

Paper I1

Walking the Way: Living the Life of Jesus Today – update on work

Walking the Way Steering Group

Basic information

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Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides an update for Assembly Executive on the work of the Walking the Way steering group and project manager, including work so far on the implementation of resolution 36 of General Assembly 2021.
Main points	In response to resolution 36 of General Assembly 2021, the Walking the Way Steering Group and Project Manager are devising SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable/Agreeable, Realistic, Time-specific) to help implement the content of the resolution. Other work continues, and is being redirected as appropriate to focus on the above.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 3/16 paper M1 General Assembly report 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3 General Assembly report 2020, p.195 Mission Council 11/20 paper M1 Mission Council 03/21 paper I4 General Assembly report 2021, p.166.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Communications

	<p>Education and Learning</p> <p>General Secretariat</p> <p>Church House Connective.</p>
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Summary of impact

Financial	Following the passing of resolution 36 of General Assembly 2021, the Walking the Way steering group and Project Manager will be funded until the end of the calendar year 2022.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Consultation and events considering whole-of-life discipleship with ecumenical partners, including Churches Together in England and Christian Aid, continue.

1. Long-term, whole-of-life discipleship for all

- 1.1 In passing resolution 36 at its meeting in July 2021, General Assembly affirmed whole-of-life discipleship as the primary long-term focus of the United Reformed Church, calling for a range of actions to be taken to embed the whole-of-life discipleship ethos of Walking the Way across the Church.
- 1.2 As part of this, General Assembly instructed the Walking the Way Steering Group and Project Manager to continue their work until the end of the calendar year 2022, whereupon the Deputy General Secretaries for Discipleship and Mission will take full responsibility for this embedding.

2. Next steps

- 2.1 In the remaining time in which the Steering Group and project manager will be in place, there is clearly much to do, not least in strengthening the relationships and trust needed for whole-of-life discipleship to remain firmly at the heart of everything everyone does across the denomination, building on existing networks and shared priorities across denomination, getting truly alongside synods in their approaches, sharing and using lessons from the LICC accompaniment programme, and using the great wisdom which continues to emerge from the stories of discipleship which the Steering Group gathers.
- 2.2 In response, the Walking the Way Steering Group and Project Manager took time at their September 2021 residential meeting to consider whole-of-life discipleship at different levels of Church Life within the United Reformed Church, sharing the following comments:
 - a) *Local Churches* – In all considerations and decisions of local churches, the question “What does this mean for discipleship?” is relevant to everything. Clarity of message is especially important for local churches as they work to develop a whole-of-life discipleship ethos. This involves strong, direct relationships with churches, literally walking alongside them in their own contexts. This requires strong leadership and accompaniment support, especially from ministers of Word and Sacraments, which can be difficult for them amidst other pressures and responsibilities. Having synod and Church House support which takes local need into account is vital. Using opportunities, such as the URC’s upcoming 50th jubilee and the popularity of the Walking the Way prayer cords, to promote whole-of-life discipleship, could help.

- b) *Synods* – Every synod is active in embedding a whole-of-life discipleship ethos across its life and work, at least in the short to medium term. This needs to be celebrated and built on collaboratively so that the wisdom of the varied approaches within synods may be shared more widely. This will be especially important as synods develop their own responses to resolution 36 in maintaining whole-of-life discipleship as a long-term focus. As key advocates for whole-of-life discipleship, not just in the life of synods, but of the whole denomination, synod teams, including Synod Moderators, Training and Development Officers (TDOs), Mission Enablers and Children's and Youth Development Officers (CYDOs) and their equivalents, must be supported in their work and enabled to share wisdom and good practice in joining up the dots of the various approaches taken across synods in embedding a whole-of-life discipleship ethos. This could involve the extensive networks and contacts which synod teams already have, as well as considering where discipleship fits in the job descriptions of synod team members and volunteers.
- c) *General Assembly* – It is hoped that, in time, all General Assembly staff and committee members will recognise whole-of-life discipleship as the core of their remit, reflected in the work, decisions and resources produced in every area of General Assembly's work. Various tools could help with this, including a very concise summary of Walking the Way's messaging, a GA proforma asking committees to consider the discipleship implications of any report or resolution proposed, staff events and activities such as the all-staff meeting, collaborative work using new Church House procedures, prayer time at Church House, and potential LICC learning hub/accompaniment support for Church House and committees.

2.3 Work is ongoing to refine these insights into SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable/Agreeable, Realistic, Time-specific) which the Steering Group, Project Manager and Deputy General Secretaries for Discipleship and Mission can work towards. Whatever goals are developed, it is clear that collaborative relationships will be key in enabling everyone involved with the United Reformed Church to play their part in embedding whole-of-life discipleship across the life of the denomination.

2.5 One certainty to be repeated continually, is that the upcoming end of the Steering Group and Project Manager roles does not mark the end of Walking the Way or missional discipleship as a priority within the URC, only the end of the phase of the journey which required a Steering Group and Project Manager. The journey very much continues and will need everyone's support if we are to continue *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today*, long into the future as a denomination.

3. Other work

3.1 The Steering Group has continued its work under the following headings, redirecting work as appropriate in order to prioritise the implementation of resolution 36 of General Assembly 2021:

- a) *Resources and communications* – The Walking the Way webpage (www.urc.org.uk/wtw) has been streamlined to make it easier to navigate whilst the new URC website is being developed. Walking the Way's social media accounts have been closed down in order to focus on the production of more discipleship content for the URC's official social media accounts.

The second series of the URC podcast is being planned, focussing on the discipleship implications of various issues.

- b) *Accompaniment* – The pilot accompaniment programme in Southern Synod has been so successful that the synod is now running it again without funding from the steering group. The pilot has also begun in Mersey Synod, with positive reports from participants.
- c) *Online discipleship* – Work is ongoing to collate all papers, notes and information from various meetings which the Walking the Way project manager and members of the steering group have held with parties interested in online discipleship. These will be passed to the General Secretariat to assist the Church in working out how to develop this exciting area of work. It will be interesting to see how the new Minister for Digital Worship post, once appointed, might be able to assist this work.
- d) *Stepwise* – The Steering Group and Stepwise Development Group continue to enjoy representation in each other's meetings to ensure that Stepwise can benefit from the Steering Group's insights and vice versa.
- e) *The URC's 50th Jubilee* – The Planning Group, for which the Walking the Way Steering Group has responsibility, is continuing its work. Please see paper N1 for more information.
- f) *Networking* – Given the centrality of collaborative relationships in embedding whole-of-life discipleship across the denomination, networking has taken on an even greater significance. Further virtual meetings of synod and network contacts are being planned, as well as physical visits by the project manager alongside other Steering Group members and Church House colleagues.