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The United Reformed Church

United Reformed Church General Assembly, Cardiff 2014

Dear friends,

General Assembly 2014 will address some very big questions: What is the Spirit saying to the United Reformed Church? Do we still embrace an ecumenical vision and vocation as our founders did? Is it time to establish a new order of ministry? How can church meetings be revitalised so that they fulfil their purpose as a place for the believers to discern the mind of Christ for their life and mission? What is our Christian attitude and response towards mental illness?

And not least, what do we understand to be the nature of marriage?

I pray that our time together in Cardiff will result in new clarity about our future direction, priorities and witness.

In the meantime, there are some practical things to say about this *Book of Reports*. We are experimenting with a new format. Responding to the request we've received from many people for more reading and preparation time, each Assembly committee was asked to report on its activities from the close of the last Assembly to December 2013, and that material was posted on the URC website at the beginning of March. The committees then wrote us a second report which described their current priorities – work in progress – together with the resolutions they bring for Assembly decisions. Both sets of reports are published in this book. Each of the reports in the forward-looking section has a cover sheet which tells you whom to contact if you have questions, sets out the resolution(s) clearly, summarises the main points, and answers the questions about financial impact and how the proposed work will affect relationships with external partners. The Assembly arrangements committee will be very interested to have your feedback on this style of presentation.

We offer you this book as the working materials for Assembly as it meets to listen for the voice of the Spirit. Those of you who will not be coming to Cardiff are welcome to join us online as key debates are streamed for your viewing. We ask the whole Church to join with us in prayer. This will be my last Assembly as general secretary – let's make it a good one!

Yours in Christ,

Roberta Rominger

ten statements of our mission purpose

Framework for Mission

Statement 1: Spirituality and prayer

We will grow in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Statement 2: Identity

The URC will be a Church where every local congregation will be able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

Statement 3: Christian Ecumenical Partnerships

We will be more confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the Church.

Statement 4: Community partnerships

We will be a Church that is more active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

Statement 5: Hospitality and diversity

We will be a Church committed to becoming even more welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

Statement 6: Evangelism

We will be more confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

Statement 7: Church growth

We will be a growing Church with an increasing membership.

Statement 8: Global partnerships

We will be a Church that is an active partner in God's global mission with other Churches around the world.

Statement 9: Justice and peace

We will be a Church committed to peacemaking and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

Statement 10: The integrity of creation

We will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

vision2020

Mission Council:
General report 2012-14

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information
Draft resolution(s)	**Matters subject to resolution are presented in separate papers.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To report to General Assembly on the work of Mission Council 2012-14.
Main points	Key Mission Council discussions and decisions are reported, together with actions taken on behalf of General Assembly (sections 4 and 5) and implementation of previous Assembly decisions (section 6).
Previous relevant documents	Cited within the paper as appropriate
Consultation has taken place with...	Not applicable

Summary of Impact

Financial	Not applicable.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Not applicable.

Mission Council report 2012-14

1. Introduction

1.1 Mission Council supports and furthers the work of the United Reformed Church between meetings of the General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the synod moderators and three representatives from each synod, together with the conveners of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three Fellowship of United Reformed youth (FURY) members, including the FURY moderator. Its task is to take a comprehensive view of the work of the United Reformed Church, to decide on priorities, and to encourage the Church at all levels in its engagement with the world. The scope of this engagement ranges from the local to the international arena and includes relationships with ecumenical partners in the UK and overseas.

1.2 Mission Council acts *on behalf of General Assembly* on matters which require action between meetings of the Assembly. Some of this work arises from decisions of the Assembly which are referred to Mission Council for implementation. Section 4 records this activity. Sometimes there are matters requiring a decision which must be taken before the General Assembly is due to meet. Such decisions are reported to the following Assembly and are contained in section 5 of this report.

1.3 Mission Council also *acts on its own behalf*, taking advice from its advisory groups (e.g. human resources advisory group, ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group) which report to its meetings and which may bring resolutions. It may also instigate work, appointing a special task group or asking several Assembly committees to cooperate in undertaking a piece of work on its behalf. It is often asked to be a sounding board for committees as they shape new policies for the approval of General Assembly. These actions and discussions are reported in the remaining sections.

2. Overview of the period July 2012 to March 2014

2.1 Since the last General Assembly, Mission Council has met on four occasions. The theme of the Assembly moderators, 'Living Conversations', has set the tone for searching discussion of the Church's future and the host of issues challenging its common life. The faith and order committee has played a key role in posing questions about possible future scenarios and which distinctive elements of the United Reformed Church's life and witness remain part of God's calling to us. If this report records fewer decisions than usual, it is because Mission Council spent much of its time in discernment mode grappling with enormous questions and seeking the guidance of the Spirit.

2.2 The October 2012 meeting received a report from the general secretary which brought together the issues raised in a host of reviews undertaken in the previous 18 months. Noting that each group had begun with a focussed task and that each had identified larger issues requiring attention, she presented a list which allocated work to various Assembly committees. She also proposed the formation of a medium term strategy group to oversee and coordinate the responses from the committees and to take forward outstanding proposals from the reviews, significantly the review of the role of the synod moderator which had been remaindered at the close of the General Assembly. This was agreed.

2.2.1 The medium term strategy group has kept a strong link with the faith and order committee throughout the 18 months of its life. The faith and order committee has repeatedly challenged Mission Council to distinguish between first and second order issues, each requiring a different kind of approach. Under their leadership, new clarity is emerging around the first order issues of the theological vision, values and ethos of the United Reformed Church, the distinctive contribution which the URC makes to Christian life and witness, and the work of the Holy Spirit through the councils of the Church. By their nature, these are questions which require continuous reflection. They will never have once-and-for-all answers.

2.2.2 It has been the medium term strategy group's role to address the second order issues in which we translate our understanding of the nature and purpose of the United Reformed Church into structural solutions to a host of pressing concerns. 'Successful' solutions, the group said, would be sustainable (meeting foreseeable needs for the next five to 10 years), scalable (capable of expansion or contraction as the Church's resources grow or diminish), and flexible (providing a common framework which can be adapted to suit the different needs and practices of each synod or local church). The group has enabled discussion of major issues concerning the role and shape of the synods, synod administration, revisions to the practice of inter-synod resource sharing, and the role of the synod moderator.

2.2.4 In March 2014 it was agreed that the group should continue until Mission Council or Assembly put alternative strategic planning measures in place. Issues agreed for the next phase of work were:

a) 'Right sizing' the central operations of the Church (nb: The aim of this is to make things work better, not to save money, although the effective use of scarce resources would also be considered.)
   - i. Evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing Assembly-level programme work
   - ii. Scope of Church House provision, including use of premises, central staffing, based on research into the needs of the churches
   - iii. Long term financial planning

b) Good governance
   - i. The effectiveness of governance by committees
   - ii. The respective roles of committee conveners and Church House line managers in relation to the new general secretariat
   - iii. Size and frequency of General Assembly
   - iv. The relationship between the trust bodies and the councils of the Church
   - v. The possibility of appointing one group of trustees to serve the trust bodies of several synods.

2.3 The October 2012 Mission Council meeting received a proposal from the staffing advisory group regarding the restructuring of the general secretariat to offer improved oversight and management at Church House. They held consultation meetings with a wide group of stakeholders and developed proposals leading to a new job description for the general secretary and three new deputy general secretary posts. The new deputy general secretaries will be heads of department for the areas of mission, discipleship, and administration and resources, encompassing the full range of Assembly work.

2.4 Mission Council welcomed the news that the Synod of Scotland and the four northern English synods (Mersey, North Western, Northern and Yorkshire) were engaged in conversations about how they might collaborate across their boundaries, sharing resources of people, programmes and support services.

2.5 A new task group was appointed to consider the relationship of the national synods of Scotland and Wales to the wider United Reformed Church. In particular, clarity was needed as to what it means for the national synods to 'speak and act in the name of the United Reformed Church' within their nations.

2.6 New names

2.6.1 To facilitate the transition to new structures, the staffing advisory group was renamed the human resources advisory group and given responsibility for the full range of people employed by the Church at Assembly level, overriding a previous distinction between Assembly-appointed staff and support staff. (nb: They do not oversee the terms and conditions of ministers of Word and sacrament, who are office holders rather than employees).

2.6.2 Mission Council agreed the name 'discipleship department' for the group comprising education and learning, ministries, church related community work, children's and youth work, and safeguarding. This name makes explicit the support of the Assembly for the spiritual nurture and support of all members of the Church, whatever their age or calling.

2.6.3 Mission Council agreed to rename the 'equal opportunities Committee' the 'equalities committee', noting that various groups were still under-represented in URC appointments and wider church life despite apparent equality of opportunity.

2.6.4 Mission Council agreed to change of name of the 'youth and children's work committee' to 'children's and youth work committee'.

2.7 Methodist/United Reformed Church relations

2.7.1 The October 2012 Mission Council meeting included a joint session with the Methodist Council. The Revd Dr David Cornick, general secretary of Churches Together in England, delivered a keynote address which charted the separate histories of the two Churches and explained some of their differences in outlook today. This was followed by a series of presentations on local ecumenism, including life in local ecumenical partnerships and united areas and the establishment of Cumbria as an ecumenical county. Small groups discussed the challenges in local ecumenical partnerships. The meeting called for faith and order conversations to be held focussing on the different understandings of ministry and denominational structure which cause difficulties for ecumenical partnership on the ground.

2.7.2 A strategic oversight group comprising senior officers of the URC Assembly and the Methodist Conference monitors progress on joint working between the two Churches including a joint property strategy group established to encourage local churches in adapting their buildings for effective mission. The strategic oversight group works in partnership with the Methodist/URC liaison group whose primary responsibility is for local ecumenical relations.

2.7.3 In January 2013 the synod moderators and selected Church House staff members were guests at the Methodist connexional leaders' forum and continued the conversation about areas for shared work.

2.7.4 Terms of reference have been agreed for faith and order conversations between the two Churches as envisioned by the October 2012 meeting of the two councils. Revised terms of reference were agreed for the Methodist/URC liaison group.

2.8 Review of General Assembly

2.8.1 In March 2014 Mission Council debated two synod resolutions regarding General Assembly. The first was from Wessex Synod asking for exploration of ways in which the United Reformed Church could return to a pattern of annual Assemblies. The second was from the National Synod of Wales lamenting the termination of the children's assembly and, while recognising budgetary restraints, asking that the children's assembly be reinstated alongside future General Assemblies.

2.8.2 The following resolution was agreed by consensus:
Mission Council requests the medium term strategy group and its successor and the Assembly arrangements committee to work both together and separately, consulting widely, on the governance, representation and accountability structures of the United Reformed Church.

This consultation should include:

i. How children, young people, and other minority voices can be listened to in decision making
ii. The balance between inspiration and other business at General Assembly
iii. The frequency and size of Assemblies and Mission Council meetings
iv. The pattern of Assembly committees and synods in contributing and responding to General Assembly

v. Length of service of General Assembly moderators
vi. The experiences of the 2010, 2012 and 2014 Assemblies
vii. Ensuring that this work is coordinated with other relevant reviews.

The outcomes of this consultation, with costed options, are to be reported to the May 2015 Mission Council with a view to decisions at the 2016 General Assembly.

2.9 In 2013 Mission Council's law and polity advisory group took counsel's opinion on a question of trusteeship and subsequently offered briefing sessions in Manchester and London which were attended by synod trust officers, legal advisers, property secretaries, moderators and clerks. A code of good practice for synod trusts would be prepared and disseminated.

2.10 An investigation group established in 2010 in response to the resignation of two members of staff at Church House completed its work, presenting recommendations for the strengthening of oversight practices at Church House.

2.11 The theme of radical welcome was commended to the synods and churches for their continuing exploration. However, it was decided that the Zero Intolerance project should be terminated, that the advertising materials produced for the project should not be released to synods or local churches, and that no external body should be allowed to use them.

2.12 Terms of reference were agreed for a new human sexuality task group, chaired by the Revd Elizabeth Caswell. They were given responsibility for guiding the United Reformed Church in its consideration of the government's proposals for same-sex marriage. The group has reported to each subsequent meeting and Mission Council has given advice on the strategy to be followed in enabling discussion across the Church and at General Assembly 2014.

3. Actions arising from committee work

3.1 Children's and youth work

Discussion on the employment status of the children's and youth development officers (CYDOs) led to a decision that they should be employed by the synods and that the Assembly programme of children's and youth development should continue through their participation in a network supported by the committee and the staff at Church House.

3.2 Education and learning

The education and learning committee brought discussion topics to Mission Council including student fees, mandatory 'safer sacred space' training, and progress on the major review entitled *The Learning Church: The Next Chapter*.

3.3 Equalities

3.3.1 The committee called Mission Council's attention to the lack of women, young people and minority groups on various URC committees and groups, in particular the URC trust and pension fund trust. Mission Council pledged itself to ensuring that this situation would be rectified as new trustees were appointed. The synods were urged to take similar action.

3.3.2 The committee also initiated a discussion on 'inclusive and expansive language', encouraging members to consider images which speak positively to all people within the diverse community of the Church.

3.3.3 A paper entitled *United Reformed Church policy in relation to the Equality Act 2010* was accepted and commended for use throughout the Church.

3.4 Finance

3.4.1 Gratitude was expressed to the synods for the contributions they had made to the ministers' pension fund in the period 2010-12, in which they had achieved a total of £2.5 million. A reduced contribution of £600,000 was requested for 2013 and £300,000 for 2014. This was in line with an earlier resolution mandating that this subsidy from the synods should be phased out by the end of the 2013-16 triennium.

3.4.2 The Church's document *Recommended mandate for investors* was amended to include avoidance of companies which benefit by offering credit at usurious rates of interest to those who do not have access to funds through normal lending channels.

3.5 Ministries

It was agreed that the number of special category ministry posts (full-time equivalent) should not exceed eight percent of the total number of stipendiary ministers available.

3.6 Mission

3.6.1 Multicultural Church, intercultural habit

Among the items remaindered from General Assembly 2012 was a report entitled *multicultural church, intercultural habit* (see *Book of Reports 2012* pp. 200-203). On behalf of Assembly, Mission Council celebrated the 2005 declaration that the United Reformed Church was a multicultural Church, noting how the landscape had continued to change in the intervening years. It committed the Church to a renewed focus towards an inclusive Church, gave enthusiastic support to the charter contained in that report (see appendix 1), and commended it to local churches, synods and the resource centres for learning.

3.6.2 The Mission Committee included Mission Council in a consultation exercise around a proposal for an evangelism project which would be funded by the Council for World Mission's mission support programme. After discussion the proposal was withdrawn for further work.

3.6.3 The National Synod of Wales presented a preliminary report of its proposed contribution to the Commission of Covenanted Churches' consultation process, called 'The Gathering'. The process did not suggest a full scheme of union. Instead, it offered a future in which the partners would agree to interchangeability of ministry as a step on the journey towards a united Church in Wales, the form of which was not yet known.

3.7 Safeguarding

Work continued on the production of new guidance materials on the safeguarding of children and adults in need of protection. A new safeguarding officer, Amy Slennett, was welcomed. She is employed jointly by the URC and the Baptist Union and is supported by a reconstituted safeguarding reference group which includes staff from the ministries and children's and youth work departments. The two departments have also been working together to implement the new system of Disclosure and Barring Service checks, incorporating the work of the Criminal Records Bureau and the Independent Safeguarding Authority.

3.8 United Reformed Church Trust

3.8.1 The chair of the United Reformed Church trust reported on an invitation which had been received from the Baptist Union to consider sharing their office premises in Didcot. After preliminary consideration this option was not pursued. However, the trust continued to explore possibilities for redevelopment of URC Church House (86 Tavistock Place, London) to make it better fit for purpose and to create space for rent-paying tenants, and in March 2014 Mission Council agreed the funding for a feasibility study.

3.8.2 A progress report was given on the regeneration agency One Church 100 Uses. In 2007 Mission Council had passed a resolution giving thanks for work undertaken by the agency and encouraging further cooperation. Some successful projects had followed, together with some difficulties. The agency remained available for partnership in church redevelopment along with other companies.

4. Actions taken on previous Assembly resolutions

4.1 Mission Council ratified resolution 15 of Assembly 2012 which made changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church (see appendix 2).

4.2 Resolution 16 of Assembly 2012 established the principle of mandatory training for ministers of Word and sacraments and church related community workers. Mission Council agreed that 'safer sacred space' training to raise the awareness of ministers/ CRCWs to appropriate boundaries in their interpersonal relationships should be mandatory and approved an implementation plan.

4.3 Resolution 20 of Assembly 2012 concerned the 2013 budget. Significant reductions were achieved following a process of consultation with the Assembly committees. Some budget cuts will take effect in 2014. Others require a longer period of transition and will be monitored by the finance committee and its officers.

4.4 Acting on resolution 33 of Assembly 2012, Mission Council agreed terms of reference for a task group on the Church's engagement with 20 to 40 year olds and appointed people to serve.

4.5 The Assembly commission established by resolution 38 of the 2012 Assembly identified issues underlying the resignation of a moderator-elect of Assembly in March 2012. These were referred to the law and polity advisory group and the pastoral reference and welfare committee to be resolved. The commission completed its work with a final report to Mission Council in May 2013. The pastoral reference and welfare committee offered statements to the November 2013 and March 2014 meetings regarding a reconciliation process which has now come to completion.

4.6 A new role description for role of the synod moderator was approved for recommendation to General Assembly, bringing to completion the work of the review submitted to the 2012 Assembly which was remaindered due to lack of time.

5. Actions taken on behalf of General Assembly

5.1 The dates and venue for the 2014 General Assembly were agreed.

5.2 The budgets for 2013 and 2014 were agreed.

5.3 Given the changes soon to be implemented in the general secretariat, Mission Council determined that the officers of Assembly would be the serving moderators of General Assembly, the general secretary, the clerk, the treasurer, and the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee. They further agreed that the three deputy general secretaries and the deputy treasurer would not be members of the Mission Council advisory group.

5.4 Appointments and re-appointments

5.4.1 Appointments

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council appointed the full list of committee members and representatives as presented by the nominations committee in the year in which Assembly did not meet. Other appointments to Assembly work were as follows:

i. The Revd Ruth Whitehead as moderator of the South Western Synod from July 2013 to June 2020;

ii. The Revd Pamela Ward as convener of the maintenance of the ministry sub-committee until July 2017;

iii. Dr Chris Evans as convener of the pensions executive from January 2013 until June 2017;

iv. Dr Ian Harrison as a member of the United Reformed Church trust until July 2014;

v. The Revd Nigel Uden as convener-elect of the board of governors of Westminster College;

vi. Chris Wright as clerk to the board of governors at Westminster College;

vii. Richard Nunn as chair of the URC pensions trust;

viii. The Revd Dick Gray as deputy treasurer;

ix. The Revd Kate Gray and the Revd Ashley Evans as members of the communications and editorial committee.

x. The Revd Rowena Francis completed her service as moderator of the Northern Synod in July 2013. The Revd Lis Mullen was appointed interim synod moderator with a transitional brief within the larger discussions across the five northern synods.

5.4.2 These internal appointments were noted by Mission Council:

i. Mission Council welcomed the appointment of Dr Andrew Bradstock as secretary for church and society. This appointment had been made by the interviewing group.

ii. The Revd Richard Mortimer completed his service as deputy general secretary in May 2013 and was warmly thanked. The Revd David Grosch-Miller was appointed to serve as interim assistant general secretary from July 2013 until June 2014.

iii. The Revd Martin Hazell completed his service as director of communications in September 2013 and Gill Nichol was appointed interim director to enable the communications and editorial committee to conduct a review of the priorities and staffing of the department.

5.4.3 Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council reappointed:

i. John Ellis as treasurer until July 2017, resolving that a deputy treasurer should be appointed to support him during his years as moderator of General Assembly;

ii. The Revd Richard Church as moderator of the North Western Synod until August 2019;

iii. The Revd Dr John Bradbury as director of studies in theology and church history at Westminster College until August 2021;

iv. The appointment of the secretary for ministries, the Revd Craig Bowman, was extended to July 2015 because of a delay in completing the necessary re-appointment review.

v. The appointments of the secretaries for ecumenical relations (the Revd David Tatem), world church relations (the Revd Jane Rowell), and racial justice and multicultural ministries (the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar) were likewise extended from July 2014 to July 2015 to allow for a strategic review of the staffing requirements of the mission department.

5.5 Changes to governing documents

5.5.1 The Structure of the United Reformed Church

5.5.1.1 Resolution 15 of General Assembly 2012 received its final approval at Mission Council in May 2013. It is reprinted as appendix 2.

5.5.1.2 Further changes were presented to Mission Council in November 2013 and agreed. They were referred to the synods and will be presented for final approval to Assembly 2014. These are presented in a separate paper on page 49-50.

5.5.1.3 Mission Council determined that there should be six international guests and six ecumenical guests as members of Assembly in future. As this was considered commentary to the Structure rather than substantive text, it was within Mission Council's power to approve the change with one vote.

5.5.1.4 Mission Council agreed to omit the words "(currently four)" from Paragraph 2.(3).(d) of the Structure. This refers to the membership of the district council, which on occasion still must be convened for decisions regarding properties. It removes the stipulation for a particular number of members, leaving the responsibility with the synod concerned. Again, this is a matter of commentary which was within Mission Council's authority to change.

5.5.2 Mission Council also amended the standing orders (see page 58), significantly to allow for the grouping of business into three categories for decision either by consensus, majority voting, or en bloc vote.

5.5.3 General Assembly 2012 passed its resolution 3 (confirmation of resolution 26 of Assembly 2010) on the understanding that Mission Council would adopt the necessary change to the rules of procedure consequent on the new procedure for agreeing constitutional changes. The following change was agreed.

> **Rules of Procedure 2.5**
> When an amendment to the Basis of Union is proposed under Paragraph 3.(1) of the Structure and the General Assembly gives first approval it shall at the same time decide whether or not following reference to the synods (and, where appropriate, to local churches) the change may be approved for a second time by the Mission Council. If not and providing that notice has not been received from synods (and/or local churches) as defined in clause 3.(1)(f) a motion to agree the proposed amendment shall come before the General Assembly at its next meeting where it shall require a simple majority to be passed.

5.5.4 Changes to the Plan for Partnership were agreed (see appendices 3a, 3b and 3c).

5.5.5 Changes to the ministerial disciplinary process and incapacity procedure were agreed (see appendices 4a, 4b, 5a and 5b).

5.5.6 The 2012 Assembly discussed changes to the ministers' pension fund rules and authorised Mission Council to adopt them (see appendix 6). The amendments were approved in October 2012.

5.5.7 A change to the composition of the board of governors of Westminster College was agreed, increasing the number from 15 to 16 to allow for the appointment of a governor with educational experience in addition to those appointed specifically to represent partner institutions.

Appendix 1

Multicultural Church, intercultural habit: a charter for the United Reformed Church

In modelling a habit of generous lives, we:

1. will be open, trusting and joyful to the leading of God's Spirit
   - [*vision2020* statement 1 *spirituality and prayer*]
     [Acts 2:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18]

2. commit ourselves to deepening our discerning and re-reading of our biblical and theological bases for our intercultural life together
   - [1 *spirituality and prayer;* 2 *identity;* 6 *evangelism*]
     [Isaiah 56:6-8; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-7; Ruth; Matthew 1.1-17; Acts 10]

3. will affirm new and different experiences, recognising a variety of expressions of the one faith
   - [5 *hospitality and diversity;* 3 *Christian ecumenical partnerships*]
     [Genesis 1:26; Psalm 133:1; Matthew 28:19; John 17:11, 23; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27; Galatians 3:27-29]

4. will journey beyond our cultural comfort zones and boundaries
   - [8 g*lobal partnerships;* 4 *community partnerships*]
     [Jonah; Matthew 15: 21-28; 28:19-20; Mark 7:24-30; Genesis 28:10-19; Acts 8: 26-40]

5. will seek to become an enlarged, inclusive, welcoming, and justice-seeking community
   - [2 *identity;* 9 *justice and peace;* 10 *integrity of creation*]
     [Psalm 148; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 4:3-5; Revelation 7:9; Micah 6:8]

6. will engage in transformation of heart, mind, structure and policy, seeking habits that redress power imbalances, challenge systemic injustice, generously cultivate diverse leadership, and seek full participation of all
   - [7 *church growth*; 9 *justice and peace*]
     [Luke 19:1-10; John 10:10; Acts 10:34; Romans 12: 1-2; Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 8:27-33; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 4:16-30; Romans 16: 1-16]

7. will work intentionally towards mutuality in giving and sharing for all of us are in need and *all must be mutually inconvenienced* for the sake of the other and the gospel.
   - [1 *spirituality and prayer;* 5 *hospitality and diversity;* 9 *justice and peace*]
     [Luke 7:18-23; Luke 10:25-37; John 4:1-39]

8. commit ourselves to the constant habit of self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through on-going education, training, monitoring and evaluation of our intercultural engagement.
   - [1 *spirituality and prayer;* 2 *identity*; 7 *church growth;* 9 *justice and peace*]
     [I Corinthians 9:1-33; 2Corinthians 5:16-20; Philippians 3:12-16]

Appendix 2

Assembly resolution 15 (ratified by decision of Mission Council, May 2013)

Changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church

Changes are shown in red.

Synod functions

2(4)(A)(xvii)

Amend to read as follows:

where the Synod, acting through its Moderator (or his/her duly appointed deputy) in accordance with either the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church (where the issues relate to perceived disciplinary breach(es)) or the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual (where the issues relate to perceived incapacity as defined in the Incapacity Procedure), considers that a minister or Church Related Community Worker is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E or Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II to the Basis of Union, as the case may be, to take the appropriate one of the following courses namely (i) to refer the case of that minister or Church Related Community Worker into the Disciplinary Process in the manner prescribed by that Process and to act in accordance with the provisions thereof as regards the suspension of the minister or Church Related Community Worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (reference to be made to Paragraph 7.5 of the Structure to ascertain the point at which a Disciplinary case shall commence) or (ii) to follow the Consultation Procedure prescribed by the Incapacity Procedure which could in its turn lead to the case of the minister or Church Related Community Worker being referred into the Incapacity Procedure and to act in accordance with the provisions thereof as regards the suspension of the minister or Church Related Community Worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Procedure (reference to be made to Paragraph 6.5 of the Structure to ascertain the point at which a case shall commence within the Incapacity Procedure) (the transitional overlap which occurs when a case is referred back from the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure leading to the commencement of a case within the other of them shall be a permitted extension of the Function).

2(4)(A)(xviii)

Amend to read as follows:

to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual *{words omitted}* appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such *{words omitted}* guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information;

2(4)(A)(xxi)

Amend to read as follows:

to consider the resignation of ministers or Church Related Community Workers not currently the subject of any case within the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O and in consultation with the moderator of the Synod to decide upon appropriate action *{words omitted}*;

2(4)(B) **Remove this paragraph altogether.**

2(4)(C) **This paragraph now becomes 2(4)(B) and is amended to read as follows:**
2(4)(B) No appeal shall lie against the decision by a Synod to initiate the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O or the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P in respect of any minister or Church Related Community Worker under Function (xvii).

Area functions

2(5)(A)(viii)
Amend to read as follows:
to consider the resignation of ministers or Church Related Community Workers not currently the subject of any case within the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O and in consultation with the moderator of the Synod to decide upon appropriate action (see also Paragraphs 2(4)(A)(xxi) and 2(6)(A)(xviii));

2(5)(A)(xviii)
Amend to read as follows:
to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual appends *{words omitted}* guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such *{words omitted}* guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information;

2(5)(B) **Remove this paragraph altogether.**

General Assembly functions

2(6)(A)(xi) *[Changes to this paragraph were approved under Resolution 9 of General Assembly 2010 and required ratification by General Assembly 2012.]*

2(6)(A)(xviii)
Amend to read as follows:
to decide upon questions regarding the inclusion on the Roll of Ministers and the Roll of Church Related Community Workers of the United Reformed Church which have been previously considered and transmitted with recommendations by synods (but excluding any matter which is dealt with in accordance with the Disciplinary Process referred to in Paragraph 7 of the Structure). *{words omitted}*

2(6)(A)(xxiii)
Amend to read as follows:
in the absence of any reference into either the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church (where the issues relate to perceived disciplinary breach(es)) or the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual (where the issues relate to perceived incapacity as defined in the Incapacity Procedure) by the appropriate Synod (the case of any minister who is the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary or a Moderator of Synod being necessarily dealt with under this provision) and where the General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf) (acting through the Deputy General Secretary or his/her duly appointed deputy) considers that a minister or Church Related Community Worker is not or may not be exercising his/her ministry in accordance with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E or Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II to the Basis of Union, as the case may be, to take the appropriate one of the following courses namely (i) to refer the case

of that minister or Church Related Community Worker into the Disciplinary Process in the manner prescribed by that Process and to act in accordance with the provisions thereof as regards the suspension of the minister or Church Related Community Worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Process (reference to be made to Paragraph 7.5 of the Structure to ascertain the point at which a Disciplinary case shall commence) or (ii) to follow the Consultation Procedure prescribed by the Incapacity Procedure which could in its turn lead to the case of the minister or Church Related Community Worker being referred into the Incapacity Procedure and to act in accordance with the provisions thereof as regards the suspension of the minister or Church Related Community Worker concerned pending the resolution of the matter under that Procedure (reference to be made to Paragraph 6.5 of the Structure to ascertain the point at which a case shall commence within the Incapacity Procedure) (the transitional overlap which occurs when a case is referred back from the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure leading to the commencement of a case within the other of them shall be a permitted extension of the Function);

2(6)(A)(xxvi)

Amend to read as follows:

without detracting from the general delegatory powers held by Mission Council, to give specific authority to Mission Council acting in the name of General Assembly to make with immediate effect such changes to any part of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual or the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P as are recommended to Mission Council by the MIND Advisory Group (or such other Group or Committee as may in the future perform the functions of that Group), all such changes to be reported to the next meeting of the General Assembly.

2(6)(A)(xxvii) The existing function (xxvi) becomes (xxvii)

2(6)(B) Remove this paragraph.

5. Appeals

5(1) Remove this paragraph.

5(2) This paragraph to become paragraph 5 and the opening words to read:

5. "The procedure for dealing with references and appeals falling outside Paragraph 6 (Incapacity Procedure) and Paragraph 7 (Disciplinary Process) is as follows:-"

The remaining 4 unnumbered paragraphs under the existing 5(2) are unchanged.

6 Incapacity procedure

6.1 After the words **"...consider that s/he is..."** insert the word "not" and after the words **"(in the case of CRCWs"** insert a closing bracket.

6.2 Add the following words at the end of this paragraph:

"..., and once so initiated that case shall be resolved in accordance with the Incapacity Procedure and not under Paragraph 5 above."

6.3, 6.4 These paragraphs are unchanged.

6.5 Add a new paragraph 6.5 as follows:

6.5 A case shall commence within the Incapacity Procedure when the Synod Moderator or the Deputy General Secretary shall send or deliver to the Secretary of the Review Commission* a Certificate of Entry* and a Commencement Notice* (the expressions marked * being defined in the Incapacity Procedure).

7. Insert new Section 7 as follows:

7. DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

7.1 The Provisions of this Paragraph 7 shall apply to cases proceeding under the Disciplinary Process (Section O of the Manual of the United Reformed Church) where the person responsible for initiating it in respect of a particular minister or Church Related Community Worker considers that s/he is not or may not be exercising the ministry of word and sacrament or the ministry of church related community work as the case may be in accordance (in the case of ministers) with Paragraph 2 of Schedule E of the Basis of Union and (in the case of CRCWs) with Paragraph 2 of Schedule F, Part II thereto and perceives the issue as a disciplinary one not falling within Paragraph 6 above.

7.2 No right of appeal shall lie against any decision taken in accordance with Paragraph 7.1 above to initiate the Disciplinary Process in respect of any minister or CRCW, and once so initiated that case shall be resolved in accordance with the Disciplinary Process and not under Paragraph 5 above.

7.3 The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Disciplinary Process shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding.

7.4 As soon as any minister or CRCW becomes the subject of a case under the Disciplinary Process, none of the Councils of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that minister or CRCW in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the due process of that case provided that the provision of such pastoral care as shall be deemed appropriate shall not be regarded as a breach of this paragraph.

7.5.1 In any case in which the caution stage (as defined in the disciplinary process) is invoked, that case shall begin with the calling in of the synod appointees as described in the disciplinary process.

7.5.2 In any case in which the caution stage is not invoked, that case shall begin with the calling in of the mandated group as described in the disciplinary process.

Appendix 3a

Changes to the Plan for Partnership (with effect from January 2013)

inserts shown in *italics*
deletions shown in **bold**
changes <u>underlined</u>

Paragraph 6.1.3 "...are not entitled to additional maternity/adoption/*paternity* leave and ..."

In April 2011 the government introduced additional statutory paternity pay and additional paternity leave. The existing guidelines for ordinary statutory paternity pay and ordinary statutory paternity leave (birth and adoption) have now been extended to include this provision

Paragraph 6.1.6 Pension Fund: ministers/CRCWs **who have not attained the age of 55 years at the date of initial induction** *inducted* to stipendiary service under the Plan may join the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund (URCMPF).

Paragraph 6.1.6.1 A minister/CRCW aged 55 years or over at the date of initial induction to stipendiary service under the Plan may not join the URCMPF.

The changes to Paragraphs 6.1.6 and 6.1.6.1 shown above are as a result of the 2012 General Assembly decision that the age restriction in respect of membership of the ministers' pension fund should be removed from 1 January 2013.

Note: As shown above, paragraph 6.1.6.1 is deleted in its entirety to be replaced by the following wording:

Paragraph 6.1.6.1 The General Assembly has agreed that from September 2013 all eligible ministers/CRCWs will be Auto-Enrolled into The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund (URCMPF). Ministers of other denominations not eligible for membership of the URCMPF will be Auto-Enrolled into The Pensions Trust.

New regulations relating to workplace pensions requires employers to enrol all eligible employees into a qualifying workplace pension scheme (QWPS). Although not employees, this includes ministers and CRCWs. In 2012 the General Assembly agreed that for the purpose of auto-enrolment the Church will only offer two pension schemes to ministers and lay staff: The United Reformed Church ministers' pension fund (URCMPF) and The Pensions Trust final salary scheme (TPT).

This new legislation will affect the Church from September 2013 when all ministers and lay staff will be auto-enrolled into one of the two schemes.

Paragraph 6.3.2.2 In the case of part-time ministers/CRCWs the church should meet a proportion of the standing charges of the manse, *(rates (where payable), council tax, water/sewage charges)*, or pay a pro rata housing allowance, based on the proportion of stipend paid.

Questions relating to the manse standing charges are received at fairly regular intervals from both ministers and church treasurers and this inclusion may help to clarify the situation.

Basic stipend:	there are a number of references throughout the Plan to 'basic stipend'. As there is only one level of stipend these should be amended to read <u>*stipend*</u>.

Appendix 3b

Changes to the Plan for Partnership (with effect from November 2013)

inserts shown in italics
deletions shown in bold

Paragraph 5.2.2 Ministers for whom remuneration for specific periods has been authorised by the **Assembly Pastoral Reference Committee** *Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee* and such other special cases approved by the Ministries Committee.

Paragraph 5.3 Lay missionaries serving in posts recognised and designated by the **Ecumenical Committee** *International Exchange Reference Group*.

The above two changes are as a result of name changes to committees.

Paragraph 6.3.4.3 Where a minister/ CRCW does not provide a car but the regular use of a car is considered necessary, it is the responsibility of the local church to provide a suitable vehicle. The costs of private **motoring** *mileage* shall be **borne** *reimbursed* by the minister/CRCW under locally agreed arrangements *in line with the Advisory Fuel Rates issued by the MoM Office.*

The above amendment is intended to clarify the existing wording and make reference to the advisory fuel rates which change regularly and are distributed to all ministers.

Paragraph 10.1.6 Where a minister/CRCW has not received a retirement resettlement grant at the time of retirement, they shall be entitled to a resettlement grant upon the first change of residence (subject to the three years' restriction in para **9.1.1** *10.1.1*).

Paragraph 10.4.1 Notwithstanding what is written above in paras **9.1 and 9.3** *10.1.1 and 10.3*, in the case of a husband and wife being ministers/CRCWs, their combined entitlement to a resettlement grant and retirement removal grant shall not exceed that of one full-time minister/CRCW.

The above two changes correct errors identified in the cross referencing.

Paragraph 12 The payment of stipend, together with any allowances, shall be made monthly on or before the **26th** *25th* day of each month.

The above change reflects the reality that all payments are now made on the 25th of the month. Historically building societies needed one further day; this is now not the case.

APPENDIX A – APPROVED RATES UNDER THE PLAN

Para 11	**Maximum weekly** *Weekly* payments to students **(6 April 2012 – 5 April 2013)** Maximum of 10 weeks paid.	£120

This change reflects the fact that it is no longer necessary to align this payment rate to the tax year and in the future this will be aligned to the calendar year in line with stipend increases.

Appendix 3c

Further changes to the Plan for Partnership (agreed 11 March 2014)

inserts shown in italics
deletions shown in bold

10.3 **Reasonable** *R*emoval costs within the United Kingdom shall be paid on the first removal of a minister/CRCW following final retirement from a pastoral charge or from an appointment paid under the terms of the Plan (or to the spouse of a minister/CRCW who dies before retirement) provided that at least two estimates have been obtained. **Normally** *T*he cost of the lowest estimate will be met *up to the maximum shown in Appendix A.*

APPENDIX C – REMOVAL COSTS
The receiving local church is responsible for paying the costs of removal (see para 6.3.3). Where the removal is within the United Kingdom reimbursement of up to 50% of the cost incurred (subject to a maximum reimbursement *shown in Appendix A* **of £1,500**) is available from the Ministry and Mission Fund and application should be made via the MoM Office. Where a minister/CRCW is called from abroad reimbursement from that Fund to the local church will be based on the removal costs from the port of entry.

These amendments are required to ensure that all grants paid under the terms of the Plan for Partnership will, in future, be calculated on the same basis. It is intended that the relevant figures in appendix A for 2014 should be £3,317 with regard to 10.3 and £1,659 with regard to appendix C.

Appendix 4a

Changes to the ministerial disciplinary process (agreed by Mission Council, May 2013)

A.5 Add the following definitions at paragraph A.5:

"General Assembly Appointees" shall mean the persons appointed under Paragraph AA.2.1.2 to examine a disciplinary case within the Caution Stage and, if considered appropriate, to impose Cautions upon the minister."

"General Assembly Representative" shall mean the person appointed (whether individually or as the holder of a particular office) to act in the name of General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf) in carrying out the responsibilities assigned to that person within this Disciplinary Process."

In the event, for whatever reason, of there not being a Deputy General Secretary, then Mission Council will need to appoint someone to assume the DGS's position within the Disciplinary Process. That person will be defined within the Process as ***"the General Assembly Representative"*** *and will include the DGS while still in post. This paper makes the necessary changes to the paragraphs referring to the DGS.*

At the end of the definition of **"Independent Safeguarding Authority"** at paragraph A.5, add the words **"....and its intended successor body the Disclosure and Barring Service or any other body which in the future may assume the functions of either of these bodies".**

Section 87 of the Freedom of Information Act 2012 states that there is to be a body called the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). Section 88 (1) states that the Secretary of State may by order transfer the functions of the ISA to the DBS and Section 88(4) states that he/she may by order provide for the dissolution of the ISA.

In the definition of **"Synod Appointees"** at paragraph A.5, after the words **"persons appointed"** insert the words **"under Paragraph AA.2.1.1"**.

A.5^, A.8*, AA.1.4, AA.2.1.2, AA.2.2, B.3.2*, B.3.3, B.3.4, B.3.5, E.4.2, E.5.3, F.6.1, G.1.2.2, G.10.2 In all of these paragraphs replace the words **"Deputy General Secretary"** with the words "**General Assembly Representative"**. *^In Paragraph A.5 the expression occurs in the definition of "Gross Misconduct. *In Paragraphs A.8 and B.3.2 the expression occurs twice. The DGS is also referred to in Paragraphs F.2.3, G.13.4 and G.14.5 – but see later as to those paragraphs.*

AA.2.1.1, AA.2.1.2 Add the following words at the beginning of paragraphs AA.2.1.1 and AA.2.1.2 of the process to bring those paragraphs into line with B.3.1 and B.3.2:-

AA.2.1.1 "In disciplinary cases arising under Paragraph 2(4)(A)(xvii) of the Structure (Synods) in respect of any Minister in membership or under the authority of the Synod in question,...."

AA.2.1.2 "In disciplinary cases arising under Paragraph 2(6)(A)(xxiii) of the Structure General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf)...."

Also at the end of paragraph AA.2.1.2 replace the words **"Synod Appointees in that case"** with the words **"General Assembly Appointees in that case. As their functions will be the same as those of the Synod Appointees in a case arising under Paragraph AA.2.1.1, the expression "Synod Appointees" shall in a case arising under this Paragraph be taken to include General Assembly Appointees."**

The persons appointed under this paragraph are not appointed by Synod but by General Assembly. Hence the need to change the wording as above.

AA.2.4 Replace the words **"both the Synod Appointees and the minister"** with the words **"the Synod Appointees".**

AA.2.6 Replace the words **"It should also be noted that..."** at the beginning of the second sentence with the word **"Also..."**.

AA.9.3 Insert the word **"a"** before **"Mandated Group"**.

AA.12 Insert the following additional paragraphs at the end of Section AA:-

"AA.12.1 Where the Synod Appointees become aware that (i) the minister is the subject of a criminal charge for an alleged offence falling into any of the categories set out in Paragraph E.7.2 or (ii) information has been laid before the Police which may result in a criminal charge being brought against him/her, in either such event the Synod Appointees shall adjourn their own enquiry and consult the Synod Moderator or other person who initiated the Caution Stage who may, on the basis of such information, conclude the Caution Stage in accordance with Paragraph AA.1.3 and call in a Mandated Group whereupon the case would be governed by the later Sections of this Process. In the event that the Caution Stage is not so concluded, the Synod Appointees' enquiry will remain adjourned pending the verdict of the criminal courts (whether or not on appeal) on the charges brought against the minister or the withdrawal of the charge (in relation to alternative (i) above) or the notification that no charge is to be brought (in relation to alternative (ii) above).

AA.12.2 In cases where Paragraph AA.12.1 applies but where Paragraph AA.1.3 is not invoked, the Synod Appointees may themselves monitor the criminal proceedings, but shall otherwise for the period specified in Paragraph AA.12.1 suspend their own enquiry."

B.3.1, B.3.2 Insert the word **"disciplinary"** before **"cases"** at the beginning of these paragraphs.

B.3.2 On the second line alter **"))"** to **")"**.

B.7.1 Replace the existing paragraph in its entirety with the following:-

"In every case involving an allegation of Gross Misconduct and in other cases where the Synod Moderator or the General Assembly Representative as the case may be considers that he/she has strong and urgent reasons for so doing, he/she shall suspend the minister with immediate effect either orally or in writing and shall forthwith call in the Mandated Group in accordance with Paragraph B.3.1 or Paragraph B.3.2, whichever applies. Suspension imposed orally shall be immediately confirmed in writing to the minister."

F.2.3 Remove the words **"the Deputy General Secretary,"**

Should the Assembly Commission or the Appeals Commission decide to delete the name of a minister from the Roll, it may append guidance to that decision. Paragraphs F.2.3, G.13.4 and G.14.5 all deal with the passing on of that guidance to persons on a "need to know" basis. In the light of his/her wide-ranging responsibilities the DGS is currently included in the list of such persons. However the role of the "General Assembly Representative" will simply be to carry out the specific functions set out in the Process. Once the case in which s/he has been concerned is concluded, his/her involvement comes to an end and s/he will have no future monitoring responsibilities. Consequently s/he should not be included in the list of persons in these paragraphs.

F.6.1 Replace the reference in the text to **"Paragraph B.9.3"** with a reference to **"Paragraph B.3.2"**.

G.13.4 Remove the words **"the Deputy General Secretary,"**

G.14.5 After the words **"the Press Officer"**remove the comma and insert the word **"and"**. Also remove the words **"and the Deputy General Secretary"**.

In the following cases, the main paragraph numbers occupy a separate line: **A.4, A.6, A.7, B.1, B.2, B.5, B.6, B.9, C.2, C.3, C.4, C.5, C.7, D.2, E.1, E.2, E.3, E.5, E.6, E.7, E.9, E.10, E.12, E.13, E.14, E.16, F.1, F.5, F.6, F.7, G.1, G.3, G.4, G.5, G.7, G.10, G16 and H.2.** This uses up space unnecessarily. Those numbers can be removed so that the numbering of the relevant paragraph would begin with the first sub-number, e.g. A.4.1, A.6.1 etc.

Appendix 4b

Changes to the ministerial disciplinary process (November 2013)

DISCIPLINARY PROCESS

A.3
Replace the whole of this paragraph with the following:
"Accordingly, where under the provisions of this disciplinary process, any notice specifies a time limit for a certain action to be taken by the recipient and that action is not carried out within the time specified in the notice to the satisfaction of the person or body sending the notice, that person or body shall have a discretion to allow a reasonable further period for such compliance, except as regards the strict time limit imposed on the right of appeal under paragraphs AA.8.1, E.5.3.1 and G.1 and upon the steps to be taken by the synod moderator under paragraphs AA.10.2.4 and AA.10.2.5. In other cases, if the person or body sending the notice considers that sufficient time has been allowed and the action required has still not been carried out or there has been an unreasonable delay in the carrying out of the action (whether or not the disciplinary process imposes a time limit for the carrying out of the action), that person or body may proceed, bearing in mind the need for the Process to be conducted as expeditiously as possible."

AA.1.5.3
Replace the existing paragraph in its entirety with the following:
"If any member of a Synod Panel or the Joint Panel is a member of a local church connected with the case or has any pastoral or personal involvement in the case or is the subject of a disciplinary complaint, that person shall not be one of the Synod Appointees for that case."

B.3.2
Delete the word **"other".**

B.3.3
Delete the word **"other".**

B.4
In each of the expressions **"connected with a case"** and **"involvement in a case"** insert the word **"particular"** between **"a"** and **"case".**

E.9.1
In the last sentence, after the words **"...appropriate so to do..."** insert the words **"...and having supplied the Mandated Group with a copy of the minister's statement...".**

E.9.2 Insert a new second sentence as follows:
"The Secretary of the Assembly Commission shall supply the minister with a copy of the Mandated Group's Notice."

G.8.
Add the following to the list at G.8.5 and move the existing G.8.5 and renumber the following accordingly:

G.8.5 "Any Cautions (other than those successfully appealed against)."

Appendix 5a

Changes to the incapacity procedure (November 2013)

Renumber current paragraph B.1.1 to become B.1.1.1. and add a new paragraph B.1.1.2 as follows:

"Should the General Assembly Representative make the enquiry specified in Paragraph B.1.1.1, the officers of the General Assembly shall appoint a Synod Moderator or other member of Mission Council to be the third member of the Consultation Group along with the General Assembly Representative and the Convener of the PRWC."

K.5.2
After the word **"include"** insert the words **"in the Decision Record".**

Delete the words "**the General Assembly Representative".**

L.11.2
After the word **"include"** insert the words **"in the Decision Record".**

Delete the words "**the General Assembly Representative".**

Appendix 5b

Changes to the ministerial incapacity procedure (May 2013)

A.1.1
Add the following definition at Paragraph A.1.1:

"General Assembly Representative" shall mean the person appointed (whether individually or as the holder of a particular office) to act in the name of General Assembly (or Mission Council on its behalf) in carrying out the responsibilities assigned to that person within this Incapacity Procedure."

A.8
In Paragraph A.8. Replace the words **"Part II"** with the word **"Procedure"**.

B.1.1
In Paragraph B.1.1 replace the words **"Paragraph 1 of Part I"** with the words **"Paragraph LP.1"**.

Certificate of suitability for entry into the procedure
In the certificate delete the words **"of Part II"**.

Throughout the procedure, replace the words **"Deputy General Secretary"** with the words **"General Assembly Representative"**.

Appendix 6

The United Reformed Church pension fund

DEED OF AMENDMENT
29 October 2012

THIS DEED OF AMENDMENT is made on 29 October 2012
BY:

(1) THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH acting by the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar and Margaret Carrick Smith being respectively Moderator and Clerk of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church and duly authorised by the General Assembly to execute this deed on behalf of the United Reformed Church (the "URC").

WHEREAS:

(A) The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund (the "Scheme") was established by an interim trust deed dated 29 May 1980 and is presently governed by a Definitive Trust Deed with Rules attached, as approved by the General Assembly of the URC in May 1993 (as amended), (the "Trust Deed and Rules").

(B) The URC is the current principal employer and United Reformed Church Ministers' Pensions Trust Limited is the current trustee of the Scheme respectively.

(C) Definitions used in the Trust Deed and Rules have the same meaning in this deed.

(D) By Rule 34.1 of the Trust Deed and Rules, the URC may, acting by the authority of the Assembly, amend the provisions of the Trust Deed and Rules, provided no amendment shall be made until a report on its financial effect on the Fund has been obtained from the Actuary.

(E) The URC wishes to amend the Trust Deed and Rules as set out in this deed.

(F) The amendments made by this deed are not regulated modifications of the Scheme within the meaning of section 67A(2) of the Pensions Act 1995.

THIS DEED WITNESSES as follows:

1. In exercise of its powers under Rule 34.1 of the Trust Deed and Rules the URC makes the following amendments with effect from 1 January 2013:-

1.1 The DEFINITIONS section is amended as follows:

1.1.2 The definition of "Normal Pension Age" is amended by replacing "65" with "68";

1.1.3. The definition of "The Pension Trustee" is amended by inserting the words "Ministers' Pensions" in between the words "Church" and "Trust", by inserting the word "Limited" after the word "Trust", and by removing the word "the" before the word "trustees".

1.1.4. A new definition is added at the end of the DEFINITIONS section as follows:

"30. Residuary Member means a member in Pensionable Service on 31 December 2012 or a member who had been in Pensionable Service at any time prior to 31 December 2012 and in relation to whom the Trustee exercises its discretion under Rule 14.2 upon him re-entering Pensionable Service after 31 December 2012."

1.2 Rule 13.2 is amended as follows:

1.2.1. By replacing the words "the pension age shall normally be" with the words, "Normal Pension Age shall be admitted to membership as"; and

1.2.2. By the addition of the following words at the end of the Rule: "Members may continue in Pensionable Service until their actual date of retirement."

1.2.3. A new Rule 13.5 is inserted as follows:

"13.5 A minister or CRCW not eligible for admission to membership under Rule 14 as it applied immediately before 1 January 2013 shall be permitted to become a member on a contributory member basis on 1 January 2013."

1.2.4. A new Rule 13.6 is inserted as follows:

"13.6 In all other cases where a minister or CRCW has elected either not to become a member at the first opportunity to do so or to opt-out of membership whilst remaining in the service of the URC under Rule 14.3, that minister or CRCW may be admitted to membership as a contributory member at a later date before Normal Pension Age, subject to the prior written consent of the Pension Trustee and membership being granted on such terms as to benefits and contributions, including the provision of death and ill-health benefits, as the Pension Trustee determines at its absolute discretion. Where however the Committee in order to meet its legislative obligations requires the Pension Trustee to admit a minister or CRCW to membership, such that the prior written consent of the Pension Trustee shall not be required, the Pension Trustee retains a discretion to grant membership on such terms as to benefits and contributions, including the provision of death and ill-health benefits, as it sees fit, subject to any legislative minima required by the Committee to meet its said obligations."

1.3 Rule 14 is amended as follows:

1.3.1. Rule 14.1.1.1. is amended by inserting the words "With effect from 1 January 2013" at the start of the Rule, and by inserting the words "or CRCW" after the word "minister" and before the word "under";

1.3.2. Rule 14.1.1.1. is further amended by replacing the words "the age of fifty five years" with the words "Normal Pension Age"; and

1.3.3. Rule 14.1.1.1. is further amended by replacing the word "became" with "become".

1.3.4. Rule 14.2 is amending by deleting the numbers "14.2.1." and "14.2.2." such that the text of those sub-rules becomes part of the main body of Rule 14.2.

1.3.5. A new Rule 14.3 is inserted as follows:

"14.3 Any member may opt-out of membership at any time on giving 3 months' notice in writing to the Pension Trustee, or on such shorter notice as the Pension Trustee may agree."

1.4 Rule 17.2.1 is amended by replacing the word "advise" with the word "advice".

1.5 Rule 20 is amended as follows:

1.5.1. The heading to the Rule is amended by the insertion of ": general" after the word "Retirement".

1.5.2. Rule 20.1 is deleted in its entirety and replaced with the following:

"20.1 If,
20.1.1 before 1 January 2013, a member retires before age 65 on account of incapacity to undertake the duties of a stipendiary minister or CRCW or such similar occupation acceptable to the Committee due to ill-health duly certified to the satisfaction of the Pension Trustee in accordance with the requirements of Rule 20.2, the member shall be entitled to an immediate pension which shall be calculated as provided in Rule 18 but by reference to the member's full prospective Pensionable Service up to attaining age 65.

20.1.2 on or after 1 January 2013, a member retires before Normal Pension Age on account of incapacity to undertake the duties of a stipendiary minister or CRCW or such similar occupation acceptable to the Committee due to ill-health duly certified to the satisfaction of the Pension Trustee in accordance with the requirements of Rule 20.2, the member shall be entitled to an immediate pension which shall be calculated as provided in Rule 20A below."

1.5.3. Rule 20.2 is amended by inserting the words "appointed by the Pension Trustee (unless otherwise agreed by the Pension Trustee)" in between the words "practitioner" and "that".

1.5.4. Rule 20.5 is deleted in its entirety and replaced with the following:

"20.5 Where a member who receives a pension under this Rule 20 either:

20.5.1 does not submit to an examination under Rule 20.3 above within a reasonable period as decided by the Pension Trustee, or

20.5.2 in the opinion of the Pension Trustee, no longer satisfies the condition described in Rule 20.2 for the payment of an ill-health pension, or

20.5.3 in the case of a member who is not a Residuary Member and is capable, in the opinion of the Pension Trustee, of undertaking remunerated employment, then the Pension Trustee may suspend the pension for any period or periods before Normal Pension Age (in which case the pension may also be reduced). The Pension Trustee shall not be required to pay any such suspended payments of pension should pension recommence but the Pension Trustee must be reasonably satisfied that the benefits (including death benefits) for a member who retires under this Rule are at least equal in value to the benefits to which the member would otherwise have become entitled on leaving the Fund."

1.5.5. Rule 20.6 is amended by inserting the words "if an ill-health pension is in payment and not suspended" at the end of the Rule.

1.6 A new Rule 20A is inserted as follows:

"20A Ill Health Retirement from 1 January 2013
A member entitled to receive a pension under Rule 20.1.2 on or after 1 January 2013 shall receive an immediate pension calculated as follows.

20A.1 Where a member has less than 10 years of membership in the Fund the pension shall be calculated as provided in Rule 18.1 but disregarding any pensionable service after attaining age 65.

20A.2 Where a member has completed more than 20 years' membership in the Fund the pension shall be calculated as provided in Rule 18.1 but by reference to the member's full prospective Pensionable Service up to attaining age 65. In the case of a part-time member this shall be on the basis that Pensionable Service remains part-time unless a concession has been granted under Rule 14.1.2.

20A.3 Where a member has completed between 10 years' and 20 years' membership in the Fund the pension shall be as calculated in Rule 20A.1 but the member shall be credited with an additional portion of pension benefits calculated as follows:

(Pension B – Pension A) x (C / 120)

Where:

Pension A is the pension calculated in accordance with Rule 20A.1 by reference to the member's actual Pensionable Service at the date of their ill-health retirement.

Pension B is the full prospective pension calculated in accordance with Rule 20A.2 (disregarding the requirement under that Rule that the member must have completed 20 years' membership in the Fund for that Rule to apply).

C is the number of complete months' in excess of 120 that the member has been a member of the Fund.

20A.4 Where Rule 20A.1, Rule 20A.2 or Rule 20A.3 applies in relation to a Residuary Member then the member shall receive pension benefits equal to those calculated under the applicable Rule save where the pension calculated under either Rule 20A.4.1 or Rule 20A.4.2 below is greater, in which case the Residuary Member shall receive a pension equal to the greater of those two amounts.

20A.4.1 The pension calculated in accordance with Rule 20A.2 (disregarding the requirement under that Rule that the member must have completed 20 years' membership in the Fund for that Rule to apply) but calculated as if the Residuary Member had retired due to ill health on 1 January 2013 (i.e. based on Pensionable Service up to 1 January 2013, prospective service at that date and the Member's Basic Stipend at that date).

20A.4.2 The pension equal to the Residuary Member's "Pension B" (as defined under Rule 20A.3 above) but multiplied by the following fraction: the Residuary Member's period of membership in the Fund prior to 31 December 2012 as divided by the Residuary Member's total period of membership in the Fund to date of retirement (or attainment of age 65 if earlier) (each period being calculated in complete months)."

