

Paper A9

New URC communities of discipleship and worship

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, CLR Programme Manager myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 36 General Assembly receives the new communities proposal, and endorses the values and principles in part two. Resolution 37 General Assembly notes the best practice and opportunities in part three, and requests that any new communities established through a Church Life Fund grant follow these recommendations. Resolution 38 General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to adopt the application and review procedures outlined in part four. Resolution 39 General Assembly instructs Faith in Action Committee to update the Accreditation sub-committee's Terms of Reference to accommodate the proposed application and review model. Assembly requests that updated Terms of Reference are brought before Assembly in July 2026. Resolution 40 General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to URCT in relation to the making of charitable grants out of the restricted Church Life Fund for new communities of discipleship and worship, in line with the detail set out in this proposal. Resolution 41 General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to publish templates and advice for applicants on the Resources Hub.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To respond to Resolution 51a from General Assembly 2023 by setting out a permissive and intentional high-level blueprint for establishing new URC communities of discipleship.
Main points	Executive Summary This paper proposes a framework for establishing and funding new URC communities of discipleship and worship through the Church Life Fund. Rooted in Resolution 51a (GA 2023) and extensive consultation, it sets out shared values and principles – Christ-centered, inclusive, adaptive, and mission-focused – to guide local initiatives. These new communities are not replacements for existing congregations but additional expressions of URC life, shaped by local context, ecumenical partnership, and a commitment to diversity, justice, and environmental responsibility. Best practice emphasises patient listening, team-based leadership, sustainable governance, and pastoral support. Applications will be made through synods, with clear criteria covering local need, safeguarding, inclusion, and accountability. Funding will be flexible (seed-funding to larger grants), with review processes balancing accountability and narrative storytelling to capture impact. The aim is to create a diverse portfolio of innovative, Spirit-led communities that extend the URC’s witness and strengthen its future mission.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N1, General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 51a)
Consultation has taken place with...	CLR New Communities Working Group CLR Steering Group Business Committee Resources Committee Attendees at the <i>Conversations at the Crossroads</i> consultation (January 2025) Worship, Faith, and Order Committee Youth Executive Green Apostles Special Category Ministers Those with an interest in better serving areas of poverty and deprivation Various, Assembly officers, staff, including the Deputy General Secretaries (Discipleship) and Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	This proposal suggests that new community grants should be made as one of three funding streams within the Church Life Fund (along with shared services and lay worker grants). Potential financial impacts outside the Church Life Fund may include future manse capital costs, depending on how individual communities evolve.
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External (eg ecumenical)	Some of the new communities may be ecumenical ventures. This opportunity is explored throughout the proposal.
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Church Life Review New Communities Working Group Proposal – June 2025

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Part 1: Introduction

This proposal has been prepared by the CLR New Communities Working Group (NCWG) in response to Resolution 51a of General Assembly 2023. Resolution 51a was an integral part of a suite of resolutions passed in light of Report N1 from the Church Life Review (CLR) and should be understood in the context of that report and its accompanying resolutions.

This proposal therefore comprises part of a wider package of CLR activities across four workstreams, all of which are intended to be funded through the establishment of a Church Life Fund, overseen by a Church Life Fund Committee representative of all thirteen synods.

This paper builds on conversations that took place at the *Conversations at the Crossroads* consultation in January 2025, and is intended to function as a high-level blueprint for new URC communities of discipleship and worship (NCDW), resourced through the proposed shared fund, including guidance on funding decisions, applications, review, and on-the-ground development. This proposal is relevant to practitioners seeking to establish (and actively grow) new communities, synods supporting and overseeing applications to the fund, and those responsible for making funding decisions.

What follows is intended to be enabling, encouraging, and permissive, ensuring that those engaged in on-the-ground community building and development work have agency, whilst also ensuring that the new church communities are URC-shaped, fit within the Church's polity, and make good use of charitable funds.

The purpose of this proposal is not to produce an exhaustive list of every possible type of new church community, nor to identify a list of places where a new community might be possible, but to outline a philosophy, process, and practice for the establishment of those communities, and to outline some of the opportunities and options as a source of inspiration.

Importantly, these new communities are not intended to replace our existing communities. They should be viewed as an addition to the life of the denomination, which will hopefully lead to growth in the areas impacted. In some cases, the new communities may represent new growth from established roots; in others, they may become the inheritors of an existing congregation; elsewhere, they may be entirely new URC communities. Overall, the projects made possible through the Church Life Fund's new communities funding stream are intended to enrich and expand the URC's mosaic of church communities.

Local churches and synods intending to establish a new URC community of discipleship and worship are encouraged to use the following values and principles at the outset and in development. We intend to develop some simple system of registration for a number of purposes, including URC recognition, sharing stories for encouragement and affirmation, safeguarding, and accountability. This will be more fully worked out in phase 3 (the implementation phase). In the meantime, please email your Moderator, Synod Clerk, and faithinaction@urc.org.uk with your plans.

Finally, it is important to note that this document is a proposal and not the process. The process for applications and reviews will not be this lengthy or complex. For the grant application and review process, please see Part 4.

Defining Pioneering

From Ministries Committee Pioneering Paper, General Assembly 2025

As a denomination, the United Reformed Church needs to constantly remind itself that it is not the church of God that has a mission in the world, but the God of mission who has a church in the world. Pioneering is a big part of God's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places. It is an opportunity for the URC to partner with others to pursue God's mission towards a more just and inclusive society.

Pioneers are people called by God. This is a vocation. Pioneers have a gift for seeing, for imagination, dreaming, inspired not just by what could be, but also by a sense of holy discontent at the way the church is fulfilling its mission and purpose. In particular, this call and gift are exercised among those not currently engaged in the church.

