



Book of **Reports**

General Assembly, Nottingham 2018



The
**United
Reformed
Church**

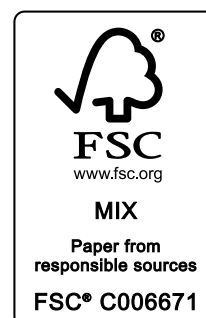
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Dear friends,

Welcome to General Assembly 2018. Welcome to Nottingham, where members of East Midlands Synod will host us. Welcome as you take responsibility for the life of our Church.

Thank you for your willingness to be part of this event. Every member of Assembly has an important contribution to make, in listening, reflecting, speaking and voting. People in our local churches and synods have trusted us to represent their needs and concerns, and to take decisions in ways that will really help their work and worship.

Be aware too that we also have an informal contribution to make outside the programmed business sessions. Among friend and stranger we shall share fellowship, listen to opinions, experiences and concerns, and nurture for a few days a special and supportive Christian community. Other people – including many you have never met before – will value your presence and involvement.

Some who read this may be observing Assembly from afar, through streaming of the discussions or through on-line reporting. Thank you for your interest; we ask too for your prayers.

At Nottingham we shall be led by our Moderators, Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, and our Assembly will include people from around the three nations that make up the URC. There will also be visitors from ecumenical and international partner churches, including speakers from three Christian bodies with whom we are linked – Yvonne Campbell of the Congregational Federation, Collin Cowan from the Council for World Mission, and Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, the new Chief Executive of Christian Aid. There will also be a major item on the Church's relationship with neighbours of other faiths, informed in part by Derek Estill's experience of local inter-faith contact in Lancashire.

Within our own Church we shall hear about new opportunities for Christian learning, about an audit of our safeguarding record, about ways we might offer membership to people who love the URC but no longer live near a local church, about the call to refresh our commitment to children and young adults, and about the invitation to us all to deepen our discipleship as we walk the way of Jesus.

Assembly at its best is a time of vision, renewal, realistic planning, uplifting worship and mutual support. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Meanwhile we hold the faith and seek to share it in a troubled and damaged world. I thank God for the many people in our Church whose practical service expresses the love of Jesus in their communities, whose faith burns bright across the years, and whose witness and life we seek to sustain and encourage through all we do at Assembly.

Yours sincerely,

John Proctor
General Secretary



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.



Mission Council

Report on Work, 2016-18

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	General Secretary: john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information; papers with resolutions follow as appendices.
Draft resolution(s)	None in the General Report.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the work of Mission Council in the last two years.
Main points	There are many. Those that require Assembly decision appear in the various appendices.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council papers from November 2016, May and October 2017 and March 2018, available on the URC website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The committees and synods of the Church.

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The Methodist Church regularly sends a representative to Mission Council, who contributes helpfully to the Council's work; the Church of England may also be represented, but has not recently taken up its seat on Mission Council.

Report on the work of Mission Council, 2016-18

Introduction

1. The brief for Mission Council directs it to oversee, prepare and sift business between meetings of Assembly. It tries to keep a proper focus on the Church's main concerns, so that all our work will further the mission of the Gospel. It also has delegated power to deal on Assembly's behalf with matters that require prompt attention.
2. Thus Mission Council must often deal with detail and practicalities, so that specific matters may progress without undue delay. It also attends to overview and vision, so that the presentation of business at Assembly may enable Assembly 'to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church'. In order for Mission Council to be alert to the needs, concerns, opportunities and hopes of the whole body of the URC, people from the synods of the Church make up most of its membership.
3. Mission Council meets in the autumn and the spring, for 48 hours on each occasion, and thus has met four times since the last meeting of General Assembly.

Preparing work for this Assembly

4. A number of major projects and tasks have been considered at Mission Council, often more than once as work evolved from one stage to another. Several of these pieces of work are included elsewhere in the Assembly agenda, so need just a mention here rather than lengthy exposition. They all, however, claimed time and care in Mission Council, which was concerned to bring them to Assembly in the best possible shape.
5. Assembly 2016 commissioned work from a task group on the future arrangements for General Assembly, for the years 2020 to 2030. This task group has shared its thinking in provisional ways with Mission Council and will now report to General Assembly, in order that Assembly may take its own decisions about its own work.
6. Mission Council has received regular reports on work for 'Walking the Way', with its focus on Missional Discipleship. An account of this work, its vision and its progress, is an appendix to this Mission Council report.
7. The ministries committee has developed its thinking on patterns of local ministry and leadership, on deployment and call, and in particular on non-stipendiary ministry. It has reported on these matters to Mission Council and has received encouragement and guidance as it continues these pieces of work.
8. The education and learning committee has used Mission Council as a sounding board for its work on a Discipleship Development Strategy, and on the learning resource (called Stepwise) that is to succeed TLS.
9. As the faith and order committee worked with the 2016 Assembly resolution on isolated members, it discussed practical possibilities with Mission Council, before bringing a carefully thought-out proposal to this Assembly.

Assembly remits and Assembly process

10. Mission Council addressed several matters that were either considered at the Southport General Assembly in 2016 or that relate directly to the business of this 2018 Assembly.

11. After the matter had been duly referred to the synods of the Church, Mission Council gave final approval to Resolution 3 from Southport, which sets out procedure for Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review between councils of the Church. Mission Council also clarified that an Appeal, in this connection, may be made by a person directly affected by a decision, even if that person is not a member of the council that made the decision.

12. Again after due referral to the synods, Mission Council gave final approval to Resolution 42 from Southport, which provided more flexibly than before for youth representation in councils of the Church. Mission Council also clarified that the upper age limit for URC Youth is a person's 26th birthday: people aged 25 are youthful; those aged 26 are not.

13. Mission Council extended Resolution 7 from Southport, on the marriage of same sex couples, in response to legislation in the Isle of Man and in Guernsey. New legislation in Jersey may also be considered before long, possibly in autumn 2018. Mission Council also thanked and discharged the human sexuality task group, which had brought careful and extensive material to Assembly meetings in 2014 and 2015.

14. Resolutions 16 and 18 from Southport asked for the preparation of a code of conduct (16) and training material (18) for people who serve as authorised elders. Mission Council signed off this code and noted the availability of the training material.

15. Mission Council approved a tidier and more streamlined version of the Church's Standing Orders, which govern the meetings of Assembly and are therefore printed in this *Book of Reports*.

External commitments

16. Mission Council made a number of commitments on behalf of the Church in regard to international or ecumenical relationships.

17. It supported a proposal that the World Communion of Reformed Churches associate itself formally with the 1999 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. The Communion took this step in the summer of 2017.

18. It supported resolutions from the Mission Committee to recommit to partnerships (outlined in each case in a short Memorandum of Understanding) with two Ghanaian churches in the UK – with the London and Europe Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and with the UK congregations of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana. These Churches have significant presence in the UK, and value their relationship with a sister Church in their own Reformed tradition that is rooted here.

19. Council for World Mission member churches in Europe and the Caribbean met to explore ideals and hopes for NIFEA, a New International Financial and Economic Architecture, seeking a fuller level of justice, respect and responsibility in the handling of trade and money among the nations. Mission Council endorsed 'the direction of travel' and commended the conference's Kingston Declaration to the churches of the URC 'for prayers, study, reflection and action'. The text of the declaration is at <http://bit.ly/2017paper13>

20. Mission Council is sometimes able to respond promptly to news from partner churches, especially at times of difficulty or change. For example, in March 2018 the Revd David Grosch-Miller reported on a visit to a Christian peace forum in Korea, which had coincided more-or-less exactly with the announcement that Presidents Trump and Kim would meet. At that juncture it was important to assure Korean church partners of our support, concern and prayers, as they yearn for the settled peace of their land. Other meetings of Mission Council have heard of events in Syria and in Myanmar.

Mission Council

Arrangements in Church life

21. Mission Council made a number of changes to arrangements that shape the life of the Church in one way or another.
22. In order to divide duty more flexibly between the treasurer and deputy treasurer, small changes were made to the terms of reference of the URC investment committee, and to the procedure for appointing Church directors to the URC Ministers' Pension Fund. Mission Council also accepted a recommendation to thank and disband the members of the stewardship subcommittee and to merge its responsibilities into those of its parent finance committee.
23. Some very limited amendments were made to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration. <http://bit.ly/paperH3>
24. Mission Council made two amendments to the rules for the URC Ministers' Pension Fund. One of these corrected an error that might have inadvertently disadvantaged part-time stipendiary ministers. The second responded to a change in the law by determining that the pension benefits due to same-sex spouses and civil partners will match those due to opposite-sex spouses. <http://bit.ly/paperG3>
25. Mission Council adjusted the Church's 'Ethical Investment Guidelines' in regard to Usury, and the revised summary guidelines are given as appendix one to this report.
26. Mission Council altered the formula for dividing stipendiary minister posts among the synods of the Church: 60% of a synod's allocation now depends on the number of its church members and 40% on the number of congregations. There is now no direct weighting for the wider population total in the region or nation that the synod serves.
27. Mission Council approved a pilot scheme for funding additional patterns of ministry and local church leadership in two synods, and directed the ministries committee to identify two appropriate synods for the pilot and to set this task in hand.
28. Mission Council approved broader terms of reference for the Church's long-standing Jewish Fund, which may now be used for the 'promotion of contact, understanding and respect among Christians, Jews and members of other faith communities, in ways consonant with the beliefs and practices of the United Reformed Church'.
29. Mission Council agreed to maintain the budgeted subvention for *Reform* magazine in the years 2018 to 2020, and asked for an update on circulation figures in May 2019.
30. The URC contributed substantially to the Greenbelt Christian arts and music festival in 2016 and 2017. Mission Council heard reports on this work and will be invited to review it after the 2018 festival.
31. A 'Complaints Policy' was drawn up for the councils and congregations of the Church, and this was also commended to the Synod Trust Companies. The full text is at <http://bit.ly/sectionQ>
32. Mission Council made some limited changes to the ministerial disciplinary process and heard of discussions about possible fuller revision of the process.
33. A report was approved that restructured, slightly, the Board of Governors at Westminster College, Cambridge.

34. In a series of discussions Mission Council was invited by the synod Moderators to consider the need to be selective about what we do as Church. Many pieces of work or activity might seem attractive and interesting. However, the claims of the kingdom of God call us to apply more rigorous criteria to any new proposal. This applies at every level of the Church's life, both local and wider. One result of these conversations is likely to be a sharper focus on the relevance to the local church of any business considered in the wider church.

Persons and appointments

35. A number of changes in Assembly appointed staff at Church House and elsewhere were agreed or noted by Mission Council, in every case after due process. At Church House, Philip Brooks arrived as Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations when David Tatem retired in July 2017. Karen Morrison moved on from her role as Head of Children's and Youth Work and was succeeded in November 2017 by Sam Richards. Simeon Mitchell started in January 2018 as Secretary for Church and Society, succeeding Grace Pengelly. Finally, Peter Meek's initial term as Moderator in the East Midlands ran until August 2018; his tenure was reviewed in the penultimate year of this term and was extended to August 2023.

36. A number of nominations are commended by Mission Council to Assembly and listed in an appendix to this paper.

37. Mission Council sent a warm personal greeting to the Revd Bernard Thorogood, former General Secretary, now living in Australia, on his ninetieth birthday.

Church House, London

38. The Mission Council report to Assembly in 2016 set out at length plans that were then being considered to refurbish the Church's central office in London. That report explained (para 10) that, 'the building ought to be made more accessible and more flexible; if it can be more compactly used, part of it may earn us money through rental; there is scope to make it more efficient environmentally; and we ought to develop our facility to host 'virtual meetings', thus enabling some of the Church's committee work to be quicker, less cumbersome and more open to people who cannot commit long hours to travel.'

39. All of the above has now been done, through a thorough refurbishment of our 60-year-old building, which exists only to serve the wider life of the Church. The work was approved by Mission Council, on the recommendation of the URC Trust, which is legal steward of the Church's central assets. The total cost was 2.65 million pounds. The building work was undertaken between January and June 2017, and staff moved back in July.

40. The second floor of Church House, which had been intentionally freed for letting, was leased to the Greenbelt Christian festival as a central office from September 2017 for at least five years. While trustees are obliged to expect a commercial rent for this space, they have also been glad to welcome a tenant whose ethos and values match quite closely to those of the URC.

41. There has been one major piece of builders' snagging to undertake after the completion of the contract. The lower ground floor has been damp. At time of writing, three months before Assembly, a plan for dealing with this is under careful consideration.

42. All of this involved some disruption to the working arrangements for our central staff, and Mission Council made a point of thanking them on the Church's behalf for their patience through these months, and for their strong commitment to the service and support of the whole life of the denomination.

Mission Council

The Windermere Centre

43. Very much the most painful decision in Mission Council concerned the Windermere Centre. The sequence of events, and the issues that arose, were these.
44. Before Mr Lawrence Moore left post as Director in September 2016, the management of house staff and hospitality was already being covered by a staff member seconded from a partner church organisation that has long experience of residential Christian events. It seemed possible that a longer-term arrangement might emerge from this, which would enable us to benefit from the expertise of the partner organisation. Yet as this possibility was explored with hope and in detail, it became increasingly clear that the centre's usage figures fell far below the levels that one would expect in a facility of this kind.
45. As a result, the education and learning and finance committees reported to Mission Council in October 2016 that there was a serious question of viability. There followed two very difficult discussions in Mission Council, that October and the following May, and some careful committee work in-between.
46. The difficulty came from talking practically about a place that many of us have loved, and where we have gained and grown. No-one spoke ill in Mission Council of Windermere's work and its contribution to the life of the Church. There has been great appreciation of the work of successive directors in planning and running the programme, and of house staff in looking after guests. We are deeply grateful, to them and to God, and it is important to set this thanks on record in Assembly.
47. However, not as many of us have been using the Centre as was once hoped. Usage has tailed off over the decades, as fewer URC people and events have made their way there. Across the years there have been several attempts to increase interest and demand; sadly none has had a long-term effect on usage. We have found ourselves investing heavily in a facility that we have actually used rather lightly.
48. Eventually Mission Council decided that the case for continuing to run the centre was not convincing. In this we were far from unanimous. Members from North Western and Mersey Synods, and a good number of other people, would have preferred a slower process and a delayed decision. However, a very definite majority of Mission Council came, with sad conviction, to the view that a further couple of years would not add clarity or new opportunity, and that it would be right to close the centre.
49. The last guests in the centre visited in late May 2017. A number of other groups who had booked were offered and accepted accommodation elsewhere. Throughout the months of discussion, the Church sought to deal honestly and respectfully with the staff of the house, and their work ended at a time when some, at least, could find new posts locally at the start of the summer season. There was a thanksgiving service on Saturday 15 July 2017 in Carver Church, next door to the centre.
50. The building then passed out of the care of the education and learning committee into that of the URC Trust. The Trust has since taken steps towards the sale of the building, and at time of writing is in close discussion with a potential purchaser.
51. The work of the centre in launching iChurch as a platform for local church websites has been handed on to the URC's communications committee.
52. Resources that come from sale of the building will be guarded and used by the education and learning committee as a lay training fund, so that the centre's role as a place of learning and welcome for all the Church's people may be handed on in new opportunities. This will express our deep gratitude, for all that Windermere has given.

53. Finally, thanks are due to the Revd Mitchell Bunting, who acted as part-time Director during the period when the Centre's future was uncertain and in the months of winding up the work. He served with grace, wisdom and attention to detail, and we are grateful too to the Synod of Scotland for releasing him to this duty.

Moderators and chaplains

54. Throughout these two years Mission Council has been wisely and carefully led by the Moderators of General Assembly, Kevin Watson and Alan Yates, with pastoral and worship support from their chaplains, Gwen Collins and Mark Robinson. All four have contributed consistently and very creditably to the fellowship and work of the Council.

Mission Council appendix one

Summary of URC Ethical Investment Guidelines

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Proctor: john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Amending one figure in the Church's guidelines.
Main points	Companies involved in usury are to be avoided if more than 10% of their turnover relates to this activity. Previously we had this figure at 25%.
Previous relevant documents	The guidelines were last reviewed by Mission Council in November 2015.
Consultation has taken place with...	Finance committee, URC Trust, URC Ministers' Pension Fund board.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Not significant.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This brings URC policy into line with that of our principal ecumenical partners.

Appendix one

Summary of URC Ethical Investment Guidelines

1.1 General Assembly recommends that trustees and all those with investment responsibilities connected with the United Reformed Church should avoid any investment in:

- a) companies directly engaged in the manufacture or supply of weapons;
- b) companies a significant part of whose business is in the manufacture or supply of: alcoholic drinks, or tobacco products, or military equipment (other than weapons); or the provision of gambling facilities; or the publication or distribution of pornography; or in the extraction of thermal coal or the production of oil from oil sands;
- c) companies who benefit by offering credit at usurious rates of interest to those who do not have access to funds through normal lending channels.

1.2 General Assembly is of the view that in the definition of the activities outlined in b) above, 'significant' means that the share of turnover derived from the activity concerned is more than 10% of the company's total turnover; for c) above the equivalent threshold is also 10%.

2. In addition to the exclusions listed above, the URC's investment bodies should reserve the right to avoid investment in companies whose operations are deemed to:

- contribute directly to human rights violations or support the maintenance of oppressive regimes who are guilty of gross human rights violations;
- contribute to a systematic, harmful impact on the social or natural environment;
- harm the society in which they operate more than they benefit it;
- promote injustice.

3. Further, it is expected that governance standards of our advisers, our fund managers, their agents, and the companies in which we invest, both directly and indirectly, should meet internationally accepted norms. By focusing on these standards, investors will favour companies which will be seeking to develop their businesses sustainably in the long-term interests of their shareholders and other stakeholders.

4. Nestle clarification: for investment purposes all companies should be treated in accordance with this ethical investment policy. There is no further requirement to exclude holdings in this company.

5. General Assembly recognises that this policy cannot be binding upon those with responsibility for specific investment decisions but when these bodies seek advice on investment matters they should apply due diligence to ensure that the integrity and reputation of the United Reformed Church is, as far as is practical, protected.

May 2017

Mission Council appendix two

Nominations

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Proctor: john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>1. General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Michael Hopkins as its Clerk to the end of the 2024 meeting of General Assembly.</p> <p>2. General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Simon Walkling as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales to 31 August 2024.</p> <p>3. General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Paul Whittle as Moderator of Eastern Synod to 31 August 2023.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To recommend three extensions of tenure to Mission Council.
Main points	Due process has been followed, and the names are commended with conviction.
Previous relevant documents	The current rubric for a moderator's review of tenure was agreed by Mission Council in November 2014.
Consultation has taken place with...	The three review groups themselves consulted widely, and then reported through nominations committee to Mission Council.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Each of these posts has an important ecumenical dimension, which is carried creditably and effectively by the post holder.

Appendix two

Nominations

1. The March 2018 meeting of Mission Council agreed to commend three extensions of tenure to General Assembly. In each case due process was followed, including extensive consultation with those who depend on the post-holder's service. Each of the review groups made its recommendation with conviction.

2. General Assembly in 2014 appointed the Revd Michael Hopkins as Clerk to Assembly, from November 2014 until the end of the 2020 Assembly. Thus that 2020 Assembly would be too late to take a proper decision about the Clerk's tenure, and it is therefore important that this be considered in 2018. A review group was set up, convened by Mr John Ellis, and this group recommended that Michael be invited to continue as Clerk until the end of the 2024 Assembly. Our Rules of Procedure limit the Clerk's service to six years plus four, so Michael would stop at that point.

3.1 The Revd Simon Walkling became Moderator of the National Synod of Wales in September 2012. After some five years he declared himself willing for the Church to test his call to continue in post beyond the initial seven-year term. The necessary review process was therefore set in train in the sixth year of the seven.

3.2 The Assembly review group, convened by the Revd Mike Shrubsole (Wessex), heard from the synod review panel and from the Moderator himself, and recommended that Mr Walkling's tenure be extended for a further five years beyond the initial seven, thus continuing to August 2024.

4.1 The Revd Paul Whittle became Moderator of Eastern Synod in July 2008 for an initial seven-year term, and a review in 2014 extended his tenure to August 2020 (which was at one time his expected retirement age). However, the change in the URC's ministerial retirement rules, and the availability of three further years of ministerial service, led Mr Whittle to ask the Church to test his call to continue in post until August 2023.

4.2 Although it has recently been unusual for a synod moderator to serve for more than twelve years, this is not irregular. Our Rules of Procedure do not prevent it. It was however necessary to follow full and careful process, if the call was to be properly tested, and this was done.

4.3 The Assembly review group, convened by the Revd Bill Young (West Midlands), heard from the synod review Panel and from the Moderator himself, and recommended that Mr Whittle's tenure be extended until August 2023, when he will retire.

Mission Council appendix three

The election of Assembly Moderators

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	General Secretary: john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	4. General Assembly adopts the changes proposed to section 3 of the Rules of Procedure, with effect from the end of the 2018 meeting of Assembly.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To bring clarity to the current process for the election of the Moderators of General Assembly. • To provide greater fairness amongst all nominees for the role. • To learn from the procedure for electing the Moderator of Youth Assembly, as this has been proven to be fair and useful in determining, with prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit, the most suitable Moderator.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current procedure is flawed: it shows bias towards nominees who are incumbent members of Assembly; it does little to help voting members of Assembly discern who may be best suited for the role. • All nominees will be invited, and expected, to attend the Assembly at which they are to be voted on, will read their biography (or have it read) to Assembly, and will be asked a question by the Moderator in the chair and given opportunity to respond.
Previous relevant documents	Rules of Procedure, Youth Assembly Standing Orders, Mission Council November 2017 Paper Y1 and March 2018, Paper Y1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly Clerk, General Secretary, children's and youth work committee, URC Youth Executive, Mission Council.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Invariably any change to our Rules of Procedure brings us closer to some ecumenical partners and further away from others.

Appendix three

The election of Assembly Moderators

1. URC Youth Executive advised Mission Council that the current procedure for electing Moderators of General Assembly is flawed, and asked that this be changed, to make more provision for the informed discernment of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Mission Council accepted the case for change and now advocates this to Assembly.
2. The procedure at URC Youth Assembly for the election of the Moderator gives those standing an opportunity to read out their ‘pen portrait’ and answer a question posed to them by the current Moderator. This question is not aimed to encourage the candidate to produce a manifesto of what they intend to do, but rather to ascertain what skills they possess and how they feel called to the role of Moderator. This question is normally written by the Moderator-Elect (who is inducted at the end of Youth Assembly). In the case of General Assembly, it would be put by the serving and chairing Moderator; it would therefore be for the Moderator to arrange for the drafting of the question (or to draft it personally) and to be satisfied as to its suitability.
3. Ensuring the candidates are invited to General Assembly gives an equal opportunity for them.
4. These concerns would be reflected by changing the relevant section of the Church’s Rules of Procedure, as follows.

Proposed wording for part 3 of the Rules of Procedure

3. Moderators of the General Assembly

3.1 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be elected by ballot in accordance with these rules. Each moderator shall serve for two years commencing at the Assembly following the meeting at which the report of the election is received in accordance with Rule 3.10~~11~~. The period of office shall be deemed to begin with the induction of each moderator and shall continue until that moderator’s successor is inducted into office. A moderator will continue as immediate-past moderator until their successor ceases to be moderator and therefore replaces them as immediate-past moderator.

3.2 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be two in number, a minister or a Church Related Community Worker and an elder. The elder may be serving or non-serving but in all cases the names of those persons nominated to serve as Moderator must be included on the membership roll of a local church for that person to be eligible for nomination.

3.3 A nomination for election as Moderator of the General Assembly shall be made by a synod, the consent of the nominee not being required. The nomination shall be in writing under the hand of the clerk of the synod and received by the General Secretary not later than the 31 March immediately preceding the annual meeting of the Assembly.

3.4 The General Secretary shall forthwith send to each person nominated a list of the nominations. Any nominee may, within ten days of the receipt of this list, withdraw from nomination by notice in writing to the General Secretary.

Mission Council

3.5 If after 31 March or after the period for withdrawal there shall be no nominations, in either or both categories, the General Secretary shall forthwith notify the clerks of the synods and invite them to request nominations from the executive committees or equivalent of their synods. Such nominations, accompanied in each case by a note of the consent of the person nominated, **and a brief biography, and brief indications of the reason for nomination by the synod**, must be in the hands of the General Secretary by 15 May. **Those who have accepted nomination shall be invited to attend the Assembly if they are not already doing so.**

3.6 In either category if after the period for withdrawal there is only one nomination, this nomination shall be placed before the Assembly and voted upon by secret ballot.

3.7 If the number of those who have been nominated in either category and have not withdrawn is or exceeds two, the election shall be by a secret ballot according to the principle of the single transferable vote. All members of the Assembly shall be entitled to vote. They shall vote by indicating their preference by figures 1, 2, 3 and so forth, but no voting paper shall be invalidated by the absence of alternative choices. If the tellers find that no name has an absolute majority of first choices, the second choices of those who gave as their first choice the name securing the smallest number of such choices shall be added to the first choices for other names. If necessary this process shall continue until one of the name has an absolute majority of votes cast. If the process continues until only two names remain, the person who then has the larger number of votes shall be elected.

3.8 At a point in the Assembly prior to the commencement of the vote, each nominee will be given a fair and equal opportunity to present their biography and to answer a question put to them by the Moderator (who shall be responsible for its content and wording). The response to this question shall not exceed three minutes. No nominees shall be in the room in which Assembly is meeting during this process, save the nominee presenting at the time. Each nominee will be asked the same question.

3.9 Members of the Assembly shall vote by means of a voting paper containing the name, the usual designation and the church of membership, of each of those accepting nomination which shall be sent by the General Secretary by ordinary post to each such member before the commencement of the Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly. Brief indication of the reasons for the nomination, as supplied by the synod, **along with the candidates' biography, will** be circulated with the ballot paper. The General Assembly may, in any case, authorise further means of informing the members about those accepting nomination.

3.10 Normally, the General Assembly shall vote to elect the Moderators of the Assembly by secret ballot as an item of business following prayer during the meeting of the Assembly. The ballot boxes shall be delivered to the tellers by whom alone they shall be opened. They shall report the result of the ballot to the Assembly at a later session.

3.11 As soon as the voting papers have been examined and the result of the poll ascertained, the voting papers shall be closed up under the seal of the tellers or any two of them, and shall be retained by the General Secretary for one month after the election, and shall then be destroyed.

3.12 At each Ordinary Meeting the Assembly shall appoint, upon the nomination of the nominations committee, three tellers to be responsible for the ballot for that year. The counting of the votes cast shall take place in secret under their supervision and control and they shall:

3.12.1 inform the General Secretary of the names of the persons elected and the General Secretary shall thereupon individually inform those nominated whether or not they have been elected.

3.12.2 report to the Assembly the names of the persons elected, the number of papers received and the number of papers which were invalid.

3.13 If any of the tellers appointed by the Assembly shall become incapable of acting, the Moderator shall fill any such vacancy or vacancies and report that action to the Assembly.

3.14 Upon receipt of the report of the tellers by the Assembly the persons elected shall thereupon become the duly elected Moderators for the two years commencing at the next Ordinary Meeting of the Assembly.

3.15 Where the previous General Assembly at its ordinary meeting has failed to elect, or in the event of either or both of the persons elected to serve as moderator becoming unable to serve more than 120 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5 for persons available to serve as moderator for the coming Assembly. On receipt of those names, the General Secretary will inform all those whose names appeared on the roll of the previous Assembly of the nominations and send them a ballot paper. Those ballot papers shall be returned by post within five working days of receipt. Thereafter, the General Secretary shall deliver these ballot papers unopened to the tellers for the election of the Moderator who shall open and count the votes cast and report the result of this election to the General Secretary in the same form as would have been reported to the General Assembly had this election been held during the Assembly.

3.16 If a moderator is unable to take office fewer than 120 days and more than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the Moderator currently in office shall continue in office until a successor is inducted. The General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5, and an election shall be held at the General Assembly in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.7 and 3.9, and the Moderator so elected shall be inducted during that meeting of Assembly.

3.18 If a moderator is unable to take office fewer than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly, or resigns from office after induction, or is removed from office after induction, then the General Secretary shall forthwith initiate a postal ballot as described in clause 3.15, and the person so elected shall be inducted at the next meeting of the Mission Council, save that if this clause comes into effect less than nine months before the planned meeting of General Assembly, then the remaining Moderator shall serve alone until the next meeting of General Assembly.

3.19 During the temporary absence of a moderator, the other Moderator may serve alone. In the event of a conflict of interest with the business under discussion, the most recent former Moderator without such conflict of interest, who is present and willing to serve, shall serve. If neither Moderator is present, the most recent former Moderator present and willing to serve shall serve.

Mission Council appendix four

The role of elders in the United Reformed Church

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Proctor: john.proctor@urc.org.uk The Revd Prof David Thompson: dmt3@cam.ac.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>5. General Assembly resolves to add a further question to Schedule B [of the Basis of Union] for elders as follows:</p> <p>Q: Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always so far as you are able to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?</p> <p>A: By the grace of God I do, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Addition of a further promise to the affirmations made by elders at ordination and induction, concerned explicitly with the work that elders do.
Main points	As per above resolution.
Previous documents	Nothing recent that is of special relevance.
Consultation has taken place with...	Initially within the Law and Polity Advisory Group, then in Mission Council.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This affirmation makes clearer our high view of the role of elders, which can be a topic of ecumenical interest, enquiry and even challenge.

Appendix four

The role of elders in the United Reformed Church

1. Mission Council has become increasingly aware in recent years of the vital role played in our local congregations by the elders of our Church. As church memberships have become smaller, and multi-church pastorates have become increasingly the rule, much that might have been handled in congregations in former times by the minister has passed to elders, particularly the church secretary or treasurer.

