

Paper N4

Local churches flourishing through good governance

General Secretary

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Mission Council in March 2021 asked the officers of Assembly to commission a review group to: “Oversee a review of the structures, resources and work of the United Reformed Church to enable us to respond faithfully to the challenges present in paper A1.”
- 1.2 This paper identifies some key challenges facing a number of our local churches – ministerial deployment, ageing demography, declining membership, and an increasing legislative burden, all leading to an increasing difficulty in maintaining legal and governance compliance.
- 1.3 In light of this, the Church Life Review Group proposes that some churches need to consider a different way of continuing their life together, or face having to make a decision to close. We present as alternatives to closure some options to enable local churches to flourish and grow, within the need to operate good governance at the local context. These include uniting with another local church (an ecumenical partner or another URC congregation, or becoming a Mission Project of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.4 The local church remains the locus of mission. Mission cannot be delivered effectively from a regional or wider base; therefore, in any re-ordering of structure or redeployment of resources, the aim will be to enable the local church to flourish.
- 1.5 Local churches will flourish in the broadest sense when they operate in line with best practice, which includes meeting the standards expected by the denomination, complying with charity law and maintaining high standards of governance. In this way, the United Reformed Church demonstrates we are a reputable organisation that can be trusted with both spiritual matters and with our assets which are held on charitable trusts. Details of these expectation and requirements are given in the Appendices.

2. Introduction

When Mission Council (March 2021) commissioned a review of the life of the United Reformed Church, among the challenges identified were the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, very significant pressures of the deployment of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments (with links to maintaining Ministry and Mission Fund income), the ministerial and lay pension fund

deficits, and the risk from maintaining an Assembly structure requiring the service of more than 500 volunteers.

The appointed Church Life Review Group (CLRG) will not be able to solve through their work every problem in the United Reformed Church.

We believe that it is the local church that is the locus of mission, bringing the Good News of Jesus to our neighbours, through word and deed. Therefore, it is incumbent on the wider structures of the denomination to enable the local congregation to engage in worship, mission and fellowship. In other words, the structures of the denomination must empower the flourishing of local churches; the structures are not here (at least primarily) to serve the institution.

However, we recognise that charity law and the Structures of the United Reformed Church place an onus on each local church to be properly constituted and compliant with a number of requirements. For some of these areas, we are proposing some ways to meet those compliance requirements through reducing the administrative and managerial burden on churches which may otherwise be struggling. For others, particularly when it comes to meeting legal obligations, things may need to be done significantly differently at a local level in order to maintain good governance and even to avoid breaches of charity law.

We believe that the greatest flourishing of local congregations, and thus of the United Reformed Church, will come when local churches do not merely meet the minimum requirements to fulfil charitable law and meet URC governance standards.

Compliance with legislative and denominational requirements must be seen as the absolute minimum standard for any local church. Beyond this minimum, there are issues of good and best practice in a range of fields. A number of Assembly policies deal with good (that is, appropriate and normal) practice, such as lifelong learning, engaging with public issues, and developing missional discipleship. Because they are Assembly policies (even if worded with verbs such as encourage or urge), they are setting up good practice for the local church and should, unless contextual issues can take precedence, also be regarded as what is expected of the local church.

We believe it is through living faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ and in operating according to good and best practice that the greatest flourishing of local churches will be found. This paper identifies several basic requirements for a local church to operate legally, safely and well, and points to a few other areas for consideration. In all this, our aim is not to add to the weight of responsibility that many in our churches already feel gravely, but to provide a pathway to return to the joy of knowing the Living God and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves. The experience of being associated with a Christian Church should be one of joy, not of anxiety, fatigue and encumbrance.

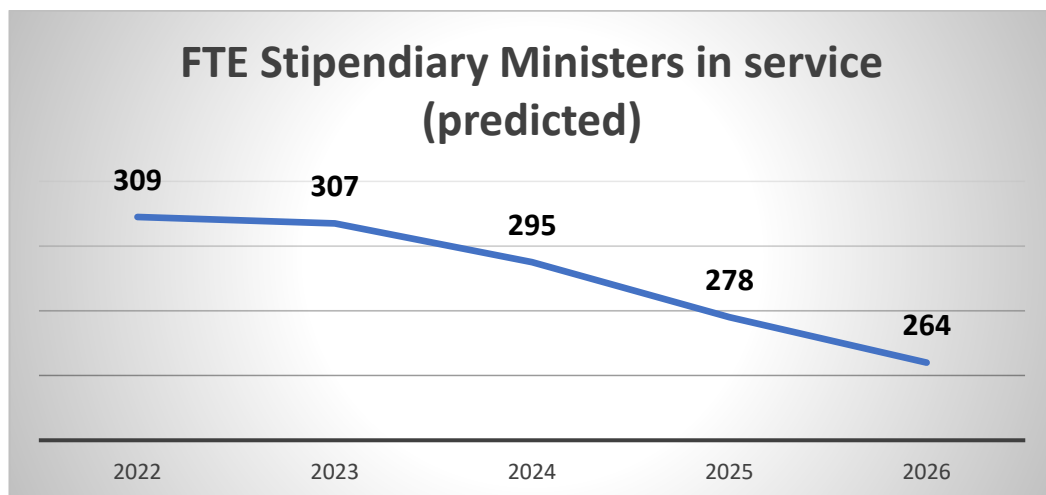
While many of the issues addressed in this paper affect our smaller congregations most acutely, we do not believe that big equals good and small equals bad. Some congregations have sustained their vocation to be small churches and have been small (numerically) for many decades. The churches that have seen the greatest decline numerically are those that are still among the larger churches in the denomination. Proportionally, they have seen the greatest downturn in membership and attendance compared with the smaller churches.

3. Some challenges – now and in the near future

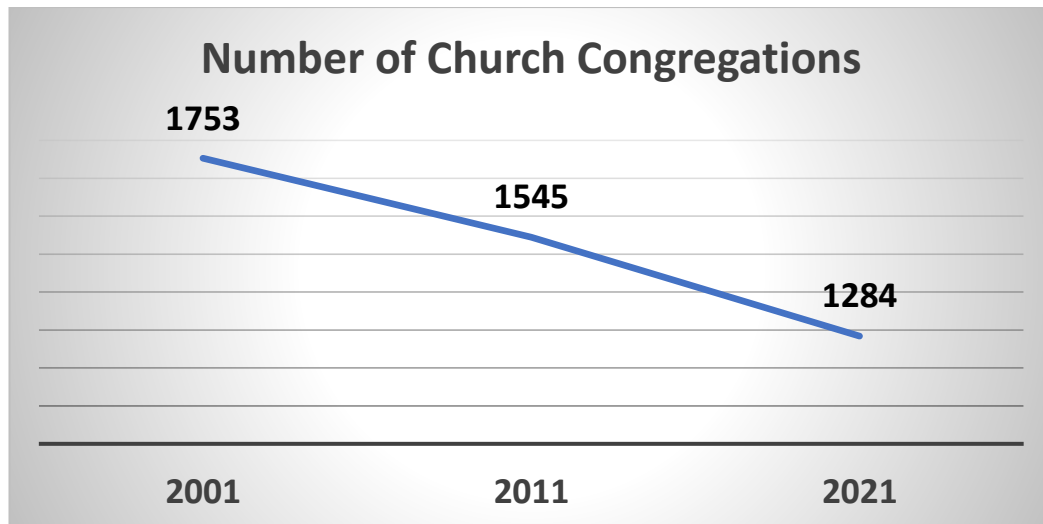
Deployment of ordained ministry

3.1 Until General Assembly 2021, the number of deployable Stipendiary Ministers (ie both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) was determined by income to the Ministry and Mission Fund – we would only deploy those Stipendiary Ministers that we could afford to pay. This link was suspended in 2021 and was replaced in 2022 by agreement that we will consider the predicted number of Stipendiary Ministers available to serve for each of the next four years, adding 20% to that predicted number to determine how many posts are available to be shared for deployment between the 13 Synods.

