Offer advice on joint mission audits as a way of preparing for possible sharing of resources locally, including the gathering of demographic and contextual information relevant to the mission potential of a church building and community partnerships that might be appropriate
- Explore a joint approach to property advice, including for Listed buildings and churches facing conservation area issues
- Resource volunteers locally to assist churches to see the potential in their buildings and to recognise when expert help is needed
- Provide material to assist good endings for buildings which have served their mission purpose
- Establish fora within the two denominations for collective discussion of current issues and best practice, drawing on the experience of the Methodist Resourcing Mission Forum
- To bring recommendations as necessary to the Methodist Council and the Mission Council
- To report to the two Councils in Autumn 2012

10) **Personnel**

- Members of the follow on group should consist of three individuals from each denomination with expertise in property, theology, research and project management from each denomination. The proposed URC members are Robert White, Peter Rippon and Fergus Urquhart.
- Administrative support would be provided from the existing staff teams of the two denominations.
- A three-year fixed-term Executive Officer post to support the group would be funded on an equal basis by the two denominations.

11) **Recommendations**

- 11.1 The Council accepts the Terms of Reference for the Buildings Follow-up Group.
- 11.2 The Council approves the principle of funding half of the three-year fixed-term Executive Officer post to support the Group.

Methodist Council Update

- 12) The Methodist Council met in April and considered a paper parallel in content to paragraphs 1-11 above.
- 13) A Resolution based on Recommendation 11.1 was passed.
- 14) Recommendation 11.2 presented more difficulty partly because at this stage little detail was possible but more particularly because at the same meeting the Methodist Council was reviewing once again the staffing at the Connexional Team office in Manchester that has historically dealt with property matters. After discussion it was agreed to support 11.2 but stressing the “in principle” nature and on the understanding that exactly how this commitment would be implemented in relation to the future Methodist staff posts would have to be subject to further discussion after the 2011 Methodist Conference has met in July.

Resolution

Noting the decisions of the Methodist Council at its April 2011 meeting, Mission Council:

- (i) **accepts the Terms of Reference for the Buildings Follow-up Group;**
- (ii) **approves the principle of funding half of the three-year fixed-term Executive Officer post to support the Group.**



Follow-Up to the “Better Together” joint meeting of the Methodist Council and the URC Mission Council in October 2010

Background

- 1) At the *Better Together* joint meeting between the United Reformed Church Mission Council and the Methodist Council in October 2010 the two denominations met together as a result of the resolutions that were agreed at the Methodist Council and Mission Council in 2008-9. The aims of the event were to promote fellowship and understanding, to explore mission issues of common interest between the Churches and to identify ways of working together on these issues in the future.
- 2) Engaging group discussions took place at the Joint Council on what the group participants thought were important issues that were facing the Church. These discussions provided the basis for ten follow-up workshops where the issues that participants said they were most interested in were planned as workshops. The workshop facilitators recorded the main feedback that they received about their workshops from the participants which helped in the analysis of the workshops.
- 3) At the end of the Joint Council, questionnaires were distributed to attendees that invited participants to rate their experience on the sessions that they had attended and asked them to comment on any other aspects of the event that they wished to. Once the Joint Council had taken place there was an opportunity to reflect on whether the aims of the joint event had been fulfilled and to examine attendee views on the first Joint Council between the two denominations. In order to analyse the event two papers were written entitled ‘Better Together Joint Council Workshops’, which examined the feedback given by workshop facilitators on feedback in their workshops, and ‘Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire’ which analysed attendee responses to questions regarding the event on the questionnaire. These papers are attached as appendices.
- 4) The feedback was mostly positive and some very enthusiastic with a number of requests for another joint meeting as soon as it could be arranged. Others were positive in principle but felt the format of the event was not as good as it could have been and that the discussions were too superficial and determined to be “nice”. They wanted to move to grappling more directly with some of the blockages felt locally that inhibited easy closer working for the sake of the Kingdom. The questionnaire and workshops feedback also highlighted reasons why a small minority of attendees did not want to have another joint meeting. Key reasons these attendees gave were they felt that the information presented to them was too basic as they already had knowledge of these subjects, there was not enough time to deal with each Council’s business in the separate sessions, and that they did not have enough opportunity to find ways of working together in the future. Most workshops received similar scores for usefulness, however the one area where participants thought more work is urgently needed is with regard to how our structures enable us to ‘lighten the load’ in order to make progress in joint work locally.