- Pioneers see differently – a possibility, an idea, a way that things could be better, or new, or different.
- Pioneers make something happen out of what they see.
- It's a gift, a call, a way of being in the world. They can't help it – it's who they are.
- Not everyone is a pioneer. But we need pioneers, because without them we'll just get stuck with the way things are.
- Pioneers make a way where there is no way.
- The world is broken in so many ways. But another world is possible.

This definition is included as a framing device because it sets out a hopeful and ambitious guide to the kind of Spirit-led vision needed to develop new communities. It is not suggested that pioneers are the only type of people who can establish a new community. A list of some of the other roles that might lead the way is included in Appendix One.

Note on Language

Some concerns have been expressed about language, particularly potential colonial implications of the word 'pioneer'; the NCWG is alive to these concerns. As a denomination, we are yet to collectively agree on an appropriate alternative which fully conveys the unique nature of the ministry.

Consultation

Extensive consultation took place at *Conversations at the Crossroads* in January 2025 with a wide variety of stakeholders, including mission enablers, training and development officers, children and youth workers, Special Category Ministers, Church Related Community Workers, ordained and lay pioneers, and others.

Members of the NCWG have subsequently consulted with or sought to incorporate the views of:

- Youth Executive
- Green Apostles
- Special Category Ministers
- Those with an interest in better serving areas of poverty and deprivation
- Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
- Head of Community Engagement.

Due to very tight timelines, some consultations were held at short notice, and in some cases with small cohorts.

NCWG Members

This proposal has been prepared by members of the NCWG: Steve Faber (Convenor), Nicola Furley-Smith, Sarah Lane-Cawte, Lindsey Brown, Ruth Maxey, Muna Levan-Harris, and Myles Dunnett.

Ornella Mbula provided the group with support.

Part 2: Values and Principles

Values and Principles for New Communities of Discipleship and Worship

These values and principles build on the themes and outcomes identified by the facilitator at the *Conversations at the Crossroads* consultation.

Values – being

- Christ-centred, Christ-focused.
- Communities that uphold God's Kingdom.
- Intentional and proactive about worship, discipleship, and mission.
- Built on strong relationships and working in collaboration with a network of local communities and churches, synod, the wider church, and ecumenical partners (without being constrained by this).
- Built within community, nurturing wider leadership.
- Adaptive, and constantly open to change (physical and temporal flexibility).
- Open to responsive, organic growth and development.
- Committed to good and responsible stewardship.

Principles – doing

- Set out to become centres of evangelism, worship, and discipleship, to see personal and community transformation.
- Empower people and communities to discern, act, build on their strengths, and learn from their weaknesses.
- Inclusive of all generations, backgrounds, identities, and abilities.
- Based around worship that is creative, inclusive, and accessible.
- Make use of spaces which are creative, inclusive, and accessible.
- Use internal and external resources for growth.
- Conciliar in decision-making, in line with the URC's ecclesiology.
- Safe, supportive environments with safeguarding and wellbeing embedded at every level.
- Committed to good governance.
- Work towards recognition by General Assembly, as a Mission Project or local church of the URC, accepting that this may be an extended process.

Part 3: Best Practice and Opportunities

Appropriate governance is key:

- Sustainability and accountability must be considered before any new community is initiated.
- Necessary compliance needs to be considered (e.g. safeguarding, risk assessment, insurance, employment, lone working policy, etc.).

New communities shouldn't be rushed; appropriate time should be spent praying and listening before establishing and developing:

- At least to begin with, the focus will be on being rather than doing.
- A new community will be relevant and appropriate in its local context, following extensive listening.
- Developing a 'guest heart', learning to be a guest at other tables, receiving as much as giving.

Investment in team work is essential:

- People should not be sent out alone, the priority must be to grow a team and get as many people engaged as possible.
- "Individuals do not plant churches. Churches plant churches. The biblical and Reformed method of church planting requires more than one gifted person launching out on his own to start a new work."¹
- A new community might plan to recruit a small team of paid resource, preferably locally grown, from the beginning.
- Relying on volunteers will rarely be enough.
- Some sort of base will be necessary in the locality.

Association with a network for support, encouragement, and discernment is vital:

- A network of partnership with appropriate local people is recommended.
- Some Synods, such as West Midlands, are establishing a regional network.
- As the portfolio of new communities grows, the Newbigin Pioneering Hub national URC pioneer network will be a focus to create fellowship, share learning, and provide a forum for discussion, prayerful reflection, and collective discernment.
- There is a need for ongoing research, training, and developing new skills as part of discernment and development.
- New Christian communities work best when they are attached to a local church community (for local grounding, spiritual encouragement and feeding).
- There is a clear need for pastoral supervision for leaders (if it is not already in place).
- Successful communities set out clear intentions and evaluate progress against them over time.
- New communities should be open to adaptation and change as part of an ongoing prayerful process of discernment and listening.
- New communities should be time-limited and reviewed. This proposal goes on to outline a review process in Part 4.

It is also important to note that this sort of ministry can be unpredictable. Outcomes are not always those anticipated or expected; different paths are often discerned once the journey has begun.

¹ <https://www.urna.org/urna/missions/churchplantingmanual/how%20to%20plant%20a%20reformed%20church.pdf>

New Christian Community Discernment Process

Appendix Three outlines several discernment processes from ecumenical partners, including the highly experienced Fresh Expressions movement and the Methodist Church. A potential URC version of those processes is included below; this is not intended to be prescriptive but is offered as a basis for further thought.

A potential URC non-sequential process might be:

pray – listen – love & serve – nourish – build

Pray continuously, intentionally, purposefully, alone and in pairs and groups.

Listen to everyone: God; neighbours; community groups; ecumenical partners; civic bodies; charity sector; Synod.

Love & serve: show radical welcome; provide food; meet people where they are; recognise brokenness; acknowledge injustice.

Nourish the new community with prayer, Bible study, creative worship, discipleship courses, and open discussion.