20A.5 Where a member has been granted aggregated membership under Rule 14.2, Pensionable Service for the purposes of this Rule (Ill-health Retirement from 1 January 2013) shall include such periods of service whilst having an entitlement to a pension in accordance with Rule 29 (Leaving Service) as the Committee shall in its absolute discretion direct, provided that the Committee shall first have satisfied itself that such service is of an appropriate ecumenical nature".

1.7 Rule 21 is deleted in its entirety and replaced with the following:

"21. Early Retirement

21.1 Save in those cases where Rule 20 applies, a member may only retire before Normal Pension Age if the member is over age 55. A member wishing to retire early will be entitled to an immediate pension based on the actual years of pensionable service and the amount of pension so calculated shall then be reduced on the advice of the Actuary having regard to the age of the member at the date of retirement, save that:

21.1.1 No reduction will be required in respect of the pension attributable to stipendiary service accrued up to and including 30 November 2006 if the member (at retirement) has completed 40 years of stipendiary service to the URC or its constituent denominations.

1.8 Rules 23.3, 29.1.1, 42.1, 42.2 and 42.3 are amended by replacing the words "normal pension age" with the words "Normal Pension Age".

1.9 Rule 29.2.2 is amended by inserting the following at the end of the Rule:

"A transfer payment can only be made under this Rule where permitted by overriding legislation and where the transfer would be a recognised transfer within the meaning in the Finance Act 2004."

1.10 Rule 41.2.3 is amended as follows:

1.10.1. in the first line of the Rule the word "is" is replaced by the words "before 6 April 2006 would have been".

1.10.2. the following is inserted at the end of the Rule:

", or since 6 April 2006, is a fund to which the Fund may make a transfer which is an authorised payment for the purposes of the Finance Act 2004."

1.11 The heading to Rule 42 is amended by deleting the words "before age 65".

1.12 The INLAND REVENUE LIMITS section is amended by inserting the following at the end of PART 1 – TAX RULES:

"10. Late payment of benefits: No provision in the Rules or Part II of the Schedule shall apply to restrict the payment of benefits after age 75 where the Pension Trustee so determines that benefits may be paid after that age."

2 Overriding amendments

2.1 This Clause 2 makes overriding amendments to the Rules. Notwithstanding any Rule to the contrary:

2.1.1 In any circumstance in which the Rules require the application of an early or late retirement factor to be applied to the pension payable to a member who is (or is treated as being) in Pensionable Service both before and after 1 January 2013, in relation to the period of Pensionable Service up to and including 31 December 2012, any early or late retirement factor (as applicable) will be calculated by reference to age 65. In respect of the period of Pensionable Service on and after 1 January 2013, any early or late retirement factor (as applicable) will be calculated by reference to age 68; and

2.1.2 It is the intention of the URC to make amendments to the Rules to implement the benefit changes described in The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Fund – Proposals for Change (the "Announcement") a copy of which is attached at Appendix 1 to this deed. Subject to Rule 34 of the Trust Deed and Rules and Section 67 of the Pensions Act 1995, in the event of uncertainty as to a member's entitlement to benefits under the Fund or in the event of conflict between the Rules and the Announcement, The Pension Trustee shall construe the Rules consistently with the Announcement, after consulting the URC where appropriate.

3. Rule 42.2 is amended by adding at the end of the Rule the words:
"Except that if the member was in Pensionable Service before 1 January 2013, the amount payable shall, in respect of the period of Pensionable Service up to and including 31 December 2012, be an amount calculated under Rule 23.2 as if the

member had retired on the day immediately before death together with an amount representing the member's own contributions paid in respect of any period of Pensionable Service on and from 1 January 2013 plus interest as above".

4. The amendments made by this deed shall not take effect in respect of benefits deriving from periods of Pensionable Service which ended before the effective date of this deed.

5. This deed may be executed in any number of counterparts, all of which taken together shall constitute the same deed.

THIS DEED has been executed and delivered by the parties on the date written at the top of the first page.

Mission Council:
Mission Council membership

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly resolves that the convener of the pastoral reference and welfare committee shall be a member of Mission Council.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To include the convener of the pastoral reference and welfare Committee as a member of Mission Council
Main points	When the membership of Mission Council was determined it was decided that the conveners of all the standing committees should be included apart from the convener of the pastoral reference and welfare committee (PRWC). This was because that committee is not a programme committee, and most of its work is by its nature confidential and not open to questioning at Mission Council or the Assembly. It has been understood, however, that the convener of the PRWC would receive Mission Council papers and would be welcome to attend if the business warranted it. The PRWC convener is a member of the General Assembly and it has recently become clear that it would often be appropriate for her/him to be present at Mission Council also. It is therefore proposed that the Assembly be invited to add the convener of the PRWC to the membership of Mission Council.
Previous relevant documents	The Structure of the United Reformed Church, 2.(6)
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	Cost of attendance at Mission Council
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Mission Council:
Assembly-appointed posts

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly confirms the list of Assembly-appointed posts and the various affiliation requirements as outlined on pages 36 to 37 of the *Book of Reports*.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Clarification of the list of Assembly-appointed posts and the required affiliation of post-holders
Main points	The list of Assembly-appointed posts is defined. Affiliation requirements are identified under four groupings.
Previous relevant documents	Annex to the 1996 report of the nominations committee to General Assembly
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly officers, nominations committee, human resources advisory group, Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Clarifies which URC posts are open to applicants from partner churches

Assembly-appointed posts

1. Confirmation is needed as to the list of posts which must be Assembly appointments as opposed to the various support roles filled internally at Church House. Assembly-appointed posts are those which have been created by resolution of General Assembly (or Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly). This list was last updated formally in 1996 in an annex to the nominations committee report to the Assembly, although some of the changes in this version derive from more recent understandings operating in that committee. Clarity is also needed as to which posts require that the post holder be a member of the United Reformed Church or one of its partner Churches.

2. To avoid confusion, it may be helpful to note that people are appointed to Assembly-appointed posts in three ways: They may be appointed by Assembly itself; they may be appointed by Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly; and, in most cases they may be confirmed by appointing groups, as authorised in resolution 16 of the 2010 Assembly:

"General Assembly agrees that the power to appoint Assembly staff members, other than officers of Assembly and Synod Moderators, shall be delegated to appointing groups duly appointed so long as appropriate processes and employment and related criteria have been met. All such appointments shall have effect from the date determined by the appointing group, and shall be reported to the next meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly."

5. The Assembly also has a role in the appointment of members of the United Reformed Church Trust and the board of governors of Westminster College, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

6. The human resources advisory group advises that there is no genuine occupational requirement for the chief finance officer to be a Christian; it would be sufficient for the post holder to be willing to work within the Christian ethos of the Church. This post has therefore been removed from the list of Assembly appointments.

Resolution

1) General Assembly agrees that the Assembly-appointed posts are as follows:

General secretary
Deputy general secretary discipleship
Deputy general secretary mission
Deputy general secretary administration and resources
Head of children's and youth work development
Secretary for church and society
Church related community worker development worker(s)
Director of communications
Secretary for ecumenical relations
Secretary for education and learning
Secretary for ministries
Secretary for mission
Secretary for racial justice and intercultural ministry
Editor, *Reform*
National rural officer
Secretary for world church relations
Synod moderators
Principal of Westminster College
Members of the Westminster College Senatus
Director of the Windermere Centre

2a) Assembly confirms that the following posts are restricted to ministers of Word and sacraments of the URC:

General secretary
Secretary for ministries
Synod moderators

2b) Assembly confirms that the following post is restricted to members of the URC:

Secretary for ecumenical relations

2c) Assembly confirms that the following posts are restricted to members of the URC and to members of those Churches which belong to one or more of the three world bodies: the World Communion of Reformed Churches, (WCRC), the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC) and the Council for World Mission (CWM).

Deputy general secretary discipleship
Deputy general secretary mission
Secretary for world church relations
Principal of Westminster College
Director of the Windermere Centre

2d) Assembly confirms that all other Assembly appointments are open to members of the URC and to members of those Churches which belong to one or more of WCRC, DECC, CWM and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

Mission Council:
Role of the synod moderator

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly approves the role description for the synod moderator set out on pages 41 to 43 of the *Book of Reports* as a model for future synod moderator appointment groups.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To complete the work undertaken in the 2011-12 review of the role of the synod moderator
Main points	Following wide consultation, the medium term strategy group offered a revised role description and person specification to Mission Council in March 2014. Mission Council agreed that this work should be submitted to General Assembly for approval.
Previous relevant documents	'Review of the role of synod moderator' (*Book of Reports*, Assembly 2012, pp. 46-56)
Consultation has taken place with...	The convener of the 2012 review group, current synod moderators, three synod clerks, members of a recent synod moderator appointment group, convener and secretary of the human resources advisory group, Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Role of the synod moderator

Purpose

1. In 2011-12 a review group chaired by Stephen Orchard considered the role of the synod moderator. Their report was presented to the 2012 General Assembly but remaindered due to lack of time. Mission Council gave its medium term strategy group responsibility for seeing this business through to completion. The recommendations of the review group were brought to Mission Council for discussion and decision over the four meetings since the 2012 Assembly, culminating in the submission of a revised role description for the synod moderator.

Building blocks

2. The Orchard Group prepared a draft job description, taking as their starting point the description of the role outlined in the Structure of the United Reformed Church (2.(4)):

> Moderators of synods. There shall be a moderator for each synod being a minister appointed from time to time by the General Assembly according to its rules of procedure and responsible to the General Assembly.
>
> The moderator shall:
> * be separated from any local pastoral charge,
> * stimulate and encourage the work of the United Reformed Church within the province or nation,
> * preside over the meetings of the synod and exercise a pastoral office towards the ministers, church related community workers (CRCWs) and churches within the province or nation,
> * suggest names of ministers to vacant pastorates, in consultation with interim moderators of local churches,
> * preside, or appoint a deputy to preside, at all ordinations and/or inductions of ministers and all commissionings and/or inductions of CRCWs within the province or nation,
> * fulfil the responsibilities ascribed to the moderator of synod under the Section O Process and the incapacity procedure.
>
> The moderators of the synods shall meet together at regular intervals for the better discharge of their duties.

3. The medium term strategy group also looked at the role description agreed by the Mersey Synod moderator appointment group as the most recent role description available. They produced a new version according with the human resources advisory group's template for job descriptions. They incorporated sections for synod-specific items, recognising that the role would vary depending on the particular requirements of the synod concerned at the time a new moderator was being sought.

4. In proposing the attached role description, Mission Council stipulated that the standard sections should not be altered by a synod appointment group without at least reference to the general secretary.

5. It is recognised that new patterns are emerging, such as the Cumbria president post within the North Western Synod and the possibility of collaborative working between the five northern synods. This role description is not meant to discourage flexibility but to establish the benchmark against which different patterns can be agreed.

6. Some synods and their moderators have instituted a pattern of regular reviews to assess the needs of the synod and agree the areas where the moderator should focus his/her energies. This is an interesting parallel to the local mission and ministry review process in local church life where the role of the minister is regularly reviewed and renegotiated in light of the church's mission priorities and pastoral needs. At synod level, such reviews offer the moderators feedback on how their ministry is being received and where changes of emphasis might be appropriate, and they are a healthy response to a job which everyone acknowledges it is unrealistic to expect one individual to fulfil. Each moderator will bring particular strengths to the role. If the synod is aware of the full breadth of its needs, it can release its moderator to work to his/her strengths and support him/her in ongoing personal development, all the while ensuring that there is provision in place for the full scope of work required.

Appendix

Draft model role description

OFFICE TITLE:	Moderator of XX Synod of the United Reformed Church
RESPONSIBLE TO:	General Assembly through the general secretary
STIPEND:	Stipend authorised by the Plan for Partnership will apply.
ROLE OVERVIEW:	To provide spiritual and pastoral oversight, care and leadership within the synod, giving confidence for the Church's mission locally, regionally/nationally, and globally. To provide clear personal leadership to enable and encourage discernment of God's will within the councils of the Church.

This post is for an initial seven-year term with a possibility of renewal for further five year terms. The main responsibilities will be subject to review during the term, and at the point of any renewal, as new insights are gained and circumstances evolve.

Responsibilities and duties

Synod

1. To play a key role in developing and realising the synod's vision and strategy by offering theological insight, having a clear awareness of priorities, and facilitating open discussion within the synod to produce realistic and agreed objectives.
2. To encourage ecumenical commitment and endeavour across the synod.
3. To encourage the Church's engagement with public issues.
4. To nurture a sense of community and coherence across the synod by clear communication and leadership to ministers, churches, officers, committees, synod staff and the synod trust company.
5. To work collaboratively with synod officers/committees to facilitate clarity about priorities and to encourage creativity and new ideas about being church.
6. To chair synod meetings.
7. [Synod specific addition, if any]

Churches

8. To work collaboratively to encourage local churches and partnerships to engage in strategies leading to health, growth, learning and renewal.
9. To ensure the development and implementation of an appropriate strategy for the deployment of stipendiary ministers/CRCWs within the synod's agreed allocation.
10. To visit and provide strategic encouragement to pastorates in vacancy, to suggest names of ministers and CRCWs to vacant pastorates in conjunction with interim moderators of local churches and to preside (except where a deputy is appointed) at all ordinations/commissionings and/or inductions of ministers within the synod.
11. To work with others to ensure that individual gifts in the churches and committees will be recognised and fostered for the benefit of the whole synod.

12. To visit and lead worship at churches within the synod.
13. [Synod specific addition, if any]

People

14. To ensure active encouragement and support for the spiritual growth, renewal and Christian service of church members of all ages.
15. To meet with ministerial candidates and provide them with procedural guidance.
16. To provide supportive oversight and pastoral care to serving ministers, CRCWs and their families both personally and through the establishment of collegial teams.
17. To act as an adviser in the URC's provision of support services to ministers and CRCWs (e.g. long term sickness arrangements, welfare, retirement processes).
18. To encourage ministers and CRCWs in spiritual growth and development at all stages in their ministry, in partnership with those responsible for their self-appraisal and ongoing development.
19. To fulfil the responsibilities ascribed to the synod moderator under the ministerial disciplinary process and the Incapacity procedure.
20. [Synod specific addition, if any]

Wider Engagement

21. To participate as a member of Mission Council and the General Assembly.
22. To represent the synod to the wider church and the wider church to the synod.
23. To take a full part in the moderators' meeting.
24. To be proactive in encouraging fruitful ecumenical activities at a regional/national level, to ensure the United Reformed Church is represented in church leaders' meetings and, where relevant, represent the synod at ecumenical events.

Person specification

Moderator of XX Synod			
REQUIREMENTS	ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE	**MEASUREMENT**
Education and qualifications	• Educated to at least diploma level or equivalent in theology • Ordained minister of Word and sacraments of the United Reformed Church	• Evidence of keeping abreast with current theological literature	Applicant's details/interview
Experience	• Experience of working as a minister in a local pastorate • Experience of leadership and working in close collaboration with other colleagues • Experience of working with church or voluntary organisations on strategic plans	• Recent experience of working as a minister in a local pastorate • Experience of different church contexts • Experience of working ecumenically • Experience of change management at synod level	Applicant's details/interview
Knowledge	• Deep understanding of the role of the Church in its mission to the world • Deep understanding of the distinctive traditions, ethos and witness of the United Reformed Church • Awareness of the individuality of local churches and their needs	• Understanding of the ethos and polity of other denominations and major faith groups	Applicant's details/interview
Skills and abilities	• Ability to exercise appropriate personal leadership within a conciliar ecclesiology • Ability to discern and deliver the kind of approach which will best promote open and constructive relationships at all levels • Delegation and team building skills • Facilitation skills • Conflict resolution skills • Skills in project and change management • Skills in time management • Ability to assess priorities and plan workload accordingly • IT skills in e-mail and document handling		Applicant's details/interview

Mission Council:
Powers in pre-union trusts

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Dr Augur Pearce augur@dunelm.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**1) The General Assembly, in exercise of the powers conferred by s.18(1) of the United Reformed Church Act 1972 and s.10(1) of the United Reformed Church Act 1981, appoints until further notice the councils and other organs of the Church indicated in column 2 on page 45 to exercise any powers with respect to trusts and any powers of nomination vested prior to 5 October 1972 (or, as the case may be, prior to 26 September 1981) in the members, courts and other organs of dissolved associations indicated in column 1 on page 45.** **2) In exercising any power vested in it by this resolution, a church meeting should act with due regard to any recommendations of the elders' meeting or of other councils of the United Reformed Church exercising oversight over the local church concerned.** **3) For the avoidance of doubt, this appointment does not affect trusts or powers in relation to property governed by s. 8(2) of and Schedule 2 to the Act of 1972, or by s. 6(2) of and Schedule 2 to the Act of 1981, or to property in Scotland.** **4) In exercise of the power conferred by s.18(2) of the Act of 1972 and s.10(2) of the Act of 1981, the Assembly delegates any further exercise that may be necessary of its powers under s.18(1) and s.10(1) respectively (including any amendment of the provision now made) to Mission Council. This is in substitution for the delegation made to the executive committee by the Uniting Assembly of 1972.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Powers in pre-union trusts (England, Wales and the Islands)
Main points	Trust deeds predating the 1972 and 1981 unions forming the United Reformed Church gave powers to certain organs and officers of the predecessor Churches. Sections of the two acts facilitating the unions allowed the General Assembly to determine organs or officers of the United Reformed Church which were to 'inherit' such powers, but this has never been done.
Previous relevant documents	The 1972 and 1981 United Reformed Church Acts

Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Column 1	Column 2
Power vested before the date of formation/unification in:	**To vest in:**
The Session, Diaconate, Deacons' Court, Committee of Management or Board of Managers of a uniting congregation.	The church meeting of the corresponding local church, or of any local church formed by its union with other local churches since the date of formation; or, if the local church has ceased to exist since the date of formation, the synod on which it was last represented.
The members or deacons of a uniting church.	
A presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of England, defined in the relevant trust instrument by jurisdiction over a particular uniting congregation.	The synod on which the local church corresponding to that uniting congregation, or any local church formed by its union with other local churches since the date of formation, is for the time being represented; or, if the local church has ceased to exist since the date of formation, the synod on which it was last represented.
A presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of England, defined in the relevant trust instrument only by geographical name.	The synod of the current province or nation of the United Reformed Church within which the bounds of the former presbytery (or the greater part thereof) lay; to be determined in case of doubt by a ruling of a moderator of the Assembly on the advice of the clerk, which shall be final.
A county Congregational Union.	The synod of the current province or nation of the United Reformed Church within which the area of the former Union (or the greater part thereof) lay; to be determined in case of doubt by a moderator of the Assembly on the advice of the clerk, which shall be final.
The General Assembly (or, prior to the adoption of that title, the synod) of the Presbyterian Church of England.	Mission Council (or the General Assembly if, whilst in session, it elects to exercise the power).
The Assembly of the Congregational Union or of the Congregational Church of England and Wales.	
The Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ.	

Powers in pre-union trusts

1. Most property held for the United Reformed Church serves the Church at the local level. Church buildings (here called chapels) and manses are the best-known examples. But from time to time land has been given or acquired to serve the denomination as a whole. This was true also of our predecessor denominations before the United Reformed Church came into being.

2. When the United Reformed Church Act 1972 varied the trusts of former Presbyterian and Congregational assets to make them available to serve the United Reformed Church, it dealt with such assets under five main categories. In the United Reformed Church Act 1981 a similar approach was taken to former local Churches of Christ assets.

Category	Type of asset	Act of 1972	Act of 1981
A	Chapels, church halls, mission halls and manses of local churches	ss.8(1) and (2), and Sch 2	ss.6(1) and (2), and Sch 2
B	Other local church land	ss.8(1) and (3)	ss.6(1) and (3)
C	Other local church assets	s.9	s.7
D	Denominational property – Presbyterian	s.11	
E	Denominational property – Congregational	s.12	
F	Denominational property – Churches of Christ		[applied by Scheme of the Charity Commissioners]

3. Section 8(2), applicable to property category A, replaced altogether the operative provisions of the trust deeds governing the property to which it applied. In their place, came the well-known provisions of the Acts' second schedules: Part II for manses, Part I for everything else. In relation to this category of property, there is no need to look beyond the provisions of the relevant schedule, which distribute necessary decision-making between trustees, church meeting and synod.

4. However the other sections made very few changes to existing trusts, apart from substituting United Reformed Church purposes for those of the predecessor denomination. So it remains important to consider what the pre-union trust instrument governing property in categories B-F (or, if there was no written instrument, the unwritten trusts implied by the circumstances of its acquisition) said.

5. The difficulty here is that, in some cases, pre-union trusts conferred powers of direction, powers of nomination or appointment, and the right to give or withhold consent to a transaction, on organs of the predecessor denomination (for example on the Board of Managers of a Presbyterian congregation, a Presbytery, a special meeting of a Congregational church, or the Annual Conference of the Churches of Christ). Since such organs no longer exist, there is a question who can now exercise their powers.

6. No difficulty has been encountered in practice, and there has been a general assumption that 'equivalent councils' under the Structure of the United Reformed Church can exercise the powers. But this is not strictly true. One reason is that the 'equivalent councils' need to be expressly determined: otherwise it would be uncertain whether church meeting or elders' meeting should replace earlier local organs. It would previously have been uncertain whether synod or district council should inherit the powers of a Presbytery. A deeper reason is that, although the

Structure is part of our denominational constitution, setting out the terms on which members of the United Reformed Church past and present have agreed to order our common life, the agreement of church members is not enough to alter the terms on which the owners of assets gave them at an earlier date. That is why the United Reformed Church Acts were necessary: so that parliament could make changes which the authorities of the uniting churches themselves could not.

7. The authors of the Unions foresaw this difficulty and secured provisions in the United Reformed Church Acts to transfer trust deed powers in relation to property in categories B-E above. (In relation to category F any provision for succession to the predecessor denomination's powers should have been made by the Charity Commission Scheme.)

8. s.18(1) in the Act of 1972 and s.10(1) in the Act of 1981 were designed to resolve difficulties arising "Where immediately before the date of formation/unification any power with respect to any trust or any power of nomination is or is to be vested in any association dissolved by [the Act]."

9. These sections did not say where such powers should go, but left that to the General Assembly to decide. "Any such power shall (in the case of a power previously vested ...in an association) vest in such person or body of persons as the General Assembly shall from time to time appoint."

10. The General Assembly has, however, never exercised this right in general terms. The Acts permitted it to delegate the right, and it did delegate its right under the 1972 Act to its Executive Committee (now Mission Council); but the Committee never exercised the right either. The right under the 1981 Act was never delegated.

11. The resolution in this paper proposes that the right under both Acts should be exercised by Assembly itself, to prevent any question as to powers in pre-union trusts arising in the future. It is suggested that decisions taken before the Union at the local level should pass to the church meeting, decisions at intermediate levels to the synod and decisions at the denominational level to Mission Council (unless it should happen that a need arises for an urgent decision when a meeting of Assembly is closer than a Mission Council meeting). The resolution is carefully worded to cover the possibility that a local church created by a Union may since have merged with others or ceased to exist, and to cover two different ways in which pre-union Presbyterian deeds may have referred to a presbytery.

12. The choice of the church meeting to make local decisions, rather than the elders' meeting, mirrors the choice made in the Second Schedules to the Acts regarding chapels, halls and manses. There too, the powers of direction, consent and appointment are bestowed on the church meeting, but church meetings are called upon to have regard to the recommendations of other councils including the elders' meeting. That exhortation is repeated in the resolution.

13. It is conceivable that a pre-union trust deed may have conferred powers on some other pre-union entity (such as a presbytery or denominational committee) not covered by the resolution, creating the necessity for a further exercise of the Assembly's right of appointment to lay uncertainty to rest. It is also conceivable that some amendment of the provisions now proposed may be needed in the light of experience. The resolution therefore also contains a delegation of Assembly's rights to Mission Council for the future.

14. The resolution will not cover property category A above since the Acts' Second Schedules have already made adequate provision for such property. This is stated, for the avoidance of any doubt.

15. Section 18 of the 1972 Act extends to the Isle of Man by virtue of the United Reformed Church Act 1972 (Isle of Man) Order 1977, to Guernsey by virtue of the United Reformed Church Act 1972 (Guernsey) Order 1981 and to Jersey by virtue of the United Reformed Church Acts 1972 and 1981 (Jersey) Order 1998. The resolution therefore also covers powers in relation to any property in categories B-E above that may exist in the Islands.

16. Sections 12(1) and (2) of the United Reformed Church Act 2000 make comparable provision in respect of assets formerly held for the Congregational Union of Scotland and its churches, but in that case the power of appointment lies with the Synod of Scotland rather than the General Assembly. The resolution does not therefore refer to the 2000 Act; but if Mission Council agrees to propose the resolution to Assembly, the law and polity advisory group will send a copy to the national synod for information, in case it should wish to follow suit.

Mission Council:
Changes to the Structure

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Ratification
Draft resolution(s)	General Assembly resolves to ratify the resolution of Mission Council to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church as follows: Insert the following immediately after **2.(6)(A)(xxiii)** so as to become **(xxiv)** and renumber the later functions accordingly. "**(xxiv) to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information;**" Remove references to the deputy general secretary as follows: **2.(6)(A)(xxiii)** delete the words "**, the Deputy General Secretary" replace the words "(acting through the Deputy General Secretary or his/her duly appointed deputy)" with "(acting through the General Assembly Representative or his/her duly appointed deputy)**" **6.5** Replace the words "**Deputy General Secretary**" with the words "**General Assembly Representative**". Remove an inappropriate reference to Section O: **2.(4)** In the sixth bullet point following the words "**The moderator shall**" replace the words "**Section O**" with "**Disciplinary**" Remove inaccurate references to **paragraph (B)**: **2.(4)(A), 2.(5)(A) and 2.(6)(A)** In each case replace the words "**(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph (B) below)**" with the words "**(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph 7.4 below)**"

Mission Council

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The resolution (a) assigns a new function to the General Assembly; (b) removes a reference to the deputy general secretary; (c) offers corrections for other minor errors.
Main points	At its meeting in November 2013 Mission Council approved changes to the Structure with the necessary two-thirds majority. These changes concerned the ministerial disciplinary process and the incapacity procedure and were proposed by the ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group (MIND). They were remitted to synods with a request for responses by 31 March 2014. Since by that date no more than one third of synods had reported that they did not agree to the proposals, the resolution is now presented to the Assembly for ratification. Since the South Western Synod indicated that it did not agree that matter be proceeded with, a representative of that synod will be invited to address the Assembly in order to explain the reasons for its decision.
Previous relevant documents	The Structure of the United Reformed Church The ministerial disciplinary process and the incapacity procedure
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of the MIND Advisory Group, the United Reformed Church's legal advisor and the assembly clerk

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Mission Council:
Membership of governance bodies

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	James Breslin urcassemblyclerk@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**See pages 53-55.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper offers six resolutions (resolutions 19A-F) clarifying the membership of General Assembly and Mission Council.
Main points	1. The provision for six additional Assembly representatives from the Synod of Scotland should be removed. 2. Membership of Assembly and Mission Council is clarified in respect of the three deputy general secretaries, the deputy treasurer, the convener of the pastoral reference and welfare committee, and the legal adviser. 3. Assembly-appointed ministers are made members of the synods in which they reside. 4. The membership of Mission Council is spelled out.
Previous relevant documents	Structure of the United Reformed Church
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Membership of governance bodies

1. Mission Council has spent some time considering membership, and presents certain proposals to the Assembly which are intended to make some adjustments to the membership of the Assembly and Mission Council, to correct an error of omission in the membership of synods, and to clarify and make explicit some implied conditions of membership.

The General Assembly

2. On the whole, the Structure is silent on the question of whether members of the Assembly must be members of the URC. When it was first drafted it may well have been assumed that those representing (then) district councils would be members. As new categories of membership were added to the list, in some cases it was specified that they must be drawn from the URC membership, but nothing is laid down about the matter in general.

3. At General Assembly in 2006 a resolution was passed (resolution 51) which stated that, with a few exceptions, members of Assembly should be members of the URC. However, this decision was not enshrined in the Structure, and so is not widely known. It is now proposed that the Structure be amended to clarify this point.

4. It is suggested that another change be considered at the same time. The Structure currently states that: "Where the moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly, a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly, the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative". Whilst it is clearly appropriate that if the moderator of a synod is an officer of the Assembly an alternative synod representative should be appointed, being a convener of a standing committee does not impede the synod moderator from representing the synod so the appointment of a substitute in that case is unnecessary. It is therefore suggested that the Structure be amended to restrict this provision.

5. One other change is proposed which, if accepted, will result in the need for an amendment to the Structure. Currently the Synod of Scotland has six additional representatives to the Assembly, under category 2.(6)(h). It is a widely held understanding that at the time of union these additional places were put in place in lieu of all former chairmen and presidents of the Congregational Union of Scotland being entitled to membership as were all former chairmen, presidents and moderators of the other constituent parts of the URC. The fact that the former chairmen and presidents of the Congregational Union of Scotland were not at that time included in the category of membership with those from England and Wales could be taken to confirm the understanding, but it was, however, not contained in the written record at the time. What *was* recorded was that this provision was "to enable the national life of the URC in Scotland to be reflected in the General Assembly." Given that since 2010 all the former leaders in England and Wales have been represented by only two of their number, it is proposed that the representation from Scotland now be brought into line with the other synods. If the Assembly decides to remove the extra six, then the former leaders from Scotland should be added to category (j) in Assembly membership. The removal of these additional representatives does not itself require a change to the Structure, and would be achieved by passing resolution A.

Resolution A

General Assembly agrees that with effect from the General Assembly of 2016 there shall no longer be six additional representatives of the Synod of Scotland under category 2.(6)(h).

6. Resolution B would make the amendments to the Structure to put into effect the changes outlined in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 above. {nb: The current text of the categories of membership of Assembly in the Structure is shown in the appendix.}

Resolution B

General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Paragraph 2.(6)
Amend the first sentence to read: "**The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life shall consist of members of the United Reformed Church (save for those in categories (g), (l), (m) and (n)) as follows:**"

Amend category (d) by the deletion of the words: "**, a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly,**" so that it reads: "**Where the moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative**".

Amend category (f) by the deletion of the words: "**being members of the United Reformed Church,**" (twice).

Amend category (j) by the addition of the words: "**former chairmen and presidents of the Congregational Union of Scotland,**" before the words: "provided that" and delete the words **"such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church and that**"

Amend category (k) by the deletion of the words: "**, being members of the United Reformed Church,**"

7. It is proposed that the three deputy general secretary post-holders should be members of the Assembly. This can be done under the provision in the Structure which allows the Assembly to determine that certain Assembly-appointed staff should be members of Assembly.

Resolution C

General Assembly agrees to appoint the deputy general secretary administration and resources, the deputy general secretary discipleship and the deputy general secretary mission as members of Assembly under category 2.(6)(n).

8. Since it is the intention that normally the deputy treasurer will, in due course, be appointed as the treasurer, who as convener of the finance committee must be a member of the URC, it is proposed that it should be determined that the deputy treasurer should be a member of the URC and of the Assembly.

Resolution D

General Assembly agrees that the deputy treasurer shall be a member of the United Reformed Church, and further agrees that the deputy treasurer for the time being shall be appointed as a member of Assembly under category 2.(6)(h).

Synods

9. Mission Council has discovered that there is an issue concerning Assembly-appointed ministers and their membership of synods. The first category of membership 2.(4)(a) is as follows: "All ministers, registered pastors (in Scotland) and church related community workers engaged directly in the service of the United Reformed Church within that synod." Assembly-appointed staff, though obviously engaged directly in the work of the URC, are not usually engaged in work within the synod. No other category of membership would cover them. In the time of fully functional district councils the issue was clearly dealt with. The first category of membership of district councils was: "All ministers, registered pastors (in Scotland) and church related community workers engaged directly in the service of the United Reformed Church within that district, and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that district." Then the first category of membership of synods was: "All ministers, registered pastors (in Scotland) and church related community workers who are for the time being members of district councils within the province or nation". It is clear that Assembly-appointed ministers should be members of a synod, and this is a mistake which happened when the Structure was changed to remove district councils. Resolution E will rectify that mistake.

Resolution E

General Assembly agrees to make the following change to the Structure of the United Reformed Church: Amend category 2.(4)(a) by the addition of the words: **"and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that synod".**

Mission Council

10. When the membership of Mission Council was determined in 1992, the legal adviser was included as a full member. S/he is not, however, a member of Assembly, but 'in attendance'. Mission Council believes that in future the legal adviser should be in attendance at Mission Council but not a member.

11. Although all conveners of Assembly committees are members of the Assembly, because the pastoral reference and welfare committee (PRWC) is not a programme committee, its convener has not been a member of Mission Council, while all the others are. Recent experience has indicated that it has often been helpful for the convener of the PRWC to be present at Mission Council, and so it is now proposed that s/he should be a member.

12. It is also proposed that the three deputy general secretaries should be members of Mission Council.

13. Mission Council, contrary to the implication of its name, is not a council of the Church. It does not have a separate section in the Structure. It is a committee of the Assembly which, at times, acts on behalf of the Assembly. The Structure makes it clear that members of standing committees must be members of the URC. Therefore, in line with both the General Assembly and the standing committees, it is proposed that it be stated explicitly that (with a few exceptions) members of Mission Council should be members of the URC.

14. Sometimes the officers receive requests from synods and other bodies for permission to send observer(s) to Mission Council. The resolution which follows seeks to bring clarity to this issue.

15. Resolution F deals with all the above issues.

Resolution F

General Assembly agrees that the membership of Mission Council shall be:

1. Moderators of Assembly
2. Moderators-elect
3. Immediate past moderators
4. General secretary
5. Deputy general secretaries
6. Clerk
7. Treasurer
8. Deputy treasurer
9. Conveners of all Assembly standing committees
10. Synod moderators
11. Three further representatives of each synod
12. Three representatives of FURY (including the FURY moderator)
13. Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust

With the exception of those in category 5 (the deputy general secretaries) all the above shall be members of the United Reformed Church.

The legal adviser and the convener of the law and polity advisory group shall be in attendance with the right to speak at all times, but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Staff secretaries shall be in attendance with the right to speak (except during the decision stage of the consensus process) but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Up to two ecumenical representatives may attend with the right to speak (except during the decision stage of the consensus process) but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Also present shall be the moderators' chaplains, the minute secretary, the consensus adviser (pending separate decision) and other staff members as agreed by committee conveners and the general secretary. These may participate in group sessions, and may speak during plenary sessions with the consent of the moderator.

From time to time there may be visitors and/or observers present by prior arrangement with the general secretary. They shall not have the right to speak or participate in any way during plenary or group sessions, unless with the explicit consent of the moderator.

Appendix

Extract from the Structure (as at December 2013)

2.(6) The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life shall consist of:

(a) Such number of representatives of synods (ministerial and lay in equal numbers) as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine. These numbers shall be calculated proportionately to the total membership of each synod, as recorded in the year book of the United Reformed Church (at present this calculation shall be such as to produce a total of synod representatives not exceeding 250);

(b) Among the representatives of synods shall be included at least two from each synod aged 26 or under, at the date of appointment. Should a synod prove unable to make such an appointment it may appoint from another synod but these persons must be 26 or under at the date of appointment;

(c) The moderators of the General Assembly and of the synods, and such other officers of the General Assembly as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine (The Assembly has determined that the clerk of Assembly and the general secretary shall be members of Assembly);

(d) Where the moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly, a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly, the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative;

(e) The convener of each of the standing committees of the General Assembly;

(f) A staff representative and a student representative being members of the United Reformed Church, from each of such theological colleges as the General Assembly has designated as resource centres for learning, and a staff representative and a student representative being members of the United Reformed Church, from such other colleges or centres as shall from time to time be designated by the education and learning committee as engaged in significant training for the United Reformed Church;

(g) Such number of representatives from the partner churches of the United Reformed Church outside of Britain and Ireland as the Assembly shall from time to time determine (currently six);

(h) Such other ministers, church related community workers and members of the United Reformed Church as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine (the Assembly has added to its membership one serving United Reformed Church chaplain to the forces, nominated each year by the organising secretary of the United Board, in consultation with the three principal chaplains, and six representatives of the Synod of Scotland);

(i) The two most immediate past moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church;

(j) Two in total from the following: former moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, past chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, past presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, former moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, former chairmen or presidents of the Annual Conference of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, former presidents of the Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, provided that such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church and that they shall have been elected by a college consisting of all such past and former moderators, presidents and chairmen as are members of the United Reformed Church;

(k) Such number of representatives of the Fellowship of United Reformed Youth, being members of the United Reformed Church, as the Assembly shall from time to time determine (at present three);

(l) Representatives of other denominations in the United Kingdom as the General Assembly may from time to time determine (currently six);

(m) A representative of the Council for World Mission;

(n) Such number of Assembly-appointed staff as the General Assembly may from time to time determine;

(o) The chair of the United Reformed Church Trust.

Mission Council:
Changes to the standing orders

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	James Breslin urcassemblyclerk@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly agrees the changes to the standing orders as listed on pages 60 to 69.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Changes are suggested to enable better decision making, better use of Assembly's time, and a more effective process for agreement of minutes.
Main points	1. All resolutions before the Assembly are put into one of three groups: A – resolutions which will be taken en bloc and decided by majority vote, B – resolutions which will be taken individually and decided by majority vote and C – resolutions which will be decided by the consensus process. 2. Draft minutes will be posted online and on noticeboards around the Assembly hall rather than duplicated and distributed. 3. The moderator must declare at the outset of a debate whether a matter is sufficiently urgent to require a decision at the meeting. 4. Two minor corrections.
Previous relevant documents	Previous standing orders
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly arrangements committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	Minor savings achieved by posting minutes in public spaces rather than copying them for all Assembly members
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Changes to the standing orders

In order to make the business of the Assembly more efficient and effective, Mission Council approved changes to standing orders to take effect for the 2014 meeting of General Assembly. This decision had to be taken in advance of the meeting because of the changes to the way in which minutes were to be presented, and, most significantly, the change to the way in which resolutions were to be handled. General Assembly, having experienced the way in which these new standing orders shape the meeting of the Assembly, is invited to confirm them for the future. In proposing this, Mission Council is aware that further improvements could be made. It is proposed that work be done on this with a view to presenting a revised set of standing orders at the start of the 2016 Assembly.

The changes now before the Assembly (indicated in red type) are:

1. The provision that all resolutions before the Assembly are put into one of three groups: A – resolutions which will be taken en bloc and decided by majority vote, B – resolutions which will be taken individually and decided by majority vote and C – resolutions which will be decided by the consensus process.

2. The provision that the draft minutes of each day no longer be distributed to all members of Assembly, but instead that they be posted on a secure section of the Assembly website which would be available only to those present (because of the possibility that the first draft could subsequently be materially changed) and additionally that a small number of copies would be printed and made available within the Assembly hall.

3. A provision which would require that the moderator should make a statement at the start of a consensus process if s/he judges that the matter is urgent and must be resolved at the current meeting of the Assembly. This would replace the current provision which permits the moderator so to declare if, following the working through of the process, there is no agreement.

4. Two corrections. (a) When the Assembly became biennial the necessary changes to the standing orders failed to remove the word “annually” from standing order 3a. (b) The removal of a reference to district councils in standing order 3d.

Standing orders of General Assembly 2014

1. The Agenda of the Assembly

1a. At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees, which include the Mission Council, or by synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

1b. For the good ordering of General Assembly's time, the moderators for that Assembly, in consultation with the general secretary and the clerk, shall group the draft motions into three groups which shall determine the manner in which the Assembly shall consider them: A – en bloc, B – majority voting and C – consensus. All matters covered by section 3(1) and (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church shall be placed in group B. In the case of any other matter the moderator may rule at any time that a motion be taken from group B and placed in group C.

1c. The motions in group A shall be taken en bloc. Notice in writing to the effect that one or more of the motions included in group A should be considered separately may be given to the general secretary by the close of business on the first day of the meeting of the Assembly. If such notice, which must be signed by at least six members of the Assembly, is duly received, then the motion(s) in question shall be removed from group A. It shall be for the moderators, in consultation with the general secretary and the clerk, to determine in which of groups B and C any such separated motions should be placed. When the single motion to approve Group A is before the Assembly, the vote shall be taken immediately, the motion being determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards.

1d. The motions in group B shall be determined by majority vote, and standing order 2 shall not apply.

1e. The motions in group C shall be considered by means of the consensus decision making process set out in standing order 2.

1f. The Assembly arrangements committee shall prepare before each meeting of the Assembly a draft order of business, and submit it to the Assembly as early as convenient in the programme.

1g. Motions arising from a report which have been duly seconded and submitted by individual members of Assembly under rule 4b shall be taken at a point in the business determined by the moderator on the advice of the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee.

1h. If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the moderator on the advice of the clerk.

1i. The convener of the Assembly arrangements committee may, during the meeting of the Assembly, propose that the order of business be changed.

2. Consensus decision making

2a. Those motions in group C shall be determined by a process of decision making by consensus. For these purposes the following standing order 2 will apply and the standing orders 4, 5d, 5e, 5f, 6b, 6c, 6e will not apply.

2b. The process of consensus:
Consensus means a decision of the council reached unanimously, or where a small minority of members of the council is willing to accept a proposal that is not their first preference.

Agreement means a decision of the council where, after careful consideration of the options, a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so that the matter may be resolved.

2b.(1) At each stage of the process the moderator will clarify the nature of the session, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.

2b.(2) The information session:
This session aims to inform the Assembly on the issue to be considered. At the start of this session, if s/he judges that the matter before the Assembly is urgent, requiring decision during the current meeting of the Assembly, the moderator shall inform the Assembly that this is the case and advise that if following the Consensus procedures there is continuing disagreement it may be necessary to move to a majority decision under standing order 2b(9)vi.

A range of options may be presented by different people who shall speak in favour of their option. Those presenting issues, reports or proposals may speak for no more than five minutes unless the Assembly agrees to an extension of time. members of Assembly are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek for clarification or further information.

2b.(3) The discussion Session:
This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. Speakers may speak for no more than three minutes.

2b.(3a) All those present may contribute.

2b.(3b) The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole council, time for thinking during a break etc. The moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage.

2b.(3c) The moderator shall ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.

2b.(3d) The Assembly may meet around tables so that small group discussion can happen quickly and easily.

2b.(3e) As the discussion session proceeds possible ways forward for the Church are developed until a specific proposal is reached.

2b.(4) The decision session:
Only those Assembly members present may contribute to this session, they may speak for no more than three minutes.

2b.(4a) Discussion continues with speakers outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. At all times, speakers are encouraged to suggest a way forward for the Assembly, rather than merely speaking with passion for a pre-determined view.

2b.(4b) Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.

2b.(4c) The proposal shall be displayed throughout the discussion in such a way that all can see the text and any progressively agreed changes to it.

2b.(4d) If there is a major new insight expressed, the moderator may determine that it is appropriate to move back into a discussion session.

2b.(5a) After summing up where the Assembly seems to be heading, the moderator checks whether the Assembly is nearing consensus using one or more questions such as the following:

i) What is your response to this proposal? (inviting a show of indicator cards)
ii) Do you believe we have consensus in support of this proposal?
iii) Do you believe we have consensus not to support this proposal?

2b.(5b) If there is strong but not unanimous support:

i) Who supports the proposal?
ii) Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by consensus?
iii) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?

2b.(6) Where some members of Assembly indicate an unwillingness to accept a proposal there shall be further discussion and then the moderator shall seek to ascertain that they accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome.

2b.(7) The moderator shall ask:
2b.(7a) are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by agreement? If so they may choose to record their dissent.

2b.(8) Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?

2b.(9) Continuing disagreement
Assembly may, at the discretion of the moderator, look for further possibilities including:

i) adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration;
ii) asking the moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly;
iii) referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;
iv) deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;
v) declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;
vi) if the issue is urgent moving to majority decision, but only if notice has been given under standing order 2b.(2).

2c. The moderator

2c.(a) The role of the moderator is very important.
The moderator:

- assists the Assembly to discern the will of God as far as possible
- is alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as members contribute
- pauses for prayer or buzz group reflection as appropriate
- encourages trust and integrity in contributions
- ensures care and support for those whose honesty or minority voice makes them vulnerable

- invites members to respond to speeches showing indicator cards, and reflects the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent
- suggests or encourages creative modifications of a proposal, picking up insights expressed
- summarises discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the discussion.

2c.(b) The Assembly and moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group. This will be appointed at the beginning of each Assembly by the Assembly. It will:

- enable group work, collate responses from groups and report back to the council
- help and support the moderator
- be responsible for the display of the text under discussion.

2d. Coloured cards

2d.(1) Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they are helpful.

Each member receives two cards:

i) Orange – held at the end of a speech, so that the moderator can see, indicates warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal.

ii) Blue – held at the end of a speech, so that the moderator can see, indicates coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.

2d.(2a) Cards held crossed indicate to the moderator it's time to move on to the next subject.

2d.(2b) Cards should be shown only at the invitation of the moderator and held so that the moderator can see them. They indicate response to what has just been said. They help the moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, and to invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

2.e Changes of order

Changes of order may be raised by any member of Assembly at any time during the meeting and must refer to the proceedings of the council. The moderator asks the member to state their change of order. The moderator rules on it immediately, or asks for a decision by the Assembly via a simple majority vote.

Changes of order include:

2e.(1) Out of order – the speaker is digressing from the matter being discussed.

2e.(2) Closed session – that the matter in hand is sensitive and should be conducted in private. This is voted on immediately without discussion. It can be raised more than once during a discussion. If it is agreed, all those who are not members of the council must leave. Members must treat the subsequent discussion in the strictest confidence and must not divulge its content or process to non-members.

2e.(3) Adjournment of the discussion – this is voted on immediately without further discussion. It can be proposed more than once in a discussion. It cannot be brought by a person who has already spoken. When the discussion is resumed the person whose speech was interrupted has the right to speak first.

2e.(4) Personal explanation – a member feeling that some material part of their former speech has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may ask to make a personal explanation.

2e.(5) Objection – a member may raise an objection if the remarks of a speaker are deemed offensive or derogatory. On such an objection being raised the moderator

shall immediately rule as to whether the remarks are offensive or derogatory and if the ruling is in favour of the objection may require the speaker to withdraw the remark. Should the speaker refuse to do so the moderator may require the speaker immediately to terminate their speech.

3. Presentation of business

3a. All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising there from, shall be delivered to the general secretary by a date to be *{the word "annually" omitted}* determined, so that they may be printed and circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.

3b. A synod may deliver to the general secretary not less than twelve weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.

3c. A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its synod for consideration and, if the synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the synod to comply with standing order 3b above.

3d. A member of the Assembly may deliver to the general secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the general secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a synod *{the words "or a district council" deleted}* through which the matter could properly have been raised, the general secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the assembly arrangements committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.

3e. Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Mission Council or a committee of the General Assembly or a synod, shall be in the hands of the general secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The general secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all synod clerks of the proposed amendment.

4. Motions and amendments

4a. A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or synod, under rule 1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under rule 3d of a motion to refer back to that committee or synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.

4b. During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. The moderator shall decide whether such motion or amendment requires to be circulated in writing to members before it is discussed by the Assembly. During the course of the debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.

4c. No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder, the exception to this being motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given.

4d. A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserves the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.

4e. It shall not be in order to move a motion or amendment which:

i) contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or

ii) involves the church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or

iii) pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or

iv) amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the moderator, clerk and general secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or

v) is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under 3d.

The decision of the moderator (in the case of i, ii, iii, and v) and of the moderator with the clerk and the general secretary (in the case of iv) on the application of this standing order shall be final.

4f. An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion under standing order 4k.

4g. If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.

4h. An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.

4i. The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.

4j. A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.

4k. Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. After any amendments duly moved under standing orders 4f, 4g and 4h have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all.

If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting. Once a sole motion remains, votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way and in accordance with standing order 7.

5. Timing of speeches and of other business

5a. Save by prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.

5b. Save by the prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Mission Council, or from any synod shall not in aggregate exceed 45 minutes, nor shall speeches in support of any particular committee or synod motion exceed 12 minutes, (eg a committee with three motions may not exceed 36 minutes). The proposers of any other motion of which due notice has been given shall be allowed an aggregate of 10 minutes, unless a longer period be recommended by the officers of the Assembly or determined by the moderator. Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than three minutes.

5c. When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.

5d. Secretaries of committees and full-time executive secretaries who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the convener concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the moderator.

5e. In each debate, whether on a motion or on an amendment, no one shall address the Assembly more than once, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.

5f. The foregoing standing order (5e) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.

6. Closure of debate

6a. A member of Assembly may deliver to the general secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion that the General Assembly, for the better consideration of a specified resolution and its related documents, goes into a committee of the whole Assembly. Provided that the moderator, clerk and general secretary together decide that this rule may appropriately be applied in the case of the said resolution, the motion shall be presented immediately following the opening speeches in support of the primary motion. For such a motion to be carried, two thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Committee procedure enables members to speak more than once and exploratory votes to be taken on particular points or suggested changes. The number and length of speeches shall be at the discretion of the moderator. After discussion in committee and decision on any proposed changes the clerk shall draw the attention of the Assembly to any changes to the original text which have been agreed.

The moderator shall then declare the committee stage to be ended, and the Assembly shall proceed to hear a closing speech from the mover of the motion under discussion and proceed to a vote on the motion, subject to any further motion under standing order 6. The decision of the moderator with the clerk and the general secretary on the application of this standing order shall be final.

6b. In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration be not put. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

6c. In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question be now put. This is sometimes described as 'the closure motion'. If the moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

6d. During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be deferred to the next Assembly. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the moderator, the general secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The general secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be represented at the next Meeting of the General Assembly.

6e. The motions described in standing orders 6b, 6c and 6d above are exceptions to standing order 4c, in that they may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote.

Precedence as between motions under 6a, 6b,6c and 6d is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.

7. Voting

7a. Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(l) and (2) of the Structure.

7b. Other motions before the Assembly shall be determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards, except

i) if the Assembly decides before the vote that a paper ballot be the method of voting or

ii) if the show of cards indicates a very close vote, and the moderator decides, or a member of Assembly proposes and the Assembly agrees, then a paper ballot shall be the method of voting.

7c. To provide for voting in the case of a paper ballot, and to assist in taking a count of votes when the moderator decides this is necessary, the nominations committee shall appoint tellers for each Assembly.

8. Questions

8a. A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the general secretary, ask the moderator or the convener of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.

8b. A member may, when given opportunity by the moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.

8c. Questions asked under standing orders 8a and 8b shall be put and answered without discussion.

9. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

9a. A member shall have the right to rise and call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall cease speaking until the moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.

9b. A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may rise and request the moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.

9c. The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.

9d. The decision of the moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

10. Admission of public and press

Members of the public and representatives of the press shall be admitted to the Assembly unless the Assembly otherwise decides, and they shall occupy such places as are assigned to them.

11. Circulation of documents

Only documents authorised by the general secretary in consultation with the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee may be distributed within the building in which the Assembly is meeting.

12. Record of the Assembly

12a. A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Assembly arrangements committee may determine.

12b. The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.

12c. A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the general secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.

12d. As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a 'Record of Assembly' and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each synod and local church.

13. Suspension and amendment of standing orders

13a. In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the standing orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.

13b. Motions to amend the standing orders shall be referred to the clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Mission Council). The clerk of the Assembly may from time to time suggest amendments.

Synod moderators' report

For last year's words belong to last year's language
And next year's words await another voice.

TS Eliot – *Little Gidding*

Changing landscape

1. This report is written against a background of sporadic violent acts of terrorism around the world, robbing some people of life itself and many millions of others of a sense of security within their own borders. We are confronted by fundamentalisms of various kinds which feed off the discontent of the poor and those who feel themselves to be victims of injustice. It is in this context that the Christian Church seeks to be a channel of reconciliation and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.

2. Successive reports by the synod moderators have noted the evidence of a changing cultural landscape into which the Church tries to interpret the Good News embodied in the person, character and actions of Jesus of Nazareth. The growth of online communities and virtual space has led us to realise our need for creative imaginations as we communicate Christian hope today.

3. The reality of declining congregational numbers has impacted budgets and puts at risk our ability to finance innovative experiments in our continuing desire to minister in experimental ways and sustain our governance structures. It can also unhelpfully focus attention inwardly rather than being interpreted as part of the Spirit's guidance to us in the many different contexts in which the Church is set.

4. As we visit local congregations to accompany them through times of ministerial transition or pastoral need, such change is variously encountered as threat or opportunity. Many faithful church members feel tired and bewildered by the inability of their congregation to thrive. They feel akin in spirit to those early followers who explained to Jesus that they had been fishing all night and caught nothing. Of course at other times they also feel ready to fish on the other side.

5. Being a community of disciples in the digital age has offered fresh opportunities for mission. Some churches have begun to stream sermons through their websites, or offer openings to people to share in church activities; others avoid websites altogether as belonging to the younger generation. There is an opportunity to be grasped in welcoming the stranger through culturally appropriate events to which invitations can be offered.

6. The trend towards remodelling buildings so that they may be more hospitable to visitors continues. Notable examples are Lumen United Reformed Church in London, the Crossing in Worksop, Woking, Parkminster in Wales and Granton in Scotland. Each of these buildings expresses in wood and stone the faith of the community which created it. However because "the reordering of a church building treasured for its familiarity and its memories requires of us a great deal of letting go, a costly act of surrender, it can be for us a powerful sacrament of God's reordering of our whole lives."[1]

7. Partnership schemes involving either other churches or agencies are also continuing to grow. Housing association projects are constructed on church land. Churches flourish in children's centres and retirement complexes and schools. Some churches offer space to post offices and libraries in rural areas, affirming the importance of worshipping communities as community hubs.

8. Imagery, so long regarded with suspicion in our tradition, has been rediscovered as an important vehicle for celebrating those values and truths which are at the heart of our faith. There is a flowering of liturgical innovation which has been resourced by local writers and artists as well as the more established hymn writers and liturgists to whom we turn and who grace our Church with their creativity.

9. Hospitality has become a rediscovered virtue for our congregations. Some of our synods are continuing with strategies to assist the churches to welcome the stranger. Back to Church Sunday, the child friendly church initiative, the use of process evangelism tools such as Alpha, Christianity Explored, Emmaus and Essence are all ways in which local churches attempt to meet people's questions about faith and put fewer cultural barriers to belonging.

10. Fresh Expressions of church are beginning to emerge with messy church experiments taking place. Churches often meet at different times for worship and sometimes in different places.

11. However, welcoming people into church is only one Gospel emphasis. Another is the need to go out of our way to meet the other. Woking has provided free coffee to commuters. Heaton Uniting Church has handed out hot cross buns to passersby. Many churches are expressing faith by involvement in foodbanks, recycling projects, credit unions and street pastors schemes.

Growing Together?

It is a great and common sin throughout the Christian world to take up religion in a way of faction; and instead of a love and tender care of the universal Church to confine that love and respect to a party.

Richard Baxter – *The Reformed Pastor*

12. Perhaps it is in our relationships with other Christian denominations that we are most aware of needing fresh inspiration. Marked as we are by a passion to realise the unity for which Christ prayed, other parts of the Christian Church sometimes appear ambivalent at best to the kind of ecumenism which brought our constituent traditions into unity.

13. Much is made today of 'lightweight structures' for missional ecumenism. As moderators we are often involved in speaking to other Church leaders. It is clear from those conversations that the kind of missional collaboration behind street pastors, foodbanks and Fresh Expressions is very much welcomed. However, formal local ecumenical partnerships are viewed by our partners as being much more problematic. In many parts of our three nations, money and people are not available to support county ecumenical bodies. This in turn adversely affects formal ecumenical churches and projects as the bodies which had given oversight to them struggle for lack of resources.

14. A particular question arising out of the general point above concerns our future relationships with the Methodist Church. There has been, at the urging of the Methodist Conference and our General Assembly a number of joint meetings between Mission Council and Methodist Council, between moderators and chairs of district. Many warm sentiments have been expressed. Yet we are left wondering, where is this leading? Perhaps our two Churches are simply wanting us Church leaders to encourage local exploration of what further closer working might involve.

15. Just at the point when we might be losing hope in a chain reaction in ecumenical development, the Churches of Cumbria have committed to "growing together in ministry, mission and buildings". Following the lead of Cumbria, Churches Together in Cornwall have also covenanted to work more closely together. We await the fruits of these ecumenical pilgrimages with hope. To recognise each other's ministries, to share

fewer buildings, and to join together in our missionary task in villages and towns can keep Christian ministry local at a time when denominational deployment strategies join more and more churches together under single ministers who spend an increased time in their car rather than in pastoral encounters.