Strategic Oversight Group

- 5) The papers *Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire* and *Better Together Joint Council Workshops* went to the Strategic Oversight Group in January 2011 for discussion where the SOG discussed the feedback received from the questionnaires, analysis of ratings, workshops feedback, and the SOG's own views of the event. The reasons that attendees gave for not wanting to have another joint Council were carefully looked at. Open to learning the practical lessons from the 2010 meeting, on balance the SOG felt that it would definitely be beneficial to hold a follow-up event to the joint meeting in order to maintain the momentum on the issues that both Churches felt that they could successfully work on together, such as buildings opportunities and children and youth work. It would be important to address the reasons some attendees gave for not wanting to have another joint Council by looking at the level of information provided to attendees, the time allocated to Council business, exploring ways for both denominations to work together and giving more attention to implications for looking at local structures.
- 6) The SOG thought that a follow-up joint meeting between the two Councils should be held in autumn 2012 for the following reasons.
 - a) Holding another joint Council within two years would ensure continuity of personnel from the previous joint meeting to the follow-up Council.
 - b) A joint event would enable the two denominations to work more closely together, to use resources more efficiently and therefore enhance mission, as detailed in the Methodist Council and URC Mission Council 2008 resolutions.
 - c) Momentum would be maintained on issues that were of combined interest to both denominations such as Building Opportunities and Children & Youth Work which were presented and debated at the Joint Council.
 - d) Local structures could be explored further at a follow-up Council as attendees at the joint meeting felt that this subject had not been fully addressed.
 - e) The feedback given by attendees would be incorporated into the follow-up event in order to ensure a smoother running and better resourced event.

Future Joint Event Development

- 7) If the proposal of a follow-up joint Council were to be taken forward future developments to be considered include the following:
 - increased joint worship helping the churches to increase awareness of God's presence and share God's love;
 - more time for interaction via discussion in workshops, providing the opportunity to debate issues of significance to both Churches where the diversity and unity on issues can be openly and honestly explored;
 - fewer and shorter presentations so that there would be more time for attendees to interact via plenary debate and group discussion;
 - a balance between decision making and information to ensure that attendees received relevant information on the projects taking place within the teams as well as enough time to deal effectively with Council business;
 - measuring the success of the event by including within any feedback questionnaires the event's objectives in order to assess how well the attendees thought that the objectives had been met.

Recommendations

1. The Council supports a proposal to hold a further joint meeting of the Mission Council and the Methodist Council in the autumn of 2012.
2. The Council agrees a planning group should be set up to facilitate the event and should include representatives of both Councils and the Faith & Order bodies of each denomination.

Methodist Council update

- 8) The April 2011 meeting of the Methodist Council passed resolutions that supported Recommendation 1. The Council made a suggestion for a date in October 2012; the present planned dates for Mission Council of 30 November to 2 December 2012 were not given to the Methodist Council.
- 9) The Methodist Council passed a resolution to support Recommendation 2.

