

Paper C3

Appendix: Further reflections and initiatives

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Marketing

Digital marketing is something that the URC could do more of, and there are consultants available who could help market the URC in general, *Reform* magazine and its products through the bookshop. The new URC Directory is also a superb tool in need of help, especially as most churches list their activities through it.

Video

The development of digital communications has made video incredibly popular – every minute of every day, 694,000 hours of films are watched on YouTube, and 10.4m minutes of films are watched on Instagram. Simply put, we could do so much more of it, and we could curate a lot more from other sources and share it on social media.

Talking Absolute Worship, Eco Congregation and others have been featured on our YouTube channels, which feed into the URC website, but with more curation, we could feature more, and generate more.

We've started a presence on TikTok and we have a valuable resource with Noah Brierley, son of the Revd Lucy Brierley, with 1.8m followers. With his father, renowned Christian presenter Justin, we could look at ways to increase videos and engagement.

We could also deliver sermons that are appropriate for the channel (less than a minute), share experiences, tell stories, enhance learning and support training.

Media relations

The United Reformed Church has a professional approach to media relations, and it is managed with safe and competent hands. However, its work is more reactive than planned.

The media does not actively seek out the opinions or comment from the United Reformed Church because it appears not to have anything relevant or newsworthy to say. Media don't understand the differences between the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the URC, and you always need to explain the difference. And even when you do, does anyone really care?

The last big story for the URC was enabling local churches to allow marriage for all if they chose to. (The URC's structure is that the local church makes the ultimate decisions for the life and mission of the church, and they invite ministers to serve, rather than top-down churches that place ministers and impose policy and polity.)

The Church needs to decide what subjects or issues fit with its mission build create media interest and enhance the public's perceptions, especially amongst potential members.

And when it does, then it needs to roll out a holistic plan – advertising/media, to items outside the church, inside the church, welcome teams and ministers/worship leaders. Campaigns will fail and people attracted to church involvement and membership will not be if one part of that fails.

Voice

There are many United Reformed voices but no media guide to help tell who can talk about what. Ann-Marie Nye is working on this and will deliver it later this year.

We train people in media relations, but it would be good to have a core team of senior, media savvy, on message, persuasive and engaging voices if the Church is to increase its public profile. And to explore what channels are possible. Look at the example of the Revd Kate Bottley – *Gogglebox*, *Songs of Praise*, *Steph's Packed Lunch*.

It is easier for the public at large to get to know a single personality, rather than a changing cast, but is this something the URC would feel comfortable with?

It would be great for a regular URC person speak on BBC Radio 4 Thought for the Day and BBC Radio 2's Zoe Ball Breakfast Show, as the Methodists have done recently.

The Movement for Reform Judaism is a small movement, but it has the confidence to punch above its own weight. It has spokespeople who are media savvy, takes every opportunity be heard, has points of view (and not just on Judaism, but importantly the issues of the day from a Jewish perspective) and is not afraid to express them.

Evidence suggests that if media is done well, then more opportunities will follow.

They also look at specific initiatives such as Eco Judaism and have the Rabbiting On podcast hosted by three female rabbis. A really clever title with decent content. How would we produce a long running series of podcasts and who for? We have dipped our toes in, but we need structure and help. A studio area in Church House would help produce these more quickly.

Printed resources

URC Publishing needs to continue to concentrate on producing core and essential publications that support the Church's strategic goals. This is supported by the URC Bookshop which will stock and sell other resources, such as books by URC ministers and others published by third party publishers, which are a 'nice to have' rather than a 'must have' resource for churches and members.

Procurement

Having brought a lot of experience from previous jobs, the Head of Communications reduced large print runs (in my first week when the yearbook order was going to be repeated despite sales going down year on year), avoiding wasteful print orders and unnecessary expense.

He also started to order fewer copies of publications and reviewed sales versus print orders, which hadn't been done strategically before.

Some books by others, such as *Praying the Way* by Terry Hinks, were ordered from third-party publishers, but not in great numbers, with a policy of buying small and reordering, rather than buying large amounts without knowing how well the sales might or might not be.