So as you change – or as change is imposed on you – keep your historic identity and your ecclesial soul. Fight the urge for perpetual re-invention and don't watch the roll book for young adults.[2]

Andrea Dilley – *30 something blogger*

The spectrum of ministries

In the New Testament, 'laos' means people and the 'laos of God' are the people of God, the Church, with different and complementary gifts and ministries but sharing one common vocation to be the people of God's new creation.

***Equipping the Saints* URC**

16. General Assembly has called on the Church to explore more collaborative patterns of ministry on a number of occasions in the past few years. We practice shared leadership of local churches vested in elders and ministers of Word and sacraments. Yet, as moderators, we rejoice in the spectrum of ministries within the United Reformed Church. Ministries such as those of lay preachers, church related community workers, local leaders, and increasingly local appointments of youth and children's workers, together with a variety of voluntary chaplaincies, contribute to the Church's mission. Yet too often these ministries are not integrated and risk becoming fragmented and demoralised as a result. The recommendations of the Assembly report *Challenge to the Church* still remain to be implemented.

17. Throughout the Church there is an acceptance of multi-church pastorates but there is evidence that the congregation's expectations of the minister serving within them have not changed. In other words, the minister is expected to do what she or he would have done in earlier years in a single church, except now the role will involve two or three churches. This involves the chairing of each constituent church's elders and church meetings and committees. We find ourselves asking frequently at vacancy visits, "What do you want a minister for? What gifts can they bring to the leadership of the local church which you do not already possess in each other?"

18. The marketing and identity campaign began a process of helping us see ourselves as others see us and in particular to reacquaint ourselves with our history so that we can have confidence in the distinctive emphases which we bring to the ecumenical table today. That still seems to be necessary as we continue in Christ's Way today. In our post-denominational context, ministers and churches need to know why we are as we are and what we have to offer to the emerging universal Church.

19. Specialist roles are developing alongside the more traditional forms of ministry. Transitional ministers are beginning to be deployed who can accompany churches for short focussed ministries for pastoral reasons. We are fortunate when we find someone who is available and has the appropriate training or skills since the need often outstrips the availability of such ministers. It also places financial requirements on already strained budgets. In addition to interims there has been a range of chaplaincies which perhaps testify to the desire within the Church to ensure Christian ministry presence in football grounds, shopping and business parks, police headquarters, sports grounds, agricultural shows and livestock markets, as well as the more traditional forms of chaplaincy.

20. In our ministry, we are aware that for many churches and ministers, our presence is not heeded until there is something to celebrate or a problem to resolve. Our role is to embody the connectedness of our Church as we reflect the decisions of our councils to different parts of the Church. Yet sometimes it feels as if we are drifting apart, into an insularity of congregations who do not understand the covenant underlying the Plan for Partnership and just want the ministry 'they' pay for. In fact the language of 'us' and 'them' rather than 'we' together underlines our failure to appreciate that body of Christ into which we were all baptised.

Discerning times and seasons

You find it easy enough to forecast the weather – why can't you read the signs of the times?

Matthew 16:3 – *The Message*

21. Listening to the Church as it tries to strike this balance between continuity and change is one of the roles of synod moderators. For a conciliar church, it raises the question of discernment. How do we recognise aright God's gracious purposes for God's children who constitute the United Reformed Church? As we together try to deploy our stipendiary ministers wisely, as we understand our future relationships with partner denominations, as we seem to be confronted with more and more issues for which there is no precedent, we find ourselves looking with some urgency for wisdom and direction.

22. Examples of this include the difficulty of forging relationships with churches which are not formally recognised by Churches Together in England to the point of sharing buildings or ministry with them. As those who have responsibility for the process of ministerial transition, the question of call to ministry continues to exercise us – particularly when a church is being incorporated into a pastorate which already receives settled ministry of Word and sacrament.

23. Perhaps more than ever before the Church has to accept a degree of provisionality. After the earthquake of three years ago, Christchurch Cathedral in New Zealand has been replaced by a cardboard structure. The acting dean said of this, "I think we were saying that this is not a monument. It is not a building to indicate the power of the Church, or the power of the architect. It is a temporary building, it looks like a tent, sometime its useful life will come to an end. This is a transitional time for Christchurch and during this time we want to have a building that reflects the sense of possibility and hope but also uncertainties in the city." [3]

24. Of course, this is difficult for those of us who have grown up with the United Reformed Church and continue to hold its vision of visible Christian unity, valuing its commitment to inclusivity, its structures of mutual accountability under God. However, we did enshrine provisionality in our Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church.

25. Gradually new forms of community are beginning to emerge. In Salford a new church is being formed in partnership with the Oasis Trust. One of the first actions was to talk about what values and ethos the new church would have. One person said that it should be non-hierarchical, another that decision making should be shared. A concern was expressed that worship should be Christ centred but culturally relevant. In time this worshipping community will have to be manifested in a form that existing structures can recognise.

26. In Cullompton, Devon, Janet Sutton Webb is exploring with others what a holistic emerging church comprising largely those with no prior experience of Church might look like. What sense does the concept of membership have in such experimental communities? How permissive can the wider Church be of experimentation?

27. Reading the signs of the times is therefore a matter of interpretation of cultural shifts. One writer has commented: "This is an age in which the cloth is being unwoven. It is therefore no good trying to patch. We must therefore set up the loom on which coming generations may weave new cloth according to the pattern which God provides."[4]

Seeds of Renewal

God's call is for newness for the whole world, not just the Church. Those of us who are called into the church have a special vocation to work for the renewal and refreshment of the Church, not as an institution out of the past, but as a centering presence out of which we may serve the new world that God is creating around us.

Loren B Mead – *The Once and Future Church*

28. Confidence in all that God is and all that God promises us through Jesus Christ is at the heart of our discipleship. The refreshing and renewing of the Holy Spirit received as a gift to individuals and to churches is the key to our renewal. Prayer needs to be at the heart of all that we do. We see prayer finding an increased emphasis in many ways: through prayer shawl ministries which have arisen; through the work of the St Cuthbert's Centre on Holy Island; through the emergence of a prayer community within the URC; as well as through the many country chapels offering themselves as retreat venues and other churches offering themselves as open places of prayer and reflection.

29. It is encouraging to see evidence of a greater ethnic diversity within the Church being reflected amongst those candidating for ministry within the United Reformed Church. General Assembly's commitment to a multi-racial, multi-cultural officer may well have encouraged the growing diversity within our congregations. There is work to do here in ensuring that intercultural sensitivity leads to informed relationships between inherited Church and newer 'tenant' congregations.

30. People of different theological persuasions within the Church need to dialogue with one another over the matters which divide rather than taking to different 'camps.' Examples of this are the Westminster consultation over issues of human sexuality and collaboration between people of different understandings over the *Vision4Life* process. The challenge for the United Reformed Church is to relinquish a sectarian spirit and recover catholicity and wholeness.

31. Various online forums have enabled lively debates to ensue about a range of issues facing the United Reformed Church and the Church as a whole. As a mark of theological ferment both to participants and the greater cloud of witnesses who click on the URC website, these demonstrate that the United Reformed Church is still thinking about its faith and still passionate about how to live the faith and make its implications clear.

32. The special category ministry provision has led to many different types of Christian presence in the wider community and innovative engagements. The National Synod of Scotland, partnering with the Church of Scotland, is contributing an SCM minister to the eco congregations movement. Congregations are encouraged to become ecocongregations by taking care of their environment. Ecocongregations also campaigns within the Scottish parliament for greater care of the earth.

33. In the story of the drought ending in 1 Kings 18, Elijah tells Ahab that he can hear the sound of rushing rain. After prayer he sends his servant seven times to look to the sea. Finally he sees a small cloud no bigger than a person's hand. It is the precursor to the life-giving rain the land so craved. It is our hope that through this report, you may notice some small signs of the renewing presence of the Spirit bringing to our structures and to Christ's mission through the URC, a freshness and vitality.

Personalia

34. Since our last report to General Assembly we have said goodbye to Rowena Francis, who has returned to local ministry and we have welcomed Lis Mullen as interim synod moderator of Northern Synod. David Grosch-Miller has also left for an active retirement in the service of the Church to be succeeded by Ruth Whitehead as moderator of South Western Synod. Howard Sharp retires from Mersey Synod in June and we will be welcoming his successor. In the parting there is sadness. In the joining, we look forward to all that Lis, Ruth and the new Mersey Synod moderator will contribute to this team.

Endnotes

1 Richard Giles, *Re-pitching the Tent*, p 63
2 http://www.faithandleadership.com/content/andrea-palpant-dilley-change-wisely-dude
3 *War Cry,* 7 September 2013 p 5
4 Mother Mary Clare Oxford, *Church of the Isles,* Ray Simpson, Kevin Mayhew 2003

National Synod of Scotland:
Scottish independence referendum 2014

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Humphreys moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly calls the United Reformed Church to pray for the people of Scotland before, during and following the independence referendum to be held on 18 September 2014. These prayers should be for all, regardless of conviction, recognising how important the peoples of these islands are to each other.** Proposer: John Humphreys Seconder: David Coleman

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The resolution is a call for prayer at an important moment which will determine the future of Scotland and the United Kingdom.
Main points	The debate concerning the referendum to be held in Scotland is increasingly on the agenda of the media. It is clear that we will be in a different place once the result is known. In Scotland some will be celebrating, some will be in despair, some will be angry and some will be afraid, but this will also be true around the rest of the United Kingdom. Unfortunate things are being said. There is rhetoric in Scotland about "them South of the border", and there are voices outwith Scotland asking, "What are you Scots playing at?" After the referendum there will be deep disappointment and serious triumphalism. Churches in Scotland have been focussing on the values that will shape the nation we want to be, irrespective of which way the vote goes, and we hope that this vision and aspiration will not be lost. This resolution is designed to remind the United Reformed Church that we belong to one Church community which always seeks reconciliation even when living with diversity of opinion.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

South Western Synod:
Ministry and mission fund giving

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	George Faris synodclerk@urcsouthwest.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly challenges all local churches to increase their giving to the ministry and mission fund by at least 1% per annum.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To challenge the churches to give more to the ministry and mission fund
Main points	At the 23 November 2013 Mission Council the URC treasurer stated that if every local church increased its giving to the M&M Fund by 1% per annum, then by 2016 on present estimates we would have a large surplus, perhaps of £1million, instead of the predicted deficit of perhaps £300k and rising. The South Western Synod, inspired by the experience of renewed stewardship at New Brunswick Church in Bristol, felt it appropriate to challenge all local churches to increase their giving to the M&M Fund by at least 1% per annum.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	URC treasurer

Summary of Impact

Financial	If successful, income should increase.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

West Midlands Synod:
Non-stipendiary ministry age limit

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roy Lowes moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**Recognising that people are working longer in many occupations and that UK legislation has changed in recent years to enable people to work without fear of age discrimination; the General Assembly resolves to remove the age related entry qualifications with regard to non-stipendiary ministry.** Proposer: Roy Lowes Seconder: Craig Muir

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	It is proposed that the age limit for training for non-stipendiary ministry be removed in light of new understandings of age discrimination and retirement.
Main points	The case of a prospective candidate is given as an example of the discrimination represented by the current policy.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 1997 (resolution 34) set an age limit of 55 for candidates applying for non-stipendiary ministry.
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of Impact

Financial	Additional candidates for non-stipendiary ministry would hopefully come forward for training
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Non-stipendiary ministry age limit

1. The West Midlands Synod has come to the view that the time has come to remove the age limits on church members candidating to be non-stipendiary ministers (NSM).

2. In establishing an age limit for candidates for ministry, the United Reformed Church wanted to ensure that the Church received an appropriate return in length of service for its investment in education and learning (and stipend for stipendiary minsters). The synod believes that factors now are such that for non-stipendiary ministers this age restraint should be lifted. These factors include:

2.1 The denomination does not pay a stipend to these ministers and invests a smaller amount in their education for ministry phase 1 learning period (pre-ordination) than for people preparing full-time for stipendiary service. The amount estimated is, we understand, about £10,000 for four years' part-time training, including academic fees and re-imbursement of expenses.

2.2 Resolution 28, brought to Assembly 2004, emphasised that if candidates had prior experience and qualifications, this might shorten their training. Of course, whenever that is the case and learning programmes are foreshortened, the financial investment of the Church is less than the estimate above.

2.3 Whilst ministers are officer holders and even stipendiary minsters are therefore not employees, we feel we should be sensitive to those aspects of law and context in our society which might suggest we ourselves are contravening issues of justice and equal opportunities which we purport to hold dear. We think our current rules could be viewed as age discriminatory and that we would need very good reasons to continue operating them.

2.4 In the main people are living longer. As Tony Benn said in a letter to his grandchildren: "The concept of old age has changed dramatically since even my parents' generation. The 60-year-old pensioner is the new middle aged..." so it is absurd "...to think of retirement now at 60 or 65 as a process of winding down until the curtain falls shortly thereafter". A small number of ministers in West Midlands are now ministering at age 70 and beyond – one at 75. We suspect that this is not just the West Midlands' air but part of a wider trend.

2.5 We do recognise that ordination means setting someone aside for future ministry, but we feel that the potential for this should be considered on a case-by-case basis and not by use of a universal age limit. The risk of someone serving a short period of time after the relatively minor investment the Church makes in training is small.

2.6 Further we believe that the denomination is in sore need of people to offer for ministry, and especially for NSM, a calling which has seen a reduction in those coming forward. This potentially vital ministry, local in context, remains a valuable asset to the denomination and restricting its flow for reasons of age and finance is no longer justified.

2.7 If we are seeing reduced numbers of candidates for NSM ministry, one factor might be that the availability of people taking early retirement and thus being available for NSM in their mid-50s is reducing. An article in *the Guardian* in January indicated: "The days of early retirement seem to be over, if a survey by Aviva is to be

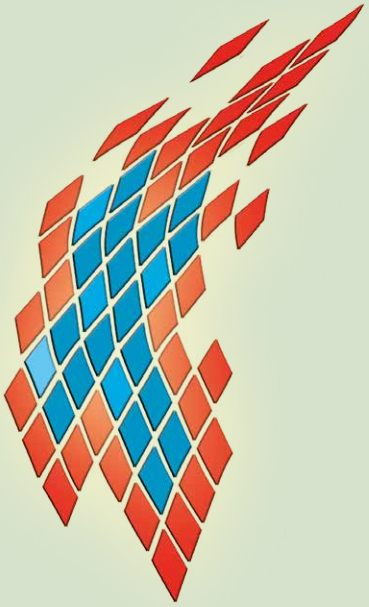
believed. It claims 55% of 55 to 64-year-olds were earning a wage in December 2012 – up from 41% in February 2010.[1] Therefore we need to make it possible for people to serve as ministers of Word and sacraments closer to their potential retirement ages.

3. The synod has been provoked to raise this point and make this plea by the case of an elder in the synod who:

- has undertaken Training for Learning and Serving to degree level at their own expense
- has been recognised as an Assembly-accredited lay preacher
- has become a local leader in their own church
- has offered much appreciated ministry in another church in the synod
- has been given, from time-to-time authorisation by the synod to preside at the sacraments at the church where they are a local leader
- is effectively offering an appreciated ministry of Word and sacrament – yet at 61 has been for some years frustrated in having their desire to have a call to ministry of Word and sacrament tested by the church purely on grounds of age.

4. The synod thus believes that there are good reasons to remove the non-stipendiary age restriction.

[1] http://www.theguardian.com/money/blog/2013/jan/04/early-retirement-over



Forward looking reports

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Assembly arrangements committee:
General Assembly 2016

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	David Robinson drobinson3@virginmedia.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**Assembly resolves to meet in Southport from 8 to 11 July 2016 (Friday to Monday) or at such time and place as may be determined.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To establish the date and venue of the 2016 Assembly
Main points	Date and venue proposed
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of Impact

Financial	The costs of the Assembly are included in the Assembly budget
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Children's and youth work committee:
Mental health

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Karen Morrison Karen.morrison@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**a) General Assembly commits the United Reformed Church to raising awareness of mental ill health issues and challenging the stigma of mental ill health, and asks the education and learning committee to ensure the adequate provision of training for those responsible for pastoral care, including ministers, in appropriate responses to mental health issues.** **b) Assembly calls on synods and local churches to follow the lead of the National Synod of Scotland by committing themselves to work towards ending the stigma of mental ill health and to make links with agencies that provide support and training appropriate to their specific contexts and localities.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper gives an overview of how the committee is currently implementing its strategic development matrix. It contains a resolution from the URC Youth Assembly regarding mental health awareness.
Main points	The strategic matrix is being delivered through the use of integrated themes, a comprehensive review of existing work and research projects. Work is proposed on church membership and the structure and operations of FURY.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation within the review.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Not assessed
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Partnership will be appropriate with both Christian and secular agencies in addressing mental health concerns.

Children's and youth work committee – the future

1. Overview

The development of children's and youth work for the five years 2013 to 2018 is referenced to a strategy which identifies the key priorities for each age group (aged four and under, ages five to 10, ages 11 to 16, ages 17 to 21 and ages 22 to 25) with regard to needs, support, information and resourcing of programme events, and allocates responsibility in each area. As our primary tool for strategy development this 'matrix' guides our discussions and enables us to bring consistency to forward planning.

2. Delivering the matrix

2.1 Integrated theme

We have adopted an integrated theme approach for future work. This year, the theme of Lost and Found was used for Youth Assembly, the Pilots worship material, the Pilots Voyagers and Navigators event and the synod youth representatives gathering, and will be used for other events. This initiative will be moved forward by means of a five-to-six-year programme of themes which, where possible, will link together. A first step will be to fix a theme for the 2015 Youth Assembly so that a keynote speaker can be secured. The FURY advisory board and Pilots management committee will consider possibilities and there will be consultation with local churches with regard to future themes. It is our hope that the wider Church will choose to follow this approach. This will help to deliver our planned objectives of equipping children's and youth workers (both employed and voluntary) and developing a greater sense of belonging to the wider Church.

2.2 Review of children's and youth work

The work undertaken on behalf of the committee is currently being reviewed in order to inform our future planning more effectively. The review process focuses on gathering primary data from a sample of local churches in each synod. Individual churches are contacted by members of the committee. Initial contact by email, which includes a brief explanation of the process, is followed up by a pre-arranged telephone call using a set of starter questions to ensure consistency. Having discussed ways to move the review forward, the review group realised that the process needed to be less a review of existing work as a set of isolated projects than a consultation about how an integrated theme approach would support existing work at local, synod and Assembly levels. The questions used, therefore, include an opportunity for the local church to share good news stories of children's and youth work as well as prompting a response to the integrated theme approach that we have adopted. This method ensures that we are in conversation with local churches about their hopes and needs for children and young people. Responses have been positive, with those undertaking the primary research reporting that local churches were encouraged that an interest was being taken in their voice and needs. Contributions will also be enabled through social media and the children's and youth work webpage. This review will help us deliver our planned objective of recognising the needs of children and young people.

2.3 Children's and youth development officer (CYDO) research

Each of our CYDOs is working on specific research papers in support of some of the key priorities from the matrix; their findings are presented and considered at our committee meetings where they inform our thinking in relation to a range of planned objectives. The areas of research being considered over a period of time are: Faith development (in each age group identified on the matrix), play, discipline and boundaries, relationship-building, children in poverty, the needs of 17 to 25-year-old young people, children's participation, youth participation, Christian faith in uniformed organisations, media usage as a tool, social media as a tool, engagement in community life, outreach

tools (for example Messy Church), creative visual arts, having a voice, and church membership. The papers produced so far have been focused and will form the basis of fuller publications including articles in *Reform*.

2.4 Church membership

Church membership has been identified in the matrix as an area to explore. After initial discussions in February, we will be considering the research papers being written and will liaise with other General Assembly committees that are also discussing church membership, significantly the faith and order committee. Questions under consideration include: What is membership for? Who is membership for? When is membership appropriate? and, Why do people become members? These discussions have particular relevance to the needs of young people moving for study or work; they will also support our objectives to enhance the voice of children and young people, help them to discover their gifts and develop a sense of belonging to the wider Church.

2.5 Structure and guidelines for the Fellowship of United Reformed Youth (FURY)

It is eight years since the current structures and operational guidelines for FURY were introduced. As part of the restructuring process of existing programmes, work will begin in June to review and, where necessary, rewrite these documents. A small group will work closely with both the FURY advisory board and the children's and youth work committee with a view to introducing a phased implementation programme at Youth Assembly 2015.

2.6 Synod links

In order to foster closer links with synods, each committee member will be assigned to a synod; their priorities will be to make contact with the children's and youth work committee (and other appropriate contacts) in their allocated synod and feed their findings into our discussions.

2.7 Materials and publications

A range of publications and other materials continue to be produced. These include theological booklets – some of which, in the future, will be informed by the research projects. Pilots produces a range of materials which are readily adaptable to use by other groups and will support the Pilots programme and engage with the annual theme where possible. The children's and youth work website includes material intended to support and deliver the matrix objectives. An e-newsletter is also produced and sent to those who have signed up for it. A series of film clips have been produced in each synod giving a voice to children. These will be shown at General Assembly and will be made available for use in other contexts.

3. Proposal from the United Reformed Church Youth Assembly for action on tackling the stigma of mental ill health

Background

3.1 There are many staggering facts surrounding mental ill health, especially among young people. Nearly 80,000 children and young people in the UK suffer from severe depression; three children in every classroom suffer from a diagnosable mental health condition (http://www.youngminds.org.uk/about/whats_the_problem), and the leading cause of death among men under 49 is no longer cancer, stroke or heart disease, but suicide. None of these facts however, adequately communicate the fear, hurt, frustration and anger caused by the stigma which has long surrounded mental ill health – a fact which, above all others, prompted members of the United Reformed Church Youth Assembly, in 2012, to bring forward a resolution calling for support, on the part of FURY, for the Young Minds Charity, joining the struggle to tackle this stigma along with associated issues and concerns.

Children's and youth work

3.2 This resolution received the full backing of Youth Assembly and has seen an increased awareness amongst its membership concerning mental ill health as well as the examination of a number of resources and materials for raising awareness. Young people serving on FURY advisory board (FAB) during the 2012 session, as well as other young people around the country, raised money for Young Minds. It was clear through their response that Youth Assembly members felt strongly about this issue.

3.3 By 2013, however, it was felt by FAB that, with the issue still a sensitive topic in many of the lives of Youth Assembly's membership, further action was required, not only from Youth Assembly or FAB, but the also the wider denomination.

3.4 A resolution was consequently brought by FAB to Youth Assembly in January 2014 calling for the General Assembly to act on these issues. Following some personal accounts from young people dealing with mental ill health, delivered publicly, and buzz group conversations about personal experiences in a more intimate way, Youth Assembly passed the resolution by consensus without further discussion. Such an immediate and heartfelt consensus on a sensitive issue is as much a rarity for Youth Assembly as it is for all other groups in Church life. This should leave General Assembly in no doubt, then, with regards to the passion and sincerity with which Youth Assembly makes the proposal of the following resolution to General Assembly.

Education and training of pastoral care providers

3.5 Pastoral care provision is a core element of Christian ministry. It is through this discipline that personal, emotional and spiritual care is given to ensure that individuals can feel secure and comfortable in sharing their most difficult and painful issues, including mental ill health. It is also true to say that many offering pastoral care as part of their ministry hold positions of influence and authority within local church communities and within the wider Church. It is of the utmost importance, then, that those providing pastoral care as part of their service within the URC be given ample opportunity to learn and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with people facing issues relating to mental ill health as well as the stigma surrounding it.

3.6 A proposal is made, therefore, that the education and learning committee, best placed to deal with issues of education and training within the URC, considers the way in which pastoral care providers are trained in this regard, hoping that any improvements or changes which may be required might be highlighted and implemented.

Local church and synod support

3.7 Denominational action is vital. However, in terms of having an effect on the lives of people facing such issues in local communities, the consequences of such wider action are limited. It is crucial then, that synods and local churches be willing to join in this struggle by supporting agencies who can assist them in raising awareness in their communities as well as equip them to tackle the stigma of mental ill health and related issues head-on in their context.

3.8 Campaigns such as *See Me*, in Scotland, and *Time to Change*, in England, for example, require local groups, including churches, not only to publicly sign a declaration against the stigma of mental ill health, but also to pledge practical action. In Lanarkshire, the United Reformed Churches and 200 other faith communities have signed the *See Me* pledge, as has the National Synod of Scotland. Some might pledge to hold events to raise awareness in their community, others to put up posters, others to host support groups, the possibilities are endless. The point is that action, rather than just words, is secured. Everyone has a role to play in tackling the stigma of mental ill health. And yes, that means you!

3.9 In URC tradition, it is neither the place of Youth Assembly or General Assembly to instruct local churches on the best way to serve God in their own locality. Only they, and God, can truly work this out. It is the duty of wider Church councils and Assemblies, however, to lead the way in encouraging and equipping local churches to act on societal issues in ways which are appropriate for their localities. The request, then, is for local churches and synods to show that they are aware of the importance of these issues and think carefully about how they can act in their local context to ease the suffering and pain caused by the horror that is the stigma of mental ill health. Therefore, the resolution is offered for the discussion and approval of General Assembly.

Communications and editorial Committee:
Communications and editorial departmental review

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Humphreys jhumphreys@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	None – information only
Draft resolution(s)	**None**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide Assembly with an update on the ongoing review of the communications and editorial department
Main points	To outline the purpose of the review and highlight the developing work of the department, even during a period of uncertainty and change
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	The communications and editorial committee, questionnaires and group discussions at March 2014 Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	None attached to this paper, but the review itself could have financial implications
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None attached to this paper.

Communications and editorial departmental review

1. The communications and editorial department is in the throes of reviewing the range of activities of the department. 'Throes' because this is not without pain; it is challenging to prepare for the next period in an ever-changing social context. Central to the review is the need to serve the United Reformed Church efficiently and cost-effectively in the short-to-medium-term, both in its 'internal communications' and in communicating the United Reformed Church's part in the mission of God to external audiences, including the unchurched.

2. The review started in January 2014 and, at the time of writing (March 2014), is progressing. It is envisaged that the committee will report to the November meeting of Mission Council and, if necessary, bring resolutions to that meeting, with the aim of implementing changes in 2015.

3. The department's work continues – and is developing – despite the questions posed by the review.

3.1 *Reform* continues to be published and is intriguing many as a confident interface between the United Reformed Church and the ever-changing, yet isolating, society in which we operate.

3.2 The press office seeks to promote the United Reformed Church and continues to respond to the necessary instances that demand some degree of reputation management.

3.3 The interim director of communications and the press office are working with other Church House departments to produce a United Reformed Church social media policy. We aim to have this work completed by Assembly.

3.4 The media training being rolled out throughout the synods (funded by the Legacy Fund) is an integral part of the immediate future, with a current focus on developing and delivering social media training.

3.5 The development of the main URC website continues, including the upgrading of the online store.

3.6 The work on the online directory (Yearbook) is ongoing and a denomination-wide consultation on the future of the print version of the Yearbook is planned to enable a decision at the May 2015 Mission Council meeting.

3.7 The department continues to promote and work with other departments of the Assembly; current initiatives being developed at the time of writing are:

3.7.1 The poppy planting project for Holy Week, in partnership with the Mission department.

3.7.2 Providing media training for all ordinands, in partnership with the education and learning committee.

4. The committee, with senior staff, is focusing on developing a visionary and viable communications strategy for the denomination. The challenge; demand and expectations are ever increasing – but the budget is not, and, in future years, is likely to fall further. The strategic dilemma is simple: Where to put limited resources for maximum, targeted, return? We have things we have to do (e.g. staffing a functioning

press office that can promote good news and minimise bad, and a graphics department that can produce Mission Council and General Assembly papers, the Yearbook and also meet the extensive print needs of the central secretariat and other Church House departments) and things we like to do (like produce books that sell well (!) and publish *Reform*).

5. As part of the review, the committee will speak to departmental staff and listen to views from across the denomination. This process began with the circulation of individual and group questionnaires at the March 2014 meeting of Mission Council. Individuals were asked about the press office, *Reform* and the publications office, and small groups were asked the following, broader, questions:

i. In what ways can the United Reformed Church be helped to communicate the Gospel better?
ii. And, in what ways could the communications department help with that?
iii. How might the communications department better promote the denomination?
iv. Thinking more generally, what do you/your church/your synod most want/need from the communications department?
v. What do you think of the current work of the department (bearing in mind that the work of the department covers several distinct areas: The press office, the graphics office, *Reform,* the publications office, the despatch area and the database)?
vi. In what ways do you think the department could develop its work?
vii. The communications committee has committed to producing print versions of the Yearbook in 2014 and 2015. We are consulting widely on this. What are your thoughts on this matter?

6. Whilst the larger part of the department's staff will be very busy providing the necessary support for the smooth running of the proceedings of the General Assembly – and communicating debates and discussions far beyond Cardiff – the staff and committee members look forward to further insights from the Assembly in the time allotted to discussion of the department's work in the past and the future.

Education and learning committee:
Ministerial green shoots fund: Reshaping EM1 student support

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Fiona Thomas fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly endorses the development of a ministerial green shoots fund for education for ministry phase one (EM1) students according to the provisions outlined on pages 92 to 94. This will be applicable to new students starting EM1 in September 2015.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To reformulate the existing ministerial training fund and to provide support to EM1 students through a new scheme of assessed grants.
Main points	Serious inadequacies in the current system will be addressed, resulting in fairer treatment of individuals and greater stability in a significant area of the United Reformed Church's budget.
Previous relevant documents	Papers H, H1 and H2 for Mission Council May 2013
Consultation has taken place with...	Resource centres for learning, United Reformed Church treasurer, relevant task groups established by the education and learning finance sub-committee, Mission Council in May 2013

Summary of Impact

Financial	Synods and sending churches will be asked to consider the level of financial support which they can offer to the fund when a ministerial candidate endorsed by them is accepted for training.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Other denominations find themselves addressing similar issues.

Ministerial green shoots fund: Reshaping EM1 student support

1. The current situation

1.1 The United Reformed Church trains candidates for the ministry of Word and sacraments and church related community work. Their initial training leading to ordination/commissioning is called education for ministry phase one (EM1) and it takes place at one of three resource centres for learning: Northern College, Manchester; the Scottish College; and Westminster College, Cambridge. Their training typically lasts two to four years. The Church covers academic fees for every candidate who is offered a place for EM1 with a resource centre for learning. In addition, every candidate is eligible to apply for financial assistance towards their maintenance and support. For part-time students this is based on reimbursement of their expenses. Full-time students may apply for a core grant, with additional allowances for dependents.

1.2 The education and learning committee is seeking General Assembly's endorsement for developing a different way of providing support to students which will address the following current problems:

1.2.1 The current system does not fully take into account the variations in personal circumstances of individual students. Careful study of the current disbursements strongly suggests that in some cases the committee is being over generous with students, whilst others are struggling to make ends meet.

1.2.2 There are some hidden subsidies in the system. The resource centres for learning and the education and learning committee have agreed that it is desirable to eliminate these so that the people and institutions concerned know the true costs. Where additional support is needed by people, it should be evident and agreed.

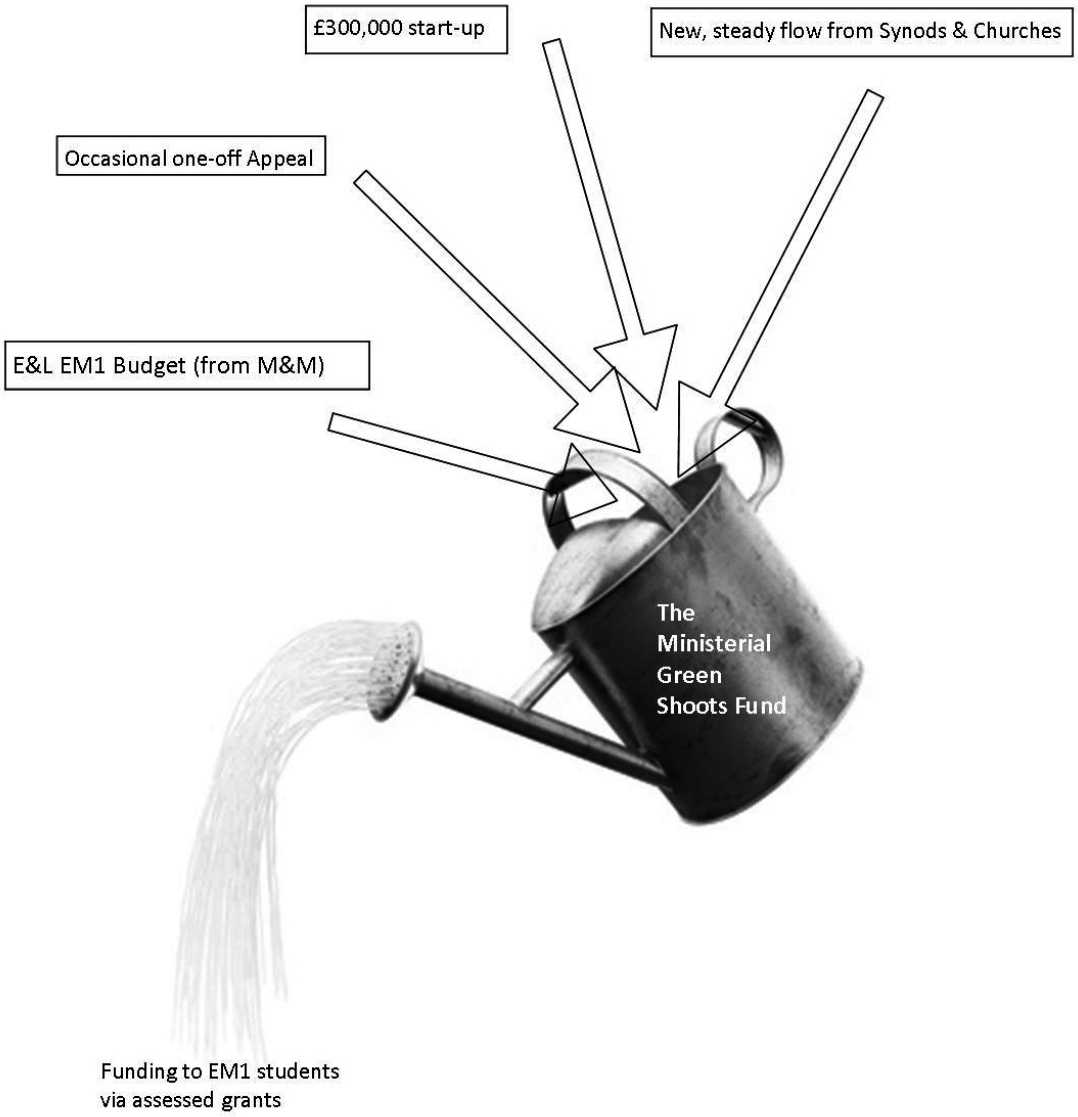
1.2.3 Out of the total education and learning budget of £1.6m per annum, EM1 is the largest single element. The committee has not wished to limit the number of students by financial constraints. Therefore, under our current system, the actual expenditure is determined by student numbers and family circumstances. The education and learning committee's budget for student maintenance and support in the financial year to December 2013 was £496,000. The actual cost was £564,635 – nearly £69,000 higher than anticipated.

2. The proposal

2.1 As discussed at General Assembly 2012, the Church's income is decreasing due to a fall in giving to the ministry and mission fund. The education and learning committee must devise ways to deliver its programmes with a reduced budget in order to meet the budget constraints agreed by Assembly. It is therefore proposed to reformulate the existing ministerial training fund and to provide grants to EM1 students through a new scheme of assessed grants. Annual funding from the education and learning budget will be augmented from additional sources. The scheme will be known as the ministerial green shoots fund and it will apply to all new students. Existing students will continue to receive maintenance and support through the current scheme throughout their EM1 period.

2.2 Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of the proposal, and further details are given below:

Figure 1: Future EM1 student support



2.2.1 The majority of the education and learning budget comes from the ministry and mission fund. However, education and learning also has access to a capital fund, the ministerial training fund, which consists mainly of the proceeds from sales of former training colleges, and income from this fund has also been used to fund EM1. The URC Trust has agreed that a one-off transfer of £300,000 may be made from this fund to the new ministerial green shoots fund as start-up funding. This first injection of income will ensure that the scheme will be fully funded for the first few years, as it becomes established. The ministerial green shoots fund will become available to students who start EM1 in the academic year 2015/16.

2.2.2 The second tranche of input to the new fund will be from the money which education and learning receives from the ministry and mission fund. It is planned that money transferred from relevant budget lines in the education and learning budget will eventually reach a level of £420,000 per annum (excluding inflation). This is seen as a sustainable level alongside the committee's other budget commitments. In the early years of the new scheme, the amount of the education and learning budget allocated will be based on the proportion of the total student numbers being supported by the scheme.

2.2.3 The third tranche of income to the new fund will come from local sources, such as synods and sending churches, who will be encouraged to see that their responsibility for supporting a student does not end when the candidating process is complete and EM1 starts. While this is a significant shift in policy, it is the only way the committee can see to provide the resources required to sustain an open door policy to all candidates accepted for training.

2.2.4 The fourth tranche of income to the new fund will be through one-off appeals and opportunistic approaches to occasional donors.

2.3 The challenges of gaining support from sending synods and churches, and of carrying out one-off appeals, have not been underestimated by the task group established to develop the new ministerial green shoots fund. They have begun to work on a number of appeal ideas which will be pursued vigorously if General Assembly endorses the establishing of the fund. The annual amount that will need to be raised by the time that all students are maintained through the new system is estimated to be £130,000. This is a significant sum, but we call upon the Church to embrace this challenge on behalf of a faithful and generous God who gives us hope for the future by continuing to call gifted men and women to service in our ministries. If this is not achieved, the Church will have to reassess its adult education priorities and commitment to whole Church learning.

3. Ensuring fairness

3.1 Alongside the establishment of the ministerial green shoots fund, it is intended to put in place a more rigorous system of financial health assessment for candidates accepted for training. This will take household income and expenditure into account more fully than is possible in the present system, so that overall fairness is maintained. Provision will also be made to ensure that students gain access to confidential financial counselling where this is needed.

3.2 A new United Reformed Church student finance panel will be established which will make decisions on the level of grants to be given to individual students, working in conjunction with the resource centres for learning and the education and learning office at Church House.

Equalities committee:
Monitoring equality

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Nash elizabethjnash@gmail.com
Action required	Discussion and reporting to equalities convener
Draft resolution(s)	**None**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The aim is to monitor equality throughout the United Reformed Church and share the information with General Assembly.
Main points	So far, the equalities committee is monitoring gender, ethnicity and the lay/ordained balance within the URC Trust and the membership of Assembly committees and advisory/ task/steering/reference groups. Through the annual local church returns, it has monitored: The gender and ethnicity of ministers, accessibility of church buildings and facilities, awareness of the United Reformed Church equalities policy and whether churches have their own equalities policies.
Previous relevant documents	Equalities policy 2006, guidance 2008/11, policy on the equalities act 2010 (all available on the URC website)
Consultation has taken place with...	Nominations committee, Mission Council, Local churches through the annual church returns

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None at this point

Monitoring equality

1. One of the responsibilities of the equalities committee is to develop equality throughout the church and to monitor the equalities policy. In order to do this the committee has checked on the makeup of the United Reformed Church Trust and the membership of Assembly committees and advisory/task/steering/reference groups. We have endeavoured to check the balance of men and women, ordained and lay, black minority ethnic people and young people. Please note that these figures are as up to date as we are able to make them. We were particularly concerned at the lack of balance in our trustees, so we took a resolution to Mission Council in May 2013, which we hope will bring a marked change by Assembly 2016.

Mission Council agrees:

1. to address the imbalance of membership of the United Reformed Church trust and the United Reformed Church ministers' pension fund trust and requests nominating synods, nominations committee and the trusts:

a. to ensure that, as vacancies on the Trust occur, more women than men are nominated until there are equal numbers of women and men;

b. to ensure that, minority groups, (eg young people, black minority ethnic people, disabled people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people etc) are appropriately included in those nominations.

2. to request synods to take similar steps towards equality in their own trust bodies.

2. We used the 2013 annual returns of local churches to ask about: The gender and ethnicity of ministers, the accessibility of church buildings and facilities, their awareness of the United Reformed Church equalities policy and whether they had their own equalities policies. We were delighted to realise that 91% of our churches are aware of the United Reformed Church equalities policy, but disappointed that less than half of our churches have a hearing loop in all parts of their buildings.

3. We hope that Assembly will find the statistics we have provided interesting, and that local churches will look at their church buildings and facilities and see what they might do to improve them, as well as reflecting on equality in their life and work.

4. The United Reformed Church equalities policy includes others whom we have not yet managed to include in this monitoring process. They are: People with disabilities including mental ill health, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

5. We shall continue the monitoring process.

Gender and ordained/lay/BME balance — Assembly committees and advisory/task/ steering/reference groups

(Figures include co-options)

(Figures in red indicate 2012 percentage
no figure in red means no comparable figures,
or, complete information not available)

Committee/group	Male	Female	Ordained	Lay	BME
Mission Council	18 (44%) (49%)	23 (56%) (51%)	19 (46%) (57%)	22 (54%) (46%)	4 MO
MCAG	4 (44%) (50%)	5 (56%) (50%)	7 (78%) (80%)	2 (22%) (20%)	2 MO
Human resources	4 (57%) (29%)	3 (43%) (71%)	2 (29%) (43%)	5 (71%) (57%)	0
Law and polity	5 (63%) (63%)	3 (47%) (47%)	1 (13%) (13%)	7 (87%) (87%)	0
Listed buildings	8 (62%)	5 (38%)	0	13 (100%)	0
Sexual ethics	3 (60%) (60%)	2 (40%) (40%)	5 (100%) (100%)	0	0
Incapacity and discipline MIND	9 (64%)	5 (36%)	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	0
Resource sharing	6 (86%) (71%)	1 (14%) (29%)	3 (38%) (29%)	4 (62%) (71%)	0
Human sexuality	3 (43%)	4 (57%)	4 (57%)	3 (43%)	1 FL
Medium term strategy group	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0
Mission department					
Mission committee	6 (43%) (43%)	8 (57%) (57%)	10 (71%) (71%)	4 (29%) (29%)	1MO1FL
International exchange	2 (50%) (50%)	2 (50%) (50%)	2 (50%) (25%)	2 (50%) (75%)	0
Commitment for life	2 (40%)	6 (60%)	1 (20%)	7 (80%)	0
Methodist/URC interfaith	2 (66%) (80%)	1 (33%) (20%)	3 (100%) (80%)	0 (0%) (20%)	0
Public issues	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0
Rural strategy	2 (67%) (67%)	1 (33%) (33%)	3 (100%) (100%)	0	0
Ministries					
Ministries committee	8 (67%) (60%)	4 (33%) (40%)	8 (67%) (60%)	4 (33%) (40%)	0
Accreditation	3 (50%) (63%)	3 (50%) (27%)	6 (100%) (75%)	0 (0%) (25%)	1 MO
CRCW	6 (67%) (56%)	4 (33%) (44%)	5 (50%) (44%)	5 (50%) (56%)	1 FL
MoM	5 (56%) (75%)	4 (44%) (25%)	3 (34%) (50%)	6 (67%) (50%)	1 MO
Retired ministers' housing	6 (86%) (86%)	1 (14%) (14%)	3 (43%) (43%)	4 (57%) (57%)	0

Committee/Group	Male	Female	Ordained	Lay	BME
Assessment	10 (50%) (50%)	10 (50%) (50%)	10 (50%) (45%)	10 (50%) (55%)	1 MO 2 FL
Education and learning	5 (50%) (42%)	5 (50%) (58%)	5 (50%) (42%)	5 (50%) (58%)	2 FO
Windermere	5 (57%) (57%)	4 (43%) (43%)	4 (44%) (29%)	5 (56%) (71%)	0
Education phase 2 & 3	4 (50%) (50%)	4 (50%) (50%)	7 (88%) (80%)	1 (12%) (20%)	1 FL
Education finance	3 (75%) (83%)	1 (25%) (17%)	2 (50%) (33%)	2 (50%) (67%)	0
Children and youth	6 (40%) (36%)	9 (60%) (64%)	5 (33%) (43%)	10 (67%) (57%)	1 FL
Administration and Resources					
Assembly arrangements	5 (57%) (50%)	3 (43%) (50%)	4 (43%) (50%)	4 (57%) (50%)	0
Communications	7 (70%) (73%)	3 (30%) (27%)	6 (60%) (45%)	4 (40%) (55%)	0
Equalities	4 (36%) (45%)	7 (64%) (55%)	7 (64%) (45%)	4 (36%) (55%)	1 ML 1 MO
Faith and order	6 (75%) (75%)	2 (25%) (25%)	7 (88%) (88%)	1 (12%) (12%)	2 MO
Finance	8 (73%) (80%)	3 (27%) (20%)	3 (27%) (20%)	8 (73%) (80%)	1 MO
Stewardship	4 (80%) (67%)	1 (20%) (33%)	1 (20%) (33%)	4 (80%) (67%)	0
Nominations	9 (53%) (59%)	8 (47%) (41%)	7 (41%) (47%)	10 (59%) (53%)	1 MO
G A appointments	15 (50%) (58%)	15 (50%) (42%)	16 (53%) (54%)	14 (47%) (46%)	3 MO
Pastoral reference	3 (37%) (50%)	5 (63%) (50%)	3 (37%) (50%)	5 (63%) (50%)	0
Disciplinary panel	29 (55%) (50%)	24 (45%) (50%)	22 (42%) (38%)	31 (58%) (62%)	2 ML
Incapacity procedure	6 (100%) (67%)	0 (0%) (33%)	3 (50%) (50%)	3 (50%) (50%)	0
Church house management	3 (43%) (71%)	4 (57%) (29%)	1 (14%) (29%)	6 (86%) (71%)	1ML
Remuneration	3 (50%) (67%)	3 (50%) (33%)	0 (0%) (17%)	6 (100%) (83%)	0
Pensions executive	3 (60%) (67%)	2 (40%) (33%)	1 (20%) (33%)	4 (80%) (67%)	0
Investment	8 (80%) (82%)	2 (20%) (18%)	3 (30%) (45%)	7 (70%) (55%)	0
Westminster College board	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	6 (75%)	2 (25%)	0
	257 (55%) (57%)	208 (45%) (43%)	218 (47%) (48%)	247 (53%) (52%)	30

Equalities committee: Inclusive and expansive language

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Nash Elizabethjnash@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly affirms the commitment made in 1984 to use inclusive language in all publications. It now seeks to build on that commitment by encouraging all those who lead and participate in worship, all those who train worship leaders – including resource centres for learning and lay preachers conferences, children's and youth leaders, local churches and synods, to explore and give intentional consideration to their use of inclusive and expansive language in worship.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The aim is to encourage everyone to think about the language they use in worship, for both human beings and God, and to reflect on the wide range of people who may be excluded by our language.
Main points	Inclusive language affirms all human beings, their sexuality, gender, ethnic and cultural background, stages of maturity, disability, and mental health. Expansive language aims to use as many names and metaphors for God as possible – to stretch the imagination towards God, in order to allow us to discover that there is novelty, challenge and joyful surprise in our encounter with the divine.
Previous relevant documents	None recent
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council November 2013

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None at this point

Inclusive and expansive language

1. In 1984, General Assembly agreed by a small majority to use gender, inclusive language in our publications for people, but not for the deity. *Rejoice and Sing* and our prayer handbooks reflect that decision. Some of our churches still find inclusive language for people strange; other churches find the use of 'man' as if it were a generic term for men and women, equally strange. Perhaps it is worth reminding ourselves that every Bible we use in English or Welsh is a translation of something written down many centuries ago, and copied many times in a language – Hebrew or Greek – which is entirely different in structure from our modern languages; and, every translation reflects the context, beliefs and language of when it was translated.

2. Inclusivity is not just a question of gender – although we have sometimes used it as if it were; it is a fundamental issue of social justice. Language that is truly inclusive also affirms sexuality, ethnic and cultural background, stages of maturity and degrees of limiting conditions. It shows respect for all people. Scripture proclaims that the world is created, redeemed, and sustained by the Word of God, and the Church attests to the power of language and words, recognising that words have the power to exploit and exclude, as well as to affirm and liberate.

3. In 1984, the question of the language we use for God seemed to have been one that the United Reformed Church could not face. But times have changed, and many churches and ministers seek to ensure that male pronouns for God are not used, because God is neither male nor female. Other ministers and churches continue to use male language for God. Does it make a difference to you that the pronouns you use for God are either the same as, or never the same as, the pronouns you use for yourself? While it is not always easy, it is possible not to use male pronouns for God.

4. But what about the descriptive words we use for God?
"We need language that gives us a fuller picture of the God who birthed us. Then the world will be a softer, safer place and God a God big enough to be worthy enough of belief." (Joan Chittister)

5. How do we think about who and what God is – what the Spirit of God is like? Which words and images do we use to describe a God beyond language and pictures? How is the mystery and greatness of God conveyed in metaphors that nourish and sustain us? Which words do we use to speak to God, to speak of and about God? Are they primarily male adjectives, monarchical nouns and words of habit? In worship, singing, preaching, teaching, and church documents, does our language and imagery for God embrace many meanings? Do we use words with and without gender, words of inclusivity and wholeness?

6. Words are a human construct. They impact and affect us differently. Each of us knows that words can wound deeply. At the same time, we also know that words have the power to transform, to inspire, and to bring life. Hence, how we speak of and represent God is always a necessary and timely question, lest we continue to misrepresent the divine.

7. Expansive language aims to use as many names and metaphors for God as possible – to stretch the imagination towards God in order to allow us to discover that there is novelty, challenge and joyful surprise in our encounter with the divine. Limiting our language for political, pastoral or personal reasons, we run the risk of domesticating God – or even of making God in our own image. Expansive language, with its broader range of words and metaphors, opens up many more possibilities. Difficult terms are not excised or excluded; rather, they are contextualised within a broad range of

language that doesn't privilege one sort of name above another. Formulations such as creator-redeemer-sustainer become less loaded with theological problems if they are used alongside the abundance of metaphor within the pages of scripture: God is a rock, God is water, God is a shepherd, a lioness, a mother hen. Traditional names such as father, son or lord can find their place when they are moderated by the use of a plethora of other names, which together serve as a constant reminder that God is far bigger than any one of them. And, we are able to engage in a conversation with the cloud of witnesses by reading historical texts in the language of other ages, thus recognising that our faith is not merely of the moment, but has an enduring quality.

8. The sheer abundance and diversity of images of God in the Bible bears witness to the futility of focusing on any one image as the ultimate exemplification of God. Unfortunately, over the years, the Church has done just that, by claiming the hetero-white-male-abled-bodied experience to be normative for faith and consequently by naming the deity as male, giving too much agency to strength, aggressiveness and virility. "There is a better balance to find, that allows for movement and space for diversity of perspective in our use of language, word, metaphor and image." (Gail Ramshaw, *A Metaphorical God,* 1995)

9. So, 'expansive language' is used to explore new and respectful language that honours all of God's people. It is more than just gender inclusive. It also seeks to find words, phrases and images that do not offend or reinforce stereotypes harmful to anyone. As our churches celebrate being multicultural and intercultural communities of faith, welcoming forms and styles of worship not historically or traditionally associated with our origins, the conversation about the use of language becomes more critical, and more challenging. Expansive language gives us freedom to play with language creatively, to encompass grammatical elegance and poetic beauty, to include unedited ancient language that underlines the historicity and enduring quality of faith. It is an invitation to move out of our comfort zones and to be mutually inconvenienced. For, if we are a "rainbow people of God" (Desmond Tutu), it follows that our language needs to reflect that diversity!

10. It is sobering to realise how many different names there are for God from the Scriptures and over 2,000 years of Christian theology, such as: Helper, Lord, servant and friend; compassionate father, a mother who breastfeeds her children and knits, a tigress, a mother hen, a shepherd, a rock and a tower, a shield and a defense, a landowner, a housekeeper, a baker of bread, a mighty ruler and a powerless infant, the light that enlightens the world, the darkness that is above all light, and the God who is both love and wisdom. At the same time, the God whose name, however close we try to get to it, will always elude us.

11. The equalities committee would like to encourage everyone in the United Reformed Church to think about the language we use in worship, both for ourselves and for God, and therefore proposes the resolution on page 99.

Faith and order committee:
What is the Spirit saying to the churches? Affirming the United Reformed Church's future

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Welch minister@theroundchapel.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision
Draft resolution(s)	**a) General Assembly, affirming the United Reformed Church's identity as both United and Reformed, gives thanks to God for the particular gifts of these two threads in the Church's life, prays for the discernment of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of each, and commits the United Reformed Church to continue with the prophetic calling to unity in both the Church and the world.** **b) The General Assembly commends the paper *What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? Affirming the United Reformed Church's future* for further study and reflection. Assembly invites people and councils at each level of the Church to feed back comments to the faith and order committee by July 2015.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Discernment with regard to the future of the Church
Main points	Seeing the particular calling of the United Reformed Church, in the context of the range of Churches and the diversity of the secular world in the United Kingdom
Previous relevant documents	Paper A1 Mission Council May 2013, the statement on the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church, Basis of Union, statement on the URC's ecumenical engagement and the Busan Assembly statement of the World Council of Churches. These documents are available on the website linked to this report.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	Not immediate
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Our findings will affect relationships with ecumenical partners and life in local ecumenical partnerships.

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? Affirming the United Reformed Church's future

Future of the Church paper 1

1. Summary of paper

1.1 The United Reformed Church is here to live and not to die. This life is rooted in the life of the one triune God, who calls the Church into being, through the life of Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The affirmation the faith and order committee feels led to make is that the future of the United Reformed Church is not about dying, but about living more fruitfully, prophetically and adventurously, being re-energised by the power of the Holy Spirit in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. This carries with it a trusting openness to God's future, rather than a specific plan or a particular structure or a programme for reorganisation. The future of the Church lies in God's hands. Our human response is to discern the mind of Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

1.2 This affirmation arises from discussions that have taken place since the autumn of 2011 on the future of the Church. This paper, the first of three, proposes that the United Reformed Church renew its commitment to be both Reformed and United, seeking to be renewed in the particular life-giving gifts that God has offered us, and reaffirming the United Reformed Church's prophetic call to unity. Paper 2 affirms the United Reformed Church's gift of conciliarity, particularly as experienced in church meetings. Paper 3, in looking at a resolution on ordained local ministry from the 2012 General Assembly, affirms the gift of elders. These papers, with their affirmations, are offered as a starting point for the reinvigoration of the United Reformed Church. However, to add a health warning at the start, they do not propose easy answers, quick fixes or specific programmes.

2. Background to this paper

2.1 In the autumn of 2011, the faith and order committee responded to a request to look at the United Reformed Church's understanding of church membership. Reflecting on membership led to wider reflections on the nature of the Church and the current viability of the United Reformed Church in particular. An invitation went out on the United Reformed Church website and through the synods to contribute papers on this theme. Thirty papers were received, covering a range of fruitful areas including: Theological perspectives; historical viewpoints; sociological, philosophical and contextual dimensions; and practical suggestions, including an interesting proposal that the United Reformed Church should become a pioneer missional movement or a Reformed order within another Church.[1]

2.2 A set of these papers was made available at General Assembly 2012, and there was a fringe meeting after the close of business one evening, attended by about 30 people, in which further comments and reflections were invited.

3. Scenarios

3.1 Out of these responses, the faith and order committee offered to Mission Council a set of five possible scenarios (to which a sixth scenario was subsequently added) as to the way forward. They are summarised below and available in full on the URC website

1 Copies of the full set of responses and a summary paper of the responses may be obtained by email to Helen Garton: helen.garton@urc.org.uk. Helen can also provide copies of the appendices for those who are unable to access them on the internet.

in a document linked to this paper (appendix A). The scenarios were offered to focus discussion around the issues that arise when thinking about the future of the United Reformed Church, and they have been discussed with groups of churches and ministers in different parts of the three nations. Responses received are as follows:

1. 'Steady as she goes, being realistic about ongoing decline' – i.e. more or less staying the same. This scenario gained the least support from Mission Council.

2. The Uniting Churches of/in Great Britain – Anglicans, Methodist and United Reformed Church uniting across the three nations, leading to a major sell-off of buildings and the development of new vibrant congregations. There were strongly divided views on this, with some folk very much in favour and others against, feeling it to be unrealistic and liable to a loss of United Reformed identity.

3. Encouraging local unions in each place. Some objected that this too would lead to a loss of United Reformed identity.

4. The development of 'pastorate churches' of 10 to 15 congregations, each pastorate having one central church building hosting a monthly united service with cell group meetings inbetween. Funds from the sale of church buildings would be released to support staff and a lively programme at the central church. Views on this one were mixed, with a strong resistance to a major structural re-organisation.

5. New forms of Christian communities predominate, such as migrant churches, Fresh Expressions and 'de-branded' churches, leading to a great variety and only a handful left with a recognisable United Reformed identity. Respondents recognised that such variety was already a reality.

6. 'Cyber-church' dependent on the development of social networking and new technology, creating the possibility of online communities. (This was not offered to Mission Council but was explored in the subsequent faith and order meeting.)