Resolution

Noting the support from the April meeting of the Methodist Council, Mission Council:

- (i) **supports a proposal to hold a further joint meeting of the Mission Council and the Methodist Council in the autumn of 2012;**
- (ii) **agrees a planning group should be set up to facilitate the event and should include representatives of both Councils and the Faith & Order bodies of each denomination.**

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Better Together Joint Council Workshops

Appendix 2 - Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire

Appendix 1

Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Workshops Paper

See Appendix 1A for a list of the Better Together October Joint Council workshops

Introduction

- 1) At the Better Together Joint Council in October 2010 ten workshops were facilitated based on feedback given by groups which met earlier at the Council. The workshops consisted of a mixture of United Reformed Church and Methodist Church participants (with one senior participant from each of the denominations) who met to explore the key challenges facing the Church locally and denominationally. The themes that arose from the workshops were arranged into categories of recurring and emerging themes. A recurring theme has been defined as a theme that arose from the discussions on a number of occasions in the groups. An emerging theme has been defined as a theme that arose from the discussions that was not expected to have arisen.

Of the topics discussed, the evident recurring themes were: The Big Society, Leadership and Mission and Discipleship. The themes that emerged from the group discussions were: Ecumenism, Coalition Churches, The Role of Ministers, Overload of Work and Shortage of Leaders for Children & Youth Work.

Recurring Themes

- 2a) The theme that recurred the most from the workshops was The Big Society, in particular 'how to help Churches meet the challenges of the Big Society' which arose from the Finding the Missing Generation workshop, and 'how the local Church engages with issues around climate change and the government spending review', which arose from the How the Local Church Engages workshop.
- b) The workshops which focused on The Big society were: 'Big Society: an Opportunity?' and 'Big Society: how the Local Church Engages'. The key messages from these workshops were that finance needed to be available in order to support, implement and properly resource Big Society projects, focus needed to be placed on discipleship when exploring Big Society ideas, and locally, people should be encouraged to feel welcome in the space used for worship.
- c) Leadership was another recurring theme that was explored. At the Articulating and Communicating Faith SCC workshop the main points that emerged were the need for strong leadership whilst not encouraging a leadership that was driven from above, and the necessity for tools to be explored that would encourage strong leadership from the Church's leaders without leading to alienation of its membership. Galvanising the Church to act was discussed at the Growing Local Leadership IP workshop.
- d) Discipleship and the need for authenticity, resourcing people for Christian discipleship, were issues discussed at the Developing Ecumenical Local Visions FLEPC workshop. Mission Shaped Structures LLL produced discussion on discipleship with regards to equipping disciples and personal discipleship in any setting.
- e) The recurring themes of Discipleship, The Big Society and Leadership are interlinked. The Connexional Team's discipleship mission which is to 'enable the making of effective, purposeful and intentional Team decisions that support the wider Church in being and making disciples in the Methodist tradition', can be linked to The Big Society theme. The Connexional Team can demonstrate discipleship by showing how its decisions support the

wider Church. This can be done by communicating the message that the Connexional team is committed to tackling The Big Society through the third emerging theme, strong Leadership. The Reverend Alison Tomlin, President of the Methodist Conference, demonstrated her commitment to a version of The Big Society in her address to the TUC on 19th October 2010 when she said: “John Wesley, and the Methodist Church he founded, believe it is inconceivable to follow Christ and not have the welfare of the poor and the vulnerable close to your heart, and we are proud to stand beside others who share those concerns today.”

- f) Other recurring themes were: Mission, which highlighted the need for mission and purpose, discussed at the Articulating and Communicating Faith: SCC workshop, Finding opportunities to do mission outside Church resources, which was discussed at the Finding the Missing Generation workshop, and the importance of mission in the local Church in order to reduce poverty was a key point raised at the Spending Cuts a Bias to the Poor EIP workshop.