Build the community: find it a space and nurture potential leaders; put in safeguards and structures to help it flourish; meet regularly for local, consensus decision-making

Links to additional resources on best practice from external sources and ecumenical partners are included in Appendix Three.

Opportunities

Assembly Executive in February 2024 (Paper H2) agreed to establish thirteen stipendiary Pioneer Ministry posts – one per synod. Ministries Committee brought criteria for approving these posts to the July 2025 General Assembly (Paper H2, Resolution 27, as enacted). Synods are working on plans to identify how they might create suitable posts for these pioneer ministries, with some closer to making an application to the Accreditations Sub-Committee than others. Several of the possibilities are based in new housing developments, and some might be ecumenical ventures. A fuller picture of the opportunities linked to these posts may therefore be possible as conversations evolve.

A more general description of the opportunities is given in Appendix One, which lists some of the potential forms an NCDW may take, and some of the potential roles which may be needed to establish and sustain them. The Church Life Fund Committee should take an open-minded approach, encouraging diversity and innovation in the applications it receives.

Part 4: Applications, Funding Decisions, Review Mechanisms, and Resources

Application Process

Applications should clearly identify local need, explain what the new community aims to do, how much it will cost, who will be responsible for doing it, when it will be delivered, and why it is worth doing. The process of crafting an application should include active and creative engagement with a range of possibilities, including some of the options outlined in Appendix One and indicators listed in Appendix Two.

Proposals may originate from any council of the church, **but must be directed through the relevant synod**, in line with the governance framework for the Church Life Fund. Given wide variation between the synods, it will be the responsibility of each synod to decide which officers/staff/committees are involved in supporting and submitting applications to the Church Life Fund Committee.

The Church Life Fund Committee will take advice from the Accreditation Sub-Committee regarding the desirability and viability of each application, on the basis that the sub-committee has the relevant experience to make such a determination. Clear delineation of responsibility will need to be added to both bodies' Terms of Reference. It is expected that Church Life Fund Committee will remain the final financial governance check for any item funded from the Church Life Fund, including new communities.

Where possible, applications should be jointly prepared by those with on-the-ground knowledge and specialist synod staff/volunteers, e.g. Mission Enablers. In some cases, synods may advise applicants that the application is not appropriate for the Church Life Fund. It will be up to each synod to manage this process, including any decisions related to synod-level appeals.

Applications should be broken into the following sections:

- Technical information, 'new community plan'
- Discussion of the criteria
- Review mechanisms.

The suggested requirements for each of these are discussed under the following sub-headings.

1. Technical Information 'New Christian Community Plan'

Every application must include:

- Detailed location information
- Context
 - Existing churches within the locale
 - Opportunities for community engagement
 - Needs assessment
 - Ecumenical opportunities
- Purpose and aims
- Comprehensive costings
- (Initial) Timescale
- Physical space(s)
- Required ministry
- Required lay workers (where relevant)
- Activity plan
- Safeguarding plan
- Diversity and inclusion plan

- Environmental impact assessment and/or net zero plan
- Accountabilities with named individuals
- Risk assessment
- Governance arrangements
- Relevant synod staff members.

2. Criteria

The governance bodies responsible for advising/deciding which applications to fund will need to make their decisions in line with agreed criteria. Every application should therefore address these criteria. These criteria are of critical importance both to the application and decision-making process.

Criteria

The applications (proposals) sent to the Church Life Fund Committee:

1. Must be intentional efforts to establish a new community of worship and discipleship and must therefore meet the values and principles for new communities outlined above.
2. Must have the clear involvement and support of the synod.
3. Must be a new opportunity emerging from clearly articulated local need.
4. Must have considered relevant ecumenical partnerships (i.e. what ecumenical partners are already doing in the area).
5. Must clearly articulate a vision, address all the requested technical information through a new community plan, and include the required information related to mechanisms for review/success measurement.
6. Are expected to address environmental impact/net zero ambition from day one, including proximity and transport issues for those who will form the new community of worship and discipleship, “greening” buildings where they are under the new community’s control, plans to audit and reduce the carbon footprint of the community, how teaching and worship focused on environmental issues will be incorporated, and engagement with other (secular) bodies locally on environmental issues, such as local sustainability groups, etc. New communities should also be registered with Eco Church/Eco Congregation to be part of the start-up plan and demonstrate clear intention of gaining appropriate accreditation under these schemes.
7. Are expected to demonstrate engagement with the URC’s commitment to becoming an antiracist Church, with leaders who have already received anti-racism training, or who will do so within one year. New communities are expected to have a plan for anti-racism, including consideration of how anti-racism will be fostered throughout the whole community (not just in the leadership), and a commitment to developing a clear process for reporting and addressing occurrences which might be considered inadvertently or overtly racist. New communities should demonstrate an awareness of racial justice and commitment to anti-racism through the theology, imagery, and language used in teaching and in worship.
8. May be located within areas of ethnic diversity, with a plan to engage and develop a community reflective of the diversity of the area, and actively lift up leaders from

different ethnic backgrounds.

9. May, where desirable, direct funding for new communities to areas of poverty and deprivation (by reference to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, or other reliable sources, e.g. Church Urban Fund's look-up tool), and should aim to make a positive contribution to the life of the community.
10. Must satisfy any other criteria or policies set by the Church Life Fund Committee and any other General Assembly priorities as enacted.

Notes to the Criteria

- It is not suggested that all the criteria must be satisfied for a project to proceed. The Church Life Fund Committee will need to exercise discretion in discerning which of the desirable applications should proceed. Rather than functioning as a restrictive way to assess applications, the criteria should be used to guide and inform decision-making in a permissive way. An example of how this would be put into practice: if a choice had to be made between two equally desirable applications, with one proposing to establish a new community in an area of deprivation and the other not, priority would be given to the application which met the criterion relating to poverty and deprivation. If, however, there was a desirable application which met most of the other criteria, but not the one related to poverty and deprivation, this would not exclude the application from being approved for funding.
- The CLFC will have the discretion to advance applications that are exceptionally desirable, even in circumstances where some of the normal requirements are not fully met.