3.2 The most recent forecast from the Ministries Office (October 2022) expects that the deployable number of Stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments will continue to decline from 330 at the start of 2022 to 264 by the end of 2026.



3.3 We do not expect any net increase in the number of congregations across which the decreasing number of stipendiary MWS will serve. We expect that the long-established trend of church closures will continue, if not increase. To quantify this, the 2001 yearbook listed 1,753 local churches; the 2022 yearbook lists 1,284: around a quarter of our churches have closed in two decades. We should be clear that not all of these are true losses – the difference includes many local churches that have merged in that time, so two or more congregations in the same locality have united to form one church covering the area previously served by more than one.



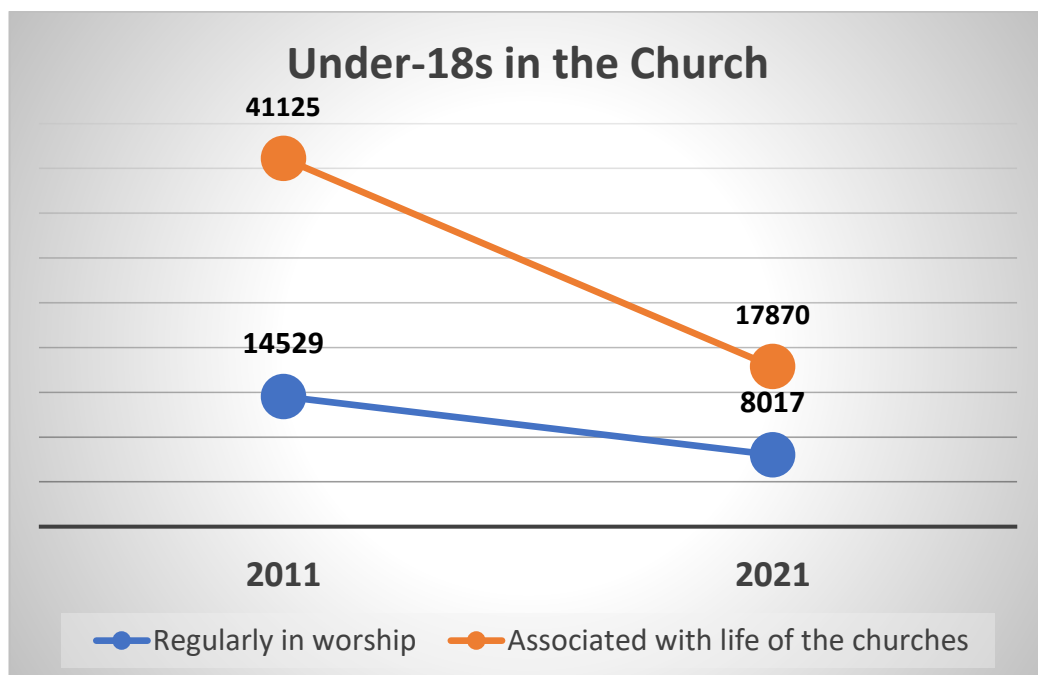
- 3.4 Although the number of congregations to be served by ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments is decreasing, the number of ministers decreases at a faster rate, and thus each minister is being asked to serve more congregations.
- 3.5 The Church of England’s Church Growth Research Programme produced in a report *From Anecdote to Evidence* in 2014 that looked at questions for church growth and decline. In the report, Prof David Voas noted that: “There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another.”¹
- 3.6 One of the report’s conclusions was that a significant factor in achieving numerical church growth is assigning roles to lay people as well as the ordained clergy. The hope that providing a larger ministry scoping to any particular church will (necessarily) lead to a growth in membership is fallacious. It is the size and nature of the team of local leaders that makes a difference. Perhaps more significantly, the research reported that in congregations where the same people tend to serve in the same roles year after year, 8% of churches reported growth, compared with 47% that reported growth where there was a lot of rotation among people in volunteer leadership roles.
- 3.7 While the report was clear that one minister serving one church is more likely to result in church growth, where there is more than one person serving a group of churches (lay and ordained) that correlation weakens or is reversed. Multiple church pastorates served by a good local leadership team can equally expect to grow. The report’s authors also made it clear that the size of the pastorate and its ministry team is only one factor amongst several that are more likely to lead to growth or decline. While there is correlation between

¹ The summary report is available at https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/from_anecdote_to_evidence_-_the_report.pdf

growth and pastorate size (the number of churches in the pastorate), this does not equate to causation.

Demographically aging congregations

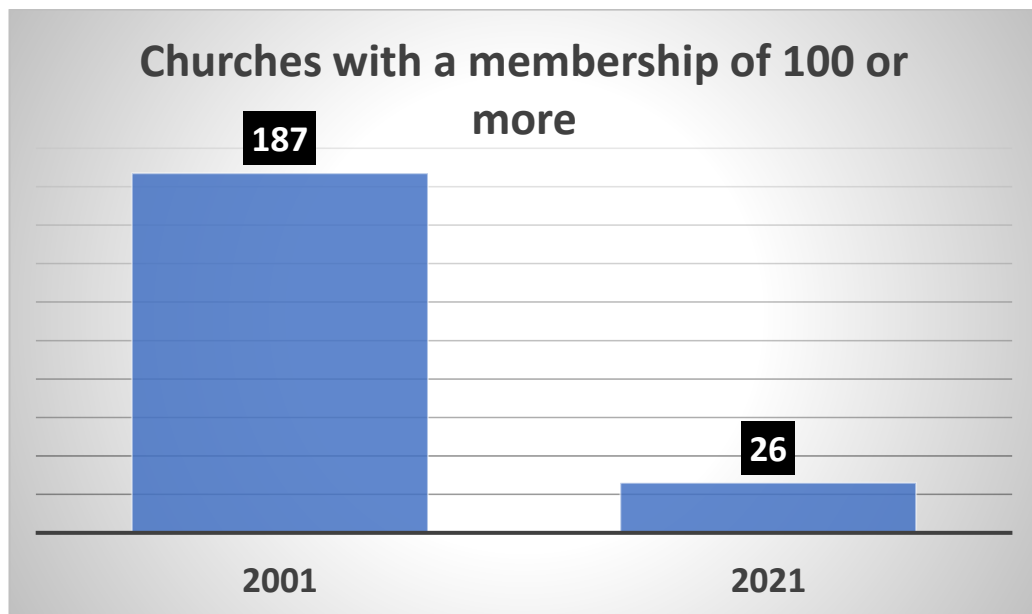
- 3.8 Our denomination does not collect data about the age of our congregations' members, other than for under-25s in various age bands, and we do not know how accurate even that data are.
- 3.9 Nevertheless, the anecdotal evidence is overwhelming. We are primarily a denomination of older people, and the average age is increasing. The majority in our congregations are visibly well into their retirement years. In many congregations that is exclusively the case. We also know, on the basis of the statistical evidence, that this is not the picture everywhere. Even when children and younger adults are not in church on Sunday, many of our churches do have meaningful connection midweek. From the limited dataset we have, we know that in the 2021 Annual Church Returns, a total of 8017 under-18s were regularly in worship (down from 14,529 ten years earlier), but there were 17,870 under-18s associated with the life of our churches (2011: 41,125 – a drop of 56% in ten years, which should be sounding loud alarm bells.



- 3.10 The impact of having older congregations is that fewer people will feel able to contribute physically to the life of the church in ways that they might have ten or 20 years ago. In many cases, disposable income becomes more restricted as members get older, thus creating some pressure on future income to the M&M Fund.
- 3.11 We must also face the fact that as congregations get older, we can expect more members to reach the end of their life and further decrease membership.