2. The Basis of Union recognises the eldership as a ministry within the Church in section 23, and specifies their role in two sentences:

‘[Elders] share with Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders’ meeting and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care. They shall be associated with ministers in all the councils of the church.’

3.1 Yet if one turns to Schedule B, the affirmations made by elders are primarily doctrinal and only the fourth concerns the eldership as such:

‘Do you accept the office of elder in the United Reformed Church in this congregation and do you promise to perform its duties faithfully?’

3.2 To discover these duties, one has to turn to ‘The Structure’, paragraph 2.2, which concerns the duties of the elders’ meeting, rather than elders individually. Assembly did agree guidelines on conduct and behaviour for elders in 2010 (resolution 12) but awareness of these seems to have been patchy.

3.3 In particular, the representative role of elders in the wider church, specifically mentioned in the Basis of Union, is not reflected in Schedule B.

4. The law and polity advisory group has discussed this matter often and recently recommended to Mission Council that a further question be added to Schedule B. This is based on question 8 in Schedule C (for ministers); it concerns first, the well-being, unity and peace of the whole United Reformed Church, secondly, love towards all other churches, and finally, building up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church – whilst recognising that for elders this is a corporate responsibility.

5. One elder in Mission Council welcomed such a question as giving a broader sense of the responsibility of elders within the Church, and it is in that spirit that this resolution is proposed. Mission Council therefore commends it to the Assembly.

6. Since such an addition would involve a change in the Basis of Union, it would need to be referred to synods, and since it affects all local churches, probably to all congregations as well. If the resolution is agreed, the General Secretary will outline the relevant procedure and seek Assembly’s approval for using it.

Mission Council appendix five

Report from the 20-40 task group

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Victoria Paulding: victoria.paulding@ntlworld.com
Action required	Reflection and response, over the years, across the Church.
Draft resolution(s)	No specific resolutions; a variety of serious insights.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To consider how the Church might improve its engagement with people aged 20-40.
Main points	Church at best is relational, and it can only flourish by relating deeply to the variety of people within and around it. Church at best is flexible, and patterns of church life that have worked in the past may not serve the future. People aged 20-40 have much to give, but may not fit easily into grooves of expectation and service that others have already prepared.
Previous relevant documents	The resolution of Assembly 2012 that asked for the task group to be set up. Reports of the Task Group to Mission Council in 2016 and 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Very widely, within the URC and with other Churches. The report gives details.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This paper is a call to self-examination, openness and flexibility. If we can respond to this call, then the external impact will be great, and not only on the 20-40 age-group.

Appendix five

Report from the 20-40 task group

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 In 2012 a resolution was passed at the URC Youth Assembly requesting that General Assembly consider the Church's engagement with 20-40-year-olds. General Assembly 2012 subsequently passed a resolution calling Mission Council to consider how to improve the integration of 20-40-year-olds at every level of the United Reformed Church and hence a task group was formed. The group consisted of six people and brought together a range of experiences and skills from those both lay and ordained and those within and without the 20-40 age range. The group was formed independently of other Assembly committees but has received support from the General Secretariat.

1.2 Since the formation of the task group in 2014, the group has examined research into the Church's engagement with 20-40-year-olds. This has included academic research and research from other denominations, including the Methodist Church and the Church of England. The group has conducted its own research within the United Reformed Church through questionnaires to Children and Youth Development Officers, Training and Development Officers, Mission Enablers and university chaplains; through consultations with URC committees; and through conversations with Armed Forces chaplains, the United Reformed Church Youth Assembly and Mission Council. Additionally, members of the task group within the 20-40 age range shared their own reflections and experiences as well as those of their peers.

1.3 It is important to note from the outset that the group named as '20-40-year-olds' in this report comprises a wide variety of demographic groups. These include those single and married, those with children and those without, those living with parents, those living away from home and those who are homeless. It comprises those at university, those recently graduated, those in training, those unemployed, those in new jobs and those well established in jobs. With such a wide range of demographics to consider, it is virtually impossible to establish how the Church can better engage with this group. It may be more appropriate to simply ask how the church can engage better with people; however, this report will consider main themes and issues as they relate particularly to those aged 20-40.

2. Research from other denominations

Over recent years a host of denominations have commissioned research on the 20-40 age group. The scarcity of this age group in churches is a reality shared by all of the mainstream denominations.

2.1 Methodist Church ('Missing Generation' report)

2.1.1 In 2011, the Methodist Church published *The Missing Generation and the Methodist Church* (L Clutterbuck and M Janowski, 2011): a ground-breaking report that delved behind the reality that all UK mainstream denominations have grappled with since the 1960s – that people aged 20-40 (and beyond) are missing from churches. Whilst the authors point out that the research is only applicable to the Methodist Church, there are insights that bear some level of generalisation.

Mission Council

2.1.2 Perhaps the biggest finding was that 82% of people surveyed left church because of a change in circumstances. People, particularly those aged 20-40, are much more mobile than in previous generations and it would seem that this has a significant impact on church attendance. People move on in some way, either to a different home or through a change of job, relationship or children, and it is at that point that they break connection with their congregation. However, in general, these people still have faith. They still see that faith as important. They still identify as Christian. They just don't go to church.

2.1.3 The research also found that people who were still involved in Church valued a range of worship styles and opportunities. They wanted their faith to be firmly connected to their lives but to also be able to experience a connection to God in worship.

2.1.4 However, the report also noted that it was unlikely that Sunday worship would be a first point of contact for people, as many people encounter church through other activities. Those who were part of churches valued small group opportunities where they could discuss theological, moral and ethical issues and feel part of a community.

2.1.5 Finally, a breakdown in the traditional models of the provision of pastoral care meant that the opportunity for a mentoring relationship with an older person was less likely.

2.2 Perceptions of Jesus, Christians and Evangelism in the UK, 2015, Barna Group (EA, Church of England & HOPE)

2.2.1 In 2015, Barna Group discovered that the same percentage of every decade of life identify themselves as Christian, but the percentage attending church is vastly different. This implies that we are looking at a 'missing generation' of the institution of the Church, not of the Church of Jesus.

2.2.2 The research also found that most non-Christians (61%) know a practising Christian, like them and think they are caring, good-humoured and friendly. 42% of practising Christians grew up in a Christian family, while 72% of non-practising Christians grew up in a Christian home.

2.2.3 In 2017, ComRes conducted 'Church Mapping' for the Church of England. They found that 77% of people who self-identify as Christian became a Christian before they were 10 years old, thus placing great importance on children's and youth work.

2.3 Joint Study Leave report – Graham Duffin, Andrew Morrice and Norman Smith October 2013

2.3.1 Three Church of Scotland ministers, Graham Duffin, Andrew Morrice and Norman Smith, explored a similar age group as part of a study leave project in 2013. Rather than exploring what the problems were, they spoke to church leaders in places that bucked the trend and had flourishing ministries with people aged 20-45.

2.3.2 They found that church leaders identified the following as key components of effective ministry to 20-45-year-olds:

- Empowering, visionary leadership – whether we like it or not, ministers are key people.
- Significant leadership roles for under 45s – people with a stake are more likely to stay involved.
- Team ministry – a sense of a range of people being involved in ministry, not necessarily a formal staff team.
- Supportive church structures – a commitment to allow the time and resources necessary to engage and grow.

- Intentional discipleship programmes – a clear priority for everyone to be involved in a programme of growth and resourcing.
- Encouragement to be actively involved in church life – taking part leads to a sense of belonging and ownership.
- Inspirational, relevant worship – it may be that a variety of worship opportunities are needed.
- A commitment to build and maintain meaningful relationships – friends inviting friends is central to any mission and evangelism strategy.
- A focus on outreach and mission – the church should be outward looking with a clear mission focus.
- A reliance on God – prayer and discernment at the heart of everything.

2.4 Church of England

2.4.1 Over the past few years the Church of England has built on some striking examples of churches which seem to be able to grow and resource others by creating and supporting 'Resource Churches' in cities. A Resource Church is defined as 'a church which, working closely with the local bishop, intentionally resources mission across a city, by planting and revitalising churches, developing leaders and providing other resources for mission. Its aim is to help evangelise the city and transform society.'

2.4.2 This city focused mission strategy is based on some core principles which include:

- generosity – give away what we have been given (church planting, resources, teams, etc);
- partnership – work with others to reach our city (diocesan bishop, churches, other denominations, businesses, charities, etc);
- audacity – re-evangelise our city and help transform the structures and communities (with a vision big enough to capture the imagination of the city and only achievable with God)
- humility – serve the city and its churches (play our part, listen and serve the city).

3. Academic research

3.1 As well as denominational research, the task group has also read academic research into the area of churches' engagement with 20-40-year-olds.

3.2 Mayo, Collins and Savage (2004) researched the differences between Generation X (those born between 1960 and 1980) and Generation Y (those born between 1980 and 2000). They found that Generation X had generally been 'turned off' Church by negative experiences, whereas Generation Y had never entered it in the first place. According to their findings, it is not (generally) that under-30s have an issue with Church: they just do not see the relevance of it to their own lives. Therefore, the Church needs to be open and authentic and to engage in genuine conversation. It also needs to speak in a language that is accessible to all, regardless of previous exposure to Church or faith.

3.3 Further research has since been conducted into Generation Z (those born since 2000). This research has highlighted the importance that grandparents have to play in the faith development of Generation Z. This research implies the need for inter-generational churches, rather than single age worship such as youth services or student churches.

4. URC research: a picture of the United Reformed Church

The task group has also conducted its own research within the United Reformed Church. Questionnaires were circulated to Children and Youth Development Officers, Training and Development Officers, Mission Enablers and university chaplains. Conversations have been held with Armed Forces chaplains, Youth Assembly, Mission Council, General Assembly and various URC committees. Discussions have also been had in local churches and on social media.

Mission Council

4.1 Barriers to engaging with 20-40-year-olds

4.1.1 The barriers to engaging with 20-40-year-olds appear to be littered with misunderstandings and frustrations between the different generations within churches.

4.1.2 There are the many practical reasons as to why it is often difficult for 20-40-year-olds to engage with the Church. For example, this age range is often the time of life when people move location most frequently: from the childhood home to university or to new employment; maybe to set up home on their own or with a partner. These moves often require young adults to move to more affordable areas, which may be some distance away from the local church they know. Furthermore, these significant and demanding life events can leave little room for a regular commitment to the life of a local church, which can feel as if it poses more demands than it offers support.

4.1.3 It is not uncommon for a local church to view a lack of regular attendance or willingness to take on roles as a lack of commitment, accompanied by a frustration that younger people are 'just not willing to take over all our jobs'. Those in the 20-40 age range can feel their local church's only engagement with them is to ask them to take over that which they are no longer able to do themselves, rather than being given the space and encouragement to create new expressions of church life appropriate to their generation. The 'invitation' can feel like a requirement to simply maintain what has been done before.

4.1.4 Likewise, the timing of church events and activities, unless they are events specifically aimed at young families, are often at times which are not convenient for those in work, or with young children.

4.1.5 As a result of this, many in the age range are far less likely to meet their peers in church, and are far less likely to participate in leadership and decision making. Many of the younger adults the task group listened to felt regularly frustrated, misunderstood or ignored, with decisions which directly affect them often being taken at meetings at which no one from that demographic was present or consulted.

4.1.6 Lack of communication and understanding can easily lead to a breakdown in relationships with 20-40-year-olds in any local church. The institution demands that younger people learn the language and culture of the church, but often seems unwilling or incapable of learning from and adapting to the lives of younger adults in return. Through no intention, younger adults can feel slowly pushed out of church, or never completely feel like they were really allowed in.

4.2 Local church life

4.2.1 What's going well?

There are churches in the United Reformed Church where you are much more likely to regularly find significant numbers of people in their 20s and 30s. Common characteristics within these churches are a strong sense of shared purpose and mission, and not a particular theology or style.

In these churches it is common for people under the age of 40 to be regularly involved in leading worship: bringing to it their own sense of authenticity, honesty, and relevance. This richer diet of worship nourishes the congregation and inspires and equips it to offer a broader variety of activities aimed at supporting people across the full spectrum of ages (not only children and retirees). This enables them to go beyond entertainment and social activities to groups which seek to foster a sense of discipleship, growth and development, exploration and challenge.

Nurturing discipleship changes how churches operate. In decision making, everyone's voice is heard and respected, people are trusted to 'get on with it', and there is a real sense of everybody being involved in ministry, not simply being asked to do church 'jobs'.

In churches like this it is quite usual and natural for some of those serving as elders or with other significant leadership responsibilities to be under the age of 40.

4.2.2 The wider reality

For many in our congregations this may sound like the life of the Church they once knew, but no longer recognise. Many churches within the URC are unsure of their purpose and mission: creating worship has become the chore of filling the pulpit, and fewer people are doing more and more ‘jobs’. Those in their 20s and 30s are ‘the missing generations’ and it would be easy to feel that churches with no one in this age bracket have little chance of changing this reality because people tend naturally to form relationships and community with those of similar age, outlook, and interests.

As both people and financial resources continue to feel more and more scarce, it is entirely understandable that at the local level, in ‘seeking to do a few things well’, many of our churches now see their mission as one to older people.

4.2.3 Reversing the trend

However, some churches do buck the trend with imaginative *Fresh Expressions*, *Messy Church*, *Pub Church*, and ‘Insert another contextually appropriate adjective’ Church, held at times more convenient and in venues more comfortable to young adults. A variety of provision for worship and nurture, specifically aimed at different demographics, is helping a growing number of local churches begin to reengage with people of the missing generations. Establishing several ‘congregations’ within the one church is a more realistic and desirable way to grow a local church, rather than the often self-defeating endeavour of trying to make Sunday mornings work for all.

However, what is also clear to the task group is that there is not one model or vehicle which has been ‘successful’. There is no specific programme or plan which ‘works’. Working on our welcome, our buildings and our language are all important ingredients but are no panacea. Furthermore, practical changes can often be used to distract us from the answers to our malaise which we suspect we have known all along: the long and more difficult road of building relationships through openness, vulnerability, and a willingness to be radically changed by our encounters with others who are often different from ourselves.

4.3 Denominational life

4.3.1 What’s going well?

Work with young people and young adults in the United Reformed Church is defined as the age range of 11-26-year-olds. Those of ages which overlap with this report’s remit (20-25) participate fully in the leadership of our youth structures and it is those at the older end of the youth work age range who predominately fill the spaces for under-26 representatives at General Assembly and Mission Council. Continued diligence by synods to ensure under-26 places at Assembly are filled continues to be of vital importance if the voice of younger adults is to be heard and have influence in our decision making.

4.3.2 The wider reality

However, we do wish to sound several notes of caution. In reality most of our programmatic work with young people stops at age 18, around the age of starting work, going to university, or leaving home. It would, perhaps, be understandable if, at times, those within the older age range felt not so much the *missing* generation but the *forgotten* one. Many of our younger adults commented that reaching this age can feel like a ‘cliff edge’, moving from a ‘youth’ experience of faith and church life with all the URC Youth programmes offer, to an experience that can be seen as a ‘one experience fits all’, which in reality can be very culturally different to the reality of most young adults’ lives.

A significant cultural difference between the generations (at the risk of unintended caricature) is that a youth group programme might have lots of discussions and activities, whereas in a traditional church service you are much more likely to be expected to sit and listen! 20-40-year olds often want to continue their church experience as a socially-based shared exploration of faith and life.

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Whilst we highlighted earlier the good work already taking place in ensuring young adult participation in our councils, responses to questionnaires showed that many young people sometimes feel as if their involvement is simply in order to train them to be committee members when they are older, rather than being taken seriously now as members now in their own right.

We would also like to note the often intractable issue of our various councils and committees taking place during university terms and working hours means participation of those within our remit is all the more difficult.

4.3.3 Reversing the trend

When considering how to reverse this trend, the task group began by asking whether a church of predominantly older people can foster and maintain a culture of regularly making decisions for the benefit of younger people, even if that means ‘voting’ against the perceived self-interests of the often older majority? Though this question was a helpful place to start our thinking, the task group soon recognised that the ideals which we aspire to in our councils should not facilitate the influence of self-interest or majority rule in any respect, so perhaps we merely need to remind ourselves of this more often!

The issue of the quality of our decision making, with regard to ‘the missing generations’, is not only that this age range are often absent from any discussion and decision, but that they are often also absent from setting the agenda of what is to be discussed and decided. Younger adults, who are students and parents, managers and problem solvers, creative thinkers and inspiring leaders in the world outside the Church, are all too often dismissed as the amusing or annoying oddity within it.

We note that tradition has it that Jesus’ entire ministry was conducted between the ages of 30 and 33, and presumably many of the disciples were of similar age!

Under 40s can bring to Church life an attitude of ‘This is where we want to be, how do we get there?’ in contrast to church agendas which, however forward looking their aim, are often in tone: ‘This is broken, how do we fix it?’ or ‘This is what we’ve got, what’s the best we can do with it?’

5. Reflections on moving forward

5.1 Something to build on?

The United Reformed Church has been greatly blessed by FURY and URC Youth (including all types of work from Pilots to youth groups). The work, the programmes and the way faith has been explored and shared by children and young people has been a strong part of our denomination’s life. Many people, including those who now are not church goers, have a faith connection because of what they experienced as a child or a young person whilst connected, in some way, to a United Reformed Church. This is something for the denomination to celebrate.

5.2 Points of contact

5.2.1 As mentioned several times already, the varied life circumstances of people in the 20-40s age bracket can all too easily lead people, seemingly, away from God. However, as a church we know that many life events can draw people back into church life – if only for weddings, funerals and baptisms. Rites of passage and life events are clear ways of being able to engage with every generation. There are many examples of how various cultures and traditions can do this. Some may be dependent on cultural background, others may be dependent on family faith experience – but all can be God-given opportunities to explore faith with people.

5.2.2 When encountering people who have had a positive Church background, this is a good opportunity to reconnect. But, fewer and fewer of the 20-40s generation have ever had a connection with a church. Their first encounter with the Church may well be

their first time of connection with any faith community. All of the task group's research and conversations have highlighted the need for this (re-)connection to be authentic and welcoming: to show that being a part of a faith community is relevant and a good thing. However busy peoples lives may be, the task group believes people aged 20-40 will respond to church life which is purposeful and truly values them. A busy life is not the same as 'life in all its fullness'!

5.2.3 Frustratingly, the question that comes next for many in our churches is: 'even when we engage successfully with this generation we never see them "in church!" When are they going to sit in the pews on a Sunday morning?' Arguably, more than any other generation, this question may be irrelevant. If we are truly looking to be inclusive in our church life, it will mean reshaping already existing church life to include a wider variety and understanding of 'church' and not the reshaping new members to fit into our existing church life? It is perhaps the Church's 'chicken or the egg' question; Which comes first, 'believing' or 'belonging'? The Church has an image of requiring certain belief and behaviour before someone is allowed to belong. This is certainly a common perception of those in the 20-40s bracket. Church is a place for people who believe certain things about God and live in a certain way, so why would those who do not share those beliefs or lifestyle even consider attending?

5.3 Organic discipleship

5.3.1 Maybe due to life changes, maybe due to world events, maybe due to a whole host of things, there is an attraction amongst younger adults to what discipleship can be. Not so much a taught way of being, but a shared journey of exploring. There are obvious links here to what 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today' may hope to be and achieve.

5.3.2 Discipleship for this generation can be a fluid experience. No longer do we see generation after generation of church family worshipping in the same place. Not only is the 20-40s generation more mobile in where it lives, but also in how it moves during the week; possibly working in one place, living in other, socialising in yet another, while having family and friends scattered even further afield. How does a person of faith live and express their faith with others in such a fragmented world?

5.4 Social media

5.4.1 Social media may be one answer to this question. This generation has been heavily influenced by social media. At its best, social media is a daily tool used to bring people together through shared interests and beliefs, and as a place of healthy disagreement and discussion.

5.4.2 However, one common criticism which the Church may share, is that social media can form distinct 'echo chambers' of community. These can become places where we gather with similar thinking people and simply reinforce our own worldview. The question this raises is whether Church can more visibly be much greater than that, a sign of authentic community – a place of discussion, disagreement, and deepening relationships, both on-line and on-the-ground. If we are to find ourselves attractive as 'authentic community', an open and exploring attitude should be a visible part of our identity and purpose.

5.4.3 There is much more we can explore as a denomination to create a vibrant online faith community, not least as a means of connecting with those in the 20s to 40 age range. We note the URC already has a Facebook and Twitter presence, a *Reform* App, and that the URC's 'Daily Devotions' have been a valuable resource for many. We are also hopeful that new resources for 'Walking the Way' and Stepwise will include video, online forums, webinars, and (despite the dangers that online dialogues sometimes suffer from) further opportunities for exploration and discussion based activities with much more interaction that emails and tweets allow.

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5.5 Keeping pace with change?

5.5.1 It can be said that much of what has been learnt about this generation is already out of date – time passes and life moves on fast. In Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, after running fast, Alice remarks to the Queen of Hearts that it appears that they have not got anywhere. The Queen retorts: 'It takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place.' Often Church can feel like that! Maybe we need to do less of *running* churches, and more of being still with God and each other to build deeper relationships?

5.5.2 The task group firmly believes that people of all ages are attracted to communities of hope, of vision, and of love.

6. Resolution or recommendations

5.6.1 In its initial remit, the task group was asked to bring resolutions, with costings, of how the Church could better engage with 20-40-year-olds to General Assembly. However, the task group members are unanimous in the belief that such resolutions are either not possible or would achieve little. All of the group's findings have shown that engagement is about building personal relationships with individuals and moving forward together. Therefore, the group does not want to give General Assembly another programme or a resolution with steps for every local church follow in order to connect with younger adults. Instead, the task group wishes to signpost individuals and churches to good news stories, the resources that are already available elsewhere, and present questions and issues for all our councils and committees to act upon.

5.6.2 As in many areas of our Church life, what seems to be required of us first is an attitudinal change, from which all else will naturally follow. The challenge from the findings of this report is for our local churches, our synods and our denominational structures and programmes to intentionally build into their thinking consideration of a much broader spectrum of people, particularly those aged 20-40. However, we are hopeful that a renewed emphasis on discipleship ('Walking the Way') and a hands-on mentored approach to lay learning (Stepwise) are positive beginnings in this regard.

5.6.3 The cost to our churches of seeking to improve engagement to 20-40-year-olds is unlikely to be financial. If the Church is truly serious about engaging in with 20-40-year-olds, it needs to be open to radical change. For some this may be painful, for others it is what they have long been yearning for. Of course, the irony is that in ten or twenty years' time, 20-40-year-olds will be a different generation, and the solutions that work today will not be the solutions that work then.

5.6.4 We hope it is by now clear that there is no quick fix or easy answer to the question of engagement with 20-40 year olds, neither is there a 'one size fits all' programme or a step-by-step guide to filling churches with people of this age group. We are also aware that for some this report will have made for difficult reading and presented some uncomfortable truths. For others it will have revealed nothing new and feel like more talk and little action. The task group pray that it may be received as a call to all parts of our church to engage more readily in open and genuine conversation with those often missing from our congregations, to continually seek to build new meaningful and mutual relationships, and to allow these encounters to shake us and to shape us.

5.6.5 The church of Jesus Christ *belongs* to all, and just as much to those aged 20-40!

Signposting

'Walking the Way' – discipleship

Education and learning – 'Blended Lives, Blended Living' report – digital age

For reflection

Questions for reflection and discussion

These may be explored by individuals or in a small group setting, or discussed at an Elders, Church, or Synod Meeting.

Introduction

Having read the report of the 20-40 task group, spend a few moments to consider how you are feeling.

Some may be sad at the picture the report paints, others inspired by the opportunity to address this issue. You may be angry at the report, or at the Church, or simply feel helpless faced with such a huge issue.

There is no right or wrong answer, but acknowledging how we feel is important before we engage with the questions the report presents.

Reflecting on your own context

- What generation(s) are missing from the life of your local church?
- What part do people age 20-40 play in the life of your local church?
- How do you believe your church is relevant to the lives of people aged 20 to 40?
- Arrange a church meeting to discuss the Key components of effective ministry to 20-40s' (see page 32)

Making connections, deepening understanding

- What barriers to 20-40 year olds exist in your church?
- Take time this week to talk to someone you know age 20-40 about their views of church. If possible, speak to someone who attends your church and someone who does not attend any church.
- What stories can you find of churches that have good inclusion of those aged 20-40 and what can we learn from them?
- Ask your synod or ecumenical contacts which churches in your area engage well with people age 20-40 and arrange to visit their worship or other significant activities which include this age group.

Questions leading to change?

- Do people age 20-40 regularly participate in leading worship at your church? If not, what realistic steps could you take to change this, if any?
- Are any of your church elders age 20-40? If not, what realistic steps could you take to change this, if any?

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- Does your church have more than one 'congregation' in order to connect with different generations? If not, what realistic steps could you take to change this, if any?
- Do those age 20-40 take part in your local church decision making, if not what realistic steps could you take to change this, if any?
- What changes has, or could, your local church make to make connections with 20-40s easier?
- Are there any aspects of your churches life which you would not want to change, and why?

Communication

- What activities in your church are specifically aimed at those in the 20-40 age range and how is this communicated?
- How does your church use social media? Could you be more effective?
- Many people age 20-40 think you have to first believe in order to belong to a church. How could your church communicate a change to this perception?
- How does your church communicate its vision, its mission, or its purpose? Does what you present feel attractive or relevant to those age 20-40?

Prayer

Spend some time now to pray for those in your church and in the wider community age 20-40, exploring if possible the challenges and aspirations of this generation.

Key components of effective ministry to 20-40s:

- a) Empowering, visionary leadership – whether we like it or not, Ministers are key people.
- b) Significant leadership roles for under 40s – people with a stake are more likely to stay involved.
- c) Team ministry – a sense of a range of people being involved in ministry, not necessarily a formal staff team.
- d) Supportive church structures – a commitment to allow the time and resources necessary to engage and grow.
- e) Intentional discipleship programmes – a clear priority for everyone to be involved in a programme of growth and resourcing.
- f) Encouragement to be actively involved in church life – taking part leads to a sense of belonging and ownership.
- g) Inspirational, relevant worship – it may be that a variety of worship opportunities are needed.
- h) A commitment to build and maintain meaningful relationships – friends inviting friends is central to any mission and evangelism strategy.
- i) A focus on outreach and mission – the church should be outward looking with a clear mission focus.
- j) A reliance on God – and discernment at the heart of everything.

Safeguarding advisory group appendix six

Safeguarding priorities and developments

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou: ioannis.athanasiou@urc.org.uk Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide an update on safeguarding operations and concerns.
Main points	Presenting key priorities about safeguarding that have an impact on the whole Church. Notifying the need to update a previous resolution related to criminal record checks.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 21: Ministries and Youth and Children’s Work: vetting and barring – General Assembly 2010 pp.254-255
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding advisory group.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Competent oversight of safeguarding and criminal record checks is a legal and reputational requirement.

Safeguarding priorities and developments

The Safeguarding advisory group (SAG) has been set up by Mission Council. Its current terms of reference (November 2013) mandate it to nurture good standards of safety around the Church as a whole. But it does not make formal recommendations to General Assembly. This report, then, lets Assembly know about some of the group's current concerns and work, and about advice that the group expects to give Mission Council in the autumn of this year.

1. The United Reformed Church is committed to creating a safe environment for all. The Church has made significant progress in recent years to put in place robust policies, systems and practices to ensure that every child and adult is treated with dignity and respect, whatever their circumstances. In accordance with public policy and guidance by the Charity Commission, safeguarding has become a key priority for all churches and synods, not just for those working with groups traditionally considered as being at risk.
2. It is real progress that all synods have decided to organise safeguarding matters and to provide advice, guidance and training to local churches. Twelve synods have employed or assigned designated professionals to act as single points of contact and respond appropriately to any safeguarding concerns. The Synod of Scotland has agreed an on-going service for aspects of their safeguarding practice with the Church of Scotland.
3. SAG has been intent on reviewing development and implementation of safeguarding policies, to conform to best practice approach to safeguarding. In addition to Good Practice 4 (GP4) guidance and the Past Case Review (PCR), the publication of supplementary guidance on 'Safeguarding Adults at Risk' was added to current safeguarding practice to empower and support adults in maintaining independence and wellbeing.
4. The URC's 'Safeguarding Strategic Plan (2017-2022)' was agreed by SAG last year and is being further developed in consultation with synod moderators, synod safeguarding officers and external experts. A joint meeting of the synod safeguarding officers and SAG in June 2018 will finalise the strategic plan for the attention of the next Mission Council and activate a collective effort to put specific standards and actions into practice in years to come.
5. Safer recruitment guidance for the whole Church will be produced by the end of this year to reflect new laws and regulatory requirements and protect children, young people, and adults from abuse, harm or neglect. As a significant first step, Mission Council will be asked to review Resolution 21 from Assembly 2010, on vetting and barring procedures.
6. SAG has not yet had opportunity to present to Mission Council its concerns about the need to review the 2010 resolution. However, these concerns are noted below for the information of Assembly. SAG believes that this matter needs careful attention, and will ask Mission Council to approve necessary revisions of the Church's approach, so that URC churches will be legally compliant, and will be safer and more trusted environments for all, including ministers, staff and volunteers.

The need to review Resolution 21, on vetting and barring (General Assembly 2010)

Criminal records checking schemes

1. The United Reformed Church uses the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in England and Wales and the Protecting Vulnerable Groups Scheme (PVG) in Scotland to help ensure that those working with vulnerable groups are safe to do so. SAG, the ministries and children's and youth work committees and safeguarding professionals in the synods work together to support and guide local URC congregations, LEPs and the wider church in their duties.
2. Criminal record checks are just one part of an effective recruitment process. They reveal any information held on central police databases such as cautions and convictions and any mention on government lists that bar individuals from working with children, young people or adults at risk. A check at enhanced level includes non-conviction data that will be disclosed where they are relevant to the role for which the person has applied.
3. It is a criminal offence for anyone listed and barred by the DBS and PVG to work or apply to work in the UK with the protected groups for which they are listed and barred (either children or adults). It is also illegal for any URC church or synod knowingly to employ a listed or barred person to do work from which they are barred or listed.