3. Mechanisms for Funding Review

The Church Life Fund Committee will have overall responsibility for reviewing the progress and outcomes of the new communities it decides to fund. As with the decision-making related to applications, the Church Life Fund Committee will take advice from the Accreditation Sub-Committee in relation to the review of funded communities. This will be structured with clear delineation of responsibilities in both bodies' Terms of Reference.

To enable this oversight process, a mechanism for review will need to be built into every project from the outset and should be one of three key parts of the application. As the new community begins to form, they will be required to corporately undertake a process to carry forward the review plan in their application and turn it into a robust living document, which will be frequently updated as the context changes. The Accreditation Sub-Committee and Church Life Fund Committee will review the document at agreed intervals as part of a review process.

As above in the 'new community plan' section, the living document should include several headings carried forward from the application, including:

- Vision
- Timeline
- Measurable aims tied to dates
- Budgeting and funding (with a pathway to an increased proportion of self-funding over time)
- Sustainability of leadership

- Safeguarding
- Diversity and inclusion.

The Church Life Fund Committee may wish to provide a standardised template which can be adapted as necessary.

Internal Review and Storytelling

As the third key element of the application process, which must also be taken forward into the living document, there must be an outline for periodic internal review and reporting against the stated aims. The purpose is to ensure accountability given the granting of charitable funds, without restricting the ability of new communities to adapt and evolve in response to emergent change, organic adaptation, and Spirit-inspired developments.

The aims should be context specific. Although it might be tempting for the Church Life Fund Committee to set global expectations in areas like the number of people involved by certain milestone dates, it is unlikely that this would adequately accommodate the reality that the growth of new communities can often be unpredictable. As a result, it is suggested that the review process should have a narrative, storytelling element. The formation of thriving communities is not a scientific pursuit and may look different in different places.

Communities must therefore commit to document and record the difference their work is making to the people they serve and the place they are located. A focus should be given both to historical achievements, current work, and the potential for further growth – sustained contact with the wider community is therefore essential.

The reporting should therefore consist of structured, technical elements, alongside storytelling about the community, and the impact it has had, is having, and might have in the future.

Measuring Success

As with other aspects of this work, quantifying success is always going to be contextual. The scope and depth of the project's reach, attendance at discipleship and worship events, deepening spirituality, growing a team, engagement in leadership teams, and succession planning may all play some part. The NCWG suggests that the Church Life Fund hold this lightly, proceeding with desirable applications according to the criteria, and evaluating each funded project against its own aims and objectives.

Synod Reviews

In addition to a formal review process for funding purposes, undertaken by the Accreditation Sub-Committee and the Church Life Fund Committee, the new communities must also be reviewed by the synod, as outlined in Part 3. The process for this review will be for the synod to decide. Generally speaking, the synod reviews should function as a 'critical friend' to encourage development, and as an expression of pastoral care for the NCDW. Each synod should decide the relevant officers and staff involved in the review from the outset of the project.

The Church Life Fund Committee will need to be confident that synods are fulfilling their role in reviewing the new communities. To facilitate this, each synod will need a named single point of contact, so that a feedback loop is created between synods and the Committee.

Resources

Existing Resource

In this context, existing resource refers to ordained/commissioned ministries, that is Ministers of Word and Sacraments (including SCM pioneer posts) and Church Related Community Workers, and the associated costs funded through the Mission and Ministry Fund (M&M), as well as lay ministries, which include Lay Pioneers, Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, and Elders (including Elders in local leadership).

Decisions related to the deployment of ordained ministry are the reserve of the synods. The NCWG suggests that synods carefully consider the needs of new communities at the pre-application stage, before a formal application is made to the Church Life Fund Committee. There is clear synergy between the thirteen new pioneering posts being brought to General Assembly in July 2025 and the CLR NCDW funding stream.

It is important to note that the financial reality of the M&M fund places a constraint on what can realistically be achieved with existing resources, which are already significantly stretched. Each individual proposed new community should therefore be considered holistically by the synod, with particular attention paid to the project's expected impact, which should be evaluated over time, to assess the ways in which resource requirements develop.

New communities will also be able to access existing shared service provision from the Offices of General Assembly, as well as any new shared services brought into existence by the Church Life Review programme.

New Resource (CLR Shared Fund)

The Church Life Fund should provide funding to cover all costs which are additional to ordained ministry and manses.

Supporting Applications

The Church Life Fund Committee will need to give careful thought to the support offered to those crafting new community funding applications. Neither a top-down imposition, nor a fully bottom-up 'wait and see' approach is suggested. Instead, a hybrid approach is endorsed, whereby the Church Life Fund Committee, supported by the Accreditation Sub-Committee, actively identifies areas which may benefit from a new community and actively seeks to support applicants in crafting coherent applications.

This will mean drawing on expertise within the relevant synod. Potential support models include employing a paid consultant(s) or alternatively bringing together a volunteer network. Some synods will already have the expertise to support applications. Different elements of the application process may require different types of support – the 'new community plan' requirement is notably different from more narrative, storytelling-based elements. This is referred to as a priority for future consideration and action.

Questions have also been raised about the benefits of using AI in preparing funding applications. This question is referred for future and wider consideration, particularly in relation to ethics.

Additional Notes on Funding

- In cases where an application proposes to establish a formalised ecumenical arrangement, there is no expectation around the ecumenical partner's financial

contribution. It is suggested that in these cases, new communities use Churches Together in England's *Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission*. In Scotland and Wales, where this does not apply, new communities exploring ecumenical partnerships should contact Lindsey Brown, Evangelism and Ecumenical Officer.

