

# Paper 12

## Update on current work

### Mission Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	For information.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	Update on the work of the Mission Committee.
<b>Main points</b>	Updates on Church and Society/JPIT work, Ecumenical and Interfaith matters, Global and Intercultural Ministries, and Mission.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper 11 to Mission Council, March 2021.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	Costs to Assembly of the various items in the paper are covered by the Mission Committee budget.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	

## 1. Church and Society/Joint Public Issues Team

- 1.1. **Reset the Debt:** This JPIT-led campaign is continuing to shine a spotlight on the issue of household debt and calls for a comprehensive solution, rather than simply short-term support or delaying measures. The team worked with MPs to secure a backbench debate on this issue in July and mobilised people to ask their MPs to speak. They also held a meeting with Treasury Minister John Glen. Find out more at [www.resetthedebt.uk](http://www.resetthedebt.uk)
- 1.2. **Staying alert to justice:** JPIT continued to advocate for a continuation of the £20 a week uplift in Universal Credit, with the government's own analysis suggesting that the planned cut in October would have a "catastrophic" impact on many on low incomes, and cause poverty, homelessness and foodbank usage to soar. JPIT also ran short campaigns to mobilise church members in support of the 0.7% international development budget commitment ahead of votes in parliament; it was very disappointing that the cut to 0.5% was approved by MPs in July. A statement was put out from church leaders including the URC General Assembly Moderators condemning this decision as "unfair, unwise and immoral".
- 1.3. **Climate justice:** The Joint Public Issues team has promoted and supported key initiatives in the lead up to COP26, including Climate Sunday, the Youth Christian Climate Network (YCCN) relay from G7 to COP, and interfaith advocacy work through Faith for the Climate/Make COP Count. The URC Moderators were signatories to the Glasgow Multi-Faith Declaration ahead of COP, which was published in September and signed by more than 50 faith leaders.

The Secretary for Church and Society, Simeon Mitchell, has supported the URC's Environmental Task Group in developing a draft updated Environmental Policy for the Church. The policy will be brought to the 2022 General Assembly.

## 2. Ecumenical and Interfaith matters

- 2.1. **Israel Palestine follow up:** The passing of the Israel-Palestine resolutions by General Assembly provoked a good deal of positive correspondence, including a letter from Kairos Palestine, signed by Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah and Rifat Kassis. The Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Philip Brooks, was interviewed on BBC Radio Merseyside in the week following Assembly. One letter of concern was received, from the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Francis Brienen and Philip Brooks will meet two of their representatives on 25 November to discuss their concerns.
- 2.2. **Church of Scotland, Methodist and URC Israel-Palestine Group:** At the beginning of September, the first meeting of this three-denominational group took place. It was agreed to share information and co-operation on Israel-Palestine work, building on the agreement between the Church of Scotland and the URC, which Mission Committee endorsed last year.
- 2.3. **Local Ecumenical Partnerships:** Mission Committee at its meeting in September discussed the place and potential of Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The discussion focused in particular on how we assess the way in which URC membership in LEPs is recorded, and formed part of preparatory work towards a new URC ecumenical policy for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the URC.

- 2.4. **URC/Pfalz Partnership:** the URC's good friend and head of the 'Pfalz friends of the URC', Pfarrer Martin Henninger retired at the beginning of October. Philip Brooks attended his farewell service in Frankenthal as an invited guest and spoke on behalf of the URC.
- 2.5. **Greenbelt:** after the disappointment of the cancelled 2021 Festival, we look forward to bringing an increased URC presence to Boughton House next year. This is also part of our 2022 programme of events to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the URC.

### 3. Global and Intercultural Ministries

- 3.1. **Legacies of Slavery:** the Legacies of Slavery (LoS) task group has found renewed focus under the convenorship of David Reynolds, Professor Emeritus of International History at Cambridge University. Emphasis has been placed on planning and delivering the process of consultation requested by Mission Council in autumn 2019. Presentations were made at most of the autumn 2021 synod meetings to share the work to date, to gauge the degree of support for the direction of travel, and to seek feedback on a draft apology. The presentations were intended as a launch for further conversations in and with local churches.
- 3.2. **Anti-Racist Church resolution:** having had conversations with colleagues outside the URC about the possibilities for an independent racial justice audit, the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, Karen Campbell, is following up ideas from within the denomination including the call for a Commission on Racial Justice. She is seeking to listen to the various ideas to discern where they intersect and where they differ before proposing a concrete course of action.
- 3.3. **Anti-Racist Church – Equalities Committee resolution:** following the General Assembly's acceptance of resolution 15, instructing the Equalities Committee to form a small group to explore how the URC might implement a policy of 'affirmative action' to address the persistent underrepresentation of black and ethnic minority people in Assembly-appointed posts; and to explore the possibilities and practicalities of a recruitment policy which actively engages with and seeks to correct the current racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed post, the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries and the Convener and Secretary of the Equalities Committee have started the process of assembling the small group.
- 3.4. The Global and Intercultural Ministries team continues to support the ministries of our **Partners in Mission**. Alison Gibbs (Zambia) is due to retire in December 2021, and arrangements are being completed for her return to the UK. The Revd Yufen Chen (London) is in the third year of an initial three-year commitment with the URC. Conversations have begun with the Council for World Mission (CWM) about extending Yufen's service to a second term, and the project being relocated from Lumen to Islington. Selena Tai left her post as Mandarin chaplaincy assistant with St Peter's House Chaplaincy in Manchester at the end of July. The balance of the URC's funding will be used to support a new Mandarin assistant on a fixed-term contract. After that URC funding will cease.
- 3.5. Melanie Smith and Mark Meatcher, URC ministers serving in Thames North Synod, have been called to work with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji through CWM. Following interview with the International Exchange Reference

Group and extensive conversations with the relevant Church House colleagues and CWM, the Memorandum of Understanding is now being finalised. It is hoped that all formalities can be completed in time for a start on 1 December 2021. Mission Committee is grateful to the Revd Paul Whittle in particular, for all his support in the process.

#### 4. **Mission**

- 4.1. The survey to gather information on the impact and future of the **National Rural Officer post** and how to resource rural churches in the future was completed over the summer. Mission Committee discussed the responses at its meeting in September and will take any final decisions on future resourcing of rural mission and ministry in February 2022.
- 4.2. The **Fresh Expressions Enabling Group**, a task group of Mission Committee also comprising members from Ministries, Education and Learning, Children and Youth Work and the Pioneers network, has worked on a paper to generate discussion on pioneering and fresh expressions in the URC. The paper will be offered to the Assembly Executive for discussion, with a view to bringing resolutions on the ways forward for fresh expressions and pioneering in the URC to General Assembly in 2022.
- 4.3. Mission Committee at its meeting in September considered further analysis of the **vision 2020** evaluation data, with a view to bringing this to the Assembly Executive in November. However, as the accompanying films could not be completed in time due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation will now be presented to the General Assembly in 2022.