Declining membership

3.12 Not all small churches, as has often been observed, are failed big churches – many have a different charism to be small rather than large. It is clear, though, that many churches which used to be much larger have decreased in size dramatically over the life of the denomination. In 2001, there were 187 churches reporting a membership over 100. The statistics held in the URC database show that by the 2021 annual return, that is using data to the end of December 2020, there were only 26. (NB. This is counting those designated as URC Members in the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships. We have more than 26 congregations with a total membership over 100 when all members in an LEP are included.) We have other data that supports this picture that our largest congregations have declined more in proportion to the change in smaller church sizes.



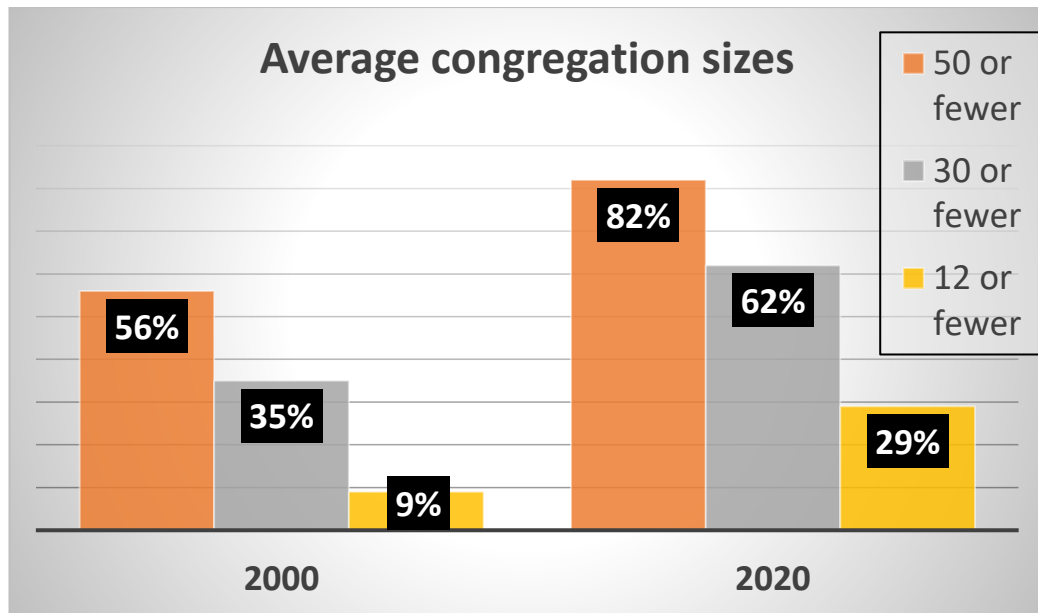
3.13 At some point, churches can fall to a size where legal compliance and good governance becomes increasingly difficult and then impossible. However, we are not called to be administrative bodies, but disciples of Christ. Even when meeting the minimum numerical standards explained below, there needs to be capacity to offer good-quality worship (and we believe it should not just be good but high-quality) worship that is glorifying of God and edifying to the people.

There needs to be capacity to develop discipleship, because we are not offering a membership club, but the call to follow Christ, which means learning more about Christ and seeking to serve him through serving others. There needs to be a capacity to deliver missional activities, both as a tangible expression of God’s love for the world and with the intention of increasing the size of the worshipping community. Even if some respond to that call by joining a congregation of another denomination – this is not a numbers game to increase the URC so much as being faithful to make disciples among all people, teaching and baptising them and engaging them in the same mission to make new disciples.

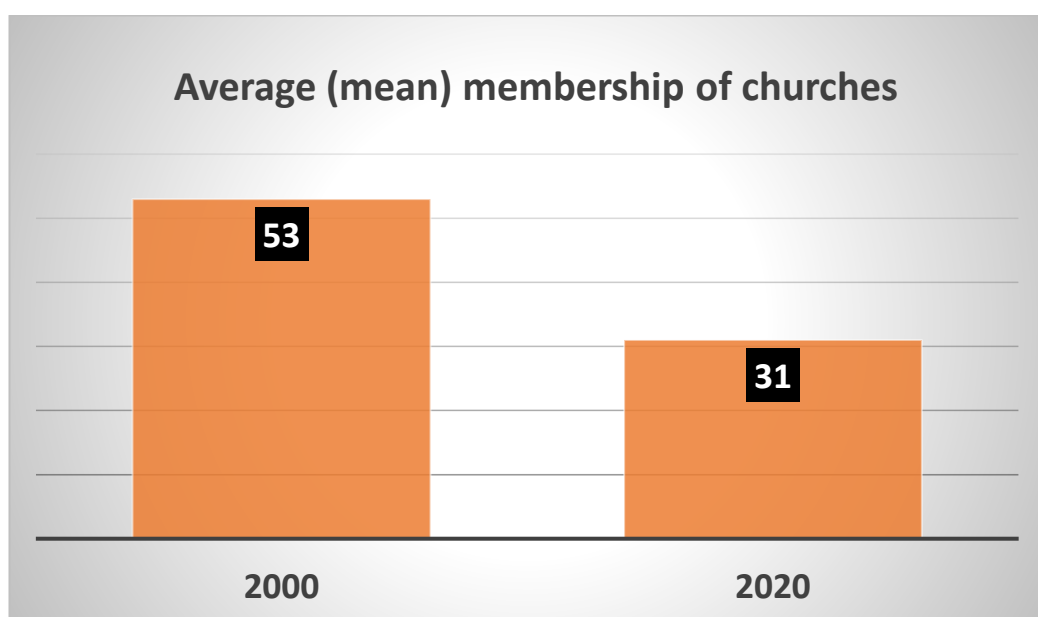
- 3.14 Clearly, if all of this activity is left to the same two, three or a small handful of people, there is no capacity to do everything.
- 3.15 We know some churches that have “forever” been made up of half a dozen members, even if not the same half a dozen – some will have died or moved away and been replaced by others joining the church, so there is no net movement in membership size. Such small churches can play a disproportionately positive part in their local community, especially in rural areas when, pro rata to the local population, more of the community are in church than in more urban areas. Small is not the same as bad or useless.
- 3.16 We have made anecdotal observations that in the most part, smaller churches tend to be less engaged in outreach and intentionally seeking to grow their fellowship, although this is demonstrably not exclusively the case. Smaller churches may offer an extremely welcoming space, but this relies on people discovering them and walking in – the yet-to-be congregant has to take the initiative to walk into church or make first contact. Often there are only limited attempts intentionally to reach out and draw new people into the community of faith even if there are well-publicised social events. We would also note that if this is a failing of smaller churches they are not alone – we can easily identify larger churches that tend to wait for people to find them.

One thing we learn from the Fresh Expressions movement, and that empirical data shows, is that if this presence alone were a good enough approach, we would have growing churches in more communities. The practice of saying, or thinking, or assuming unthinkingly, ‘if we build it, they will come,’ is not working, and has worked ever. The myth of the full church is just that – there have always been more spaces in our pews than there have been people to fill them. Prof Robin Gill is just one amongst many whose academic research has established this beyond doubt (see, for example, Gill in *The Myth of the Empty Church* SPCK, London, 1993).

- 3.17 There is no single or formal definition of a small church. One boundary point is that a church has 50 regular worshippers or fewer. The Small Churches Task Group, commissioned by General Assembly 1998 Resolution 6, reported that in 2000, 56% of United Reformed Churches were, by that definition, small churches. They also noted that 35% of our congregations had 30 or fewer regular worshippers, and 9% had 12 or fewer in their usual congregation.
- 3.18 By contrast, and by way of update, figures from the 2021 Annual Returns (data as at 31 December 2020), show average congregations of 50 or fewer in 82% of our churches. 62% had 30 or fewer in the congregation and 29% had 12 or fewer. This is a very significant move towards smaller congregations in two decades. The average size of congregations was 58 in 2000, and just 34 in 2021.