- The funding made available by the Church Life Fund Committee will cover up to 100% of the stated costs in an application. No expectation for match-funding or part-funding from existing churches, synods, or external partners is formally stated. There must however be a tangible commitment (e.g. volunteer time, financial resource from a synod or existing congregation, etc) from those involved in establishing the new community, to ensure shared ownership and buy-in.

Part 5: Governance and Polity

If General Assembly agrees to establish a Church Life Fund (with its own Committee), part of its purpose will be to fund the establishment of new communities of discipleship and worship (NCDW). We anticipate that some, but not necessarily all, of these NCDW will in time go on to become accepted as local churches of the United Reformed Church. Experience elsewhere shows that some of these NCDW are likely to be useful experiments which do not go on to be received as local churches by the General Assembly, and we believe these should not be seen as “failures.”

We are at a point where we need to take appropriately managed risks and try new things, just as some of our congregations in our predecessor streams did consistently throughout their histories.

Nevertheless, whilst the people that we seek to draw to Christ and Christ’s Church may be reached in quite novel ways, it is important to note that the new communities funded through the Church Life Fund are expected to conform to the principles set out in the URC’s constitutional documents.

We do not believe that moving to become more proactive in establishing NCDW necessitates changes to the United Reformed Church constitutional documents. This does not mean, however, that there is no need to look at or change the Church’s structures – just that they are not prohibitive to the establishment of NCDW.

Some of the reasoning for this is explored more fully in GA 2023 Paper N4, which reflects on what the General Assembly has previously agreed about Mission Projects. NCDW can be established by local churches or by synods, or by either of these working in partnership ecumenically, and operate according to the local context and intent for the worshipping community.

The Structure of the United Reformed Church is clear and precise about the establishment required of a local church congregation of the denomination. Other documents from the United Reformed Church set out permissively additional considerations for ecumenical ventures. We do not see obligations in the Structure or elsewhere that would make the formation of NCDW unconstitutional, although there is guidance and wisdom from policies of the Assembly that helpfully frame what we would see as desirable, and in some instances, expected.

Governance structures can be very different in size for a large and a very small church or a newly established community of discipleship and worship. A local church of over 100 members would not function effectively with an eldership of three, whereas it would be nonsensical to expect a church with just ten members on the roll to have all ten as serving elders.

Similarly, some larger churches find that they can manage business more efficiently by having a Finance and Property Committee reporting to the Elders’ Meeting, whereas a smaller church can manage those important functions as part of the regular Elders’ agenda. Whilst the Functions of the councils of the Church are set out in the Structure, precisely how each council manages its work must fit the context.

Constitutionally, to be recognised as a Mission Project of the United Reformed Church, a management committee needs to be in place, and the “ownership” of the Mission Project belongs with the synod, even if much of the operational work is delegated to that

Management Committee. An intentional NCDW would not be expected to elect Elders, whereas for a local church to be accepted by Assembly as a congregation of the United Reformed Church, there would need to be an Elders' Meeting, as required by the Structure. The NCDW would not even, initially, be required to be constituted as a Mission Project, ready to be received and accepted by General Assembly as such. Governance for an NCDW should be contextual and developing.

We would not expect power to be vested in an individual, whether ordained or not. If one person is given the task of seeking to form an NCDW, we would expect one of their most urgent priorities to be in forming a leadership team. This might in time become the management committee of a Mission Project or even the Elders' Meeting. The conciliar ethos of the URC is something we would expect to be represented early in the life of this NCDW, whether the new community is being established as an ecumenical venture or not.

The leadership team, however constituted formally, will need to take responsibility for safeguarding practice and policy. In its earliest phase it may not be practical to comply fully with Good Practice 6, but all the principles of safeguarding must be in place and observed from the outset, and more complete and technical compliance will be expected to follow as soon as reasonably possible.

In agreeing an appropriate form of governance, consideration must be given as to how the NCDW will account for its charitable funds, how it will manage the health and safety of those forming the community, and who, if employment is being created to serve the NCDW, will be the legal employer, responsible for ensuring the regulations associated with employment are met.

The management of liabilities for insurance purposes will also need to be considered, and insurers will require a properly constituted body to be that which holds the insurance for the activities of the NCDW, whether as a local church or the synod.

Fundamentally, whilst the denomination must ensure the legal risks and moral obligations are properly managed, we do not want NCDW to be so overwhelmed with the burden of compliance matters that the focus is on creating and maintaining an institution. The purpose of the NCDW is about helping people to relate to God as worshippers and disciples, and for this to be a joyful encounter with each other and with our God. Structure and governance issues must be dealt with through enabling the purpose of the NCDW to be realised. The NCDW should flourish because of appropriate governance allowing the people to be disciple-making disciples, not petty bureaucrats.

Part 6: On-the-Ground – Costings, Intergenerationality, Training, Worship,

Evangelism, and Discipleship

Cost Thresholds and Scale of Ambition

In line with the approach to the CLR shared fund proposal, these costings follow a low, medium, high funding model. Dependent on the size of the eventual fund, a 'pick and choose' approach could be followed. These thresholds are based around real-life costings from on-the-ground communities.

It is not expected that the Church Life Fund will provide funding for ordained ministers, as this will continue to come from the M&M fund. Manse capital costs are also not expected to be funded through the Church Life Fund, on the basis that it will be impossible for the fund to be large enough to accommodate three workstreams, if one is also required to cover the costs of property.

Low – £5-15k

This category of funding would be appropriate as seed-funding for small new community projects. Although minimal in scale, this level of funding can lead to success, and would allow the development of a diverse portfolio of mission projects. Lower initial contributions minimise risk but leave the option for enhanced funding if the project takes off and requires additional resource. This level of funding is already used in the URC: West Midlands Synod makes initial small grants of £5,000 available for mission projects.