Fair and transparent processing of criminal offence data

4. Individuals and the self-employed cannot apply for a standards or enhanced check directly to the DBS. 'Due Diligence Checking' Limited has been contracted by the URC to provide criminal records checking services for Church House and the churches and synods of the United Reformed Church. Checks for Ministers, Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), Assembly accredited lay preachers, and other relevant staff of the URC in England, Wales and Scotland and, are currently processed by the ministries office at Church House.
5. Once a decision for appointment has been made, a DBS or PVG check should always be carried out for successful applicants and only for job roles and positions which are eligible. Before someone acting on behalf of the URC considers asking an individual to apply for a criminal record check, they are legally responsible for ensuring that they are entitled to apply for the role.
6. It is essential that criminal offence data obtained via checking schemes are obtained lawfully, fairly and transparently. Any application for a check should therefore be initiated with the consent of the applicant, to ensure protection of the rights of people who apply to work or volunteer for the URC. Personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences are not included in the definition of special category data, but similar extra safeguards are applied to processing of sensitive category data.
7. The law indicates that certain General Assembly appointees and others undertaking roles for the URC, including ministers, will be deemed to be engaging in 'Regulated Activity' and therefore will require a criminal records check prior to undertaking such work. To identify which roles are eligible for a DBS check, it is important to first be clear about what each role entails and produce a written job or role description (for a paid or volunteering position), emphasising the specific requirements and duties of the post, the frequency and period of time over which the work is to be done, and how the work will be supervised. The job or role description should say whether it is eligible for and requires a criminal records check, and if so the level of the check.

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8. All local churches and synods must treat DBS and PVG check applicants who have a criminal record fairly and should not discriminate because of a conviction or other information revealed. DBS and PVG checks with convictions or offences do not automatically bar applicants from working with children or adults. The URC has clear guidelines and procedures to deal with concerns resulting from information revealed by the check (a blemished disclosure), in accordance with the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. The safeguarding officers also provide a comprehensive support service in such circumstances, including assistance with completing risk assessments and setting up appropriate safeguards for DBS and PVG applicants and the local churches.

Guidance

9. In this area, we take guidance from the DBS, in its Guide to eligibility for DBS checks; the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended by Protection of Freedoms Act 2012); the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (Scotland) Act 2007; new legislation related to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and relevant documents published by statutory agencies. Guidance about regulated activity with children has been published by the Department for Education (DfE). Information about regulated activity with adults is available from the Department of Health (DH). Guidance for both vulnerable groups as well as guidance about regulated work in Scotland are accessible on the URC website.
10. Section seven of both the *Safeguarding Good Practice 4* for synods and General Assembly and *The Handbook for Churches* contains clear and practical guidance on how to integrate criminal records checking schemes in the recruitment processes for paid and voluntary workers. DDC has set up a web page (www.ddc.uk.net/urc) with further information and guidance for local churches, trustees, verifiers and other responsible staff to complete on-line and paper DBS and PVG applications for those working or volunteering with children and adults at risk. The government also provides an on-line tool to find out whether to check eligibility of roles for a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check in England and Wales (<https://www.gov.uk/find-out-dbs-check>).
11. The table on page 37 shows URC roles where the activity is seen to be eligible for criminal record checks. However, this list is indicative and not exhaustive as there will be local variations in titles and roles. Further, it should be recognised that roles change over time and new roles are formed, and that some roles are not eligible, while others require certain types of check. As an example, those in self-help groups or family and friends' arrangements are not eligible for an enhanced criminal record check. When a role is reviewed or a new one is created, those overseeing this process should consider whether the individual undertaking that role is going to undertake 'regulated' activity or work with children or adults at risk.
12. DBS checks must be renewed every five years. In Scotland, membership of the PVG scheme lasts forever. PVG scheme members are continuously checked, unless they decide to leave the scheme, and they should keep their record up to date if for example, they change jobs or move to a new house.

Safer recruitment checks

13. The draft resolution that SAG expects to put before Mission Council in the autumn will include the following clauses:
- Reiteration of the United Reformed Church's commitment to being a Safe Church
 - Encouragement to all local churches and synods to follow best practice on recruiting people who will work or volunteer with children and young people and adults at risk
 - Reasserting the need for those who make decisions and act on behalf of the denomination to request criminal records checks as part of robust recruitment processes, and for specific roles that ministers, workers and volunteers undertake to support and serve children, young people and adults at risk.

14. Mission Council will be asked to support this resolution as an indication of the Church's desire to have in place the best safer recruitment policies as well as procedures that will satisfy the demands of the law and the expectations of our insurers and ecumenical partners.

URC Roles where the activity is seen to be eligible for a criminal record check

Anyone who wishes to raise questions of detail about this table is asked to contact the presenters of the report before we get to Nottingham.

	With barring information		Without barring information		No checks
	Adults	Children	Adults	Children	
Ministers, stipendiary/non-stipendiary and Church Related Community Workers – active		X			
Ministers, stipendiary/non-stipendiary and Church Related Community Workers – non-active					X
Ministers of other denominations employed by the URC	X	X			
Others in Special Category Ministry posts	X	X			
Ministers and CRCWs in training	X	X			
Children's and youth work elders	X	X			
URC Assembly accredited lay preachers, England and Wales			X	X	
URC locally recognised lay preachers, England and Wales			X	X	
URC Assembly accredited or locally authorised lay preachers, Scotland					X
Assembly appointed staff and Church House support staff who undertake regulated activity with children and/or adults	X	X			
Safeguarding professionals and officers, including safeguarding coordinators and their deputies, and safe church advisers	X	X			
Synod recognised lay pastors/local leaders/interim moderators/interim ministers					X
Children and Youth Workers (paid/voluntary), managers of Children and Youth Workers, stewards and drivers in settings with regulated work with children or young people	X				
Vulnerable adult workers (paid/voluntary), pastoral and personal care visitors where role includes direct feeding, physical care, assistance with financial matters or driving to medical or social care appointments		X			
United Reformed Church Trustees			X	X	
TLS students studying Gateways into Worship, Gateways into care or Stepwise development programme	X	X			

Mission Council appendix seven

Past case review: recommendations and responses

Basic Information

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Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Reporting on what has been learned from the Past Case Review.
Main points	The Church needs to be more systematic, careful and attentive to matters of safeguarding, human resources, health and safety and to nurture a culture where needs for protection and support are given due priority.
Previous relevant documents	Noted in the report. Mission Council reports from March 2015 onwards
Consultation has taken place with...	The safeguarding advisory group The Methodist Church Independent specialists

Summary of Impact

Financial	Resourcing external expertise and consultancy support from academia and specialist agencies to produce and share learning through the learning process.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Appendix seven

Past case review: recommendations and responses

1. Background

1.1 In May 2015, Mission Council authorised a Historic Case Review of previous ministerial practice over the life of the denomination. In response to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) enquiry, the Church conducted a review of all ministers' files from 1972 onwards to ensure that any historic issues and concerns were dealt with appropriately. The Historic Case Review (later known as the past case review phase one) was completed early in 2016.

1.2 Between October 2015 and January 2016, 1556 files were identified and reviewed. This involved many hours of work by synod teams and individual members who volunteered to read the files, to whom we express our grateful thanks. As a result of an extensive and thorough assessment, 54 files were referred for independent review by external safeguarding consultant in four categories ranging from the most serious (1) to the less significant (4). Both of the two category 1 cases were referred into the Church's Ministerial Disciplinary Process.

1.3 In October 2016, phase two was launched and opened for anyone to make a complaint or raise concerns about past actions or behaviour of people affiliated with the URC since its formation in 1972. The purpose of this phase was pastoral, in permitting those who had a complaint to be listened to and be taken seriously with further action taken to resolve it. Although the process was planned to conclude in March 2017, this was extended and continued until May 2017, when the open call to anyone to report and share his/her concerns was closed.

1.4 During this phase 18 cases were identified and assessed through the PCR process. We are indebted to those who had the courage to speak up during this process, sometimes opening old wounds and sharing uncomfortable stories. The process was also enriched by the efforts of listeners drawn from all over the United Kingdom and those who served on the allegations panels and the allegations reference group.

1.5 Both phases of the past case review revealed a similar range of issues. The cases that were identified related to concerns around professional boundaries, inappropriate relationships and behaviour, misconduct, inconsistency in keeping records, failure to follow procedures, domestic, emotional and other types of abuse, bullying, neglect, financial discrepancies, a lack of training and complaints policy.

1.6 All the cases have now been resolved, although not always with agreement on both sides. In some cases, the complaint had already been through the appropriate processes of the Church and was an attempt to reopen a closed enquiry, but sometimes involved the recommendation of the independent consultant, referrals to external agencies and specific actions of an individual synod officer. Whatever the outcome of the reviewing process and any consequential responses to concerns, churches and synods have taken action to provide a range of pastoral support and alternative care services by the URC and/or other relevant organisations.

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1.7 What follows is a report on the learning outcomes and the appropriate actions which have been proposed for our Church as a consequence of these two phases of the past case review process.

2. Introduction

2.1 This Past Case Review (PCR) report is focussed feedback and recommendations to the URC from the internal and external experts appointed to review our PCR, and the actions which have been taken, or are in process.

2.2 This is a practical report which does not report higher level strategy, theological reflection, methodology, process reflection, or final recommendations from the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG); these will be addressed in the final report from the PCR learning group. As the purpose of the PCR has been to hear in order to learn well and amend behaviours both structurally and personally, it seemed right to focus on immediate changes which can bring safer practices and relationships for those in membership, governance, and leadership throughout the URC. It seemed appropriate to SAG, and to committees representing its constituent members, that actions to encourage safe church environments are taken as soon as possible, rather than at publication of a final learning document.

2.3 In the following sections, this report outlines what experts consider to be the context and the learning objectives through the review process taken place between April 2015 to June 2017. The sections following outline the experts' initial observations and recommendations and the URC's immediate and planned responses.

2.4 This document conflates feedback and recommendations from three groups of the internal and external experts:

- **External expert reader**, PCR phase one (A nurse, midwife and health visitor with a Masters degree in child care law and practice, who has served on panels for 28 serious case reviews for children, domestic homicide reviews and serious case reviews for adults and produced independent management reviews to contribute to identifying good practices as well as failures in practice; Member of National Safeguarding Forum for NHS England)
- **Internal learning review team** who reflected on three significant cases identified through PCR Phase one (Safeguarding Officer, Secretary for Ministries and an external expert, consultant and ex-director of The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS))
- **PCR Learning Group**, comprise of two URC members (Church historian with significant senior roles in URC and ecumenically and an academic theologian) and two external members (colleague denomination national Safeguarding Officer and an academic researcher/expert in abuse studies)

3. Context of this report

3.1 The purpose of each expert group was not to investigate, but to review all cases, identify problems and challenges and, on the basis of a systematic review, make recommendations, with the objective of supporting the URC towards a positive approach to safeguarding in the future and to more robust systems and procedures. However, no matter how robust our systems and procedures become, the internal learning review team reminds us that any system, including safeguarding systems, can only manage and reduce risk, not eliminate it. What the URC strives toward is far more a change of culture, rather than simply amended procedures.

3.2 The learning group tells us that we need to understand the historical and cultural contexts in which initial decisions and recommendations on historic cases were made. The internal learning review team noted: 'The passage of time has inevitably had a bearing on the recommendations, comments and questions which have arisen from the review. How the Church handled matters in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s

may be different to how the Church currently responds to safeguarding concerns. This is not to make excuses for any poor practice, at any time.’ However, the landscape of safeguarding has changed over the past twenty years. All experts report that these changes were taken into account within their reviews.

4. URC’s framework of safeguarding policy and Practice

4.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to learning through its revision of policy and practice, scrutiny and challenge of functions, and identification of areas for improvement. The URC has had a long record of commitment to safeguarding individuals in its care, alongside a growing public interest in protecting vulnerable people, particularly children. In 1991, the Children Act became law. Subsequent to the Children’s Act, there was a growing awareness that in addition to preventing potential victimisation of children, and then adults at risk, there needed to be awareness to prevent abuse, harm and neglect.

4.2 From 1994 onwards, the URC created a range of policies and procedures to prevent abuse and to protect potential victims in every area of the Church’s life.

- a) 1994 *Good Practice in safeguarding children and young people* (GP1) produced, supported by training; this was followed by GP2 (2001), GP3 (2004), and GP4 (2015) which included good practice for adults at risk.
- b) 2005 Declaration of a Safe Church was passed by Assembly, addressing the issue of sexual abuse; This was followed by the Declaration towards a Safe(r) Church (2008).
- c) 2006 *Preserving the Integrity of the Body: sexual ethics within the United Reformed Church*, was published by the URC.
- d) 2006 *Relating Together, Life Together and Worshipping Together*, booklets were distributed to churches.
- e) 2008 *Safeguarding – It’s a whole Church responsibility* was produced, distributed and supported by training.
- f) 2014 General Assembly resolved that some training was to be mandatory for ministers, and in 2015, Mission Council agreed that the first mandatory training was to be ‘Safer Sacred Space’, training in safe boundaries for ministers.
- g) 2015 Mission Council called the Past Case Review to further understand its own practice and to align the URC with the independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA).

4.3 The good practice approach to safeguarding led to the appointment of the URC’s first Safeguarding Officer in 2013. The role is now full time, with the Safeguarding Officer advising on all matters of safeguarding within the URC. SAG maintains an overview of all safeguarding policies, practices and systems within the URC and the current strategic plan (2017 to 2022). Its membership is the URC’s Safeguarding Officer, the Secretary for Children and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), the Education and Learning Programme Officer, and up to three co-opted members with relevant experience.

4.4 Local churches are required to appoint a safeguarding coordinator and produce a safeguarding policy with relevant procedures, and all synods have safeguarding designated officers. Most synods have a single point of contact for safeguarding.

4.5 The URC also contracts external agencies in support of safeguarding work, including Due Diligence Checking Ltd (DDC) which is the umbrella organisation for Criminal Record Checks (DBS/PVG). The URC is a member of the Christian Forum for Safeguarding (CFS) to ensure that the church’s views are represented in the wider field of safeguarding.

5. Recommendations and responses

In each of the following sections observations and recommendations from the three areas of expertise have been conflated to main themes and their set of recommendations. However, to keep a link between the recommendation and the reviewer, there is a reference. EEx indicates the external expert, LG indicates the PCR learning group, and ILR indicates the internal learning review team.

6. Recording and filling data and information

6.1 A review of the files illustrated many instances of insufficient information, with record keeping often inconsistent, incomplete, with detailed financial records yet sparse allegations notes, not always following from allegation to conclusion. The records are not always dated or signed and do not always contain information of who they relate to. There was no evidence of how many different files were kept about the same minister. There were incidences of missing information in files and occasions where it is unclear what the outcome of an investigation was. There was occasionally documentation about the same individual records but with differing records of the outcomes of investigations. The use of language and terminology was a concern across some files. On one occasion, a safeguarding concern was referred to as a ‘hiccup’. This clearly minimises behaviour. On other occasions terminology was ambiguous and so ascertaining what had actually happened was difficult.

6.2.1 Recommendations from experts

- a) Systems should be put into place to standardise record keeping, with standardised structure to files (EEx). Moderators need to check files for an individual who is moving synods to determine if there are concerns. Therefore, there must be a comprehensive and structured data recording system, which ensures all material is accessible. Records need to be carefully constructed using clear and unambiguous terminology (LG).
- b) Allegations should be recorded on specific records so that they are easily identified and have an audit trail (EEx). Cases need to be documented in detail, providing as much information as possible. Files need to contain all the relevant information and documents (LG).
- c) All information must be securely filed (LG).
- d) All records and telephone conversations should be dated and timed and labelled with the name of the person that they relate to. Records should be written up within 24 hours of the conversation (EEx).
- e) Record audits should be carried out to ensure that the records are of good quality (EEx).
- f) There should be one single record kept (EEx).
- g) There must be clarity about outcomes of investigations and whether follow up is required (LG).
- h) Ministers should be aware of the information that is held on file about them and that this will be shared with any synod to which the minister moves (LG).

6.2.2 The learning group recommend that over the next five years the URC move towards a centralised electronic recording system. As a centralised system allows for records which demonstrate unfounded allegations and appropriate ministerial conduct, this information may be very helpful for those seeking to move positions and needing to demonstrate that any concerns which may have been raised were investigated fully without the need for any further action. The learning group noted that it is essential that the URC become compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and that all material on file is kept in accordance with this new regulation, with the exception of child protection cases there must be a clear date at which material on file will be destroyed.

6.3 Response

6.3.1 SAG has listened to all the experiences of the readers, the reviewers, and all key staff who have handled files in the PCR. Alongside this, the Church House administration

and resources department has been working closely with Ministries Secretary and Safeguarding Officer on the new database for Church House. The new database now has extended capacity to consistently record personal data and information and functions to indicate where files of a particular minister will be securely kept. Though the recommendation of central electronic records is not dismissed, it will take time and much discussion if it is to be achieved. What has been designed for immediate use will allow the necessary information to be known whilst also being securely held. These actions respond to recommendations 6.2.1 a), c), and f).

6.3.2 A new cover sheet for ministers' physical files has now been agreed, supported by guidance on why such information is kept. This cover sheet has been circulated to synods to include in ministers' files and will give a record of every document in the file, dated and signed by the person who included it in the file. When a minister moves pastorate or project, there is clear guidance on how a file moves, and what synod files should be destroyed. These actions respond to recommendation 6.2.1 a)

6.3.3 In the light of the new legislation and recent guidance by Charity Commission, safeguarding is also one of the priority areas for a working group at the Church House focused on the new GDPR. To meet the requirements of the new legislation that come into force in May 2018, the Safeguarding is now part of this working group to introduce updated guidance for processing, sharing and retaining often highly sensitive personal information. It is also anticipated that a records management and retention schedule will be produced, picking up the recommendations at 6.2.1 b), d), e), and g).

7. Allegation and investigation process

7.1.1 There were allegations which had been made by relatives, members of the church and other vulnerable victims which have not been appropriately investigated. It should be noted that a decision of the police not to proceed with investigation or criminal charges does not mitigate the risk posed to the public. There is little evidence of information sharing with statutory agencies or using their skills and expertise. There is evidence that the URC's reinstatement policy was not followed. A theme which needs to be highlighted is the number of resignations that are offered and accepted at the first sign of an allegation. The URC has a duty of care to ensure that they mitigate any risk to the public. There was no evidence of any minister being referred to the DBS for consideration following resignation.

7.1.2 There were times at which the reputation of the URC or individual church appeared to be prioritised over the safeguarding of the individual. The files contain many examples of repeated patterns of behaviour which have failed to be addressed when first identified. Thus, a complaint is raised but not actioned or a decision is made that action is not required, then subsequent examples of the same behaviour occur. In some cases, there seemed to be a need for more investigation and critical thinking on concerns and more exploration and questioning was required. Some of the independent readers have noted that synod moderators have written to ministers and requested a response but there is no record of a response being given. It is unclear what the process is for checking that responses have been received or to flag where they have not. A reading of multiple cases provides some evidence of concerns raised by women being dismissed or minimised. The synod structure presents challenges for effective communication and information sharing. However, these are central aspects of a robust safeguarding system.

7.1.3 Other challenges related to information sharing were identified in cases where individuals had moved denominations. It was clear in some cases that more detailed checks and follow up work was required to ascertain why an individual was moving and to be assured that there were no outstanding safeguarding concerns. Similarly, there are cases on record of individuals moving from the URC when concerns had been expressed and going to work for other external organisations. It was not clear what, if any, action had been taken to share relevant information in these cases. There was some evidence of cases where references were not checked. There were other examples of

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cases where individuals' own explanations of behaviour appeared to have been taken as factual, rather than being explored or investigated. Concerns were raised by those in the learning group that members of mandated groups might lack the knowledge and experience of working on safeguarding cases and this could impact the quality of decision making and the safeguarding process.

7.2.1 Recommendations from Experts

- a) References must be taken up and checked (LG). Where a ministry candidate has worked either in the church or in secular employment, references should be sought from the most recent employer. The process for this should not jeopardise current employment (ILR).
- b) All cases where safeguarding is suspected should be referred through to the URC safeguarding lead for guidance (EEx).
- c) All allegations which are possible criminal offences should be reported to the police (EEx).
- d) Where a minister is convicted of specific criminal offences this should lead to an immediate removal from the Roll of Ministers, in a similar way that the conviction of specific offences leads to an immediate barring for working with children or vulnerable adults/adults at risk (what is known as auto-bar offences) (ILR).
- e) Disciplinary procedures should be followed to conclusion even in the event of resignation (EEx). Once disciplinary procedures have been instigated there should be a full completion of process irrespective of any legal outcome (ILR).
- f) URC's policies and procedures should be followed (EEx). It is important that all concerns raised are investigated thoroughly and responded to effectively (LG).
- g) URC to share information and make referrals to LADO as appropriate (EEx).
- h) Mandated groups should be improved: any investigations should be carried out by a team who have no other contact with the minister and their family to prevent a conflict of roles (EEx). There should be a selection process for those on mandated groups (LG). There should be comprehensive safeguarding training for all individuals on mandated groups (LG). Whenever there is a disciplinary hearing that involves a safeguarding matter, the hearing should comprise of one safeguarding specialist to assist in the process, especially as the hearing consists of lay people who may not have any direct experience of safeguarding (ILR). Those on mandated groups should have the opportunity to operate in this role more regularly to build up experience (LG). Review of the mandated group should occur periodically, where the disciplinary process is lengthy to ensure current availability, including whether any specialist would be required to be part of the mandated group (ILR).
- i) Vulnerable witnesses and complainants should be provided with additional support at Hearings (ILR).
- j) There should always be at least 2 investigators (EEx).
- k) There needs to be a universal process for checking that responses to requests have been received and for follow-up action where this has not occurred (LG).
- l) Disciplinary procedures should be followed to conclusion regardless of resignation (EEx).
- m) Consideration should be given to cases for referral to DBS (EEx).
- n) All policies and procedures should be version controlled and dated and regularly reviewed (EEx).
- o) It is important to build up dialogue with other denominations and to check the reasons why an individual has moved cross-denominationally (LG).
- p) A framework for information sharing external to the URC should be developed, which complies with the new data protection regulations (LG).
- q) The URC review the current safeguarding policy and disciplinary policy to incorporate critical safeguarding incident protocols, and specifically where there are allegations made against a minister or church officer (ILR).
- r) A review of the procedures and process of Section P should be undertaken to see if it 'fits' the purpose it was designed for. Particularly whether it can be used where the incapacity relates to a minister's ability to exercise the function of minister of religion whilst experiencing mental health issues and whether the process can proceed fairly if this is the case (ILR).

- s) Where there have been a number of churches and other groups who have been involved with or had to manage their interaction with a case, there needs to be structured pastoral response (ILR).

7.2.2 Overall, safeguarding of an individual must take priority over the reputation of the URC or local church (LG), and there is a need to put respectful uncertainty into practice through thorough investigation and critical reflection (LG). Gender should not be a factor in judging whether a concern is legitimate (LG), and thought should be given as to how to develop more effective communication between synods (LG). It is important not to ‘take the word’ of someone about what happened but to ensure information is checked and appropriate exploration takes place (LG).

7.3.1 Response

Since the appointment of a full time Safeguarding Officer, there is now clear safeguarding oversight, in partnership with SAG and its representative committees, with a deeper working relationship with all synod safeguarding officers. Many of the recommendations from the expert groups are about clear policies and protocols, many of which were not in place in the historic context of many of the referred cases. The URC’s practice is improving and was noted by the external expert when reading more recent files.

7.3.2 Section O processes and disciplinary processes are currently under review, yet Section O has already been amended to prevent the resignation of a minister without completion of a case, and to refer relevant cases to the DBS. In 2017, it was agreed that synod safeguarding officers, alongside the URC’s Safeguarding Officer may now advise with the Section O process.

7.3.3 SAG adopted a strategic plan (2017 to 2022), shared with synod safeguarding officers, where areas and protocols are identified for further development and implementation. The Safeguarding Officer has highlighted safer recruitment guidance as a key priority for the whole Church and is committed to producing this guidance to reflect new laws and regulatory requirements (including GDPR) by the end of 2018. With comprehensive guidance and support, it is expected that churches will be safe and trusted environments for ministers, staff, and volunteers in the years to come.

7.3.4 It will take some while to adopt consistent practice across every synod, and there is frequently resistance to markedly robust process. However, there is a significant piece of work to complete to ensure that the URC has a trusted and clear allegation and investigation process, including pastoral care for any victims. The PCR phase two introduced a range of steps for such future processes and SAG and all safeguarding officers are committed to the publication of clear process guidelines by the time of General Assembly 2020.

8. The link between the discipline and safeguarding processes

8.1 Reading the files showed some disconnection between the discipline process and consideration of matters as safeguarding issues. At times, the discipline process seemed to be prioritised. There was also some confusion at times as to what constituted a safeguarding issue. It is important that the URC does not adopt a ‘bunker mentality’ where it assumes that DBS checks are sufficient to ensure safety of those working in its contexts.

8.2 Recommendations

- a) Safeguarding needs to be prioritised across the discipline process (EEx).
- b) There needs to be clear guidance on what constitutes a safeguarding issue and when behaviour crosses the threshold (EEx).
- c) A safeguarding culture needs to continue to grow and develop (EEx).

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8.2.3 Response

SAG has agreed a strategic plan (2017-2022) to address the recommended cultural changes. The plan will be further developed in consultation with synod moderators, synod safeguarding officers and external experts. A joint meeting with the safeguarding officers and members of SAG in June 2018 and the final approval by the next Mission Council will put the plan and its specific objectives into action. There is emphasis on safeguarding awareness and training, recording systems and processes for safe recruitment, key commitments of the Safeguarding Officer (appointed December 2017). The ministries committee is presently revising all discipline processes. We acknowledge that it will take time to change culture but are committed to the changes needed.

9. Coercive control and financial abuse

9.1 The learning group identified a significant number of cases where bullying behaviour or coercive control was evident. In a number of these cases such behaviour seemed to be minimised or dismissed. In one such case the allegation was shared with the individual accused without the knowledge of the person making the disclosure. Understandings of spiritual abuse (coercive control in a religious context) are developing together with recognition of the importance of addressing such behaviour. In other cases, there are signs of financial abuse or control through the lending or receiving of finance. This issue seems to be overlooked in many cases or minimised. There is a growing understanding and body of work about financial abuse and it is important that this is not minimised in reports of concerning behaviour.

9.2 Recommendations

- a) The URC needs to ensure that bullying or controlling behaviour is addressed and not minimised (LG).
- b) Developing an understanding of spiritual abuse would be beneficial to the URC (LG).
- c) As with other forms of abusive behaviour allegations should not be shared with an individual who is accused without the knowledge of the individual who raised the complaint. (LG).
- d) The URC needs to ensure that financial abuse or the use of finance to control is addressed and not minimised (LG).
- e) Developing an understanding of financial abuse would be beneficial to the URC (LG).

9.3 Response

SAG will address the specific types of abuse detailed in 9, then, through the safeguarding office, will work with synods to understand and address specific abuses. Training in boundaries, with material commissioned by the education and learning committee and now available in each synod and Resource Centre for Learning, asks participants to discuss boundary violation in a range of scenarios, including the abuses listed in 9. Recommendation 9.2 c) will feed into revised disclosure guidance.

10. Specific ministerial issues

10.1 Many cases on file recorded those who were victims of abuse as being members of United Reformed churches abused by those in ministerial or pastoral positions. There were also records of those in ministerial and pastoral appointments being subject to abuse. Evidence shows that abuse of ministers and pastoral workers is often hidden and difficult to disclose. There were a significant number of issues associated with ministers who had retired. These seemed to divide into cases where there was ongoing concern of a safeguarding nature for other individuals and cases where ministers appeared to struggle with the retirement process and separation from their local church. There is evidence in a number of records that there have been difficulties with professional boundaries and putting ministers in difficult positions and placing church members at risk. There is also evidence in the records that ministers who work within prisons are particularly at risk to allegations, but incomplete records made it difficult to identify if the allegations had been proven or disproved.

10.2 Recommendations

- a) The issue of power and its use in the perpetration of abuse must be explored and understood within leadership training and monitoring (LG).
- b) Consideration should be given to how to support ministers and pastoral workers who experience abuse and whether a whistle blowing procedure should be developed for this purpose (LG).
- c) Retired ministers who may continue to pose a safeguarding concern must be monitored effectively (LG).
- d) Thought should be given to how to support retired ministers in the process of retirement and how to manage the process so that 'letting go' is enabled (LG).
- e) Clear policies in place around professional boundaries (EEx).
- f) Use of 'professional supervision' where ministers discuss cases with a 'supervisor' which will have a helicopter view to challenge involvement and re enforce boundaries (EEx).
- g) Importance of professional boundaries to be re-enforced with all ministers (EEx).

10.3 Response

The issue of power is highlighted within Education for Ministry Phase 1 (10.2 a) and the recommendation will have been shared with Resource Centres for Learning (RCL). SAG will take up the issue of the necessity of whistleblowing process for thorough consideration and possible extension of Church House's current relevant policy into the practice of the synods (10.2 b). Recommendations 10.2 c), d), f) are being discussed within the ministries committee. There is presently no cross-URC boundary policy, but there is mandatory training in boundary good practice for ministers, Safer Sacred Space (10.2 g). Training in boundaries, with material commissioned by the education and learning committee and now available in each synod and RCL, asks participants to discuss boundaries in a range of scenarios, highlighting safe boundaries, questionable boundaries, and boundary violations.