3.2 Discussion was lively! Mission Council did not feel that structural re-organisation, whether within the United Reformed Church or with ecumenical partners, was the primary way to renew the life of the Church. Rather there was a desire to re-focus on: Spirituality, embracing a renewal of prayer and worship, and seeing the ways in which spirituality connects with the whole of life; on theological reflection, giving time to consider the gifts of the United Reformed Church's particular Reformed heritage and the way those gifts shape and invigorate our shared life today; and on practical local initiatives – reaching out to meet material and spiritual need in each community.

4. United Reformed Church identity

4.1 Context and realism

4.1.1 These are challenging and changing times for the Christian faith across Europe, where traditional churchgoing has been in steady decline. The United Reformed Church across its three nations has not been immune from this experience. The Christian faith is being challenged on many sides, significantly from a militant atheist perspective. There are challenges which arise out of the western enlightenment and post-enlightenment world: About the role of reason and experience, the nature of authority and institutions, approaches to scripture, the tension between personal autonomy and community, and the place of structures in the life of the Church. Various shifts have taken place. There has been a shift away from a providential understanding of God, acting in history and providing for God's people in a variety of ways, to a belief

in causality. There has been a move away from institutions to a focus on the self, with an emphasis on self-expression and self-realisation rather than on the security of religious institutions, rules or mutual belonging.

4.1.2 Much has been written about the decline of the Church and the Christian faith from sociological, philosophical and theological approaches, and about possible responses. It is clear that there are no quick fix answers. If there were, Churches across Europe would have found them and would be acting on them. Not having easy answers is itself a challenge in this contemporary age, which expects ever quicker solutions. This means that seeking God's guidance for the future of the Church is not going to be an easy road. It is a path that will require hard work and commitment. Yet, in responding to these contemporary challenges, the Church offers a glimpse of eternity in the present moment – a different way of living from the relentlessly increasing pace of life. In the presence of God; it is possible to go beneath the surface of life, drinking deeply from the wells which give life (John 4).

4.1.3 There are two dilemmas that can hold the Church back from responding to God's call in the present situation. One is the sense of despair and negativity that afflicts organisations which feel they are in decline, leading to helplessness and hopelessness. The second is a desire to focus on details and activities instead of the bigger picture. The faith and order committee wants to be realistic about the range of fears and anxieties that people face across the Church and to give opportunities for these to be named. However, in what the committee is bringing, there is a focus on the joy of life in Christ, the energy the Holy Spirit offers and the vision of what God holds in front of us. We assert that it is out of vision that strategy emerges, and out of strategy that management develops.

4.1.4 The faith and order committee could have added another two scenarios. One is the possibility that we are about to die as a church. The committee is not offering a strategy for closing churches – an option which is time-consuming and painful and takes the Church away from the more fruitful business of letting the Spirit grow among us. We believe that while death is part of the natural cycle of life, the energy of the Resurrection and the Holy Spirit leads us to focus on growth and fruitfulness. So this paper is not offering an option that talks about death. Nor are we offering a scenario that says we are about to double in size. While for some congregations, especially those with people from a range of ethnic backgrounds, this may be the case, there are more congregations which are declining or just holding their own. This paper aims to sound a note of realism about the present situation.

4.2 Identity – being United and being Reformed

4.2.1 Discussion on the scenarios led to reflections about the United Reformed Church's identity. Do we have an identity? Do we need one? There were strong views on both sides. Some felt that we should discover the United Reformed Church's unique selling point (UPS). Others said that the United Reformed Church's USP is in its particular combination of gifts. Any identity we articulate will need to enable us to celebrate our diversity as we seek to hold together across congregations and nations.

4.2.2 The source of Christian renewal is in the gift of God's love, and the United Reformed Church shares the same origins – as do all Churches – in the life and death of Jesus, the Resurrection and Pentecost. It is by this Gospel that all Churches emerge and are shaped, taking form in different ways at different times in human history in response to changing circumstances. In the 17th century in England, some of our ancestors rediscovered the gift of the Spirit in particular personal and local community ways; in the last 40 years we discovered it in the challenge to unity. Some say that Christian faith can be held personally without any need for Church. However, the faith and order committee wants to affirm that being a Christian means being rooted in mutual belonging within the body of Christ, and that Churches are the embodiment of God's purpose in Jesus Christ for the sake of the world.

4.2.3 The question before us now is: Where is God taking this particular part of the body of Christ today? Is the combination of gifts that we have received over the centuries and in the last four decades still a combination that we are distinctively called to offer to a needy world?

4.3 The values and passions of the United Reformed Church

We asked people to name the things the URC is passionate about. Here is what they said:

- freedom in Christ – freedom to decide, freedom to worship, liturgical freedom and freedom of conscience, each one tested against authority of Scripture and church meeting
- decision-making processes that challenge us to seek the mind of Christ together, even against a majority view
- informality
- the relationship to the Word of God in the Bible
- the commitment to social justice
- our willingness to die as a denomination
- inclusivity and tolerance
- lively, imaginative local churches
- allowing individuals to express faith commitment (bottom-up)
- local church deciding who its members are
- children and young people as equal partners
- the Holy Spirit working through all/any
- the discernment we exercise in calling a minister
- flexibility – try it and see
- the sovereignty of God (can we find our way of saying "God gave me this word"?)
- the sharing of gifts as seen in the ministry and mission fund and resource sharing between the synods.

4.4 Discovering the Holy Spirit

4.4.1 We also asked where people experienced the Holy Spirit, individually and collectively. Here are some of their answers:

- in our shared discernment
- when we come together
- listening to one another, prayer, moving into grace
- when a person is at peace with him or herself
- awareness of learning and growth
- in times when inspired and excited
- there at the edges of experience
- when people are ready to be courageous
- in being disturbed
- in openness
- in excitement and caution.

4.4.2 We heard stories about the movement of the Holy Spirit in people's experience: Passionate ecumenism in Hungary, faith in action in Sierra Leone, new life after a church fire or a decision to relocate, fruitful community engagement, transformation after congregational conflict, and the Mission Council experience that led to Catch the Vision. None of the stories was about programmes or restructuring. Rather, we recognise the Spirit in signs of hope and possibilities of growth. We begin by seeking to discern together.

4.5 Conciliarity

One of the Spirit's particular gifts is the way in which the United Reformed Church embodies conciliarity. A separate paper will address conciliarity and the church meeting, examining both the gifts of conciliarity and some of the challenges that the United Reformed Church faces in embodying conciliarity in each place.

4.6 Eldership

Elders are also a gift as local ordained leaders in each congregation and this too is the subject of a separate paper. General Assembly 2012 voted to consider the implications of creating an order of ordained local ministers. At the same time, the Synod of Scotland had requested that more work be done on lay presidency. As a result of extensive deliberations on these two areas, the paper entitled 'Ordained local ministers' affirms the role and ministry of elders.

4.7 United and Reformed

One thread in the discussion at Mission Council described United Reformed Church identity as being about a distinctive combination of characteristics – like a recipe or a culture. It is not that the United Reformed Church has characteristics which are not individually shared with other Churches; it is that the particular combination of these characteristics constitute our distinct identity. This paper will now move on to consider the two separate but inextricably intertwined strands of being Reformed and being united, in order to affirm God's particular calling to the Church at this time.

5. Reformed identity

5.1 What do we understand as the essence of our Reformed identity? In part this is a political question. In Scotland, the Church of Scotland is the national Church, and as a Reformed Church, carries with it a particular understanding of the Reformed relationship to the nation. In England, the Church of England is both Catholic and Reformed, with its own particular role to play in relation to the state. English forebears of the United Reformed Church came in part out of a separatist dissenting tradition in the 17th century, holding to a particular view of the role of the Church as over against the state. In Wales, there is no established Church, so each Church is free to relate to political authorities as it feels led. The view across the United Reformed church is a mixed one, not least because of the differing national contexts within which it finds itself.

5.2 Does the United Reformed Church live in the present or build on the past? How do we ask this question without losing confidence in the way in which faith held over generations gives us our roots? What would we learn if we returned to our stories, not least reminding ourselves of the issues for which our Reformed ancestors were prepared to die?

5.3 Churches are shaped and re-shaped by their connection with Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the histories of their particular traditions, going back to the incarnation. Each Church is shaped by its faithfulness to Christ and the Spirit, discerned anew in every age, in anticipation of the final goal, when God draws all creation to God. We urge congregations to revisit two important documents, the founding statement on faith and the Church in the Basis of Union, and the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church, believing that familiarity with these will strengthen our sense of identity (appendices B and C on the website).

5.4 The statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church reminds us that we as a Church accept the witness of the historic creeds. The Revd Prof Alan Sell, in a paper to Mission Council March 2014, pointed out the Reformed understanding that United Reformed Church worship and meetings are credal gatherings. Articulating this sense of the credal dimensions of worship and meetings, and, revisiting the Reformed creeds and confessions can stimulate reflection on the Christian faith.

5.5 Mission Council worked on identifying the particular range of Reformed characteristics which shape the United Reformed Church's identity today:

a) *Semper Reformanda* – openly and intentionally stating our readiness to change in light of experience of the Holy Spirit;
b) our particular interpretation of the priesthood of all believers;
c) elders – ordained and set apart for shared leadership;

d) the church meeting, in which people together discern the leading of the Holy Spirit, and through which power is shared;
e) the ability to develop policies that embrace diversity, e.g. in recognising both infant and believers baptism, but not re-baptism;
f) upholding the rights of personal conviction;
g) the strong sense of social justice and action;
h) freedom in worship, centring on Scripture;
i) valuing the local church.

5.6 Reformed spirituality

There is a need to discern the spiritual gifts of the Reformed tradition and the ways in which these can renew the lives of individuals and congregations. At the heart of the Church's life is the prayerful discernment of the Holy Spirit, both within and between congregations and Churches. Resourcing this discernment will help the life of the Church to flourish and be more effective in speaking of God, and God's promise of life in all its fullness, to the communities in which United Reformed Church congregations are set.

6. United identity

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 The United Reformed Church's founding vision was of significant union between the Churches of the UK. In 1972, the United Reformed Church celebrated the birth of a new united church, bringing together the Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England. The dream was further realised in unions with the Churches of Christ and the Scottish Congregational Church. This dream is foundational to the Basis of Union and has been reaffirmed at previous Assemblies. The most recent significant discussion was in the 2007 General Assembly which resulted in the adoption of a statement on the nature of the United Reformed Church's ecumenical engagement (see appendix D on the website). There was also discussion in Mission Council as recently as November 2011 with the review of URC ecumenical relations.

6.1.2 However, 42 years later, the URC has not seen the wider union it prayed for. While the URC has a well-regarded commitment to the ecumenical journey, other factors affecting the life of the Church in the UK have come to the fore. There has been a growth of secularisation, leading to a retrenchment of many historic denominations as they have sought their own survival. There has been a critique of 'structural' forms of ecumenism, over against newer 'missional' forms of ecumenism such as street pastors and night shelters. There has been a blossoming of new Churches, both home-grown and those fuelled by immigration, with their own sense of identity and their desire to flourish. Some have perceived there to be a lack of confidence in the Gospel across the United Reformed Church, (described as 'functional atheism') which has resulted in diffidence about sharing the faith both within the Christian community and in the wider community.

6.1.3 The March 2014 issue of *Reform* brought together four helpful and challenging reflections on ecumenism, both local and international, commenting on the nature and future of the ecumenical journey. The World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary refers to the unity statement adopted at the Assembly in Busan in 2013, which is offered to the Churches as a stimulus to further thought on the unity that is God's desire for God's people (appendix E on the website). The faith and order committee is studying this document alongside the WCC 'Common Vision' statement to see how best to engage the United Reformed Church in responding.

6.1.4 The faith and order committee brought a paper on the United Reformed Church's ecumenical identity to the March 2014 meeting of Mission Council. It called the Church to be at the ecumenical cutting edge of Christian life in the UK today, wholeheartedly bringing its Reformed identity to the table. The committee believes that this is the United Reformed Church's particular contribution to the life of the Church in the UK at the present time – a clear grasp of Reformed identity

and a prophetic calling to unity. This has the potential to lead to the renewal of the Church and its outreach into the world. The United Reformed Church, in its particular experience of unity and its particular interpretation of conciliarity and the commitment to stay together with a diversity of views, seeks to pursue the goal of visible unity with partner Christians, in order to witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in an increasingly divided world.

6.1.5 We issue this call at a time when there seems to be limited desire from other Christian traditions to engage meaningfully with the United Reformed Church. We must hold the significance of the ecumenical drive. Through our clarity about what we offer from our own identity to the ecumenical scene, we will be realistic. We will not be discouraged when our gifts are not received by others, nor will we complain about them. Rather, living with our own integrity, we will see where the Spirit is speaking to the Church and leading across the Churches. As one Mission Council respondent put it in the November 2013 meeting: "What does faithfulness to our calling mean? Not beating others up, but quietly raising the ecumenical dimension, seeking partners where they may be found, but not being deterred from doing pieces of work if we're on our own."

6.2 Receiving other Churches' gifts

There are things we can learn from other parts of the Christian tradition that would benefit our life. How might we explore the gifts of other traditions? How open are we to receiving them?

6.3 Local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs)

There is a need to celebrate the gifts of these partnerships, as well as exploring where the future of such partnership lies. There will be a fringe meeting at General Assembly on local ecumenical partnerships; there is a Churches Together in England working group, which includes the United Reformed Church's ecumenical officer, the Revd David Tatem, looking at issues with regard to LEPs, how they work and what their future may be.

6.4 Balance of ecumenical engagement between local, regional and national

In a Church in three nations, committed to the importance of the local congregation in each place, there is a need to look at the capacity for developing ecumenical relationships that will differ depending on the locality, the region and the nation.

6.5 Developing new partnerships

There is a range of new partners springing up from outwith the historic Churches who bring with them new and different possibilities for shared life and work.

7. Practical issues

7.1 In general

Our discussions have given rise to a host of practical issues, some of which are listed below. We have seen the value of *vision2020* and *Vision4Life* in enabling congregations to grow in faith and direction, and we hope that further appropriate resources may be offered as this period of discernment and reflection continues.

a) Identify the Church's priorities, locally, regionally and at the Assembly level (e.g. increasing numbers? Spreading the Word?), looking at the interconnectedness of priorities and accepting that the Church cannot do everything.

b) Release ourselves from guilt at our failings and all the things we think we could do but we do not have the time for; focus instead on trusting in God's grace.

c) Look at greater use of technology – cyber church, Skype, services online, intimations on web.

d) Ask the United Reformed/Methodist joint property strategy group for help with a theology of church buildings.

e) Re-visit the nature of ministry and the relation between lay and ordained ministry, particularly in the light of deployment. This work is in progress.

f) We are in an age where institutions and structures are often bypassed by looser networks such as social media. Do people still need the Church? And, if so, what for? What kind of structures will enable denominations to flourish in the future?

7.2 Ecumenical

a) Ask synods to target ecumenical possibilities and put some resources into these.
b) Put together a collection of stories where the United Reformed Church is contributing ecumenically, contributing good things.
c) Identify the issues and attitudes that block ecumenical growth and development and devise ways of addressing these.
d) Look for signs of resurrection, identifying where God is present in and between our Churches and celebrating this presence.
e) Look at the Cumbria and Cornwall covenants and the models they offer for ecumenical counties.

7.3 Affirmations and challenges

1 The United Reformed Church affirms that our primary identity lies, as with all Christians, in relation to the one triune God, source, guide and goal of our life.

2 The United Reformed Church affirms that our particular identity, shaped by context and conviction, is an offering to the three nations in which we are set.

3 The United Reformed Church affirms that the Church, participating in the trinitarian and relational life of God, is called to model this life throughout the world, in both its inner and outer life. The gathering of people in relationship in each community is part of the embodiment of God's gift of life for the world.

4 The United Reformed Church affirms that the renewal of congregational life is key to the renewal of the Church. Without congregations, there is no Church. This is not about a 'one size fits all' idea of a congregation – congregations vary enormously; it is about the way in which people are valued and held together. We affirm that in the body of Christ, congregations are held together with one another, sharing insights and support for mutual enrichment. The United Reformed Church has a particular contribution to make about the way in which authority is held within and between congregations.

5 There are important questions about the way our wider structures enable mutual enrichment. But, prior to these are the questions around whether our congregations feel on fire with a Gospel that is for all people and are able to communicate this fire with the communities in which we are placed. This passion arises out of people's rootedness in God and their openness to the Holy Spirit through prayer, worship and the reading of Scripture, those aspects of our shared life which have sustained God's people over the generations.

7.4 This paper is offered to help a two-fold discernment, a discernment about ourselves in the United Reformed Church and a discernment about the triune God who brings us into being, holds us in a warm embrace and sends us out into God's world. This discernment involves prayerful listening to the Spirit and respectful listening to what is on each other's hearts and minds.

Prayer:

Come Holy Spirit, burn within us; come Holy Spirit, set us on fire; come Holy Spirit, release your gifts in us; come Holy Spirit, that we may discern your leading as we listen to you and hear the wisdom of your people.

Faith and order committee:
What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? The United Reformed Church's gift of conciliarity

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Welch, convener of the faith and order committee minister@theroundchapel.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision
Draft resolution(s)	**1. General Assembly affirms conciliarity, and in particular the role of the church meeting, as one of the gifts of the United Reformed Church, both to the wider Church and to the society in which this Church is set.** **2. In order that this affirmation may become a source of renewal across the United Reformed Church, General Assembly commissions the faith and order committee, in consultation with other committees as appropriate, to undertake the following work:** **a) to produce resources for study which emphasise the theological understanding that undergirds conciliarity,** **b) to suggest resources to enable meetings to be more engaged in their discernment of the mind of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit,** **c) to offer reflections on the nature of church membership and ways in which it has evolved and is evolving,** **d) to encourage the United Reformed Church through such media as *Reform*, the United Reformed Church website, and the United Reformed Church Facebook page to publish stories of creative ways in which churches meet.** **3. General Assembly invites further reflection on this paper in the councils of the Church at all levels and invites comments to be fed back to the faith and order committee by July 2015.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This is paper two of the future of the Church discussion, and looks at the United Reformed Church's gift of conciliarity, with a particular focus on the nature of church meetings.
Main points	The United Reformed Church needs renewal in its understanding and practice of conciliarity, on the basis of a shared listening to the Holy Spirit.

Previous relevant documents	Future of the Church paper one, General Assembly 2014
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	Nothing immediate
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Local ecumenical partnerships

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? The United Reformed Church's gift of conciliarity

Future of the Church paper 2

1. Introduction

1.1 In autumn 2011, The United Reformed Church's faith and order committee initiated a discussion on 'the future of the Church' (see separate 2014 General Assembly paper 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? Affirmation of the United Reformed Church's future' for the details of this discussion.) The discussion has taken place over several 24-hour faith and order committee meetings and three meetings of Mission Council in 2013 and 2014, and an understanding of the identity and gifts of the United Reformed Church has been re-affirmed. Several issues have emerged for further work and this paper looks at one of these areas – the gift of conciliarity: the way in which the Holy Spirit speaks to the Church through the different councils. While conciliarity has many dimensions to it, this paper addresses conciliarity at the congregational level, in church meetings, recognising that more work needs to be done to interpret conciliarity in synods and General Assembly. A further paper looks at the role of elders, another distinctive gift of the United Reformed Church.

1.2 While every Church has an identity based in part on its understanding of its councils, the United Reformed Church believes that its particular understanding is a helpful offering to the wider ecumenical movement. It is an approach to life which can also make a valuable contribution to society. However, the United Reformed Church has not always fully lived out the riches of its own understanding of conciliarity and needs renewal in this area. This paper looks at a cross section of issues, gifts and practical dimensions.

2. Setting the scene

2.1 The nature of conciliarity can be viewed from a range of perspectives.

2.2 The appendix includes a brief historical summary, including some of the critical issues from the United Reformed Church's traditions. We are the inheritors of understandings of conciliarity which shaped our forebears.

2.3 In the Mission Council discussions, the church meeting was clearly identified as one of the distinctive characteristics of the United Reformed Church. Mission Council members said: "The church meeting – a gathering when at its best is something to cherish"; and "we need to reclaim the importance of church meeting and find our place in it." The councils of the Church which are most familiar to the members of the United Reformed Church are the church meeting and the elders meeting.

2.4 A range of critical comments has been raised, particularly regarding the experience of conciliarity in the local church meeting.

- Members do not necessarily feel the need to go to church meetings.
- Church meetings can become business – focussed rather than engaging in worship, prayer, Bible study and reflection on mission issues.
- Chairing is not always done well.
- There can be a culture of bullying and misuse of power.
- Discerning the work of the Holy Spirit through the voice and experience of each member is not always given priority.
- Church meetings are not connected well to the other aspects of discernment of God's purpose in a local church, e.g. study groups and outreach activities.
- Church meetings and elders meetings can feel like they are duplicating agendas without having a distinctive role for each one.
- Discussions skirt around the surface of the faith and of people's experience, rather than digging in to the depth of faith and experience.
- Church meetings can ask for hard work on behalf of the church members, which people are not prepared for.
- Church meetings do not necessarily feel part of the wider 'mutual episcope' which connects with meetings of synod and General Assembly.

2.5 Sociological observations are also valuable. It is interesting to note Daniel Jenkins' comment in 1944:

> "The Church Meeting in a Congregational Church is an indispensable part of the Church's life. A Congregational church does not make sense without it. [...] But in many of our churches it has ceased to be a living force and is maintained, often only by a few faithful people, out of respect for a tradition which no one understands very clearly any longer. Some churches founded comparatively recently have given no place to the Church Meeting even in their constitution, while a surprisingly large number acknowledge that they find it more convenient to function without one, all responsible decisions being taken by the minister and a small body of officials who call a Church Meeting only at irregular intervals to confirm the more important arrangements they have made."

Jenkins goes on to make this telling point:

> "Unless we can re-establish our Church Meetings as living fellowships there will be little reason for our maintaining our distinctive existence as Congregational churches."

2.6 Participation in church life used to provide a social cohesiveness that has come under challenge with the great variety of alternative social activities available today. Enlightenment individualism has led us away from an understanding of human community focused on mutual responsibility and nurture. The sense of decline of the Church in general in the West, and of the United Reformed Church in particular

in the UK, has led to a questioning about the relevance of the Christian faith and its visible expression in church structures. With the pressures of decline and the resultant uncertainty about the Christian faith, some church meetings now avoid the big issues about God and faith in favour of practicalities such as building maintenance, finance and structural organisation.

2.7 Theologically, some interesting questions arise. The United Reformed Church testifies that God is present in the councils of the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit. But, do those who attend meetings go in anticipation of encountering God? What is the nature of that presence in the church meeting? If encounters with God evoke mystery, awe and wonder, do these elements need to be more visible in church meetings?

2.8 prof Alan Sell (United Reformed Church minister, writer and theologian) gave a talk at Mission Council in March 2014 in which he emphasised that the conciliarity of the United Reformed Church is about discerning the Word and the Spirit in the community of believers, in a spirit of mutual episcope. Councils of the church are not 'higher' or 'lower' but 'nearer' or 'farther', depending upon the person's standpoint, and are radically interconnected in their seeking the mind of Christ. Councils give continuity to the past, as in the handing on of the apostolic tradition, and they open the way to the future by discerning the new directions in which the Holy Spirit is leading the people of God. Councils are critical to the life of the church because they are the key place in which the purposes of God are discerned for the believing community.

3. The gift of conciliarity

3.1 What is the Spirit saying to the United Reformed Church?

3.2 United Reformed Church conciliarity is about discerning the mind of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in the community of believers. "The existence of the church is not the product of human activity, but is to be traced back to the Lord himself, in the sovereign self-giving of God in his Spirit, who, through his Word, calls the Church into being and by his own breath makes it alive with the very life of Christ." Arising out of this understanding, Alan Sell argues that our councils are credal gatherings, primarily there to affirm and interpret the Christian faith, and, as a consequence of that affirmation, to encourage people in their living out of that faith.

3.3 There are five marks of the Holy Spirit which affect the way in which councils are seen. These marks are offered as an aid to reflection both to those who organise and those who participate in church meetings, to see the ways in which the Holy Spirit is recognised in each place:

1 The Holy Spirit is the giver of life and the energiser. In shared discernment, the Church identifies the aspects of life that give energy and learns to sit lightly to those aspects which drain people of energy. This is not about choosing an easy road, but about being passionate disciples, set on fire by the Spirit.

2 The Holy Spirit is the giver of gifts and these come through different languages and voices. The Church is called to identify and celebrate the diversity of gifts held within the body of Christ, not judging people, but helping each one to discover his or her particular gifts, giving thanks for the gift of each person in each part of the Church's life and recognising that it is the same Spirit drawing all people to God.

3 The Holy Spirit is the Indweller, dwelling in the midst of God's people. A high priority of the Church's life is to rediscover the importance of worship, prayer and theology, to sense the tangibility of God – in sign and symbol, in bread and wine, in each other – and to convey that tangibility to a needy world. The church needs to find again an appropriate sense of 'fear and trembling' in encountering the mystery and wonder of the living God in our midst.

4 The Holy Spirit leads God's people into truth – not my truth or your truth, but God's truth. As members of the body of Christ talk together,

different perceptions of truth are shared, recognising that God's truth will only be seen in all its fullness at the eschaton. One of the Reformed characteristics that the United Reformed Church cherishes is wrestling to discover where the truth lies, continually open to new insights.

5 The Holy Spirit is the Sender. The Church is not here for itself alone, but, by sharing in the life of the Holy Spirit, shares in God's purpose for God's world.

3.6 It is interesting to note that in the Basis of Union, the founding document of the United Reformed Church, theological considerations with regard to the nature of the Church are offered separately from the functions of the various parts of the structure. Where the church meeting is explicitly discussed, it is through a list of its functions. While the first functions listed are helpfully about outreach, mission, and considering the Christian faith, the church meeting's dependence on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and its part in God's purpose for the church and the world are not spelt out at this point. In the 42 years since the original coming together of Congregationalists and Presbyterians in the United Reformed Church, there has been a sea change in the UK in terms of the reducing visibility and prevalence of the Christian faith, a change which has had an effect on Christians' understanding of their faith and the way this faith is held. There is therefore a need to spell out the theological undergirding of conciliarity, rather than only looking at function.

4. Affirmations with regard to conciliarity as expressed in the church meeting

4.1 The United Reformed Church is not alone in honouring the role of church meetings, but the United Reformed Church is distinctive in its understanding of the relationship between the various councils of the Church, from the congregational to the Church-wide level. The church meeting is only one of the councils of the Church and operates in mutuality with the conciliarity embodied in the other councils. Conciliarity also occurs outside the formal councils.

4.2 What follows is a list of affirmations with regard to the role and purpose of the church meeting. These are the aspirations arising from the United Reformed Church's interpretation of conciliarity and the promises that this holds for the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

1 The United Reformed Church's understanding of conciliarity and the role of the church meeting within this understanding is a defining characteristic of the United Reformed Church, but not the only defining characteristic.

2 The church meeting reflects the underlying spirituality of the United Reformed Church in terms of the discerning of the mind of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit by the whole people of God. It connects with a range of other expressions of this spirituality, including the regular worship life of the Church, prayer, study of the Scriptures, and small group discussions.

3 The church meeting is rooted in prayer, worship, and listening to the Holy Spirit.

4 The church meeting is a place in which people listen for the voice of God in and through the multiplicity of different voices that speak. It symbolises and celebrates God's affirmation of each person as worthy and valuable, each of us a vehicle through whom the Holy Spirit may be heard.

5 The church meeting is based on Scripture reinterpreted over the centuries in response to different ways of discerning the mind of Christ. Acts 15, for example, offers a picture in which an issue arises, there is heated discussion, agreement is reached, and a decision is then disseminated. Revisiting scriptural understandings of conciliarity and the models it offers would be helpful.

6 The church meeting is the place in which people (lay and ordained) hold each other to account in mutual faithfulness to the Gospel.

7 The church meeting is a place for bringing to the surface the conflicts between different personalities, diverse interpretations of the Gospel and different viewpoints, and working these through in creative ways.

8 The church meeting is inspirational in that it depends on the Holy Spirit who energises, renews and equips the whole people of God.

9 The church meeting is about discerning God's path for that particular local community, which means developing an understanding and connection with the people of the place.

10 The church meeting is about wrestling with the intellectual, social, political and theological issues of the day.

11 Church meetings in any given locality are shaped and informed by their connectedness to other church meetings and the wider councils of the Church. As the interconnected network of relationships is built, so the mind of Christ is discerned.

5. Ongoing concerns

5.1 Mission Council and the faith and order committee identified a range of issues and questions which still need to be addressed if these affirmations are to be modelled in each place. The United Reformed Church confesses that the practical experience of church meetings does not always live up to its aspirations.

1 **The spirituality which undergirds the church meeting**
This is not always clearly understood or easily made visible. It would be helpful to update the *Refreshing the Church Meeting* booklet, putting the church meeting in the context of United Reformed Church conciliarity.

2 **The relationship between elders and the church meeting**
It is not clear to everybody the roles of each and which topics are best addressed by one or the other (bearing in mind that trustee legislation has opened up a new raft of issues for elders to discuss). The secretary of Mission Council's law and polity advisory group has prepared a helpful and extensive advisory statement of the church meeting's various roles, powers, functions, limitations etc, based on the Scheme of Union, the United Reformed Church Acts and his own experience of church meeting as it has operated in three flourishing city churches. Though not yet in its final form, a version of this document can be found on the URC website (www.urc.org.uk): URC Resources/Church resources, *The Church Meeting*.

3 **The relationship between personal and conciliar leadership**
There is an argument which says that leadership through the church meeting may be too diffuse for the rapidly-changing times in which we live. There is a counter argument which says that in its attentiveness to the different voices in church meeting, the United Reformed Church demonstrates an alternative style of leadership in these changing times. It would be helpful to look further at the way in which individuals' gifts are affirmed and offered alongside the gifts of shared leadership in each church.

4 **Vocation**
One of the roles of church meeting is to help those attending church feel affirmed, enthused and confirmed in their vocation in God's world. It would be helpful to take time to reflect on what is happening in a meeting if these dimensions are not present.

5 **Conflict**
Church meetings are not always attentive enough to power struggles and conflicts and are sometimes insufficiently equipped to resolve them. More reflection on the sources of conflict, and more training on how to respond well to it, would be helpful.

6 **Frequency of meetings**
Does the church meeting meet too often, so that it is in danger of looking into the detail of practical business rather than being attentive to the Holy Spirit and the time in which the Holy Spirit moves? Or, should the church meeting meet more frequently, so that it has sufficient time for the whole community to wait upon God? It would be helpful in each place to determine the 'first order' issues pertaining to the Gospel that need the primary focus of the gathered people, and the 'second order' issues of good order and regulation that could be delegated to smaller groups.

7 **Attendance in relation to a church's size**
In larger congregations, a small percentage of people attend church meetings. More work needs to be done on this phenomenon and the consequent effectiveness or otherwise of church meetings.

8 **Wider connections**
Church meetings are not always seen as connected to the wider councils of the Church and vice versa. The connection and interplay between the different 'foci' of church life needs to be addressed if the relationship between these councils it is not to be just a matter of 'handing things down' or 'handing things up'.

9 **Models**
Not everyone is enthused by church meetings, for various reasons. There is concern about the amount of attention given to the minutiae of church life. Some are asking whether the conciliarity embodied in church meetings could be developed using social media. FURY Assembly has particular ways of enabling different voices to be heard and different views to be exchanged and could contribute to a discussion of helpful ways of encouraging mutual connectedness at different levels of church life.

10 **Agendas**
Many different views have emerged about church meetings and their role in practice. Would it be helpful to undertake more research into church meetings' issues as they are perceived on the ground? Could church meetings be a focus for the imaginative retrieval of the centrality of the Gospel, both in the content of the items discussed and in the way these items are addressed?

11 **Local ecumenical partnerships**
More work needs to be done on how United Reformed Church conciliarity and the role of the church meeting finds expression in local ecumenical partnerships.

12 **Membership**
This has been identified as an area on which more works needs to be done and the faith and order committee will be responding to this request in its autumn 2014 meeting, noting that the children's and youth work committee have also identified this need.

13 **Good practice**
It might be helpful to draw together and share some stories of fruitful and effective examples of conciliarity and the church meeting.

5.2 Conciliarity and the possibility it provides for discernment has at its best the potential to be a renewing, re-energising, fruitful and creative response to the work of the Holy Spirit in the United Reformed Church.

Appendix

1. A brief history of the church meeting

1.1 The Reformation highlighted the relationship of the Church to the State. Most Reformers, following Luther and Calvin, developed Augustine's notions of the two Kingdoms, mutually supportive, although Calvin had a torrid time in Geneva as political control of the city was taken over by his opponents. The first English Separatists rejected the idea that the State had any say in the government of the Church. The two things they found most objectionable were the imposition of ministry and discipline by bishops appointed by the State and the assumption that everyone in a parish had the right to take Communion at their parish church. There was no scriptural warrant for either of these practices, since the primitive Church existed on the margins of society. They located the presence of Christ in the sincerity of those gathered at the Lord's Table rather than in the physical elements. It followed that the president at the Lord's Table was one called by the Christian community. That community might also appoint other officers mentioned in the New Testament, such as teachers or relievers. It also disciplined its members. Hence, there was a need for the gathered church to meet to discern the will of the Holy Spirit in these matters.

1.2 During the Commonwealth period, attempts were made to give the local parishioners a say in the appointment of their minister, although the State still exercised control. After 1662, those who followed a Congregational or Presbyterian way held meetings to call ministers and make any other appointments. Not until 1689 were they able to register places of worship, and few of these were the property of the congregation. Until well into the 18th Century, the provision of the meeting house might be the responsibility of a sympathetic local landowner, or a few of the more prosperous members of the congregation. The business of church meetings was to admit or dismiss members and set aside officers. A frequent agenda item in Congregational churches would be the testimonies of people seeking membership. These local churches usually associated with others in their locality, though such associations, even amongst nominally Presbyterian churches, were influential rather than ruling bodies.

1.3 The number of Congregational churches began to increase after the Evangelical Revival. The effect of this was to reinforce the role of the church meeting as a place of mutual testimony and spiritual development. Business might include planning local evangelism or even a decision to move to another building, but the trusteeship of buildings, including their management, tended to be a separate concern of a few. The county associations and Congregational Unions which began to emerge in the early 19th Century had a similar agenda, built around worship, sermons and plans for evangelism at home and abroad. The political questions around the civil emancipation of Dissenters were treated in specially-summoned public meetings. There were interdenominational societies which pursued charitable objectives such as education and medical care for the poor, and Bible and tract distribution. Church meeting might pray for them but it would not manage them.

1.4 The widening of the franchise and the rise of trades unions and cooperative bodies gave church members a taste for participation in decision-making. Congregationalists were sympathetic to political reform and counted their resistance of state control in the past as part of the development of civil liberties. The church meeting began to be held up as an example of how people from different social classes might work together. However much the theoreticians might emphasise that this was working together to discover the mind of Christ, there was a confusion in the minds of members between the church meeting and popular democracy. In the 18th Century a minister could still adopt a fairly autocratic style on the basis that he had been called by the congregation, not set over them by an external authority. There were autocratic Congregational ministers in the late 19th Century, but they were much more likely to

face a challenge from the church meeting. The agenda of the meeting broadened, especially as more members had a financial stake in the property of the Church. Instead of a rich patron, a church was more dependent on the regular income from pew rents, a de facto shareholding system. Even so, a Victorian church meeting would have been more interested in holding to account those who managed the buildings than entering into the details. Disciplining erring members was still a function of the meeting. Communion attendance registers were kept by both Congregationalists and Presbyterians with a view to withdrawing membership from non-attenders. As the 19th Century closed, Congregationalists saw denominational structures as subordinate to the local church meeting while English Presbyterianism was consolidating a more connexional structure. However, attendance records of this time – which some regard as their golden age of Congregational church meetings – reveals that only a minority of members, especially in larger churches, actually attended.

1.5 The modern church meeting is dominated by organisational questions. As our churches grow smaller there is less capacity, or even willingness, to delegate decision-making. The more the meeting concerns itself with minutiae, the more it becomes important to those who like working that way and the less it is attended by those who are impatient with detail. The spiritual building of the congregation is concentrated in opening devotions. Discipline has become somehow inappropriate. The appointment of church officers has become a question of falling on the willing rather than discerning the gifts of the Spirit. Some churches have overcome the mass of detail by devising rules for the handling of business. This is to be encouraged. There is a balance to be struck between the meeting of all members and the meeting of elders. However, in any kind of meeting, how it is conducted is secondary to how the agenda is set. If the pressure of circumstances becomes 'how do we keep going?' and this determines the agenda, being more efficient about it will not recover the role of the church meeting in guiding us in the essentials of the Christian life. The guiding theological principle of the United Reformed Church in this matter is embedded in the Manual, where the major functions of the church meeting are summarised under the headings: 'Concerning the outgoing of the Church' and 'Concerning the nurture of the fellowship'. The church meeting should also take note of §4 in The Structure: "Decisions on the part of any council shall be reached only after the fullest attempt has been made to discover the mind of the other councils or of local churches likely to be affected by the decision." Beyond this lies our responsibility as disciples to discover the mind of Christ, not just what we can all agree upon.

Faith and order committee:
What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?
Ordained local ministry

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Welch minister@theroundchapel.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**1. General Assembly, affirming the existing gift of elders and the diversity of gifts within each elders meeting as part of the United Reformed Church's distinctive contribution to the Church universal, wishes to reinvigorate the role of elders and welcomes current work to that end.** **2. General Assembly directs the faith and order committee to set up a task group incorporating expertise from other committees of the United Reformed Church to explore the possibility of authorising 'celebrant elders' to preside at the sacraments.** **To that end, General Assembly asks for work to be done in the following areas:** **a) the nature of ordination within the United Reformed Church, both of ministers of Word and sacrament and of elders;** **b) how within the understandings of the various traditions which make up our Church the sacrament of Holy Communion is linked to ordination;** **c) the suggested future relationships of 'celebrant elders' to local church leaders, lay preachers, ministers of Word and sacrament, synods and General Assembly;** **d) the nature and financing of the requisite training to support such elders in their calling;** **e) the accountability of such elders and the question of who would be responsible for discerning, authorising and supporting their vocation;** **f) the place of such elders in local ecumenical partnerships.** **General Assembly instructs that the progress of such work be reported to General Assembly in 2016.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Assembly 2012 asked for consideration of ordained local ministry. This paper outlines a range of thinking about ordained local ministry and lay presidency, asks for the role of elders to be affirmed, and proposes further work on the concept of 'celebrant' elders.
Main points	See resolution above
Previous relevant documents	2012 General Assembly resolution 35 and *Patterns of Ministry* report to General Assembly 1994
Consultation has taken place with...	Ministries committee, education and learning committee, synods and Mission Council

Summary of Impact

Financial	Yet to be worked out
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Relationships with ecumenical partners would be affected, particularly within local ecumenical partnerships.

What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? Ordained local ministry

Future of the Church paper 3

"The Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church." [1]

1. Summary

The faith and order committee was asked to respond to resolution 35 of General Assembly 2012 which asked whether a newly-constituted 'ordained local ministry' might be of use to the United Reformed Church. This paper considers the idea of adding this additional category of ministry to those already recognised within the United Reformed Church. It notes that we inherit from our parent traditions differing views on the interpretation of the phrase 'pastoral necessity' and the value of lay presidency at Communion. It also recognises concerns that ordained local ministry could be construed as ordination by the back door and lead to unaccountable local leadership and it names some practical difficulties. A brief examination of past resolutions brought to Assembly on this topic, and of feedback at synod level, has led to the suggestion that, instead of an extra category of ordained ministry or a blanket approval of lay presidency, the United Reformed Church should explore further use of that local ordained leadership we already value — the eldership.

2. The issue

2.1 Given the demography of the United Reformed Church, it is not uncommon for members of our smaller churches to feel they have insufficient contact with ordained ministers, either when wishing to celebrate Communion, or in terms of local leadership more generally. Attempting to address this difficulty, resolution 35 of the 2012 General Assembly, brought by Wessex Synod, stated: "General Assembly requests the ministries committee and the faith and order committee to consider whether some form of locally ordained ministry would be helpful to the mission of the United Reformed Church and to report back to Mission Council with a view to further discussion and a decision at General Assembly 2014." [2]

2.2 The text accompanying this resolution noted that: "there are many lay preachers, and some elders, who are regularly presiding at sacraments, usually with appropriate authorisation, often in a reasonably small number of churches which they visit fairly regularly. In practice, such people are already exercising a ministry of Word and sacraments. We believe that it would be far better theologically to ordain such people to a ministry of Word and sacraments. We also believe our ecumenical partners would find this easier to understand." [3]

2.3 David Thompson, a former moderator of General Assembly, puts the case concisely: "The principle here is the philosophical one, that if something looks like a minister, acts like a minister, and does the things that ministers do, then it is reasonable to suppose that it is a minister. Moreover, if they are ministers, why should they not be ordained?" [4]

2.4 This had also been the perspective of the earlier faith and order reference group when this question was brought to their attention. In 2011, as the result of initiatives from the Synods of Scotland and the West Midlands, the general secretary requested the faith and order reference group to consider whether lay presidency at Communion could be theologically affirmed as a gift to other churches. Reference was made in the group's discussions to the Church of Scotland's recent development of an order of ordained local ministers: Assessed, trained (to certificate level) and qualified; deployed locally with a remit for preaching, sacramental ministry and pastoral care; serving under the direction of an ordained national minister; normally in a non-stipendiary role, but able to be paid if circumstances dictated this to be the best option. [5]

2.5 However, the Synod of Scotland said that ordained local ministry was not necessarily the answer. It was felt that the transition from Churches of Christ presiding elders (see the appendix) to auxiliary ministers, with all the demands of training (now essentially identical to those for stipendiary ministry) on what are now 'non-stipendiary ministers', had discouraged many from offering a local ministry of Word and sacrament. The demands of extra training inherent in the Church of Scotland ordained local ministry model could equally jeopardise the relationship between lay preachers and the local congregations whom they have got to know well over the years, and put off others from developing such relationships, thus repeating the mistake originally made when presiding elders morphed into ministers. Age might also prove a bar for such transitions to be feasible.

2.6 Papers were exchanged between the reference group and the Synod of Scotland. A meeting held between representatives of each concluded: "We all recognise that the United Reformed Church has a problem, that the pattern of our ministry is not fitting the needs of the churches, and indeed the communities we serve." [6]

3. The difficulty

3.1 But though the difficulty was easily recognised, as with many other questions, we in the United Reformed Church hold in good faith a spectrum of views as to how to categorise or resolve it. While the Wessex resolution exemplifies the desire of many in our churches to do things 'decently and in order', the discussion above, catalysed by the Synod of Scotland, demonstrates an equally strong desire to take seriously the role of the whole people of God in sacramental leadership.

3.2 The interpretation of the phrase 'pastoral necessity' in the current criteria for authorisation of lay presidency at Communion (resolution 10 of Assembly 1998 [7]) exemplifies the tension between different understandings of 'normal' practice within our churches: "A pastoral dimension has been understood to mean a) in cases of pastoral need and b) by those who had a pastoral relationship with the church concerned. In some parts of the United Reformed Church the necessary pastoral dimension in lay presidency has been interpreted more in terms of the pastoral need (which has made it an exception) and in other parts of the Church more in terms of the pastoral relationship (which has made it more commonplace)." [8]

4. The history

4.1 These conflicting understandings of what is 'normal' have deep roots in our pre-union traditions.

4.2 "The Churches of Christ had both deacons and elders but only the elders were ordained to Word and sacrament. Under the Union [in 1981], elders became auxiliary ministers gradually morphing into the present title of non-stipendiary minister. In the Churches of Christ, elders were elected by the congregation and formed part of a team ministry, leading worship including presiding at Communion and involved in the pastoral care of the congregation." [9]

4.3 "Moreover, in the Congregational tradition, lay presidency at the sacraments had been exercised and received as a gift to congregations for decades by the time the United Reformed Church was formed. There were different historic reasons for this: 'In the 19th Century – the period of most rapid growth – the celebration of the sacraments was very much less frequent than it subsequently became... In the 20th Century, however, a gradual change took place... in the incorporation of Communion into the main service, rather than being an 'after-service' for the faithful few. Thus, by the 1960s, the expectation that lay preachers would preside, assisted by the publication of service books from the 1930s onwards, had grown." [10]

4.4 While the statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church makes it clear that we are not bound by the past, but must follow Christ wherever he leads, we need some understanding of our different histories if we are to take into consideration the viewpoints of others.

5. The theology

5.1 All Church traditions claim a biblical pattern for the forms and orders of ministry that they establish. One key text in all our traditions has been Ephesians 4. Of the gifts that are given, "some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." From this text, Calvin argues that pastors and teachers are those "whom the Church can never go without." [11] To this, he adds the ministries of elder and deacon. There is a claim of a biblical pattern for this ministry. Nevertheless, some will argue that there is a sense of pragmatism within the Reformed tradition such that the ordering of our ministries is in principle flexible and contingent, at least to an extent. [12]

5.2 The faith and order reference group response when this was first discussed in February 2011 highlighted the following points: "The sacraments should be available to God's people in a way that corresponds to our theological inheritance and Reformed faith; there is a need to involve the wider Church in an affirmation of the suitability of those who preside; there is a sense in which presidency at the sacraments is a discipline and it is reasonable to expect that those who preside should be under orders." [13]

5.3 John Bradbury of Westminster College helpfully brings in the perspective of our European colleagues in the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, where the question of locally ordained ministers has also been explored: "The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe maintains that where the ministry to be exercised is one of Word and sacrament, ordination is appropriate and necessary. The text states that:

'The decisive factor for ordination is whether or not the service in question is a ministry of Word and sacraments. If it is, the person to serve should be ordained [as a minister of Word and sacraments], regardless of the time frame and geographical limitations that have been set for the particular service'." [14]

5.4 However, we cannot forget that recognition of the vocation and ministry of the *laos*, the whole people of God, is also a theological imperative held dear among some in the United Reformed Church. "In the Churches of Christ, presidency at communion was always the function of the elders of the local congregation. However, it was never the custom for the same person to preside and preach, even if the minister was the preacher. Hence the function of the elders (who were understood in the earliest days to be the bishops of the congregation on New Testament lines) as presidents was never in doubt." [15]

5.5 Could such apparently conflicting positions be reconciled? It seemed sensible to find out more about how the issue played out at grassroots level. Could any points of confluence be determined?

6. Voices from the synods

6.1 These questions have, of course, been raised and debated before, exhaustively. However, when proposals for moderating elders and local ministers were brought to Assembly in 1995, following the report *Patterns of Ministry* (1994), these were both defeated, the first by a large majority and the second by a clear majority.

6.2 A compromise resolution encouraging Mission Council to explore the possibility of new forms of local leadership was approved[16] and through resolution 29 of the 1998 Assembly the formal role of local church leaders was inaugurated.[17] The result has been mixed, with a variety of patterns developed in different synods,[18] and a lack of clarity about how local church leaders relate to elders, church meeting and the wider structures of the Church.

6.3 In the 20 years since *Patterns of Ministry,* the number of ministers in active URC service has declined by almost 40% and continues to fall. The number of congregations has never declined as rapidly, so that whereas there were more than five ministers for every 10 churches in 1994, there are now fewer than four.[19] This general trend applies even when numbers of retired ministers willing to offer service to the churches are taken into account. It therefore seemed right for the faith and order committee to canvass the current views of the synods, through the synod moderators, in order to explore how the situation is currently experienced.

6.4 The Wessex resolution showed a clear desire in that synod for the development of ordained local ministry; Thames North indicated some support for this. The Synod of Scotland showed an equally strong desire to affirm lay presidency; West Midlands also showed interest in this way forward, in light both of the increasing disparity between the number of ministers and of churches and that synod's historical appreciation of lay presidency.

6.5 However, a different point of view from either of these was raised in unanimity by six other synods: "We already have local ordained ministry. We have elders." While further questions can properly be raised about the distinction between the United Reformed Church's ordination of ministers of Word and sacrament and of elders (see below 7.1.2), this groundswell of opinion was worth closer examination. Furthermore, the potential for enhancement of the role of all elders was underlined by the response of Mission Council to an earlier version of this paper.

7. A solution?

7.1 Elders have already been highlighted as one of the gifts of the United Reformed Church to the wider Church. What is the point, synods argued, of creating another category of ministry beyond that which we already have? South Western Synod expanded: "URC ecclesiology bestows upon the local church the authority to elect elders and to invite whomsoever they wish to preach; it offers authorisation to preside to those not on the roll of ministers and allows us to be flexible in interpreting pastoral necessity. Inventing new categories of ministry will not change these."

7.2 Concerns were expressed about: The possibility of unsuccessful candidates for ordained ministry being ordained by the 'back door' of local ministry; the relationship of an ordained local ministry to the existing leadership team of elders; possible disciplinary issues if people rise to leadership without understanding the conciliar nature of the local and wider Church in the United Reformed Church; and the difficulty of holding such leaders accountable, when the local church may prefer an unaccountable leader to none at all. It was pointed out that elders are accountable to the church meeting directly. Moreover, Assembly has already adopted guidelines for elders' conduct paralleling those of ministers.[20]

7.3 Positively, several synods described the efforts already being put into "encouraging and equipping our elders to embrace and fulfil their calling to give spiritual leadership to the church." (Yorkshire Synod)

8. Yes, but...

8.1 The committee is painfully aware of the complexities of this issue, covering theological, pastoral and practical aspects cutting to the heart of what we believe it means to be the United Reformed Church. Questions of both principle and practice remain to be resolved if we are to take this path.

8.1.1 It could be argued that this is an old set of arguments, less relevant in the developing context of pioneer ministries, Fresh Expressions and our growing relationships with some of the new churches in which boundaries between lay and ordained leadership are less significant. Certainly questions of church order are looking different these days with some dialogue partners. Yet, this question will not go away if we ignore it, for the balance between order and freedom, pragmatism and inspiration still needs to be struck.

8.1.2 During the compilation of this paper, questions of theology and good order in need of further work have arisen. For example:

a) Is it the need for lay presidency or for local leadership, or both, that really lie at the heart of this problem? How can we decide?
b) Does good order necessarily imply ordination?
c) How does the ordination of elders differ from that of ministers of Word and sacrament?
d) Would the recognition of some elders as fitting celebrants of the sacraments be a pragmatic response to felt need, or a discernment of the Spirit's gifting? How can we tell the difference, and how can the Church agree on this?

8.1.3 Practical issues with further theological implications have also emerged from our discussions thus far, highlighting the lack of hard evidence, beyond the anecdotal, concerning conditions on the ground in our churches. The Basis of Union promises that the United Reformed Church shall "take steps to ensure that *so far as possible* ordained ministers of the Word and Sacraments are readily available to every local church." [21] [italics added] In considering the report *Equipping the Saints* (2005), Assembly agreed that deployment patterns should accept "that not every congregation has or will have a minister directly providing their day-to-day leadership."[22] But what is the current situation? What proportion of congregations in different synods still have regular access to what level of ministerial oversight? What is the best use we can be making

of all – church related community workers, elders, ministers of Word and sacrament, lay preachers, local leaders and others – who are leading the churches? What are the implications for their training?

8.2 What if we *were* to decide to move forward in the direction of 'celebrant elders'? Careful development of good process would be necessary in order to support and guide elders who felt called to this ministry, as well as their congregations. Here are just a few of the considerations that might arise.

8.2.1 Since the proposal is not that every elder has the gifting and call to become what one might label a celebrant elder, a call/discernment/authorisation process would still be required. How would this be done? Within the local church? Through synod pastoral committees? By an Assembly committee? Would those elders already regularly celebrating the sacraments need to go through further training initially, or regular refresher courses, in a parallel way to Assembly-accredited lay preachers?[23] Would the Church have the authority at Assembly level to insist on this, or the money to fund it? How would celebrant elders in a congregation with little or no ministerial oversight receive support beyond the local level for their leadership?

8.2.2 Questions of power and accountability must also be tackled. For example, if a lay preacher who is not an elder has a regular relationship including celebrating Communion with a church other than their own, and under this scheme they are ordained celebrant elder, in which congregation should their eldership be rooted – their home church or one of those in which they exercise this aspect of their ministry? And, to which congregation are they answerable?

8.3 Finally, to acknowledge the practicalities of the situation obtaining in each of our nations, if not every congregation can even find enough serving elders, is it naïve to expect a sufficient supply of celebrant elders to emerge, even from the pool of regular lay celebrants whom we know already exist within some of our synods? Age, and the rigours of training requirements (considered in 2.5), may prove dissuasive factors.

8.4 The faith and order committee has not been able to agree unanimously on this proposal. Significant questions of principle remain unanswered or contested. However, the committee and Mission Council feel that the time has come to test the mind of the church.

a) It seems to many that the current situation – lay presidency variously authorised under an elastic definition of 'pastoral necessity' – is neither theologically coherent nor practically viable in the longer term.

b) However, the argument from 'good order' to ordain to the ministry of Word and sacrament all who preside goes against the theological convictions of some in our churches, does not cohere with the sense of calling of others, and will therefore not solve the practical problem.

c) We have found no neat or permanent solution to this question. We suggest however that the United Reformed Church explore further dimensions of the gift of eldership we already appreciate and which already exists within each congregation of the United Reformed Church.

d) In the discussions leading to the production of this paper, one point that has emerged clearly is the need to affirm and reinvigorate the ministry of eldership as a distinctive feature of the United Reformed Church and a gift to the whole Church (as for example in the work already being done by synods, education and learning committee work on the training of elders, and the commitment of the ministries committee to resourcing them).

e) We invite the United Reformed Church to explore further the possibility that some elders may be called to celebrate the sacraments within their own congregations or other local churches with which they have a significant pastoral relationship. Realising that this is a significant move which will affect not only the lives of our churches but also those of others beyond our own fellowship, we seek the Spirit's guidance through the councils of the Church.

Footnotes

1 Basis of Union, The Manual A.20, *The Manual Of The United Reformed Church*, URC Publications, London.
2 *Record of Assembly 2012*, p41.
3 *Reports to Assembly 2012*, p268.
4 Thompson, David, *Lay preachers: a ministry in search of a theology*, unpublished paper, 2012.
5 2010 Church of Scotland Ministries Council report to that Church's General Assembly – p3/27, Blue Book.
6 From notes of a meeting between representatives of the United Reformed Church's faith and order reference group and representatives of the pastoral committee of the National Synod of Scotland on the question of presidency at the Sacraments – 14 May 2012.
7 *Record of Assembly 1998*, p10.
8 Mortimer, Richard, unpublished paper submitted to the faith and order reference group, June 2010.
9 Barr, Mary, paper prepared for Synod of Scotland meeting September 2011 and submitted to the faith and order reference group, August 2011.
10 Thompson, David, ibid, 2012.
11 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1559,* Book four, III, 4, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, 1960, p1057.
12 Bradbury, John, *Local Ordained Ministry: A discussion paper for the faith and order committee of the United Reformed Church*, Nov 2012.
13 Pope, Robert, *Presidency at the Sacraments*, unpublished paper for the faith and order reference group, 2011.
14 Bradbury, ibid quoting *Ministry, Order and Episkope*, CPCE 2012, p66
15 Thompson, David, 'Some notes on Eldership in the United Reformed Church', unpublished paper, 2011.
16 *Record of Assembly 1995*, p44-47.
17 *Record of Assembly 1998,* p32-33.
18 Thompson, David, ibid, 2012.
19 Statistics on numbers of ministers and churches are published in each Yearbook.
20 http://urc.org.uk/images/Ministries/Ministries%20Committee/Toolbox/guidelines_elders.pdf
21 Basis of Union, *The Manual* A.24, *The Manual Of The United Reformed Church*, URC Publications, London.
22 *Record of Assembly 2005, p*15.
23 http://www.urc.org.uk/lay-preachers.html#four

Finance committee:
Trustees' report and accounts for 2013

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Ellis, Treasurer john.ellis@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly notes the trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2013.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To notify General Assembly of the audited accounts for 2013.
Main points	The accounts for the United Reformed Church's central activities are legally in the name of the URC Trust. Copies of the audited accounts for 2013 will be placed on the website and made available at Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	Accounts for 2012 are available on the website.
Consultation has taken place with...	Not applicable.

Summary of Impact

Financial	A change of auditors for 2013 has reduced the audit fee for this and related work to c£50,000.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The report provides a publicly-available summary of the Church's activities.