3.19 We more typically measure a church’s size by the membership roll. This decreased in the same period from 53 members per church on average to just 31, down over 40%! The number of churches with six or fewer members has gone from 5% in 2000 to 10% (125) in 2021. Almost a quarter of local churches (23%, 289 churches) recorded 12 or fewer members in the same year. Although these very small churches with six or fewer who have committed to the privileges and responsibilities of Church Membership may be able to fulfil the legal and URC governance requirements, serious questions about their ability to be congregations offering quality worship and growing disciples must be asked. Undoubtedly, some will be doing this at least as well as much larger churches, and most, if not all, would say that they are doing their best. We believe the time has come to start to ask these questions and be ready to put in place strategies and mechanisms that will enable all our congregations to give demonstrably positive answers to them.



- 3.20 We also want to be clear that when we talk about numerical growth in any church, there is no strategy that will guarantee growth, and that we share the conviction that God through the Holy Spirit gives growth – it is not the result of human effort. However, we also believe that where a church is oriented towards seeking growth, making efforts to share faith and loving service and put into place plans to welcome and include newcomers and then to develop them as disciples, they are more likely to grow. Why would God direct potential new disciples to places where they will be rejected, ignored, or exploited?

Increasing legislative requirement around buildings and operations

- 3.21 We know that that the legislative responsibilities and complexities of managing buildings and charities only increases. The UK government has recently announced additional responsibilities that churches will need to address regarding preparedness for potential terrorist attacks on their buildings, while many of our churches are still struggling to get on top of GDPR, safeguarding and formal health and safety risk assessments, to name just a few of the more recent requirements.
- 3.22 We also know that this extra workload falls to fewer and fewer people to address. Very rarely will churches be exempt from these increasing requirements on the grounds of numerical or financial size.
- 3.23 For some, the weight becomes such that the Elders and members feel utterly overwhelmed and discouraged, and decide the only way to escape is to close the congregation. If the burden cannot be borne by those available, the only way to be released from the burden is to be released of the responsibility of managing a church in the 21st century.
- 3.24 For others, they may feel that a significant portion of the legislative burden could be eased by surrendering the church building. They might choose to ask their trustees (most often the Synod Trust company) to sell the building, while they rent space in a community building – or they might be small enough to meet in a member's house for worship and fellowship. Matters such as data protection, safeguarding and proper accounting will continue to need attention, but the continuing church will not have to worry about the expense and regulations around maintaining safe buildings.
- 3.25 Others still might decide that the time has come to retain an online presence, but meet together in person rarely, if at all. Again, this will not remove all responsibility, but a simplified operation can result in simpler compliance issues.

Upholding legal and governance requirements

- 3.26 Any church that is unable to fulfil its legal obligations as a charitable body must be deemed unsustainable. We cannot damage the reputation and, therefore, the witness of the denomination by allowing unsafe and illegal practice. If, in consultation with the Synod and with the Synod's support as appropriate, they cannot take action to meet those legal obligations within a short and agreed timescale, the Synod will need to initiate a conversation with the church to encourage it to consider the question of the church resolving to

close or to merge with another local church. If the church cannot make that decision by itself, the Synod will need to exercise its responsibilities under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure to move to close that congregation or merge it with another local church (calling a meeting of the District Council to authorise disposal of assets if necessary).

- 3.27 It is possible for a local church to work in partnership with other URC congregations to fulfil some of its obligations – for example, sharing a Treasurer or Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator – provided that the Elders’ Meeting are fully and regularly briefed on those matters. A local church cannot abdicate and will always retain its responsibilities for legal, financial and governance compliance. The Elders’ Meeting (or equivalent council in an LEP) are the charity trustees for the local funds and so will always carry that legal responsibility.
- 3.28 Some simplification and relief from these requirements might also be found in a local church, with the Synod’s support, ceasing as a full local congregation and being re-formed as a Mission Project. The next section explores further some of these possibilities.

For reflection

- Which of these are the greatest issues facing your church?
- What is the story of your church over the last two decades?
- What have been the positive achievements?
- What have been the greatest challenges?

4. Renewing and re-forming – some options

Exceeding the baseline standards

- 4.1 It is the belief of the Church Life Review Group that we should not be aiming for (barely) hitting minimum standards. Rather, the United Reformed Church as a whole, and so its local congregations also, should aim for more than this. We should be aiming to be well-functioning parts of Christ’s Church, giving glory to God through our very existence as well as our work and worship. Being part of Christ’s Church should not be characterised by “scraping by” or the experience of constant burden and worry over who will do what. We wish to speak of churches thriving, not simply surviving. Jesus, after all, came to give life in abundance.
- 4.2 Similarly, we are convinced that the experience of being part of a church should be a joy as we meet with other members of Christ’s Body. When the primary concern is one of meeting rules and regulations, church quickly becomes a grind, something that sucks life and energy rather than giving joy. It is harder to meet with the Living God in worship when the focus is on rotas.
- 4.3 We believe that the fundamental purpose of the Church is to be those gathered together and sent out. We gather together to worship God and learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are sent back into the world to live out our developing discipleship. Ministry and mission are an inseparable pair, and the church cannot exist as such if it only

meets for worship and does not serve in mission, nor is it the Church of Jesus Christ if there is no worshipping community to engage in mission – that is, acting in the service of others and in witness to the Living God.

- 4.4 Further, while in some places individuals are engaged in serving their community, undeniably doing good works, if the community of faith of which they are part does not have a shared sense of ownership in that mission, it cannot be said that it is that local church in service. Acts of service, and even evangelism, that are purely the response of the individual are just that – the work of an individual. However, churches might choose to use an act of worship to commission the individuals to undertake the work with their blessing, and with prayerful and hopefully practical support. Then it becomes the work of the church, even if the service is actually done by a single individual responding to a sense of call. Equally, the church would then have the right to withdraw that support, as the individual would be accountable to the church for what they are now doing in the church's name. If the church does not own the work, it cannot be said to be the work undertaken by the church, and if a congregation is not engaging in witness and service, it is failing in its calling and responsibility.

For reflection

- How do you experience joy as you gather for worship and in service of your community?
- To what extent is the mission engagement carried out by individuals from your congregation actually the work of the church (that is, carried out in the church's name)?
- Are the workers commissioned in worship for this work?
- Can those outside your church recognise the work of the church offered among them?

'Marks of Viability' and 'Sparks of Vitality'

- 4.5 The report of the Small Churches Task Group (SCTG) was received by Mission Council in the spring of 2001. With a few minor changes, it was agreed that the report should be published.
- 4.6 The SCTG proposed that "viability" was a more helpful measure of church life than the size of a local church. They identified nine "Marks of viability" to indicate a level of congregational life that should help to discern if a congregation was still viable. These were churches that are open to the following:

Small Churches Task Group: Marks of Viability



- 4.7 The Task Group report said that these marks of viability “need to be discerned in a variety of contexts” – evidence of a mark might be different in a very isolated village and in a thriving suburban church; they might be different in a multicultural community and congregation against one set in a mostly monocultural area.
- 4.8 In response to the SCTG report, Thames North Synod developed a resource pack to help churches (of whatever size) called, “Open All Hours?!” The Synod took the nine marks of viability, but called them “Sparks of Vitality,” adding a tenth dimension, that of being open to the workplace. The thinking behind the alternative naming is to be expansive – looking at how to develop churches rather than judge that a church has reached the end of its life.
- 4.9 We understand the Marks/Sparks of being open to one another includes active participation in the wider church through giving at an appropriate level, agreed with the Synod and in line with the Synod’s policies, to the Ministry and Mission Fund. This is a core value of the United Reformed Church and is a part of our covenanting together and stewardship of finances. Another element of this Mark/Spark is that the church should be committed to participating in Synod meetings and events. There is no Synod without the local church – no “them” and “us”, only “we”. Similarly, the members of General Assembly are drawn from local churches, and we need members

from churches to serve the denomination on our committees. Any church that lives in isolation from the wider church is not fulfilling this Mark/Spark.