11. Conclusion

The past case review sheds light on some uncomfortable truths of the past. It also highlighted the need for the Church to become more systematic, careful and attentive to a wide spectrum of areas, including safeguarding, human resources, health and safety and pastoral care. In the light of the recent public interest and media reports about safeguarding, our attention to safeguarding requires more attention. The more members commit to demonstrating a duty of care, seek transparency in applying their responsibilities, and are ready to respond appropriately to concerns for those who need safeguarding and support, the safer the members of all our churches will feel, and victims of abuse will find a place of healing and trust within our churches. The biggest culture change will be for members to lose the notion that to be trained in boundaries or to be asked to complete a DBS check means that they are not trusted. 'We never used to do it like that; you don't trust me!' is a frequently heard response to an invitation to training or to enter due process. We all need to understand that much abuse had been hidden and the closed network of relations did not allow those in less powerful positions to seek remedy in our previous church culture. As our acknowledgement of that history, we are now called to identify actions that ensure future protection, safety and more responsible and joyous relationships. The final report and the lessons learned through the past case review offer a promising step to identify and effect changes in the internal policies and practices of the United Reformed Church. As a matter of urgency and responsibility, and out of respect for the stories of survivors of abuse who stepped forward to voice these, a safeguarding strategic plan for the whole church will take effect in the immediate future (2018 to 2022). Thanks to those who contributed to the planning and implementation of the past case review, we will be able to promote safer practices and prevent people from suffering or experiencing abuse or neglect in the years to come.

Mission Council appendix eight

‘Walking the Way’ report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen: francis.brienen@urc.org.uk Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The development and launch of Walking the Way over the last two years.
Main points	Much time and effort was given to sharing the vision in 2016-17. In 2017-18 resources have been made widely available. CWM funding has been sought and granted.
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2016, and to every meeting of Mission Council since then.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission committee. Education and learning committee. Mission Council.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Present work draws on a CWM grant, as was always intended, and for this our Church is very grateful.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	We have drawn on some resources created in other churches and fellowships, and intend that ‘Walking the Way’ will give our Church’s witness increased credibility and confidence.

Appendix eight

‘Walking the Way’ report

1. ‘Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today’ was welcomed by the General Assembly in 2016 and is the URC’s major emphasis on refreshing and growing our habits of discipleship and mission. Mission Council received various reports from the ‘Walking the Way’ steering group and noted that work on supporting the United Reformed Church’s denomination wide focus on missional discipleship has continued apace.

Communicating the vision

2. During 2017 the focus was on communicating the vision, and developing resources for synods and local churches. Steering group members attended synod meetings, ministers’ conferences and other events to explore missional discipleship together and listen to the needs of synods and local churches.

3. The communications department designed a logo and livery for ‘Walking the Way’, as well as webpages and introductory materials. PowerPoint presentations and audiovisual resources were also produced to introduce ‘Walking the Way’ in synod meetings and local churches. Walking the Way is now also present on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Supporting local churches

4. Much work was done to resource local churches with materials that could be used in developing missional discipleship that touches on all aspects of life. Introductory leaflets accompanied by a prayer card were sent to local congregations in August 2017. The leaflet contained a link to Advent resources on the website, to mark the beginning of this emphasis within the life of the URC.

5. January 2018 saw the publication of *Holy Habits*, a congregational resource based on the book of the same name by Andrew Roberts, published by BRF and developed by the Methodist Church and the URC. It offers individuals and congregations an opportunity to look further into the ten habits covered in the original book, re-imagining them for personal and community life in the 21st century. Film resources to accompany each holy habit are being developed with the Revd Kevin Snyman and will be available by the middle of 2018.

6. The steering group also produced liturgical ideas for Lent 2018 to help congregations consider how Jesus’ time in the wilderness in preparation for his work might influence our relationship with missional discipleship.

7. A task and finish group was set up to design a new discipleship course to replace the TLS programme. The group developed a framework and commissioned writers to produce new materials which can be used by all those wishing to deepen their discipleship. Now named Stepwise, the first stream – Faith-filled life – will be available in September 2018.

Resourcing with people

8. The steering group convened a meeting in July 2017 which brought together those in synods and Resource Centres for Learning to share plans and learn how an emphasis on ‘Walking the Way’ is unfolding across the denomination. The meeting strengthened links between the various groups and helped to ensure that we pursue a common vision.

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9. A ministers’ conference is being planned to take place from 30 April to 3 May 2018 with the Revd Dr Peggy Kabonde of the United Church of Zambia and the Rt Revd Dr Rowan Williams as keynote speakers. The conference will be a key opportunity to work with Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs in seeking to build a church which truly caters for the needs of all people to live out their calling to discipleship and mission.
10. The importance of accompaniment has been emphasised by many people engaged in mission and discipleship development. The steering group is exploring the role of mentoring and coaching with the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity (LICC).

Praying the Way

11. Prayer and reflection are integral to the Walking the Way process. Autumn 2017 saw synods and local congregations involved in a season of prayer to prepare for Walking the Way, with prayers for each week written by one of the synods. GEAR also held several events to pray for the positive reception of Walking the Way.
12. The URC’s Daily Devotions, coordinated by the Revd Andy Braunston, are received by 2,000 subscribers and written by over 100 people from across the URC. This material is now part of the Walking the Way emphasis and is stimulating small groups as well as individuals as they reflect on their spiritual journey daily.
13. Walking the Way is for all generations and to that end the steering group is developing ideas for Messy Church and Godly Play sessions, which explore discipleship and mission across the generations.

Staffing

14. The original impetus for Walking the Way came partly from CWM’s Mission Support Programme for its member churches. Thus CWM funding was always part of our plan. However, a formal application for that funding could only be made when plans were taking detailed shape. It was made in December 2016 and funding was granted, which covers the employment of a project manager, the production of publicity and advocacy materials in print and online, and consultancy with the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King served as part-time interim project manager for nearly six months and ensured timely delivery of materials to synods and local churches. We are very grateful for all her work. Simon Peters took up the post of full-time project manager in January 2018.

Steering group

15. The members of the ‘Walking the Way’ steering group were originally asked to serve until Assembly 2018. In order to ensure a smooth handover at this juncture, the convenors would like the present members to continue in service to the end of 2018, and for the nominations committee to bring any necessary recommendations for the future to the autumn meeting of Mission Council. In fact, however, a number of places on the steering group are nominated by other groups, for example the children’s and youth work committee or the synod training and development officers’ meeting. This cross-representation is one way of ensuring that Walking the Way integrates properly with other concerns, needs and plans around the URC.

General Assembly task group

Proposals for the future of General Assembly

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Val Morrison: valmorrison7@btinternet.com
Action required	<p>The task group asks General Assembly to determine its future size, location and related aspects.</p> <p>The task group invites General Assembly to extend the group's remit to consider how the impact of any changes to General Assembly might affect the Mission Council.</p> <p>The task group proposes to consider the expectations of the Assembly Moderator(s).</p>
Draft resolution(s)	<p>6. General Assembly resolves that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) General Assembly should primarily be funded from the ministry and mission fund, rather than by synods or individuals; b) members of General Assembly be given fuller information on the costs of General Assembly, and a clearer invitation to consider making a donation, including the option of donating by Gift Aid; c) all papers be issued electronically as the primary means of dissemination, but those who wish may choose to receive paper copies at the expense of the Assembly budget; d) it prefers to meet in a venue either around tables or with significant breakout rooms if possible; e) from the close of General Assembly 2018, Moderators should be inducted at the close of the Assembly which begins their term of office and should therefore chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office; f) every effort be made to encourage a variety of voices to speak, by giving priority to those who have not spoken before. <p>7. General Assembly resolves to change its membership as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) There shall be the same number of representatives from each synod. b) There shall be no additional representation from the Synod of Scotland (thereby rescinding a previous Assembly decision to grant six additional representatives to the Synod of Scotland). c) Synod Moderators shall be included in the representation from the synods. <p>Details of how this would change the Structure of the United Reformed Church are set out in the body of the report.</p>

Draft resolution(s)	<p>8. General Assembly resolves to cease the current pattern of rotation of venue, previously informally agreed, and to meet regularly in the centre of the UK, as outlined in pages 61 to 62 of the <i>Book of Reports 2018</i>, with immediate effect.</p> <p>9. General Assembly wishes its future pattern of meetings to be that set out in Option D.</p> <p>10. The number of synod representatives shall be 208, who shall be divided among the synods equally. Within each synod, at least one third of its representatives shall be either Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers, and at least one third shall be lay.</p> <p>11. The number of representatives of churches outside Britain and Ireland shall be five, with a further place for a representative of the Council for World Mission, and there shall be five representatives from partner churches within Britain and Ireland.</p> <p>12. The number of representatives of URC Youth, in addition to the twenty-six youth places available for appointment by synods, shall be two.</p> <p>13. The number of EM1 students shall be one, rather than one from each Resource Centre for Learning.</p> <p>14. The Convenor of the pastoral reference and welfare committee shall not be a member of Assembly.</p> <p>15. Those elected as Moderator of General Assembly at the 2018 General Assembly shall serve from 2020 to 2022, chairing the Assemblies of 2021 and 2022 in whatever manner they shall determine.</p> <p>16. After 2022 there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly at any one time, and Assembly resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church to reflect this change and make it clear.</p> <p>17. General Assembly instructs the Mission Council to make detailed alterations to sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Rules of Procedure, upon the advice of the Clerk, to effect the decisions of principle that it has made.</p> <p>18. General Assembly further extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to propose recommendations on the expectations of General Assembly on the activities to be undertaken by the Assembly Moderator(s).</p> <p>19. General Assembly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) further extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to consider changes to Mission Council in the light of decisions made by the General Assembly, b) instructs the task group to report to each meeting of Mission Council, and c) instructs Mission Council to make appropriate changes to its size, composition, and meeting pattern if these are ready to be made before the next meeting of General Assembly.
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Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To offer proposals for changes to the frequency, location and makeup of General Assembly to enable it to do its work within the budgets set by Assembly of 2016.
Main points	Propose to return to an Annual Assembly with changes to location and size of the Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	AAC supplementary report to GA 2016. Mission Council Paper U1 of May 2017, and Paper N1 of November 2017 and March 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council, URC Youth, individuals and committees.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Possible modest increases in required funds, depending on what we decide to do.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Improvements in the efficiency of our governance processes will reduce the risk of reputational damage.

Proposals for the future of General Assembly

Part one: how we reached our recommendations

1. The task group's remit

1.1 In July 2016 General Assembly resolved to appoint a task group:

to consider the documentation already available, to consult widely, particularly with synods and Assembly committees, and to bring to the General Assembly of 2018 proposals for the form, size, duration, location and funding of the Assembly in subsequent years from 2020 to 2030.

1.2 The report also stated that:

The task group of five people, including a former Moderator of General Assembly, a current or recent Synod Clerk, and the Clerk of the General Assembly, nominated by the nominations committee, and appointed by the Assembly officers, to begin work immediately, and report to each meeting of Mission Council. A report to the autumn 2017 meeting of Mission Council should enable that meeting to make decisions that enable a venue to be firmly booked for the 2020 meeting of General Assembly.

1.3 In the event, the Nominations process proved a little slower than the drafters of the Assembly resolution hoped, and the task group began work in December 2016. Its members are Val Morrison (convenor) (former Assembly Moderator and a former Synod Clerk), Adrian Bulley (Synod Clerk), Dick Gray (former Deputy Treasurer and a current Synod Treasurer), Margaret Marshall (Synod Clerk), along with Michael Hopkins (Assembly Clerk), supported by John Proctor (General Secretary).

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1.4 The task group notes that the current pattern of governance is a two-year cycle, which consists of one meeting of General Assembly and four meetings of Mission Council. The task group also noted that these meetings are costed at £200,000 and £20,000 each respectively, making a total budget of £280,000 over the two years of a cycle. (N.B. Although the Assembly budget for 2017 and 2018 was increased to £230,000, this was not intended as a permanent change, and we expect the budget to revert to £200,000 for 2020.)

1.5 Although Mission Council was not part of the remit, the task group are convinced that any big changes to General Assembly cannot be considered in isolation from Mission Council.

2. Consideration of documentation already available

2.1 The task group considered documents from discussions at Mission Councils over the last few years, including extensive notes from a session led by the General Secretary in March 2016, and the discussions at the 2016 General Assembly based upon the supplementary report of the Assembly arrangements committee.

3. Consultation

3.1 The task group members had good and wide connections across the synods, and we made extensive use of these contacts.

3.2 Early contact was made with convenors of Assembly committees, in advance of the more general consultation.

3.3 Reflections from recent moderators and their chaplains on their visits to the assemblies of other churches were sought.

3.4 An open survey was undertaken in which there were 547 responses, from individuals, committees, synods, and other groups. We believe that this is a very high response rate for URC surveys.

3.5 The results of all these consultations underpin all our recommendations. At every stage, we have consciously tried to make recommendations based upon evidence and theology, while having due regard to financial considerations.

3.6 The task group has consulted Mission Council several times to refine its proposals.

4. Background

4.1 The current discussions result from General Assembly in 2012 resolving to make a significant reduction to the budget for Assembly but failing to agree any ways to implement that cut. Mission Council did agree ways to implement that decision, but there has been a general dissatisfaction with aspects of the Assembly, voiced by members of the Assembly and by synods, since 2012.

4.2 The task group also noted that a freezing of the budget since 2012 amounted to a gradual cut in real terms because of inflation. Conference centres, railways, hotels, caterers, and technical services suppliers have all increased their charges each year. Nonetheless, the fall in URC membership over this period has meant that the cost of Assembly per member has actually increased, in cash terms, as well as in real terms.

5. Comparison with other denominations

5.1 As well as the observations from former moderators and their chaplains, the task group considered how churches with similar sizes organised their equivalents to the General Assembly. This is what we discovered:

Church	Number of members	Membership of GA equivalent	Frequency of meeting
Church in Wales	84,000	143	Two days twice a year
Presbyterian Church of Wales	24,000	150	Three days once a year
Methodist Church in Ireland	50,000	260	Five days once a year
Scottish Episcopal Church	54,000	150	Three days once a year
United Reformed Church	48,000	315	Four days every two years

5.2 The task group also considered larger churches, including the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Methodist Church in Great Britain. However, we discovered that these churches spend money and staff time on their equivalents to General Assembly at levels which would rapidly bankrupt the URC.

6. Theology and ecclesiology of General Assembly

6.1 The Structure of the United Reformed Church [paragraph 2(6)] states that the General Assembly:

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.

6.2 The task group believes that there are theological ideas that shape the way that Reformed churches have historically made our decisions and ordered our structures, and wishes to highlight these:

- 6.2.1 A key principle for our tradition is conciliarity, that is, that we reach our decisions as representatives meeting together in council, guided by the Holy Spirit. Congregationalists and the Churches of Christ hold the Church Meeting to be the central place of authority, while Presbyterians recognise the authority of the wider councils of Presbytery, Synod, and General Assembly. Together these traditions, which are held in common with other Reformed Churches, represent a view of the church that understands its authority under Christ to lie in a body of representatives acting in council, rather than in an appointed person or persons. We believe this is fundamental to the ecclesiology of the URC.
- 6.2.2 Mission Council in March 2016 was asked to consider several ways that an Assembly's effectiveness could be viewed. What matters most – the quality of its decisions, the sense of ownership and wide participation it engenders, or the inspiration it offers to those who attend? Clearly these aims need not be at odds with one another, but if one is more important to us than the others, this preference will tend to shape how we plan and deliver Assembly.
- 6.2.3 In this discussion members of Mission Council placed most stress on wide participation, ahead but not to the exclusion of the other two aims. The value of a broad membership, including many people whose primary church involvement is local, the opportunity to hear a balance of different voices, and the sense that the whole Church is overseeing the whole Church, were all attractive aspects of this way of viewing Assembly.
- 6.2.4 However, a problem with a broadly-based way of decision-making is that sometimes urgent administrative decisions are needed while the appropriate council is not in session. In such situations a smaller group is sometimes given executive power to act on behalf of the council. Where this practice is infrequent, or when the issues are of no great consequence, the principle of conciliarity is still upheld. However, when the 'executive' group becomes a regular and significant feature of the decision-making process, our historical

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understanding of conciliarity is significantly altered, particularly when the Assembly itself does not make the major decisions.

- 6.2.5 At least since 2006, there is evidence that the URC, both at the level of synods and the General Assembly, has given significant and ongoing responsibility to various executive bodies. In the case of the General Assembly this body is the Mission Council.
- 6.3 The remit of Mission Council is:
a co-ordinating committee...the purpose of the Mission Council is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the community. Its service is directly towards the Assembly, but its concern is with the whole Church and all its members, so it will seek to be aware of the pains and joys, the adventures and hopes of the whole body.¹
- 6.4 The Structure gives as one of the functions of the General Assembly that it: shall also appoint a Mission Council with power to act in its name between meetings of the General Assembly and to discharge such other functions as the General Assembly may from time to time direct.²

On this basis, many decisions of Mission Council carry the words ‘Acting on behalf of the General Assembly...’ to indicate that the Mission Council does not carry such authority in its own right but only by delegation from the General Assembly. In practice, therefore, Mission Council functions very much like a council of the church rather than as a coordinating committee.

- 6.5 The functions of General Assembly also include:
- i) to oversee the total work of the church;
 - ii) to make decisions on reports and recommendations from its own committees, issue such directions and take such actions as it deems conducive to the propagation of the gospel, the welfare of the URC, the interests of the Church of Christ as a whole and the wellbeing of the community in which the Church is placed;
 - iii) to conduct and foster the ecumenical relationships of the URC;
 - iv) to support and share in the missionary work of the Church at home and abroad;
 - ix) to remit questions concerning the witness and judgment of the Church for general discussion in Church Meetings, Elders’ Meetings, and synods, and to call for reports from these councils;
 - x) to interpret all forms and expressions of the polity practice and doctrinal formulations of the URC including the Basis and the Structure and to determine when rights of personal conviction are asserted to the injury of the unity and peace of the URC;
 - xi) to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the URC;
 - xii) to make, alter or rescind rules for the conduct of its own proceedings and of those of other councils and commissions of the URC and such other rules, bye-laws and standing orders as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable for the performance of its functions and the carrying into effect of any of the provisions contained in the Basis and the Structure and for the conduct of the business and affairs of the General Assembly and of the other councils and commissions of the URC;
 - xix) to provide for the raising of funds for the work of the URC and to determine arrangements for payment of stipends and expenses to Ministers, Church Related Community Workers and officers of the URC and for such other financial matters as the General Assembly may from time to time think desirable;

¹ The Manual, section G

² Structure, paragraph 2(6)(o)

- xx) to consider and decide upon issues and representations duly transmitted by other councils of the URC;
- xxix) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

The task group believes that General Assembly can only do these things if it meets often enough to do so.

6.6 Moving further towards executive government may, of course, be a direction in which the URC wishes to proceed, but this would be at the cost of our conciliar heritage, and a step away from how we have hitherto understood Reformed theology.

6.7 The task group has not therefore explored a way forward that would enlarge the role of Mission Council and shrink that of Assembly. If this were a path the Church wished to take, the group would ask for new briefing to that effect. Nonetheless, we note as a general point that the role of General Assembly is closely linked to that of Mission Council: any decrease of the responsibilities of the one would tend to increase those of the other, and vice versa.

6.8 By contrast, those who believe it is appropriate to recall and refresh our conciliar commitment might want the Church to consider:

- 6.8.1 An annual meeting of General Assembly.
- 6.8.2 A corresponding reduction in the meetings and powers of the Mission Council.
- 6.8.3 Revising the membership of the General Assembly in a manner that attempts to return to the original egalitarian intent of Reformed conciliar structures. Everyone in the synod who desires to attend Assembly gets their fair turn.

7. Strategic and other questions

7.1 The questions raised by our explorations lead the task group to ask the Church to make some strategic choices:

- 7.1.1 Should we return to an annual Assembly?
- 7.1.2 Should the frequency and/or powers of Mission Council be reduced?

7.2 Less strategic – but nonetheless important – questions raised are:

- 7.2.1 Should there be one or two Moderators of General Assembly? Does the answer to this question change if the frequency of Assembly changes?
- 7.2.2 Should Moderators be inducted at the end of General Assembly, and then chair the General Assembly at the end of their period of office?

8. Criteria for making decisions

8.1 The task group believe that the URC should make decisions on the basis of good theology, good governance, and good strategy.

8.2 However, we are aware that funds are limited, and so decisions the Church makes based upon the grounds in paragraph 8.1 have to be affordable and workable. Because of this we have sought to make recommendations broadly in line with the current budget.

Part two: recommendations

9. General recommendations

Having consulted extensively, the task group proposes a number of general recommendations, which we wish to make regardless of decisions to be made about the size and frequency:

9.1 Time of year: the General Assembly should continue to meet in late June or early July, preferably not clashing with the Methodist Conference, the Church of England General Synod, or the Presbyterian Church of Wales General Assembly. No evidence has been found to suggest that a different time of year would bring any practical, financial, theological, or governance advantages.

9.2 Meeting at tables can be helpful, but a preference for tables should not rule out an otherwise suitable and affordable venue. The task group also notes that a significant number of suitably sized breakout rooms can enable the small group conversation aspect of Consensus decision making at least as well as meeting around tables. Indeed, this can be more effective because it allows those with impaired hearing to participate without background noise and allows people to move closer than the width of a large circular table (which is what venues often provide, despite assurances to the contrary).

9.3 Whatever the number of synod representatives is, that number should be divided equally among the synods, and unfilled places (apart from youth reps) may not be transferred. Smaller synods have found it difficult to ensure fair representation from the breadth (theological, ecclesiological, demographic and geographical) of their synods on the current formula, while some larger synods have difficulty filling the places allocated to them. The task group observed that no one thought an equal division of places among the synods at Mission Council, despite widely differing sizes of synods, was unfair. Therefore, the task group proposes that it would be simpler and fairer to divide the places at General Assembly equally among the synods.

9.4 Rather than a strict 50:50 division between Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs on the one hand, and 'lay' members on the other, we recommend that a measure of flexibility be introduced, while retaining enough provision to prevent either group dominating. Therefore, we propose that at least one third of each synod's reps should be 'lay', and at least one third 'ministers', with the remaining third open to either category. Equality of representation between ministerial and 'lay' has always been an important ecclesiological belief in the URC. The task group, however, notes that an exact division may not take into account the fact that some synods now have very few ministers. Nor does it take into account that a number of local churches are led by various forms of 'lay' leaders. The task group propose that the most helpful way to address this situation is to introduce a measure of flexibility, while retaining safeguards for both ministerial and 'lay' representation.

9.5 The task group propose that synod moderators should be included within the number of each synod's reps, rather than as a separate category. While the task group expect that most synods will wish their Moderator to represent them, this also adds a measure of flexibility because a synod whose Moderator was on sabbatical or close to retirement or on long term sick leave, for instance, might decide that this place was better used by another representative.

9.6 The survey made it clear that the only way of paying for Assembly that will be acceptable to the Church is from the ministry and mission fund. Expecting payment from individuals or from synods would not find support. However, the task group recommend that those attending Assembly should be given a fuller explanation of its costs and a clearer invitation to donate than we presently offer. This possibility should be mentioned on the expenses form.

9.7 The results of the 2017 survey showed clear enthusiasm for wide participation, within the context of a strongly held view that General Assembly is first and foremost a business meeting. In our tradition a business meeting is always held within the context of worship. The task group also notes that General Assembly being primarily a business meeting does not preclude there being other events and activities, but business is the primary purpose.

9.8 The task group noted from past accounts that some General Assembly Moderators had not been given guidance on discretionary spending, and recommend that the current practice that Moderators should be guided that discretionary spending is limited, and budget figures must be adhered to, is maintained.

9.9 The task group noted that many people now use electronic devices as their primary means of receiving documents, and prefer this to paper copies. Therefore, the task group recommend that, as a default, papers will be supplied electronically. The requirements form will allow people to opt into receiving paper copies, as well or instead, at the expense of the Assembly, if they wish.

9.10 Evidence from several Moderators of General Assembly, serving and former, showed a widespread desire among Moderators that they chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office, when they had built up practice in chairing Mission Council and gained a greater familiarity with the business of the Assembly. The task group also noted that the Presbyterian Church of Wales successfully followed this practice. The task group therefore recommend that Moderators should be inducted at the end of the General Assembly at which they take up office, rather than the beginning, and then chair the meeting at the end of their term of office. Were this proposal adopted, then on a one-off basis the Moderators of the 2018 Assembly, Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, would also chair the 2020 Assembly, and their successors would chair the Assembly at the end of their term of office.

9.11 Experience at Assembly is that some members speak more than others, and by the end of a three-day meeting some faces and voices have become very familiar indeed at the microphone. This was a matter we saw a very strong response to in the survey: a significant majority of the 547 respondents respectfully suggested that this situation does not always help Assembly to do its business as well as it might. General Assembly works best when a wide range of voices are heard. The task group considered how to respond to this, and decided to recommend that:

- a) Members be reminded by the Moderator at the start of the first piece of business that Assembly works best when a wide range of voices is heard. So those members who feel led to speak frequently should also consider leaving space for others;
- b) The Moderators be reminded that they are not required to invite people to speak in the order in which interest is expressed, so it is in order to choose speakers in any order, encourage particular people to speak, and to invite speeches from those who have not yet spoken etc.
- c) “Maiden speech” cards are issued to everyone attending General Assembly for the first time, and that such speakers will be given priority in being called to speak – at least on the first occasion that they approach the microphone.

Draft Resolution 6

General Assembly resolves that:

- a) General Assembly should primarily be funded from the ministry and mission fund, rather than by synods or individuals;
- b) members of General Assembly be given fuller information on the costs of General Assembly, and a clearer invitation to consider making a donation, including the option of donating by Gift Aid;
- c) all papers shall be issued electronically as the primary means of dissemination, but those who wish may choose to receive paper copies at the expense of the Assembly budget;

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- d) it prefers to meet in a venue either around tables or with significant breakout rooms if possible;
- e) from the close of General Assembly 2018, Moderators should be inducted at the close of the Assembly which begins their term of office and should therefore chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office;
- f) every effort be made to encourage a variety of voices to speak, by giving priority to those who have not spoken before.

Draft Resolution 7

General Assembly resolves to change its membership as follows:

- a) There shall be the same number of representatives from each synod.
- b) There shall be no additional representation from the Synod of Scotland (thereby rescinding a previous Assembly decision to grant six additional representatives to the Synod of Scotland).
- c) Synod Moderators shall be included in the representation from the synods.

In order to make this clearer to members of Assembly we include the current definitions of membership of General Assembly and the proposed changes to the Structure to implement the above proposed changes.

The purpose of this resolution is to change the wording in the Structure about the number and nature of synod representatives, as set out in the report. The existing wording is as follows:

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 25 or under, at the date of appointment. These representatives need not be members of the United Reformed Church, but must be actively involved and engaged with the United Reformed Church at local, synod or assembly level, and have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of the synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent; should a synod prove unable to make such an appointment it may appoint from another synod but these persons must be 25 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, the synod concerned shall appoint a substitute as its representative;

The new wording is as follows:

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 as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine.;
- (b) Among the representatives of synods shall be included at least two from each synod aged 25 or under, at the date of appointment. These representatives need not be members of the United Reformed Church, but must be actively involved and engaged with the United Reformed Church at local, synod or assembly level, and have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of the synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent; should a synod prove unable to make such an appointment it may appoint from another synod but these persons must be 25 or under at the date of appointment;
- (c) The Moderators of the General Assembly 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);

If this resolution is passed, the General Secretary will move that it be referred to synods under paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, with responses to be made to him by 29 March 2019. The same provision will apply for a number of the resolutions that follow.

10. Options the task group is not recommending

Before we present options for the location, size and frequency of General Assembly, we need to lay out some options which we are not offering:

10.1 Despite requests from some sections of the Church, the task group does not find any evidence that it is realistically possible for the Assembly to meet more often than it currently does yet with the same or a greater number of people attending. Both income to the ministry and mission fund and total church membership numbers have been gradually falling. We simply cannot afford the current or a larger Assembly more often, nor does this seem appropriate in a Church of our size.

10.2 Indeed, if the budget goes back from £230,000 to £200,000 after Nottingham, then we cannot afford a biennial Assembly of the same size and length as Nottingham on a regular basis. We should have to consider at least a modest reduction in numbers, if we were to stay with the biennial pattern.

10.3 Despite possible cost savings, the task group does not recommend that the Assembly meets less frequently than now. The evidence we gathered showed that both the sense of detachment from decision making that currently exists, and the departure from the ecclesiology of conciliarity, would both be exacerbated by this.

11. Location

11.1 The task group recommend abandoning the current pattern of rotation of venue around the UK. This pattern was agreed some years ago between the Assembly and the synods, and involves meeting in the nations of the UK in the sequence Wales, England, England, Scotland, England, England, Wales...

11.2 The current pattern of rotation has been largely successful in ensuring that General Assembly visits all locations, however the task group question the extent to which the Assembly reflects the flavour of the place where it is meeting. The task group also received evidence that some synods view hosting the Assembly as a burden rather than a pleasure.

11.3 The evidence the task group saw showed that the pattern of rotating venues is expensive in both finance and staff time. More site visits are needed to a new venue than to one where we return regularly. Venue hire is also more expensive, because suitable venues in some locations are limited. Travel expenses for Assemblies further from the centre of the UK are higher than more central ones.

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11.4 The task group therefore proposes to General Assembly that the current pattern of rotation be abandoned, and that instead the Church seek a venue in the central part of the UK (which we define as being roughly Yorkshire and Lancashire, down to the southern edge of the English Midlands). The task group further propose that if a good enough venue can be found in this central part of the UK, then Assembly should return to it regularly. Even if we met consistently in one place, other synods could be involved in hosting and in shaping the ethos and flavour of the event, if they wished.