General secretary nominating group

Nomination of general secretary

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Ellis, Moderator of General Assembly john.ellis@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly appoints the Revd John Proctor to serve as general secretary from 6th July 2014 until 30th June 2021.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint a new general secretary
Main points	• A general secretary review group of 12 was set up in 2013 in accordance with the URC's procedures. • The group saw its task as shaping a discernment process and enfolded all its work in worship and prayer. • The group used the revised job description for a general secretary prepared by the human resources advisory group (HRAG) and accepted by Mission Council. • The group, after consulting widely including with the present general secretary, decided not to recommend a re-appointment. • The group invited nominations and self-nominations for a new general secretary and received 18. • A short list of four from amongst those who were willing to be considered were met by the group. • The group's unanimous recommendation was that the Revd John Proctor should be nominated to Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with…	The general secretary; HRAG; a structured sample of people within and beyond the URC who have contact with the work of the general secretary.

Summary of Impact

Financial	N/A
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A

Ministries committee:
Report to General Assembly – part 2

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Craig Bowman ministries@urc.org.uk
Action required	none
Draft resolution(s)	**none**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	A summary of work currently on the committee's agenda
Main points	Elders are vital in providing spiritual leadership. Anecdotal evidence highlights pressures on ministry today; there is a need to quantify this for the support of ministers and the health of the Church.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 35 from General Assembly 2012 on ordained local ministry. Local mission and ministry review programme agreed by Mission Council in December 2008.
Consultation has taken place with…	The faith and order and education and learning committees

Summary of Impact

Financial	none
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Recognition of the importance of eldership in our tradition will impinge on local ecumenical partnerships. There is continuing exploration with partner churches regarding the interchange and mutual recognition of ministers.

Ministries committee

1. The road ahead

The goal of the committee and its sub-committees is to continue to find ways of recognising, encouraging, and developing the gifts of the whole people of God to bring about growth in the life of the Church and for the sake of God's mission in the world around.

2. Elders on the way

2.1 We see the resourcing of the eldership of all local churches as a key part of this, as steps are taken to support teams of people in spiritual leadership. In times or in places without a minister, the team of elders will work together to continue to encourage the local church to grow and thrive. When there is a minister in pastoral charge, the team of elders will include the gifts of the minister. We are happy to learn that churches and ministers together are growing more used to using the minister's role description to flesh out something of how this working together happens. The hope is that a minister's role description will be created when a minister arrives in a pastorate and then reviewed when the pastorate evaluates its purpose as part of local mission and ministry review.

2.2 We will also be taking part in the ongoing discussion in the United Reformed Church regarding the need to provide appropriate people to preside at the sacraments for all local churches. This may be through some form of recognition of a presiding elder in the church, or perhaps recognition of some other form of ordained local ministry.

3. Walking with ministers on the journey

3.1 Ministers of Word and sacraments and church related community workers continue to be a highly valued resource within the life of the United Reformed Church and the committee continues to work in several areas concerning the relationship of ministers to the denomination.

3.1.1 An online tool is currently being developed to help in the assessment of pressures bearing down on all ministers, in order to help individuals to develop strategies to aid their resilience and also to help synods know what training and support they need to provide.

3.1.2 The secretary for ministries remains the key point of contact with the government department for work and pensions as case law continues to unfold regarding the position of ministers in stipendiary service as office-holders rather than as employees. The position of the United Reformed Church remains that the church is committed to treating its ministers at least as well as they would be treated if they were employees.

3.1.3 The numbers of stipendiary ministers and the scoping targets for each synod will continue to be managed by the ministries office. The need for flexibility in addressing this challenge has grown with changes in the pension and retirement age, leading to more varied retirement ages among working ministers.

4. Travelling companions

We have welcomed the able contributions of Gethin Rhys in his role as convener-elect and look forward to his leadership in the next period of work. Welcoming new companions often means that we say goodbye to those who have journeyed with us. We are sad that the Revd Ruth Whitehead finishes her time as convener this summer but are very grateful for her contribution to the committee and to the Church over these past few years and wish her every blessing as she continues to settle into her role as moderator of the South Western Synod.

Mission committee:
Report to General Assembly – part 2

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision
Draft resolution(s)	**General Assembly welcomes the resource pack on foodbanks produced by the joint public issues team and commends it for study and use by all churches.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Assembly is requested to consider the report and the resolution, and to discuss the way forward on particular areas of work.
Main points	The report provides information on future mission committee work within the *vision2020* framework. This includes work on: • A discipleship proposal. • The commemoration of the First World War. • Reimagining local ecumenical partnerships. • A major rural mission conference. • A new direction in racial justice and intercultural ministry. • The development of CreateTalk. • Supporting church growth. • A new focus region for Commitment for Life. • Churches' involvement with foodbanks. • Revising the Church's environmental policy.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Committee report to General Assembly part 1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Other Church House staff and a variety of groups/networks, within and beyond the United Reformed Church, with whom the mission team members collaborate.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Covered by mission committee budget 2014.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Much of this work will create opportunities for ecumenical working and for strengthening relationships. Work on the First World War, reimagining LEPs and Israel-Palestine in particular will require regular consultation and communication with external partners.

Mission committee

1. Introduction

1.1 It has been four years since the General Assembly adopted the *vision2020* framework for mission. We have seen *vision2020* statements working as a tool employed by churches, synods, committees and Assembly to broaden and enrich our engagement in mission and the forward planning in the Church. The 10 statements and their outward-looking focus have encouraged and enabled the United Reformed Church, at all levels, to keep growth and a rich and varied engagement with the world at the top of the agenda.

1.2 The Mission Committee has been delighted to see the *vision2020* framework being used creatively across the Church and continues to monitor and support its development. Gathering and sharing the stories of mission has been encouraging. Our challenge now is to enable churches, synods and Assembly programmes and committees to think about making 'mission pledges' that will firm up our vision of a growing and engaged Church that looks and plans forward as a regular and committed practice.

1.3 Our report is structured to reflect some of the ways in which the mission department is engaging with a diverse agenda for mission, within the *vision2020* framework, across the United Reformed Church.

2. Spirituality and prayer

Prayer is the heartbeat of mission and an emphasis on prayer and spirituality runs through all the work of the mission committee. Spirituality and prayer will be key parts of a new mission support programme application to the Council for World Mission, which the committee will bring to Mission Council later this year. Work on the proposal started in 2012 with an initial focus on evangelism, but, following extensive conversations across the Church, a more urgent need to develop discipleship was identified. How we address this will be the subject of a meeting in the summer of a group of people representing the wide diversity of the Church. In prayer and conversation, the group will seek to discern God's leading as to the way forward.

3. Identity

3.1 During the next four to five years, the United Kingdom will mark the anniversary of the First World War and the United Reformed Church will share in this period of remembrance. Local churches, synods and the United Reformed Church at Assembly level will participate in a number of events to honour the fallen. The Church will also encourage reflection upon the wider issues of war, peace, nationhood and sacrifice, and the relevance of the Great War to contemporary debates about conflict resolution and peacemaking. In so doing, it will seek to identify the distinctive contribution it can make to public thinking as a Church conscious of its identity as a nonconformist or 'dissenting' communion.

3.2 To plan and oversee a strategy for its engagement in the anniversary, the Church has convened a small task group, located within the mission committee. This group will: Monitor developments in the media, parliament, the Churches and elsewhere; undertake theological reflection and historical study; collect relevant stories from around the world, particularly those of people drafted in from the colonies and of women; circulate material to, and gather material from, synods; help to resource and (as invited) advise local churches; and brief and prepare materials for the Assembly moderators and other public spokespeople for the Church. The group will consult with local churches to obtain a sense of the Church's mood and what members might expect their leaders to say on their behalf.

4. Ecumenical partnerships

4.1 There is much refocusing happening within the ecumenical scene. Significant for us will be the work to re-imagine local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs), especially in England, as well as cooperation within Churches Together groups. As the focus tightens ecumenically, new initiatives develop and older, less successful patterns are set aside, so it is important for us, within the context of the *vision2020* framework, to develop resources that enable the United Reformed Church contribution to be clarified and enhanced.

4.2 We are well placed to develop new, imaginative ways of doing things given the greater flexibility that we have in contrast to some of our partners. We are becoming more involved in Fresh Expressions. We have distinctive characteristics that we count as strengths, such as conciliarity and the role of elders, and we need to develop these. This will require the development of resources and good communications with local churches and appropriate synod resource people. Much of this focus also applies when thinking about how to encourage engagement in interfaith relations and initiatives.

5. Community partnerships

The work of rural mission continues through the excellent services of the Arthur Rank Centre. Rural communities need vibrant churches more than ever; isolation, hidden poverty, poor transport, lack of jobs and opportunities for young people and lack of affordable housing are all challenging issues for rural people. However, rural mission is at a tipping point. In order to be vibrant in a multi-church situation, there is an urgent need to move away from traditional approaches to leadership and to equip all members of congregations for mission and ministry. Around the country there are examples of collaborative ministry where lay leaders have been released and equipped, enabling the local church to engage with its community with purpose and creativity. The Arthur Rank Centre and the national rural officer have been instrumental in this work. Plans are now in progress for an ecumenical conference which will bring together organisations involved in supporting rural mission and ministry across the UK in order to encourage, inspire and equip rural lay leaders and clergy and to explore the way forward. This conference, called Germinate, will be held in Coventry on 11 October 2014 and a desired outcome will be the formation of small groups which will meet every six months as learning communities to reflect on progress, refine the vision and plan next steps. Following the resignation of the Revd Graham Jones, a new national rural officer is currently being recruited. It is envisaged that he or she will play a key role in the conference and its follow up.

6. Hospitality and diversity

6.1 General Assembly 2012 deferred the *multicultural church, intercultural habit* paper for discussion and action by Mission Council. This was received and adopted at the October 2012 Mission Council. The new focus *multicultural church, intercultural habit* which encourages a broader conversation on inclusion, diversity and hospitality, has been well received by the very active racial justice and intercultural ministry (RJiM) network and a wider cross-section of the United Reformed Church.

6.2 Among the new areas of work underlining the strategic and necessary shift in the work of racial justice and intercultural ministry are:

6.2.1 Strategic work to enable, develop and nurture the contributions of black and minority ethnic ministers in the United Reformed Church. One example is the intentional and specific attention currently given to the growing number of Korean ministers and communities living in the UK and the implications for mission and ministry. Work has started on developing a memorandum of understanding that would identify best practice related to partnership in mission and ministry in the UK, including accountability and the sharing of resources. This initiative will include input from synod moderators, Korean partner churches, Korean ministers on the United Reformed Church roll of ministers or associated with the United Reformed Church, and the staff secretaries for

mission, intercultural ministry, ecumenical relations, world church relations, ministries and education and learning. A large gathering of Korean ministers and lay leaders is planned for 2014.

6.2.2 Collaborative work with the urban URC network, the equalities committee and education and learning to develop a series of new resources to enable and deliver the *multicultural church, intercultural habit* shift in local congregations. The resources will be made available online and as hard copies (upon order). The racial justice and intercultural ministry office invites suggestions from synods/churches on resources they would value.

6.2.3 A significant feature of church life in the UK for at least the last 30 years has been the number of places where one church shares its premises with another worshipping congregation. With new migrant communities this pattern is growing exponentially. The relationship will vary from an intentional and growing partnership to one of simply renting space. However, recent research by racial justice and intercultural ministry and the urban URC network reveals that, in spite of the challenges related to shared worship spaces, there are potentially exciting opportunities for partnership in mission and ministry. To this end, racial justice and intercultural ministry and the urban URC network are creating a handbook to help local congregations to develop this ministry. As part of this process we will be piloting a 'better hosting' conversation gathering (May 2014) with the aim of having a larger gathering in May 2015.

7. Evangelism

7.1 The mission committee and the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar in his role as the moderator of General Assembly have sponsored ArtTalk, a process to link churches and communities through art. The feedback has been so inspiring that mission committee is extending this work to CreateTalk, linking churches and communities through all the creative arts.

7.2 CreateTalk will see a range of people throughout the United Reformed Church, already involved in innovative work, mentoring local congregations to do the kind of projects which have already been successful. One project team said: "ArtTalk is about inclusion. It enables the church to welcome and work with people of all ages and abilities. It allows for multi-faith discussion and ecumenical sharing. The biggest reason why a church or group should run an ArtTalk project is because it enables them to share God's love and work for Christ in the community" (Moldgreen United Reformed Church). In Cullompton, ArtTalk worked with the South Western Synod's emerging church pioneer minister and a network of volunteers called Hug Cullompton to create a community gallery in an empty shop. The exhibition gathered artists and craftspeople from the town and over 1,000 visitors came over the two weeks. The owner of the building is now exploring ways of making it a permanent Arts Hub and crafters' cooperative on the high street and from the experience a new group of people exploring Christian faith and sharing Holy Communion has started to meet monthly. CreateTalk will build on this inspiration, giving practical support and tools to help local congregations engage with communities.

8. Church growth

Following the *vision2020* conference on church growth, several synods have made church growth a key focus in their work. The mission committee will seek to support this work wherever possible: By offering a practical workshop on church growth in cooperation with the Windermere Centre, through the Growing the chURCh Facebook page, through the *vision2020* grants fund and by supporting and networking the growing number of pioneer ministers. At the suggestion of the medium term strategy group, the mission enablers network has initiated work on church planting. This is in its very early stages and will need research as well as broad consultation with other committees and groups across the Church. A paper will be brought to mission committee later this year which will help to develop the conversation within the United Reformed Church.

9. Global partnerships

9.1 The mission team has started work to provide resources for groups visiting Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. This will include a theological position paper and material to increase understanding of the issue of occupation as well as practical information. It is also our intention to begin to engage more formally with the indigenous Palestinian churches in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We are working with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, other denominations and non-governmental organisations to explore how Churches can respond constructively to critical reactions to statements on Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

9.2 In May 2014 there was a church leaders' trip to El Salvador, organised by Christian Aid, where the participants visited Christian Aid partners. The trip sought to deepen the whole Church's relationship with Christian Aid and commend Commitment for Life as a programme of General Assembly. Opportunities for greater understanding of the issues in the region and the production of worship resources for use by Commitment for Life churches will be key outcomes. El Salvador is just one of the four countries in Commitment for Life's new region of Central America.

10. Justice and peace

10.1 A major concern of the joint public issues team (JPIT) and the church and society office continues to be the growth in the number of food banks in the UK and in the demand for their services. The extent of church involvement can be seen in the fact that more than 160 churches from our three traditions responded to an invitation to share their experiences with foodbanks with JPIT.

10.2 Both JPIT and church and society share the concern of many that, while foodbanks perform an absolutely vital service at this time, they cannot be a permanent solution to the problem of food poverty. Accordingly our voices have been among those calling for an independent enquiry into the factors driving the demand for food banks and for these factors to be suitably addressed. Such an enquiry is now underway. The team has also prepared resources which it offers to churches involved with local foodbanks, these being designed to help them, if they wish, to reflect upon their involvement in foodbank work through Bible study, prayer and discussion; to incorporate that involvement into their worship and liturgical activity; and to raise awareness locally about the work undertaken by foodbanks and the underlying issue of food poverty and financial hardship. The JPIT resources may be found here: www.jointpublicissues.org.uk (see resolution on page 132).

11. The Integrity of Creation

It was at General Assembly in 2004 that the United Reformed Church adopted its current environmental policy. A resolution passed at Assembly in 2007 recognised the need for the Church to shrink its carbon footprint, and for a response to climate change to be built into the whole life of the local church, but no significant revision of the 2004 policy has been undertaken since its adoption. Given the increased urgency of the requirement for the Church to shrink its footprint, and the significant advances in our understanding and awareness of environmental issues over the last 10 years, now is a good time to undertake a thorough revision of the Church's environmental policy. This process is well underway, in consultation with a number of individuals and organisations with specialist knowledge and expertise, and it is planned that a revised policy will be brought to Mission Council in November 2014.

Nominations committee

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Carol Rogers carannrog@aol.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	**a) General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 138-152 of the *Book of Reports*, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the Supplementary Report to Assembly.** **b) General Assembly re-appoints the Revd Paul Whittle to serve as moderator of the Eastern Synod until 31 August 2020.** **c) General Assembly re-appoints the Revd Kevin Watson to serve as moderator of the Yorkshire Synod until 31 May 2020.**

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Appointments to committees and posts
Main points	n/a
Previous relevant documents	n/a
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with the synods, local churches, and the committees and groups where appointments are needed

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Nominations committee

This committee nominates to Assembly the names of people to serve as conveners and secretaries of all Assembly committees, and as members of those committees. It also suggests names of United Reformed Church representatives on other bodies. It recommends the people to make up appointment groups for moderators of synods and Assembly-appointed staff.

Convener: John Durell
Convener-elect: Irene Wren
Secretary: Carol Rogers
Synod representatives:

I Melanie Campbell	II Martin Smith	III Rita Griffiths
IV Chris Reed	V Duncan Smith	VI Margaret Marshall
VII Paul Whittle	VIII George Faris	IX Colin MacBean
X Simon Fairnington	XI Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor	XII Jean Silvan Evans
XIII Myra Rose		

1. Current work

1.1 The main activity of the committee is routine, but in its own way demanding. We depend on the gifts and the goodwill of members of our Church to maintain the work of all our Assembly committees and working groups; but we depend on our own committee members to ensure that invitations are issued that may result in balanced committees where every member contributes to the work of the whole.

1.2 Our synod representative members encourage churches and committees of their own synods to respond to our secretary's annual letter (sent out early in the summer) which lists forthcoming vacancies, and asks for suggested nominees. We also welcome suggestions made by committees themselves where appropriate, recognising that often they have the clearest understanding of their own needs. To keep a healthy balance between continuity and 'new blood', and between established expertise and untested enthusiasm, is not always easy; and, the more obvious balance we always try to achieve between lay and ordained, and male and female, can itself be easily lost through the refusal of first choice nominees. However, we remain deeply grateful for the number of names that we receive, and for the extent to which members of our churches still feel able to accept invitations and contribute in this way to the life of the Church.

1.3 As well as nominating committee members, we also have a responsibility for the membership of General Assembly panels, and for ensuring that our representation on outside bodies is maintained. The last section of this report indicates the scope of the task. Even where the responsibility for some of these appointments lies with others, we are keen to maintain an up-to-date database of all who serve in this way, in order that the load may be seen to be fairly shared.

2. Monitoring

2.1 To help us in maintaining balance in all the Church's committees and working groups, we continue to monitor the responses of all those who receive invitations and to share this information with the equalities committee. Important as this monitoring process is, we need to warn against reading too much into trends detected in so small a sample.

2.2 In fact, most of these observations closely follow those made in our 2012 report – no new trends are apparent.

- Across those committees whose members are appointed through the involvement of the nominations committee, at September 2013 membership was 57% male and 43% female, and 52% lay and 48% ordained.

- While we seem able to maintain the lay/ordained balance, we have not been able to improve the male/female ratio but have been frustrated in our efforts by the larger number of refusals that we receive from women, both lay and ordained, than from men.
- We have again been grateful to the secretary for racial justice and intercultural ministry for helping us identify good numbers of BME (black and minority ethnic) members, eight of whom have accepted invitations.
- We continue to be concerned about the age profile of those who are invited. It appears that many more are over 55 than under, reflecting our lack of success in even identifying younger people who might be approached.
- All this information is dependent on invitees completing a monitoring form. We are grateful that the majority do, but a invariably a small number fail to – often, it seems, because a thoughtful letter of refusal appears kinder than an impersonal form.

3. Committee membership

3.1 Each synod is represented on our committee, some by their clerks and others by individuals with a good knowledge of the people within the synod. We benefit by this gradual change in our own membership. In the past year we have welcomed our new secretary, Carol Rogers, and now we welcome our new convener, Irene Wren.

4. Thanks to all who serve

The Church continues to receive richly from its many willing members who are part of its committee structure, or who serve on panels and working groups, or represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows will surely include a real sense of gratitude for all who serve us in this way. The Revd John Durell now completes his service as convener of the nominations committee. The members of the committee wish to record their gratitude for the many ways in which he has served both the committee and the wider Church in this role.

5. Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. The Assembly moderators, the moderators-elect, the immediate past moderators and the general secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee.
2. Symbols have been used as follows:
   - ** denotes those whom General Assembly is invited to appoint for the first time;
   - † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service;
   - # denotes a convener-elect who will become convener in 2015;
   - / the name after the slash is the alternate for the one before it.
3. The number in round brackets following the name indicates the member's synod: (1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.
4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category, this is indicated in round brackets following the name.
5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes exceptionally be renewable. Committee conveners serve an additional preliminary year as convener-elect. In sections one to four of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. The date in square brackets following the name indicates the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000 some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. In years when General Assembly meets, new committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of Assembly. In years when General Assembly does not meet, they normally begin on 1 July.

1. Mission Council

Mission Council acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the synod moderators and three representatives from each synod together with the conveners of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three FURY members, including the FURY moderator.

(Synods appoint and decide terms for their representatives)

Northern Synod	Mr Robert Jones, Mr Danny Pigeon, vacancy
North West	Miss Judith Haughton, 2 vacancies
Mersey Synod	Mrs Joan Colwell, Mrs Rita Griffiths, the Revd Tim Meadows
Yorkshire Synod	Mr Chris Reed, Mrs Jenny Poulter, the Revd Alison Termie
East Midlands Synod	Mr Duncan Smith, the Revd Jenny Mills, Mrs Jill Turner
West Midlands Synod	The Revd Jacky Embrey, Mrs Margaret Marshall, Mr Andrew Evans
Eastern Synod	The Revd Dr Catherine Ball, Mrs Linda Harrison, Mr Clifford Patten
South Western Synod	Mr George Faris, the Revd Dougie Burnett, Mrs Gwen Jennings
Wessex Synod	Mr Colin MacBean, 2 vacancies
Thames North Synod	Mr Simon Fairnington, the Revd Edward Sanniez, vacancy
Southern Synod	The Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor, Mr Alistair Wilson, vacancy
National Synod of Wales	The Revd Shelagh Pollard, Mrs Ruth Henriksen, vacancy
National Synod of Scotland	The Revd Connie Bonner, the Revd Stephen Brown, Mrs Barbara Bruce

In attendance: Minute secretary: Mr Bill Robson** [2018]
together with staff secretaries, moderators' chaplains and others as appropriate

1.1 Mission Council advisory group

Convener: Moderators of General Assembly
Secretary: General secretary
The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith [2016], the Revd Gethin Rhys (committee convener) [2018], the Revd John Humphreys [2018]
Moderators-elect and immediate past moderators of General Assembly
[*ex officio:* Honorary Treasurer]

1.2 Human resources advisory group

Convener: Mr Keith Webster [2017]
Secretary: General secretary

Mr Mike Gould [2017]	Mr Peter Pay [2017]
Mr Alistair Forsyth [2017]	The Revd Wendy White [2017]
Vacancy	General secretary
Head of human resources	

1.3 Law and polity group

Convener: The Revd Prof David Thompson [2016]
Secretary: Dr Augur Pearce [2016]

Ms Morag McLintock [2016]	Ms Denise Fitzpatrick [2017]
Mr Duncan Smith [2016] (synod clerk)	Mrs Kath Fowler (PLATO)
[*ex officio*: Clerk to General Assembly	legal adviser]

1.4 Listed building advisory group

Convener: Mr Peter West [2015]
Convener-elect: #Mr Neil MacKenzie [2019]
Secretary: The Revd James Mather**

Mrs Elizabeth Conran (1)	Mr Michael Williams (2)
Ms Alison Lee (3)	The Revd David Figures (4)
Mrs Judith Booth (5)	Mrs Rachel Wakeman (6)
Mr Peter West (7)	Mr Roger James (8)
Mr Gerry Prosser (9)	Mr Christopher Buckwell (10)
Mr Guy Morfett (11)	Mrs Sue Cole (12)

1.5 MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline) advisory group

Convener: The Revd Peter Poulter [2016]
Secretary: Dr Jim Merrilees [2018]
Convener of the Assembly commission: The Revd David Skitt
Secretary of the Assembly commission: Mrs Gwen Jennings
Convener of the review commission of the incapacity procedure: Mr Donald Swift
Secretary of the review commission of the incapacity procedure: The Revd Ray Adams
Consultant for ministers and CRCWs:
Consultant for mandated groups: The Revd Alison Davis
Training coordinator: Mr Keith Webster Co-opted: Mr Hartley Oldham
General secretary, Clerk to Assembly, Secretary for ministries, legal adviser

1.6 Resource sharing task group

Convener: The Revd Paul Whittle [2017]
Secretary: Mr Chris Allerton
Treasurer: The Revd Dick Gray
Miss Margaret Atkinson
Mrs Rachel Wakeman
Mr Mike Gould
[*ex officio:* Honorary treasurer]

1.7 Human sexuality task group

Convener: The Revd Elizabeth Caswell
Dr Jacob Addo
The Revd John Hardaker
The Revd Neil Riches
Ms Karen Campbell
Mrs Val Morrison
The Revd Justine Wyatt

1.8 Medium term strategy group

General secretary
Ms Linda Austin
Honorary treasurer

1.9 The Church's engagement with 20-40 year olds task group

Mr Stewart Cutler
Ms Sabrina Groeschel
Ms Emma Pugh
General Secretary
The Revd David Downing
Ms Victoria Paulding
The Revd Mike Walsh

1.10 National synods task group

Chair: The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar
Scotland: Dr Jim Merrilees
Wales: The Revd Gethin Rhys
England: Simon Fairnington
Law and polity advisory group:
The Revd Jack Dyce
The Revd Shelagh Pollard
Mrs Sarah Lane-Cawte
The Revd Prof David Thompson
Dr Augur Pearce

1.11 Methodist/United Reformed Church strategic oversight group – faith and order conversations

The Revd Sarah Moore
The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard
The Revd Paul Whittle

2. Mission department

2.1 Mission committee

Convener: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2016]
Secretary: Secretary for mission
vacant (1)
vacant (3)
The Revd David Dean (5) [2015]
The Revd Sam White (7) [2015]
Mrs Sheila Thatcher** (9) [2018]
Mr Martin Hayward (11) [2015]
The Revd Lindsey Sanderson (13) [2015]
The Revd Stuart Nixon (2) [2018]
Mrs Tessa Henry-Robinson (4) [2015]
vacant (6)
The Revd Stephen Newell** (8)
The Revd John Macaulay (10) [2015]
Mrs Janet Drogan** (12) [2018]

2.1.1 International exchange reference group
Convener: Mr Chris Wright [2016]
Members: The Revd Paul Whittle (Synod Moderator) [2018]
Mrs Judith North (5) [2016]
Secretary for world church relations

2.1.2 Commitment for life reference group
Convener: Mr John Griffith [2016]

2.1.3 Methodist/URC interfaith reference group
(Members normally serve for six years in parallel with Methodist terms)
Co-convener: The Revd Clare Downing [2019]
The Revd Bill Burgess [2015]
The Revd Tim Clarke [2015]
Mr John Mellor **[2020]

2.1.4 Joint public issues team strategy and policy group
Ms Marie Trubic (spokesperson on public issues for the United Reformed Church)
(Other members appointed by the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union of Great Britain)

2.1.5 Rural strategy group (United Reformed Church/Methodist)
Co-chair: The Revd Roy Lowes
The Revd Louise Franklin
The Revd Peter Ball

3. Discipleship department

3.1 Ministries committee
Convener: The Revd Gethin Rhys [2018]
Secretary: Secretary for ministries
The Revd Heather Pencavel (8) [2015]
The Revd Clive Sutcliffe (7) [2016]
The Revd Dr James Coleman (4) [2017]
Mrs Jane Woods-Scawen (6) [2017]
Mr Stuart Dew** (9) [2018]
Vacancy
Mrs Judith Johnson (leadership in worship advocate) [2015]
Convener, assessment board

3.1.1 Ministries – accreditation sub-committee
Convener: The Revd Fran Ruthven [2017]
Secretary: Secretary for ministries
The Revd Richard Church (synod moderator) [2017]
The Revd Helga Cornell (6) [2015]
The Revd Bridget Banks (11) [2017]
The Revd Naison Hove (10) [2017]
The Revd Mark Robinson**(4) [2018]

3.1.2 Ministries – CRCW programme sub-committee
Convener: The Revd Jacky Embrey {2016]
Secretaries: CRCW development workers
The Revd Carolyn Smyth (13) [2016]
The Revd Keith Morrison (5) [2016]
The Revd Dr John Campbell (10) [2016]
Mr John Grundy (3) [2017}
Mrs Rosie Buxton** (12) [2018]
The Revd Simon Walkling (synod moderator)

3.1.3 Ministries – maintenance of ministry sub-committee
Convener: The Revd Pamela Ward [2017]
The Revd Richard Turnbull (5 [2015]
Mr Peter Rippon (5) [2016]
Mrs Eilidh Young (13) [2016]
The Revd Sue Kirkbride** (13) [2018]
Mr David Black ** (6) [2018]

3.1.4 Ministries – retired ministers' housing sub-committee
(Members will normally serve for four years but appointments may be extended for a further two years)
Convener: The Revd David Bedford [2016]
Secretary: Retired ministers' housing society Ltd

The Revd Anne Bedford (3) [2015] The Revd John Humphreys (synod moderator) [2015]
Mr Peter West (7) [2015] Mr Malcolm Lindo (10) [2016]
[*ex-officio*: Honorary treasurer]
(*Properties are managed by a company viz:* ***Retired ministers' housing society Ltd****. Details of the members of the board etc may be obtained from the secretary, Mr Andy Bottomley, at Church House)*

3.1.5 Assessment board

(Members usually serve for five years as training is required)
Convener: Dr Ewan Harley [2019]

Retiring 2015:
Mrs Judith Garthwaite (4) Mr Rod Morrison (4)
Ms Mercy Nimako (11) Mrs Maureen Campbell (10)

Retiring 2016:
Mrs Adella Pritchard (6) The Revd Franziska Herring (6),
The Revd Sue Kirkbride (13)

Retiring 2017:
Ms Alex Bediako (10) Mr Bill Gould (3)
The Revd Peter Henderson (8) The Revd Shahbaz Javed (10)

Retiring 2018:
The Revd Kim Plumpton The Revd Mary Thomas (9)
The Revd Ruth Allen (5)

Retiring 2019:
The Revd Stuart Radcliffe** (2) The Revd Sohail Ejaz** (7)
The Revd Peter Rand ** (1) 1 vacancy

3.2 Education and learning committee

Convener: The Revd John Smith [2015]
Convener-elect: #
Secretary: Secretary for education and learning
Mrs Liz Bird (7) [2015] Mr Mal Breeze (12) [2016]
Mrs Julie Jefferson (6) [2016] The Revd Dr Irene John (13) [2016]
Ms Ellen Quayle (10) [2017] Mrs Sheila Telfer** (4) [2018]
The Revd Ros Lyle** (10) [2018} vacancy
The Revd Jack Dyce (resource centre)
The Revd David Salsbury (synod development officer)

3.2.1 Windermere management committee

Convener: The Revd Mitchell Bunting
Minute secretary: Mrs Jenny Poulter (4) [2016]
Mr Peter Farrand [2015] Dr Peter Clarke (1) [2015]
The Revd Jan Adamson [2017] vacancy

3.2.2 Education for ministry phase 2 and 3 (EM2/3) sub-committee

Convener: The Revd Dr Robert Pope
Minute secretary: The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King
The Revd Sue Fender (EM2 minister)
Mrs Marie Trubic (CRCW)
The Revd David Downing (EM3 minister)
The Revd Anne Sardeson (training and development officer)
The Revd Dr James Coleman (training and development officer)
[Ex officio: Secretary for education and learning
Convener, education and learning committee, Secretary for ministries]

3.2.3 Education and learning finance sub-committee

Chair: The Revd John Smith (acting in a vacancy)
Minutes secretary: Secretary for education and learning
Member: Mr Lyndon Oelmann
Ex-officio: URC Treasurer (John Ellis)
Staff in attendance: Chief finance officer, education and learning finance officer

3.3 Children's and youth work committee

Convener: The Revd Tim Meachin (2017)
Secretary: Head of childen's and youth work

The Revd Tim Lowe (6) [2015]
Ms Alison Hadley (5) [2015]
Mr Philip Reeve (3) [2017]
The Revd Richard Eastman (5) [2017]
5 vacancies
FURY Moderator
FURY Moderator Elect
The Revd Sue McKenzie (10) [2015]
Mr Mick Smerdon (13) [2016]
Mrs Lorraine Downer-Mattis (10) [2017]

3.3.1 Pilots management sub-committee

Convener: Mrs Soo Webster [2015]
Member: Mrs Tricia Legge (5) [2015]
(Other members of the sub-committee are appointed by the children's and youth work committee. The Congregational Federation also has two representatives.)

4. Administration and resources department

4.1 Assembly arrangements committee

Convener: The Revd Michael Hopkins [2020]
Secretary: Facilities manager

Assembly moderators
General secretary
Convener, local arrangements committee
Moderators elect
Clerk to General Assembly

4.2 Communications and editorial committee

Convener: The Revd John Humphreys [2015]
Convener-elect: #Mr Peter Knowles [2019]
Secretary: Director of communications

The Revd Ian Fosten (7) [2015]
Mrs Andrea Varnavides (4) [2016]
The Revd Dr Kevin Snyman(12) [2017]
The Revd Kate Gray (2) [2017]
The Revd Heather Whyte (8) [2015]
The Revd Peter Cooper (10) [2017]
Mr Andy Jeans (3) [2017]
The Revd Ashley Evans (10) [2017]

4.3 Equalities committee

Convener: The Revd Helen Mee [2018]
Secretary: The Revd Adrian Bulley [2017]

Mrs Tunde Biyi (7) [2015]
Mrs Margaret Telfer (9) [2016]
The Revd Susan Flynn (3) [2017]
Mr Clive Curtis** (12) [2018]
Mrs Adella Pritchard (6) [2016]
The Revd Iain McDonald(8) [2016]
Ms Maria Mills (8) [2017]
Mrs Ruth Clarke** (2) [2018]

4.4 Faith and order committee

(Members normally serve for six years)
Convener: The Revd Elizabeth Welch [2017]
Secretary: Secretary for ecumenical relations

The Revd Dr Malachie Muneyeza (6) [2018]
Dr Augur Pearce (7) [2018]
Ms Anna Briggs **(13) [2020]
The Revd Tim Meadows (3) [2018]
The Revd Dr Catherine Ball**(7) [2020]
1 vacancy

4.5 Finance committee
Convener: Honorary treasurer
Chief finance officer
Mrs Mary Martin (6) [2015]
Mrs Elsie Gillard (2) [2016]
The Revd Kate Gartside (3) [2017]
Mr Richard Turnbull (5) [2017]
Mr Andrew Mackenzie (7) [2015]
Mr Richard Pryor (7) [2016]
Mr Ian Simpson (9) [2017]
The Revd David Walton ** (6) [2018]

4.5.1 Stewardship sub-committee
Convener: Mr Keith Berry [2017]
Mr Jim Crawford (3) [2016]
Mr John Denison (11) [2017]
Mrs Rosie Buxton (12) [2016]
The Revd Andrew Mills** (11) [2018]

4.6 Nominations committee
(Synods appoint and decide terms for their representation)
Convener: Mrs Irene Wren [2018]
Secretary: Mrs Carol Rogers [2017]
Mrs Melanie Campbell (1)
Mrs Rita Griffiths (3)
Mr Duncan Smith (5)
The Revd Paul Whittle (7)
Mr Colin MacBean (9)
The Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor (11)
Dr Jean Silvan-Evans (12)
The Revd Martin Smith (2)
Mr Chris Reed (4)
Mrs Margaret Marshall (6)
Mr George Faris (8)
Mr Simon Fairnington (10)
Mrs Myra Rose (13)

4.6.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments
(Members usually serve for five years as training is required)
Retiring 2015
Mrs Joan Turner (7)
The Revd Pauline Barnes (5)
Mrs Angela Quinn (13)
Mr Peter Pay (9)
The Revd Alison Termie (4)
Mr Phil Knott (2)

Retiring 2017:
The Revd Stuart Brock (1)
The Revd Linda Elliott (12)
Dr Tony Jeans (6)
The Revd Peter Rand (1)
The Revd Dr Jim Coleman (4)
The Revd Derrick Sena Dzandu-Hedidor (11)
Mrs Hilary Miles (11)
Mr David Clarkson (12)

Retiring 2018:
The Revd Viv Randles (10)
Mr Bill Robson (13)
The Revd Liz Shaw (10)
The Revd Martin Smith (2)
Mrs Helen Renner (3)
Mrs Lesley Richmond (13)
The Revd Mike Shrubsole (9)

Retiring 2019:
Mrs Sue Brown** (9)
The Revd Paul Bedford** (9)
other names to be confirmed
The Revd Nick Adlem** (9)
The Revd Sohail Ejaz** (7)

4.7 Pastoral reference and welfare committee
Convener: The Revd Sheila Maxey [2015]
Convener-elect: # Mrs Wilma Frew [2018]
Secretary: Deputy general secretary, discipleship
Mrs Irene Wren (5) [2015]
Mrs Gabrielle Pagan (7) [2016]
The Revd Clare Downing (synod moderator) [2015]
Mr Douglas Hay (13) [2017]
[*ex officio :* Honorary treasurer General secretary Secretary for welfare]

4.8 Disciplinary process – commission panel

(Members serve for five years as regular training is required. They may be invited to continue serving beyond this as experience is especially valuable on this panel)

Convener: The Revd David Skitt [2019]
Deputy convener:
Secretary: Mrs Gwen Jennings [2017]
Members:

Retiring 2015
The Revd Meryl Court (10)
Dr Fiona Liddell (12),
Mrs Pamela Sharp (3)
Mrs Pat Crozier (3)
Mr Colin MacBean (9)
Mr Patrick Smyth (13)

Retiring 2016
Mr Geoffrey Milnes (5)
Mr Neil Robinson (4)
Ms Nneoma Chyima (10)
The Revd David Pattie (8)
The Revd Yvonne Stone (6)
The Revd Wendy White (2)

Retiring 2017
The Revd Nick Adlem (8),
The Revd Colin Offor (1)
Mr Donald Swift (3)
The Revd Craig Muir (6)
Mr David Rice (13)
The Revd Jane Campbell (5)
The Revd Ian Kirby (8)
Miss Judith Haughton (2)
The Revd Carolyn Smyth (13)
Mr Douglas Hay (13)
Mr Alistair Forsyth (4)
The Revd John Bremner (13)
Mr Keith Webster (10)

Retiring 2018
The Revd Pauline Calderwood (4)
Dr Peter Campbell-Smith (11)
Mrs Wendy Dunnett (9)
The Revd Bill Bowman (11)
Mr Roger Tucker (1)

Retiring 2019
The Revd Debbie Brown** (3)
Mrs Mary Cummings†(6)
The Revd Peter Flint **(11)
Mr Andrew Harvey†(8)
The Revd Graham Maskery**(2)
The Revd Sue McCoan**(6)
Mr Mussafar Nazish **(3)
The Revd Wendy Swann** (9)
3 vacancies
Mrs Sue Bush** (1)
Mr Peter Etwell† (1)
Mrs Barbara Goom† (8)
The Revd Naison Hove†(10)
The Revd Deborah McVey**(7)
The Revd Sarah Moore (2)
Mrs Pat Poinen† (1)

4.9 Standing panel for the incapacity procedure

(This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience)

Secretary: The Revd Ray Adams [2017]
The Revd Ruth Whitehead (synod moderator) [2018]
The Revd John Marsh (past moderator of General Assembly) [2017]
Mr David Nash (legal experience) [2018]
Dr Ewen Harley (GP) [2018]
Commission office for the incapacity procedure: Dr David Westwood [2018]

4.11 United Reformed Church Trust

(Members normally serve for six years. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number and appoint a secretary and deputy secretary.)

Chair: To be elected
Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones
Deputy secretary: Mr Andy Bottomley
Members:

Group 1 (Synods 1,2,3, 13)
Mr Andrew Atkinson (1) [2016]
Group 2 (Synods 6,8,9,12)
The Revd Dick Gray (8) [2016]

Mr Neil Mackenzie (3) [2016]
A further name to be confirmed
Dr Ian Harrison [2017]
A further name to be confirmed

Group 3 (Synods 4, 5,7,10 and 11)
Mr Alastair Forsyth (4) [2016]
The Revd Michael Davies† (11) [2018]
A further name to be confirmed

FURY appointee: vacant
Mission Council nominated members: To be appointed if necessary
[*ex officio*: Moderators of General Assembly, General secretary,
Honorary treasurer, Clerk to General Assembly
In attendance: Convener, investment committee]

4.11.1 Church house management group
Convener: Deputy general secretary administration and Resources
Mr Mike Gould
Mr Derek Jones
Mr Doug Maxwell
Head of Human Resources
[*ex officio:* General secretary Chief finance officer Director of communications]

4.11.2 Remuneration sub-committee
Convener*:*
Secretary: Head of human resources
Ms Carmila Legarda (Methodist HR)
Mr William McVey (elder)
Ms Sara Foyle (Church House staff representative)
Honorary treasurer
Chief finance officer

4.12 The United Reformed Church ministers' pension trust Ltd
(Members normally serve for six years. Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company secretary.)
Chair: Mr Richard Nunn
Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones
Members of URC:
The Revd Roger Woodall [2016]
Miss Margaret Atkinson [2017]
Members of Fund:
The Revd David Bedford [2013]
The Revd Duncan Wilson [2014]
The Revd Jacky Embrey [2014]
The Revd Kate Gartside [2015]
[*ex officio*: Honorary Treasurer
Convener, pensions executive
Convener, maintenance of ministry sub-committee]
In attendance: Convener, investment committee

4.13 Pensions executive
Convener: Dr Chris Evans [2017]
Secretary: Mr Rob Seaman
Members: Mrs Liz Tadd (12) [2015]
Mr Steven Manders (13) [2016]
[*ex officio*: Convener, maintenance of ministry sub-committee;
Convener, investment committee, Honorary treasurer]
(The pensions executive reports to the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pensions Trust Board, the maintenance of ministry sub-committee and to the finance committee.)

4.14 Investment committee
Convener: Mr David Martin [2018]
Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones
Members: Mr Andrew Perkins [2017]
Mr Brian Hosier [2015]
The Revd Dick Gray [2016]
The Revd Julian Macro [2016]
[*ex officio:* Honorary treasurer
Convener, pensions executive
Chair of United Reformed Church trust or another director
Chair of United Reformed Church ministers' pension Trust or another director
Treasurer, Westminster College] *In attendance:* Chief finance officer

5. Representatives to meetings of sister churches

5.1	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	
5.2	General Synod of Church of England	The Revd Graham Maskery [2016]
5.3	Methodist Conference	Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
5.4	Congregational Federation	Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
5.5	General Assembly of Church of Scotland [note 7]	Mr John Ellis, Revd Nigel Uden, The Revd Mitchell Bunting
5.6	United Free Church of Scotland [note 7]	The Revd Mitchell Bunting
5.7	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation [note 7]	The Revd Mitchell Bunting
5.8	Scottish Episcopal Church [note 7]	The Revd John Humphreys
5.9	Methodist Church in Scotland [note 7]	To be arranged
5.10	Baptist Union of Scotland [note 7]	To be arranged
5.11	Presbyterian Church of Wales [note7]	2 vacancies
5.12	Union of Welsh Independents [note 7]	2 vacancies
5.13	Covenanted Baptists	
5.14	Church in Wales Governing Board [note 7]	
5.15	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	To be decided

6. Representatives on ecumenical church bodies

The following have been nominated as URC representatives at the major gatherings of the ecumenical bodies listed.

6.1 Council for World Mission (CWM) from Assembly

The Revd David Coleman
Mr Philip Timson
Secretary for mission

Mrs Zadie Orr
Secretary for world church relations

6.1.1 CWM European region meeting

The Revd David Coleman
Mr Philip Timson
Secretary for mission

Mrs Zadie Orr
Secretary for world church relations

6.2 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

The Revd Dr Sarah Hall
The Revd Dr David Pickering
General secretary

Ms Emma Pugh
Secretary for world church relations

6.5 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.6 The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

The Revd Rowena Francis
Secretary for world church relations

The Revd Professor David Thompson

6.7 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church leaders' meeting

General secretary

6.7.1 CTBI senior representatives' forum

General secretary

Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.7.2 CTBI environmental issues network

The Revd Dr David Pickering

The Revd Mike Shrubsole

6.7.3 CTBI church and public issues network

Ms Marie Trubic

Secretary for church and society

6.7.4 CTBI churches' criminal justice forum
Mrs Wilma Frew

6.7.5 CTBI stewardship network
Mrs Faith Paulding

6.7.6 CTBI churches' international students' network
Ms Eleri Evans [2014]

6.7.7 CTBI consultative group on ministry amongst children (cgmc)
Mrs Karen Morrison

6.7.8 CTBI inter-religious network
Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.7.9 CTBI racial justice network
Secretary for racial justice and multicultural ministry

6.7.10 CTBI churches' network for mission
Secretary for mission

6.7.11 CTBI China forum
The Revd John Scott

6.8 Churches Together in England (CTE) forum
General secretary — Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.8.1 CTE enabling group
Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.8.2 CTE coordinating group for local unity
The Revd Kevin Watson — Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.8.3 CTE Churches Together for healing
The Revd Deborah McVey — The Revd Vivien Henderson

6.8.4 CTE churches' joint education policy committee
Mr Graham Handscomb

6.8.5 CTE churches' theology and unity group
Secretary for ecumenical relations

6.8.6 CTE group for evangelisation
Secretary for mission

6.8.7 CTE spirituality coordinating group
The Revd Sue Henderson

6.8.8 CTE churches' rural group
The Revd David Herbert

6.8.9 CTE minority ethnic affairs group
Secretary for racial justice and multicultural ministry

6.9 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) members meeting
[see note 7]
The Revd John Humphreys — The Revd Mitchell Bunting/Mrs Kathleen Ziffo

6.10 National sponsoring body for Scotland [see note 7]
The Revd John Humphreys — The Revd Mitchell Bunting

6.11 Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN) [see note 7]
The Revd Gethin Rhys

6.12 Commission of Covenanted Churches [see note 7]
2 vacancies

6.14 Free Church education committee
Mr Graham Handscomb Mrs Gillian Kingston

6.15 European Churches' environmental network
Mr Charles Jolly

6.16 Churches' refugee network
The Revd Fleur Houston

6.17 Churches' committee on funerals and crematoria
The Revd Sally Thomas The Revd Kate Hackett

6.18 Churches' agency for safeguarding
Safeguarding officer

6.19 Churches' forum for safeguarding
Safeguarding officer

6.20 Churches' network for non-violence
Head of children's and youth work

7. Representatives on formal bi-lateral and multi-lateral committees

7.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group
Co-convener: The Revd Kevin Watson (synod moderator)
The Revd Kay Alberg The Revd Roy Fowler The Revd Sally Thomas
Secretary for ecumenical relations

7.2 Roman Catholic – United Reformed Church bilateral dialogue in England and Wales
The Revd Prof David Thompson The Revd Dr John Bradbury
The Revd Dr Sarah Hall Mrs Ann Shillaker
The Revd Lindsay Sanderson Staff Secretary

7.3 Church of England/United Church/Church of England bilateral dialogue
The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith The Revd Elizabeth Welch
The Revd Tm Meadows The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

7.4 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland)
The Revd John Humphreys Mr John Collings
The Revd Zam Walker The Revd Mitchell Bunting.

7.5 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion
The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

8. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

8.1 Northern College
Miss Margaret Atkinson [2015] The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2015]
The Revd David Jenkins [2017] Mrs Sheila Davies [2017]
Mr Steve Wood [2017] Secretary for education and learning

8.1.1 Luther King House Educational Trust
Secretary for education and learning

8.2 Westminster College: board of governors
Convener: The Revd Nigel Uden [2018]
Clerk: Mr Chris Wright [2018]
Honorary College Treasurer: Mr Anthony Williams [2016]
Members:
Dr Jean Stevenson [2018]
The Revd Nigel Appleton [2015]
The Revd Kristin Ofstad [2016]
The Revd Canon Andrew Norman [2018] (Cambridge Theological Federation)
Secretary for education and learning
(together with other governors appointed by other bodies)
The Revd Craig Muir [2015]
Mr Brian Long MBE [2016]

8.2.1 Cheshunt Foundation
Mr Guy Morfett [2016]
The Revd Craig Muir [2017]

8.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation
Convener, Westminster College governors

9. Governors of colleges and schools with which the United Reformed Church is associated

9.1 Caterham School — The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith [2015]

9.2 Eltham College — The Revd Terry Sparks [2015]

9.3 Walthamstow Hall — Mrs Isabel Heald [2015]

9.4 Milton Mount Foundation
Ms Hilary Miles [2016]
The Revd Derek Lindfield† [2018]
The Revd Kevin Swaine [2016]
The Revd Val Towler† [2018]
The Revd Richard Wells†[2018]

9.5 Silcoates School
Dr Moira Gallagher [2017]
The Revd Steven Knapton [2014]
Mrs Tessa Henry-Robinson [2015]
The Revd Dr Janet Lees [2017]
Mrs Sue Lee [2015]

9.6 Taunton School — The Revd Ruth Whitehead

9.7 Bishops Stortford College — Mr Anthony Trigg [2015]

10. Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

10.1 Arthur Rank Centre
The Revd Elizabeth Caswell [2014]

10.2 Churches legislation advisory service
Mrs Sheila Duncan — General secretary — Deputy general secretary

10.3 Congregational fund board
Mr Anthony Bayley† [2018]
The Revd Eric Allen [2015]
The Revd Kate Hackett [2015]
The Revd Geoffrey Roper† [2018]
Mrs Jackie Haws [2017]

10.4 Congregational Memorial Hall trust
The Revd Derek Wales [2017]
Mr Hartley Oldham [2015]
Dr John Thompson [2016]
Mrs Margaret Thompson† [2018]
Mr Graham Stacy [2015]
Dr Brian Woodhall [2016]

10.5 Discipleship and witness board of trustees
Mrs Patricia Hubbard [from before 1999]

10.5.1 Publications development group
Vacancy

10.6 English Heritage's places of worship forum
Mr Peter West (convener of the listed buildings advisory group)

10.7 Lord Wharton's charity
The Revd Derek Lindfield [2017]

10.8 Methodist faith and order committee
Dr Augur Pearce [2017]

10.9 Retired ministers' and widows' fund
Mr Ken Meekison [from before 1999]
Mr Anthony Bayley [from 2014]
The Revd Julian Macro [from 2004]

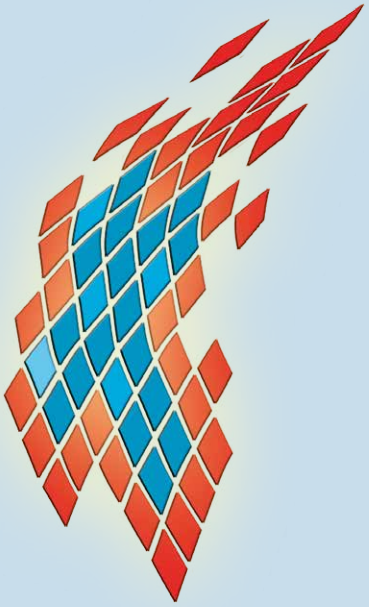
10.10 Samuel Robinson's charities
Mr Tony Alderman [from 2004]

10.11 Scout association – URC faith adviser
The Revd David Marshall-Jones

10.12 United Reformed Church history society council
The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe
Dr David Robinson
The Revd Prof David Thompson
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar

10.13 United Reformed Church Guide and Scout active support unit
The Revd David Marshall-Jones

10.14 Westhill endowment fund
Mr Howard Bridge,
The Revd Elizabeth Welch (co-opted)
The Revd Dr Stephen Orchard,



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Assembly arrangements committee

Committee members:
Convener: David Robinson
Secretary: Ann Barton
Moderators, Moderators-elect, General secretary, Clerk to Assembly, Convener of local arrangements committee

1. Looking back over the period July 2012 to December 2013

1.1 As was reported to General Assembly in 2012, all Assembly committees had been asked to consider the scope for making savings on their budgets for 2013 and beyond. As a result, Mission Council determined that the budget for Assembly 2014 be set at £200k, a reduction of one-third. Mission Council, as authorized by Assembly and taking account of the advice of the Assembly Arrangements Committee, has determined how those savings will be made. The Assembly Arrangements Committee is grateful to the synods and those who will be attending the Assembly in 2014 for helping to make these savings achievable.

1.2 Feedback from the 2010 and 2012 Assemblies has been important in our deliberations. A difficulty at recent Assemblies has been the large amount of business to be conducted over the four days on which we meet, which at times has resulted in discussion having to be rushed or curtailed. Careful thought has been given to how we will order and conduct business at Assembly 2014 in the hope that similar problems do not arise again. This will be explained in more detail when General Assembly meets in Cardiff.

2. Looking forward

The Medium Term Strategy Group reported to Mission Council in 2013 that the intention is to hold one more biennial Assembly in 2014 before reviewing the future arrangements for, and frequency of, meetings of General Assembly.

Pending any such review, the Assembly Arrangements Committee proposes:

Assembly resolves to meet in Southport from 8 to 11 July 2016 (Friday to Monday) or at such time and place as may be determined.

Children's and youth work committee

Committee members:
Convener: Tim Meachin
Secretary: Karen Morrison (Head of children's and youth work development)
Members: Matthew Barkley (FURY moderator 2014-15), Stewart Cutler (CYDO 2012-13), Lorraine Downer-Mattis, Richard Eastman, Alison Hadley, Gary Leighton (FURY co-moderator 2012-13), Jane Leighton (FURY co-moderator 2012-13), Tim Lowe, Shirley Knibbs, Sue McKenzie, Tamara Oates, Philip Ray (CYDO 2014-15), Philip Reeve, Meg Robb (July 2013), Mick Smerdon, Angela Such (November 2013), Soo Webster (convener of Pilots management committee), Rob Weston (July 2013), Rebecca Whiffen (FURY moderator 2013-14).

1. Overview

Children's and Youth work in the United Reformed Church has experienced a number of significant changes since the last General Assembly. The reorganisation of the Church House staff team, changes to the employment of synod children's and youth work development officers (CYDOs) and developments in safeguarding legislation have brought challenges and opportunities. Our work, at local, synod and Assembly level, has seen the engagement, involvement and development of children and young people who have a strong sense of identity, passion for their faith and motivation to be proactive witnesses in the wider world. It is worthy of note that the programmes and opportunities offered have led a significant number of those involved to make a commitment to training and service including children's and youth work, church related community work and the ministry of Word and sacraments. Our commitment to this work is both vital and fruitful and the work of the committee and Assembly and synod staff is to be commended.

2. Staff team

The team of children's and youth work staff has been restructured as part of a wider process at Church House. The team now comprises Karen Morrison (head of children's and youth work development), Natalie Husk (children's and youth work programme officer), Heather Wilkinson (PA to children's and youth work) and Naomi Crocker (PA to head of children's and youth work and Pilots administrator).

3. Fellowship of United Reformed Youth (FURY)

FURY is the umbrella organisation of United Reformed youth of which every young person aged 11 to 25 associated with the United Reformed Church is a member. FURY's mission is 'to discover God, to help each other grow in the Christian faith and, through our lives, to reflect God's love to all'.

4. Youth Assembly

This annual gathering, including representatives from ecumenical partners, brings young people together from across the church to explore in theme based workshops and debate, to further the business of the church and to worship together as a community of God's people. The business sessions enable people to experience the challenge of public speaking in a safe and supportive environment. In addition to the business of the assembly, a sense of belonging is developed and an Assembly wide network of friendships is established. In addition, Youth Assembly enables young people to contribute to the wider church by means of resolutions which may lead to working groups or discussions at General Assembly.

5. What Do You Think?

This event runs immediately before General Assembly and enables the under-26 synod representatives to prepare for the business of Assembly. During their time together they discuss the background behind some of the resolutions, using the book of reports, and learn how the Assembly is conducted. This is an invaluable experience for those attending.

6. Pilots

Pilots has become more fully integrated with the rest of the children's and youth work programme. A consequence of this is that Pilots publications are now sent to all churches (and are available online) and have been used in churches with no Pilots company. The introduction of an annual Pilots Sunday has helped to raise the profile of Pilots and to increase support for Pilots in local churches. Two successful Voyagers and Navigators events have taken place since the last General Assembly. Developing Leadership Skills (aged 15 to 19) training weekends have seen young leaders complete the first three year cycle. Pilots continues to flourish as a Christian organisation involving children and young people in the life of our churches.

7. Children's and Youth Work Development Officers

The employment of CYDOs is moving to their respective synods. We are encouraged that a number of synods have continued to support the deployment of their CYDOs to Assembly work which, of course, benefits the children and young people in their synod. The CYDO team brings consistency of professional practice to work in individual synods and provides support for events and programmes.

8. Child Friendly Church Awards

Since General Assembly 2012, 13 churches have received the Child Friendly Church Award and 14 have received the Child Friendly Church Re-Award. Churches are supported and assessed by their synod CYDO. Churches are reassessed after three years and the committee has provided guidance to CYDOs in relation to the re-award process. This includes responding to churches who do not meet the criteria when they are reassessed. Conversations with churches will be instigated after two and a half years to enable support to be given in advance of revalidation.

