**Conflicts of interest around pension funds at the Mission Council and General Assembly**

There are a number of different conflicts of interest around the decision-making relating to pension funds.

Ministers[[1]](#footnote-1) who are members of the Ministers Pension Fund, their spouses or civil partners, and their dependent children, have an obvious interest. This interest takes more one form: some may wish to support a Defined Benefit scheme to protect the guaranteed nature of their pension; however, some may wish to support a move to a Defined Contribution scheme in order to secure their interests through stabilising the long term health and robustness of the Fund.

People who are members of the Lay Staff Pension Fund, their spouses or civil partners, and their dependent children, also have an obvious interest. This interest takes more one form: some may wish to support a Defined Benefit scheme to protect the guaranteed nature of their pension; however, some may wish to support a move to a Defined Contribution scheme in order to secure their interests through stabilising the long term health and robustness of the Fund.

Anyone who is a member of a local church of the United Reformed Church, including Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, also has an interest because the size of their contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund will change depending upon which decisions are taken. Some may wish to keep such contributions as low as possible, while others may wish to make a larger contribution in order to maintain or secure what they perceive as a benefit to their minister.

It is important that Decisions made by Mission Council and General Assembly, are in the best interests of the Church and reflect the views of its members, acting in their representative capacities. This is only possible after discussion and consultation amongst its members has taken place. If everyone with a conflict of interest in respect of pensions was removed from the decision-making, there would only be a handful of people left. This would not enable effective, representative decision making to take place. It is therefore important that those that have declared and recorded a conflict of interest are included. This will not diminish the decision made.

Decisions made in respect of the Pension funds will be considered by the United Reformed Church Trust (URCT). On its behalf, the Law and Polity Advisory Group have approached the Charity Commission, who have agreed that, in this context, those with a conflict of interest may participate in decision-making. Individual conflicts of interest should be declared and recorded. The Charity Commission have advised that it is prepared to make an order to this effect for the benefit of the United Reformed Church Trust under section 105 of the Charities Act 2011.

This is why you were asked in advance of the meeting to declare your interests. These have been checked, and recorded, and the numbers declaring each interest were:

1. Are you a member of the URC Ministers’ Pension Fund, or a spouse or civil partner of a member of the Fund? 51 out of 78

2. Are you a member of the URC Lay Staff Pension Fund, or a spouse or civil partner of a member of the Fund? 9 out of 78

3. Are you a member of a URC local church? 76 out of 78

In total, 76 out of 78 people recorded an interest in at least one category, many people in two categories, and some in all three categories. A full list will be preserved with the official copy of the minutes.

1. In this paper, the term ‘Ministers’ means both Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Church-Related Community Workers. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)