- 4.10 The Church Life Review Group offers an eleventh Mark of Viability/Spark of Vitality. **Churches must be open to responding to the Gospel** – and we would argue that this is so central that it ought to be at the top of the list. In this, we respect the theological diversity of the United Reformed Church. Yet a church can only be made up of those already committed to living as disciples or followers of Christ, and those seeking to understand Christ's call on their life who may not yet be committed to following Him. We expect people to be changed in the light of meeting with Jesus. This does not presume a theological uniformity by any means – far from it. Christ meets us all where we are and as we are, but loves us too much to let us remain the same. Ever so, there is no mould into which an imperfect Christian is poured from which a perfected one emerges. We will retain a great diversity, even as we are being made more like Christ.
- 4.11 A church that is not actively seeking to help people develop and deepen their knowledge of God, and is not encouraging and challenging its members to live out that discipleship in the world is not answering the Great Commission. Each church will do this according to their theological understanding, conviction and context, just as each individual will, but we believe this is so elemental to the life of the church that it needs to be stated explicitly. Without it, we remain a well-meaning if somewhat exclusive club, or we are so engaged in community service without a faith perspective being evident that we could more easily be secular social entrepreneurs, and not Christians living out our baptismal vocation to follow Christ all our days. We return again to our core belief that ministry and mission are inseparable partners in the life of a church.
- 4.12 Whether we consider this from the point of view of viability or vitality, we offer these Marks/Sparks as the basis for self-reflection. We do not intend this to be formal test, where a church must provide evidence of (say) at least eight sparks of vitality. It requires a subjective, discerning look to see whether the sparks can still be fanned into flame with God's help and support from the wider church.

For reflection

- Which of these Marks/Sparks are most evident in your church?
- Which are least evident or not present?
- How open is your church to change, so that the least evident Marks/Sparks can be developed?
- What support from outside do you need to bring about this change?

When a local church cannot sustain its life

- 4.13 When a church is no longer able to meet the minimum size for good governance, or might be deemed unviable (or lacking sufficient of the 'sparks of vitality'), *regardless of size*, they and the Synod are faced with a number of choices. We believe that it is not responsible to allow a church to continue in this state.

- 4.14 The first question to face is whether there is something that can be done to supplement and strengthen the struggling congregation. Are there people in a neighbouring church who would be willing to transfer their membership and service, to give the struggling one a new lease of life?

We observe a number of places where members travel past one or more other URC congregations to attend the church that holds their membership. This might be because they have established roots in a local church but have moved home, or it might be that they are attracted by the style or programme at a church further away. Might they be encouraged to support the more local congregation and local community? Are there resources that could be shared from another church? Would employing a local worker or releasing financial resources through grants or loans from the Synod, the denomination, or outside the church help to turn that church around? In this latter scenario, we must face honestly as responsible stewards the question as to whether this will actually be transformative, or whether this is simply a way of delaying an unpalatable inevitability.

- 4.15 Having considered this first-order question, and where it is felt that there is nothing that can be added to the current church to bring it back to a point of sustainability, there remain a number of options for the congregation.

- 4.16 Firstly, the church might be encouraged (usually by the Synod) to consider if the time has come to end its life and witness, and pass the necessary resolutions to close as a congregation of the United Reformed Church.

The question can, of course, arise from within the local church – we do not want to set up Synods as those that must always be the ones to ask this question, which gives rise to a risk of Synods being seen as asset strippers. Our work remains to further the work of the United Reformed Church and the Church generally, not to retract our work. It must also be remembered that simply asking the question, and considering it honestly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not pre-suppose that the church should or must close. Asking the question might provoke a new determination and lease of life, which would be a very positive outcome.

- 4.17 Secondly, the church may decide to explore uniting with another church to form an LEP, if a suitable church (or churches) can be found who are willing to explore this form of partnership. Equally, the church may decide to explore union with another URC congregation so that their work and common life will continue in a new form. In either case, we expect that this should be seen as a new church being formed from the parts of two or more coming together, rather than a takeover by one of the other. Each will have something unique to contribute to the new, united church. Such union, whether ecumenically or with other URC congregations, cannot be seen as a last bid for survival. The partnership will only succeed and thrive where it is born out of a desire to be faithful to God in worship and witness. Just having a local body to “see us out” is not sufficient ground for uniting two or more churches.

- 4.18 Thirdly, using its power under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure, a Synod may determine that Church X must unite (amalgamate) with another URC

congregation, Church Y. This has the same effect as ending the separate identity and existence of Church X, but it transfers its assets to the enlarged Church Y. Again, it may pastorally be better to regard this as a completely new Church Z, the sum of the parts of Church X and Church Y with their differing charisms and attributes. This does rely on the members of Church Y who must be willing to let go of their current identity so that it is a merger, not a takeover.

- 4.19 Fourthly, the Synod may decide to close the church, under the same function in the Structure. This can be done without the consent of the local church meeting (although potentially might be subject to a Constitutional Review process if there is a question over whether the Synod reached their decision and acted properly in achieving this end). The Synod would then assume control of the assets of the closed church.
- 4.20 Fifthly, the Synod may decide that the local church should become a Mission Project of the Synod. This terminates the status of the congregation as a local church and re-creates it as a Mission Project. Such changes must be presented to General Assembly and accepted by them. The 1992 General Assembly approved the creation of Mission Projects for causes that were not suitable (at that stage) to become “full” local churches of the denomination. Under the paragraph 2.(4)A(ii) of the Structure, the Synod may decide upon the establishment of new causes and the recognition of mission projects. The 1992 approval of this type of cause gives the Synod the responsibility to see that Mission Projects have suitable oversight and support.
- 4.21 Guidance from the Law and Polity Advisory Group in September 2020 clarified that: “A Mission Project might be: (a) a wholly new piece of work; (b) a new way of operating from the premises of a now closed local church, perhaps where the ecclesial body had ceased, but community work was still going on; (c) a transitional arrangement for an emerging piece of work that might become a local church in due course.” Further, that advice states explicitly that: “A Mission Project is NOT a way of simply propping up a local church that would otherwise normally close.”
- 4.22 In light of this, the fifth option above in paragraph 4.17 will not be available as an avenue open in every case. It must meet one of the three tests in the LPAG guidance and not be a way to avoid what would otherwise mean closure of the local church. A litmus test must be applied to a mission project: there must be, or there must be a realistic prospect and intention to develop, both ministry *and* mission.

Non-negotiably, a Mission Project is centred around mission, and cannot simply be a vehicle for providing pastoral care to a remnant congregation fading away. In such cases the options are narrowed to (i) closure, giving thanks to God for the life and witness of that congregation, (ii) uniting with another church to form an LEP, provided that this will make a viable local church, and (iii) uniting with another United Reformed Church congregation if there is the ability to make a viable and vital local church.

For reflection

- Are you in a place where your congregational life cannot be sustained? (Refer to the requirement laid out in the appendices as well as the reflections you have covered earlier in this paper.)
- If so, do you warm to one of the options above to avoid closure, and if so, why?
- Is there a viable route to uniting with another church, ecumenically or with another UC congregation?
- Who in the Synod structures should help you with exploring this possibility?
- Is the way forward for your church to become a Mission Project of the Synod? (See the next section for suggestions on how this might look.)