Emerging Themes

- 3a) The discussion on Ecumenism at the Realising Ministers’ Potential workshop highlighted the issue that ecumenism only seemed to work at grass roots. This is enlightening as promoting engagement or even unity between The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and other Christian Churches is defeated if unity between Churches is only fostered and promoted locally, preventing the knowledge and lessons learned between Churches from being translated into strategic implementation nationally.
- b) United Churches was an emerging theme that was highlighted during the Developing Ecumenical Local Visions FLEP concept workshop. The importance of this theme is that it relates to the discussion that emerged on ecumenism in the workshop detailed above. The main factor highlighted was that group participants felt that there were parallels between the forming of the Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition government, and the opportunity that this presented for forming coalition Churches. If the government was able to form a coalition that is committed to shared common interests and goals in order to better serve the electorate, this demonstrates that it is possible for the Church to form a coalition with other Churches that have common interests in order to better serve their congregations and engage with the public.
- c) The Role of Ministers was an emerging theme that came out of the workshop Growing Local Leadership IP. The discussion was centred on ministers training in order to successfully deal with the contemporary issues that the Church is facing. There was great awareness of the importance of galvanising the Church to act by showing confidence in the gospel and challenging society’s ideals.
- d) Other emerging themes were: an overload of work due to a focus on breadth rather than depth which emerged from The Big Society an Opportunity workshop and a shortage of leaders for children and youth work which arose from the Finding the Missing Generation workshop.
- 4) The workshops highlighted issues which were both key and of common interest to both Churches. On the basis of these discussions, key areas of focus should include: The Big Society, Leadership, Discipleship, Ecumenism, The Role of Ministers, Overload of Work and Shortage of Leaders for Children & Youth Work.

Appendix 1A

Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Discussion Groups

1. Realising Ministers' Potential
2. Developing Ecumenical Local Visions including Future for the LEP concept
3. Growing Local Leadership including the Inspire Project
4. Articulating & Communicating Faith: Speaking into Contemporary Culture
5. Finding the Missing Generation
6. Making Buildings Assets: Adapting Within the Rules
7. Mission Shaped Structures: Lightening the Load on the Local
8. Big Society: an Opportunity?
9. Big Society: How the Local Church Engages
10. Spending Cuts with a Bias to the Poor: Explaining Issues of Poverty

Appendix 2

Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Questionnaire Feedback Paper

Introduction

1. At the first Better Together Joint Council held in October 2010 between The Methodist Church and The United Reformed Church questionnaires were distributed to attendees to gather their overall feedback on the event. The Joint Council was attended by approximately 160 attendees, of which 87 attendees completed the questionnaire. 39 participants were from the Methodist Church, whilst 49 participants were from the URC. 47 participants were male and 40 were female. There were 55 lay and 32 ordained participants.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions which related to the joint sessions, workshops, worship, networking and event location with a section for attendees to provide comments. For questions which required attendees to rate their experience a scale was provided where the value attributed was: 1=least positive & 5=most positive.

The overarching feedback from the questionnaire was that most attendees enjoyed the opportunity to interact with each other and found the workshops were a useful tool in allowing discussion on issues relevant to both denominations.

Summary

2. The average scores were calculated for questions that required a rating from attendees. The average ratings are listed in **Appendix A**.
3. The average rating for the sessions/workshops from both Methodist Church and URC attendees was 3.4.

The average lowest rating for a workshop was Mission Shaped Structures which scored 2.6. This suggests that participants were not persuaded that the existing structures are as flexible as they wish.

The Big Society - an Opportunity workshop received the highest average rating of 4.3.

4. The session that received the lowest average rating was session 6, which included Ways ahead for Children & Youth Work and Building Opportunities, with an average Methodist Church and URC combined score of 2.9. The highest average rating for a session (excluding the question on individual sessions which scored 3.6) was session 3, groups exploring the key challenges facing the Church locally and denominationally, which scored 3.6.

These scores demonstrate that attendees valued the opportunity to discuss joint issues of interest in groups, but were less enthusiastic about the presentations on Children & Youth Work and Building Opportunities, mainly due to their length, as commented on in the feedback received from attendees.

5. The average rating for the sessions given by Methodist Church attendees was 3.4, and the average rating for the sessions given by URC attendees was also 3.4. These averages show that Methodist Church and URC attendees had the same experience overall as they gave similar ratings for the sessions/workshops.

The comments given by attendees in the final section of the questionnaire were divided into three categories which were: Event Format, Sessions/Workshops and Ecumenism. The main comments given by Methodist and URC attendees can be found in **Appendix B**.

