

Paper X4

Synod changes

North Western and Mersey Synods

Basic information

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Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 77 General Assembly transfers Macclesfield & Bollington United Reformed Church from the North Western Synod into Mersey Synod, and instructs the two Synods to effect this transfer at a date convenient to all parties, and to notify that date to the General Secretary.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Agreement to movement of a Church between Synods.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Over a period of time, Macclesfield and Bollington URC sensed an increasing impetus to explore a move of Synods, and engaged in conversations jointly with representatives from North Western and Mersey Synods as they explored that possibility.

Macclesfield and Bollington URC expressed their thinking thus:

“We believe that the church is an agent of God’s purposes and that our proclamation of the Gospel in worship goes hand in hand with pastoral care, service of the wider community and the search for a society in which God’s love, justice, peace, will prevail. Although we know ourselves to be blessed as a fellowship in many respects, we are aware of our insufficiency and have come to realise increasingly the degree to which we have learnt to rely on the sufficiency of God.

“We believe that there are respects in which God has used developments within the North Western Synod to guide our life as a church.

“Firstly, there was the creation of Missional Partnerships in 2017 and our designation as a congregation within the Greater Manchester South and Cheshire Missional Partnership. Apart from ourselves and Wilmslow, other churches in the partnership are closely grouped together in Greater Manchester; we are isolated geographically. Had the United Reformed Church come into being after 1974 when the county boundaries were revised, we would have been grouped with other congregations in Cheshire, which are currently in the Mersey Synod. We are aware that if Macclesfield were to move to Mersey Synod, we would still be on the edge of the Synod, but geographical distances between the churches in the South Cheshire Group would be similar to one another, giving rise to a sense of solidarity and inclusion.

“In practice, the geographical distance from other churches in the Partnership has made it impossible for us to engage meaningfully in joint activities or to collaborate in mission and pastoral care. In the knowledge that these are best exercised in as local an area as possible, we realise that in our case this might be better achieved through strengthening our existing ecumenical collaboration with HOPE churches in Macclesfield.

“We believe that our growing sense of disconnection from the Missional Partnership may be a sign of God’s calling to move.

“Secondly, we were given further momentum in our journey when, at a meeting of the North Western Synod, the Synod Executive encouraged local congregations and Missional Partnerships to discuss whether their mission was best served by current structural boundaries and to respond with any proposed changes by 1 August 2022. We duly discussed the matter with a range of church members at meetings of Pastoral Group Leaders, Elders, and Church Meeting. While it was generally agreed that our mission was not best served by current arrangements, our geographical position on the southern-most tip of the North Western Synod meant that a change of Missional Partnership was not a viable option. So we decided instead to explore the possibility of moving to another Synod and had informal discussions about this with representatives of the North Western Synod Executive. The most obvious Synod was Mersey, where we might eventually be grouped with other Cheshire congregations. The formal meeting with representatives of North Western and Mersey Synods on 14 December 2022 brought further understanding and focus.

“We believe that in discerning God’s call, approval by the church is of utmost importance. The Macclesfield & Bollington Church Meeting on 8 January, with the unanimous support of the Elders, gave a ringing endorsement of the proposal to move to Mersey Synod. There were no contrary voices and the two abstentions reflected a proper measure of sadness in contemplating the dissolution of the existing bond with North Western Synod.”

A Synod Meeting was held in North Western Synod on the 20 February 2023 where, following prayerful consideration of Macclesfield and Bollington’s request, North Western Synod supported and endorsed their thinking. In love, a resolution was then sent to Mersey Synod who met on the 11 March 2023. Further prayerful discussion and conversation about Macclesfield and Bollington’s request led to Mersey expressing a wish to welcome the church into the Mersey Synod.