Developing Mission Projects – seeking to plant/re-plant viable congregations

- 4.23 When General Assembly 1992 accepted the World Church and Mission Report which proposed the creation of Mission Projects, the detail on what they were and how they would operate was lacking. This may have been deliberate, to keep options and patterns of work as open as possible. Yet the same report spelt out a number of criteria to enable a Mission Project to be accepted as such by General Assembly.
- 4.24 The report requires the Synod to make provision to enable the Mission Project to have “suitable oversight and support [and] appropriate opportunity to share in the decision-making process of the URC”. Mission Projects were to be “within the responsibility and oversight of Synods”. Further, “each Mission Project would need to formulate suitable constitutional and management structures”.
- 4.25 The report also noted that if Mission Projects were accepted as a new category of work, the denomination would “need to develop a policy strategy towards them”. There is only limited evidence of such a policy strategy having been developed, save for a number of Mission Projects having been created by Synods and accepted by General Assembly, and the limited guidance from the Law and Polity Advisory Group referenced in paragraph 4.18.
- 4.26 One reading of the URC Acts would suggest that a Mission Project cannot hold (or have held in Trust for its purposes) property. The Mission Project is an unincorporated body, and is not a congregation (again, by one reading) of the URC, and so would appear not to be covered by the URC’s exception from registration as a charity. This has a knock-on effect over the basis on which a Mission Project may open and operate a bank account and show financial transparency.
- 4.27 The September 2020 guidance from LPAG supports this view. A Mission Project is run by a committee appointed by the Synod, and it might choose to appoint “most of the committee from the local area of the Mission Project, or from areas further away, depending what was the most sensible approach to take in the particular circumstances”.

- 4.28 Monies involved in operating the Mission Project are the responsibility of the Synod. The Synod should operate designated funds for that Mission Project, and as the Synod ultimately controls the Mission Project, even if its operations are delegated to a local committee, the Mission Project, and thus its funds, are part of the Synod's work.

Note that within Scotland, every local church must be registered as a separate charity. As a Mission Project is governed by the Synod, a Mission Project within Scotland is covered by the charity registration of the National Synod. It should not be registered as a charity in its own right. An existing church that is registered separately that then becomes a Mission Project should have its charity wound up and the assets transferred to the Synod.

- 4.29 As the Synod is ultimately responsible for the Mission Project, this has implications for safeguarding – should a Mission Project also be compelled to have a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator (CSC) when it is not, strictly, a church? The inability to find a CSC and, therefore, its inability to comply with denominational requirements, may have been one of the factors that led to the church being re-formed as a Mission Project. However, the need for the Synod to approve constitutional and management structures for the Mission Project means that compliance with appropriate safeguarding policy is required without exception, although that does not build capacity to implement policies at the local level.
- 4.30 The question of adequate “oversight and support” by the Synod must be the lynch pin to hold a Mission Project accountable for all aspects of its work and to build capacity for the Mission Project to develop.
- 4.31 Local safeguarding compliance might, in practice, be provided for by the managing committee or by a neighbouring United Reformed Church congregation, to which the Synod may delegate some of its powers to act as the “managing committee”. In this scenario, the neighbouring church to which the Synod's powers are delegated becomes responsible for the good governance and spiritual walk of the people in the Mission Project. Financial management could be provided by the church, again with powers delegated from the Synod, and so it could hold and operate a bank account for the Mission Project or simply operate their finances as a dedicated (designated or restricted) fund of the church's main account. Those in the Mission Project, if they wished and if they undertook appropriate preparation, would become members of that neighbouring church.
- 4.32 Delegation of powers does not remove responsibility or accountability. Even if a local church manages and hold the finances for a Mission Project under the Synod's delegation, the monies remain with the Synod and the church holding the funds for the Mission Project must make regular financial reports to the Synod. The terms of delegation should also specify the circumstances where financial decisions, such as major expenditure, must be referred to the Synod. Careful drafting of the delegation will be needed such that it is clearly evident that the Synod controls the work of the Mission Project.

Partnering with stronger churches

4.33 Any arrangement or ordering of churches no longer meeting criteria that would allow them to continue as a separate church, but instead continuing their life as part of another church (even while under the direction and control of the Synod), looks, ecclesiologically, like the Methodist Class system, Base Ecclesial Communities in South America, or Cells within the Cell Church Movement as explained below. These models are offered to help with understanding. They do not differ in terms of responsibilities for good governance or the re-invigoration of a local gathering of God's people to do God's work. They do not require changes to United Reformed Church structures or policy. Rather they are models to be agreed between the Synod and the people at the heart of a Mission Project – they are patterns that might give shape to the Mission Project that will allow it to meet the existing policies of General Assembly.

Giving new life as a cell of a larger church

4.34 In Cell Church understanding, the Cell has two key purposes – to grow and to divide. Worship would normally be a function of the church where many Cells exist, and in larger gatherings of churches for a Celebration. Using the biological metaphor, a cell cannot exist in isolation, it must be part of a body (a local church), but each cell has its own life within the body. It has its own DNA and the potential to grow.

4.35 The Cell also provides a suitable environment to nurture and develop future leaders for that Cell and for other Cells that it goes on to produce.

4.36 At an operational level, the Mission Project operating as a Cell of a larger church might meet in the church building in their community, or in an individual's house. They could well operate using the "Four W" model of cell church, where the weekly meeting begins with a Welcome (some sort of ice-breaker activity), then members engage in Worship, they hear the Word expounded and applied to their lives, and they consider how they will Witness to others in light of what they have heard.

4.37 Cell Churches usually operate by five core values – every member growing, Jesus at the centre, every member in ministry (service), building a community marked by opened and sacrificial love, and doing evangelism, not just talking about it.

4.38 In most cases, a church will be in this position because it was discerned that they no longer had the capacity for self-governance or growth and division, that is, to produce two cells within the existing church, rather than growing to the point where they can be established/re-established as a local church in their own right. The expectation is that a cell will grow and sub-divide whilst remaining part of the same church.

4.39 In most cases, following this model seems less likely to be appropriate – those in the Mission Project would, presumably, want to move to such a point that they can be their "own" church again, rather than produce further cells. However, for some this may be a helpful vision of their future life together.

Giving new life as a Class of a stronger church

- 4.40 Under Methodist Standing Orders (CPD Vol 2, SO605A), where a local church falls below 12 members and remains below 12 for four successive quarters, the Circuit shall close that church and transfer any remaining members to another local church. Both buildings could continue to be operated by the church, with the Circuit deciding how often to offer worship in each of the chapels operated by the enlarged church. Each former church may, “retain its pastoral identity for so long as it is deemed appropriate”.
- 4.41 In Methodism, a Class Leader is appointed by the Church Council. In a possible equivalent model for the operation of Mission Projects of the Synod where another local church provides the operational management and oversight, the Church Meeting would make the appointment of the Class Leader. The leader of the Mission Project would be tasked to report regularly to the Elders’ Meeting at the church on the state of the project and those associated with it, and the “managing” church would be accountable to the Synod. (One of the leader’s responsibilities in a Methodist Class is to ask the people weekly: “How is it with your soul?” This would be a good practice for Elders in churches to do also.)
- 4.42 One of the benefits of a Class system is that it joins/holds people together in a small group, where relationships with each other and with God can be fostered. Meeting weekly and being asked the question about soul-state shows that the Christian life is not static, and does not end with making a commitment to Christ (or simply growing up within the Church – many members and adherents would struggle to point to a moment when they made a choice to follow Jesus.) Rather, it shows that discipleship is ongoing and progress varies from week to week. Struggles can be acknowledged and support offered in a safe space.
- 4.43 The Class has a form of membership, and the Class Leader is thus responsible (as the first point of contact, and in partnership with the church leaders and Ministers of the church carrying delegated authority to act for the Synod) for the pastoral care of those who are members of the Class.
- 4.44 The Class can be the locus for weekly worship, study, and service, but is closely linked with another, larger, grouping with which it can meet for worship and teaching, as well as providing a bigger resource pool for administration, governance and missional activities.
- 4.45 The Class is fully part of the local church, but takes primary responsibility for its own pastoral care. Governance is the sole responsibility of the larger church of which the Class forms a part.
- 4.46 This presents itself as a very helpful model for the organisation of smaller churches that should become Mission Projects. What the Mission project will retain is a sense of local fellowship and (usually) a local place to meet, either in a church building in their own community or in private homes or rented public space. But they will only do so under the auspices of the larger church until such time as the Synod discerns the Mission Project has the capacity to

have a full life as a local church in their own right, and the General Assembly receives them as such.