Draft Resolution 8

General Assembly resolves to cease the current pattern of rotation of venue, previously informally agreed, and to meet regularly in the centre of the UK, as outlined in pages 61 to 62 of the *Book of Reports* 2018, with immediate effect.

12. Reverting to an annual Assembly

12.1 One motivation for Assembly's setting up the task group was a desire to explore the possibility of reverting to an annual Assembly. This might appear to be a step backwards. However, the task group believes that no Church need fear to admit that something hasn't worked as well as was hoped, and if that is the case, we should look to make changes.

12.2 The task group has seen some evidence that an increase in the number of decisions made by Mission Council has created difficulties in their acceptance, because the authority of Mission Council is challenged. (The termination of the ZI campaign, and the closure of the Windermere Centre would be two examples.) The group believes that reversing the current trend, and making more decisions at General Assembly, would increase confidence in and support of such decisions, and reduce challenge, thereby improving the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church. We cite as additional evidence that the 2014 Assembly came close to calling for the special meeting of Assembly that was eventually held in 2015 because it believed that the registration of buildings (in Scotland of celebrants) for the marriage of same sex couples needed to be based on decisions of the General Assembly itself.

12.3 The task group therefore believes that the Church should consider seriously the chance to revert to an annual pattern, and that this would have a variety of benefits for our common life. We put four options before Assembly, one of these corresponding roughly to our present practice, and the other three exploring an annual pattern.

13. The frequency and size of General Assembly

The four options we put before Assembly are these:

13.1 *Option A:* roughly what we do at the moment. A biennial Assembly, about 20% smaller in size than at present, in the sort of conference centre we have used in recent years, plus four meetings of Mission Council in a two-year cycle. This option is costed at £203,000, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £283,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget over a two-year cycle is £280,000).

13.2 *Option B:* an annual meeting, again in the sort of venue we have used in recent years. As para 10.1 above indicates, this would have to be smaller or shorter than at present, if it is not to cost more. This option shrinks the size of Assembly by about 20% and shortens it by a day, from 72 hours to 48. There would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. This would cost at £135,000 for the General Assembly, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. **a total cost of £310,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).

13.3 *Option C:* an annual meeting, as in B above, but we keep the length of Assembly at 72 hours and shrink its membership by close to 50%. Again, there would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. Assembly would cost £133,000, with £20,000 for

Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £306,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).

13.4 *Option D*: we would go The Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire, annually, and would be the sole users of their site for the period of Assembly. This would allow us to combine the membership numbers from B above (20% shrinkage), with a 72-hour Assembly as in C above. Again, there would be one meeting of Mission Council per year. The cost would be £103,000 for the Assembly, with £20,000 for Mission Council, i.e. **a total of £246,000** over a two-year cycle (the current budget being £280,000).

14. A recommended option

Option D is our preference. Here are the reasons.

14.1 It would enable General Assembly to continue to meet for 72 hours, without reducing the number of representatives very much. This is because the charges at The Hayes, which include use of the full facilities, all catering, and AV equipment, are close to the costs for accommodation alone in other centres. The accommodation at The Hayes has improved in recent years so that it now compares with the kinds of hotels used for recent Assemblies, far ahead of university accommodation. The food quality has also improved in recent times, to a level comparable with any other facility that we could afford. Should the bedroom numbers at The Hayes prove insufficient (there are just enough rooms if no-one at all shares), there is a Travelodge one and half miles away, which could accommodate a few members of GA who travelled by car, with all meals taken at The Hayes.

14.2 The AV equipment does not allow for live streaming. However, we understand that there are URC members with the skills and equipment to provide basic live streaming at a very low cost.

14.3 It may be necessary to arrange a coach to/from Derby station, which will be cheaper than a large number of taxis, as the local train service to Alfreton and associated taxis may not cope with the volume of traffic. The cost of this is low within the overall costs.

14.4 Even the largest hall at The Hayes may not be big enough for us to meet around tables. However, there are many breakout rooms, and as noted in paragraph 9.2, we believe that these do have some advantages over table top conversations.

14.5 The task group feels that what we could get for our money at The Hayes is significantly more than at any other venue, and it is our considered view that the disadvantages are considerably outweighed by the many advantages.

14.6 Swanwick can comfortably seat all attendees for meals at one sitting.

15. Numbers and costs

All of the schemes above have been worked through in detail. The proposed membership numbers and the estimated costs are given in tables at the end of this paper. To illustrate within the body of the report some of the detailed work tabulated there, these figures are outlined now for the preferred Option D.

- 15.1 The detailed and underlying assumptions:
- A Duration 72 hours (three nights)
 - B Representatives reduced to 16 per synod including Moderators (reducing the total from 269 to 208)
 - C Other members of Assembly total 38 (currently 46)
 - D Cost is £60,000 for accommodation; catering is included.
 - E Travel costs average £80
 - F Venue and AV: included.

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- G. Transportation (of equipment and materials, from London) £1,500
- H Additional programme costs: £2,500 for Moderators' specials
- I £3,300 for *What do you think?* (URC Youth event, linked to GA)
- J Set-up costs:
Printing £3,000 (based on papers requested) remainder by internet
Staff £5,000 (contribution to other Church House budgets for use of staff)
Committee costs £1,250 (no site visits needed)
- K Contingency £5,000

15.2 While the task group has confidence that these figures are as realistic and achievable as any figures could be this far in advance, they are offered to demonstrate that the task group has undertaken proper research, not to provide a firm budget against which account can be held with suppliers that have not yet been identified, let alone negotiations begun.

15.3 Work of similar detail has been done for the other options, where catering, AV costs and venue costs also needed to be counted as lines of their own, as we could not expect them to be included as part of accommodation costs.

15.4 The resolutions below on numbers make limited reductions in:

- a) the number of ecumenical representatives, from six to five;
- b) the international representation, from six to five;
- c) URC Youth, from three to two, as it was before the Assembly became biennial;
- d) Resource Centre for Learning representation, to reflect the present low number of EM1 students, who indeed already have a common representation on the education and learning committee;
- e) the number of committee convenors. The pastoral reference and welfare committee is necessarily private in almost everything it does, and its convenors have not always found it necessary to attend central council meetings.

15.5 One could find reasons for opposing any of the changes listed above. To oppose them all would entail the synods, rather than other constituencies, contributing entirely to the reduction of Assembly numbers. The task group thought Assembly ought to consider making savings in other constituencies too.

Draft Resolution 9:

General Assembly wishes its future of meetings to be that set out in Option D.

[Should Assembly opt instead for A, B or C, the numbers below may need to be amended before the following resolutions are considered.]

Draft Resolution 10:

The number of synod representatives shall be 208, who shall be divided between the synods equally. Within each synod, at least one third of its representatives shall be either Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers, and at least one third shall be lay.

Draft Resolution 11:

The number of representatives of churches outside Britain and Ireland shall be five, with a further place for a representative of the Council for World Mission, and there shall be five representatives from partner churches within Britain and Ireland.

Draft Resolution 12:

The number of representatives of URC Youth, in addition to the twenty-six youth places available for appointment by synods, shall be two.

Draft Resolution 13:

The number of EMI students shall be one, rather than one from each Resource Centre for Learning.

Draft Resolution 14:

The convenor of the pastoral reference and welfare committee shall not be a member of Assembly.

16. Number of Moderators

16.1 The task group's consultations have revealed that in general terms an Assembly Moderatorship which requires a six year commitment places a very significant limitation upon the number of people who can offer themselves for this service.

16.2 The task group has also observed that the pool of such people available for this role is not great, and is shrinking, so it is reasonable to suppose that, while there have been no difficulties hitherto, there might be difficulties in finding the right person in the future.

16.3 How many Moderators should there then be? One Moderator provides greater clarity for governance, and avoids the issue of what the Church would do if two Moderators disagreed upon a question that required a moderatorial decision.

16.4 Two Moderators offer the advantages of sharing the work, covering more things than one Moderator could do, being able to consult one another about difficult decisions, and increasing the profile of our Church through greater exposure.

16.5 While there might be some small financial savings in only having one Moderator at a time, these are not significant enough to be a driving factor.

16.6 The task group proposes that if the Assembly returns to being annual, it should revert to one Moderator who could be a Minister of Word and Sacrament, a CRCW, or an Elder. If the Assembly remains biennial, then the case for two Moderators remains. (N.B. This issue recently animated Mission Council, and the task group's Resolution 16 is put forward with some ambivalence, yet as a way of helping Assembly to focus its own opinion and make up its mind how many Moderators it wants.)

16.7 Resolutions 15 and 16 will only be moved if appropriate in the light of earlier decisions.

Draft Resolution 15:

Those elected as Moderator of General Assembly at the 2018 General Assembly shall serve from 2020 to 2022, chairing the Assemblies of 2021 and 2022 in whatever manner they shall determine.

Draft Resolution 16:

After 2022 there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly at any one time, and Assembly resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church to reflect this change and make it clear.

16.8 The General Assembly of 2021 shall be asked to elect a Moderator (either a Minister of Word and Sacraments, a Church Related Community Worker, or an Elder), who shall serve from 2022 to 2023, chairing the 2023 General Assembly. This pattern shall then be repeated each year. Synods shall continue to be allowed to make two nominations, one of a Minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker, and one of an Elder, so as to maximize the pool of people available, and maximize opportunities for elders to serve as Moderator, while retaining maximum flexibility.

Mission Council

Draft Resolution 17:

General Assembly instructs the Mission Council to make detailed alterations to sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Rules of Procedure, upon the advice of the Clerk, to effect the decisions of principle that it has made.

16.9 Discussion about the role of the Moderator in Assembly gave rise at Mission Council to a wider-ranging discussion about the work of the Assembly's Moderator beyond the meetings of Assembly and Mission Council. The task group would be willing to look at this issue, if asked to, and invites Assembly to take a decision about this.

Draft Resolution 18:

General Assembly extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to propose recommendations on the expectations of General Assembly on the activities to be undertaken by the Assembly Moderator(s).

17. Mission Council

17.1 If the Assembly were to opt for Options B, C or D, the Task Group's response to the evidence and theology is to suggest that there would be less need for Mission Council to act as it does now, which would mean that Mission Council had a smaller and more focused task, which would then merit a smaller and more focused membership.

17.2 Therefore, the task group propose that if Assembly were annual, Mission Council would only need to meet either for one residential meeting, or for two one-day meetings. The group's view is that more is achieved in one residential meeting at smaller travel costs, although two one-day meetings may be better for disposing of minor business more expeditiously.

17.3 At the moment it is possible for members of Mission Council not to be members of the General Assembly. It is unusual, if not unique, for people to be members of an executive body without being members of the body of which they are an executive. This could be resolved if synods were asked to nominate which of their reps to General Assembly were to be members of Mission Council in the forthcoming year.

17.4 Unintended consequences of reducing Mission Council's work might be a weakening of the relationships within that body that help it to handle controversial and complex matters, and a weakening of the support given to the small number of Advisory Groups (for example, law and polity, or safeguarding) that report to Mission Council. Whether we think that Mission Council undermines our conciliar theology, or expresses it in a manner that complements the work of Assembly, there do seem to be a few things that a body of under 100 people does better than an Assembly of 300. These factors do not suggest that change cannot be considered, but that the implications of change ought to be considered too, and remind us that any change we make may still have unexpected consequences.

17.5 If one of Options B, C or D is chosen, more work needs to be done on the consequent changes to Mission Council, and therefore the resolution below will be moved:

Draft Resolution 19:

General Assembly:

- a) further extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to consider changes to Mission Council in the light of decisions made by the General Assembly,
- b) instructs the task group to report to each meeting of Mission Council, and
- c) instructs Mission Council to make appropriate changes to its size, composition, and meeting pattern if these are ready to be made before the next meeting of General Assembly.

18. Staffing

18.1 The bulk of the organisation of Assembly is currently handled by staff at Church House, with assistance from volunteers. In the future this could be handled either by URC staff, or by using an events management company. There would be an inevitable tradeoff between in-house management of Assembly and a professional company. It is likely that professionals would manage the task more efficiently, and perhaps more cheaply. Whereas if we took some of the task away from Church House staff, the event would lose something of its family feel; members would place their bookings with strangers rather than with URC people, and some may feel that they are not as well understood as they would like to be. We have gathered some data on the potential costs of using an events management company, to assist those in Church House who are charged with making operational decisions. If General Assembly chooses Option D, the task group's preferred option, it is likely that Assembly could be largely organised from within existing staff resources. If General Assembly chooses Option A, B or C, this might strengthen the case for considering the use of external professional help.

Appendix one

Comparison of the numbers of members of General Assembly in different categories under the various options.

Category	The current position	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
Synods representatives and moderators	269	208	208	130	208
Serving Assembly Moderator(s)	2	2	1	1	1
Clerk	1	1	1	1	1
General Secretary	1	1	1	1	1
Deputy General Secretaries	3	3	3	3	3
Committee convenors	11	10	10	10	10
URC Trust convenor	1	1	1	1	1
Immediate Past Moderators	2	2	1	1	1
Former Mods (elected by all former Mods)	2	2	2	2	2
RCL	6	4	4	4	4
URC Youth	3	3	2	2	2
Forces Chaplain	1	1	1	1	1
Ecumenical	6	5	5	4	5
Int/ CWM reps	7	6	6	4	6
TOTAL	315	249	246	165	246

Appendix two

Summary Budget for General Assembly

2018		Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
Accommodation					
Nights	3	3	2	3	3
Members	269	208	208	130	208
Others	46	41	38	35	38
Non members	21	21	21	21	21
Avg cost	75	80	80	80	
Total accom	75,600	64,800	42,720	44,640	60,000
Catering					
Lunches	9	9	9	9	
dinners	15	15	15	15	
Snacks	2	2	2	2	
Misc	600	600	250	250	
Total	26,808	21,660	14,134	14,758	Included
Travel costs					
Avg cost	75	80	80	80	80
	25,200	21,600	21,360	14,880	21,360

General Assembly task group – Appendix two

Mission Council

Venue costs										
Hall hire	20,000				12,500				15,000	Included
AV	36,000			22,000	15,000				15,000	Free
Transport	6,000			4,000	3,000				3,000	1,500
		62,000		51,000	30,500				33,000	1,500
Program costs										
Main	6,000			2,500	2,500				2,500	2,500
What do you think	3,000			3,300	2,000				2,000	3,300
		9,000		5,800	4,500				4,500	5,800
Set up costs										
Printing	12,000			5,000	3,000				2,000	3,000
Staff	12,000			20,000	12,000				12,000	5,000
Committee	5,000			2,500	1,250				1,250	1,250
Site visits	5,000			1,000	1,000				1,000	Not needed
		34,000		28,500	17,250				16,250	9,250
Contingency	10,000			10,000	5,000				5,000	5,000
Donations		10,000		10,000	5,000				5,000	5,000
Grand total		242,608		203,360	135,464				133,028	102,910

Synod Moderators

Giving up and taking up

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Andrew Prasad: moderator@urcthamesnorth.org.uk Clare Downing: moderator@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Discussion. Potential to be used as a conversation starter at local church level.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Giving up and taking up – a challenge to consider how we might be called to change as we ‘walk the way’. The paper is offered not only to Assembly, but also as a resource to local churches, to help them consider the purpose, relevance and necessity of their ways of being, and to think carefully about prioritising where we expend our energy, so as to live the Jesus life today.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If we are to take up the challenge of being Church in the present day, we may not be able – or be called – to continue all that we presently do. • Some of what we are called to let go of is inherently good, but not necessarily the highest priority at this time – and other things that we need to leave behind may be inherently unhelpful. • God continues to work within the United Reformed Church and wants to encourage us.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council Paper Z1, May 2017. Mission Council Paper Z1, March 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council, on which all the synods are represented, in a series of conversations.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No immediate impact.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No immediate impact.

Giving up and taking up

1. The synod moderators' report to General Assembly is traditionally a substantial document, providing something of a 'state of the nation' summary of how we perceive the life of the denomination.
2. In the past 12 months, we have brought papers to Mission Council, reflecting the challenges we see in the Church, the main document being Paper Z1, which was discussed at Mission Council in March 2018, with resolutions passed encouraging us, at all levels of the Church to consider our priorities. We commend this paper to the churches, as we take seriously the need to declutter, or prune – to stop trying to do everything, rather to do fewer things and to do them well.
3. As one part of our thinking, our General Secretary, John Proctor, challenged us to respond to this question: 'How do we interpret the purposes of God in the context of steady decline in the United Reformed Church, and how does this interpretation shape both our spirituality and the leadership we offer?'
4. It is from our responses to this question that the theme of 'Giving up and taking up' has emerged. In an era where 'giving something up for Lent' may be little more than a chance to revisit a failed new year's resolution, many of us have been encouraged to 'take something up for Lent' instead. Whilst 'giving up' might seem negative, some of the things we might be called to let go of are hardly assets to our life of faith.
5. Our offering to you this Assembly is one which we hope will stimulate thought, but is in a form which might easily be taken back to any local church for wider discussion. Each section has one thing to give up, one to take up. There are short scriptures to consider, a thought in the form of a haiku (a stylised form of poetry from Japan), stories from local situations and a discussion question.
6. As individuals, local congregations, synods and the whole denomination, our emphasis continues to be on 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today'. As we follow the call to live the life of Jesus today, we pray that we will have the courage to give things up and take them up in response to the Spirit's call.
7. Here is our offering, for reflection, and perhaps for inspiration and action.

Give up	Take up
<p>Guilt 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.' – Hebrews 12:1</p> <p>Things done – or not done. A God of new beginnings can throw off shackles.</p>	<p>Grace "'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.' – 2 Corinthians 12:9</p> <p>Undeserved favour. God's riches at Christ's expense. Love beyond measure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nick Brindley, a minister in Thames North Synod reflects: 'During the rehabilitation from my very serious stroke, my vocation has been a constant. God has called me as I now am. Whatever it is to be a Minister of Word and Sacraments, God's message to me has been that I can fulfil it, wheelchair bound as I am. I can proclaim the Gospel of God's love from my new position at least as properly as from my old.' 	

A woman carrying a heavy load over her head was given a lift by a bullock cart driver. Interestingly, she sat in the cart but still carried the load over her head.

Have you heard of stories of when church members felt guilty about not being able to 'do it all' or even closing a church? How can we help churches to realise that in our weakest moments, the grace of God is more than sufficient and our contribution is counted?

Give up	Take up
<p>Anxiety 'Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.' – Luke 12:25-27</p> <p>Like a constant drip. But why? What if? How could it? Wearing down the soul.</p>	<p>Prayer 'Do not worry about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.' – Philippians 4:6</p> <p>Not demanding, but aligning ourselves with God. May your will be done.</p>

- The Ask Centre at the United Church in Rhyl grew out of prayer and reflection on what God was calling the church to do. The words 'ask', 'seek' and 'knock' (from Matthew 7:7) link the centre's aims of tackling deprivation in the town, partnering with the Citizens Advice Bureau and local foodbank, and helping people grow in faith. God helped through the ups and downs of the project development with encouragement in prayer and a word from the Psalms.
- Emmaus Church Centre, Chatham – a local ecumenical partnership of 20 years – has recognised that its life is coming to an end as the Anglicans begin a new church in another part of Chatham. Having enjoyed being a lively, worshipping, Bible-based fellowship seeking to 'walk together with Jesus', many of the members of both denominations, through prayer, have answered God's call to stay to renew God's mission in the locality. The future is exciting.

Indian sages have said: '*Chinta nahi, chinten karo.*' The alliterative terms '*chinta*' and '*chinten*' stand for anxiety and prayer. The advice is not to focus on anxiety but on meditational prayer.

How often in your experience are church matters decided based on anxiety rather than aligning with God?

Give up	Take up
<p>Independence '...when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.' – Luke 10:31^b</p> <p>'Not my problem mate.' Priest, Levite, Church Meeting, all caring for self first?</p>	<p>Interdependence 'For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.' – Romans 12:4-6^a</p> <p>Sharing gifts, graces, open handed not grasping – holding each other.</p>

Mission Council

- In Thamesmead, an area with a long commitment to ecumenism, Southern Synod has agreed to have an Anglican serve the United Reformed/Methodist church, and provide pioneer ministry in another part of the estate. Sally and Andy Willett are the URC contribution to local ecumenical ministry. Starting from scratch, without a building, a new congregation of around 30 has been built up and connects with the wider work in Thamesmead.

When groups feel weak, they often focus inwardly. Is this happening in local churches? Are we demanding our rights rather than asking what we can do with or for others?

Give up	Take up
<p>Buildings ‘When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said: “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.”’ – Luke 21:5-6</p> <p>‘I’ve always come here.’ This shell – blessing or burden? Could – should – we let go?</p>	<p>People ‘Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.’ – 1 Peter 2:5</p> <p>All bring gifts to share – honed together, so all may take out gifts to share.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Milton Keynes, ‘Church Without Walls’ worships in a variety of places – from a forest to a local school and on occasion, a historic church building. Sharing walks, food, quietness and activity, the church reaches out into varied communities. • After an unsuccessful attempt to get planning permission to redevelop their Grade II listed building, Frome United Reformed Church decided to walk away and ask the Synod Trust to sell it. They now meet in a local school and take along ‘church in a box’ – everything they need to hold an act of worship – and pack it away again until next time. Numbers at worship have grown, and it has made the church consider how best to make themselves known in the town without a distinctive building. 	
<p>Buildings can be a blessing or a burden. They enhance the Christian presence or distract the people. Imagine what your church would be like without walls, without a building.</p>	

Give up	Take up
<p>Status ‘James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him: “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them: “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him: “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.”’ – Mark 10:35-37</p> <p>Our church? It is God’s. My ministry? God’s gifting. God’s glory, not ours.</p>	<p>Discipleship ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.’ – Acts 2:44-47</p> <p>Their ‘holy habits’ – but now is it too hard to walk the Jesus way?</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St Andrew’s with Castlegate is the largest church by membership in East Midlands and has always had full-time ministry. During its recent vacancy, the church ‘gave up’ its claim to a full-time minister and agreed, with generosity and good grace, for its new minister to give 20% of their time to supporting other churches in Nottinghamshire. 	
<p>King Oswin gave St Aidan a very fine horse for his travels. Aidan gave the horse and its royal trappings to a beggar. The unhappy king questioned Aidan, who challenged him to consider the relative value of the horse and a child of God. After reflection, King Oswin asked Aidan’s forgiveness.</p> <p>We live in a status-conscious world. We make statements by our choice of life-style – what we wear or eat, who we mix with.</p> <p>Have there been moments when you felt that individuals were, or church life was, more about status or maintaining status quo than founded on personal or corporate discipleship/servanthood?</p>	

Give up	Take up
<p>Life ‘Then Jesus told his disciples: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”’ – Matthew 16:24-25</p> <p>Seed of dying plant risks everything in death for one new life chance.</p>	<p>Change ‘The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.’ – Isaiah 40:8</p> <p>Ugly chrysalis; a necessary stage to form a butterfly.</p>

Mission Council

- Banbury United Reformed Church gave up its own buildings 25 years ago and entered into a sharing agreement with the town centre parish church. Last year they were suddenly faced with the unwelcome decision of the parochial church council to bring that agreement to an end, despite their shared mission. A few months later, they are looking at new life and mission in the town centre, exploring moving into retail premises and being church in a new way.
- In Barry, the Methodist and United Reformed churches had large Victorian churches on either side of a road. They decided to unite and build afresh. At present, 'the Barry Waterfront Centre' is in a temporary building on the new site, but they have used the land to create a community garden and allotment, to engage people in activity and bless them with produce.

Can you think of a point in the life of your congregation where letting some activity or way of doing things die gave the opportunity for new life?

8. Finally, a personal note: since Assembly last met, we have said goodbye to Lis Mullen, who retired from Northern Synod, and welcomed her successor Dave Herbert. We give thanks for them both and for the gifts each Synod Moderator brings to our meeting.

Church changes not previously reported to General Assembly

1.1 This report notes all churches that have closed – or opened – between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018 (the cut-off dates that we work to, to prepare the *Book of Reports* for General Assembly).

1.2 Below is a simple listing of the closed churches, synod by synod, listed in alphabetical order and with the date of closure. The Record of Assembly, will include a section on church ‘obituaries’, and all United Reformed churches that have closed in the qualifying period have been invited to submit a short report on the life of their church, for inclusion in that. A PowerPoint presentation with images for the life of the closed churches noted below will be shown at Assembly 2018. We are grateful to the Revd Mark Meatcher for his careful work in compiling this list.

Resolution 20

General Assembly notes the closures, with praise to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years.

Church closures

Synod 1: Northern Synod

Barnard Castle United Reformed Church, Barnard Castle, 2 October 2016

Oxclose LEP, Washington, 1 September 2017

(Noting that Oxclose ceased to be a local ecumenical partnership on 1 September 2017 but continues as an Anglican Church.)

Synod 2: North Western Synod

Mossley Abney, Aston-under-Lyne, 23 April 2017

Synod 3: Mersey Synod

Salem United Reformed Church, Orrell, 24 September 2017

Synod 4: Yorkshire Synod

No church closures to report in this period.

Synod 5: East Midlands Synod

Danesholme Community Church, Corby, 15 January 2017

Synod 6: West Midlands Synod

Brierley United Reformed Church, Brierley, 6 August 2017

Gorsty Hill United Church, Stoke-on-Trent, 31 August 2016

(Noting that Gorsty Hill United Church ceased to be a local ecumenical partnership on 31 August 2016, but continues as a Methodist church.)

Newton Road United Reformed Church, Birmingham, 31 December 2017

Sharpness United Reformed Church, Sharpness, 4 April 2016.

St John’s United Reformed Church, Stourbridge, 31 December 2016

St Michael’s & All Angels, Stourport-on-Severn, 31 August 2016

(St Michael’s & All Angels ceased to be a local ecumenical partnership on 31 August 2016, but continues as an Anglican church.)

Union Free Church, Wellington, 31 March 2018

Mission Council

Synod 7: Eastern Synod

Castle Hedingham United Reformed Church, Castle Hedingham, 4 June 2016
 Cavendish United Reformed Church, Cavendish, 15 October 2017
 Christ Church United Reformed Church, Sudbury, 7 January 2018
 Mattishall United Reformed Church, Mattishall, 31 December 2016
 Terling United Reformed Church, Terling, 31 March 2017

Synod 8: South Western Synod

Bickington United Reformed Church, Bickington, 28 January 2018
 Bradley Stoke, Holy Trinity, Bristol, 10 September 2017
(Noting that the URC withdrew from the local ecumenical partnership on 10 September 2017 but that it continues with Methodist and Anglican involvement.)
 Christchurch United Reformed Church, Charmouth, 27 November 2016
 Sidmouth United Reformed Church, Sidmouth, 1 January 2017
 Stoke sub Hamdon United Reformed Church, Stoke sub Hamdon, 31 December 2016
 Yeovil United Reformed Church, Yeovil, 10 June 2017

Synod 9: Wessex Synod

Christ Church, Creekmoor, 2 October 2016
(Noting that the URC withdrew from the local ecumenical partnership on 2 October 2016 but that it continues as an Anglican church.)
 Lords Hill Ecumenical Church, Southampton, 16 July 2016
(Noting that the URC withdrew from the local ecumenical partnership on 16 July 2016 but that it continues as an ecumenical church.)
 Lovedean United Reformed Church, Lovedean, 16 October 2016
 Lytchett Minster United Reformed Church, Lytchett Minster, 30 June 2016
 Temple Cowley United Reformed Church, Oxford, 5 November 2017

Synod 10: Thames North Synod

Chigwell Row United Reformed Church, Chigwell, 30 September 2016
 Feltham United Free Church, Feltham, 28 January 2018
 Queens Park United Reformed Church, London, 20 March 2016

Synod 11: Southern Synod

Folkestone United Reformed Church, Folkestone, 10 December 2016
 Hartley United Reformed Church, Hartley, 25 September 2016
 Northfleet United Reformed Church, Northfleet, 2nd April 2017

Synod 12: Synod of Wales

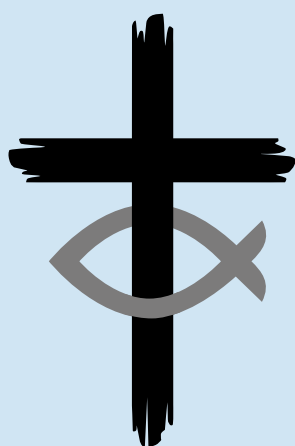
Caersalem United Church, Ebbw Vale, 18 April 2017
(Noting that the URC withdrew from the local ecumenical partnership on 18 April 2017 but that it continues as a Baptist church.)
 Newtown United Reformed Church, Newtown, 24 July 2016
 Northop United Reformed Church, Northop, 5 November 2017
 Porth United Reformed Church, Porth, 15 May 2016
 Wesley United Church, Abercynon, 14 January 2017

Synod 13: Synod of Scotland

Portobello United Reformed Church, Edinburgh, 30 April 2016
 Selkirk United Reformed Church, Selkirk, 17 December 2017

Church openings

No new United Reformed churches, or local ecumenical partnerships involving the URC, opened in the period between 31 March 2016 and 1 April 2018.



The
**United
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Assembly arrangements committee

Report and resolution

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	James Breslin: james_breslin2@outlook.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	21. General Assembly resolves to meet in Birmingham at the University of Aston from 3 July to 6 July 2020 or at such other time and place as may be duly determined.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the work of the committee and decide on the venue for the General Assembly 2020.
Main points	As resolution.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Equalities committee. East Midlands Synod.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No unbudgeted expenditure.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Report and resolution

1. The work of the committee

The committee is responsible for all practical arrangements concerning the Assembly. It organises accommodation for Assembly members and staff. It sources suitable venues for the Assembly and for the youth event 'What do you think?' It plans the Assembly programme; the order of business; special presentations; other meetings; displays and arrangements for distinguished visitors, both local and from farther afield. Since 2014 it has also been responsible for the provision of evening meals. To do this the committee works closely with several extra bodies, some of whom send representatives to its meetings. Particular mention should be made of the communications committee, the equalities committee and the children's and youth work committee whose input and involvement is invaluable.