As a further example, Southern Synod deployed ministry with a brief to plant a new church in West Thamesmead in south-east London. This ecumenical venture resulted in the formation of West Thamesmead Community Church, which meets in a Primary School. The ministers (a husband and wife sharing the ministry post, who also had pastoral charge at other established URC congregations) were provided with a Manse, and an initial budget for the first year of a little over £13,000, to cover school hire, events, and programme costs (e.g. Messy Church).

Medium - £16-50k

This level of funding would make possible more substantial projects, particularly those requiring higher levels of seed-funding related to hire/rental of space and project costs. At the upper end of the bracket, there may be ample funding to cover the costs of a lay worker from the beginning. A selection of smaller and medium-sized projects would allow the development of a diverse and varied portfolio of new communities.

High - £50-100k

A project of this scale would represent a significant, higher risk outlay. A lay worker could be funded from the outset of this project. At this level of funding, the Church Life Fund should expect very clear reasoning for the requested level of outlay.

Very High - £100k+

This funding bracket is included for completeness, but it should be noted that this would be an exceptionally high contribution for a new community project and should only be undertaken if there is a very significant reason to contribute such a significant portion of the funds available to the Church Life Fund. It is not suggested that a project requesting this level of funding should be rejected automatically, but serious scrutiny should be given to the budget, with careful consideration of the risk profile and potential benefits.

Ongoing Funding

It will be the responsibility of the Church Life Fund Committee to decide whether to continue funding for a particular project based on the outcome of funding reviews. It should be noted that the process of developing new communities can be an extended one, taking several years. The Committee should be open to the possibility of ongoing funding where practical and desirable, whilst acknowledging that new communities should aim to increase the proportion of self-funding over time.

Scale of Ambition

The Church Life Fund will be of limited size; even at the high end, total expenditure is unlikely to be higher than £4m per annum. This means that there is a cap on what can realistically be achieved. Assuming a medium-sized fund at the apportionment outlined in the impact model, which states that shared services and other core costs account for £500k across all modelling scenarios, this would equate to £1m per annum available for new communities funding.

At the extremes, this would be around 70 very small projects, 20 medium projects, or 10 large projects, or a combination of these. Although this level of work is far from insignificant, it is important to note that what is realistically achievable is largely dependent on the amount of money available to grant.

Likewise, the scale of ambition will also be dependent on the number and nature of applications received by the funding body. Decisions about the frequency of Church Life Fund Committee meetings will be dependent on the nature of allocation.

Further thought should be given to how the Church Life Fund might take a hybrid approach to generating applications, that is neither entirely dependent on local action, nor a top-down imposition of new communities. A fruitful approach might be identification of areas which might benefit from a new community, and active support with preparing a grassroots application. The NCWG invites the CLR Steering Group to give further thought to this question.

Indicative Funding Items

Given the above information, the following list is intended to illustrate *some* of the things which would be eligible for funding from the Church Life Fund. This list is included as an indication, but the possibilities are significantly more extensive.

- Start-up costs for new communities (e.g. publicity, materials, hospitality)
- Venue hire and equipment for community-based gatherings or outreach
- Project/programme costs for initiatives such as Messy Church, café church, or intergenerational events
- Employment costs for lay workers supporting the new community
- Support for hybrid or digital church initiatives, including technology and platform costs
- Costs associated with forming new expressions of church in housing developments, or community hubs
- Partnership-based projects with ecumenical bodies
- Costs associated with innovative outreach models such as mobile or pop-up church initiatives.

Intergenerationality

The NCWG consulted with Youth Executive twice, seeking to understand what representatives of URC Youth most value about their church community and what they

want to see from new URC communities.

Cultural Considerations

- Radical inclusivity is essential – communities must be accepting, adaptable, and safe, especially for those with past negative experiences.
- Authenticity matters – values must be lived, not just stated.
- Belonging is of equal importance to worship – communities must be open and welcoming.
- Intergenerational inclusion is critical – youth inclusion should not be tokenistic.
- New communities must be grounded in faith, mission, and inclusion.

Worship

- Worship must be high quality, welcoming, and varied – traditional, contemporary, reflective, or experimental formats are welcome.
- Flexible timing (e.g. midweek or evening services) and spaces increase accessibility for children and young people.
- Online (like YourChurch) and informal options are valued for reach and flexibility.

Summary

To properly serve the needs of our children and young people, and proactively reach out to new children and young people, new URC communities should prioritise inclusive belonging, practical discipleship, flexible worship, real-world mission, and accessibility in their worship and spaces. Young people seek spaces that are open, engaging, and responsive – where faith is lived and shared in meaningful ways.

Worship, Evangelism, Mission, and Discipleship

This proposal has emerged from General Assembly 2023 Resolution 51a, to explore the development of new URC communities of worship and discipleship. The goal is to have encounters with God in new places and with new people, and to initiate or join in with Kingdom-centred community building. This paper is intended to provide a framework of values and principles for grant applications and practical support for local pioneering work.

While each new community will be contextual and local, projects can be supported at every stage, from first ideas to development, by synod and Church House mission and discipleship teams. There is a wide and ever-growing range of resources available to assist with the development of worship, evangelism, mission, and discipleship.

The NCWG note that this proposal is not, and should not be viewed as, a blueprint to develop a set of isomorphic church communities. Instead, values and principles, along with best practice and contextual learning, have been outlined, which will help inform the new communities' unique expression of our shared faith through worship, evangelism, and discipleship.

Observations on Discipleship Development

- Interactive, discussion-based learning is key
- House groups and informal settings support faith development
- Spaces must affirm neurodiverse engagement and allow safe questioning
- Exposure to diverse theological voices is enriching.

Observations on Missional Commitments

- Visible community engagement, service, and social justice work are essential

- Eco-friendly buildings support mission and engagement
- Everyone should be equipped to contribute and lead now, not later
- Training and leadership development must be accessible to all.

