

Paper 12

A missional lens for the URC

Mission Committee

Basic information

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Action required	For decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 32 General Assembly affirms its commitments to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) address issues of racial injustice, including furthering the URC's commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church, and responding to the continuing negative impacts of transatlantic slavery;b) prioritise work seeking to recognise, address, and dismantle poverty in the UK;c) respond to the climate crisis, including accompanying local churches in their respective journeys;d) reinvigorate our ecumenical vision through ecumenical working and resource sharing; and endorses these commitments as the denomination's 'missional lens', asking its Assembly Committees to use it as a focus in considering their work for the next four years.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide a missional focus for the URC over the next four years.
Main points	This paper sets out the priorities of recent Assembly decisions, draws them together into a missional focus which can be used to assist in prioritising where resources are deployed.
Previous relevant documents	Assembly reports and resolutions: GA 2022 Environmental Policy GA 2023 Poverty and Inequality in the UK GA 2024 A Church with People at the Margins: A strategy for mission and ministry (NW Synod) GA 2021 Action Towards an anti-racist Church

	GA 2022 Legacies of (Transatlantic) Slavery GA 2023 Legacies of Slavery: Proposals for repairing justice GA 2024 Legacies of Slavery: Repairing Justice GA 2022 and 2023 – Reinvigorating the Ecumenical Vision of the URC.
Consultation has taken place with...	All of the strands of the proposed Missional Lens have been formulated following intensive consultation across the denomination as a whole.

Summary of impact

Financial	This resolution does not require any additional spending but provides guidance in terms of mission objectives for spending decisions to be taken within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	Adopting the Missional Lens will provide the opportunity to work even more closely with ecumenical partners and in several areas the URC is fulfilling a leading role.

Introduction

‘Yesterday, today, forever – Jesus is the same’. While the Gospel call remains the same, the world around us changes; its needs change, and we must be light-footed in our responses, able to adapt to our changing world even while remaining true to Jesus’ call. The United Reformed Church is restructuring for the future. That is a positive thing. If we are to be a Church fit for the future, we cannot be a Church that remains stuck in the past, nor a Church that is afraid of change.

But if the URC has something to offer into the world, we must be mindful that in adapting, or even changing, we don’t let go of that which makes the URC uniquely ‘us’. That raises the question, ‘Who are we – at our core?’ What do we care about? What do we stand for? And leading from that, what should be our missional lens?

What do we mean by a ‘missional lens’?

Since 2022, the URC has agreed, through its Assembly discussions and resolutions, to adopt several major mission initiatives. These decisions have led the denomination to set in train key pieces of work which will only bear fruit if we maintain our focus on what Assembly has itself agreed to. In a world so full of pressing problems, it is all too easy to move on to the next shiny, new programme, forgetting the core missional objectives we have already given ourselves. Recognising that we are a small denomination, with finite resources, it is better that we commit to doing a few things well than attempt to do everything and fall short across the board. The ‘missional lens’ is the perspective from which we will engage our conversations, actions and commitments, seeking to ensure they come together as an intentional whole. It will prompt us to keep asking the question ‘Is this what we have committed to do – or are we losing focus?’

The purpose of this paper and its accompanying resolutions is to draw together the strands of who we are and the changes we have promised to bring about, to serve as the missional lens for the way we deploy our scarce resources, both human and financial, over the next four years.

Who are we?

The URC understands itself as a Church which cares deeply for our communities, for those beyond our borders and for our created world. We are a Church which is Christ-centred and justice-focussed, inspired by the call to love God and love our neighbour as ourselves. Our very existence as a Church came about through a willingness to move and change. We are a courageous Church, willing to face and navigate challenge. All of this is not just our self-understanding, but qualities observed and frequently admired by many of the ecumenical and secular partners with whom we engage.

Our inspiration

The URC is embracing anew the call to evangelise, to make disciples, with a commitment to become a growing church by enabling the creation of new worshipping communities, whilst deepening our commitment to faith in action, informed by the Gospel. The emerging 'Faith in Action Committee' which brings together Mission and Discipleship has, as part of its brief, the responsibility and privilege of helping to give focus to resources made available through the work of the Church Life Review. As we look to the future, we seek inspiration from Jesus, the Christ, who called people not to worship him, but to follow him. Jesus knew who he was. He was rooted and unwavering. His focus was outward-looking – feeding, healing, loving; welcoming those on the outskirts; restoring people to fullness of life – and challenging the unjust structures of his day. Jesus was resolute – even when the road was difficult; even when others rejected him or turned away. Even if it meant being crucified. This Jesus tells his followers to learn from his actions – then go out to do the same.

As we prepare for the next stage in the life of our Church, surely we need to focus on resourcing the journeys of all Jesus' would-be followers – those new to faith and long-standing believers – by equipping them for the road ahead; enabling them to be confident and rooted in their relationship with Christ, even while using their faith as the platform to live a transformed world into being. Just as Jesus set his face to addressing the injustices of his time, our discipling must seek to challenge and dismantle the unjust structures which distort and diminish lives today.

Our missional lens

In preparing for all the above and recognising the priorities that our Assembly gatherings have already adopted, the United Reformed Church is living out the commitment to:

- address issues of racial injustice – striving to become an actively anti-racist Church, and committing to concrete actions to bring about positive change in response to the continuing impacts of transatlantic slavery
- prioritise action seeking to recognise and address the issues confronting those who experience poverty and marginalisation, working with ecumenical and secular partners as we strive to eradicate poverty in the UK context
- recognise and respond to the climate catastrophe, including a stated commitment to work towards net zero carbon emissions by 2030, accompanying local congregations in their respective journeys
- reinvigorate our ecumenical vision through ecumenical working and resource sharing.

The missional strands outlined here are interwoven with our integral commitments to intentionally listen to the voices of children, young people and young adults; to seek and listen to the voices of those who are often marginalised or silenced; and to ensure that safeguarding is at the heart of all we do. Together, these form our missional lens.

Missional lens as a call to action

We have recognised that we can't just speak into situations – we need to live God's upside-down kingdom into being. We are called to be a Christ-centred, courageous, community of faith, hope, and love – in action. And while that calling may sometimes feel costly – it will never be more costly than the cross.

By holding fast to where we have discerned that Christ is leading us in the Assembly decisions taken since 2022, we join the strands of what we have already agreed in an intentional way, providing a missional lens for the next four years, shaping our decisions and priorities. Through this missional lens, we answer Jesus' call to reach out to those who have been marginalised and discriminated against; remain true to the ecumenical prayer that we should work as one; whilst always caring for the integrity of creation. It will be for all Assembly committees to consider their work through this missional lens. As we seek to continue to be Christ's hands and feet in the world in these intentional ways, may God bless us and all we do, say and are.