This has worked well: wastage has been reduced to a minimum, we break even on most items, make a small profit on the majority of them, and items that are remaindered are sold off or given away as incentives.

The publishing world has changed, so smaller print runs are now commonplace. Gone are the days of having to order thousands of books, That said, giving away books at the Christian Resources Exhibition and at Synods is not a bad thing. It helps promote the Church and informs and reminds warm contacts and members about who we are and what we do. And it drives people to find out what else the URC Bookshop publishes and offers.

- **See URC Bookshop Procurement Policy**

Free resources

The committee removed the costs associated with leaflets about the URC, *What is the URC*, a basic guide, and *Join the family*, a leaflet about membership. Both are free, apart from postage and packing, in packs of five. Talking to ministers and members revealed that they didn't want to pay £2.99 per pack!

We have distributed more than 50,000 leaflets, and feedback from ministers shows that people have become members because of these resources.

Resourcing local churches

Each local church is characterised by its people, locality, demographics, and socioeconomic factors. Essentially no one church is the same and its needs from the Synod and national Church will vary accordingly.

Communications and resources for these churches must reflect an understanding of the individual nature of the community. Bespoke communication solutions or resources for each church are not realistic given the cost and drain on resources but we could produce resources nationally to fit local situations.

For example, a prayer poster for those losing weight, so churches can put one up in the room where WeightWatchers meet. It is a connection between the local church and the group using the building, and a reminder about what the building does on Sundays!

Success is not just about knowing your churches and their members well, but also about the quality of the resources provided and how they are delivered by the communications team.

There are key areas where training and guidance on communications best practice can make a real difference, with programmes including topics such as:

- How to communicate effectively
- Working successfully with local media
- Becoming a local United Reformed voice.

The resources have to meet a real need, be fit for purpose, well written, well designed and well produced, otherwise churches will not use them. We also need to market them again and again, otherwise when someone searches for discipleship development, newer, non-URC resources, will appear above the ones that should be used by URCs.

Certificates

We also consulted about the dated and differently styled certificates, changing them to A4 individual certificates, with the same core design and brand, on parchment and foiled. The cost is higher but a pack of 20 certificates would last some churches, even before the pandemic, years.

We've sold thousands, but yet some still question the cost of a £2.99 certificate. We're welcoming someone into the URC with something that now could be placed on the wall. If this is a member, then if they give £5 per service they attend, then the ROI is £3.99 versus £200 of giving. Sadly, some don't see this as an investment.

We also dropped producing ecumenical resources because no other denomination produced them. We are the smallest of the mainstream Christian churches yet the only ones producing resources for LEPs. They didn't sell and were therefore dropped.

Resources for people with dyslexia, visual impairments and whose mother tongues are not English

We regularly print in-house General Assembly papers, Assembly Executive papers and other resources when requested for those with a variety of visual impairments. The Committee received a paper at its last meeting about resources for people with dyslexia, being printed on different coloured paper and in accessible, dyslexic-friendly fonts.

We have also been asked to produce resources in other languages for churches with communities from other countries. We are happy to do this but being mindful of the high cost of professional translation services, we will be asking for volunteer translators to help with this. The resources requested are aimed to introduce the URC to those communities, such as *What is the URC?* and *Join the family*.

Creative thinking and ambition – an example:

Advent kits: The 2020 Advent kits were an idea from Communications with the content produced by our close partners the Children's and Youth Work, producing a letterbox sized box packed with activities, resources and gifts for churches to buy at cost to give to those on the periphery of church life. The end result was superb, and they sold out. They were produced at a loss although the intention was to break even.

Lessons were learned for the 2021 kits, which were less ambitious, but still retained the box format.

In 2022, because church buildings had reopened, these were reduced to an A5 envelope again packed with activities and ordered in the thousands. More than 12,000 kits have been ordered over the three years. A Lent and Easter kit in 2021 was also well distributed.