2. Staffing the Assembly

2.1 While some of the work involved in managing the Assembly is visible to everyone, there is also a great deal that happens behind the scenes and in preparation. Those responsible for all of this fall into three groups, each of which plays a major part in making the Assembly happen.

2.2 Firstly, we have several volunteers, some recruited locally through the assistance of the hosting synod and others with specific tasks recruited directly by the Assembly arrangements committee. While a few, e.g. the timekeeper, are present on the floor of the Assembly, most are based in the general office and assist in the production of minutes, order papers and all the various items needed by members. A recent and valuable development in this has been the appointment of youth interns. This year we have two – Georgina Neale and Megan Marston-Phipps.

2.3 The second group is made up of outside professionals. These provide the various services needed to manage the Assembly that we cannot provide in house. Some of the firms we use for these purposes have worked with us for several years and contribute generously to the efficiency and comfort of the Assembly.

2.4 Last, but by no means least, the Assembly draws upon the time and skills of many of the staff of Church House. The Head of Communications and her staff, the Head of Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations together with others have important roles in organising the Assembly. However, more than any other, the heaviest burden is carried by the secretary of the committee Ann Barton. Since 2005 she has ensured that the Assembly happens. Without her considerable organisational and negotiating skills the Assembly would be much poorer, both in terms of content and cost. This is her last Assembly before retirement and the committee invites Assembly to acknowledge all that she has done, going well beyond anything that might be expected.

Children's and youth work committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Jenny Mills: revdjmill@btinternet.com Sam Richards: children.youth@urc.org
Action required	Report to General Assembly and re-presentation and discussion related to the Charter for Children, followed by resolution.
Draft resolution	22. General Assembly recommits the United Reformed Church to the Charter for Children and its implementation in this 21st century world.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Actions and developments since General Assembly 2016 and future actions.
Main points	Reviews, staff changes, report of work undertaken, future actions.
Previous relevant documents	Papers B1, B2 and B3 Mission Council May 2017 Paper B1 Mission Council November 2017 Paper B1 Mission Council March 2018 CYWC Review Terms of Reference.
Consultation has taken place with...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Executive 2017 and 2018 • The General Secretary • The children's and youth work committee • Education and learning (the Revd Fiona Thomas) • General Assembly arrangements committee.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Printing costs (from CYW budget).
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Sharing with ecumenical partners to promote CYW.

General report

1. Statement of purpose

Children, young people and young adults are central to God's mission and Christ's Church (Matt 18:1-14; 19:13-14).

'The remit of the children's and youth work committee is to support, encourage and promote work with children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church.'

Imagine a brightly coloured golfing umbrella – that's how we see ourselves:

- A colourful canopy for the breadth and diversity of activity undertaken with children, young people and young adults, providing an environment to foster flourishing
- A spoked-network of connectivity and communication between local churches, synods and the committee providing a structure and programme
- A handle to enable the whole to be carried and represented by staff and committee to the URC and beyond
- A sharp end to drive developments forward (and fend off threats)
- A moving mechanism to enable responsive change
- The whole providing a sense of denominational identity for children, young people and young adults
- The sheer joy of dancing and singing in the rain with the prospect of puddles to jump in!

The 2018 *Yearbook* statistics state we have 14,188 children, young people and young adults (0-25) worshipping at main services, and an additional 30,784 associated with the life of the Church across the URC.

The URC's 'Towards a Charter for Children in the Church', introduced at General Assembly 1990, challenged churches to become fully inclusive in their work with children. The children's and youth work committee feel the charter is as relevant to the life of the Church today as it was then and intend to reacquaint the Church with it at this General Assembly, to continue to challenge, support and inspire work with children in the churches of the URC.

Children's and youth work have adopted an integrated theme each year – Roots and Foundations in 2016, Feasts and Festivals in 2017, Pilgrimage in 2018 – and we are planning One Body for 2019, and Common Ground for 2020.

Children's and youth work have been intentionally working in a more integrated way with the whole URC, particularly contributing an intergenerational perspective to Walking the Way, Stepwise and Greenbelt. We are highlighting the hidden gems of Messy Church, toddler groups, junior church, Godly Play, Open the Book, holiday clubs, performing arts groups, open youth clubs, Crossfire and many other forms of children's and youth work, alongside Pilots, URC Youth, URC Guide and Scout Fellowship, Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade. We believe we have a lot to offer in joined-up thinking and discussions.

2. Reviews

In 2016, following notice of resignation, the post of Head of Children's and Youth Work Development was reviewed and revised prior to recruitment. A key recommendation was a total review of the work in the light of budget and post reductions from 2012-13 that had continued to affect the overall programme. Mission Council in May 2017 encouraged the children's and youth work committee to conduct such a review within the committee's own budget, and this is in process. The Review plans to present a report to November 2018 Mission Council with recommendations to shape future vision and strategy.

3. Staff changes

Karen Morrison, Head of Children's and Youth Development since January 2013, resigned and left post in February 2017. We give thanks for her faithful service to the URC. The children's and youth work office did a fantastic job of keeping everything running smoothly. Dr Sam Richards was appointed from November 2017 to the revised post of Head of Children's and Youth Work (HCYW). Simon Peters (Programme Officer) moved on in December 2017 to become Walking the Way Project Manager. Carole Sired (Pilots Desk and PA to HCYW) moved on in January 2018 to become PA to Mission, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. As the HCYW had been charged with a review of the area of work, it was agreed to recruit to one-year fixed term posts for a new programme officer (Lorraine Webb due to start April 2018); and to create a non-Church-House-based post of Pilots Coordinator (two days per week) to which Steve Tait was appointed from March 2018, alongside a three-day-a-week Administrator post to be staffed by a temp (currently Helen Corbett) from February 2018. This should enable staffing to be reconfigured, if appropriate, in the light of the Review outcomes in 2019. Enormous thanks are due to all the staff who have moved on in this period for their dedication and commitment to the work over their many years of service.

4. URC Youth

4.1 URC Youth Assembly 2017. Introducing the URC theme of the year of Feasts and Festivals, YA 2017 was a brilliant celebration of our heritage and life together. The keynote speeches and ceilidh were well received. Business brought to Assembly included: an introduction of 'Get Talking', URC Youth's resource to stimulate conversation on Mental Health; 'Commitment to God's Creation'; as well as a detailed and thought-provoking conversation on the future of the URC.

4.2 Youth Executive (YE) had a very busy year in 2017, with plenty of time allowed at meetings for planning YA, for communication between synods and YE, and discussing and exploring Feasts and Festivals. On behalf of URC Youth Assembly, YE brought the 'Commitment to God's Creation' to Mission Council in May 2017. Work continues on how the whole church can reduce its carbon footprint, but progress is slower than expected. After discussions at Youth Executive a paper regarding the election of General Assembly Moderators was brought to Mission Council in November 2017, and a revised version will be discussed at GA 2018. YE responded to feedback by starting to focus on intentional inclusion in order to widen participation, and committing to ensure that the promotion of URC Youth events demonstrated the diversity within the URC.

4.3 URC Youth Assembly 2018. YA's take on Pilgrimage was to ask: 'Are we nearly there yet?' through a series of keynote talks, creative and issue-based workshops, and worship. Thirty per cent more young people attended than the previous year. It was encouraging to see young people attending from a greater variety of backgrounds, many for the first time, with more synods being represented, and improved access for those with disabilities. A resolution was passed to co-opt the new role of equality and diversity representative on to YE, their job will be to ensure that all URC Youth events are inclusive. We also passed a resolution calling on synods to support the Greenbelt Festival. Other business included exploring the development of URC Youth merchandise; and considering the possibility of lowering the age of Youth Assembly to 11. The 20s to 40s task group findings were reported to us.

4.4 URC YE 2018 has all the thirteen synods represented for the first time since the structures changed. The first equality and diversity officer was co-opted and will serve on YE until Youth Assembly 2019. We are redesigning Youth Assembly to have a greater focus on empowering everyone. The 2019 theme will be One Body: We're all in this together. The price will be frozen. We have received, and are actively exploring, a proposal to establish a URC Youth music group. YE are getting involved in establishing a JPIT Ecumenical Youth Forum and sending a rep to the Quaker Youth gathering in 2018. We give thanks for our Youth Moderators (past and present) and all the work they have done and continue to do.

5. Pilots

5.1 2016 saw the 80th anniversary of Pilots. Celebrations were 'low key' having had national events only 5 years previously. Pilots celebrated the past to affirm the present and look to the future:

- Pilots produced a special 80th anniversary logo.
- Anniversary badges and balloons were sent to all companies.
- Pilots companies around the country were encouraged to celebrate and then to tell their stories and those of old Pilots through *The Bridge*. The Revd Janet Lees penned a hymn especially for the anniversary.



5.2 Publications:

- 2016 Roots & Foundations Worship Materials, and Canada Overseas Voyage Resource
- 2017 Feasts & Festivals Worship Materials, and Pakistan Overseas Voyage Resource
- Basic Introductory Training material was produced for Pilots leaders; *Let Justice Flow* (social justice material) was written by members of the Pilots Community and Commitment for Life Interns; and *The New Compass* (Pilots Manual) was produced by Pilots and Children's and Youth Work Development Officers (CYDOs) along with *Compass Taster* booklet and new *Logbook*
- 2018 Pilgrimage Worship Materials.

5.3 Big Day Out 2017. At the request of the discipleship department, Pilots hosted the URC's Feasts and Festivals Big Day Out at Warwick Castle in May, as an intergenerational event. Over 1,300 attendees, engaging worship, crafts activities, poetry, workshops, bird shows, sword fights, journeys through time, and other activities, provided the whole URC with a good starting point from which Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today could emerge as the URC's fresh focus on missional discipleship. Warmest thanks to all who worked hard to make this day a success. Guests and contributors on the day came from Christian Aid, Messy Church, URC Youth, Racial Justice Advocates and the Council for World Mission – plus the Moderators of General Assembly. Music was provided by Mersey Synod's Café Jam band and there was a Treasure Hunt around the castle and grounds. Films of the day can be seen on bit.ly/PilotsBDO18 and bit.ly/PBDO18.

5.4 2017 was a hugely challenging year for Pilots with the departure of the key staff and further Pilots companies closing. 2017 saw approval given by Mission Council to appoint a Pilots advocate – a voluntary figurehead; it is hoped that this person will make a positive impact, once appointed.

5.5 2018 sees the development of The Big Speak Out, hosted by Pilots for all URC young people aged 11-18. This will run alongside General Assembly, enabling young people to find their voice and have fun and fellowship (a Voyagers and Navigators event reimagined). Pilots leaders are being offered their own gathering at the weekend, to share learning, build community and consider the future. The new Pilots Coordinator, Steve Tait, will be working closely with regional Pilot officers to promote and support existing companies. Pilots is planning to contribute to Greenbelt festival; and we celebrate the birth of the newest Pilots company at Tolworth.

6. CYDOs and synod developments

The CYDO team played an active and supportive role in covering the large gaps in central staffing over 2017 and 2018. There is a focus on improved two-way communication with CYDOs being invited to contribute to a wide range of meetings across URC work that involves children and young people. Some synods, for a variety of context-specific reasons, have moved away from employing CYDOs which presents new challenges to sustaining an Assembly-level programme and enabling children and young people across the whole denomination to have equal access to all opportunities and resources. This area will form part of the Review.

Children's and youth work

7. Safeguarding

The accessible nature of *Good Practice 4* (GP4) has been well received, helping churches and synods to understand their obligations and consider safeguarding issues in ways fit for current times. The CYW office has also benefitted directly by using it to update its own safeguarding policies for events and services. We are working closely with the newly appointed URC Safeguarding Officer, and have added shutdown and dispersal procedures to our risk assessments, in response to recent terror attacks.

8. Website

The text-based nature of the site is still somewhat challenging to work with, but our aim is to ensure it is possible to easily access the breadth of opportunities and resources available through the CYW office. We wish to increase the repository of resources for local churches, include shared stories about children's and youth work and add materials for parents and carers. We have altered the format of the monthly resources to complement the Holy Habits materials as part of the Walking the Way focus.

9. Society, ecumenical and international work

There is a genuine sense of interest in the wellbeing and full participation of children and young people in the worldwide Church ecumenically. The recent Council for World Mission Global Youth Forum and the World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism clearly showed an increased focus on truly intergenerational working and living. The URC continues to support the WCC's efforts to promote the rights of children in the Church and Society. Our closest Mission partner, CWM, is also renewing its work with children and young people, regionally and worldwide. In Europe, this will mean a focus on mental health and migration issues in 2018, following calls from children and young people in member churches calling for more action in these areas. We are contributing to the planning of both programmes in the UK and recruiting participants. Members of URC Youth have participated in worldwide mission and training opportunities enabled by our ecumenical partnerships. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Children's Ministry Network – The URC continues to play an active part, developing links with other UK denominations, particularly through mutual invitations to youth representatives to attend events.

10. Other work undertaken

The Children's and Youth Work office have published a new booklet on 'Theology of Play'. The Child Friendly Church Award scheme has 111 churches participating, with 17 CFCAs being awarded since GA 2016. Links with Crossfire have been strengthened.

11. Future plans

The committee feels that there is a growing need for work related to intergenerational issues in churches and we are identifying the challenges of sustaining and developing such work, along with the challenges of passing on the faith within families and communities in a wide variety of contexts.

- What Do You Think 2018 – An event to help prepare under-26 synod representatives for General Assembly.
- Greenbelt 2018 – The committee have been able to contribute both financially (as a result of salary savings due to delayed recruitment of HCYW) and through CYDO and URC Youth time to the URC associate partnership programme. We are recruiting URC Youth Greenbelt ambassadors to promote Greenbelt in their synods and to contribute to the URC programme at the festival.
- A trip to Taizé is being offered in August 2018.
- Making Space day conference for local church children's, families and youth workers is an initiative proposed by the CYDOs. Plans are in progress for 6 October 2018 in Rugby, with an optional networking meal the night before for those choosing to stay.

For fuller view of children's and youth work, see www.urch.org.uk/our-work/children-and-youth and synod websites.

Communications committee

Report to General Assembly

2018

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Peter Knowles: peterwknowles@gmail.com
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide Assembly with an update on the work and priorities of the communications committee.
Main points	To give an overview of the work done in the past two years and to examine future challenges.
Previous relevant documents	C1 – Mission Council, October 2016. C1 – Mission Council, November 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing discussion with the communications committee, the staff of the department and the Deputy General Secretary (Administration & Resources).

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	It is hoped that the role of the URC will be recognised by ecumenical partners, especially in the context of the work of JPIT and at Greenbelt.

Communications update report

Mission statement

The communications department exists to promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- Giving voice to good news
- Facilitating regional/national communications
- Supporting the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly
- Resourcing the local churches.

Committee members

Convenor: Peter Knowles

Secretary: Gill Nichol

Current members: Kate Gray (2018), Kevin Snyman (2018); Rebecca Gudgeon (2019); Tim Llewlyn (2019), Heather Carr (2019); Eilidh Carmichael (2021); Lesley Draper (2021)

1. Overview

1.1 The communications team provides expert advice and support for the life and work of the United Reformed Church. The department produces online and physical resources for the use of the Church in every area of its life. As every part of the Church learns to manage with fewer people, the need for high quality published material to resource church life increases.

1.2 The workload is huge, just as the ambition of the Church through Walking the Way, Stepwise and other major initiatives is vast. The communication requirements in the current year are especially demanding. In addition to the 'normal' workload the department is also active in the launch of Walking the Way and Stepwise, General Assembly, Youth Assembly, two Mission Councils and the Ministers' Gathering. The last six months have also been busy with the integration of iChurch into the work and life of the department.

1.3 The team cannot do everything, at the same pitch, all the time, and so there is a constant dialogue between ambition and our ability to deliver. Priorities have to be set, but that can sometimes mean work that needs doing has to be turned away, or sent 'outside', to be fulfilled. However, we are now being asked to contribute to more projects earlier in the planning process, which allows communications work to be better considered and scheduled.

1.4 There is also (and inevitably) a tension between the team's ambition to offer strategic direction and expertise in the field of communications and a view that communications is simply the fulfilment of service requirements. We are not unique in facing this tension. We resource the church at national, synod and local level, in very many ways, as outlined below:

2. iChurch

Communications was asked in November 2017 to take over the work of iChurch from the education and learning department and we are excited about the prospect of building up this resource for many more churches. The change to a rate card (from the Windermere Centre's 'pay what you can') has been controversial. For some churches it represents an unwelcome 'commercialising' step, but many others are pleased at the budgeting clarity it brings. Churches that cannot afford the full costs are invited to contact us to discuss paying a reduced rate – we do not want any United Reformed churches or affiliated groups to be denied the opportunity of having a website. Overall, the new system offers sustainability and the prospect that we will, over time, be able to expand support and training. We are working on marketing iChurch and hope to reach many new churches (and other URC groups), currently without any web presence, or with expensive or inflexible web providers.

3. Website

Work on the redevelopment and improvement of the URC website – www.urb.org.uk – continues. In autumn 2017, in collaboration with both a freelance website expert and our website support provider, we restructured the site, redesigned the home page and satisfactorily tackled the longstanding complaint over searchability. A lot of hard work has already gone into developing the new site; we are pleased with progress so far, but the site remains a work in progress and efforts are ongoing. Constructive feedback is very welcome.

4. External communications

4.1 The work of the media office and the Head of Communications in dealing with urgent and difficult enquiries – known as ‘Reputation Management’ – is largely unpredictable but has been increasing in the last 24 months as more local churches seem to understand the need to bring cases to the attention of the press office at an early stage of the process; this has been to the benefit of all. Most of these cases relate to property matters; a number of cases also relate to historical abuse offences.

4.2 Greenbelt 2016 and 2017 proved to be very successful for the URC as an associate partner. The URC’s involvement won plaudits from the festival organisers and from those who attended.

4.3 Work continues with the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) and media officers from partner denominations. We helped promote JPIT’s Brave New World? conference and aim to take the media lead on some JPIT campaigns.

4.3 The Trussell Trust, Greenbelt, Street Child United, Single Communications and Christian Connections have moved onto the top floor of Church House. Where possible we support their work by promoting it through our own social media channels.

4.4 We were delighted with the media interest we generated surrounding the Constance Coltman 100-year anniversary – we generated a good level of coverage in print and broadcast media. The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe participated in an item on Radio 4’s *Women’s Hour* and BBC One’s *Songs of Praise* produced a show entitled *Pioneering Women*, which featured the Revd Jenny Mills as a successor to Constance Coltman.

4.5 St David’s Uniting Church near Cardiff featured in an episode of *Songs of Praise* in October 2017, focusing on its work with refugees.

4.6 Several members of URC staff and officers have appeared on Premier’s *Your News* panel radio show.

5. Internal communications

5.1 *News Update* monthly subscriptions stand at almost 4,000 and one recent issue was forwarded more than 8,000 times. We make clear on NU how people can subscribe directly to the e-newsletter.

5.2 The URC has now enjoyed working with its redeveloped logo for two years and it is good to see how well rooted it has become, in multiple formats, across the life of the Church. The logo offers a meaningful way of describing ourselves through the cross made up of paint strokes and the symbol of the fish. It is a very recognisable way of identifying the denomination and provides continuity with the original design for the denomination.

5.3 Communications is working closely with the Ministers’ Gathering steering group, the Walking the Way steering group and Children and Youth department (on projects which have included Youth Assembly and The Big Speak Out). We provide comprehensive communications plans that break down key areas/issues/messages to be promoted, the channels which are best placed to promote these elements, and overall objectives.

Communications

6. Social media

6.1 We have been able to create social media campaigns, news stories, and well-timed resources for audiences to engage with. News stories are regularly posted and news items from associated accounts such as *Reform* magazine, JPIT, Walking the Way and URC Youth are regularly shared and promoted to increase engagement.

6.2 By the beginning of 2018, more than 1,000 people ‘liked’ the URC communications’ Facebook page and 3,000 followed the URC’s communications’ Twitter account.

7. Reform

7.1 *Reform* is well loved and increasingly well used by local churches. Following a review, we have re-focused the editorial content on material which can be used in the daily life of the Church, such as in discussion groups. *Reform* has seen a 3% decline in subscribers over the past year, which we hope to make up in the coming months with digital subscriptions.

7.2 Since General Assembly last met, *Reform*’s editorial board has met twice (and is scheduled to meet again in June 2018). The board gives us helpful feedback, and has been particularly useful in helping us understand more about how *Reform* is received in local churches.

7.3 The magazine remains something of which the URC can be proud (other similar publications having failed in recent years) even as print circulations and print advertising revenues decline throughout the publishing world.

7.4 We are grateful to Mission Council for agreeing to maintain the current level of investment (without which the magazine would not continue) for a further three years, from January 2018. The debate that took place about the cost of *Reform* to the denomination was a forceful reminder that the future cannot be assumed. We were reminded that *Reform* claims scarce financial resources and that the Church has to weigh that cost against *Reform*’s acknowledged value.

7.5 One clear requirement of Mission Council was that we increase the number of subscribers to the digital edition of *Reform*. This is a strong product with a good retention rate of subscribers and a major advantage in that, once created, it has no additional costs associated with each ‘copy’ distributed. Digital subscription numbers are currently small, but are constantly rising. We believe that, if we can get new readers to try digital *Reform*, we will see a sustained increase. For these reasons, promoting digital *Reform* is a major focus of our marketing strategy in 2018 and we are also aiming to increase digital advertising revenue.

8. Publications office/online store

8.1 We moved to a new-style pocket diary for 2018, and published an A5 desk diary for the first time. Both sold well (the pocket diary sold out!). We have taken on feedback about the new style of diary and may make further refinements to the pocket diary for 2019.

8.2 A copy of *Celebrated Lives* is included in the price of each *Yearbook* and is also sold separately. The take-up for the separate edition has been very small. We will review this arrangement.

8.3 The ten *Holy Habits* booklets are a key text for the denomination’s Walking the Way focus and are promoted as such.

8.4 The prayer handbook continues to sell well within the denomination – we believe it has an audience outside the URC and are planning to start marketing it to non-URC audiences with the 2019 edition.

8.5 Social media campaigns for the online store are planned throughout 2018. We have a growing email list of customers whom we will communicate with regarding new products and promotions and from whom we can gather feedback.

8.6 The Christian Resources Exhibition proved to be a good opportunity for sales and for raising awareness about the URC. We now have the equipment in place for publications to be made available for sale at Mission Council and other URC events.

8.7 We have shifted stock control and profit records from the finance department to the publications department. This arrangement has been a great improvement and will provide us with fast and accurate stock and accounting figures.

9. Graphics and print

9.1 The graphics office has been busy with many new projects, including the Stepwise and Walking the Way leaflets. We designed the logos for both Walking the Way and Stepwise, which took many weeks of careful, collaborative work, but was worth it!

9.2 Major annual publications, such as the *Yearbook* and *Celebrated Lives*, have been designed and printed, as has a range of Constance Coltman anniversary merchandise and URC logo mugs, alongside the more routine items including church certificates and training materials.

9.3 Numerous booklets have been produced and we are near to completing a design for an anthology, *God is with us: fresh responses to the Good News*, which is based on the 'Chapter and Verse' column in *Reform*.

9.4 Work on updating *The Manual* is ongoing.

9.5 Substantial input from the graphics team is crucial to the smooth running of Mission Council and General Assembly. The team also runs the AV/production desk during these meetings of the councils of the Church.

9.6 The choice of new publications is overseen by the publications board – a subcommittee of the communications committee, which is tasked with finding the most appropriate way of spreading works by, for and about the denomination. A small number of works which we believe will find a wider readership are published under our own name. Some are redirected to other publishers, and the self-publishing route is increasingly favoured for important but very small-scale, readerships.

Education and learning committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Convenor: the Revd Professor Neil Messer Secretary: the Revd Fiona Thomas: fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Take note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To inform the General Assembly of the work and actions carried out since July 2016 by the committee.
Main points	Orientation of the committee within 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today'; Work on a successor to Training for Learning and Serving; Activities of the resource centres for learning.
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2016 and papers discussed by Mission Council in the intervening period.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council, and representatives of all the synods.

Summary of Impact

Financial	The committee has an annual budget, and works within it.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Strong ecumenical partnerships are evident throughout the work overseen by the committee.

General report

The education and learning committee maintains strategic oversight of adult learning in the United Reformed Church by liaison with relevant officers in synods and other Assembly committees; supporting Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs); providing programmes such as Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) and Stepwise; 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

Convenor: Neil Messer

Secretary: Fiona Thomas

Members: Jack Dyce (until 2017), Ros Lyle, Jennifer Millington, Robert Pettigrew, David Salisbury (until 2016), Sheila Telfer, Mary Thomas (from 2016), Jill Thornton (from 2016), Rudolph Wontumi (from 2016). The committee also invites the principals of the RCLs, the convenors of its subcommittees, a representative of the Methodist Church, a CRCW, and a CYDO to its meetings. The General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) are members ex officio.

Walking the way together

1. Christian disciples learn about God and the world as we follow Jesus. The most significant change that has happened in the work of the education and learning committee since General Assembly 2016 is the re-orientation of the United Reformed Church towards missional discipleship through Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today. Some of these effects were anticipated two years ago, when we moved TLS into a transitional phase, and started to develop its successor as a consciously intergenerational and interdisciplinary programme. The committee did not anticipate the closure of the Windermere Centre and the subsequent emergence of a discipleship development strategy, which has meant that much time at recent Mission Council meetings has been devoted to issues presented by the committee.

2. The education and learning committee's responsibility within Walking the Way is to ensure that there is a successor to TLS as a distinct programme. We are well on the way to achieving that, having established an active task and finish group convened by Professor Graham Handscomb which brings together people from the URC and the ecumenical worlds of mission, children and youth, training and development, community work, and theological education. The programme will be called Stepwise and the first stream will be available from September 2018 with current information available from www.urc.org.uk/stepwise/. Its effectiveness will depend on active advocacy within congregations as much as close collaboration between Assembly committees, synods, and RCLs.

3. Much of the work of the committee over the past two years will find its way into Stepwise in one way or another:

3.1 The delivery of Stepwise will be in line with the report 'Blended Lives, Blended Learning' (bltgreporturc.org.uk) which put forward a learning framework which combines inherited and contemporary learning approaches;

3.2 The publication of the book *Appreciating Church* with the associated website www.appreciating.church in February 2017 represents a major investment of time from the URC and ecumenical partners in working from the strengths and gifts of church and community organisations rather than starting with a deficit model. The methods described will be drawn upon when developing forms of peer evaluation and journaling for the Stepwise programme;

Education and learning

3.3 The discipleship development strategy has Stepwise as a significant focus, because the programme is an obvious place where the principles of equity, accessibility, and flexibility will be expressed.

4. The scope of the committee's work is broad, stretching from congregational development through TLS/Stepwise to initial and continuing ministerial education. Within the latter, the major items of work since 2016 have been:

4.1 Working with the ministries team to ensure that there is coherent administration for EM1 from candidating through to the end of EM1;

4.2 Relocating the annual EM1 summer school from the Windermere Centre to a new venue and arrangements;

4.3 Recognising that work of the EM2/3 subcommittee had come to a natural end with the realisation that consistent, reliable systems and programmes had been tested, accepted and set in place. The part-time Education and Learning Programme Officer who coordinates this work now regularly attends education and learning committee meetings;

4.4 Refreshing and restarting the Church Leadership Programme and consciously making it available to lay leaders as well as to people who are Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers;

4.5 Through the synods and RCLs completing initial mandatory Safer Sacred Space (SSS) training for all ministers, with the cycle of update training now starting. Arising from this the committee commissioned a professional boundary training game from the Clinic for Boundary Studies, an organisation frequently contracted to deliver SSS. The *Professionalism Game* covers all aspects of boundary safety, warning or infringement. Each synod and RCL has the game for use in many environments, well beyond the mandatory SSS. There are developments to include formal Safeguarding training within SSS, and many synod officers deliver these two training elements together (one on attitudes and culture, the other on process and legal frameworks);

4.6 In July 2017 the first research network conference was held, hosted by Northern College at Luther King House and coordinated through a task group of the committee. Work continues to build a database of people from the URC who are undertaking research in theological and allied subjects. The long-held aspiration to develop such a network is being realised due to patient and persistent work.

The closure of the Windermere Centre

5. There is no easy way to describe the hurt which many people felt over the decision to move towards closure of the Windermere Centre, which Mission Council first contemplated in November 2016 and reluctantly agreed in May 2017 after careful consultation. The debate around this was carried out by Mission Council and a dedicated webpage established by the education and learning committee as a space where ideas, options and opinions could be contributed by individuals and groups with a concern for the Centre. A thanksgiving service for the life and contribution of the centre was held at Carver Uniting Church on Saturday 15 July 2017. Mission Council has expressed the desire that the proceeds from the disposal of the centre building will be used to support lay development, and the eventual adoption of the discipleship development strategy will ensure this.

Taking the best forward from TLS

6. The URC is exploring new ways of developing discipleship informed by the learning that has been gained over the two decades of the life of TLS. Further detail is given later in this report about the changes in TLS which have taken place in the past two years. The education and learning committee is committed to ensuring that

there continues to be a route through which individuals can prepare for the ministry of Assembly-accredited lay preacher, and which synods can draw on if they so choose for synod recognition for lay preachers. Transitional TLS will fulfil both these functions until Stepwise becomes available in full. A service of thanksgiving for the contribution of TLS called 'Transforming Faith, Transforming Life' has been planned for Saturday 23 June in Birmingham with the Revd John Proctor preaching as the General Secretary of the URC.