Training for Practitioners

Those involved in establishing new communities will have training opportunities made available through the Newbigin Pioneering Hub. Although the Hub currently only trains lay people, there is potential for the offering to be expanded to accommodate top-up pioneering training for ordained ministries. A comprehensive proposal from Seedbeds/Newbigin Pioneering Hub is under active consideration.

Ministers wishing to undertake pioneering ministry will also be able to access relevant training through their EM2/3 budgets. Courses and resources will be highlighted by TDOs and the RCLs.

The role of a CRCW will not normally be appropriate to these communities, but there may be rare occasions when a CRCW would be the 'best fit'. The NCWG does not wish to be proscriptive, but allow for contextual flexibility.

Note on Church Community Life Cycles

One of the repeated observations at the *Conversations at the Crossroads* conference concerned the cycles of church life: midwifing (formation of a new community), nurturing (leading through a phase of growth), sustaining (pastoral care of a developed community), and hospice (faithful shepherding of a community at the end of its journey).

Two critical points emerge from this. Firstly, there are distinct phases in the life of a church community, with different calls on its leaders and members. Secondly, it should not necessarily be an aim for a particular new community to go on indefinitely – it can be healthy for a community to emerge, grow, flourish, and end well. The NCWG invites the Church Life Fund Committee to hold this observation as they undertake their work.

Note on Furthering General Assembly Priorities

It is essential that where possible new communities proactively further priorities General Assembly has set out for the church. The criteria listed in Part 4 provide a framework which will help funds dispensed by the Church Life Fund to be used in ways which further the URC's missional priorities. General Assembly has recently (over several Assemblies) passed Resolutions which commit the Church missionally to racial justice, poverty, climate crisis, and ecumenism. As Assembly adopts new Resolutions relating to additional missional priorities, these will need to be considered for inclusion in the new communities criteria by the Church Life Fund Committee.

Appendix One: Opportunities

These examples are intended to inspire imagination, creativity, and active discernment of the urgings of the Spirit. NCDW might be:

- New communities on housing estates
- Church at the margins
- Online and digital churches
- Micro churches
- Fresh Expressions, including messy, muddy, forest, cafe, dinner church
- Churches without buildings/walls
- Missional communities
- Satellite/campus initiatives
- Church plants
- Replanting
- Recovery churches
- Social action and community organising expressions
- Church for those physically distant from the URC
- Churches for diaspora, immigrant, and refugee communities
- LGBTQIA+ affirming spaces
- Coffee and retail shop expressions (*with a clear worship / discipling element*)
- Social enterprise churches
- New monastic and pilgrimage communities
- Spiritual wellbeing, health, and exercise communities
- Coaching circles / circles of presence
- new growth from old roots
- Something else entirely!

Those leading them might be:

pioneers – pilgrims – storytellers – missionaries – listeners – advocates – apostles – community ministers – nomads – edge ministers – town ministers – witnesses – pilgrim witnesses – minister friends – friends – nexus ministers – accompaniers – companions – special category ministers – ministers of presence – catalysts for change – missionaries

Inspiration can be taken from existing new URC communities of worship and discipleship, including:

- West Thamesmead Community Church (LEP), Southern
- Cambridge Solidarity Hub, Eastern
- Loves Farm Church (LEP), Eastern
- Church Without Walls (LEP), East Midlands
- Wooler Warm Welcome, Northern (Community Projects Awards winner)
- Contemporary Spirituality, Northwestern
- Birchwood Minister, Mersey

Appendix Two: Church of England Research

A major Church of England research project recently identified a few key ingredients which are common among growing churches:

- Churches that have a clear mission and purpose
- Church leaders and congregations who are intentional about and prioritise growth
- Clergy and worshippers who are willing to change and adapt
- Churches where lay people as well as ordained clergy are active in leadership and other roles
- Churches that actively engage children and young people
- Churches with a welcoming culture who build ongoing relationships with people
- Churches that nurture disciples (offering specific encouragement through courses & activities)
- Clergy/leaders who innovate, envision, and motivate people.

It should be noted that these are indicators and not criteria. Successful applications would helpfully refer to some of these indicators, where appropriate, to evidence that they are being addressed.

Appendix Three: External Resources

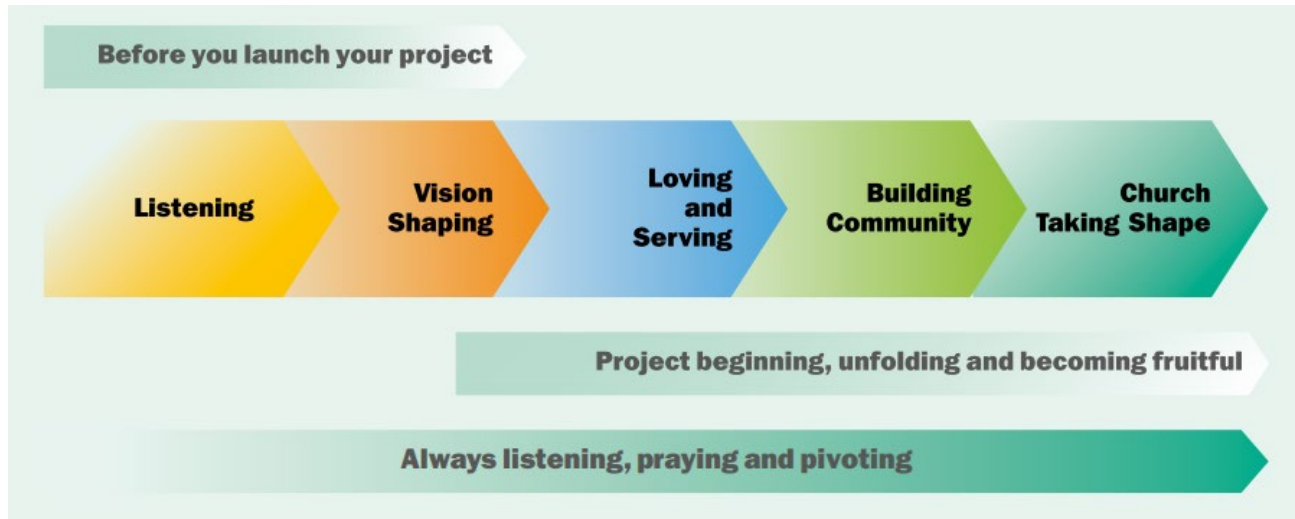
The NCWG have identified an array of practical external resources which may be of use:

- FEx compass and map (see below), and lots of resources: Where do I start? - Fresh Expressions
- Godsend: a toolkit for new Christian communities. Book and app: <https://godforall.org.uk/northern-mission-centre/godsend-app/>
- The Methodist Church, New Places for New People resources: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/evangelism-growth/new-places-for-new-people/>
- The Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) report: Mosaic Church and Tussenstand pionieren: Tussenstand pionieren- Engels (1).pdf
- Churches Together in England's A Flexible Framework, and Toolkit. Discussion points and a checklist for developing a project in partnership with others: A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission – Churches Together in England.
- The Church of England's Diocese of Chelmsford (Essex and East London) has put together a resource for discernment, *Travelling Well Together*: <https://www.chelmsford.anglican.org/about-us/travelling-well-together/>
- The Church Urban Fund has a look-up tool to explore poverty data for your area: <https://cuf.org.uk/lookup-tool> Other community transformation resources can be found on the website.

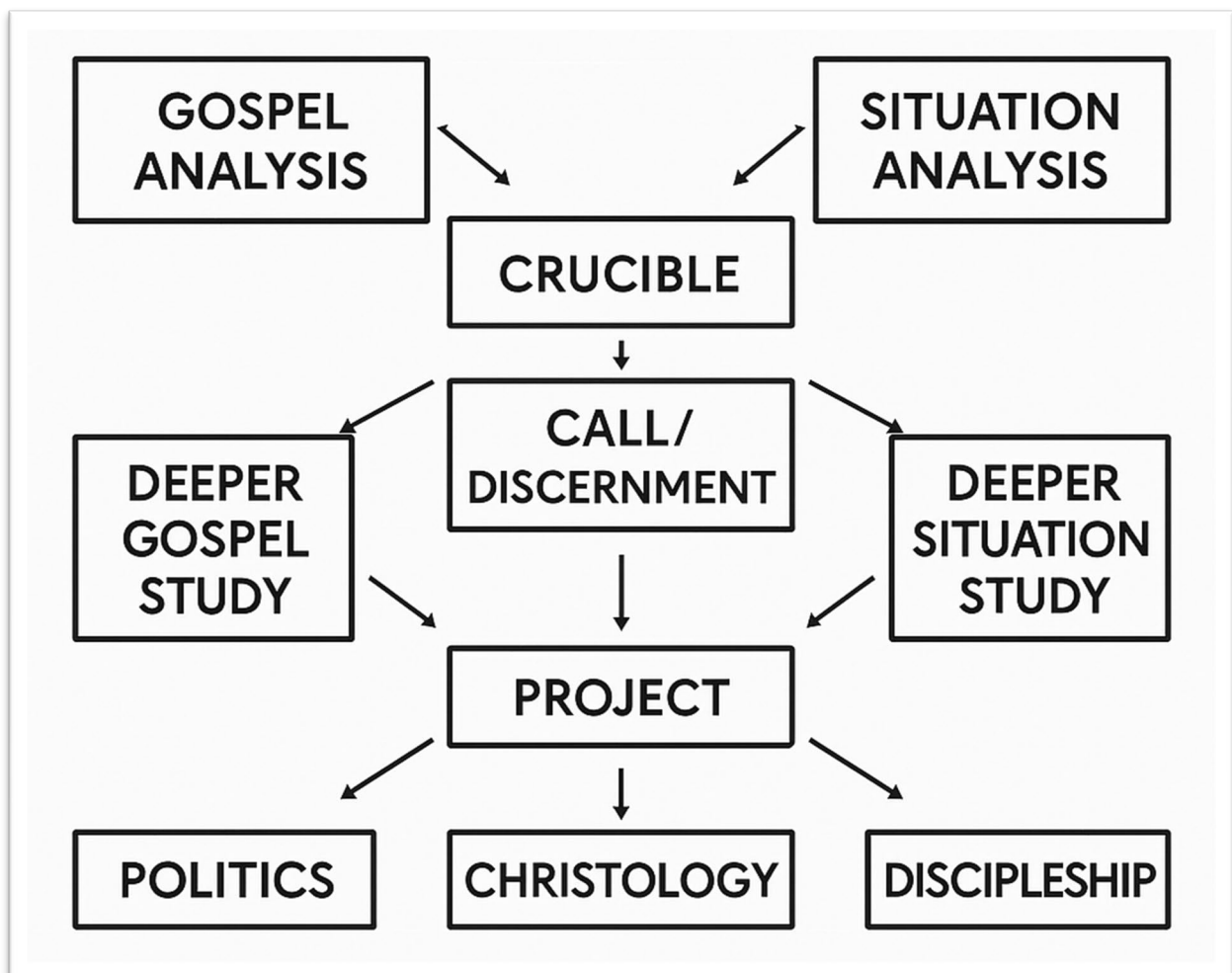
The FEx (Fresh Expressions) Map:



The Methodist Church process:



One of John Vincent's models (of many) from Christ in the City (Urban Theology Union):



Reformed Church of America: discern – prepare – grow

Discern = pray, evaluate, assess.

Prepare = find partners; get training; organise oversight.

Grow = gather regularly