- 4.47 This retains at the heart of things, the notion that Mission Projects should, with appropriate support, have the potential to regain their status as a local church, but provide a practical and perhaps medium-term way of maintaining a presence in a local community until those concerned (in the Mission Project, the appointed Management Committee and the Synod) discern that the Project has run its course and should be brought to a close.
- 4.48 However, if the “class” of the larger church exists only for worship and pastoral care, it does not seem to meet the key criteria of being based around mission. Retaining the local fellowship as a “class” or another church seems an easy and attractive option, but careful thought must be given as to how local mission will be fostered and developed, the first of the functions of the Elders’ Meeting of the larger church (Structure 2.(2)(i)).

Giving new life as a Base Ecclesial Community (BEC)

- 4.49 BECs are found in many different contexts, but originated in South America, as a way of forming a very local congregation set in a particular community. They typically follow a liberation theology (but not in all social contexts).
- 4.50 BECs operate from week-to-week as essentially autonomous groups, self reliant for providing worship, but under the tutelage or oversight of a priest who may live a great many miles away and have an itinerant ministry over a large area. They might not visit a BEC for many weeks or months as they complete a circuit around the many BECs under their charge.
- 4.51 The priest identifies a “lay catechist” who would be the local leader of the BEC, and who is trained to lead a “priest-less Mass”, with pre-consecrated bread and wine.
- 4.52 BECs are always a “church within a church” and are never intended to be a totally independent structure, but are attached to a larger parish church. Nevertheless, local organisation and identity are key features of a BEC.
- 4.53 There is an emphasis on empowerment of the laity – members of a BEC are expected to be active in their faith and in serving their local community.
- 4.54 Where a Mission Project can still organise its local life and mission, but is deficient in some areas of governance (legislatively or ecclesiological), this model may be a helpful picture for that Project. The governance can be managed by the larger church of which the Project is a part (under suitable oversight from and delegation of powers by the Synod), and ministry would come under the larger church’s remit. In other regards and to the outside world, it would look as though the Mission Project is a congregation of the United Reformed Church. This does place the onus on the larger church/Synod-appointed management structure to ensure that the governance is properly in place for this largely autonomous grouping, and the Mission Project must be ready to accept that governance.

- 4.55 This option is effectively making the congregation a “Local Arrangements” Mission Project, where the leadership is lay with only minimal input and oversight from an ordained minister (and if Authorised Elders are given permission to preside at the sacraments the ordained presence may be nil). Pulpit supply, the councils of the church, day-to-day management of property and finance all come from within the membership.
- 4.56 However, General Assembly resolved that Mission Projects are the responsibility of the Synod, with operational oversight from an appointed committee. No local gathering, however constituted, can be part of the United Reformed Church without connexion to the wider Church; no local congregation of any size can operate independently of the Synod and General Assembly. The denomination, through the Synod and the management committee given oversight for the Mission Project, continues to care about and care for a Mission Project.

Just as a BEC is part of another, geographically distant, church, so a Mission Project is not autonomous in making its own policy and strategy. That authority remains within the wider church and thus the Mission Project and its local leadership are answerable to others and must still act in compliance with the policies of the United Reformed Church and within the law. A Mission Project that functions as a BEC is still a Mission Project of the Synod and the path between the local operation and the oversight of the Synod must be clear at all times.

For reflection and action

- If, as a result of working through this paper, the congregation feels its future lies as a Mission Project, which, if any, of the models above looks most suited for your future? Be realistic about your capacity to contribute to the local management of the Mission Project and your capacity to develop or continue your mission.
- Speak with the appropriate Synod Pastoral Committee (or equivalent) or the appropriate officer within your Synod to discuss your thinking so far and see if these plans can be developed into reality.
- Do you need to go back to an earlier phase of the reflection and discern afresh whether there is a different future for your church?

Appendix A

United Reformed Church expectations of a flourishing church

A1. A general guide

- a) The United Reformed Church as a denomination has a number of expectations and places a number of obligations on local churches regarding their operation. Primarily, these are contained within the Structure of the United Reformed Church and Basis of Union (available at www.urc.org.uk/the-urc-manual) and the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000, but also by policies agreed at the General Assembly.
- b) If a church cannot, with appropriate support from the Synod, fulfil these expectations, it is no longer able to operate as a local church of the United Reformed Church. The remaining members and the Synod are obliged to consider options for the local church's future as explained in this paper.

A2. An Elders' Meeting

- a) All local churches must have an "Elders' Meeting" (The Structure of the United Reformed Church 2.(2)) or an equivalent council in Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The meeting is made up of the minister(s) serving the congregation and the elders elected by the Church Meeting. The minimum and maximum number of serving Elders is not specified, but the plural is used consistently – there must be at least two serving Elders (i.e. not including any ministers called to serve that church).
- b) From amongst the Elders' Meeting, a Church Secretary (or secretaries) must be nominated, and Church Meeting must elect the person or persons for them to take office (Structure 2.(2)(iv)). The Church Secretary must be one of the serving Elders.
- c) Other functions of the Elders' Meeting are given in the same section of The Structure.
- d) At Assembly Executive November 2021, the resolution attached to paper H4 was passed, whereby, 'Assembly Executive strongly recommends local churches to use the process for the Safer Election of Elders.' That process is laid out in paper H4, which can be found at www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/27/Assembly_Executive_full_papers.pdf.

A3. A Church meeting

- a) The Church Meeting consists of all those "who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the United Reformed Church". The Church Meeting may invite others who regularly worship at the church but who are not on the membership roll to attend and speak at the meeting, but they may not vote on any matter.
- b) Minister(s) serving the congregation are *ex-officio* members of the Church Meeting by virtue of their induction to serve in that congregation.

- c) The Church Meeting must be held at least once a quarter and it is our expectation that this is honoured in LEPs where partner denominations may not have the same emphasis on members' meetings.
- d) The Church Meeting is responsible for the functions laid out in paragraph 2.(1) of The Structure, including the election of Elders and officers of that local church.

A4. Financial governance

- a) The role of Treasurer is not defined within the Structure. The Elders' Meeting (acting together in council) are the body responsible for, "the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the Local Church" (Structure 2.(2)(x)) and the Church Meeting has the responsibility to "adopt financial reports" and shares in the same general oversight for the financial responsibilities, acting on the recommendation from the Elders' Meeting.
- b) Subject to proper reporting, especially to the Elders' Meeting so that they can fulfil their responsibilities as charity trustees, it is not necessary the Treasurer to be a serving Elder of the local church, or even (strictly) a member of the United Reformed Church. If a local church is not able to identify and appoint a competent person to manage their local accounts (which may be a person serving as Treasurer at another URC congregation, especially in a Joint Pastorate or Group of Churches), serious concern about the viability/sustainability of that congregation must be an issue to be addressed.
- c) Banks will normally require at least two signatories for an account, and these must be members of the Elders' Meeting or other local Trustee body for the church who have the authority to permit payment against the charitable funds. So that the Elders may exercise proper control of the church's finances, the URC expectation is that at least two signatories will be appointed and appropriate mandates given at the bank that payments can only be authorised by at least two signatories. This arrangement should also be followed for online banking – one person to raise the transaction and a second to authorise it. (Best practice is that there should be more than two signatories. Blank cheques must never be pre-signed by one party for the second to fill in payment details later.)