Evaluating the comments from The Methodist Church and URC attendees in the comments listed under Event format highlighted similarities between the two organizations. Both denominations agreed that the programme was crowded and that there should be more adherence to the time-table.

In the comments listed under Sessions/Workshops both the URC and Methodist Church attendees agreed that they valued the group discussions/workshops. Both denominations felt that the presentations given were too long.

The comments listed under Ecumenism showed that both denominations valued the opportunity to interact with each other at the Joint Council, but felt that they would like to explore further ways of working together.

6. The feedback from questions that required attendees to respond by choosing between two/three options is provided in the table below.

The feedback highlights that the majority of attendees thought that the amount of worship was appropriate and enjoyed the style of worship. 18% of attendees thought that the event was too long, so whilst not a huge proportion, a number of people were dissatisfied with the length of the event.

Appropriate amount of worship	Ten attendees thought the amount of worship was not appropriate.
Style of worship	Twelve attendees did not enjoy the worship style
Length of event	Sixteen attendees thought the event was too long, five attendees thought the event was too short whilst 66 thought the length of event was just right.

Conclusion

7. In conclusion, the feedback received from attendees indicated that they welcomed the interaction between the Methodist/URC attendees, and would have liked to have had more opportunity to discuss issues relevant to both denominations, via the provision of more workshops at the Council.

Attendees felt that the differences between the denominations were not explored/challenged in order to identify common goals, whilst keeping individual identities, and wanted further ways of working together to be identified.

Appendix A

Average Ratings for Sessions/Workshops

Sessions/Workshops	Methodist Church & URC Average Rating	Methodist Church Average Rating	URC Average Rating
Individual Sessions	3.6	3.6	3.5
Joint Session 2	3.4	3.4	3.4
Joint Session 3	3.6	3.6	3.6
Joint Session 4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Joint Session 5	3.2	3.2	3.2
Joint Session 6	2.9	2.9	2.9
Joint Session 7	3.4	3.4	3.3
Joint Session 10	3.5	3.5	3.5
Releasing Ministers Potential Workshop	3.2	3.2	3.3
Developing Ecumenical Local Visions Workshop	3.5	3.5	3.2
Growing Local Leadership Workshop	3.4	3.4	3.4
Articulating & Communicating Faith Workshop	3.6	3.6	3.6
Finding the Missing Generation Workshop	3.3	3.3	3.3
Making Buildings Assets Workshop	3	3	3
Mission Shaped Structures Workshop	2.6	2.6	2.6
Big Society an Opportunity Workshop	4.3	4.3	4.3
Big Society – How the Local Church Engage Workshop	3.3	3.3	3.3
Spending Cuts – Bias to the Poor Workshop	4	4	3.8
Knowledge Learnt from other Denomination?	3.3	3.3	3.3
Valuable Opportunity to Network?	3.4	3.4	3.5
Happy with Event Location?	4.2	4.2	4.2

Appendix B

Methodist Church/URC Comments

Methodist Church Comments		
Event Format	Sessions/Workshops	Ecumenism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Thought given to not holding particular sessions in the evening if concentration is minimal at that time of the day ▪ Should be more adherence to time-table 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fresh Expressions, Children & Youth and Buildings presentations were too long with too much information ▪ Group discussions were valued ▪ Council should have been more challenging with concrete outcomes ▪ Strategy was missing ▪ Little time for debate during joint sessions ▪ Methodist sessions were rushed ▪ Helpful if all reports had recommendations in the summary/ section of report where they are all together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Good opportunity to meet with counterparts and sister denomination ▪ Not enough opportunity to find ways of better working together ▪ Joint meetings in danger of leading to ‘middle of the road’ resolutions

URC Comments		
Event Format	Sessions/Workshops	Ecumenism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not enough time to deal with Council business ▪ Programme too crowded, not space between sessions and meals) with no time for reflection ▪ Needed more time to debate the contentious issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would have liked to have attended more than one workshop ▪ Children & Youth presentation was too long ▪ Did not think consensus voting was helpful ▪ Joint sessions added little 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difference between Methodist Church and URC were not challenged ▪ Would like further specific ways of working together ▪ Unclear about purpose of joint meeting ▪ Not enough time to talk with each other