9. Research

As part of their Assembly work, CYDOs are involved in a programme of research projects on a range of issues and topics. We will use the findings to inform future discussion and priorities. The current research topics are media usage as a tool, use of social media as a worker, children and youth participation, church membership, having a voice (children and young people), children in poverty (financial, cultural, emotional), and play (the value of play, developing social skills through play, 'fair' play, discerning gifts for raising self-esteem through play, changing poor behavioural patterns through play). More topics will be added in due course.

10. Children's and youth web pages

The new children's and youth work pages of the URC website are full of useful resources, information and age specific areas to support those working with children and young people in the church. The site offers a reflection section for leaders called Five Minutes' Peace, seasonal resources, news stories, maps to show the position of Pilots companies and Child Friendly Churches across the URC, and a sign up button for the e-news letter.

11. Good Practice

An updated version of the URC's safeguarding material will soon be published and training material to use with local churches based on the new material has been written.

Communications and editorial committee

This committee is responsible for the setting and maintenance of standards of all publications. It is responsible for all media relations.

Committee members:
Convener: John Humphreys
Secretary: Martin Hazell (to 2013), Gill Nichol
Members: Peter Lyth (to 2013), Peter Ranscombe (to 2013), Orin Stephens (to 2013), Helen Jones (to 2013), Heather Whyte, Ian Fosten, Steve Beney, George Mwaura, Andrea Varnavides, Peter Cooper (from 2013), Peter Knowles (convener-elect), Kevin Snyman (from 2013), Andy Jeens (from 2013)

1. Overview

1.1 It's been a busy and interesting 18 months in the life of the communications and editorial department. It may be clichéd to comment on the ever changing, fast moving world of communications – but like all the best clichés, it's true. The development of online solutions and the explosion in social media applications provides opportunities and creates challenges. The department – across most of its sub-divisions: press and media, graphics, publications, Reform, the website, despatch and the database – has started to consider properly how the United Reformed Church can make best use of available technologies to communicate effectively with all of its audiences and further the mission of the Church. (More of this in 2014 and beyond.)

1.2 The department is not only starting to change the way it works, there have also been several changes in the staff that do this work – and these have been highlighted in the relevant sections below. Pertinent to note here though, is that Celia Meiras, the director's PA, returned from maternity leave in February 2013 and that the Revd Martin Hazell, who served as director of communications from January 2007, moved on from this role in September 2013. Gill Nichol, the denomination's press and media manager, took on the role of interim director of communications on a fixed-term contract from October 2013 to July 2014.

1.3 The committee thanks Martin Hazell for his contribution to the work and development of the department over almost seven years.

2. The press and media office

2.1 The press and media office is the first port of contact for many both in and outside the denomination. Gill Nichol, the press and media manager, handles all external communications for the Church – including news releases, work on a variety of media campaigns including joint work with the Mission Department on Back to Church Sunday and the Flesh and Blood campaign and reputation/crisis management issues. Gill also works closely with the Reform team, contributing news to Digest (the denominational newsletter distributed with Reform), as well as writing regular news for the URC website and producing the URC's Quarterly Update (QU) e-news. E-news has been so successful that, in October 2013, we renamed it News Update (NU) and now send it out 10 times a year.

2.2 On 1 October, Emma Pearce, the department's administrative assistant, began working an additional two days a week as the PA to the press and media manager, covering the running of the office and leaving Gill free to focus on more proactive media work. This didn't quite happen, as Emma's move to the press office coincided with the start of Gill's post as interim director. Emma's work was essential in ensuring the provision of a basic press and media service in the final three months of 2013 –

as was the contribution of Stuart Dew (former URC press officer), who helped out with dozens of writing and editing tasks.

2.3 At the end of 2012 Gill successfully applied for a grant from the URC's legacy fund to run a three-year programme of communications training. The training on offer is two-fold: high level broadcast media training delivered externally and aimed at 'senior' staff, and locally delivered training across the synods. In 2013, three broadcast workshops and three synod training days were delivered. Workshops are now being booked for 2014.

2.4 In December an interim press and media officer – Eve Parker – was appointed (to start work in January 2014).

3. The graphics office

3.1 There's been many a report of the death of print – but not in this denomination's graphics office! In the past 18 months the graphics office – staffed by Sara Foyle and Tina Yardley – has generated the impressive total of 580 pieces of print, from flyers and adverts, brochures, pin badges, and new logo designs to TLS materials, the updated TRIO pack, Mission Council and General Assembly papers and the Yearbook. Almost everything that you see with a URC logo on it has been designed and often printed in-house. However the denomination's continued need of print does not mean that it has neglected newer technologies.

3.2 The graphics office has invested a significant amount of time into research – making sure it's up to date with all relevant developments in e-publishing and print-on-demand technologies. The Story of the Moderators is one example of a successfully published print-on-demand title which has sold steadily. Sara also developed the URC media app (to be launched in May 2014) which enables quick sourcing of the latest URC news and information.

4. The website

4.1 The last 18 months have seen many changes and –we hope users will agree – improvements in the main URC website and satellite websites. At 2012 General Assembly this committee reported a challenging transition from one platform and host provider website to another; this had not been without its problems. We are pleased to report on a happier position.

4.2 In December 2012 Nick Alexandrou joined the team as web coordinator and began the process of developing the website. In June 2013, Sara Foyle, senior graphic designer, took responsibility for the redevelopment of the website, worked on both the design and back-end of the site and made sure the site architecture was fit for purpose. This new site was launched in October 2013. In the last two months of 2013, Sara and Nick ran web workshops for Church House staff and most departments now have a staff member able to update basic elements of their pages.

4.3 With the end of Nick's contract we investigated more cost effective solutions to supporting and developing the URC website. By its very nature, the website will always be a work in progress, but feedback from users has been positive and, as 2013 drew to a close, the site was in good shape for 2014.

4.4 The committee thanks Pablo Cabello and Nick Alexandrou, both of whom have now left the staff team, for their contribution to the website.

5. Reform

5.1 Reform has not been untouched by the wind of change that has affected other parts of the department. In January 2013, Kay Parris, who had edited the magazine for almost five years, left her position at Church House to return to work as a freelance journalist, and Steve Tomkins took her place as editor. The committee would like to

record its thanks to Kay, whose editorship has been widely recognised throughout the denomination, moving Reform from an inward looking publication into a modern magazine – what the 2012 *Book of Reports* described as 'essential reading for the more progressive Christian.'

5.2 Steve has built on this, working with his two colleagues, Chris Andrews and Charissa King, to redesign the magazine and bring in many new features. Unusually, the redesign was done in-house, without the cost of an external designer. Several of the new features seem to have inspired lookalikes in other Christian publications, imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Responses from readers have been overwhelmingly positive. The Reform website was also redesigned in 2013.

5.3 The critical success of the magazine has started to translate into more positive financial figures too. There was an increase in subscriptions in 2013, from 3,674 subscribers at the end of November 2012, to 4,525 at the end of November 2013. Outgoings have decreased somewhat – to £172,000 (Jan-Sep 2013) from £183,000 (Jan-Sep 2010) – and, pleasingly, advertising revenue has increased a little: from an average of £3,587 per issue in 2012 to an average of £4,471 per issue. A strategy aiming to increase subscriptions is being developed and will be rolled out in 2014.

5.4 Reform's strapline, *News, Comment, Inspiration, Debate*, continues to sum it up – this magazine truly does do with it says on the tin. Reform continues to be a magazine that the URC can be proud of.

6. Publications

6.1 Publications covers both the publishing of a small number of titles, and the selling of books and merchandise. The prayer handbook continues to sell well, as does the Yearbook. *Surprised by Grace* by Susan Durber, published at the end of 2013, has been a success, as has David Peel's print-on-demand title, *The Story of the Moderators*.

6.2 Elizabeth Quinn, publications assistant, has been in post since December 2012, and has impressed with her commitment to high levels of customer service, interest in developing URC publications and grasp of the processes needed to streamline the purchasing process.

6.3 In October 2013, the committee reversed an earlier decision to cease publishing a hard copy of the Yearbook and move to online provision only. The committee has now committed to a printed Yearbook for 2014 (delivered by Easter 2014) and 2015 (to be delivered in January 2015). A full denomination-wide consultation will take place and be reported to Mission Council no later than May 2015. Mission Council will make the decision as to whether we continue with a printed Yearbook for 2016 and beyond.

7. Despatch and the database

The work of the communications department also includes the maintenance of the central information database (currently under review), the despatch office, advising on copyright issues, providing technical support and a media desk at meetings of Mission Council, and undertaking all communications aspects of General Assembly. The committee thanks those who work in these vital and often unseen roles. Special thanks must go to Robert Wadey, despatch clerk, who retired in December 2013 after 17 years at Church House. Robert handled all tasks with calm patience and good humour, including the challenge of getting 4,500 copies of the 2014 prayer handbook mailed out in his final two weeks in post.

Education and learning committee

The education and learning committee maintains strategic oversight of adult learning in the United Reformed Church by liaison with other Assembly committees and synods; supporting four resource centres for learning (RCLs); providing the Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) range of courses; and maintaining positive relationships with ecumenical partners. The committee supports the initial and ongoing professional development of ministers of Word and sacraments, church related community workers, Assembly-accredited lay preachers, and other lay ministries including eldership.

Committee members:
Convener: John Smith
Secretary: Fiona Thomas
Members: Celvon Binns, David Whiting (to 2013), Sue Matthews, Liz Bird, Mal Breeze, Irene John, David Salsbury
Co-opted members: Sheryl Anderson (Methodist Church), Jan Murphy (childrens and youth work representative), Zaidie Orr (education for ministry phase 1 student representative)

1. A backward glance to 2012

The Committee predicted continued conversations on the role of ministers of Word and sacraments, the possible need for a wider range of authorised lay ministries, increased attention to intentional integration of effort between the four RCLs, TLS and relevant people in the synods, and tackling budget changes whilst ensuring that the educational principles established in 2005 were renewed and maintained in changing times.

2. Since 2012

2.1 *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter*

2.1.1 In September 2012 the committee instigated a process called *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter by* commissioning a small group of people to assess the progress made towards realising the aspirations of the United Reformed Church training review of 2006. It was recognised that the tectonic plates of change which gave rise to that radical and wide-ranging review had continued to shift, creating new features on the landscape. The Committee has continued to explore ways of encouraging whole church learning.

2.1.2 *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* task group completed its work in January 2014, submitting a number of recommendations for the committee's consideration. Their report was positive about the variety and flexibility of learning opportunities offered through the United Reformed Church, whilst recognising that the 2006 intention for close collaboration between educational providers is yet to be fully achieved. Their work has helped to start a process which is engaging key people and institutions in active conversations about the shape of the learning church, and more will be heard about this at Mission Council meetings over the next fifteen months.

2.2 Detailed work is being done on reshaping student support during education for ministry phase one (EM1), recognising that the financial systems established at an earlier time needed to be updated. A resolution will be brought to General Assembly 2014 seeking to put in place a new system of means-tested bursary grants to be applied to new EM1 students starting in the academic year 2015/16. The intention is to provide stability in both student support and teaching capacity in the resource centres for learning. In the meantime the RCLs have operated with reduced budgets for two years, and have drawn on their reserves where possible, as a short-term measure.

2.3 Inspections of Westminster College and Northern College through the ecumenical Quality in Formation system for Theological Education Institutions revealed that the RCLs have outgrown the parameters of the system. With much heart-searching the committee left the system after completion of the two inspections. The foundations are being laid for a new method of evaluating the work of the RCLs which takes into account the complexity of the tasks in which they are engaged, not simply as lay training centres or ministerial training colleges but as flexible and accessible partners within a network of whole Church learning providers. The outline principles of the scheme were piloted in the committee's 2013 five-year review of the Windermere Centre, and ecumenical partners have shown some interest in potential collaboration.

3. Other developments

The Committee's report to General Assembly 2012 expected:

a. Clear use of *vision2020* as a general framework for the work of education and learning. Progress has been slow in this area, other than in the shaping of the Windermere Centre programme;
b. Training for the church's commitment to radical welcome. A facilitators' toolkit was made available to synods through printed form and CD-roms. The material is now available for open access though the online library of the United Reformed Church Learning Environment (URCLE);
c. Conversations about a wider range of authorised lay ministries. This awaits the outcome of discussions by others on the flexible deployment of Special Category Ministry;
d. Development of blended learning and a virtual learning environment for the United Reformed Church. URCLE was hampered by technical difficulties in its early stages and has still to catch the imagination of users. However, it has become the key means of delivering resource materials for TLS students and the Education and Learning Committee uses it for the distribution of papers ;
e. Formation of a theological research network. Pursuing this has been frustratingly slow, and a recommendation in *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* report has recently brought it back to the committee's attention.
f. Deepened relationships across United Reformed Church networks between synod training and development officers, mission enablers, children's and youth development officers, and resource centre for learning tutors. Earlier annual conferences had laid the ground, but the differently-funded and shorter gathering of July 2013 was hampered by too little time for face to face discussion on key issues. There is broad commitment to meet again in 2015, remembering what is most likely to work well;
g. Support for ministers through education for ministry phases two and three. The consequences of reducing the EM3 allowance in order to balance the committee's budget are still working their way through the system. Work is in hand on the first mandatory subject for education for ministry phase three (EM3) in accordance with resolution 16 of General Assembly 2012.

4. Looking forwards through the following pages

a. The United Reformed Church is blessed with resourceful and creative people who are committed to working together with vigour and imagination.
b. We are changing habits and practices in response to budgetary challenges whilst remaining true to our educational principles.
c. We rely on each other and on God's grace as we work together to deepen our discipleship and wrestle with the Word through action and reflection.

5. Training for Learning and Serving

5.1 For training for learning and serving, the period since the last report to Assembly has been one of consolidation and cautious exploration of new development prospects. Staff and students have been learning to engage with the challenges and opportunities presented by working primarily with electronic media through URCLE. While this

may appear uncomplicated, when broken down into components that include the development, distribution and use of electronic study and administration materials; the creating of systems for electronic production, marking, moderating and external examination of assignments; and the holding of meetings in which the familiar rainbow coloured covers of printed TLS documents are no longer in evidence, it is evident that there is a lot more to it than first apparent. Appreciation goes particularly to the Revd Dr John Burgess (TLS deputy coordinator) for his efforts in overseeing the changeover and to Mrs Penny Flynn, (TLS marking administrator) for ensuring a smooth transition in assignment marking.

5.2 Further consolidation came in embedding the pattern of holding three residential weekends annually rather than four, requiring considerable reorganisation of venues and careful reformulation of weekend programmes to ensure that essential content remained while achieving an overall reduction in the time spent together. The former was successfully realised through the efforts of the Mrs Heather Skidmore (the TLS administrator) and for the course managers, the latter is an ongoing endeavour.

5.3 Regarding development prospects, TLS has entered into the first stages of exploring a new validation partnership with a university to replace the existing arrangement with Chester University. Consultations following our last report, which indicated a decision had not been made about continuing with the higher education pathway (Pathway 3), suggested that while TLS should never be dominated by its higher education component, Pathway 3 is of value to some and should therefore be retained if possible. Possibilities have been explored and discussions in this area are in progress. Financial commitments are a significant factor but equally influential is the desire to work only with partners who are sympathetic to TLS objectives and methods.

5.4 Like other Church agencies TLS lives with the enrichment and challenges of the increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in our society and congregations. History suggests that such challenges are not new for TLS. When the programme, developed in the Church of Scotland, was transferred south of the border to be used by the United Reformed Church, it was felt necessary to 'de-Kirk' the materials so that they were accessible to the new users! Recently however the challenge was brought to the fore by the enrolment of five Korean students from one congregation and this has highlighted the need for a more concerted effort in making the programme more accessible to diverse social, racial and cultural constituencies. Plans to address this matter are already being put into action and are expected to continue for some time.

5.5 An additional reason for seeking greater inclusivity is the need for more people from a wider range of backgrounds to feel drawn to TLS studies. By the time of Assembly, TLS will have completed its enrolment for the academic year 2014-15, hopefully attracting more new students than the last two years. While one year courses have maintained, even increased, their support, the foundation course, the feeder course for all others, has had its lowest enrolment figures for several years. Various causes have been examined but the simple fact of declining numbers in the Church having an impact cannot be discarded. However, there is no doubt that that there are still many folk in our congregations, and indeed among our ecumenical partners, who would benefit from TLS studies, and TLS will do its best to open the door for them.

5.6 On a more positive note:

a. 30% of the 197 candidates who attended Assembly assessment conferences for ministerial training between February 2002 and April 2013 and 30% of those subsequently accepted for training had engaged in TLS in some form.

b. After previously reporting that two newly-developed courses had not run since their pilots, this year *Developing Community Experiences* is running, and can be attributed in part to active collaboration with the church related community work (CRCW) development workers and road shows.

c. Eleven TLS students graduated from Chester University this year with a foundation degree in contextual theology. This followed two in the previous year and precedes an expected five next year.

5.7 Because of the intricacy of the work and the personal commitments and circumstances of those involved, the developmental work on TLS local introductory training experiences (TLS LITE) materials continues slowly. Keeping up with contemporary approaches to hermeneutics and other theological disciplines is vital to all TLS material but the task is a particularly challenging one in LITE, coupled as it is with the need to produce material which may be used at a very basic level. The new module on leading worship is in use and the editorial board is now working on *Getting to Grips with the Bible*. TLS Staff are currently exploring how to make LITE modules more available and electronic distribution would seem to hold the key to that ambition.

6. Northern College (United Reformed Church and Congregational)

6.1 Northern College (NoCo) continues to develop, both as a resource centre for learning serving the United Reformed Church, and as a constituent college within Luther King House (LKH) where all our validated teaching and learning takes place in an ecumenical and multi-ethnic environment.

6.2 LKH continues on a journey, and there is now a sixth constituent college; we have welcomed the Urban Theology Unit (Sheffield) which will teach modules from the LKH MA in contextual theology and bring a number of research students. Its director, Noel Irwin, is also teaching at LKH. We have completed the withdrawal from the Southern North-West Training Partnership and the Chester undergraduate qualifications; all validation is now through Manchester University, which is supportive of our work and development. Further links are being developed with the Black and minority ethnic churches in the Greater Manchester area. Open College, which welcomes students from many denominations and from many countries, continues to grow and to enrich the community of LKH, which has 'highly trusted' status and can thus grant visas to overseas students. The sadness is the withdrawal of the Methodist College, which will be complete by the summer of 2015. We feel privileged to be part of the multi-denominational, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic learning and worshipping community here in Manchester. We gain so much from each other and it is a delight to be part of the mutual support across the colleges.

6.3 Graham Adams has now joined the staff of NoCo and is the tutor in world Christianity (including mission studies) and world faiths within LKH. He is a Congregational Federation minister and we are delighted to strengthen our relationship with the Federation. We also welcome the experience Graham brings, not only in his subject areas, but also of helping to develop the Federation's own ministerial training course. Christine Jones has completed new work on all the CRCW modules and introduced fresh areas of study. The English Standards Board (which validates the CRCW modules for a qualification in community work) revalidated all the modules, and Christine's work was affirmed as creative, innovative and a benchmark for other institutions. Rosalind Selby has taken up her post as principal, and teaches within the biblical team at BA and MA level, with a particular interest in reading the Bible ecologically. Kathy White continues to teach the Hebrew Bible; she also developed an MA course, enquiry based learning, giving students creative opportunities to work with the book of Jonah. Those who joined the college after Kathy have been grateful for the advice and continuity she has brought. Our administrator, Christine Thornborough, played an important part in the work on means testing for future EM1 students which will benefit all URC students. We are grateful for all she does to support us.

6.4 NoCo continues to offer flexible pathways to students training midweek and at weekends, with modules also available in blocks at different points in the year. Several students moved from weekend to midweek, or vice versa, and even back again.

6.5 All tutors work hard to liaise with local synods and preach and lead sessions at Synod meetings or local churches as we are invited to do so. We have participated in short courses, lectures and events at LKH which attract participants from many local churches, both URC and ecumenical. The LKH spring 2014 local preachers' conference, largely driven by NoCo, is on the theme of preaching for Pentecost.

Looking forwards:

6.6 We live in challenging times for the denomination, with experiences of falling numbers, many congregations with an ageing profile, and most of us facing financial problems. The United Reformed Church is not alone, with other denominations having to make tough choices around training too. There is work to be done.

6.7 As the United Reformed Church considers its nature in the future there will be a profound effect on how it perceives ministry and its needs for a new generation of church leadership. That in turn will have consequences for the way we train people for ordained, commissioned or lay ministry, and prioritising will not be easy. The new NoCo staff team and the governing body are working together to find the opportunities in the challenges and to respond to the new directions in which the Holy Spirit is leading us. Yes, those challenges are huge, but we feel that we are well-placed to respond.

6.8 At LKH, NoCo staff are participating in discussions which will open up new learning opportunities. The CRCW modules work at the cutting edge of ministry and LKH is making these available to all by integrating them into the main timetable. Taking that into consideration, NoCo is able to guide students along a pathway for pioneer ministry (terminology covering Fresh Expressions and missional ministries preferred by different denominations). As all courses are available to those training for lay ministry as well as for ordained or commissioned ministry, we see this as an exciting development and potential tool for the future within the United Reformed Church.

6.9 We see a potential to increase the flexibility we already offer with a mixed mode of full-time and part-time training over the period of time recommended by the assessment board for an individual student. We know that further integration of work across the RCLs, TLS and at synod level is needed if training for the future United Reformed Church is to be the best and most appropriate that we can make it for our evolving denomination. We pray for guidance and wisdom in the coming months and years, and look forward to working within the United Reformed Church as together we seek to support the forming of the people of God for ministry in the 21st century.

7. Scottish United Reformed and Congregational College

'Serving a church in three nations'

7.1 The phrase above from the unification of 2000 is perhaps more frequently heard in the national synods than elsewhere but it is coming into a particular focus in the year of an independence referendum in one nation. As a college, we are very aware that the phrase is capable of different interpretations and seen to have different implications and significance. For historical, geographical and cultural reasons, it is natural that we have a specific and special relationship with the National Synod of Scotland. Yet, for us, it is important to hold together the integrity of the denomination with the distinctiveness of our responsibilities within a particular nation.

7.2 In education for ministry phase 1, for perhaps the first time in our history of more than two centuries, most of our matriculated students have come to us from beyond Scotland. That makes for a rather different learning context. We don't believe that it means that somehow we abandon our 'Scottishness' (itself a complex and contested idea) but that the sense of context becomes wider without losing the depth of its rootedness. This academic year, then, has brought us all on to a new journey of exploration together.

7.3 Our relationship with the National Synod of Scotland is based primarily on the College being the 'training officer' for the synod. We are involved in the whole education, and indeed learning, life of the synod and the churches: continuing education for ministers and others (including education for ministry phase three grants), lay learning,

spirituality development and congregational learning. Perhaps the key to this is a constant interweaving of different elements in synod, congregational and college life. The college, while in governance and identity distinct, is nonetheless strongly embedded in the whole life of the synod. We are able to develop educational responses because we are engaged in the conversations and the challenges from the outset. The phase 'learning church' is often used, not infrequently with a question mark at the end. Often, it is taken to mean a church in which a significant number of its members are engaged in learning, maybe particularly structured learning. With our synod development colleagues (who are also associate staff of the college), we are involved in less structured learning development. We are able to support the synod and its congregations as a learning church in the sense also of learning as an organisation. That can be amongst the most difficult learning challenges: not only to reflect on the lessons of our communal experience but also to take that learning into the life of the organisation – in its structures and processes, in its vision and programmes, in its relationships and dynamics.

7.4 Though much of our work is in Scotland, we are very glad when the opportunity arises to work in other situations, especially where we perhaps have specific expertise: in ministry with older people, in narrative and storytelling, in organisational and human resource development, in Scandinavian as well as Scottish theology and culture. We have worked with a number of synods as well as at the Windermere Centre.

7.5 The ecumenical scene in Scotland is distinctive. Our principal focus remains educational collaboration with the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Methodist Church in Scotland. We are conscious that these are changing and challenging times for ecumenism but remain strongly committed to collaboration wherever possible. In this past year, we have renewed our involvement in initial ministerial education with the Scottish Episcopal Church. We worked together with both partners in a conference for clergy taking up positions of sole responsibility. We continue to be actively engaged with the lay learning group under the auspices of the Episcopalians. We are conscious that there are wider conversations beginning.

Looking forwards:

7.6 Formation for ...
In the context of conversations about the nature and content of theological education over the past year, we have reflected on what now are the key ingredients of formation for ministry. We've been thinking about the core dimensions, not only of initial and continuing ministerial education, but of learning for the whole Church. With the preacher's love of lists with the quality of a common initial letter, here are a few ...

- **Intelligence**
  As a college, we were founded over 200 years ago because of Scottish Congregationalists' belief in the importance of an educated ministry (at least as well educated as the Church of Scotland!) We remain convinced that a sound education forms a good basis for exercising ministry and for being a theological resource to others. Yet, in the contemporary context, this is not as wholly linked to information as it was formerly. As we look at flourishing and failing situations, we cannot but be conscious of the fundamental importance of emotional intelligence.

- **Imagination**
  One of the central tasks of ministry must surely be fostering creativity and imagination, not least because they are at the heart of what it is to be human made in the image of God who constantly makes all things new. In a rapidly changing environment, we can no longer rely upon repeating old ways or even now upon simple linear adaptation. We are called into radically new forms and expressions. That takes imagination and a commitment to innovation.

- **Integration**
  There are few organisations that are not aware of how rapidly and rigidly we erect and settle into silos – of institutional life, of relationships, of disciplinary perspectives

and of modes of thinking and speaking. By drawing on different wells of inspiration in our learning, we nurture the practice of thinking more broadly and deeply.

- **Individual**
  In recent years, much emphasis has been placed in education on the individual. Learning pathways are no longer well-trodden shared routes through education. Handling that complexity can be a challenge, but perhaps the greater challenge is to maintain community amidst this personal-focused education. And, beyond that, to foster unique gifts and encourage personal growth while equally encouraging shared commitment and a deeper engagement in being in community.

Are we on the right lines?

8. Westminster College

8.1 God is very good! Our story since 2012 is all about the continuity of faithful service and the transformation, hard work, risk and excitement of new possibilities. Our last Assembly report described changes as we continued to open Westminster to meet the United Reformed Church's expectations in response to the 2006 training review. Westminster has never stood still. We have evolved across the generations. That evolution gained added impetus and mandate as one of the United Reformed Church's resource centres for learning. We wanted to be a better place to visit and to open new opportunities to help the United Reformed Church dance to the Holy Spirit's music. General Assembly wanted that too.

8.2 So we have continued to devote energy and passion to sustaining our life of worship and prayer, building faithful community at the heart of our work. As change has multiplied within Westminster and the United Reformed Church's contexts, within the Cambridge Theological Federation of which we are a dedicated part and within theological education generally, we have never lost touch with faith's roots. Morning and afternoon in term begin with chapel prayers. Bible study and exploring preaching remain staples of the Monday morning timetable. Placements in local congregations and churches across the world remain fundamental to student progress towards call and ordination. In tutor groups and classes, around meal tables, in committees and at the pub we gather to share life and faith amidst the laughter and tears of all that human experience and God's grace bring.

8.3 We have continued to welcome a diverse community of students preparing for ordination and independent students deepening their theology. Increasingly we are tailoring courses to individuals, making full use of the suite of undergraduate and post graduate teaching through the Federation. Most of our teaching is ecumenical and we delight in the blessings and challenges of this fundamental strand of Westminster DNA. Sabbatical and shorter stay ministers come from across the denomination and world. Our story is partly a story of continuity.

8.4 Our story also means transformation. At the last Assembly we hoped that building work would begin in the summer of 2013. It did! At times the process has challenged and tested us as we have adapted to fit temporary accommodation and disjointed routines, and we honour the steadfast good will of students and staff who have risen to tremendous challenges.

8.5 By the time Assembly meets we expect that the builders will have all but finished. Westminster has been refreshed and transformed. En-suite bedrooms, better student flats, wireless internet, new kitchens, improved lighting, disabled access, a lift to bedrooms and library, dramatically modernised teaching rooms, new archive facilities and proper office accommodation all take their place within a building that stands renewed.

8.6 All of this has happened thanks to the fabulous response to the appeal (which stands at £6,768,699 as January ends). We have been humbled by donations from across the United Reformed Church and beyond. We have been entrusted with much. We say a sincere 'thank you' to all who have given Westminster this future, not least those on our committees who have supported us. We owe special thanks to Brian Long who has led the appeal magnificently.

8.7 Transformation includes changes amongst our people. Last summer Susan Durber left as principal to begin theological work with Christian Aid. No one connected with Westminster can be in any doubt that we would not be where we are without her talent, vision, courage and leadership. Susan completely embraced our being a resource centre for learning and enabled Westminster to embrace this vision with vigour and verve. The United Reformed Church owes Susan a tremendous debt. Neil Thorogood became Westminster's principal as 2014 dawned.

8.8 At Easter 2014 Tony Bottoms steps down as the chair of governors. Our debt to Tony is immense and we honour his wise and dedicated service. We are delighted that Nigel Uden now brings the wealth of his experience and gifts to the role. We are appointing a new full-time director of pastoral and church programmes to teach and to develop our resourcing of local congregations, closely collaborating with synods and wider United Reformed Church networks. Art @ Advent in 2013 was the first such new offer and we plan a growing programme delivered at Westminster, taken across the United Reformed Church and made available online. We have welcomed new faces amongst our support staff as we open up to church and commercial use around the clock and throughout the year.

Looking forwards:

8.9 Westminster is now properly equipped to serve. We will continue to offer rigorous and empowering theological education for those preparing for ministry. We will build our collaboration within the Federation, especially as we share our premises with the Henry Martyn Centre for mission studies and as we look forward to welcoming, in a new building on our site, the Woolf Institute for the study of relationships between Christians, Jews and Muslims. The Federation begins teaching a new undergraduate common award from September 2014, currently undergoing validation with Durham University. We look forward to its increasing flexibility and potential to meet many of the United Reformed Church's needs. Other courses will remain with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Cambridge.

8.10 We envisage a widening range of United Reformed Church groups, committees and networks using Westminster, and have devoted time to visits and conversations across the United Reformed Church. Listening has been fundamental to shaping our future programmes. We will increasingly unlock Westminster's creative potential as venue and resource for the whole Church: equipping leaders, encouraging disciples, being blessed by learning together. We are eager to welcome individuals and groups, committees and whole congregations. We will offer short days and longer stays, engagement with key thinkers and space for retreats. We will craft events or simply offer you wonderful accommodation and hospitality leaving you free to do your own thing. We will provide B & B accommodation throughout the year and cater to big conferences. Whatever your needs might be, please contact us to talk them through. Westminster is your place in Cambridge.

9. The Windermere Centre

9.1 The mission statement is being used to inform all areas of Centre policy, from programme planning to individual team member personal development goals.

9.2 The work of the Centre continues to draw upon its distinctive setting in the Lake District:

Education and learning

a. Responding to and resourcing United Reformed Church initiatives (eg *vision2020* has given the Centre programme its shape since 2012);
b. Creating alliances to devise and deliver sustained programmes for the life of the Church (eg ageing and spirituality, the Church in a digital age, adventures in faith and spiritual renewal);
c. Delivering core and/or hosting United Reformed Church courses (ministers' pre-retirement courses, ministers' refresher courses, welcome to the United Reformed Church, TLS weekends, ministerial assessment training, EM1 summer school);
d. Promoting and resourcing an active web presence for local churches via iChurch (http://ichurch.urc.org.uk);
e. Hosting and running church weekends, with a focus on growing and being encouraged in faith and discipleship;
f. Resourcing specific groups within the Church (eg lay preachers, Bible study leaders, church secretaries, church treasurers);
g. Hosting various church networks and committees;
h. Being a resource to wider church networks, committees and groups (eg the Iona Community executive, the Society of Friends in Japan, the International Ecumenical Forum);
i. Resourcing the spiritual and social life of the Church in the context of faith development through courses and retreats offering a variety of arts, crafts, music and outdoor pursuits.

9.3 Underneath and alongside the programme planning and delivery, the period since Assembly 2012 has been focused on matters of financial management. The major restructuring of the Church's 2013 budget required that the Centre implement stringent expenditure controls and identify new income streams in order to meet its budget commitments. A model was required that would ensure the future sustainability of the Centre. To this end, we drew up a business plan covering the period 2013-16 and implemented a strategic marketing policy (within the tight limitations of existing resources) based on 'permission marketing' in order to build up a customer base that would deliver repeat custom. We have used new and repeat custom as the benchmarks by which to measure the effectiveness of the marketing strategy. The staffing structure at the Centre has reduced to half of its 2009 levels without the need for additional redundancies. Much tighter control of expenditure has been achieved.

9.4 On the income side, 2013 saw an average of 11.5 brand new customers per month attending courses, representing approximately £20,000 in additional income. Targeted marketing has seen a significant increase in returning custom (eg church groups that had stopped using the Centre returning) and repeat custom (particularly in groups and individuals booking again before leaving the Centre).

9.5 However, we experienced an unanticipated £33,000 drop in income from United Reformed Church use of the Centre over the period 2012-13 as various departments and committees of the United Reformed Church met their new budget targets by reducing their use of the Centre. This created a sudden gap in the Centre's finances through loss of guaranteed income that could not be closed within the period by marketing within the United Reformed Church alone.

9.6 We are currently in the process of revising the financial model on which the business plan is based. We are actively pursuing the recommendations of the 2013 Windermere Review with appropriate bodies within the United Reformed Church. These included a call for increased investment in marketing over the upcoming three year period.

Looking forwards:

9.7 We have three major priorities:
- extending the customer base beyond the United Reformed Church;
- resourcing the United Reformed Church more effectively;
- developing closer working relationships with the other resource centres for learning.

9.8 The immediate priority for the Centre, implementing the review recommendation, is to use the next three years to extend the customer base beyond the confines of the United Reformed Church.

a. Strategically, the marketing priority is not to focus on 'saturation advertising' but rather to create new relationships with our ecumenical partners and others through peer recommendation (on the principle of Facebook 'likes'). This is by far the most effective way of creating a sustainable customer base and, equally importantly, of extending and creating new ecumenical relationships.

b. The development of the iChurch local church website project, the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc) and the extension of online learning opportunities is proving to be very effective in this regard. The Windermere Online Festival has created an important new working relationship with the Baptist Church, for example. We are monitoring the transition from online contact to residential participation in courses.

9.9 The second priority is to resource the United Reformed Church more effectively – both to 'scratch where the Church is itching' and also to create itches where they ought to be but do not currently exist. We are focusing on the following areas.

a. When Church and Kingdom collide. Encouraging these explorations and conversations as part of the United Reformed Church's wider discussion on the future of the Church.

b. It just works. Sharing and disseminating good practice as a way of encouraging the United Reformed Church to expect to grow, rather than simply to decline.

c. Growing new disciples by promoting evangelism and outreach that engages people with no previous Christian background. In this regard, we want to support and extend the United Reformed Church's involvement in Fresh Expressions.

d. Renewal of faith and deepening discipleship.

e. Seeing an ageing Church as a resource-rich, effective Church rather than a failure.

9.10 The third priority is to develop closer, more intentional working relationships with the other three resource centres for learning in order to resource the Church more effectively and reduce the risk of a situation in which the RCLs are in competition with each other for increased share of a shrinking market base. We envisage a strategy that models the learning community that the United Reformed Church has stated it wishes to become.

Please pray that the Centre will continue to be a faithful and significant servant of, and resource to, the United Reformed Church.

Appendix 1

Statistics of students in education for ministry phase 1

	Students in Training			Anticipated entry into URC Service			
	Mar 2012	Mar 2013	Jan 2014	2014	2015	2016	2017
STIPENDIARY							
Full-Time Courses							
Northern College (RCL) MWS	10	8	6		2		4
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	1	2	3		1	1	1
SURCC (RCL)	4	2	3	1	1	1	
Westminster College (RCL)	21	23	23	5	13	3	2
Part-time Courses							
Northern College (RCL)	3	4	4	2	1	1	
SURCC (RCL)			1				1
Subtotal	39	39	40	8	18	6	8
NON-STIPENDIARY							
Full-Time Courses							
Westminster College (RCL)	2	2					
Part-Time Courses							
Northern College (RCL)	6	5	3	2	1		
SURCC (RCL)	1	1					
Westminster College (RCL)	3	3	2	1	1		
Subtotal	12	11	5	3	2		
GRAND TOTAL	**51**	**50**	**45**	**11**	**20**	**6**	**8**

SURCC (RCL) Scottish United Reformed and Congregational College
Resource Centre for Learning
MWS Ministry of Word and Sacraments
CRCW Church Related Community Worker

Anticipated entry does not take into account those who have been selected at recent Assessment Conferences but who have not yet formally begun their studies at an RCL.

Appendix 2

Students sent by synod

01 Northern

Stipendiary

Elaine Colechin	Westminster College

02 North Western

Stipendiary

Samantha Aspinall	Westminster College
Linda Rayner	Northern College
Jim Williams	Northern College
Nick Jones	Westminster College
Daleen Ten Cate	Northern College
Alison Claire Smith	Westminster College

03 Mersey

Stipendiary

Alison Micklem	Northern College
Diane Farquhar	Scottish Congregational and United Reformed College
Angela Rigby	Northern College

04 Yorkshire

CRCW

Lisa Marie Wigfield	Northern College

Non-Stipendiary

Angela Lawson	Northern College

Stipendiary

Catherine Lewis-Smith	Westminster College

05 East Midlands

Stipendiary

Liz Adams	Northern College
Henriette Wentink	Westminster College

06 West Midlands

CRCW

Kirsty Mabbott	Northern College
Vicky Longbone	Northern College

Non-Stipendiary

Peter Kimberley	Northern College
Elaine Hutchinson	Northern College

Stipendiary

Chris Dowd	Westminster College
Zaidie Orr	Northern College

07 Eastern

Stipendiary	
Bruno Boldrini	Westminster College
Gillian Thomson	Westminster College
Bryn Rickards	Westminster College
Martin Belgrove	Westminster College

08 South Western

Stipendiary	
Janine Atkinson	Westminster College

09 Wessex

Stipendiary	
Joshua Norris	Westminster College
Richard Stein	Westminster College
Ruth Wilson	Westminster College
Paul O'Connor	Northern College

10 Thames North

Stipendiary	
Catherine McFie	Westminster College
Matthew Prevett	Westminster College
Trevor Hahn	Westminster College
Memona Shahbaz	Westminster College
Rebecca Plunkett	Northern College
Sally Bateman	Westminster College

11 Southern

Non-Stipendiary	
Tim Reith	Westminster College
Lisa-Maria Browning	Westminster College
Stipendiary	
Phil Wall	Westminster College
Martin Ferris	Westminster College

12 Wales

Stipendiary	
Branwen Rees	Westminster College
Stephen Best	Northern College
Nadene Dorothy Snyman	Scottish Congregational and United Reformed College

13 Scotland

Stipendiary	
Stewart Cutler	Scottish Congregational and United Reformed College
Jake Tatton	Scottish Congregational and United Reformed College

Total Students 45

Equalities committee: Equalities means everyone

The equalities committee is responsible for reminding the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work, and challenging the practice of the United Reformed Church where appropriate. This includes:

- Taking action to assist in the development of equal opportunities throughout the United Reformed Church within the context of a diverse society
- Monitoring of the equal opportunities policy and updating it when appropriate
- Promoting training programmes in equality and diversity
- Promoting, supporting and encouraging the United Reformed Church's contribution to equality in the wider life of our society
- Reporting to General Assembly

Committee members:
Convener: Elizabeth Nash
Members: Tom Arthur, Tine Ashitey (to July 2013), Tunde Biyi, Adrian Bulley (secretary from July 2013), Susan Flynn (from July 2013), Andrew Jack (secretary to July 2013), Michael Jagessar (secretary for racial justice and intercultural ministry), Iain McDonald, Helen M Mee (convener-elect), Maria Mills (from July 2013), Adella Pritchard, Margaret Telfer, Gwyneth Tilley (to July 2013).

1. The equalities committee has continued to work on its remit, which was agreed in May 2012. This has been helpful because it has enabled us to broaden the scope of our work, which has increased in response to the change in our name from equal opportunities to the equalities. We are grateful for the increase in committee membership from eight to ten which has enabled us to connect with each Assembly committee, monitoring their equality activity and helping them to ensure that 'equalities means everyone'.

2. We have produced a number of papers which are on the United Reformed Church web site (see URC resources/equalities). They are designed to help church members, church meetings, synods and other enquirers to see the ways in which they can improve equality. The documents on the website are currently:

Equal Opportunities Guidance 2008, updated 2011
Equal Opportunities Policy 2008
Accessibility Resources Methodist and Church of England 2010
Suggested Equal Opportunities response to difficult statements
Training in Equal Opportunities for churches in vacancy 2011
Remit of Equal Opportunities Committee 2012
Taking Action on Bullying and Harassment 2012
United Reformed Church and Synods policy relating to the Equalities Act 2010, 2014

3. We have an ongoing concern about the balance of membership of Assembly committees, although we know that the nominations committee works very hard on this issue. We were pleased that Mission Council responded so positively to our concern that trustees in the United Reformed Church are so unbalanced – 25% women and 2% black minority ethnic. They agreed to ensure that more women than men are nominated as United Reformed Church trustees until there are equal numbers and that minority groups (e.g. young people, black minority ethnic people, people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people) are included. We hope that synods will also work towards equality in their trustees. The question of equal representation in all the areas of our life and work together is one which needs to be monitored constantly. Otherwise, we find that equality has slipped away. We are currently concerned at the low level of black minority ethnic representation including church house staff. Equalities means everyone.

Equalities

4. Are children and young people included in all the structures of the United Reformed Church, including General Assembly? We are very sorry that there will not be a children's assembly in 2014. Equalities means everyone.

5. With the synod moderators we are exploring ways of monitoring equality in the movement of ministers. Equalities means everyone.

6. We have started to work on the questions of inclusive and expansive language. We are only at the beginning but it is 23 years since *Rejoice and Sing* was published with a commitment to use inclusive language wherever possible. Since then some of our churches have become accustomed to avoiding male language for God, while many others have not changed the habits of 1972. Equalities means everyone.

7. We have been working on the inclusion and development of women in leadership through *The Leading Question – women in leadership in churches and ecumenical organisations*, produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain and *The Seven Deadly Sins of Women in Leadership* by Kate Coleman. We look forward to the possibility of offering further training for women as our leaders. Equalities means everyone.

8. We are beginning to lay plans for the celebration of the centenary of the ordination of women in England, Constance Coltman (nee Todd) 1917, also remembering Susannah Rankin (nee Ellis) in Wales 1925, and Vera Kenmure (nee Findlay) in Scotland 1928. We hope that every synod will create its own celebration and that all local churches will participate. We look forward to some wonderful ways of celebrating that equalities means everyone.

Faith and order committee

The faith and order committee exists:

- to address issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC;
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues;
- to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of faith and order;
- to listen to concerns raised by local churches, synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate;
- to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to questions of faith and order.

Committee members:
Convener: Elizabeth Welch
Secretary: David Tatem
John Bradbury (co-opted), Susan Durber (to 2013), Sarah Hall, Michael Jagessar, Tim Meadows, Richard Mortimer (to 2013), Neil Messer, Malachie Munyaneza, Stephen Orchard (co-opted), Augur Pearce, Sally Thomas

1. Introduction

1.1 The 2012 General Assembly agreed to the creation of the faith and order committee to replace the previous, informal faith and order reference group. This is therefore the first report from the committee.

1.2 There have been six meetings since the last Assembly, normally taking place over a 24 hour period at Westminster College.

1.3 Members of the committee and others serve on a number of other faith and order bodies. John Bradbury serves on the World Communion of Reformed Churches' dialogue group with the Roman Catholic Church. Susan Durber has served on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and has been nominated to serve for a further term. Neil Messer serves on the ethics committee of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and Augur Pearce serves on the Methodist Church Faith and Order Committee. David Tatem serves on the Churches Together in England Theology and Unity Group of which David Thompson is convener, the Church of England Council for Christian Unity, the Joint Implementation Commission and the Methodist Anglican Panel on Unity and Mission of the Anglican / Methodist Covenant. (For details of bilateral conversations see 3.1.1 and 3.1.6)

1.4 At present no members of other denominations serve on our faith and order committee but this is being addressed.

2. The agenda of the committee

2.1 The work of the committee is generated in three ways. Work may be referred from within the Church, from local congregations, synods or by General Assembly itself. Work is also referred from the wider bodies to which the Church belongs, notably the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, the Council for World Mission, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches. Lastly, the committee itself may identify new pieces of work to assist the Church in being more effective in its theological engagement with issues in the wider society.

2.2 The committee has continued work on issues inherited from the faith and order reference group. New issues have also been addressed. One of these in particular, the future of the Church, has taken a major amount of time and focus. This will be the subject of three separate reports to Assembly. This report gives an overview of the full range of the committee's work.

3. Ecumenical documents and conversations

3.1 Church of England conversations

A bilateral group has now been established between the United Reformed Church and the Church of England, to take further earlier conversations and the momentum created by the service of healing of memories in Westminster Abbey in February 2012. This is under the joint convenership of the Rt Revd James Newcome, the Bishop of Carlisle, and the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, moderator of the Southern Synod. Other United Reformed Church members of the group are Tim Meadows, Julian Templeton and Elizabeth Welch. The Church of England members are James Hawkey, Rebecca Swyres and Martin Davie (until December 2013). The group has met three times and its work is programmed for a three year period.

3.2 Church of the Palatinate

The URC holds a theological consultation with the Church of the Palatinate every two years and in September 2013 this was held in Klingenmunster with the theme of tolerance. The theme was explored under three headings: tolerance within our traditions, tolerance between traditions, and tolerance between religions. Our participants in the consultation were Sarah Hall, Frin Lewis-Smith, Donald and Margaret Norwood, John Parry, Edward Sheldrake, David Tatem and Phil Wall. The next theological consultation will be from 17 to 22 September 2015 at Westminster College with a theme reflecting on the commemoration of World War One.

3.3 Methodist conversations

The joint meeting of the Methodist Council with Mission Council in October 2012 observed that there is a lack of knowledge within each of our traditions about the other. The most commonly known difference is between the connexional nature of the Methodist Church and the URC focus on the ecclesial significance of the local congregation. it was agreed that these ecclesiological and cultural differences should be explored in order to aid our working relationship. The committee has identified people who will work on behalf of the United Reformed Church when the exact form of these conversations has been decided.

3.4 Metropolitan Community Church

Questions have been asked concerning the status of the Metropolitan Community Church as an ecumenical partner and the status of their ministers. Work has been and is being done to consider the position of Churches that are not members of those ecumenical groups that bring automatic recognition. This will hopefully provide a resolution to the questions raised.

3.5 Welsh covenanting proposals

The proposal to explore the creation of a Uniting Church in Wales arose from an event of the Commission of Covenanting Churches in Wales known as the Gathering. This was held in Aberystwyth in October 2012. The proposals have since been explored within the Churches in Wales. The Faith and Order Committee has maintained a close link with the conversations, particularly in relation to episcopacy and the question of what decisions the National Synod of Wales might take independently of the rest of the denomination. In 1982 General Assembly voted to enter into a united Church in England, with the acceptance of bishops, and a subsequent Assembly supported the proposal for an ecumenical bishop in East Cardiff. The talks in Wales will see us revisiting these discussions. We want to ensure good denominational memory so that past convictions may help to inform consideration of these new proposals.

3.6 Roman Catholic conversations

At the last General Assembly a well attended fringe meeting discussed the report of the first round of conversations with representatives of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. The second round is now in progress with the hope of developing aids to dialogue at the local level. Membership of the group has changed. It is co-convened by David Thompson and Archbishop Bernard Longley. In addition our other members

are John Bradbury, Sarah Hall, Lindsey Sanderson, Ann Shillaker and David Tatem (co-secretary). The Catholic members of the group are Colin Carr, Anne Doyle, Tim Galligan (co-secretary), Patsy McDonald and Clare Watkins. The group meets twice a year.

3.7 World Council of Churches General Assembly

The Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea in November 2013 generated a number of documents and statements which are sent out to member Churches to be received. The committee has begun to consider 'Towards a Common Vision', the latest unity document of the Faith and Order Commission, as well as the unity statement of the Assembly itself. We are pleased that Susan Durber was one of the co-authors of the unity statement. The intention is to encourage engagement with the document at congregational, synod and Assembly levels. The World Council is asking for responses by the end of December 2015.

4. Other issues and themes

4.1 Ethical decision making

Neil Messer connects the thinking of the committee with the ethics committee of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe which is currently grappling with beginning of life issues. In July 2013 the committee met with Steve Tomkins, the new editor of Reform, to identify ethical issues which could be addressed through the magazine. These include poverty, immigration, equality, individual rights versus corporate responsibility, economic slavery, reliance on the market, ethical banking and the anniversary of World War One. In such areas the theological reflection of the committee connects with the Church's work in mission and social responsibility.

4.2 Future of the Church

This has been the dominant piece of work since the last Assembly, beginning with an open invitation for submissions from across the Church. From these contributions, five scenarios of possible futures were developed and offered at the May 2013 meeting of Mission Council. The committee extracted significant themes and brought them back for exploration in greater depth at Mission Council. These include the identity of the Church, at present focusing on the nature and distinctiveness of the Church Meeting. General Assembly will be offered the opportunity to engage with this work.

4.3 Ordained local ministry

Resolution 35 of the 2012 Assembly, brought by Wessex Synod, asked for work to be done on this topic. A working group involving representatives of faith and order, ministries and education and learning met to consider how to proceed, beginning with assessment of the perceived need for such a ministry across the denomination as a whole. There is a considerable breadth of view of what is desirable. The committee is currently developing proposals for consideration by General Assembly.

4.4 Same sex marriage

Consideration of the question of marriage in the light of current legislation is being led by the Human Sexuality Task Group. The committee is providing support to that work. The November 2013 meeting included a significant conversation with the convener of the task group. Individual members of the committee have been involved in various pieces of work in this area and we anticipate close cooperation with the task group as its work continues.

4.5 Theology and the academy

A recurrent and important item on the committee's agenda has been the place of theology in our resource centres for learning, schools and universities. In March 2013 meeting dialogue took place with the convener of Education and Learning's review, *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter.* The committee participated in consultation on this project. We identify this as one of many areas where cooperative work is essential.

4.6 Worship

4.6.1 With the demise of the previous Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee there has been no specified home for worship issues. The committee has identified that as there are often issues of faith and order relating to specific worship situations, it should ensure that worship is covered by its agenda. Two particular initiatives had been undertaken. Susan Durber contributed to a conference in February 2013 on the subject of the theological nature of worship.

4.6.2 The Committee is currently in the process of producing a booklet of worship proverbs. This is based on the World Communion of Reformed Churches' document, 'Worshipping the Triune God: Receiving and Sharing Christian Wisdom Across Continents and Centuries'. It is hoped that this will be available at General Assembly for use throughout the church.

4.7 The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation

2017 is the year when this anniversary will be marked in many parts of the world, especially within Europe. The committee is beginning to consider how the United Reformed Church may participate in the commemorations that are being planned both within the Reformed tradition and ecumenically.

5. Communicating the work of the committee

Clearly the work of the committee does not go on at an ethereal level detached from the life of local congregations. It connects with issues that ultimately touch the lives of individual Christians and local churches. Nevertheless, the discussions do by and large take place within the context of a small group of people nominated or co-opted for their expertise. As the discussions in Mission Council around the future of the Church have shown, however, it is important, especially given our conciliar nature, that the work that the committee is doing is communicated as effectively as possible. The committee seeks effective ways of engaging in discussion with people across the Church from every part of the theological spectrum with which the United Reformed Church is blessed.

Finance committee

The finance committee is responsible for the general financial oversight of funds administered for the benefit of the United Reformed Church, its long-term financial planning, and the preparation and control of its budget under the authority of Mission Council and the trustees.
The committee ensures that proper procedures are in place for the maintenance of accounting records, controlling and monitoring the budgetary process, and the preparation of financial statements in compliance with applicable UK law and accounting standards. To this end the committee liaises with the auditors at least once per annum.

Committee members:
Convener: John Ellis (honorary treasurer)
Members: David Aplin (to 2013), Richard Dewar (to 2013), Edward Sanniez, Mary Martin, Andrew Mackenzie, Elsie Gilliland, Richard Pryor, Angus Massie (to 2013), Ian Simpson (from 2013), Kate Gartside (from 2013), Richard Turnbull (from 2013)

Drinking deeply of generosity

Generosity in hard times

1. The 2012 Assembly wrestled with hard financial choices. While some decisions were controversial, they have succeeded in providing a period of relative stability for the central finances of the Church. It seems probable that in each of the four years 2012 to 2015 we shall achieve close to a balanced budget.

2. Within the budget, it has been possible to increase stipends for both 2013 (2.0%) and 2014 (1.6%) by more than the average increase in earnings across the economy. In each year, however, this has been less than the rate of inflation. Some ministers are embarrassed to receive rises higher than those received by most members of their congregations, but the committee is also aware that for manse households wholly dependent on the stipend, a repeated fall in its real value can be very difficult. Children's allowances continue to be paid to eligible ministers.

3. None of this would be possible without the dominant element of our income: the ministry and mission fund (M&M). While many charities have found their income falling away, average M&M giving per member in the United Reformed Church continues to rise each year. Unfortunately this faithful generosity cannot hide the effects of a falling membership and total giving to the M&M continues to fall at around 1% per year. This threatens to make our financial stability only a temporary feature.

4. Since the last Assembly a survey of giving patterns across the United Reformed Church has produced food for thought. One in five respondents did not know that M&M giving is how ministers' stipends are paid. The findings for total giving to the URC in relation to income were particularly sobering. On average the least well-off respondents were by far the most generous as a proportion of their income and meeting the biblical tithe figure (10%). Average giving as a proportion of income consistently fell as household income increased. Many replied that they do not base their giving on a percentage of income despite General Assembly's recommendation that members should consider giving 5% of their take-home income to the work of the Church. The full report of the survey is available on the website.

5. Whilst being immensely grateful for continuing generosity, the committee notes that if the typical local congregation were willing to increase its M&M giving by just 1% a year, instead of reducing it by 1% a year, the anxieties beyond 2015 could be transformed. If every local church made a habit of giving £101 each year for every £100 it gave the previous year, the pressure on expenditure for stipends and other essentials would be lifted.

Encouraging further generosity

6. To encourage congregations drinking deeply of God's goodness and generosity to reflect this in financial terms, the stewardship sub-committee have produced an updated version of the financial stewardship programme TRIO (The Responsibility Is Ours). This has been designed specifically for our context and is equally suitable for URC congregations and ecumenical partnerships. The new pack was piloted across forty churches in 2013 and will be launched before Assembly. Churches who have worked through a TRIO programme consistently report an increase in giving, with one church seeing their freewill offering rise by 46%.

7. The stewardship sub-committee have also produced the leaflets *Thought that stewardship was just about money?* (also available as a PowerPoint presentation) and *The relationship between Christian living and Christian giving* to support reflection and understanding. Copies of these leaflets were sent to all churches.
Enjoying past generosity

8. The legacy fund reflects the generosity of past members and typically has around £200,000 to give away in grants each year. These are available for innovative and exciting projects and local churches can access the fund via synods.

9. Since the last Assembly, the projects helped have included Art Talk, which uses art to initiate exploration of spiritual questions, media training for synod staff, HOPE 2014, and a variety of *vision2020* projects.

Supporting Synods

10. The last Assembly agreed a procedure for supporting less wealthy synods if a financial safety net were required. This procedure has not been used in the form described in 2012, although members of the finance committee and the chief finance officer have held discussions with several synods facing financial challenges to clarify the options open to them.

11. The underlying marked inequality in resources between the synods is to be addressed through an enhanced inter synod resource sharing process, which has been agreed by Mission Council and is described elsewhere in the *Book of Reports*.

Other updates

12. Deputy treasurer: Mission Council felt that a deputy treasurer should be appointed to cover for the treasurer while he is also serving as moderator of General Assembly and to be his potential successor. The search for a successor continues but the Revd Richard Gray has been appointed to provide the cover element in the meantime. Dick comes to the post with extensive experience of our finances, not least as treasurer of the South Western Synod.

13. Auditors: Following a review, the auditors for those funds managed centrally or through Westminster College have been changed to Mazars. One advantage is a 20% reduction in fees.

14. Accounts: The 2012 accounts, in the name of the URC Trust, are available on the website. Those for 2013 will be available for inspection at Assembly.

Ministries committee

The committee is responsible for the ministry of Word and sacraments, church related community work, lay preaching and eldership. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education and in the armed forces, and special category ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, church related community workers and lay preachers, including supervision, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the work of the assessment board and is assisted by four sub-committees.

Accreditation sub-committee
Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries.

Church related community work programme sub-committee
This is responsible for supporting the church related community work ministry and programme under the terms agreed in the church related community work covenant. This includes the accreditation of churches-in-community

Maintenance of the ministry sub-committee
This advises on the level of stipend and ministers' conditions of service through the Plan for Partnership. It is also concerned for pensions through its associated pensions executive.