Stability and change

7. The shift between posts related to TLS and those related to Stepwise will see the first major staff changes within the education and learning team since 2016. In 2014 the team consisted of 7 people making up 5 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts. Gradually this has dropped to 4 FTE, and by 2019 will have been reshaped to 5 FTE with Stepwise posts replacing TLS posts, and the addition of a full-time Instructional Designer. This latter post is intended to support online learning in Stepwise and elsewhere in the URC, given that digital literacy has become a given alongside text-based learning.

What's to come?

8. When General Assembly meets in 2020 it can expect to hear reports on the introduction of four out of five of the anticipated Stepwise streams involving people from across the breadth of the URC as facilitators, mentors, content providers and participants. The faith-filled worship stream will be ready for launching in September 2020, and there will be a new progression route for people seeking to become Assembly-accredited lay preacher. The ministries and education and learning committees, in conjunction with RCLs and synods will have done further work on flexible ways of pursuing EM1. All of this will have been supported and influenced by the adoption of the discipleship development strategy which is due to be discussed again by Mission Council in May 2019.

Training for Learning and Serving (TLS)

9. The period of transition into a new discipleship development programme for the URC has brought both challenges and opportunities to TLS as it winds down its own activities and seeks to pave the way for what is to come.

10. Of the challenges, the greatest has been to sustain a sense of coherence and vitality to what remains of TLS. In 2017 we said goodbye to the foundation course which, from the beginning, was the core element in TLS studies and in later years has served as a vital feeder for new course members onto one-year courses. The final cohort of foundation students completed their work during the summer of last year. With such a significant feature disappearing, it has been important to demonstrate to those still engaged with TLS, especially continuing students, that what remains operates with the same efficiency, sustains the same high standards and is of the same value as in times past. As losing TLS has been a bereavement experience for some people, even with the prospect of some elements continuing in the new programmes, this has not always been easy.

11. With the gradual winding down, a proportion of the organisational tasks have either disappeared altogether or reduced considerably in size. This has meant changes in responsibilities for some of the TLS staff, particularly for the TLS Coordinator, who traditionally had responsibility not just for the overall oversight of the programme but also for the specific task of managing the foundation course. The Coordinator's role now encompasses the general administration of TLS and responsibility for managing TLS Lite (Local Introductory Training Experiences) which has taken on an additional function designed to cover the transitional period.

12. Known as Lite+Plus, this new form of Lite allows people to embark upon a process of study which may potentially lead to accredited lay ministry, currently as an Assembly-accredited lay preacher. As before, the process is intended to take three

Education and learning

years, with the first year consisting of the completion of four core Lite courses; the second year involving a TLS one-year course (for lay preaching, this is Gateways into Worship (GiW)) and the third year entailing a period of Mentored Reflective Practice (MRP). So far, the take up of this new approach has been limited (twelve course members had registered by March 2018) but this may be explained by the fact that some interested parties are biding their time until the new programmes are up and running. For others, however, Lite+Plus is a welcome and effective means to begin their study and training immediately in a local setting.

13. Lite+Plus has also presented a chance to develop and trial new methodologies in assessment and learning which hopefully will prove helpful for future programmes. To bring Lite+Plus up to the educational standard appropriate to its new function, it was necessary to supplement the existing Lite materials with slightly more demanding assignment tasks. This provided an opportunity for widening ways in which students could respond to questions. Instead of just the usual essay format, options have been made available within the tasks for assignments to be completed using alternative media such as audio-visual or creative arts. It is interesting that no student has yet chosen to complete an assignment using one of these options, but it may be too early to draw any general conclusions from this. The year of MRP to all intents and purposes introduces the technique of apprenticeship into the learning experience. TLS has always required practical application alongside theoretical learning, but MRP takes this a step further in facilitating a year-long partnership with an experienced practitioner. No student has yet reached this stage in the process but the systems and paperwork to enable it are being prepared, and the outcomes are looked forward to with interest and anticipation.

14. Meanwhile the traditional elements of TLS press on doing what they do best, enabling and equipping folk in the URC (and occasionally outside the denomination) to follow Jesus and to be faithful and effective in all areas of their discipleship. To this end, a very pleasing aspect of the past year was the largest enrolment for some time on GiW. Eighteen students will complete their studies on GiW around the time of Assembly, successfully we hope, and most will become Assembly accredited lay preachers. We rejoice in this.

15. As we rejoice, we also give thanks to those who've made all the achievements of TLS students possible. Stanley Jackson, John Burgess and Penny Flynn, as the remaining current TLS staff, deserve the Church's special thanks for keeping the ship steady during a time of turbulence. Beyond this, all that TLS has achieved has only ever been possible because of the enormous contribution of the mass of volunteers who have served it in various ways. The passing into glory during the year of two of TLS's great stalwarts, Tom Stevenson (who served as regional organiser and pastoral care course manager) and David Bunney (TLS's longest serving marker) has been a reminder of how much the success of TLS has depended upon people like them, who gave so freely and willingly of their time, energy and skills. It seems appropriate then, to end this TLS report in paying tribute to them and all like them who made TLS such a wonderful instrument for the spreading the kingdom of God on earth.

The Scottish College

16. The Scottish United Reformed and Congregational College exists for the service of the Church, and to provide a space, place and community where followers of Jesus may walk together in an intentional way, focussed on growth, discipleship and learning. We are dedicated to supporting one another as we develop in knowledge, in spirit and in practical skills. This is the purpose of all college activities whether directed as part of Education for Ministry of Word and Sacrament in our EM1 programme, or in those activities offered for the nurture of the wider church.

17. The college has seen changes in personnel since the last General Assembly, with the adaptations and challenges that are involved. Inevitably this has occasioned readjustments, particularly following the long and distinguished service of the Revd Dr Jack Dyce as Principal.

18. In succession to Jack, the college was delighted at the end of last year to appoint as its Principal the Revd Dr John McNeil Scott. John was ordained in 1993 and has been a minister of the URC since 1997. A former tutor with the Open University, John was involved in educational work with prison inmates during 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland. He returns to the URC following a few years serving a congregation in Belfast. Besides congregational experience, John brings to his new role understanding of service in non-congregational contexts, as well as a deep commitment to intercultural ministry. He worked as the URC's Senior Chaplain to Higher Education in London. He was Chaplain to the London School of Economics, associated with the school's Taiwan Research Programme and was one of the initiators of the Taiwanese Christian Fellowship in London.

19. Jack continues to share the walk of college life; on retirement he was appointed Emeritus Research Professor of Nordic Theology, allowing him to continue with and develop his academic work in Nordic regional studies and their contribution to theology and inter-disciplinary dialogue. This involves him in speaking at conferences, and in writing articles for journals and book chapters. The college is fortunate to benefit from Jack's ongoing contribution to its life, both in terms of the friendship, expertise and energy he continues to bring, as well as through the profile provided in new quarters through his academic research.

20. Knowing that it cannot give its best service to the church without the involvement and support of a wider community, the college has sought to renew and deepen its partnership with the National Synod of Scotland, and the wider URC. The college was delighted when recent discussions with the Synod of Scotland resulted in the continuation of previous arrangements whereby the Principal acts also as Training Officer for the synod. We hope that this will allow for a helpful continuation of our collaboration and integrated learning while allowing for fresh direction in role and responsibilities.

21. The Revd Lindsey Sanderson continues as a college tutor, bringing to that role local ministry involvement, significant ecumenical and world church experience, and gifts that range from third sector leadership to the writing of hymns and liturgy. The Revd Trevor Jamison acted as a college tutor alongside his role as environmental chaplain to Eco-congregation Scotland. Trevor recently left to take up ministry in Northern Synod and we thank him for his service and wish him well as he returns to local ministry.

22. The Revd Jan Adamson's retirement from being Field Officer for Local Mission and Development and the transition of the Revd Stewart Cutler to be minister of Word and Sacraments means that they no longer have their former roles as associate tutors. We express our great appreciation for the creativity and commitment they brought to the life of the college, both in initial ministerial education and in wider learning and development work.

23. What remains constant is our commitment to a model of learning community that brings into dialogue and sharing of experience folk from across the life of the Church – members, elders, ministers, students. Not least we seek to make this true in that part of learning that we call training, aware always that different callings within the life of the Church must be, and ought to be, exercised collaboratively.

24. Our existing partnerships remain strong and effective, particularly with the Scottish Episcopal Institute, and with Glasgow University. We are conscious of the need to complement existing relationships with new networks of mutual fellowship and endeavour, seeking out those others – locally and further afield – with whom we can walk our ways together in mutual support and follower-ship.

25. The college continues to benefit from an appreciative inquiry process begun in 2016, and to reflect on how the strengths and values identified can be nurtured, and the challenges identified met. We began a strategic planning process this June, aiming to set out our priorities and plans for the next phase of college life.

Education and learning

26. Our dedication to fostering Christian imagination, and to walking the way of Kingdom dreams in company with – and for – the church is rooted in the example of God in Christ, whom we might even say pictures for us a ‘learning God who calls a learning people’.

There is a sense in which we may think that God learns not less than we do, but more, since [God] is always completely open to all the freshness of this new world ... Our knowledge, unlike that of God, is in part, and some day we shall know as perfectly as we are known. But even then, faith, hope and love will endure, and so therefore will learning, both human and divine.

The God who hopes for this world is also the God who learns. God’s perfection and God’s unity as the Hopeful One, the learner and the lover, is part of God’s faithfulness towards the world.

John M Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (SCM, 2011)

27. Inspired by this faithful, learning God we offer our service and our imagination to the church and to the world.

Westminster Walking the Way: Purpose, people, places

Purpose

28. With the URC’s other RCLs, Westminster College exists to foster discipleship across the whole denomination. Our purpose is to take that wide horizon of discovery and fill in its details with resources, events and invitations to encourage and inspire. We develop our events and courses in constant conversation with as many people as possible across our churches and synods, tailoring programmes to requirements.

29. Prayer, welcome and hospitality remain fundamentals of Westminster’s life. Whether it is those who come together for our regular times of devotion as the day begins, at lunchtime or in worship for a conference, Westminster’s life is rooted in being a praying community. We see part of the privilege of our purpose being to hold the URC in prayer just as we know we are being prayed for.

30. Whilst initial ministerial formation remains a core function its shape is evolving to better suit the increasingly diverse needs of students. We continue to offer academic programmes through three partner universities (Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin and Durham) enabling us to shape diverse academic options. Most of these programmes are shared within the Cambridge Theological Federation, one of the broadest and most diverse ecumenical and inter-faith families for the study of faith and practice in the world. A significant development since the previous General Assembly is that, alongside term-based delivery, we are now using block teaching weeks. These have begun in the 2017-18 academic year for ministerial students on the Living Ministry Programme, our nine-month church placement. We have replaced the weekly college programme with four block weeks across the year. We cover the same material but with reduced disruption to the intense placement experience, reduced travel costs and greater opportunity for in-depth discussion with each week taking on something of a retreat atmosphere. From the 2018-19 year we will deliver Durham undergraduate modules in block weeks so that students can remain where they live, have a variety of placements at or near their homes, and come to Westminster for three to six weeks of intensive teaching across the year. We see this evolution greatly increasing opportunity for people from local churches to join such a week’s teaching, enjoying all Westminster offers with in-depth study without having to formally enrol on an academic course.

31. We continue to create annual opportunities for elders, lay preachers and worship leaders, reshaping these to take account of such ministries increasingly being offered with fewer Ministers of Word and Sacraments alongside. ‘In the company of...’ is our highly flexible invitation for anyone, ordained or not. You can choose when to come and how long to stay. We offer a member of staff as a conversation partner, pointing you towards resources and encouraging your own discovery.

32. In response to requests arising from intentional conversations we will be offering training in transitional ministry for two of our synods and going on the road as a team of teachers to spend time in South Western Synod, offering something of Westminster to those who might not find it easy to travel to Cambridge. We are developing our web-based learning resources and will soon be making available the first of a series of videos, created by our Old Testament tutor, Dr Alison Gray, exploring how artists have pictured the Bible. As has always been the case our teachers regularly respond to invitations to lead events and provide input to local congregations and synods whenever possible.

People

33. In the summer of 2016 Alison joined us and it has been wonderful to see her gifts flourishing at Westminster. The summer of 2017 saw us welcoming two new colleagues. The Revd Dr Robert Pope came as Tutor in Church History and Doctrine to replace the Revd Dr John Bradbury as he returned to pastoral ministry. We were very sorry to see John go but delighted to welcome Robert with his rich experience.

34. In an exciting innovation we have created the full-time post of Director of Church Resource Development. This is funded entirely from within Westminster's own resources and, unlike our other five teaching positions, is not a General Assembly appointment. We shaped it to ensure we can listen well to the URC and develop all we offer more appropriately and creatively. It is wonderful to have the Revd Peter Ball taking up the challenge and bringing his experience in local ministry and as a synod training officer and mission enabler. Peter helps us to remain deeply involved in Walking the Way and the emergence of the new Stepwise programme. Peter's appointment has enabled the Revd Samantha White to refocus her work as our full-time Director of Pastoral Studies, as context-based learning and pastoral resources become a growing focus.

35. Sadly, we will be saying farewell to Revd Dr Yak-hwee Tan as our New Testament Tutor in the summer of 2018 as she returns to Singapore.

36. Westminster's teaching team is sustained and supported by over forty other members of college staff and a host of volunteers on our committees who, together, ensure the college runs smoothly and well. We owe them all a huge debt.

Places

37. The Woolf Institute building is complete, providing a superb addition to the Westminster campus. It is home not only to the Woolf staff, focussing on dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims, but also to the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. With both of these welcome partners Westminster will be developing an increasingly diverse range of events and courses, many online, to help churches engage even more with some of the big issues such as the place of faith in society and the threat of climate change.

38. We have also been able to complete a purpose-built art studio. This is available for students, staff and visitors who want to find artistic expression for their creativity and learning. Our MA module exploring art and theology has used the space, and we are designing programmes that ensure it can be home to new offerings of imagination and a deep encounter with God.

39. In all of this, Westminster continues to offer all that it is and hopes to become to serve the whole URC.

Education and learning

Northern College

Who are we ... in Manchester?

40. Northern College is serving the whole of the URC, as well as contributing to the life of the Congregational Federation and the British Province of the Moravian Church. We are a community of:

- Twenty-six students (24 of them URC) in training for various ministries – ministry of Word and Sacraments (MWS) in stipendiary and non-stipendiary service and ministry of CRCW;
- One post-graduate Mona Powell ‘Fellow’ who is working towards a PhD in Old Testament studies;
- Four full-time academic members of staff: Revd Dr Graham Adams (Mission Studies in the context of global Christianity and religious diversity and dialogue); Revd Dr Noel Irwin (Public Theology and CRCW Tutor); Revd Dr Rosalind Selby (Principal, Biblical Studies); Revd Dr Kathy White (Hebrew Bible and language);
- One half-time Support and Development Tutor: Revd Dr Tim Mountain (who also works with North Western Synod). Tim is helping develop our work for the wider church and offering more capacity for student support, particularly our weekend part-time students);
- 1 College Administrator: Mrs Christine Thornborough.

41. This is a wonderful place to walk an ecumenical and international way with Baptists, Unitarians and other students and colleagues who bring their experiences from varied countries of origin and diverse denominations in the UK. We are a learning and worshipping community sharing an atmosphere of friendship and collegiality.

What does walking this way of formation look like?

42. Full-time students are just that – giving their full time to their studies and placements – but without moving to Manchester. Rather, they remain rooted in their own communities and stay here for two days a week during term time. They belong in community here and in placement yet can still retain church/minister/synod support near home. They undertake academic qualifications and practical learning alongside substantial contextual placements from the beginning of their studies, clocking up between 190 and 280 hours in placement each year (depending upon their year of study). There is a creative flow between the academic and placement elements; students are becoming reflective practitioners from the beginning. We are the only college accredited to train CRCWs, and ministry of Word and Sacrament students have the opportunity to take some of these modules. This means our students leave college with real understanding of each other’s ministries; ministry of Word and Sacrament students all feel that their mission-in-the-community skills have been richly enhanced. We have a part-time weekend programme (six weekends a year) with placements alongside, enabling people to remain in employment while studying. The opportunity to move between the midweek and weekend courses offers flexibility which is important to particular students and their families.

43. Placements are in a great variety of settings: yes, local churches, but also cathedrals, chaplaincies (airport, hospital, prison, retail and armed forces for example) and local charities (such as sheltered housing or foodbank projects). Full-time students fulfil a summer pastorate, and all students have the opportunity for a ‘Belonging to the World Church’ placement. Over the last two years, students have visited: Cuba, Canada, India, Germany and Taiwan as well as the Calais migrant camp.

44. The staff feel immensely privileged to walk with the students on this part of their journeys of discipleship, seeing them develop skills and insights that will be offered into the wider church and communities as they, in their turn, play a part in encouraging the whole people of God. We believe we are equipping the future equippers, not least by ensuring that their contextual experiences reflect the reality of the church and world today.

How do we walk the way with others?

45. Supporting the students' journeys is just part of the picture. We have many 'friends' who feel a part of Northern College too:

45.1 Local churches, in various synods, who ask us to preach, or offer support in other ways – or whose members come to teaching, lay preaching events, open lectures, quiet days, or church Saturdays;

45.2 We want more friends like this! We are developing this aspect of our work in many ways, working closely with synods and our colleagues at other RCLs, to ensure that we can share resources and people. Northern College is a resource for the whole URC – and beyond, as we work also with Congregational Federation, Methodist and Moravian colleagues. Of particular importance are the fresh ways we can serve churches as they are engaging with 'Walking the Way' and the URC as it develops Stepwise;

45.3 the synods and committees and other working places of various denominations, as we respond to requests of many kinds (from leading the Bible studies at this General Assembly to supporting Ministers' Summer Schools, from giving papers at conferences to participating in preparing materials for local churches, as well as supporting lay preachers, elders and others in developing their ministries);

45.4 the student-placement churches, cathedrals, chaplaincies, projects and charities. We are grateful to them as they welcome and support the students in their learning experiences. Developing these relationships helps encourage local churches to see us as a resource for them too.

What can we offer to the church?

46. Of course, it is right that we are all being encouraged as individuals and churches to explore our gifts and to seek further equipping for different and future ministries. In that context, Northern College continues to be open to new possibilities. As well as the friends we are already working with (mentioned above), we are looking to develop our relationships with synods and the wider church, playing our part in Walking the Way and Stepwise. We hope to be employing more staff time soon that will further increase our capacity.

47. It is essential that children, young people, adults, church members, elders, worship leaders, and all who are responding to God's call upon their lives should not only be encouraged to do this, but should be equipped for the challenges we face together – and as a resource for the whole church, we seek to be proactive for such a time as this.

Students in Training: A statistical summary

Key to abbreviations:

SURCC Scottish United Reformed and Congregational College

RCL Resource Centre for Learning

MWS Ministry of Word and Sacraments

CRCW Church Related Community Worker

	Students in Training		Anticipated entry into URC Service			
	Mar 2016	Mar 2018	2018	2019	2020	2021
STIPENDIARY						
Full-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL) MWS	11	11	4	2	3	2
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	5	4	2	1		1
SURCC (RCL)	2	1			1	
Westminster College (RCL)	16	17	8	6	2	1
Part-time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)		1			1	
SURCC (RCL)	2					
Subtotal	36	34	14	9	7	4
NON-STIPENDIARY						
Full-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)	1					
Westminster College (RCL)						
Part-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)	4	8	1	4	2	1
SURCC (RCL)						
Westminster College (RCL)	2	3	2	1		
Subtotal	7	11	3	5	2	1
GRAND TOTAL	43	45	17	14	9	5

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.

Students in Training, by synod

02 North Western

CRCW	Katy Ollerenshaw	Northern College
Non-Stipendiary	Alma Fritchley	Northern College
Stipendiary	Cath Atkinson Andrew Mudharara Alison Smith Jenny Travis Alex Clare-Young Sarah Fitton Lee Battle Jonnie Hill	Northern College Northern College Westminster College Northern College Westminster College Northern College Northern College Northern College

03 Mersey

Non-Stipendiary	Pamela Hughson	Northern College
Stipendiary	John Grundy Paul Duncan	Northern College Northern College

04 Yorkshire

Stipendiary	Tessa Henry-Robinson Adam Woodhouse	Westminster College Westminster College
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05 East Midlands

Non-Stipendiary	Amanda Linney	Northern College
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06 West Midlands

CRCW	Andy Littlejohns	Northern College
Non-Stipendiary	Chris Watson Fiona Elvins	Northern College Westminster College
Stipendiary	James Hamilton	Northern College

07 Eastern

Stipendiary	Gillian Thomson Cristina Cipriani Naomi Young	Westminster College Westminster College Westminster College
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08 South Western

CRCW	Maria Lee	Northern College
Stipendiary	Barnabas Shin Aiyana Gardner-Houghton Julie Kirby Matthew Rigden	Northern College Northern College Westminster College Westminster College

Education and learning

09 Wessex

Non-Stipendiary	Helen Everard Cara Heafey	Northern College Northern College
Stipendiary	Paul Stein	Westminster College

10 Thames North

Non-Stipendiary	Solomon Aryee-Brown	Northern College
Stipendiary	Helen Garton Stephen Ansa-Addo	Westminster College Westminster College

11 Southern

CRCW	Jo Patterson	Northern College
Non-Stipendiary	Tim Reith Ted Bellingham Prince Brown-Engmann	Westminster College Westminster College Northern College
Stipendiary	Bernard Fidler Jo Clare-Young Josh Thomas Dan Harris Jacob Bali	Westminster College Westminster College Westminster College Westminster College Westminster College

12 Wales

Stipendiary	Ceri Gardner	Northern College
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13 Scotland

Stipendiary	Susan Henderson	Scottish Cong and URC College
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Total Students 45

Equalities committee

Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Helen M Mee: hmmedin@aol.com
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>23. General Assembly extends the membership of the equalities committee to include a nominee of URC Youth.</p> <p>24. General Assembly welcomes the attention already given to diversity by the nominations committee and invites the equalities committee to seek ways of supporting the nominations committee in this aspect of its work.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To share with General Assembly the main thrust of the work of the committee since General Assembly 2016 and to indicate future work identified.
Main points	To promote a culture of inclusion and equalities within the life of the URC and to challenge practices which are exclusive of the diversity within the denomination.
Previous relevant documents	urc.org.uk/equal-opportunities.html
Consultation has taken place with...	Nominations committee; URC Youth Executive; General Assembly committees through linked observers; Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

Summary of Impact

Financial	As budgeted.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ecumenical.

Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity

1.1 The equalities committee assists the development of equalities throughout the United Reformed Church and promotes, supports and encourages our contribution to equality and diversity in the wider life of our society. It seeks to remind the whole denomination that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work. It therefore will challenge the practices of the URC where appropriate.

1.2 This remit is wide-reaching and aspirational and we seek to fulfil it through collaboration. Thus, members of the committee are each linked with another committee, receiving papers and attending occasional meetings. In 2018 an updated checklist for equality committee members was produced which outlines that role. It is available on the equalities page of the website and is printed as Appendix 1 on page 109.

1.3 The committee has been keen to support the Assembly arrangements committee in seeking strategies to mitigate against some of the shortcomings of this year's venue. We welcome the actions of that committee in terms of guidance offered and temporary adaptations made to the building.

1.4 The work of encouraging equality and cherishing diversity belongs to the whole Church and is the task of every disciple. We recognise however that the work of some programme staff is particularly focused on welcome and inclusion, and we value their input to and support of our work. Likewise we greatly appreciate the work of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) both in advocacy and as invaluable resource providers. We encourage the awareness of churches and individuals through following social media and weblinks.

1.5 We note and rejoice in a continued embedding and celebration of issues of equality and diversity within the work of individual committees and broader initiatives such as 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today'. We work closely with the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources) and are encouraged by the ongoing refreshing of HR policies.

2.1 Since Assembly 2018 two committee members had to resign membership during their tenure. Other members left at the end of their term of service. We thank them all for their contributions. We also thank the nominations committee, acknowledging that their task is complex and perhaps thankless. Finding those willing and able to serve on Assembly committees is hard but that is compounded by our policy to ensure that committees reflect the diversity of the denomination when many of these diversities are not visible.

2.2 This is an equalities and inclusion issue. Do we need to rethink how we conduct our business and decision making to ensure as wide a representation as possible?

2.3 We welcome and encourage any approach which allows greater participation e.g. issue based and time limited approaches such as task and finish groups.

2.4 We are continuing to develop virtual meeting and other technological skills which allow us to hold a short, focused meeting to progress an item, consequently saving time at physical meetings and allowing items to progress more quickly. Virtual attendance at the core meetings has also been made possible.

2.5 We commend the continuing development of this approach across the denomination primarily as it enables greater participation of those who otherwise

might feel unable to contribute to a committee on the grounds of, for example, distance, disability, family responsibilities or work commitment.

3. The committee warmly welcomes the initiative taken at Youth Assembly to create an equality and diversity representative role on the URC Youth Executive. The descriptor for the role includes serving on the equalities committee whilst holding the office. An enabling resolution accompanies this report.

4. The position of different schools associated with the URC has now been very helpfully clarified. Those schools which have a member of their Board of Governors nominated by General Assembly are asked to report to General Assembly whilst those (we know of four) with a locally sustained link to a local church (or its successor) should rightly report locally.

5. Looking ahead we have identified a number of areas which merit further exploration from an equality and diversity perspective:

- ensuring strategies and procedures are in place to collect data on ethnicity in regard to recruitment and employment at Church House;
- exploring possibilities for being recognized as a Breast Feeding Friendly Church;
- collating available equality statements from synods in order to share best practice across the denomination;
- updating the welcome pack available to new equalities committee members and considering whether a document collating the URC's commitment to equality with some guidance as to best practice would be helpful to committee convenors.

6. We continue to hope that the faith and order committee will be able to identify a permissive paragraph to be added, as appropriate, to the Basis of Union and Schedules A, B, C and D where a trinitarian formula is used (Baptism, Ordination) to allow the use of expansive language (General Assembly 2014) to describe the triune nature of God.

7. Two excellent resources considering transgender issues have been produced over recent months.

- *Transfaith: A transgender pastoral resource* published by Darton, Longman and Todd in 2018 is a resource book offering pastoral guidelines, Bible studies and liturgies. Its authors are Chris Dowd and Christina Beardsley with Justin Tanis. Chris is a URC minister.
- The Church of Scotland has produced *Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care*. This is a downloadable booklet available on the equalities webpage, and includes personal stories shared by a number of leaders from the URC in Scotland. The booklet seeks to 'promote learning and awareness of the issues transgender and gender non-conforming people experience in order to better facilitate pastoral care'.

8.1 The equalities committee is concerned that in our experience of being a shrinking denomination we sense that a less-than-inclusive culture is emerging. Both anecdotal accounts and visible count would suggest that this is a trend across the denomination.

8.2 With fewer people available to take on roles that we currently understand to be essential the number of participants and voices heard at the table reduces.

8.3 This appears to have at least two effects:

- as some individuals take on more roles they naturally become more skilled and better equipped to represent the denomination creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. This makes it even harder for those at the edge to see themselves as potential contributors;
- a sense that the shrinkage is happening faster amongst the already marginalized groups in our denominational family

Equalities

8.4 If we are still committed to being an inclusive church then we need to match this intent with practical solutions to allow participation. This developing situation if not addressed will continue to impact on some of the good work done over the years.

8.5 This is a challenge to the whole Church as we struggle to ensure that with such a commitment we actively seek and hear the voices from the edge as well as those more centrally placed. Without those voices we are all diminished. Our second resolution therefore offers the Equalities Committee's ongoing support for this aspect of the work of the Nominations Committee.

Appendix 1

Observing Assembly committees at work: Guidance for members of the equalities committee

1.1 What follows here is designed to help members of the equalities committee observe and reflect back reasonably constructive comments and suggestions to a General Assembly committee on its own practice of inclusion in relation to the desired intentions of the URC.

1.2 Good equalities and diversity practice is more than ethnicity, gender and culture. There are a whole range of protected characteristics as covered by the Equalities Act 2010. Ultimately in working towards transformative inclusion we must consider how all elements of difference intersect and how discrimination, based on different layers of identity often interlocks to reinforce and perpetuate each other.

1.3 For instance, when attending a mission committee meeting or that of the education and learning committee or the finance committee, it will not necessarily be evident what the equalities issues are and how that committee's working practice is related to the issues that matter to Equalities. The intention is not that equalities observation of a committee's work must be done from the perspective that there must be some evil intention lurking somewhere in the committee's work. Rather the intention is to affirm good practice, highlight deficiencies and point to helpful ways to improve representation and participation in the meeting. It is also to indicate where a course of action that might arise from a committee decision might raise issues of discrimination or exclusion.

2.1 Things to consider (a sort of checklist, in no particular order and not exhaustive):

- Make up of committee: who constitutes the committee? How diverse is it? Where is improvement needed? Is there an awareness of such a need?
- Meeting space and timings: how is this affecting representation and participation? Is it accessible, easy to find, welcoming and friendly? Who would find it most difficult?
- Agenda and meeting process: what does the agenda and process say about inclusion, knowledge, inclusion/exclusion? Who finds it easier? What are the assumptions? For whom is it challenging? Are all able to equally access the resources for the meeting (especially online materials)?
- Language and images: how accessible has been the conversation for all? Is there care in ensuring that acronyms and specialised terms are clarified? Do the images represent the diversity of the URC? Is the convenor ensuring clarity of communication and action for all?
- Culture of inclusion: how is this evident from the way the meeting happens? Who are valued? Who speaks? How many times? Who are heard? Who/what are the trusted voices? What is the convenor doing to make everyone feel included and to participate? Are all treated equally? What are the two key values of the committee?
- Visibility and invisibility: are there signals, codes, comments that are 'insider' (or only known to a few)? Who sits where? In terms of layout – are all equally visible to the convenor or is the convenor only in eye contact with a few?