A5. Safeguarding

- a) The United Reformed Church has stated on numerous occasions that safeguarding is of paramount importance (for example, see Good Practice 5, p20) and the responsibility of the whole Church.
- b) Since General Assembly 2022, each local church has responsibilities under the Structure to appoint a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator who must report regularly to the Church Meeting. Church Meeting are responsible for adopting and promoting implementation of safeguarding policy in line with Assembly requirements, and the Elders' Meeting has a duty to "satisfy themselves that all necessary [safeguarding] procedures are in place".

- c) The Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator must be sufficiently competent to do exactly that – co-ordinate safeguarding matters for the local church. This does not negate the responsibility of Church and Elders' Meetings to ensure that proper standards are maintained, but the CSC must have the confidence of the local church to lead them well in matters regarding safeguarding of children and adults at risk.
- d) Under Resolution 48 (Paper T5) of General Assembly 2021, many categories of office holder, worker and employee will be required to undertake safeguarding training at either the Foundation, Intermediate or Advanced levels. Anyone who is unwilling to undertake training at the appropriate level will thus be in breach of General Assembly policy and will not be a suitable person to hold the role/position to which they may have been appointed.
- e) Similarly, Resolution 49 (Paper T6) of Assembly 2021 updated the matrix showing the appropriate level of DBS disclosure required for a variety of office holders and employees. Other than where specified in that matrix, disclosures in Scotland are dealt with under the PVG scheme in line with the safeguarding procedures for the National Synod of Scotland. Anyone not complying with the policy on disclosures is liable to be removed from their position, and may become subject to criminal investigation.

A6. Upholding legal and governance requirements

- a) Any church that is unable to fulfil its legal obligations as a charitable body must be deemed unsustainable. If, in consultation with the Synod responsible and with the Synod's support as appropriate, they cannot take action to meet those legal obligations within a short and agreed timescale, the Synod will need to initiate a conversation with the church to encourage it to consider the question of the church resolving to close or to merge with another local church. If the church cannot make that decision by itself, the Synod will need to exercise its responsibilities under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure to move to close that congregation or merge it with another local church (calling a meeting of the District Council to authorise disposal of assets if necessary.)
- b) It is possible for a local church to work in partnership with other URC congregations to fulfil some of its obligations – for example, sharing a Treasurer or Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator – **provided that the Elders' Meeting** is fully and regularly briefed on those matters. A local church cannot abdicate and will always retain its responsibilities for legal and governance compliance.
- c) This compliance must be seen as the absolute minimum requirement for any local church. Beyond this minimum, there are issues of good and best practice in a range of fields. A number of Assembly policies deal with good (appropriate) practice, such as lifelong learning, public issues, and missional discipleship. Because they are Assembly policies (even if worded with verbs such as "encourage" or "urge") they are setting up good practice for the local church and should, unless contextual issues can take precedence, also be regarded as what is expected of the local church.

Appendix B

Charity law requirements

B1. A general guide

The following is a general guide to legal requirements and is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive nor constitute formal legal advice. This document does not cover the legal frameworks for the Crown Dependencies of the Islands of Guernsey and Jersey or the Isle of Man, although the applicable laws are the same in principle at least as those in England, Scotland and Wales where the overwhelming majority of our churches are established (that is, currently every one of our churches except for four between these three islands).

The default position is that those serving on the Elders' Meeting or equivalent council in LEPs will normally be the Trustees of the charity holding the funds for the church, unless they are not qualified to act as Trustees because of their age or because they are disqualified by the relevant regulator. In Scotland, all churches must be registered as separate charities and have a registered charity number. In England and Wales, churches with an income over £100,000 per year are required to register as a separate charity, but most others are deemed to be excepted from registration. The threshold for registration will eventually reduce.

Whether or not a church is registered as a separate charity, the same principles and best practice, and in many cases the same legal requirements (other than submitting annual reports to the regulator) apply. The United Reformed Church requires all local churches to comply with relevant charitable legislation and best practice.

B2. Charity Commission for England and Wales (“CC” www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

a) How many Trustees are required?

- i) The Charity's Governing Document (also known as the Constitution), where one exists as should be the case for all separately registered charities, may set a minimum and/or maximum number, and a quorum for decision-making. Trustees must be over the age of 18 (but for Charitable Incorporated Organisations and company charities they may be over the age of 16.) There is no upper age limit.
- ii) There is a legal requirement to follow any rules in the Governing Document regarding Trustee recruitment, and the document may say how many are needed and how they are appointed. CC guidance recommends that charities should 'aim for a minimum of three unconnected trustees with a good range of skills'. You need enough trustees to govern the charity effectively.' (Note: most churches in England and Wales are not registered as separate charities and therefore most will not have a Governing Document, although there are some denominational expectations and requirements for all

churches regarding meetings in the Structure and Rules of Procedure. We suggest that some further work is done on what a Model Governing Document for all of our churches might look like).

- iii) CC suggests asking prospective Trustees to sign a declaration that they are eligible (not disqualified) prior to appointment; it is an offence to act as a trustee when disqualified unless the CC has given a waiver for the individual.
- iv) Charities must fulfil legal duties regarding DBS checks for Trustees where the charity works with children or adults at risk.

b) Requirements for Charity Trustee meetings

- i) When and how meetings will be held normally set out in the Governing Document, and those stipulations must be followed.

c) How to manage charity finances

- i) Trustees have a legal responsibility to maintain financial records (which must be kept for six years), and to prepare annual accounts and have them independently examined or audited (according to the nature and size of charity). Churches governed by charities registered separately rather than excepted from registration must submit the Trustees Annual Report to the CC.
- ii) Trustees “must act responsibly, reasonably and honestly” with the charity’s resources. They should have “effective processes for handling money to help avoid poor decisions and accidental errors, as well as theft and fraud. Failure to do so is likely to result in a breach of [their] duty.”
- iii) All Trustees must manage properly any conflicts of interests of loyalty and financial involvement, to ensure that they can properly act in the charity’s best interests at all times.

B3. Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR: www.oscr.org.uk)

a) How many Trustees are required?

- i) The Charity’s Governing Document may set a minimum and/or maximum number, and a quorum for decision-making. OSCR “expect” Trustees to be at least 16 years old and they must not be disqualified from trusteeship.
- ii) Other than for Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIO), the law does not specify a minimum number of trustees for charitable bodies “but it is good practice to have at least three”. Advice from the Law and Polity Advisory Group is that it is not possible for United Reformed Church congregations for operate as a SCIO.
- iii) OSCR recommend asking prospective Trustees to sign a declaration that they are eligible to act as Trustees prior to appointment.

- iv) Charities must consider whether a Disclosure Scotland (PVG) check is necessary, for example when the charity works with vulnerable beneficiaries.

b) Requirements for Charity Trustee meetings

- i) When and how meetings will be held normally set out in the Governing Document, and those stipulations must be followed.

c) How to manage charity finances

- i) The 2005 Act gives Trustees specific duties to maintain financial records (which must be kept for six years), prepare annual accounts and submit them to OSCR.
- ii) Trustees are required to act with “care and diligence” in managing the financial affairs of the charity, which means having appropriate controls over financial procedures to protect the assets of the charity.
- iii) All Trustees must put the interests of the charity before their own interests or those of any other person or organisation. Conflicts of interest do arise, and the charity must disclose the conflict and not take part in any discussion or decision-making on the matter.