Retired ministers' housing sub-committee
Works in association with the United Reformed Church ministers housing society ltd.

Committee members:
Convener: Ruth Whitehead
Secretary: Craig Bowman
Members: Andy Buxton, James Coleman, John Cox, Brenda Jesse (to 2013), Heather Pencavel, Jane Scawen-Wood, David Skitt (to 2013), Clive Sutcliffe (to 2013), Peter Meek (synod moderator), David Bedford (convener of the retired ministers' housing sub-committee), Graham Campling (convener of the assessment board), Pamela Ward (convener of the maintenance of the ministry sub-committee), Frances Ruthven (convener of the accreditation sub-committee), Jacky Embrey (convener of the CRCW programme sub-committee), Judith Johnson (leadership in worship advocate), Gethin Rhys (convener-elect)

1. Flexible ministry

1.1 At General Assembly 2012 the ministries committee presented proposals for releasing funds to support ministry other than the recognised models of church related community work and the ministry of Word and sacraments. The assembly did not accept those proposals, due, at least in part, to a fear that this might lead to the loss of the special category ministry programme through which new and 'non-traditional' ministry has been supported for many years. The ending of special category ministry was never our intention but we recognise that developing a scheme that provided more flexibility in how funds could be used by synods could add to pressure on that ministry, rather than being a catalyst for other work. This is particularly true when there is a perceived lack of ordained ministers available for local church ministry.

1.2 After further consultation and reflection Mission Council in October 2012 affirmed its support of the special category ministry scheme and limited the number of posts to eight percent of the total number of stipended posts. Following this, and in the light of the strong sentiments expressed in a number of quarters, the committee came to the conclusion that it would not seek to bring further proposals for resourcing other ministries at the present time.

2. Discipleship

2.1 Many of our other concerns since the last General Assembly sit well under the heading of the renamed department in which ministries is located – discipleship. The ministries committee and its sub-committees are aware that our task is to help equip and support people for the ministry they are called to offer in their locality. Naturally we are concerned with specific recognised ministries which provide leadership for the church, including church related community work, eldership, lay preaching and the ministry of Word and sacraments, but we also realise that each of these has a duty to enable discipleship in others.

2.2 We see the challenge ahead of us as providing leadership that encourages discipleship in all our churches, helping each member to recognise their particular calling and use their gifts for the work of Christ and the sake of the world. Whilst the church can be good at recognising the value of time which is spent on church business, it has not always been so good at valuing the time that is spent elsewhere as individuals seek to live out their faith in their family, community and work. At heart our churches need to be communities whose members are learning to follow, being formed, seeking to serve, and being accountable as part of the body of Christ, rather than seeking to live out their faith in isolation.

3. Ordained local ministry

In response to resolution 35 of General Assembly 2012, along with the faith and order committee, we have been considering the question of ordained local ministry. We have struggled with a lack of clarity as to whether the perceived need is for the authorisation of individuals to preside at the sacraments or for the wider recognition of local leaders. If the former, we await clarity over the doctrinal issues involved; if the latter, we will look to continue supporting and strengthening leadership in the local church, in particular the key ministry offered by elders.

4. Eldership

4.1 We believe that elders are vital in helping to develop discipleship in local churches. For some the call to serve as an elder can be the first step on a journey that opens up a wider ministry as a lay preacher, church related community worker or minister of Word and sacraments. However this should not draw our attention away from the high calling of the eldership itself and the important role that elders play in encouraging discipleship amongst the people they serve. Often it is the elders who have the deeper local knowledge and understand the mission needs around them, who have the deeper relationship with individuals in the church and community, and who need to be at the centre of the relationship between the local and wider Church.

4.2 We are immensely grateful that over 10,000 members serve the United Reformed Church in this vital role, both locally and in the wider Church. Eldership is one of the key elements of our Reformed identity and should be prominent in the life of the Church, not just our committee. We recognise that whilst for many eldership is vocational and is a response to hearing God's call, some find themselves as elders out of a sense of necessity. We are pleased to see the work that is being done in particular synods and resource centres for learning to equip and support elders and we have been working with the education and learning committee to update the course for elders and provide additional material to resource those who have responded to this call.

4.3 In emphasising the key role of eldership we have recognised that many of our churches are in local ecumenical partnerships, some of which are constituted without elders. Usually, these partnerships make some other provision for a group that has a sense of vision and growth and which is seeking to encourage discipleship amongst all members. Nevertheless we wish to draw attention to the value which Reformed churches have found in a locally elected eldership for over 500 years.

5. Apostles

5.1 Having stressed the strong sense of discipleship essential in the Church, we also recognise the apostolic nature of our work. The Church sends as well as affirms and, although we often seem to be trying to bring the world into the Church, we are very much about equipping people to bring the Church into the world. One way in which we do this is through chaplaincy, both ordained and lay. 'The chaplain' may be a job title for an individual but the ministry being exercised is for the benefit of the Kingdom and the Church and is healthiest when it is understood and supported by the whole Church. We wish to renew our plea that the whole Church value the work undertaken by those serving as chaplains, either part-time or full-time, and we encourage those local churches which have a chaplain in membership, or have links with a chaplaincy locally, intentionally to include prayer for and support of the chaplain on their agenda and in their devotions.

5.2 Whilst chaplains are found in a variety of spheres we mention one particular group in 2014. This year marks the centenary of the establishment of the United Navy, Army and Air Force Board, which enabled ministers in our tradition to serve as chaplains in the First World War, and which has continued to support this particular area of service. A service to mark the centenary of the board is to be held in June 2014.

6. Inspirational work

As was indicated above, there is an often-voiced belief that the United Reformed Church has too few ordained ministers. In fact our ratio of ministers to members means the number of members per ordained minister is probably lower than it has ever been, but the number of congregations that those members and ministers are spread across creates the leadership and mission challenges of which we are so acutely aware. The assessment board and assessment process is one area of the ministries committee's work that is a source of inspiration for all who are involved in it. God is still calling women and men of faith to be set apart for ministry within the United Reformed Church. We are grateful for all who think they hear that call and are willing to open themselves up to others in order to test it. It is a privilege to walk alongside someone who is on that journey, even if only for a little while, and the Church is well served by those who undertake this task at the local church, synod and Assembly stages of the process. Although it can be an inspirational task it is not an easy one, especially when it leads to saying 'no' to someone, but the need for robust discernment at all levels of the Church is crucial, for when things go wrong, there is considerable cost for the individual and for the Church – a cost that is personal, spiritual and financial.

7. Ministerial resilience

The resilience, health and care of our ministers rightly appear on the agenda of some of our sub-committees but they are also an ongoing concern of the ministries committee itself. Elsewhere you will read how the retired ministers' housing society is seeking to assist synods in the care of retired ministers, and how the maintenance of the ministry sub-committee has been working on the support of those who suffer from prolonged periods of illness. The ministries committee has agreed to seek funding in order to run a *Managing Ministry Pressure Better* (MMPB) programme within the United Reformed Church. This is a programme for ministers and their churches to help individuals identify and manage pressures, whilst indicating to the church where there are common areas of concern that might relate to the nature or setting of the pastorate, or the length of time in ministry. It is hoped that this will help individuals in ministry but also identify where the resources of the Church need to be used to enable healthy ministry.

Ministries:
Accreditation sub-committee

Sub-committee members:
Convener: Geoff Townsend (until 2013), Fran Ruthven
Secretary: Craig Bowman
Members: Bridget Banks, Richard Church, Helga Cornell, Malcolm Fife (until 2013), Jim Murison, Tessa Henry-Robinson (until 2013), Naison Hove, Graham Campling (convener of national assessment board)

1. Special category ministry posts

1.1 Following a hiatus whilst the General Assembly and Mission Council considered a proposal for the funding of other ministries and a transfer of responsibility for special category ministry to the synods, 2013 saw a number of new applications, although 2014 has not seen any.

1.2 Several posts have been renewed and the post at Milton Keynes West Flank has ended. New posts have been approved for Oldham Town Centre, Salford-Oasis, Chorlton and Whalley Range, Saltaire, and Brighthelm.

1.3 Of the three posts set aside for evangelists, one has been withdrawn, one remains unfilled and the West Midlands post was filled in 2013. We look forward to hearing about this work as it develops over the next few years.

1.4 Unfortunately not all posts run smoothly. Sometimes management difficulties arise, particularly where appropriate support structures are not in place at the time of an appointment. Another cause of difficulty can be when a post holder is also minister of a local church and the expectations of the congregation do not accord with the intentions of the post. Whether this is due to a misunderstanding in the planning stage or a wish to adapt the post to the congregation's priorities, it reinforces the need for the elders and church meeting to understand and support the original vision.

1.5 Sometimes ecumenical partners make unilateral decisions, reducing funding or withdrawing practical support. Such decisions can have a significant impact on an agreed special category ministry post. There have been a number of such instances, perhaps because of current economic difficulties, and these have challenged the sub-committee.

2. Certificates of eligibility

2.1 The ministries committee is responsible to General Assembly for oversight of the projected number of ministers for future years and for deciding each year, on the basis of these projections, whether certificates of eligibility for stipendiary service may be issued to ministers of other denominations. Such a certificate grants eligibility to receive a call to serve in a pastorate or post and to be admitted to the roll of United Reformed Church ministers.

2.2 No certificates of eligibility have been granted since 2011 and current projections regarding ministerial numbers and the financial outlook mean none will be issued in 2014.

3. Certificates of limited service

3.1 Certificates of limited service provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities. A certificate of limited service allows a minister or community worker of another denomination to serve in and be paid by the United

Reformed Church in one specified post for a limited period of time. Five certificates were granted in 2012 and seven in 2013.

3.2 The issuing of certificates of eligibility and certificates of limited service may appear to be a bureaucratic annoyance, yet we see it not only as part of our function to administer the roll of ministers, but also of significant pastoral import in supporting congregations and individuals and ensuring suitable accountability.

4. The roll of ministers

Admissions to the roll of ministers (from 1st April 2012 to 31st January 2014)

4.1 By ordination and induction:
Nigel Adkinson, Heather-Anne Adlem, Lorraine Aizlewood-Threlfall, Kay Blackwell, Nicholas Brindley, Chris Burgham, Harmke Aleida Dorothee Büürma, Allison Claxton, Graham Dadd, Christopher Kemshell, Anne Lewitt, Mhari Mclintock, George Mwura, Rosemary Shirley, Penelope Smirthwaite, Melanie Smith, Helen Warmington, Ruth Watson, Meryl White, Grant Wilson, William Young

4.2 By transfer from other churches:
Ernie Bosse (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa), Alan Gibbon (Congregational Federation), Joan Ross (Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand), Wilbert Sayimani (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa), Samuel Silungwe (The United Church Of Zambia)

4.3 By changes within the roll of ministers:
James Gascoigne (non-stipendiary to stipendiary service), Robert Maloney (non-stipendiary to stipendiary service), Andrew Royal (non-stipendiary to stipendiary service)

4.4 Deletions from the roll of Ministers by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination:
George McCleave, Andrew Pugh, John Rees

5. Church related community workers

Admission to the Roll of church related community workers (from 1st April 2012 to 31st January 2014) by commissioning:

None

6. Assembly accredited lay preachers

6.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1st April 2012 to 31st January 2014 as a result of having completed a United Reformed Church course of study or have prior accreditation from another denomination.

Northern:	Helen Cooper, Paul Dempster, Donna Moore, Clare Oswell
North Western Synod:	Michael Brueck
Mersey:	Joan Colwell
Yorkshire Synod:	Elizabeth Aizlewood, Liz Bird
East Midlands Synod:	Mark Hodgson, Jean Hudson, Wendy Pittman
Eastern Synod:	Richard Lewney, Christine Macleod, Sara Pells
South Western Synod:	David Hoar
Wessex:	Rosie Martin, Paul Stein
Thames North Synod:	Sally Bateman, Anne Byfield, Lola Fatogun, Jackie Haws, Peter Knowles, Marion McNeill
Southern Synod:	Linda Lambert, Joanne Patel, Dawn Powell
The Synod of Scotland:	Heather Leighton, Elinor McCulloch

6.2 Twenty six of these lay preachers had successfully studied through Training for Learning and Service.

Ministries:
Church related community work programme sub-committee

Sub-committee members:
Convener: Jacky Embrey
Secretaries: Suzanne Adofo, Steve Summers
Members: John Campbell, Graham Ghaleb, John Grundy, John Mellor (until 2013), Keith Morrison, Marie Trubic, Carolyn Smyth, Paul Whittle

1. Seeking candidates

Churches engage with their communities in a myriad of ways. The church related community work (CRCW) programme enables churches to use a community development approach in their mission and ministry, recognising that Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness. Crcw ministers are a valuable but scarce resource, with only 14 currently in post. We have therefore made it a priority over the last two years to seek those who are called to this distinctive ministry. We are pleased that there are now three CRCWs in training and that the number of candidates due to attend the 2014 assessment conferences is the highest ever.

2. Churches-in-community

Crcw ministers serve for a maximum of ten years in any one post, so we are constantly open to new and exciting opportunities for innovative community ministry in churches and groups of churches across the United Reformed Church. Over the last two years we have strengthened the support given to churches seeking CRCW ministers (churches-in-community) with a new initial enquiry procedure and a scheme of annual visits, once an application has been approved. Work is about to start on enumerating the long term benefits of being churches-in-community.

3. Assisting others

The work of the programme sub-committee and the development worker post in supporting and promoting CRCW can benefit all churches that are interested or involved in community work in any way. Our biannual 'road shows' are open to all churches and training is available through the Developing Community Experiences year of the Training for Learning and Serving Programme, with which we are heavily involved. Some of the more practical elements of the CRCW training at Northern College are also being made more easily accessible to those who would find them useful.

Ministries:
Maintenance of the ministry sub-committee

Sub-committee members:
Convener: Anthony Haws (until 2013), Pamela Ward
Secretary: Craig Bowman
Members: Alison Hall, Andrew Martlew, Peter Rippon, Richard Turnbull, Eilidh Young, Chris Evans (convener of pensions executive), John Ellis (honorary treasurer)

1. Stipend increase

The maintenance of the ministry sub-committee bases its proposal for the stipend increase each year on a formula using the consumer price index. For January 2014, this produced an increase of 1.6%, which is lower than in the previous two years. It represents a fall in real income for ministers for the third year in succession, which we regret. Unfortunately, ministers are not alone in facing economic pressures at this time, and we have to bear in mind also the difficult financial situation facing the United Reformed Church centrally and locally.

2. Plan for Partnership: retirement removal grants

The Plan allows for ministers moving house on retirement to be reimbursed for 'reasonable removal expenses'. After discussion of what was reasonable, it was agreed to tidy up the Plan, which in all other situations sets a definite figure, by stating a maximum.

3. Long-term sickness absence

3.1 It is pleasing to report that at the time of writing, there are no ministers in a long-term sickness situation. No doubt this will change before long. It is a concern that the majority of such cases of sickness can be attributed to stress.

3.2 Following a situation in which the Unite union was involved, and in response to their comments on our procedures, the maintenance of the ministry sub-committee has been involved in a complete rewriting of our sickness absence policy and procedure. It is hoped that by the time of General Assembly this will be in use in all such situations.

Ministries:
Retired ministers' housing sub-committee

This sub-committee continues to be responsible for policy in matters of the provision of retirement housing for ministers, their spouses, widows and widowers. It uses the United Reformed Church retired ministers' housing society limited as its agent for the implementation of policy and the practical steps associated with the provision of housing.

Sub-committee members:
Convener: David Bedford
Secretary: Andy Bottomley
Members: Anne Bedford, John Humphreys, Malcolm Lindo and Peter West

1. The immediate challenge

1.1 The past two years have seen both change and challenge.

1.2 Changes include the society's taking a more proactive approach to its investments by carrying out its own surveys on proposed properties. This has provided the society with greater knowledge of its properties and future repair requirements, so enabling it to undertake a more detailed and accurate approach to repairs and renewals.

1.3 The committee has charged the staff to take a more pastoral role in the oversight of its tenants through increased visits. This is starting to reap benefits, for within each of the properties that the society manages there is a story. A story of a retired minister living alone in a retirement flat, few possessions and curtains drawn, a minister struggling to care for his wife with Alzheimer's, to name but two. The work is not just about bricks and mortar; it is about people, servants of the Church.

1.4 The society is therefore seeking to be proactive in its awareness of these situations and is informing synod moderators of pastoral issues that arise. This work is in early stages but the society acknowledges the input and support of the moderators in this positive development.

2. Grateful for generosity

2.1 The Society received donations and legacies which in 2012 amounted to £460,000 and in 2013 to £360,000. Many churches, synods and individuals have responded generously to the re-launch of our appeal in 2006 and these gifts are much appreciated.

2.2 In 2007, General Assembly approved a resolution recommending that ten percent of funds raised from the sale of redundant churches be contributed to the society. Encouragingly, many synods have agreed to this course of action, and others have offered to help in different ways.

3. Our ongoing work

3.1 The society continues to work with the finance department and is grateful to Andrew Grimwade and his team for the support, financial information and advice they provide.

3.2 The society continues to contribute to the ministries pre-retirement courses run at the Windermere Centre. These sessions have been redesigned to be of benefit to all, regardless of whether assistance with housing will be needed.

4. The future

The future of the society is exciting, and it is a privilege to be serving those who for all their lives have served others. It is a unique ministry with both challenges and rewards, which operates, hopefully, with a light in touch but far reaching consequences through the network and support of local churches, moderators and the wider fellowship of the United Reformed Church.

Mission committee

The central task of the mission committee is to focus on mission, working with the whole of the church to formulate and give expression to our mission and faith in ways which bring alive our vision of "being Christ's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference to the world" (General Assembly, 2007). The committee seeks to encourage growth in discipleship, evangelism and witness by:

- reflecting on the church's mission practice and theology;
- formulating policy, strategies and programme (action) priorities;
- reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically;
- working with partners; and
- continuously evaluating the place of mission and evangelism within the work of General Assembly.

Committee members:
Convener: Tracey Lewis
Staff secretaries: Francis Brienen (mission), Michael Jagessar (racial justice and intercultural ministry), Graham Jones (rural officer, until end 2013), Andrew Bradstock (church and society, from September 2013), Linda Mead (commitment for life), Jane Rowell (world church relations), David Tatem (ecumenical relations).
Members: Pat Poinen (to 2013), Vacancy North Western, Andrew Willett, Tessa Henry-Robinson, David Dean, Louise Franklin (to February 2014), Samantha White, Janet Sutton Webb (till January 2014), Peter Hurter, Naison Hove, Martin Hayward, Nick Stanyon (to October 2013), Lindsey Sanderson, Marie Trubic (co-opted)

1. Introduction

1.1 Mission is what happens when the Holy Spirit is alive in Christian people living out their calling to love their neighbours. What do we need to do as a whole Church (that cannot be done by the local church) in order to be the United Reformed Church well equipped, vibrant and adventurous in mission? The mission committee holds this question in the forefront of its thinking, work and engagement with the wide mission agenda of the United Reformed Church. In the following reports we offer an account of the ways in which mission is alive and well and being progressed. The work represented here is a treasury of resources available to all our churches, its purpose being to open opportunities and equip local churches so that we might all reach beyond ourselves and join in the passionate and active love of God for the world around us.

2. *Vision2020*

2.1 The *vision2020* framework for mission was adopted by General Assembly 2010 and the mission committee and staff continue to support local churches, synods and Assembly in their engagement with it. At the November 2013 Mission Council synods reported back on *vision2020* and many encouraging stories were shared. Various synods have sought to integrate *vision2020* with the local mission and ministry review. Others have engaged with it in different ways, offering it as a tool for identifying mission priorities alongside others. The synod *vision2020* reports are available on www.urc.org.uk (Mission Council November 2013).

2.2 Mission committee and team members have also been able to share *vision2020* by providing input at new ministers' conferences, at the 'Welcome to the United Reformed Church' course and through the programmes of the Resource Centres for Learning. Another bi-annual *vision2020* conference was held in the summer of 2013, this time focusing on church growth.

The mission team from left to right, the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, Mrs Wendy Cooper, the Revd David Tatem, Dr Andrew Bradstock, Mrs Tracey Hardingham, the Revd Helen Garton, Miss Becky Harrington, Mrs Linda Mead and Ms Francis Brienen

2.3 There has been an increase in applications to the *vision2020* grants fund, which offers grants for one-off special projects and for longer term developmental work. Grants were given for the development of Messy Church, for the creation of a community garden, to buy equipment for puppet ministry, and for a writers' workshop for inclusive worship material, to name some examples.

2.4 A report on the work in the past 18 months is now given for each area of work of the mission committee and team. It offers an account of the broad remit and wide range of activities the committee and team engage in and demonstrates how each contributes to *vision2020*.

3. Church and society

3. 1 Church and society continues to help the United Reformed Church bring the "life in all its fullness" that Jesus announced to the communities it serves. Working in close and fruitful partnership with its Methodist and Baptist colleagues within the joint public issues team (JPIT) church and society develops resources and briefings to help churches and their members learn more about contemporary issues and respond to them through prayer and action. Through JPIT, church and society also enables our Church's concerns regarding social justice, peacemaking and the integrity of creation to be heard in the public square. *Vision2020* continues to provide the framework within which the church and society team works.

Spirituality and prayer

3.2 In the last Assembly report we noted that working within JPIT has many advantages over working alone. JPIT's role in "building a prophetic voice across three nations" helps to increase awareness of our denominations' identities, and releasing our media statements on social and political issues jointly results in our work receiving far greater coverage. Both these outcomes can increase the attractiveness of the Church as it becomes identified with a bold, prophetic and authentically Christian approach to our society.

Church growth

3.2.1 A report issued jointly by the JPIT churches and the Church of Scotland in 2013, *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, had an impact which could never have been imagined when the 2012 Assembly report was penned. As its title suggests, *The lies* set out to promote more truthful debate around poverty, naming and challenging six myths about its causes and effects promulgated by politicians and

influential sections of the media. These myths both hide the complexity of the true nature of poverty in the
UK and, by blaming the poor for their condition, enable society at large to avoid taking any responsibility for it. With the benefit of a judiciously-timed press release the report received extensive media coverage over Easter 2013, featuring widely on national radio and television, in national and international papers and on social media. Many hundreds of people wrote to their MPs about the report, and numerous churches have used the worship and study resources available on the JPIT website (www.jointpublicissues.org.uk). No less importantly, the report provoked a response from government ministers, and it continues to inform the debate about poverty and welfare reform.

3.2.2 Some of the groundwork for *The lies* was laid at the 2012 Assembly in Scarborough, where a resolution was passed based upon the joint Mission Council/ Methodist Council report *Social Impact of Poverty and Inequality in the UK – a challenge to the church* (see appendix 17 of the *Book of Reports 2012*). This resolution formed part of a longer document known as 'The Scarborough Statement', a copy of which was presented to the local MP following a Walk of Witness through the town during Assembly.

The General Assembly moderator, the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar hands over 'The Scarborough Statement' to the local MP

3.2.3 That 2012 resolution, which included a plea to government to take into account the effects of its policies on vulnerable people in the UK, has informed our work in other ways. The impact of social policy reforms and spending cuts on those Jesus called the 'least of my brothers and sisters' (Matthew 25:40) is a constant concern of JPIT, as evidenced in its programmes, its representations to parliament, its public statements, blogs and tweets, etc.

3.4 In January 2013 we and our JPIT colleagues hosted a one day conference in Birmingham offering "inspiration and practical advice to help join the dots between action, politics and discipleship". Called *Think Speak Act*, this extremely popular event attracted 200 people from our three denominations and beyond to hear key speakers such as Giles Fraser, learn and share ideas, and be inspired and equipped to bring justice to the heart of mission. A short video showing highlights of the day is at www.youtube.com/watch?v=VfPeYXuTgQ4.

3.5 JPIT had a presence at the three main party conferences, facilitating meetings between our moderators and MPs (including government ministers) and briefing them accordingly.

Justice and peace

3.6 In our last report we noted that people in the West Midlands were discussing the idea of forming a local joint public issues team. The moderator of West Midlands Synod has played a strategic role in this project, and it has been exciting to see this regional body come into being and to hear of other parts of the UK where a similar idea has

been mooted. The secretary for church and society has played a role in supporting the West Midlands venture.

3.7 Through JPIT we have been involved in public issues on the global stage, including climate change, nuclear disarmament, the Middle East situation and the use of drones.

4. Commitment for life

4.1 As a programme of General Assembly, commitment for life sits within the mission team but also has its own reference group convened by John Griffith. The group meets three times a year and is the regulating and supportive body for the programme coordinator and administrator.

4.2 Christian Aid receives 75% of the money contributed, to be divided equally among our four partner countries. The World Development Movement receives 10% for their work on the root causes of poverty. The remaining 15% is used for the administration of the scheme and for grants. In recent years these have been given to the Jubilee Debt Campaign, Fairtrade Fortnight, Banana Link, the Ecumenical Accompanying Programme in Palestine and Israel, the Trade Justice Movement and our intern scheme.

Members of FURY at the IF campaign gathering

4.3 During the last two years contributions from churches have remained steady but are part of a gradual decline. This has been masked by a legacy we received over three years from 2011. Churches are looking closely at how and where their giving is sent, so we are pleased to see that the total has not declined further. Grateful thanks are expressed to all contributing churches.

4.4 Commitment for life is very much part of the identity of the United Reformed Church as a church passionate about justice and living out our faith through action as well as words. As the single largest denominational giver to Christian Aid our contributions are vital for the work in our partner countries/region. Churches are more informed of issues related to their partner country and build a relationship with the partners.

Identity

4.5 In 2013 Christian Aid made the difficult decision to cease funding work in Jamaica. Following discussion with Christian Aid and Reference Group members, Central America was chosen as our new region. This comprises Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. We look forward to learning more about this region.

4.6 We continue to provide educational and worship resources. A service outline for Commitment for Life Sundays has been particularly well received. The 2014 outline focuses on *Water – A precious resource*. The annual visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory and advocates' days provide opportunities for people to learn

more about our work and the issues involved. Monthly emails continue to be a great source of information for local churches. *Stories for change* provides stories on the issues in Central America, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe whilst *Moving Stories* looks at the situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

The integrity of creation

4.7 Since the last Assembly commitment for life has been part of organising two conferences within the ecumenical World Development Conference group. The last one took place in February 2014 and focused on *Good Work*. These events bring together supporters from across the denominations, non-government organisations and charities to engage and be inspired on development issues. Other ecumenical work has included the the World Council of Churches' planning group for the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel. Last September a vigil was arranged outside Friends' Meeting House, London at which the Revd Paul Dean from Ashford shared the service with Bishop William Kenny, auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

4.8 Our website continues to offer information and inspiration for churches. Over the last two years it has advertised the IF campaign, Fairtrade Fortnight, Christian Aid's Tax and Climate Justice Campaigns and The World Development Movement's Carbon Capital and Food Speculation campaigns. All these campaigns have the potential to make a huge difference to people in poverty.

4.9 The IF campaign achieved the political targets that it had set itself. There was a significant amount of funding pledged for nutrition ($4.1 billion in total) and progress towards the 0.7% target for aid and development, but most significant were the achievements around tax. Tax was put on the G8 agenda and the government talked openly about the links between tax and development and the beginnings of a process towards beneficial ownership and greater information exchange. Another success is the Interfaith group, set up by coalition agencies who were part of the IF campaign, which will continue meeting and working collaboratively where possible.

Justice and peace

4.10 The joint Belonging to the World Church/ commitment for life trip to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory in February 2013 enabled the group to see the work of Christian Aid partners and meet with Palestinian Christians, both in the West Bank and Israel. This was a deep learning experience for many. Since returning, many of the trip's participants have shared their reflections and stories with congregations across the Church and the mission team is looking at new ways to build relationships in this area and understand more of the complex issues and injustices.

A URC group meeting the director of the YMCA in Beit Sahour, Palestinian Occupied Territory

4.11 In August 2012, Miriam Webb took on the role as Christian Aid Collective/ commitment for life intern. August 2013 saw Ian Rowe come into the post. He has spent much of his time working with Pilots groups, especially in Yorkshire and Scotland. This successful scheme has given us a real opportunity to work more closely with younger people in churches and at synod events. With a focus on helping young people understand about the injustice in this world it is also our way of offering a legacy for the future.

5. Ecumenical relations

5.1 Much of the work of ecumenical and interfaith relations lies in responding to events at local, national and international level. There is much 'business as usual' to report along with new developments.

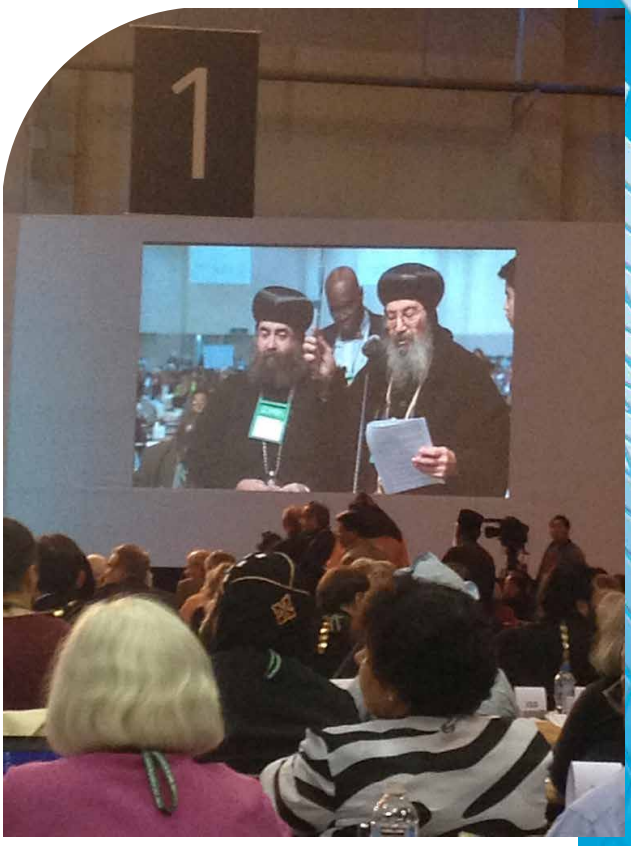
5.2 Following the service of healing of memories in Westminster Abbey, we have established a dialogue group with the Church of England. In Wales we are involved with other ecumenical partners in considering the proposals for a uniting Church that emerged from the Gathering in Aberystwyth. Our conversation with the Roman Catholics in England and Wales has entered its second phase.

Ecumenical partnerships

5.3 The secretary for ecumenical relations, has represented the United Reformed Church on the Joint Implementation Commission of the Anglican Methodist Covenant and on the Methodist/Anglican Panel on Unity and Mission. He has continued to sit on the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity. More widely he serves on the Churches Together in England Enabling Group, the Theology and Unity Group and the Churches' Inter-religious Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, as well as in a number of more informal ecumenical and interfaith networks. Part of his work is concerned with interfaith relations and therefore he serves as co-secretary to the Methodist/URC Interfaith Reference Group which is still undergoing review and possible restructuring following reductions in the Methodist interfaith budget. The interfaith agenda is a growing area of work. We now have a network of synod interfaith advocates who meet annually.

5.4 Ecumenical and interfaith roles are fulfilled by the Revd Sally Thomas in Wales and the Revd Mitchell Bunting in Scotland. The three officers operate together as a team and have begun regular meetings to ensure co-operation on ecumenical issues that affect the United Reformed Church across the three nations.

5.5 There have been a number of events of significance since the last Assembly. September 2012 saw the Churches Together in England (CTE) Forum in Swanwick where the United Reformed Church representation exceeded the allotted number due to United Reformed Church members fulfilling other ecumenical roles, a fact which does not go unnoticed. The Forum also indicated the changing pattern of ecumenism in the new Churches that are coming into membership and which are expanding CTE's ecclesiological and theological spectrum.



The World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, South Korea

Mission

5.6 October 2012 saw the second joint meeting of the Methodist Council with our own Mission Council. This has resulted in a good deal of reflection on the similarities and differences between our two denominations and the different directions in which we are moving. Recently the Methodist/United Reformed Church Liaison Group has moved towards a new pattern of working as a task group, with responsibility for dealing with the day to day issues that need to be resolved between the two churches. Often these relate to the lives of the approximately 300 United Reformed Church/Methodist local ecumenical partnerships. Recently the secretary for ecumenical relations is to be part of a small CTE group that is currently reviewing the life and necessary support for local ecumenical partnerships in England.

5.7 There have now been two occasions where our synod ecumenical officers have met together with their Church of England and Methodist counterparts, most recently in November 2013.

Global partnerships

5.8 In September 2012 the secretary for ecumenical relations, along with other delegates from the United Reformed Church, attended the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe. In June 2013 two delegates attended the General Assembly of the Conference of European Churches in Budapest and in November 2013 two delegates with the secretary acting as adviser attended the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea. At this Assembly the Revd Sarah Moore, one of our delegates, was appointed to the Central Committee. A number of other United Reformed Church representatives continue to contribute and serve on international committees dealing with theology, ethics and a range of social and political issues.

The World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, South Korea

5.9 September 2013 saw another theological consultation with our covenant partners in the Church of the Palatinate (Germany), reminding us that this long standing partnership with another European Church continues to be active and valued.

5.10 The ecumenical and interfaith scene therefore has continued to be both active and evolving. The secretary also serves as secretary to the faith and order committee and the discussions initiated by that committee around the future of the Church have inevitably taken into consideration our ecumenical relations and the wider scene and will continue to do so.

6. Mission

6.1 The Church is called, sent and empowered through the Holy Spirit to join in God's mission of transformation. The Mission Team seeks to support the Church at all levels in responding to the call to "be God's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference for Christ's sake". Within the wide brief of the mission team, the secretary for mission's work has focused primarily on equipping churches for engagement with evangelism and church growth.

6.2 Together with the secretary for racial justice and intercultural ministries, the secretary for mission organised a second *vision2020* conference in July 2013 focused on church growth. The conference was attended by nearly 60 people, including ministers, local church leaders and synod moderators. The keynote speaker was the Revd John Daniel of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand. Input from practitioners, through workshops and case studies, formed a crucial part of the programme. A church growth Facebook page (Growing the chURCh) has been set up and is engendering lively debate. The presentations, case studies and workshop notes are available on the URC website together with an annotated bibliography on church growth. The conference provided inspiration to a number of synods to start or strengthen their work on church growth. A follow up to the conference will be held in the autumn of 2014.

Speed faithing at the Church Growth Conference

6.3 Extensive discussions have taken place with all partners in Fresh Expressions regarding its future. The second phase of Fresh Expressions is coming to an end in 2014. Several new partners have joined, including the Salvation Army and the Church of Scotland. A new board, more broadly representative of all the partners, is being formed and an annual meeting of all stakeholders will be introduced. The current team leader Bishop Graham Cray will retire in April 2014 and will be succeeded by Canon Phil Potter. The Mission Committee supports the United Reformed Church's continued involvement through the employment of a half-time coordinator who is part of the Fresh Expressions team. It is also exploring committing more financial resources to the next phase as an expression of the importance of this work for the United Reformed Church, which is further demonstrated by the growing number of pioneer ministers in the synods.

Church growth

6.4 The work of the coordinator for Fresh Expressions, Linda Rayner, has developed steadily and has seen a shift from mapping fresh expressions in the United Reformed Church to vision casting. She has led vision days and training in Eastern, West Midlands, North Western and Mersey Synods. She has started discussions with the Resource Centres for Learning aimed at ensuring a Fresh Expressions focus to the learning programmes. Advocacy with leaders at all levels of the Church has also formed a major part of the work. The coordinator continues to network Fresh Expressions practitioners and link people in the synods and is building up a social media presence. Major research on Fresh Expressions in the Church of England was recently published, which is significant to the United Reformed Church as well (www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/anglicanresearch).

Mission

6.5 In October 2012 the mission committee started discussions on submitting an application to the Council for World Mission's mission support programme (phase 3). The committee identified the need for evangelism and how to equip people in the United Reformed Church for this task as the focus to be explored for a new mission programme. A small group of committee members and staff produced a proposal for a three-stage process for creating a culture of evangelism in the URC. This was widely discussed across the Church between March and September 2013. Feedback showed a number of reservations about the proposal, including uncertainty whether evangelism should be the focus and how evangelism should be defined, concerns about initiative overload and most of all, lack of confidence in expressing/articulating one's personal faith. As a result the mission committee has agreed that the proposal be reshaped to focus on pre-evangelism and discipleship.

6.6 In 2012 the United Reformed Church registered as a denomination to take part in Back to Church Sunday. Back to Church Sunday started in 2004 to encourage church members to invite a friend or family member to come to church on the last Sunday of September. The secretary for mission has continued to support the promotion of Back to Church Sunday, with the support of the communications department. In 2012 a total of 197 United Reformed churches took part. However, in 2013 the number of participating churches dropped to 97. This was in line with an overall decline in participation in the UK in the past year, but in contrast to the overall success of Back to Church Sunday, with 25,000 participating churches in 13 countries. The BTCS team is considering how the initiative should develop further and a new format is proposed for 2014, comprising a season of invitation with five invitational Sundays (www.backtochurch.co.uk).

Evangelism

The launch of Back to Church Sunday 2014 at Lambeth Palace

6.7 HOPE entered its penultimate year in 2013. In order to promote HOPE and to support local churches in their engagement in mission, the mission department distributed the resource book *Hope, the Heartbeat of Mission* to local churches, ministers and local leaders. Funded by the James Donald Tract Fund more than 1,500 copies were given out. Four training events during June and July 2013 were also offered, in Hinckley, Warrington, Wolverhampton and London. The HOPE book was accompanied by a leaflet on the Flesh and Blood Campaign, which seeks to encourage blood and organ donation. The mission team supports the campaign together with the communications department (www.hopetogether.org.uk) (www.fleshandblood.org).

6.8 The Mission Enablers Network continues its quarterly meetings, supported by the secretary for mission and the administrator. The network continues to grow with several pioneer ministers

Community partnerships

with synod roles also attending. For the first time a joint networking conference was held, bringing together the training and development officers, the mission enablers, the children and youth development officers and the Resource Centres for Learning. It provided an opportunity for the networks to get to know each other, reflect together on common issues (such as the future of the Church) and explore joint areas of work. Another joint network gathering will be held in 2015.

7. Racial justice and intercultural ministry

7.1 A series of conversations around 'multicultural church, intercultural habit' led to Mission Council's adoption of the 'Intercultural Charter' affirming the evolving nature of the work. Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry (RJMM) is now referred to as racial justice and intercultural ministry (RJiM). This shift has seen a wider cross-section of the URC identify, own and support RJiM and has also encouraged a broader conversation on inclusion and diversity in helpful ways.

Identity

7.2 Networks are at the heart of racial justice and intercultural ministry work. Racial justice and intercultural advocates met regularly for strategic work, support and sharing of good practices. Among their focus were 'Racism Avatars, Awareness and the Intercultural Agenda: Turning Principles into Practice', 'Curating Racism and the Intercultural Agenda'. Ministers and lay leaders (EMLOM) gathered to reflect on 'the URC as an Intercultural Church: What We Need to do Differently and How?' Cascades of Grace (COG), a network of BAME women has focused on identifying and nurturing new leadership through mentoring. Culture-specific network gatherings included an annual Ghanaian Conference (May) and a gathering of Christians of Pakistani and Korean backgrounds. One impact of the intercultural conversation is the intentional work of these culture-specific groups on working closer together. Hence, the Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers Association (EMLOMA) has changed its remit and the Ghanaian and Asian culture-specific groups will now work on partnering events. Racial justice synod coordinators and advocates are strategically working across synods.

Networking is vital to racial justice and intercultural ministry

7.3 Racial justice and intercultural ministry work includes both monitoring the inclusion agenda of the United Reformed Church and enabling racism and diversity awareness training. This involves collaborative work with the equalities committee. Monitoring work has been carried out in the area of children's and youth work, education and learning and Church House. We are currently mapping the delivery of awareness training across the Church. Diversity awareness training/courses have been delivered at all the Resource Centres for Learning. Monitoring helped us become aware

of the gaps in the delivery of our inclusion agenda and what needs to be done. We were also able to prepare new resources to help synods and local churches continue monitoring. Training remains on their agenda in helpful ways.

Hospitality and diversity

7.4 A number of collaborative projects have been initiated: the church growth conference in July (with mission), a 'Rainbow of Spiritualities' celebration event in June (with Urban URC Network), ArtTalk which is an on-going project (Moderator of General Assembly, Mission and Elizabeth Gray-King) and a conference on better hosting of migrant churches (with urban URC network). The 'Rainbow of Spiritualities' resulted in the compilation of a significant resource of world Church songs and music (book and CD) by intercultural musicians of the United Reformed Church.

7.5 ArtTalk was launched at General Assembly 2012 as an exciting opportunity for churches and church groups to connect with their communities through arts based activities. ArtTalk project awards and a resource pack have been funded from the legacy fund. Successful award recipients engaged in innovative mission work in Pontypridd, Newham, Redditch, Leicester, Collumpton, Leamington Spa and Huddersfield, all making robust connections with their communities via exhibitions and workshops. New, non-church based spirituality groups have formed and churches have made new relationships with their civic communities. Many churches and groups around the UK have run ArtTalk activities without extra awards funding, with new connections and greater understanding as a result. ArtTalk results show such rewarding signs that further development is in the pipeline for the future. Reports of the projects are being documented and made ready for the webpage.

Spirituality and prayer

7.6 The two formal ecumenical networks with which we are associated are the Churches' Racial Justice Network of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs (MECA) of Churches Together in England. Racial Justice and intercultural ministry is also involved in two focus groups: the countering politically extreme right group of JPIT, and Churches equality and diversity practitioners network. We also contributed to the Baptist Union of Great Britain's re-thinking of its racial justice work. The Churches racial justice network's key work is the production of the Racial Justice Sunday resources and resource sharing across the islands. MECA currently works on a political manifesto for Black Christian voters, resources for countering black Christian conversion to Islam, re-reading the Hebrew Bible (black ministers and rabbis in conversation), and the yearly online resource handbook of all black Churches in the UK.

Multicultural Celebration in September 2013

7.7 The multicultural celebration is a regular biennial event and in September 2013 it brought together over 400 people representing a wide cross section of the United Reformed Church, including synod moderators, to celebrate our intercultural life together. Focussing on the theme, "Gifted! A Time of Plenty", the programme included a wide variety of activities, underscoring how truly intercultural the event has become and demonstrating that though small, we are a very gifted Church. The event also included an art award and a multicultural congregational story award, and it has generated energy and motivation for those who participated.

7.8 For more information on the breadth of RJiM's work, past, present and ongoing, please visit the RJiM and mission webpage.

8. Rural mission

8.1 A quarter of United Reformed churches are in rural communities. The rural officer supports and equips them to respond to the challenges they face and to share in God's mission in the countryside. In this work he is supported by the United Reformed Church/Methodist rural strategy group. This group fulfils a vital role in linking the rural officer post to the two denominations, in thinking strategically about rural mission, and in encouraging the post-holder to be accountable. The post and the group are excellent examples of creative and effective ecumenical partnership.

Ecumenical Partnerships

8.2 Creative Leadership in the Rural Church (CLiRC) completed its pilot programme in February 2013 and met its target of attracting 15 ecumenical participants for the 2013-15 programme. CLiRC is an 18-month leadership development programme for lay and ordained leaders in the rural church and the rural officer has acted as programme director. A dynamic ecumenical partnership, its outcomes include leaders better equipped to lead communities in addressing all 10 *vision2020* statements.

8.3 The MA in rural mission and ministry, developed in partnership with the York Institute for Community Theology and York St John University, was put on hold whilst a new home for it was sought; the York Institute is closing in 2014. Cliff College has also developed an MA in rural mission and the York MA has fed into this. These programmes are designed to resource people engaged in mission and ministry in rural communities.

8.4 A response is still awaited from the Heritage Lottery Fund to the first stage of a research project developed with the Plunkett Foundation, the Church of England and the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University, exploring whether the creative and extended use of church premises makes them more sustainable and supports the Churches' mission.

Evangelism

8.5 In partnership with the Lincolnshire District of the Methodist Church the rural officer has worked on a five year strategy (from 2012) to influence the behaviour of the Methodist people with regard to food. A steering group has formed and a fringe meeting was held at Methodist Conference 2012, followed by a very successful day seminar in October 2013 "Hungry World: Generous God". There may be opportunity for the United Reformed Church to share in this initiative, addressing issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

8.6 An URCLE (United Reformed Church learning environment) rural network has been initiated and has the potential to develop into an ecumenical rural virtual network, seeking to strengthen mission, identity and communication.

The integrity of creation

8.7 Four students from the Cambridge Theological Federation (CTF) were recruited in October 2013 for the CTF's rural social context placement – an outward-facing one-week placement seeking to understand context better. At the Arthur Rank Centre the rural ministry course was delivered twice a year for those new to, or returning to, rural ministry.

8.8 Having been closely involved in the development of the ecumenical rural development enabler post for the Peak District National Park, the rural officer then became a member of the management group. He has continued to fulfil duties as a trustee of the farming community network, sat on the *Country Way* editorial board, represented the Arthur Rank centre on the historic religious buildings alliance, sat on the Fresh Expressions' rural roundtable and attended the Churches' rural group. All roles support and facilitate mission and ministry.

Community partnerships

8.9 The rural officer supports and resources the network of United Reformed Church synod and Methodist district rural officers, including helping to organise and run the annual ecumenical rural officers' gathering in November. In consultation with the synod moderators, a job description was drawn up in summer 2013 for synod rural advocates. The rural officer is a member of the strategy group supporting the work of the rural officer in the National Synod of Wales.

8.10 The work also has a global dimension through the International Rural Churches' Association (IRCA) and IRCA (Europe). IRCA was founded at the Arthur Rank Centre about 20 years ago but is now a loose independent global network of rural church practitioners. The next four-yearly global IRCA conference will take place in Malawi in 2014. A European IRCA gathering was held in Germany in 2012. IRCA also had a presence at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, which was secured with help from the United Reformed Church.

9. World church relations

9.1 The primary purpose of the world church relations work is the development of active partnerships with churches around the world. Our global partnerships enable us to learn about ourselves, our Church, our world and God's mission in it. They offer us an opportunity to build relationships that are deep, supportive and long-lasting.

9.2 The past 18 months have been challenging for the world church department. The long-term absence of the secretary for world church relations due to illness has put strains on the work. Nevertheless, we were able to continue supporting synods in the global partners programme, facilitate experience enlargement, provide opportunities for young people to experience the world church, support mission partners and engage with international ecumenical work. We are grateful for the sterling work done by Helen Garton, the administrator for the belonging to the world church programme, and to Chris Wright, the convener of the international exchange reference group.

9.3 There have been Synod trips to Botswana, India, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, as part of the belonging to the world church programme. And we have welcomed global partners from Jamaica, Madagascar and Mozambique to the UK.

East Midlands' youth exchange with the Botswana Synod of the United Congregational Church in Southern Africa

9.4 We have provided grants and practical assistance to ministers who have spent their sabbaticals and continuing ministerial education in: Australia, Botswana, Canada, India, Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories, Kenya and Uganda, Korea, Romania and Hungary, South Africa, Switzerland, Taiwan, US, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A couple of ordinands have been on international student placements in New Zealand and the USA.

9.5 Young people from the United Reformed Church have attended the mission house taster weekends in Amsterdam, the mission camps in Taiwan and the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute conference in South Korea. There have also been young people's trips from the East Midlands Synod and the Northern Synod to Botswana and South Africa, and a return visit from young people from Botswana to the UK.

9.6 The International Exchange Reference Group has continued to meet to receive news from our mission partners and to support them in their work. Currently, the United Reformed Church has three mission partners, all serving through the Council for World Mission (CWM). Alison Gibbs is in the final stage of her service as head teacher of Mwenzo Girls' School in Northern Zambia and will finish in 2015. Philip Woods is working on the executive staff of CWM. The ministry of the Taiwanese chaplain in Manchester, the Revd Chung Shou-Hui, was reviewed during 2013. She was commended for her excellent work among the Taiwanese and Mandarin speaking students there and for her support of the growing Taiwanese Fellowship in London, based at Lumen United Reformed Church. In both places there is outreach to the wider Taiwanese student community. How the work will develop and be supported in both centres is currently under discussion.

Global partnerships

9.7 The United Reformed Church continues to play its part in the Council for World Mission (CWM), both globally and in the European Region. In June 2013 the National Synod of Scotland hosted the CWM Council meeting, which brought delegates from all the CWM member churches to Scotland. The meeting coincided with the bicentenary of the birth of David Livingstone and the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar delivered the keynote address.

9.8 The World Council of Churches' General Assembly was held in Busan, South Korea, from 29 October to 9 November 2013. This unique gathering happens every seven (now to be eight) years. It carries forward the ecumenical and mission agenda of the Churches and met around the theme "God of Life, lead us to justice and peace". The United Reformed Church was represented by Michael Jagessar and Sarah Moore with David Tatem as ecumenical adviser. Statements and documents from the Assembly are now being received in various ways within the Church and in conjunction with ecumenical partners.

9.9 As well as facilitating a United Reformed Church presence at a number of international assemblies, we were able to send representatives to the synod or assembly of a number of partner churches. These included in the Church of the Palatinate (Germany), the Waldensian Church (Italy), the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, and the Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China. A particular highlight was the Uniting Assembly of the United Protestant Church of France.

Hospitality and diversity

9.10 There are 50 united denominations around the globe, encompassing a great diversity of histories and contemporary expressions. There is a particular sense of kinship among the united/uniting churches of Canada, the US, Australia and the UK. They share a common story of courageous union in a time of ecumenical enthusiasm which has now waned. Each expected to give up its life into further unions and has had to make the transition to being a denomination. Each struggles to project an identity because all are broad churches which instinctively play down their distinctiveness. And each struggles with the challenges of secularism in the surrounding culture. In February 2013, the general secretaries of these four Churches met together in Toronto, accompanied by their ecumenical/world church officers. The conversation was lively and the sense of mutual support was profound. There has been an exchange of resources, including Australia's excellent website of new hymns and songs (www.songsthatunite.org.au). The United Reformed Church has offered to host a conference in 2015 bringing together theologians, artists and liturgists around the theme of hospitality and diversity.

10. Conclusion

10.1 Our engaging in mission as a whole church can look like a lot of meetings, conferences, consultations, projects and papers. But in the mission department we believe that our greatest resource for mission is people, their passion for the Gospel and God given gifts for sharing it. And so, whether the agenda is ecumenical, intercultural or international, about health and well-being or poverty, the church in the city or rural setting or the fresh expression, or enabling campaigns for justice, we give thanks for the ways in which people are brought together engaging in the mission of the whole Church, forming growing networks and listening to each other's insights on the challenge of being followers of Jesus, in churches, in mission.

10.2 The mission committee's report is offered with thanks to the staff of the mission team and the networks of representatives, enablers and advocates who are part of the development and communication of our identity as a Church committed to broad, outward-looking and varied mission. Thanks too to the many local churches, who share their inspiring stories so that we might all be encouraged.

10.3 On behalf of the whole Church we would like to record our appreciation of Frank Kantor, secretary for church and society, and Graham Jones, rural officer, who have moved to new posts since the last Assembly. We thank them for the excellent contribution they have made on behalf of the United Reformed Church.

Pastoral reference and welfare committee

The committee considers the cases of ministers and church related community workers which are referred to it by officers or councils of the Church when there is perceived pastoral need. Such response may be needed:

a. when synod moderators or synod pastoral committees seek assistance in their pastoral care of ministers, church related community workers (CRCWs) and congregations;
b. when there is a breakdown in relationship between the minister and congregation or the wider Church which, for whatever reason, does not fall within the pastoral care of the synod moderator or the synod pastoral committee;
c. when the continuation of a minister's or CRCW's service within the United Reformed Church is in question;
d. when financial assistance is sought from welfare funds.

Committee members:
Convener: Sheila Maxey
Members: Richard Mortimer (secretary until June 2013), Howard Sharp (secretary from June 2013), Irene Wren (minute secretary from June 2013), Gabrielle Pagan, Clare Downing (from July 2013), Douglas Hay (from July 2013).

1. Pastoral reference work

1.1 We continue to commend the work of the churches' ministerial counselling service from which ministers – in active service, in training or in retirement – and their families can receive completely confidential support. The cost of this service to the United Reformed Church between Assembly 2012 and 31 December 2013 has been £6,351.00.

1.2 We have responded to the various individual cases of the past two years in a variety of ways depending on the nature of the cases and the issues involved, sometimes drawing on the wisdom and experience of others, sometimes using committee members. Although the committee only meets three times a year, members have been called upon, on occasion, to make home visits. Committee conference calls have also been held on occasion between meetings in order to respond to urgent matters.

1.3 General Assembly 2012, in resolution 38, requested the committee to liaise with the Assembly commission members in initiating a process of reconciliation both personal and collective. Considerable time and effort has been expended on this matter.

1.4 Since the disbanding of the sexual ethics advisory group the committee has been responsible for ensuring that there are two named people in each synod to act as advisers in cases of sexual misconduct within a church community.

1.5 The relationship between the committee's pastoral work and that of the synod moderators is very important and so the presence, at the moment, of two of the synod moderators on the committee has proved very helpful.

2. Welfare grants

2.1 A letter explaining the nature of these funds is sent annually to all ministers and CRCWs with their payslips. New ministers and CRCWs receive that letter with their first payslip. There are dedicated educational and welfare funds and we make

Pastoral reference and welfare

disbursements totalling in the region of £70,000 per annum. This exceeds the income from the dedicated welfare funds so typically at least £10,000 p.a. of this total is provided from the ministry and mission fund.

2.2 The committee would like to pay tribute to the invaluable work which Judy Stockings, the senior finance officer, has done for the committee over the years. She has guided the committee through the complications of the welfare grants with clarity and a pastoral heart.

Church changes

Balcombe Free Church

Balcombe Free Church was founded in the 1850's as the village Congregational chapel. In 1896 the former Tintern Abbey tearooms building was bought by one Thomas Wells of Lindfield. Mr Wells was a staunch nonconformist and the first chairman of Lindfield Parish Council.

The building was transported all the way to Balcombe and re-erected on the present central village site, which had also been purchased by Mr Wells. This flimsy building with its corrugated iron roof remained in existence for about one hundred years. It must at least have had firm foundations. It survived the 1987 hurricane unscathed, not to mention generations of children playing riotous games. A brick front was added in 1968 which may have helped to hold the building together and certainly gave it a facelift.

Eventually, however, the old building was demolished, and the present new building was officially opened in September 1996, offering a place of worship and used regularly by village organisations.

In 1972 the church became a congregation of the United Reformed Church. Over the years it has been linked with various congregations: Christ Church, Pound Hill (now Crawley URC) in the 1960-80's, then Moat, East Grinstead, and finally Lindfield URC from 2001 (renewing the earlier Lindfield connection).

More recently the congregation became small numerically, and after much prayerful consideration it was concluded that the work and witness of Balcombe Free Church as currently constituted was complete. A closing service of thanksgiving was held on 8 July 2012.

Bloomsbury United Reformed Church Centre Mission Project

In 1959 Saltley Congregational Church moved into a new purpose-built church on the Bloomsbury Estate in the Nechells area of inner city Birmingham. In 1979 they were joined by the members of the former Presbyterian church to form a congregation with 22 members. After what members described as a 'decade of disinterest' from the wider United Reformed Church, ministry was provided from 1987 to 1989. In 1989 a CRCW post was established and greatly valued by local residents and other community agencies. Activities for the community grew within the project but there was a decline in the congregation and the church asked its district council to consider establishing a mission project based in the Oliver Street premises.

The three aims of the mission project were to offer spiritual direction and pastoral care to local residents, to develop groups for fellowship and worship, to work with local residents, and to offer advice and support to other groups within the Nechells area, which suffered from high deprivation. Two successful achievements of the project were Noah's Ark playgroup and a nearly new shop. The former provided much needed facilities for pre-school children. The latter was a place where members of the local community, many of whom lived on their own, could meet and socialise. Despite difficulties the project was a genuine and thoughtful attempt of creative engagement which, with the church, gave over 50 years of faithful service and witness.

Bromsgrove United Reformed Church

The church in Chapel Street, Bromsgrove held its final service on 9 June 2013. This was a sad occasion but also a celebration of over 340 years of Christian witness in a small market town.

Independents had worshipped on the site since 1672 and the first stone meeting house was erected in 1693. The current building was erected in 1832 and cost £1200 with seating for 420. It had a small graveyard, the last burial being that of the Revd Thomas Ashwell (the first full time minister) in 1860. In 1852 the elders were able to authorise the building of a schoolroom which was later used as the church hall. Both buildings were grade II listed. The church was unique to the area of Bromsgrove, built in a Grecian style with Doric columns either side of the main door and a simple, tranquil interior.