The Methodist Church & United Reformed Church Cross Representation – URC Observers at Methodist Council

Introduction

The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church made an agreement regarding cross representation at the Methodist Council and URC Mission Council, whose representatives are then co-opted onto the Strategic Oversight Group, at the December 2008 Mission Council and the February 2009 Methodist Council. The resolution stated that the cross representation arrangement between both denominations would be reviewed in 2010 which is what this paper sets out to do.

Background

- 1) At the 2008 Methodist Conference and the 2008 General Assembly Resolution 62/2 and Resolution 16 respectively were agreed in identical terms with a commitment to:
‘...work more closely together, using more efficiently the resources of the two Churches to increase our effectiveness in mission and outreach....’
- 2) The February 2009 Council Minute 09.1.12 (ii) stated that: The Council, responding to Resolution 62/2 of the 2008 Conference:
‘invites a representative of the United Reformed Church to be a regular observer at its meetings and wishes to appoint a Methodist observer to attend the Mission Council, with this arrangement being subject to review in 2010.’
- 3) The United Reformed Church decided that the observer at the Methodist Council should be one of the two Assembly Moderators elect. The agreed Methodist Church representative at the Mission Council was the then President designate. In order to provide clarity about succession, amendments to the terms of cross representatives for the Methodist Church are being proposed to parallel the Mission Council’s cross representation proposals.

Strategic Oversight Group

- 4) At the Strategic Oversight Group meeting in January 2011 it was proposed that the Methodist cross representatives should be based on every third President being the rep for three years from designation, ensuring that the cross representative would automatically be a member of the Methodist Council throughout their time on Mission Council. This would ensure continuity and communication.
- 5) The Strategic Oversight Group also proposed that the URC representative to Methodist Council should continue to be a post shared by the two Assembly Moderators, with a handover to their successors at the mid point of their two year term as Moderators and their successors’ terms as Moderators elect. Only one Moderator would attend any one meeting of the Mission Council.

Methodist Council Update

- 6) The April 2011 meeting of the Methodist Council agreed to the proposal in paragraph 4 above, but amending it so that the Methodist representative would be either the President (a Presbyterian) or the Vice-President (a Deacon or lay person) for the whole of the relevant three year term.

Recommendations

- a) The URC continue to provide a representative at the Methodist Council.
- b) The position of URC representative at the Methodist Council should be held by the Assembly Moderators/Moderators Elect, one of whom would attend any particular meeting. The two year term would commence one year before being inducted and would conclude after one year as Moderator.



ADD

a) Synod Resolution - Eastern

Eastern Synod wishes to raise concern over decision making in the URC and communication between Church House and the local church. The closing of the bookshop so soon after passing a resolution at General Assembly to keep it open, the Identity Campaign and the lack of opportunity to discuss it, and a change in the reporting of General Assembly to widespread use of CD technology are examples.

Resolution

Mission Council asks that decisions being made at Church House level be made with greater openness and clarity; and in consultation with Synods and local churches.

b) Resolution Re: Public Launch of the National Marketing Campaign

Although appreciating the main thrust of this campaign, that congregations be welcoming and accepting of all people, many people across the church have expressed deep concerns about it.

- 1) Firstly there has been a lack of consultation of councils of the church as it has been produced,
- 2) Secondly it appears to have altered from a marketing identity campaign which would promote the strengths of the United Reformed church solely to a 'radical welcome' campaign,
- 3) And thirdly whilst its benefits are uncertain, it holds serious potential for causing division and damage to the unity of our church.

Resolution

In light of the alteration of the marketing campaign from a 'marketing identity' campaign to a campaign solely of 'radical welcome', and in view of concerns raised about its negative and unbalanced content and its potential for causing damage to the unity of our denomination, Mission Council instructs the Steering Committee not to go ahead with the public launch of the national marketing campaign, until it is fully discussed both in concept and implementation by the councils of the church and then approved by Mission Council or General Assembly.

Moved by: Revd Dr Catherine Ball.
Seconded by: Revd Ruth Whitehead.

Mission Council resolutions regarding the campaign of radical welcome May 2011

Mission Council has been debating the URC's campaign of radical welcome; discussing the content and the implications of the campaign. During hours of debate, over three business sessions, during which many opinions were expressed, what came through was strong support for radical welcome and the desire that the campaign be the best it can be. Mission Council set up a small group to work alongside the steering group to help widen the reach of the campaign and to help our churches understand the campaign better.

Preamble to Mission Council's resolution on the URC's campaign of radical welcome

On behalf of the steering group a summary of what it had heard from Mission Council and what it needed Mission Council to hear, was offered. A précis of this preamble is below:

These things had been heard:

- a) that there was a groundswell of support for radical welcome as a worthy and exciting expression of the way of Jesus for our time, which had been reflected not only in the campaign but in several other items on the agenda;
- b) that the steering group needed to do better in communicating the theology and meaning of radical welcome to the church;
- c) that the training in radical welcome offered through the campaign would benefit every church, regardless of whether it chose to affiliate with the campaign;
- d) that there were concerns about the campaign as it had been unveiled, but that criticism had been offered in a spirit of, "We want it to be the best it can be";
- e) that there was a small number of people who rejected the campaign altogether;
- f) that Mission Council took seriously its responsibilities as steward of the CWM grant and protector of the church from division and therefore wanted to feel confident in the campaign, this being the reason behind proposals offered including requests for changes to the campaign;
- g) that concern around the campaign was not with the headlines but the body copy, with its assertion that only "radically welcome campaign" churches were Jesus-shaped and that gay people should be welcome on the basis of, "Love – no conditions apply";
- h) that there had been serious concern over the statement referring to "the sexuality issue" with its perceived exclusion of some churches from the campaign;
- i) that the possibility that radical welcome should entail sending visitors to a different church should be revisited;
- j) that work was needed elsewhere in the church on the question of eligibility for church membership;
- k) and that there were fears about finding enough volunteers to serve as companions to churches in training.

The steering group needed these things to be heard:

- a) that the number of responding churches had grown from 80 to 173;
- b) that the body copy could be changed
- c) but that there would be no compromise on the principle of radical welcome;
- d) that the campaign needed to communicate to its audience or it was not worth doing;

- e) that it was outward facing and that this might involve using wording that caused certain offence within the church;
- f) that they were voluntarily withdrawing not only the statement referring to “the sexuality issue”, but the website on which it had been posted;
- g) that instead a simply list of Frequently Asked Questions would be made available;
- h) that the steering group had not invented the sexuality issue and that it was urgent that it be addressed properly under the guidance of the Human Sexuality Task Group.

The resolution, as previously offered, with an amendment to paragraph 4, was presented to Mission Council. The wording for paragraph 4 was supplied by Elizabeth Lawson.

Resolutions agreed:

Mission Council agreed the following four-point resolutions.

Mission Council resolves to form a group that will:

1. Comprise a representative of Mission Committee, two representatives of Mission Council, one FURY representative and two Synod moderators, not involved in the Campaign Steering Group;
2. Work closely with the Steering Group, involving members in discussion about proposed ways forward;
3. Ask Synods for feedback from synods where possible, and from at least some of their local churches;
4. If, by 31st August 2011, the review and steering group have reached a consensus they may proceed to organise the campaign along the lines agreed by them, and shall arrange for the circulation of a summary of their conclusions to members of Mission Council. If there is no consensus, the groups shall notify the deputy general secretary of that, and the matter will go back to the mission committee to consider with a view to formulating proposals for the matter to be further considered by Mission Council in November 2011.

ends

19 May 2011