The church struggled in more recent years with falling numbers and consequent declining income. For many years the hall was used for church activities and by local interest groups and charities, including the Royal British Legion's annual poppy day. Members took an active part in the events of the local Churches Together in Bromsgrove. The last minister was the Revd Gerald England who was shared with Baxter United Reformed Church, Kidderminster on a quarter scoping. The support of many lay preachers and retired ministers was necessary and much appreciated for the continuance of weekly services.

Brownshill Green United Reformed Church

Around 1880 Vicar Lane young men's Bible class commenced a Sunday school and evening service in a cottage at Brownshill Green, Coventry. In 1883 a suitable plot of land was purchased. By 1887 with an average of 40 to 60 persons meeting each week it was considered that the cottage was inadequate and the Coventry Standard newspaper noted the Bible class's suggestion of celebrating the Queen's diamond jubilee by erecting a mission chapel at Brownshill Green at an estimated cost of £200. A vestry and kitchen were added to the rear of the building in 1898.

Pastoral oversight for the mission chapel was provided from the Warwick Road church into the 20th century. A significant change came in December 1954 when the Revd A.W. Lyde was inducted to the joint Congregational churches of Keresley and Brownshill Green. In 1955 a meeting agreed the recognition of Brownshill Green as a separate church and a service of recognition was held in 1958.

The numbers of children attending Sunday school increased considerably after the Second World War, occasioning a project to build a church hall at a cost of £4,500. This was opened in 1964. Pastoral oversight continued with Mr Lyde and in 1979 the church was grouped with other churches to provide shared stipendiary ministry. With reductions in numbers, the Sunday school closed in 1998 and the church in March 2014, bringing an end to the 126 years of endeavour to maintain a witness to God at Brownshill Green.

Clayton United Reformed Church

Opened in 1952, the Congregational church on Stafford Avenue, Clayton quickly became a hub for community life. Church membership strengthened, most notably in the 1980s when the remaining members from Trinity, Hanley transferred to Clayton, enabling further premises to be built for community activities and the sanctuary to be made more comfortable.

The building remained well used throughout the church's sixty year history. A thriving company of scouts made their home there, transforming the sanctuary every other year into a theatre for their award-winning gang show.

However, with an ageing and declining membership, and with office-holders increasingly burdened with health concerns, the situation looked bleak. Finances were also running low. People feared for the future.

In a prophetic report to the AGM in March 2012, the church secretary, Mr J. Stephen Jones, noted that, 'Twenty-six years ago, a stronger fellowship closed its church doors and along with its minister moved to Clayton—Trinity URC, Hanley. This transformed our church. Could it happen again?'

At Easter 2012, the church was approached by Newcastle Baptist Church, a strong fellowship which had outgrown their premises. Following discussions, the elders and church meeting decided unanimously to open negotiations with the Baptists which led to the decision to close and sell the building to them. Now the church at Stafford Avenue continues, going from strength to strength, under a Baptist banner rather than a United Reformed one.

Dumfries United Reformed Church

The congregation which was to become Irving Street, Dumfries was formed around 1805, following a period in 1801 when James Haldane preached for four months in the town. Two congregations grew in the town, and Irving Street united with the church in Waterloo place in 1917.

The Dumfries Church had a continuous succession of ministry almost to the time of its closure, including two who went on to distinguished service in theological education. It was never large, but it was highly thought of in the town – particularly in ecumenical activity. Over the years, imaginative adaptation of the building allowed a number of links with the community to flourish.

But certainly its greatest strength through almost two centuries was in a committed and faithful membership, particularly noted for their outward looking attitude, mirrored by a strong sense of family identity. Particularly in the decades following the Second World War, Irving Street Congregational Church was a joy to be part of. We remember its life with pride and gratitude.

Evington Road United Church, Leicester

Worship began in 11909 in a modest corrugated iron structure. The present building opened in 1927 and was regarded by many as the Churches of Christ cathedral. For some time the church resisted the appointment of elders to support their minister. Finally in 1970 the church agreed to elect three elders, ordained for life to Word and sacrament. The congregation was active in church planting and the support of other churches in the area by sending members to add to their numbers. They also received members as other churches chose to amalgamate with them.

In 1981 the church joined the United Reformed Church. In 2007 they joined in a local ecumenical partnership with Anglican and Methodist neighbours to form the Valley Church, which then became part of the URC East Leicester Fellowship. With a declining congregation and the changing character of the district the ageing membership found themselves out of their comfort zone. Nevertheless, the church worked with the Evington Road neighbourhood association, local council members and the police to host an open youth group of up to 114 members, catering for the ethnic minority groups in the area. Investigations were held with 'One Church 100 Uses' to create a URC community centre, but understandably the elderly members felt they could better support churches nearer their respective homes. The final service was held in April 2013. The church building will continue to serve as a community centre under the care of a local Muslim association.

Grindon United Reformed Church and Grindon Church Community Centre

Grindon church's building is situated in Galway Road on the Grindon estate in Sunderland. The church was opened as a Congregational church in 1956.

From 2003 until 2013 the church has hosted the Grindon church and community project (GCCP) and Helen Stephenson as church related community worker has led the project for those ten years. In that time the project has established a community garden, supported a well attended 'messy church', and provided accommodation for a number of community groups, including a youth group with over a hundred names on the books and a parents and toddlers group.

Helen has now moved on to another CRCW post in Sunderland. Nevertheless the question may be asked, why close? Well, the church has just three members which is not sustainable as church in the normal sense of the word. It is intended that at closure the church will become a mission project under the care of the Northern Synod, the building will continue to be a place of worship, and GCCP will continue as a charitable incorporated organisation. It is not so much closure as a new beginning.

Leigh United Reformed Church

Historically, Leigh United Reformed Church was known for its thriving choir and Sunday school. Uniformed organisations met within its walls and parade services were held regularly. In its latter years the church building was shared with a local well known dance group and this enabled further links with the community. Regular coffee mornings became a popular meeting place for many local people. Another church, St John's Apostolic Church of the Whole World, were invited to share the building. The church looked outwards as it shared ministry with the local Baptist church for five years and developed a twinning arrangement with the Mzilikazi United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

By July 2011 the church buildings were deemed unfit for public worship. The congregation joined the worshipping life of Kingsleigh Methodist Church and talks toward a local ecumenical partnership were actively pursued. However, a sad and honest decision was taken that it was time for the church to close.

Its mission continued through significant financial gifts to Commitment for Life, the twin church in Bulawayo, Kingsleigh Methodist Church, the ministers' pension fund and sponsorship of a child's education. Many members of Kingsleigh Methodist Church shared in the closing service and it has been encouraging to see the witness continuing as former members of Leigh URC take up membership within the Methodist Church.

Lenham United Reformed Church

The Independent Church was begun in Lenham in 1662 by the former village vicar, the Revd Thomas Shewell. There are no further records until 1784, when a Mrs Albect from Devonshire came to live in nearby Harrietsham and by her zeal awakened people to faith. As a result the chapel building was erected in 1784 on the Maidstone Road leading off from the village square. The faithful proclamation of the Gospel led the substantial congregation, in 1824, to rebuild the church in order to hold 500 people. The church was named Ebenezer Chapel, Ebenezer meaning 'the stone of help'.

On 31 May 1940 at 5:15am the building and hall were destroyed by a bomb falling from one of nine Albacore aeroplanes returning to their base at Detling from a raid on Nieuport Harbour in Belgium. A rebuilt church was commissioned in 1952.

In recent years Lenham URC took part in a special category ministry project which introduced cell church principles. After the retirement of the minister concerned the members decided to leave the URC and become an independent congregation attached to Jubilee Church in Maidstone, a large church organised on the cell church model. The final service of Lenham United Reformed Church took place at in June 2012. It was a service of thanksgiving for the heritage of 350 years and of prayer for the congregation as it took on a new identity continuing to bear witness to the Gospel within the village.

Moor End United Reformed Church, Mixenden, Halifax

Moor End United Reformed Church was founded in 1688 when a chapel was built on the west side of Mixenden in response to legal changes to permit nonconformity. In 1717 the minister, the Revd Matthew Smith, paid for and built a new chapel measuring twelve yards by ten yards on his own land at Hill End (now Moor End). The old chapel was converted into cottages.

In 1783 the Revd Daniel Jones came from Wales and stayed for more than eight years, leaving in March I791. The entry in the chapel book reports, 'He returned to Wales, and it is hoped, declined the Ministry: for he was a disgrace to it. He might preach up virtue: but he practised vice.' Jones became known as the 'drunken priest' as he was often intoxicated in the pulpit. The congregation was frequently left singing while he ran to Sandyfore to fetch his forgotten sermon.

Others left a better legacy. In 1842 Mr Isaac Brierley of Rochdale was invited to become pastor and under his ministry the Sunday school increased to such an extent that it was decided to convert the building to double its size. In 1958 the Sunday school had 100 children on the register with ten teachers.

The church celebrated its 300th anniversary in 1988 with a service led by the Revd Donald Hilton, moderator of the Yorkshire Province. The final service was held in October 2012.

Pollokshields United Reformed Church, Glasgow

The Congregational church was founded in October 1899, the first services being held in the Pollokshields Burgh Hall prior to the opening of the newly-built church property in Fotheringay Road, in April 1903. Throughout the twentieth century, faithful members and energetic leaders served the local community, establishing the church as the 'village' church in the south-side inner suburb of the city of Glasgow, attracting to its ministry some pastors of stature, and admired and respected by the churches of the other Christian denominations within the district. For much of this time, Pollokshields Congregational/URC punched above its weight, contributing presidents and treasurers to the Congregational Union of Scotland and co-founding and leading the local ecumenical council, Pollokshields Churches Together.

Acknowledging the declining numbers and age profile of its members, the congregation sold its property to the trustees of Hutchesons' Grammar School, who preserved, extended and sensitively modernised the buildings as an integral part of the school. Thereafter the congregation enjoyed a further decade of burden-free worship and full week-end use of the facilities before disbanding with dignity at the end of 2009. The trustees continued the church's support of various youth projects in the community until the final closure in April 2013.

Rushall House Group

The new Congregational church building in Station Road, Rushall proudly opened its doors in 1861 and closed them in 1974, with a dwindling congregation and no money to pay for a new roof. But the church, as the body of God's people, remained active in the homes of its members for a further forty years, finally ceasing to meet in 2013.

The founder, Alfred Stanley, went among the local men – mostly pitmen, lime burners and boat builders -- with religious tracts, reasoned discussion and understanding. Within a year, 130 people were meeting in a house church in Stanley's rented home and a church was under construction. Many had contributed financially. One man offered two loads of sand, another 5000 bricks.

By the late 1960's, the church building had become badly neglected and a lot of the older members had died, with the congregation sometimes down to a dozen. There was talk of a new road to Walsall being constructed, and the local council agreed to buy the land on which the church stood for £25,000. With the building demolished, it was decided that the church would meet in members' homes, on a rota, as it had begun. Rushall had again become a house church. The first such meeting was in July 1972.

The three remaining church members still plan to travel to meet twice a year.

Salford Central Mission and MediaCity Church

Salford Central Mission was created to transform the local community in the name of Christ. As the docks grew, so did the spiritual and physical needs of those in the area. In 1907 the mission was officially opened in a landmark building to serve the Salford dock community. The mission thrived for much of the first half of the 20th century and had a significant impact on the locality. Changes in church attendance and lifestyle patterns in the latter half of the century meant that the faithful but dwindling congregation struggled with the upkeep of the building and delivery of the vision. They began to explore ways of continuing within a new partnership with the Oasis Trust. Due to differences in style many of the members left to go to other churches. At this point Salford Central Mission really ceased to exist as a congregation.

Today, the Oasis church leader has started a new congregation in the academy school built on the land previously occupied by the church. Alongside this the United Reformed Church has committed a special category minister to work in the Ordsall and MediaCityUK areas to continue the vision that brought the church into being over one hundred years ago.

Springfield Church Centre Darlington

In 1901, the historic firm of Robert Stephenson & Co moved their railway engineering plant from Newcastle upon Tyne to the Springfield area of Darlington and, with over 1000 workers and their families, created a new community. The session of St George's Presbyterian Church Darlington felt a call to work in the area.

Worship began in the works canteen. Help then came from other sources with Bibles, books and staff. Sunday School and evening services commenced in 1903 with 34 members. A fire in 1905 destroyed everything, and for a few weeks a tent was secured, then a move to a cottage in Springfield kept the church alive. Eventually a new site was purchased and a (second hand) 'new' building opened in January 1907 in the heart of the community with 175 people.

This 'tin hut' served the community well for the next 100 years under the oversight of St George's (now Northgate URC), although it was virtually self supporting.

Its strengths were in children's and youth work with a strong Sunday school and uniformed organizations. It was also used as a community hall.

Recently numbers dwindled and it was decided to look at other options. In December 2008 construction started on what is now a purpose built home for the Salvation Army in Darlington. During the period of the build both denominations shared Northgate URC premises and bonds of friendship were further strengthened, continuing to this day.

St John's United Reformed Church, Kenton

The church was opened for worship as a Presbyterian Church in November 1930, effectively planted by what is now Trinity Church Harrow. Three years after the opening the membership was 259 with a large Sunday school and a Bible class for young adults. The early congregation had a large proportion of Scottish people and enjoyed links with the Harrow and District Caledonian Society which lasted throughout its history.

By 1954 there were over 400 members and 420 boys and girls in the junior church. The church continued to serve the community over the years with a large Guide company, a Scout troop, three women's meetings, and other week-day activities.

As the years went on people aged, long standing and much loved members died, and key leaders moved away, leaving the church with a membership of just over 20. The year prior to closure was particularly difficult with the death of the last minister, the Revd. Kathy Wilson, seeming to mark a point of no return.

After extensive consultation a decision was made to close and disperse to other churches. The congregation are now coming to terms with this most difficult and painful decision and are looking towards larger and livelier congregations nearby. They have been very grateful for the support they have received from the synod, in particular the ministry of the synod transitional minister. St. John's closed its doors for the last time on Advent Sunday 2013.

St Stephen's United Reformed Church, Bootle, Merseyside

St Stephen's was founded in 1928 to serve one of the first council housing estates in Bootle. When it opened it was known as Linacre Park Presbyterian Institute and the building was also used as a school. It grew rapidly and, by 1941, it had over a hundred members with more than two hundred in the Sunday School. During the war, when Bootle suffered more bomb damage than any other town of comparable size in Britain, the Home Office took it over as a first aid post. After the war, it became a preaching station. By 1972 it was a church in its own right, choosing to change its name to St. Stephen's United Reformed Church.

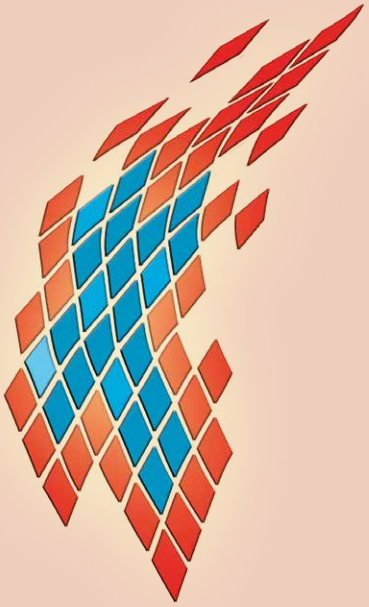
For most of its eighty-five year history, the church was served by some dedicated lay pastors and it was not until 1982 that a stipendiary minister was appointed. In the 1970's the church had a flourishing Sunday school, youth clubs, uniformed organisations and a play group. Sadly, the last few years saw a fall in the number of worshippers and, with no real prospect of growth, it was felt that the Anglicans would be better able to provide for the social and spiritual needs of the community. St. Stephen's had played a prominent part in the ecumenical life of Bootle and given support to many charitable organisations. It will continue to be a place of worship, housing an Anglican congregation whose church had to be demolished.

Tranmere United Reformed Church

With the encouragement of the minister and deacons of the Rock Ferry Congregational Church, two cottages were rented in Rose Place off Union Street, where a Sunday school was formed and adult meetings commenced. As numbers grew the committee responsible purchased a building site on the corner of Randel Street and Peel Street. Funds were then raised and eventually the Mission Hall was built. Services commenced during September 1881.

During the next ten years Tranmere district expanded and the demands of the growing population gave an incentive to consider the possibility of building a church in Old Chester Road. In 1899 the site of the present church was purchased and building commenced in 1900. The new church seated 560 and cost £3,081. The church was opened in May 1901.

In the early 1980's falling numbers meant that Tranmere United Reformed Church was reduced to part time ministry. Many of the stalwarts had died leaving the work of the church to fewer people. At the beginning of 2013 it was decided at a church meeting we could continue no longer. The majority of the Tranmere members have moved within the East Wirral Team to Highfield United Reformed Church where their roots began.



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United Reformed Church history society

1. Since last reporting the society has continued to fulfil its objects of encouraging interest in and study of the history of the United Reformed Church and its antecedent traditions and related movements. Four issues of the journal have been published, the annual lecture was given in London (2012) and Northumberland (2013), and work on the organisation of historical records has continued. The Council co-operates with other similar societies through the Religious Archives Group and the Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries in order to raise general public awareness of the minority Christian traditions in England and Wales.

2. The 2013 study conference went to Shepherds Dene, the retreat house for the dioceses of Newcastle and Durham, an attractive residence in the arts and crafts tradition at Riding Mill. The warden, George Hepburn, provided hospitality of a high standard, and was able to join members in some of the sessions. The Revd Elizabeth Brown and the moderator of the General Assembly, John Ellis, shared responsibility for worship.

3. To mark the centenary of the founding of the Presbyterian Historical Society, it was appropriate that the annual lecture, a fascinating account of 'Presbytery in Northumberland: three hundred years of dissent', should have been given by a former clerk to the General Assembly, the Revd James Breslin, who has spent much of his ministerial career in the county. An opportunity to explore the terrain was organised with the assistance of the Revd Ron Forster. The tour began at Kirkharle parish church, from where Robert Blunt was ejected, before a visit to the URC at Great Bavington, the origins of which certainly precede its official registration as a meeting house in 1693. Hexham Abbey provided the last point of call.

4. The programme included papers on the Christian world, John Penry, URC local pastors, ecumenical diplomacy in the aftermath of the Great War, alcohol and the churches, and an examination of what constitute gifts and graces in synod (previously provincial) moderators. Warm appreciation was expressed for Liz Brown's secretarial contributions since 1996, as she retired from post at the Annual Meeting. Margaret Thompson will combine the roles of administrative and membership secretaries in future.

5. One issue raised at the annual meeting concerned the wider United Reformed Church, in that any decision to discontinue the Yearbook would almost certainly end the custom, inherited from all the constituent denominations, of providing obituaries of ministers and other prominent members. Another discussion focussed on attracting a larger audience to study days and weekends by looking to organise mid-week meetings, these to be in the spring rather than the autumn.

6. The new editor of the journal, (in succession to Professor Clyde Binfield), is the Revd Dr Robert Pope. He has produced one thematic issue, drawing together a number of contributions where 1662 provided the significant date. Other articles have addressed issues to do with hymnology, theology, scandal in the ministry and an examination of addresses from the chair of the Congregational Union/Congregational Church in the period 1940-72. Dr Pope has also edited the T & T Clark Companion to Nonconformity and is to be congratulated on a wide ranging volume, to which a number of Society members, past and present, have contributed.

7. Mrs Helen Weller, archivist at Westminster College, continued her supervision of the society's collections. The main task, as a consequence of the College's redevelopment, has been to pack archives and papers for transfer to Churchill College for safekeeping for the duration of the work. Arrangements were made in good time

to identify books and other resources required by scholars already at work. In addition, Mrs Weller has retained key material in her office, and is able to give guidance on sources and what material is available for consultation. She can be contacted every morning except Tuesdays by phone (01223 330620) or by email (hw374@cam.ac.uk).

8. Library purchases included the five volume edition of the minutes and papers of the Westminster Assembly 1643-1652, edited by Chad van Dixhoorn, and the Cockermouth Congregational Church Book, published by the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society. It has been possible to initiate a programme of re-binding those books most in need of new boards.

9. In line with decisions made at society and national levels, some local congregational material from the Churches of Christ archives was offered to county record offices and archive centres in London, Leicester and Cumbria. In addition, the National Records of Scotland in Edinburgh agreed to act as in the first instance as forwarding agent for material collected before the union of 1981, but with the option of retaining core records.

10. The Marquis Fund, to further the study and publication of Nonconformist history, is administered by the society and representatives of Westminster College. Grants may be made to scholars of any denominational affiliation or none, if the criteria are satisfied. Application should be made to the treasurer, using the College address. In the course of the year copies of works were received, where assistance had been provided from the Fund.

11. The standard subscription rate for membership is £18. For all enquiries about society membership, including a 25% reduction for students and newly retired ministers, Mrs Margaret Thompson may be consulted either by email (mt212@cam.ac.uk) or via Westminster College. Gift aid declarations continue to make a valuable contribution to general finances.

URC musicians' guild

1. 2013 was not an easy year for the URC musicians' guild. For several years now, the guild has been aware that its membership is declining, bringing challenges to the way in which it sees its future. Our regional activity has shrunk to a position where only our branches in southern England organise events. Our membership is very thinly scattered throughout the synods of the URC and it seems no longer affordable or practical to expect members to travel miles to meetings.

2. So the central committee has spent many hours heart-searching:
- does the guild in its present form have a realistic future or...
- should it accept that it has had 40 good years but now is the time to shut up shop and let others take on a new musical mantle or...
- should it restructure and if so how...
- does the URC want a musical organisation and if so...
- how should it be promoting good music for worship and...
- who will help?

3. The guild believes it must have a future, but it has to have more focused objectives and different ways of making these happen throughout all the synods of the URC, with the help of all those who think as we do – that music in all its most wonderful forms can bring people to God in a way that other aspects of Christian worship may not. Our revival is still a 'work in progress' but by the time you read this, we will be well on the way to deciding where we want to be and, hopefully, who will help us get there.

4. We would like to be known as URCMusic.

5. *Anyone* who enjoys music in their local church, whether it be traditional, modern, multi-cultural or a mixture of all those (and that should include *everyone* !) should be interested in how URCMusic can help them. Or perhaps you will know someone who can help URCMusic be the organisation that is central to the way in which we make music in the United Reformed Church for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. If *you* can help URCMusic in any way, please do not hesitate to get in touch with our secretary, Mrs Chris James, via Church House or by emailing secretary@urcmusic.org.uk

Schools relating to the URC

Bournemouth Collegiate School

1. Bournemouth Collegiate School has enjoyed a successful time from April 2012 to December 2013. The school numbers remain buoyant and strong, which is pleasing given our strong and excessive local mainstream and independent school competition and the economic climate which really only hit the Bournemouth and Poole areas in the last 12 months (always delayed along the south coast). Most pleasing has been the increase in numbers in year 12. However, the school is still challenged by having to offer considerable financial support to many parents.

2. The school has strengthened and significantly enhanced our position and quality of output regarding pupil tracking and academic monitoring (with mentoring), the range of performing arts productions and events, sports academy success (international and national), visual and creative arts and photography, and musical repertoire and opportunities.

3. In addition, the school's staff team (support staff and teaching staff) has been significantly strengthened through the additions of new staff and more staff posts, the appointments of some outstanding staff and a focused continuing professional development programme for all.

4. The school belongs to the United Learning group and continues to be supported well by them.

5. There are numerous challenges for BCS to address. The local schools have all increased the numbers on their rolls and places available, with the result that we have a very mixed, and in some year groups, weak academic clientele. An increasing number of parents are experiencing financial pressures. Our senior school has very old and in some cases very poor facilities and this is hampering recruitment. Its lack of suitable teaching spaces is adversely impacting on teaching and learning. Like all schools, we must contend with the constant meddling in education by the authorities and the changes to GCSE's and A level requirements. We also need more members with appropriate expertise and skills on our local governing body.

6. In conclusion, I can report a happy school that is unrecognisable from the one four years ago. We remain proud our pupils' achievements and successes, and we intend to set the bar even higher to the next academic year.

Caterham School

1. I am pleased to report that, once again, the past year has been very successful.

2. In academic terms we had our best ever year for GCSE results with every record broken:

A*48%	
A*-A	78%
A*-B	95%
A*-C	99.5%

3. We also had some excellent A level results. The raw data did not match last year but they represent a significant result for each student with many achieving personal bests:

A*22%	
A*-A	62%
A*-B	88%
A*-C	97%

4. This year we have a record number of pupils on the senior school roll (879). We have record number of applications for both day and boarding places, which bodes well for the future.

5. The school maintains its commitment to holistic education, with a strong focus on what happens outside the classroom.

Home Field with Old Park Woods

6. A notable and extremely positive development for the school is our recent purchase of Old Park Woods and Gravelly Hill Woods. As the Headmaster, Julian Thomas, states: 'This is a truly significant moment in the school's 202 year history'. For those not wholly familiar with the area, the photograph shows Home Field with Old Park Woods in the background. As you will see, the woodland is contiguous with the school's boundary. Its purchase takes the overall size of the school's campus to over 200 acres. The school is committed to a programme of inspirational learning outside, as well as inside, the classroom. We want students to be inspired by their surroundings and to learn both the delight and value of being outside. We have recently completed our new outdoor learning area which includes a high-ropes course, climbing tower and outdoor classroom (see photographs below). This acquisition will allow us to develop our programme of outdoor activities for students even further.

7. There have been some terrific achievements in school sport, too, although the heavy rain during the summer term hampered many of the school's Saturday cricket fixtures. A new director of rugby, Dan Richards, was appointed for the start of the autumn term and he is already making a positive impact on all the rugby teams. It has also been an extremely successful term for our lacrosse teams. Netball continues to be very popular, demonstrated by a successful tour of Dubai which took place in the autumn half-term break. There continues to be an extensive range of around 60 clubs and societies for pupils to enjoy during break times and after school.

8. The school's proud tradition of charitable activity continues with a wide range of events organised to support the school's main charities, which are schools in Tanzania, India and Ukraine. The school's charity committee, made up of Caterham sixth formers, plans all events and last year broke all previous records by raising nearly £20,000 during the academic year 2012-13. A wide range of local and national charities is supported as well.

9. The 2013 summer term ended on a high with Gyles Brandreth visiting us as our guest speaker on speech day. The head master was recently delighted to announce that the speaker at the next speech day will be none other than Brian Blessed!

Eltham College

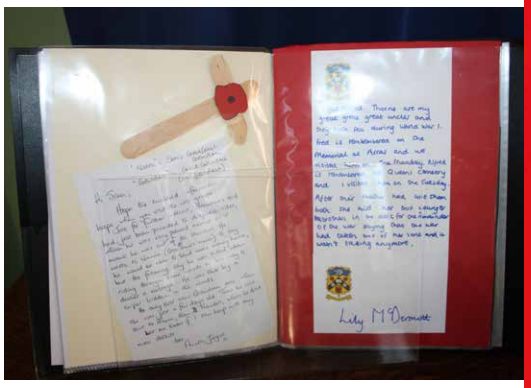
1. In 2012 Eltham College celebrated the centenary of its move from Blackheath to Mottingham. We recreated this event with a charity run from Blackheath to Mottingham involving pupils, staff and parents, raising funds for a local children's hospice. A centenary dinner with an invited audience heard Lord Puttnam remind us of the importance of Eric Liddell to the world, not just Eltham College, where he was a pupil one hundred years ago. With 2012 being an Olympic year in London, the memory of Eric Liddell was very much to the fore both at Eltham College and on the television. There were three television programmes which involved the retelling of Eric's great achievements in the Paris Olympics and his subsequent missionary work in China. The *Real Chariots of Fire* programme used pupils from Eltham to recreate and discuss the Paris Olympics and Eric's legacy at the school. *Songs of Praise* from the Old Naval Chapel in Greenwich used Eltham's trebles for most of the hymns. Finally, BBC Scotland came and filmed Eric's eldest daughter, Patricia, whom we had brought over from Canada to hand out the prizes at our annual sports day. There were even events which recalled the style of races and prizes distributed in 1912 (eg the Businessman's Race, and a set of crayons!) Patricia Liddell then formally opened our refurbished sports pavilion which was used one month later as an official training ground for the Olympic football tournament, with both Mexico (men) and the USA (women) training there before winning the gold medals. We were also delighted to have a former pupil, Jack Oliver, competing in the weightlifting competition in London – the first pupil to have been at the Olympics since Eric Liddell.

2. The autumn term included performances of drama relating to 1912. Our annual carol service moved from the school chapel to Southwark Cathedral so that two services could be held, accommodating the whole school in the afternoon, and many parents and former pupils were present in the evening. The moderator of the Southern Synod of the United Reformed Church, the Rev'd Nicola Furley-Smith, was present at these services.

3. Throughout the past two years, at the request of Old Elthamians, the school has been trying to recall the efforts of our founding fathers in relation to the School for the Sons of Missionaries (our former name) by supporting a school in Tanzania. Kisasa Secondary School in Dodoma, the capitol city of Tanzania, is run by the state but has been in need of support for some time. Eltham College pupils visit the school over the October half-terms and take part in lessons helping the local children with English, sport and drama. A member of staff, Mrs Elaine Galloway, has spent two years working in the school teaching physics and English. She was joined by a series of former pupils who have spent up to six months teaching science and English, two key subjects at the school. Monies have been raised at Eltham College to help build extra classrooms, a toilet block for girls, a sports field and a library, as well as paying for a librarian who opens the facility on Saturdays. We are delighted that our support has been welcomed with open arms. More pupils now want to attend the school and we are hopeful that their academic achievements will rise over the next few years.

4. A similar project took place in Borneo in 2013, with a group of pupils led by the headmaster. They not only visited an orang-utan sanctuary but also spent four days in a village in the 'Corridor of Life' region helping the construction of two water towers and paying for tow tanks to provide clean water to the local villagers. The concept of ensuring that our pupils remain aware of the needs of others remains alive at Eltham College one hundred years on from Eric Liddell's time.

Silcoates School



1. As 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War we, like many others, have turned our attention to a fitting commemoration of the events that marked our school and country all those years ago. With no living witnesses of the conflict we must try to build on the memories left to us to help a new generation understand the importance of the 'war to end all wars'. In our chapel, our roll of honour furnishes us with the names of the fallen, our school having had an above average number of deaths in service during that war.

2. We have been following that train of names in our recent journeys with year 11 students to the battlefields of northern France and Belgium, piecing together the stories of these Old Silcoatians, amongst so many others. Our A level theatre studies students have also taken these names as a starting point for their final examination piece which is to be called 'The Silcoates Pals'. Our junior school made for us a field of remembrance last Remembrance Day and we aim to have a wall of remembrance for the centenary. Poppy seeds have been planted in our grounds which we hope will flower this summer. Alongside these thoughts and plans we continue to support a number of charities including the Royal British Legion poppy appeal.

3. Our charity work is one of our strengths as a school. After our successful Goa project at Easter 2012, we are now linked with a school in Tanzania and aim to send a group of sixth form students to visit in October 2014. We hope to improve facilities at the school and take part in daily life with the students. Our major fundraising in 2013 was for meningitis charities in memory of William Blackburn, one of our pupils, who died from meningitis in December 2012 aged 14. We continue to remember him and our efforts so far exceed £14,000.

4. Our website – www.silocoates.org.uk – continues to provide news of all our activities. Chapel resources and activities for worship and learning with children and young people have been developed by our chaplain and can be downloaded free of charge.

Taunton

1. At Taunton School, the chapel continues to be the place where we meet regularly for quiet reflection, challenge and the celebration of Christian festivals. Senior school pupils come to the chapel twice a week and the prep school children come each Wednesday.

2. Special services are held for harvest festival, to which the pupils bring gifts of food for donation to the Taunton food bank and a charity supporting homeless people in the area, Remembrance with the laying of wreaths in memory of the fallen from our school community, Christingle and Christmas. Choirs from both schools enhance our worship with their beautiful singing.

3. The Senior School marks Lent with a service of Tenebrae and both schools focus on Good Friday at the end of term. Easter is always early for the prep School – we celebrate the resurrection on the last morning of term. We end the summer term with leavers' services. The prefects put the upper sixth leavers' service together themselves and include their favourite hymns.

4. Many in the senior school, staff and pupils, have taken responsibility for leading services. We also welcome many outside speakers who show us that God can be worshipped in many different ways. A regular visitor is our jazz piano teacher, who brings his band once a term and leads the school in lively modern songs. In the last two years, we have looked at the Ten Commandments, the Lord's prayer, the story of Moses, how to use the Bible and pray, and some of the parables Jesus told. Each spring term from 2102, we have enjoyed a special day to help us understand some Christian teachings – Prayer Spaces in 2012, the Easter Experience in 2013 and the Lord's Prayer in 2014.

5. Recently the chapel choir sang the Taunton school anthem, commissioned by friends of the school from the composer Howard Goodall, and in the same service we celebrated 100 years of Wills East and Wills West, boys' boarding houses. In October 2013, we had a wonderful service in which a beautiful new stained glass window was dedicated. The window is the gift of a family which has seen five generations of its members pass through the school and depicts some of the many aspects of our vibrant community life.

6. Life is not all joy; the chapel has also too often in the last few years been the place where we have met to give thanks for the lives of young people, a current pupil and some recent leavers, whose lives ended prematurely. These sad occasions have reminded us of the eternal values which are part of our Christian ethos. School life comes to an end, human life is uncertain, but faith, hope and love continue; faith will be swallowed up in sight, hope emptied in delight, but the love of God for us is never-ending and this is the bedrock on which our school life must be built if our time here is to have lasting worth.

Walthamstow Hall

1. Greetings to the URC from Walthamstow Hall! Walthamstow Hall has had a fantastic and busy 175th Anniversary year, with a series of celebrations to mark our foundation in 1838.

2. The school is thriving in many ways: record numbers, record examination results, sporting successes and many additional events to mark our birthday. After an eventful 2012 of plans and preparation, 2013 began auspiciously with our U15 lacrosse team taking the national championships Cup in a nail biting final against Wycombe Abbey.

3. Then, in the summer term, we turned the sod on a one million pound project for a new dining hall on our junior school site. This follows the building of a new hub pupil entrance, reception and gallery space completed at senior school in 2012.

4. In the summer our year 11's achieved 45% of their GCSEs at A* with 94% at A* to B level. The upper sixth leavers hit a record 92% A*to B grades at pre-U, and a stunning average of 74% at A* and A grades. Not surprisingly, 10% of the year gained Oxbridge places, with the usual clutch of medics in addition.

5. We continue to be a school where academic excellence is valued and nurtured. These results placed us very high in all the national league tables, though we never forget that these only tell part of the story. Each girl's personal, spiritual and cultural development as a whole person remains our ultimate goal.

6. Over the summer the Ship Theatre enjoyed a total refurbishment thanks to the generosity of parents and old girls. As a result it was in fine fettle for six performances of *Guys and Dolls* this autumn term.

7. As a bonus, we recently welcomed an independent schools' inspectorate team here on inspection and await the final report.

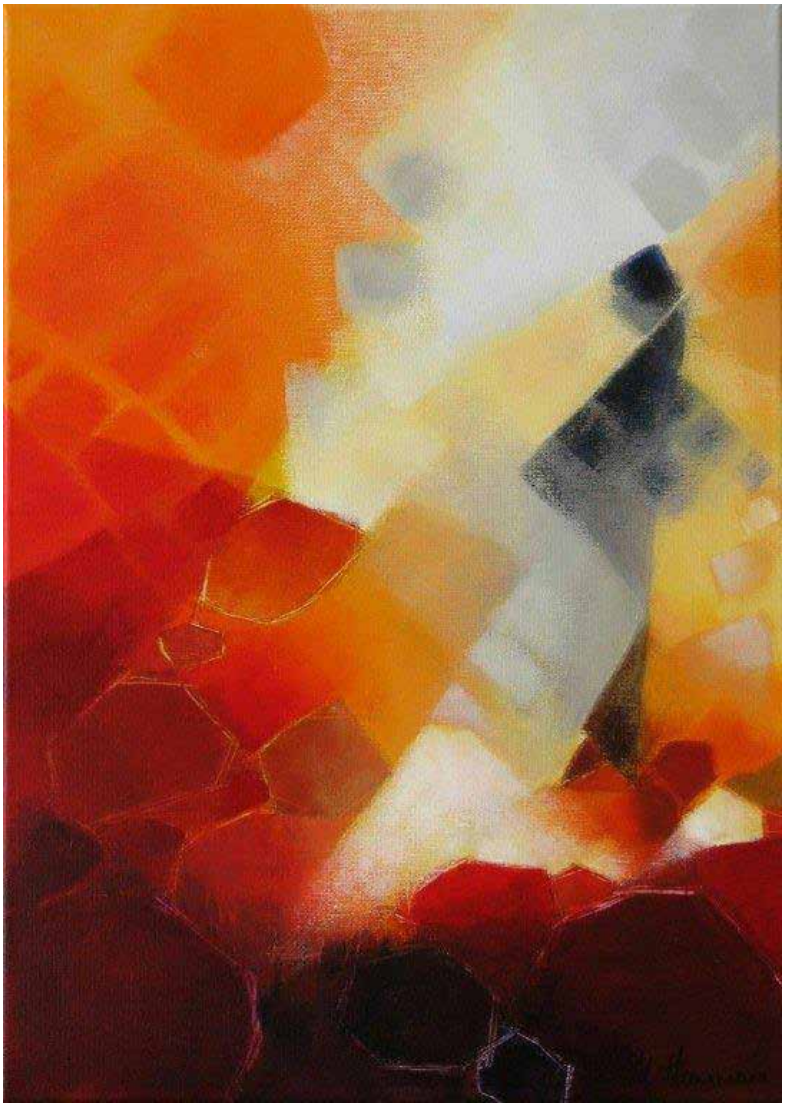
8. Through our well-established bursary scheme, including virtually 100% founders' bursaries, we continue to make a remarkable and privileged education in a Christian setting available to as many girls as possible. Long may it continue!

Women's world day of prayer, England, Wales and Northern Ireland

2013

1.1 *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* was the theme that became close to our hearts as we celebrated the annual women's world day of prayer (WWDP) service in March. Written and prepared by Christian women of France, the service challenged us to consider our own standpoint and actions towards strangers and to remember that in the words of the Talmud, *there are no strangers*; *there are only women and men we have not yet met.*

1.2 From the outset the service emphasised the importance of welcoming others into our midst, symbolised by the colours of the graphic. The reds and yellows are symbols of warmth and acceptance, while the grey gives the impression of being left out in the cold.

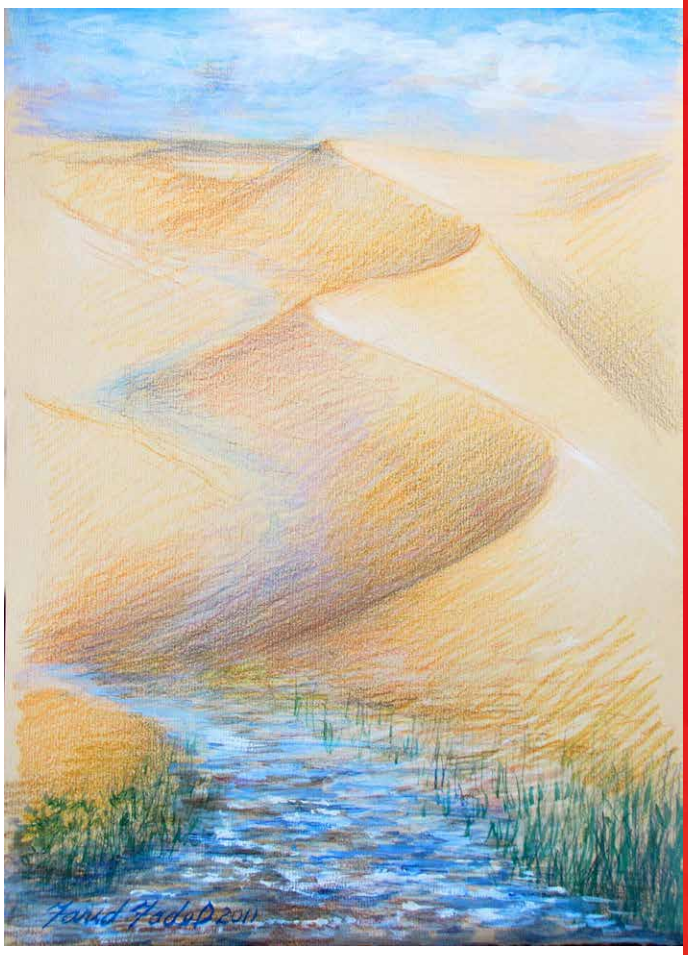


1.3 Bible verses from Leviticus 19 reminded us that we should love the stranger as ourselves. The verses were interspersed with life stories of women who had not received a warm welcome in France and were followed by prayers for forgiveness for any ways in which we may have caused hurt to those who turned to us for refuge.

1.4 The New Testament message from Matthew 25:31-40 made it clear that whenever we welcome a stranger it is Christ himself we are welcoming. Positive experiences of women who had come from other countries to live in France were shared. In prayers of intercession we committed ourselves to reaching out to strangers and to giving thanks for the richness and diversity that those coming from other countries offer to society.

1.5 During the year a national consultation was held regarding a name change for the movement in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. An overwhelming 90% said no, and at their annual general meeting in May, the national committee voted to keep the name as 'women's world day of prayer'. Feedback and comments will be taken into consideration to carry the movement forward.

2014



2.1 The theme for the 2014 day of prayer service in March is *Streams in the desert*. This has been prepared by Christian women in Egypt and the theme flows like a river through the service, with the promise of living water that never runs dry, through the Bible passages, the prayers and the hymns. The graphic, painted by an Egyptian artist, reflects Isaiah 35.7: *Waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in* the *desert.*

2.2 The Bible reading from John 4, the story of the woman of Samaria, forms the heart of the service. Through the promise of Jesus offering life-giving water we are challenged to become channels of God's living water to the world and to demonstrate the WWDP motto, 'informed prayer and prayerful action'. Pray for Egypt and the 12% of Christians who live there in their great troubles.

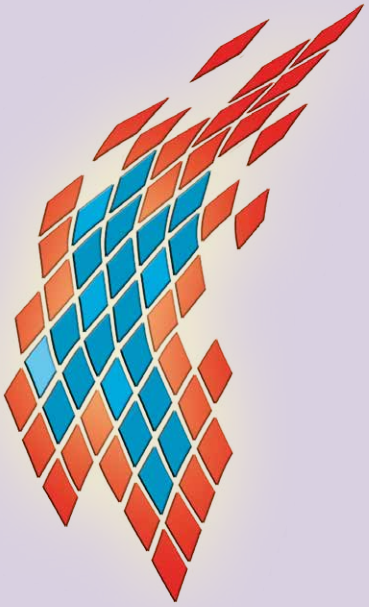
2.3 In 2014 Eileen Rhodes completes nine years as the URC representative on the national committee of WWDP and Assembly will wish to express its thanks to her. She says that it has been a life-changing experience, with many new challenges and the opportunity to meet wonderful Christian women, both nationally and internationally. She asks our prayers for her successor, Rosemary Shirley.

World day of prayer Scottish committee

1. The committee's preparations for the world day of prayer in March 2014 are now complete. The theme, *Streams in the Desert,* was prepared by Christian women in Egypt. They were continually in our thoughts and prayers as we prepared. Their hopes for democratic change in their country have sadly not materialised and many Christians have been victimised. We continue to remember them as we distribute the materials. Many of our committee have had requests to give presentations on the world day of prayer and Egypt, which we have been delighted to do.

2. Two of our committee attended the quadrennial meeting in 2012. They enjoyed contact with representatives from all over the world. It was particularly helpful to discuss issues from representatives from the UK and Eire. It was agreed that we meet up every two years and Scotland agreed to host the inaugural meeting in Edinburgh in Sept 2013. Each team gave a presentation about what they did. Discussion followed about possible areas where we could collaborate. From this we have borrowed ideas and have now prepared a joint press release ready for WDP 2014 and a meditation leaflet based on the scripture readings.

3. Two of our members will attend the European conference in Salzburg in July 2014. The committee has now started preparing the service for March 2015, planned by women in the Bahamas with the theme, *Do you know what I have done to you?* Fourteen of us attended a two-day retreat to study together and prepare for the work ahead.



Resolutions

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 1

Appointment of acting clerk to the Assembly

General Assembly appoints the Revd James Breslin as acting clerk to serve until a new clerk has been appointed.

Resolution 2

Appointment of the convener of tellers for the election of the moderators

General Assembly appoints Rita Griffuths to serve as convener of tellers for the election of the moderators 2016-18.

Resolution 3

Appointment of facilitation group leaders

General Assembly appoints AB, CD, EF to serve as facilitation group leaders, with the freedom to involve others as appropriate.

Resolution 4

Grindon Church Community Centre

General Assembly receives the Grindon Church Community Centre as a mission project of the United Reformed Church. *Proposer: Lis Mullen* *Seconder: Ron Forster*

Resolution 5

Mediacity Church (an Oasis/URC partnership)

General Assembly receives Mediacity Church as a mission project of the United Reformed Church. *Proposer:* *Seconder:*

Resolution 6

Metropolitan Church Manchester

General Assembly receives Metropolitan Church Manchester as a mission project of the United Reformed Church. *Proposer:* *Seconder:*

Resolution 7

Church changes

General Assembly receives notice of the closure of the local churches listed on pages 207 to 214 and gives thanks to God for their worship, witness and service.

page 82

Resolution 8

General Assembly 2016

Assembly resolves to meet in Southport from 8 to 11 July 2016 (Friday to Monday) or at such time and place as may be determined.

page 83

Resolution 9

Children's and youth work committee: Mental health

a) General Assembly commits the United Reformed Church to raising awareness of mental ill health issues and challenging the stigma of mental ill health, and asks the education and learning committee to ensure the adequate provision of training for those responsible for pastoral care, including ministers, in appropriate responses to mental health issues.

b) Assembly calls on synods and local churches to follow the lead of the National Synod of Scotland by committing themselves to work towards ending the stigma of mental ill health and to make links with agencies that provide support and training appropriate to their specific contexts and localities.

page 91

Resolution 10

Education and learning committee: Ministerial green shoots fund

General Assembly endorses the development of a ministerial green shoots fund for education for ministry phase 1 (EM1) students according to the provisions outlined on pages 92 to 94. This will be applicable to new students starting EM1 in September 2015.

Resolution 11

page 102

Faith and order committee: Affirming the United Reformed Church's future

a) General Assembly, affirming the United Reformed Church's identity as both United and Reformed, gives thanks to God for the particular gifts of these two threads in the Church's life, prays for the discernment of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of each, and commits the United Reformed Church to continue with the prophetic calling to unity in both the Church and the world.

b) The General Assembly commends the paper *What is the Spirit saying to the Churches? Affirming the United Reformed Church's future* for further study and reflection. Assembly invites people and councils at each level of the Church to feed back comments to the faith and order committee by July 2015.

Resolution 12

page 111

Faith and order committee: Conciliarity

1. General Assembly affirms conciliarity, and in particular the role of the church meeting, as one of the gifts of the United Reformed Church, both to the wider Church and to the society in which this Church is set.

2. In order that this affirmation may become a source of renewal across the United Reformed Church, General Assembly commissions the faith and order committee, in consultation with other committees as appropriate, to undertake the following work:

a) to produce resources for study which emphasise the theological understanding that undergirds conciliarity,

b) to suggest resources to enable meetings to be more engaged in their discernment of the mind of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit,

c) to offer reflections on the nature of church membership and ways in which it has evolved and is evolving,

d) to encourage the United Reformed Church through such media as *Reform*, the United Reformed Church website, and the United Reformed Facebook page to publish stories of creative ways in which churches meet.

3. General Assembly invites further reflection on this paper in the councils of the Church at all levels and invites comments to be fed back to the faith and order committee by July 2015.

page 120

Resolution 13

Faith and order committee: Ordained local ministry

1. General Assembly, affirming the existing gift of elders and the diversity of gifts within each elders meeting as part of the United Reformed Church's distinctive contribution to the Church universal, wishes to reinvigorate the role of elders and welcomes current work to that end.

2. General Assembly directs the faith and order committee to set up a task group incorporating expertise from other committees of the United Reformed Church to explore the possibility of authorising 'celebrant elders' to preside at the sacraments. To that end, General Assembly asks for work to be done in the following areas:

a) the nature of ordination within the United Reformed Church, both of ministers of Word and sacrament and of elders;
b) how within the understandings of the various traditions which make up our Church the sacrament of holy communion is linked to ordination;
c) the suggested future relationships of 'celebrant elders' to local church leaders, lay preachers, ministers of Word and sacrament, synods and General Assembly;
d) the nature and financing of the requisite training to support such elders in their calling;
e) the accountability of such elders and the question of who would be responsible for discerning, authorising and supporting their vocation;
f) the place of such elders in local ecumenical partnerships.

General Assembly instructs that the progress of such work be reported to General Assembly in 2016.

page 128

Resolution 14

Finance committee

General Assembly notes the trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2013.

page 99

Resolution 15

Equalities committee: Inclusive and expansive language

General Assembly affirms the commitment made in 1984 to use inclusive language in all publications. It now seeks to build on that commitment by encouraging all those who lead and participate in worship, all those who train worship leaders, including resource centres for learning and lay preachers conferences, children's and youth leaders, local churches and synods, to explore and give intentional consideration to their use of inclusive and expansive language in worship.

Resolution 16

page 132

Mission Committee: Foodbanks

General Assembly welcomes the resource pack on foodbanks produced by the joint public issues team and commends it for study and use by all churches.

Resolution 17

page 35

Mission Council: Assembly-appointed posts

General Assembly confirms the list of Assembly-appointed posts and the various affiliation requirements as outlined on pages 36 to 37 of the *Book of Reports*.

Resolution 18

page 49

Mission Council: Changes to the Structure

General Assembly resolves to ratify the resolution of Mission Council to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church as follows:

Insert the following immediately after **2.(6)(A)(xxiii)** so as to become **(xxiv)** and renumber the later functions accordingly.

"**(xxiv) to ensure that, where an Assembly Commission or an Appeals Commission following a Hearing under the Disciplinary Process contained in Section O of the Manual or a Review Commission or an Appeals Review Commission following a Hearing under the Incapacity Procedure contained in Section P of the Manual appends guidance to its decision to delete the name of the minister or Church Related Community Worker from the respective Roll, any such guidance is brought fully to the attention of those responsible for exercising oversight of the minister or Church Related Community Worker and any others who might in the future be identified as being proper and appropriate persons to receive such information;**"

Remove references to the deputy general secretary as follows:
2.(6)(A)(xxiii) delete the words "**, the Deputy General Secretary" replace the words "(acting through the Deputy General Secretary or his/her duly appointed deputy)" with "(acting through the General Assembly Representative or his/her duly appointed deputy)**"

6.5
Replace the words "**Deputy General Secretary**" with the words "**General Assembly Representative**".

Remove an inappropriate reference to Section O:

2.(4) In the sixth bullet point following the words "**The moderator shall**" replace the words "**Section O**" with "**Disciplinary**"

Remove inaccurate references to **paragraph (B)**:

2.(4)(A), 2.(5)(A) and 2.(6)(A)
In each case replace the words "**(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph (B) below)**" with the words "**(subject to the restriction referred to in Paragraph 7.4 below)**"

page 51

Resolution 19

Mission Council: Membership of governance bodies

A. General Assembly agrees that with effect from the General Assembly of 2016 there shall no longer be six additional representatives of the Synod of Scotland under category 2.(6)(h).

B. General Assembly agrees to make the following changes to the Structure of the United Reformed Church:

Paragraph 2.(6)

Amend the first sentence to read: "**The General Assembly which shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life shall consist of members of the United Reformed Church (save for those in categories (g), (l), (m) and (n)) as follows:**"

Amend category (d) by the deletion of the words: "**, a committee convener or otherwise entitled to membership of the Assembly,**" so that it reads: "**Where the moderator of synod is an officer of the Assembly the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative**".

Amend category (f) by the deletion of the words: "**being members of the United Reformed Church,**" (twice).

Amend category (j) by the addition of the words: "**former chairmen and presidents of the Congregational Union of Scotland,**" before the words: "provided that" and delete the words "**such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church and that**"

Amend category (k) by the deletion of the words: "**, being members of the United Reformed Church,**"

C. General Assembly agrees to appoint the deputy general secretary administration and resources, the deputy general secretary discipleship and the deputy general secretary mission as members of Assembly under category 2.(6)(n).

D. General Assembly agrees that the deputy treasurer shall be a member of the United Reformed Church, and further agrees that the deputy treasurer for the time being shall be appointed as a member of Assembly under category 2.(6)(h).

E. General Assembly agrees to make the following change to the Structure of the United Reformed Church: Amend category 2.(4)(a) by the addition of the words: "**and Assembly appointed ministers who are members of a local church in that synod**".

F. General Assembly agrees that the membership of Mission Council shall be:

1. Moderators of Assembly
2. Moderators-elect
3. Immediate past moderators
4. General secretary
5. Deputy general secretaries
6. Clerk
7. Treasurer
8. Deputy treasurer
9. Conveners of all Assembly standing committees
10. Synod moderators

11. Three further representatives of each synod
12. Three representatives of FURY (including the FURY moderator)
13. Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust

With the exception of those in category 5 (the deputy general secretaries) all the above shall be members of the United Reformed Church.

The legal adviser and the convener of the law and polity advisory group shall be in attendance with the right to speak at all times, but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Staff secretaries shall be in attendance with the right to speak (except during the decision stage of the consensus process) but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Up to two ecumenical representatives may attend with the right to speak (except during the decision stage of the consensus process) but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

Also present shall be the moderators' chaplains, the minute secretary, the consensus adviser (pending separate decision) and other staff members as agreed by committee conveners and the general secretary. These may participate in group sessions, and may speak during plenary sessions with the consent of the moderator.

From time to time there may be visitors and/or observers present by prior arrangement with the general secretary. They shall not have the right to speak or participate in any way during plenary or group sessions, unless with the explicit consent of the moderator.

Resolution **20**

page 34

Mission Council: Membership of Mission Council

General Assembly resolves that the convener of the pastoral reference and welfare committee shall be a member of Mission Council.

Resolution **21**

page 44

Mission Council: Powers in pre-union trusts

1) The General Assembly, in exercise of the powers conferred by s.18(1) of the United Reformed Church Act 1972 and s.10(1) of the United Reformed Church Act 1981, appoints until further notice the councils and other organs of the Church indicated in column 2 on page 45 to exercise any powers with respect to trusts and any powers of nomination vested prior to 5 October 1972 (or, as the case may be, prior to 26 September 1981) in the members, courts and other organs of dissolved associations indicated in column 1 on page 45.

2) In exercising any power vested in it by this resolution, a church meeting should act with due regard to any recommendations of the elders' meeting or of other councils of the United Reformed Church exercising oversight over the local church concerned.

3) For the avoidance of doubt, this appointment does not affect trusts or powers in relation to property governed by s. 8(2) of and Schedule 2 to the Act of 1972, or by s. 6(2) of and Schedule 2 to the Act of 1981, or to property in Scotland.

4) In exercise of the power conferred by s.18(2) of the Act of 1972 and s.10(2) of the Act of 1981, the Assembly delegates any further exercise that may be necessary of its powers under s.18(1) and s.10(1) respectively (including any amendment of the provision now made) to Mission Council. This is in substitution for the delegation made to the executive committee by the Uniting Assembly of 1972.

page 38

Resolution 22

Mission Council: Role of the synod moderator

General Assembly approves the role description for the synod moderator set out on pages 41 to 43 of the *Book of Reports* as a model for future synod moderator appointment groups.

page 58

Resolution 23

Mission Council: Changes to standing orders

General Assembly agrees the changes to the standing orders as listed on pages 60 to 69.

page 137

Resolution 24

Nominations committee

a) General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 138-152 of the *Book of Reports*, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the Supplementary Report to Assembly.

b) General Assembly re-appoints the Revd Paul Whittle to serve as moderator of the Eastern Synod until 31 August 2020.

c) General Assembly re-appoints the Revd Kevin Watson to serve as moderator of the Yorkshire Synod until 31 May 2020.

page 129

Resolution 25

General secretary

General Assembly appoints the Revd John Proctor to serve as general secretary from 6th July 2014 until 30th June 2021.

page 76

Resolution 26

National Synod of Scotland: Scottish independence referendum 2014

General Assembly calls the United Reformed Church to pray for the people of Scotland before, during and following the independence referendum to be held on 18 September 2014. These prayers should be for all, regardless of conviction, recognising how important the peoples of these islands are to each other.

Resolution 27

page 78

West Midlands Synod: Non-stipendiary ministry age limit

Recognising that people are working longer in many occupations and that UK legislation has changed in recent years to enable people to work without fear of age discrimination; the General Assembly resolves to remove the age related entry qualifications with regard to non-stipendiary ministry.

Resolution 28

page 77

South Western Synod: Giving to the ministry and mission fund

General Assembly challenges all local churches to increase their giving to the ministry and mission fund by at least 1% per annum.