Equalities

- Awareness: is there an effort to welcome marginalised/minority people or first timers to the meeting? How aware are the participants of a diversity of views or perspectives on a particular matter/issue? Is there concern about a convenor's awareness level of diversity and difference? Is there a possibility for the development of awareness competence and other skilling?
 - Intentionality: is there a sense that the agenda, process, discussion and outcomes reflect a reasonable grasp of diversity, difference and inclusion? What good practice have you observed? What can be improved?
3. For any meeting a member of the equalities committee attends: what will I take away as good practice/model of inclusion to be shared with others?

Faith and order committee

Report of ongoing work

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Alan Spence: alanandsheila@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	25. General Assembly recognises that some people who wish to continue as members of the United Reformed Church are unable to do so in the normal way, often because they live at a great distance from any local church of the URC, or their circumstances require a greater degree of mobility than enables them to be church members in the normal way. General Assembly requests each synod to consider whether they can identify one or more local churches which have a vocation to hold the membership of such people, who could be received onto the roll of that local church simply by resolution of the Church Meeting. General Assembly further requests that synods continue to treat such a local church fairly and justly in regard both to scoping and requested contributions to the ministry and mission fund.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	An update on the committee's work and outline of its future plans. To extend the policy on church membership.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To give an overview of the work done in the past two years – and that planned for the next two years. To emphasize the committee's commitment to resource local churches for study and worship and to respond to matters referred to it. Recommendation that the denomination makes a small extension to its church membership policy.
Previous relevant documents	'What is the Spirit saying ...?' at Assembly 2014 and 2016. General Assembly 2016 Resolutions 21, 23 and 24. 'Isolated members' discussion at Mission Council in May 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Law and polity advisory group Synod Moderators.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ability to recognise the URC membership of a limited number of individuals currently worshipping in a local church of a partner tradition.

Report of ongoing work

1. Interpreting our remit

The faith and order committee has been reflecting on the nature of its role in the mission of the United Reformed Church. Here is a brief summary.

1.1 We do not see it as part of our role to try to shape the agenda of the denomination or to advance any particular project or programme. Rather we understand ourselves as a theological resource for the General Assembly, or for Mission Council acting in its name, as it considers questions of doctrine or order. This means that generally we expect to find ourselves responding to tasks to do with these issues that are asked of us by the Assembly.

1.2 We do, however, believe that there is a role for us in identifying particular pieces of work being carried out by the Church which may have a faith and order element to them. Our aim would be to offer advice in the early stages of such work to assist in its formulation. Sometimes, however, we might of ourselves identify an issue of doctrine or order that arises in our Church's wider life that we would wish to bring to the attention of Assembly. Further, our committee might on occasion believe that there is a particular theological resource that we could helpfully develop should the Assembly encourage us to do so.

1.3 In our communications, we are aware that technical theological language is not always helpful. We aim to provide input to the wider church in an accessible format with summary documents wherever possible. We believe that faith and order remains a valuable space and resource to assist the United Reformed Church in its mission.

2. Response to resolutions from General Assembly 2016

2.1 Resolution 21

The committee has been working for a few years on 'What is the Spirit saying to the churches?' Material was presented at the General Assembly in 2014 and again in 2016, and after the 2014 Assembly there was also a wide-ranging consultation with local congregations around the URC. This edited version of the 2016 material, posted on the faith and order web page, sums up the committee's message. Our Church has a calling to live, a task to fulfil, a great God to serve, and grace sufficient for the journey ahead. We hope that people will find this message refreshingly positive. In some churches it may give resource material for preaching or discussion. We commend it to you, and commend you to God's guidance, wisdom and love. (<https://www.urc.org.uk/urc-resources/faith-and-order>)

2.2 Resolution 23

In response to this resolution the committee has begun work on a series of short articles on what the church believes about ten central issues of the Christian faith.

2.3 Resolution 24

2.3.1 In 2016 General Assembly recognised in principle that a scheme should be developed for 'wider fold/isolated members', and instructed the committee to bring a proposal to Mission Council in May 2017. The discussion of this proposal raised questions about its conformity to the law and polity of the URC, and the committee was invited to explore the matter further.

2.3.2 Having consulted with the law and polity advisory group and the synod moderators, the committee now offers an amended (and less adventurous) proposal to General Assembly.

- 2.3.3 If the resolution is passed, we believe it will be important for the Church to offer guidance to those local congregations asked by their synods to fulfil this role, to clarify reasonable expectations around pastoral care for isolated members. It is unlikely, we think, that the numbers of people involved will be large.

3. Mission and ministry in covenant

3.1 The Church of England and the Methodist Church are in serious discussion about the possible interchangeability of ministry between the two churches with a proposal entitled, 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant: Report from the faith and order bodies of the Church of England and Methodist Church' (www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/mission-and-ministry-in-covenant.pdf)

3.2 We were invited to respond and did so as follows:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an initial response to the 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant' document. As ecumenical partners, we would wish to support you in this proposal to work more closely together and in freeing up resources for mission. The proposal is clearly a challenging one for both your denominations and we would encourage openness and honesty about the difficulties in reaching a potential concord. If you are able to reach a genuine agreement with integrity we would wish to celebrate with you.

The United Reformed Church does not see that such an agreement would create any new obstacles for our ongoing ecumenical relationships with the Church of England and Methodist Church. Indeed, we would welcome the opportunity to engage in developing 'Mission and Ministry in Covenant' to other partner denominations. With this in mind, we have been reflecting on our understanding of episcopacy and its expression for us in a conciliar form. We offer our prayers for your discussions and look forward to our future involvement whether that be as supportive friend or participant.

3.3 Much of the discussion between these two churches has to do with the place and meaning of episcopacy. As the possibility of any future interchange of ministry between the URC and Church of England will clearly depend to some extent on the issues of episcopacy we have begun to reflect on a URC understanding of the role of episcopacy in relation to our commitment to conciliarity.

4. The role of scriptures in the URC

When, some three years ago, questions were being asked about what role the Scriptures played in the decisions of our church, faith and order asked four of its members to write papers on the matter. The committee has recently sought to shape those papers into a coherent argument and to propose a way forward. A paper was presented to the Mission Council in March 2018 for discussion and the following extracts are provided:

Scripture in the URC

4.1 This presentation is the outcome of the committee's reflection on papers by Augur Price, Romilly Micklem, Sarah Hall and John Proctor on *sola scriptura* and to propose a way forward for our Church on how we might better engage with the scriptures.

Our family tree

4.2 Here is the argument in brief. How we use the Scriptures is to a large extent shaped by our traditions. Our Church traces its ancestral line through Disciples of Christ, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, through theologians like Lesslie Newbigin, PT Forsyth, Philip Doddridge, Isaac Watts, Richard Baxter and John Owen. They in turn understood their roots to lie in the Reformation theology of Calvin, Bucer and Knox, itself dependent on the revolutionary genius of Martin Luther. These Reformers

were in turn all trained in Catholic institutions shaped by Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury and most significantly Augustine of Hippo. That tradition is also our heritage. Yet we are still far from the beginning. Our line passes back to fourth-century thinkers of the Eastern Church like Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus and Athanasius, whose intellect contributed to our creeds. And it goes further back to the Jewish community of the Way who gathered on the day of Pentecost. All existing churches are cousins linked in one family tree.

Held together by the scriptures

4.3. One strand that unites these outwardly disparate communities is the content of their faith, determined as it has been by our common scriptures. In the debates that have shaped the doctrines, creeds and confessions that brought our churches to where we are today, the Bible has always played a decisive role.

The use of Scripture

4.4 Being shaped by the scriptures does not mean that the wider church has felt limited or constrained to stick to the wording of the Bible. For instance, scholars in the fourth century found it necessary to introduce a non-biblical word *homoousion* (of one substance) to describe the relation of Jesus to God in the face of subtle Arian arguments that undermined his divine status. Similarly, the term 'Trinity', to explain the nature of the God who is made known in the life of Jesus and the dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit was quite novel.

4.5 Further it was generally recognised that there is a spiritual dynamic in properly understanding and interpreting the scriptures. Paul wrote: 'God has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life' (2 Corinthians 3:6). True understanding requires spiritual enlightenment. 'I believe so that I may understand,' was the insightful maxim of Anselm of Canterbury.

4.6 Sometimes the implications of the Bible message have remained hidden in its pages for centuries. It was William Wilberforce, a British politician in the 18th century, who helped us to see that a gospel of genuine freedom requires the abolition of slavery even though the text may not appear to explicitly demand it. Secular feminists have enabled Christians to understand that the logic of equality before God as divine image-bearers encourages women in the modern world to go to university if they so wish, to vote, and to receive the same salaries as their male counterparts. Marxist liberation theologians have opened our eyes to God's concern for justice for the poor, the dispossessed and the powerless. This divine mindfulness for the cause of the oppressed was always present in the text but the Church sometimes failed to give it due attention. Environmentalists have made us more aware of our biblical duty before God to take proper care of the earth.

Our founding documents

4.7 The URC shares in this rich biblical heritage with other Christian communities and has affirmed the determining role that the scriptures play in the expression of its own faith. Augur Pearce reminds us of some of our formal statements.

4.8 We 'acknowledge the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people'. We also assert that the Church's life 'must ever be renewed and reformed according to the scriptures, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit', and that study of the scriptures is one of the ways through which 'God makes known in each age his saving love, his will for his people and his purpose for the world'.

The problem

4.9 In practice, however, we in the councils of the United Reformed Church have sometimes struggled to determine theological, moral and social questions by reference to the scriptures. Further, we are generally reluctant to exercise any form of constraint over those among us who write or speak publicly against the central articles of our faith, however damaging such views might appear to be to the unity of the church. Why is this?

4.10 From his doctoral thesis Romilly Micklem argues that we have in the United Reformed Church a supreme source of authority for our life of faith, and a separate conciliar structure for managerial authority, which is neither constituted nor in a *de facto* position to determine the validity or otherwise of specific readings of scripture.

4.11 The reasons for this are complex but have much to do with the lack of shared traditions of interpretation. Put bluntly, Micklem holds that the URC does not have enough of a common framework or shared tradition for the interpretation of scripture to be carried out meaningfully as a collective enterprise. This makes for rich diversity, but it also makes for insular bodies or silos of interpretation, between which interpreters cannot collaborate, because they do not have enough common ground. Let us consider more closely how these ways of interpretation have come about.

Ways of interpretation

4.12 Everyone approaches the scriptures with their own interpretive framework, whether or not they recognise it. There is no neutral space or value-free position from which we study the Bible. We all bring to the text our own particular worldview which has been shaped by our intellectual history, our religious experience and our cultures.

4.13 This was the case from the beginning. The first Christians, transformed by experience of divine salvation in Jesus, read the Jewish Scriptures as a Christian text. They believed its pages were inspired by the Spirit of Christ and saw them as referring to him and the events of his life almost everywhere. This way of interpreting the Old Testament is particularly apparent in the book of Hebrews which relativized the significance of Moses and the Jewish cult with the coming of the Messiah.

4.14 A rather different interpretive key was the distinction Paul made between grace and law, or faith and works, in the redemptive process. In the unfolding history of salvation the giving of the law through Moses was viewed by him as no more than a temporary measure; in due course living under Torah was to be superseded for people of faith by the coming of Christ. Consequently early Christians did not believe that civic and ceremonial laws in the Old Testament applied directly to them. As to the moral law their interpretive key was love.

4.15 It was not long before different ways of interpretation emerged in the new Christian communities. In the face of the speculative theories of Christian Gnostics, Irenaeus spoke of the 'rule of faith' (a core set of Christian beliefs) and the (unwritten) apostolic tradition as interpretive safeguards to counter unrestrained speculation. In the city of Alexandria, initially through the person of Origen, a way of reading the scriptures developed which favoured allegorical reading and sought to discover in the text three levels of meaning: the literal, the moral and the spiritual. Somewhat in conflict with this was a group of theologians living in Antioch who emphasised literal, historical and linguistic approaches to the text.

4.16 For Luther the interpretive key was the doctrine of justification. We would not be far from him if we spoke of the Gospel in this way. It is through the lens of the Gospel that we properly understand the meaning of the scriptures.

4.17 The Enlightenment introduced a world-view committed to apply scientific method to every area of intellectual enquiry. Textual, historical and literary critical

Faith and order

methods were soon applied to the study of the Bible which appeared to many to undermine both its authority and meaning. There was an aridity about biblical study.

4.18 As a response to the religious cynicism initially fostered by the use of these scientific methods Friedrich Schleiermacher encouraged us to think of theology not as a study of God as such but as a study of human spirituality or piety. In particular, he viewed it as testimony to our sense of absolute dependence on God. In his classic work *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher transposed classical Lutheran dogmatics into a systematic theology based on the shared phenomenon of human spirituality. Celebrated as the father of liberal theology Schleiermacher has influenced the way many now approach the Bible. They understand it as speaking about our experience of God rather than about the objective reality of God. Theological truth is consequently viewed as a subjective construct rather than as an external reality that exists independently of human experience.

4.19 The Reformed theologian Karl Barth was deeply distressed that his liberal German theological professors colluded with the rise of German nationalisation and militarisation. He believed that an interpretive method that said nothing about injustice was deeply flawed. He went on to construct his theological masterpiece *The Church Dogmatics* around the concept of divine revelation. Barth summarised the Gospel as ‘God speaks to humanity, God enables humanity to hear him speak.’ Central to this way of approaching the scriptures is his emphasis that Jesus as the ‘Word of God’ is in effect the dynamic act of divine self-communication. Apart from this speech-act of God all human spirituality is, according to Barth, empty and hollow.

***Sola scriptura* and tradition**

4.20 *Sola scriptura* is not a claim that we can read the Bible without the interpretive frameworks that developed in history. Rather it is the view that all our theology, and creeds, confessions and statements of faith are themselves subject to the critique of the scriptures.

4.21 So we have an interpretive circle. The scriptures critique our religious formulations, but it is these formulations which shape the framework by which we interpret the Scriptures. How do we break out of our closed interpretive schemes?

Engagement

4.22 We do so by dialogue with other Christians, other Churches, other traditions and by engagement with the shared theological history of the Church, and indeed through openness to the world. The Holy Spirit is given to the church as community so that we might come to the truth together. A dialogue of spiritual openness is essential. One of the most divisive debates in the Christian Church was that between Luther and Rome over the nature of justification. Yet recent discussions between Lutherans and Catholics have led to a nuanced joint declaration with little that still separates the two parties on this matter. The Holy Spirit can and does enable the people of God in humility and openness to come to a shared understanding of the mind of the scriptures.

4.23 Those who study in an ecumenical context believe they are better theologians for it. Those who serve on sexuality committees generally express appreciation for what they have learned from opposing views. We need to encourage engagement. Imagine the outcome of Gear and Free to Believe hosting a joint conference on ‘What is the Good News?’

4.24 One caveat if we are to embark on such an exercise: we do so not to enhance ecumenical relations, although that will surely happen; we do so not to show the love of Christ, although to respect and engage with the views of others is a loving act; we do so because we are seekers of the truth. Jesus said to his disciples: ‘If you continue in my word you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.’

Finance committee

General report 2016 to 2018

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer: ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the central budgets and other major finance-related areas of work over the past two years.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central budgeted funds were in financial surplus in both 2016 and 2017; • The financial aspects of the refurbishment of Church House and the operation of the legacy and church building funds have gone well; • A challenge posed by the needs of the Lay Staff Pension Scheme has been satisfactorily addressed; • The Minister's Pension Fund has reorganised its investments; but there will be a need to increase URC contributions from January 2019; • That will be a focus for finance committee activity in the next year, as will assisting others to establish a Discipleship Development Fund to support training and development for all URC people.
Previous relevant documents	Finance committee paper for General Assembly 2016.
Consultation has taken place with...	Most synods and Northern College who are employers within the lay staff pension scheme (paragraphs 7 and 8). Some synods and the URC Retired Ministers' Housing Society re the URC Ministers' pension fund (paragraphs 16 and 17).

Summary of Impact

Financial	Nothing new in the report itself.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

General report 2016 to 2018

Financial results

1. In 2016 the income and expenditure account for the URC central fund showed a surplus of around £150k. In 2017, the equivalent figure was a surplus of more than £850k (partly attributable to some key vacancies arising and taking time to fill, but also because ministerial costs were lower than budget).

2. In both years the ministry and mission (M&M) contributions held up well. The recent trend for M&M contributions from local churches to reduce by a little over 1% per year continued but, given the decline in URC membership, this still represented increased giving by church members to support the denomination-wide provision of ministers, ministerial education, other mission activity and the support costs of the denomination. We want to express our gratitude for the ongoing commitment of churches giving what they can afford to enable the spiritual needs of all our brothers and sisters in Christ to be met.

Church House refurbishment

3. The URC Trust oversaw the work done during 2017 on refurbishing Church House (referred to elsewhere in the *Book of Reports*). The finance committee were delighted that the costs came in slightly below budget and that they will be more than fully recouped over time as a result of letting the second floor and receiving contributions to our standing costs from our new tenants.

Legacy Fund

4. Bequests to the United Reformed Church which are not specifically earmarked for other purposes are placed in the legacy fund, administered by the finance committee but with the involvement of the Deputy General Secretary (Mission). Currently the fund is able to make grants totaling around £200,000 a year to support innovative mission projects. For the funding pot to sustain that level of grant-giving going forward requires more legacies to be left to the denomination like the £75,000 one notified towards the end of 2017.

Church building fund

5. The Church building fund has given grants totaling more than £150k in each of the past two years via the inter-synod-resource-sharing process to support churches undertaking certain types of building development of their premises. Loans are also available to support building projects and these are administered by the finance committee directly.

Lay staff pension scheme

6. The lay staff pension scheme is administered by TPT Retirement Solutions ('the Trustee') for the 13 participating employers – the URC re Church House and certain other staff, 11 of the synods and Northern College. In August 2017 the Trustee indicated that, following the latest triennial valuation of the Scheme's assets and liabilities as at September 2016, it would be necessary for the various employers to increase their deficit recovery contributions to the Scheme from 1 January 2018.

7. Following consultation with all the employers, the Pension Executive and the finance committee negotiated an agreement with the Trustee that, in return for payment of two lump sum capital contributions by 30 June 2018, it would not be necessary for the regular monthly employer contributions to be increased for at least the next three years.

8. This arrangement was the preferred way forward for all the employers involved and we hope to be able to confirm at General Assembly that each of the employers within the Scheme has contributed, proportionately to their share of the deficit, capital sums totaling £3.4m by 30 June 2018.

9. We are grateful to the employers for the co-operative and constructive approach each took to bring this issue to a satisfactory resolution.

10. The URC investment committee and the URC Pension Executive have also worked hard and successfully recently to encourage the Trustee to follow investment criteria and approaches which sit more comfortably with the URC's appetite for acceptable risk and with its ethical investment concerns.

URC Ministers' Pension Fund (URCMPF)

11. The URC investment committee has undertaken a lot of work during the past two years to assist the URCMPF to restructure its portfolio. The objectives underlying this restructuring were to simplify oversight of the portfolio and the demands placed on those charged with its administration, while reducing fees and other costs as well as preserving an ethical approach to investing the funds of the scheme.

12. As a result, the substantial assets held in the form of bonds have been moved from an active fund to a cheaper but, over the past few years, just as successful tracker fund. More recently, the fund's equity holdings have been switched to a pooled fund with Newton Investment Management, their Sustainable Global Equity Fund. Following recent growth in the equity market the opportunity was also taken to rebalance the scheme portfolio by moving some of the gains in equities to increase the weighting of the scheme's property assets.

13. Taken together, these changes will reduce complexity of oversight of the portfolio, reduce external costs and ensure appropriate ethical investment considerations are fully taken into account.

14. We want to take this opportunity to thank David Martin in particular for all his efforts in directing the work of the investment committee over recent years as he stands down from the role of convenor; but stays on the committee to continue to offer it his expertise.

15. Some very preliminary results of the triennial valuation of the URCMPF's assets and liabilities as at 1 January 2018, which will determine the contribution levels from next January, were reported by the scheme actuary to the URC Ministers' Pension Trust in March 2018. While the recent excellent performance of the pension fund assets has led to the deficit recovery position relating to benefits for past service being vastly improved compared with 3 years ago, a substantial increase in employer contribution levels is required to provide for benefits relating to members' service in the future due to changes in investment conditions.

16. Discussions re the recovery plan are ongoing, but the likelihood is that the URC contributions will have to increase by between £500k and £750k. Finding ways to address this will be a major priority for the finance committee as well as the Ministers' Pension Trust, over the coming year. One possibility is that we may seek to ensure that the part of M&M giving to the scheme is used to meet the ongoing liabilities with other ways being found to tackle the remaining deficit for past service.

17. During the years 2016 to 2018 no support has been sought from synods for the URCMPF beyond what is offered by local churches via M&M contributions. However, one synod has continued to give sums to the Pension Fund throughout these years. Moreover, three synods have taken steps to agree to donate a percentage of the proceeds of non-manse property sales to the URCMPF to help in offsetting the forecast increased pension contribution costs.

18. At present it is unclear whether any other synods might follow the lead of these four.

Discipleship Development Fund

19. When Mission Council decided it was necessary to close the Windermere Centre they were anxious that its efforts to support lay discipleship should be continued in other forms. Provision was made in the 2018 budget for money which might otherwise have been put towards the Windermere Centre instead to go to support iChurch; online learning; the transition from TLS to Stepwise; and to provide a small pot of money to assist individuals to access training and development opportunities.

20. Mission Council also asked for proposals to be developed which might utilise the proceeds from the eventual disposal of the Windermere Centre building to establish a Discipleship Development Fund. The finance committee expects to be heavily involved with the education and learning committee, the resource sharing task group and synods in exploring how this might be done during the coming year.

Finance committee

Annual accounts

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer: ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	None – for information.
Draft resolution(s)	26. General Assembly notes the Trustees’ Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To draw to General Assembly’s attention the availability of the audited accounts for 2017 and accompanying Trustees’ report. These are available online from the end of May 2018 and, during General Assembly, hard copies of the above will be available from the Assembly office.
Main points	The United Reformed Church’s central activities are legally accounted for in the name of the URC Trust. With advice from the finance committee, the Trust has received and approved the audited accounts for 2017. Copies of the audited accounts and trustees’ report are now available on the URC website and hard copies will be made available at General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	Audited accounts for 2016 are available on the website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Simply noting the availability of the accounts has no financial impact.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The report provides a publicly available summary of the Church’s activities and financial state.

Ministries committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Craig Bowman: ministries@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Main area of focus since General Assembly 2016 and subcommittee reports.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Ministries report to General Assembly 2016.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Re-allocation of some money from the Ministry and Mission Fund to resource pilot scheme for funding other ministries.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

General report

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, prisons 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 subcommittees.

Committee members

Convenor: Paul Whittle (from 2016)

Secretary: Craig Bowman

Members: Martin Camroux, Allison Claxton, James Coleman (until 2017), Stuart Dew, Sally Thomas, Jane Woods-Scawen (until 2017), Peter Meek (synod moderator), David Bedford (convenor of the Retired Ministers' Housing subcommittee until 2017), Anne Bedford (convenor of the Retired Ministers' Housing subcommittee from 2017), Ewen Harley (convenor of the Assessment Board), Pamela Ward (convenor of the maintenance of the ministry subcommittee), Frances Ruthven (convenor of the accreditation subcommittee until 2017), Russell Furley-Smith (convenor of the accreditation subcommittee from 2017) Simon Loveitt (convenor of the CRCW programme subcommittee from 2017), Andy Buxton (leadership in worship advocate until 2017), Jenny Sheehan (leadership in worship advocate from 2017).

1. We continue to be grateful for the contribution made to the support of the variety of ministries within the United Reformed Church by members of the ministries committee and its subcommittees. As in so many other areas of the Church's life we appreciate the expertise and commitment that these many volunteers bring to this work.

Minister numbers

2.1 Since General Assembly 2016 the committee has continued to consider the number of stipendiary ministers likely to be available to the church and how the valuable resource represented by these committed women and men of faith can best serve our mission. We bring a resolution to Assembly which seeks to remind the church that there is some flexibility in how we 'deploy' ministers.

2.2 The contribution made by those who serve as ministers in a non-stipendiary role is greatly valued by our church. However, it is believed that the current training requirements for those offering for non-stipendiary service may deter some from offering service in a distinct local setting. Following consultation and exploration at Mission Council we bring a proposal for a new model of local non-stipendiary ministry.

2.3 Whilst in some places it is felt that we 'do not have enough ministers', our demographics and financial resources suggest that the number of stipendiary ministers we can afford to support is not very much larger than the number we expect to have in the coming years. As will be seen in the report of the accreditation subcommittee the shortfall is being addressed to a certain extent by the issuing of Certificates of Eligibility.

Funding additional ministries

3. In response to requests from some synods, and recognising that there may be a shortfall in the number of stipendiary ministers available for deployment in the coming years, the committee asked Mission Council to agree a pilot of a scheme whereby ministry and mission fund monies could be released to synods to support ministry other than stipendiary ministry of word and sacraments and church related community work. This may be full or part-time, sessional or expense-only work and could be youth or family work, community or pastoral support, or many other aspects of ministry that

Ministries

would not be possible without additional funding being provided. We have invited synods to declare an interest in being a pilot synod and when these have been received and considered we will choose two with whom we shall partner to explore the value of such a scheme.

Pastoral supervision

4. The support and accountability of ministers is a matter of concern for the ministries committee along with many across the church. As ministry continues to develop in response to changes in demographics, secularisation and digital communication, ministers can find themselves increasingly isolated and seeking to manage diverse and, sometimes, opposing expectations. Additionally, external bodies may have expectations with regard to ministerial practice that are difficult or unwise to ignore. The past case review and increased awareness of safeguarding is one such area. Recognising that some within our church, including one synod and at least one ecumenical partner, believe that pastoral supervision is an appropriate response to some of the pressure on ministers, the ministries committee will be exploring this further and consulting with others across the church.

Ministers' gathering

5. Arising out of 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today' and the changing nature of ministry, the ministries committee has been working with the 'Walking the Way' steering group and education and learning to arrange a gathering for the United Reformed Church's active ministers, both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. Over 600 ministers were invited and about 350 will be gathering at Yarnfield Park in Staffordshire at the end of April 2018. As well as this being a unique opportunity to meet with a large number of colleagues in ministry, the gathering will hear from well-respected speakers, worship together, explore aspects of walking the way, learn about developments regarding the URC's lay development plans and share in a wide variety of workshops. The two key speakers will be the Rt Revd Dr Rowan Williams and the Revd Dr Peggy Mulambya-Kabonde from the United Church of Zambia.

Accreditation subcommittee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this subcommittee 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.

Subcommittee members

Convenor: Russell Furley-Smith

Secretary: Craig Bowman

Members: Bridget Banks (until 2016) Susan Durber, Naison Hove (until 2017), Fran Ruthven (convenor until 2017), Ewan Harley (convenor of the assessment board), Andrew Prasad (synod moderator), Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee)

Certificates of eligibility

1.1 Certificates of eligibility are issued so that ministers of other Churches may be introduced to a pastorate in the URC and if called enter the roll of ministers of the URC.

1.2 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 may be issued.

1.3 No certificates were issued between 2011 and 2016.

1.4 In the light of projections, it was agreed that 10 certificates would be available for issuing between 2017 and 2019.

1.5 Four certificates were issued following interviews in December 2017. The URC should be encouraged by the quality of ministers from other churches seeking to serve the URC. Further applications will be sought for interview in autumn 2018 with the expectation of issuing three further certificates in each of the next two years.

Certificates of limited service

2.1 Certificates of limited service allow a minister of another denomination to serve in and be paid by the URC, in a specified post only and for a limited period of time. They provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities.

2.2 Four new certificates have been issued in the last two years and six have been renewed or extended.

Special category ministries

3.1 Special category ministry (SCM) posts are broadly of three kinds, to enable synods to provide ministry outside existing deployment quotas: new or priority areas of outreach where pioneering work is required; chaplaincies; innovative ministry in unique situations.

3.2 It was agreed by Mission Council in 2014 that the number of SCM posts (full-time equivalent) should not exceed 8% of the total number of stipendiary ministers available.

3.3 Currently there are 24 SCM posts (21.75 FTEs).

3.4 The subcommittee has undertaken work into the effectiveness of SCM posts and is grateful to synods for their input. The research suggests, tentatively, that a SCM post is likely to have the greatest impact if:

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- a) there is a clear understanding of the vision and purpose of the post;
- b) there is a willingness to change the vision and purpose of the post if external factors necessitate;
- c) there is strong and clear management of the post and post holder;
- d) there is appropriate support of the post and post holder from the local church (if relevant), wider church and community. There is scope for further research on the impact of scoping a part-time SCM post with a part-time pastorate;
- e) the right person, with the right skills and gifts, is in the post;
- f) there is continuity. This does not mean the post holder must never change but there are difficulties if there are too many changes in personnel involved in a project. There is scope for further research on the impact of a change in post holder mid-term;
- g) there is long-term and consistent commitment from ecumenical partners.

The roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Admission to the roll of ministers of word and sacraments

(from 1 February 2016 to 31 January 2018)

- 4.1 By ordination and induction:
Liz Adams, Sally Bateman, Stephen Best, Andy Braunston, Stuart Cutler, Paul Dempster, Martin Ferris, Nick Jones, Peter Kimberley, Paul O'Connor and Angela Rigby
- 4.2 By changes within the roll of ministers:
Graham Dadd (from non-stipendiary to stipendiary service)
- 4.3 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process:
Tom Bayliss, John Cox (United Church of Christ, USA), David Flynn, Karen Knight, Bernard Moss (Church of England), Steven Orange, Sue Powell, Caro Smyth, Chris Ray (Baptist), Richard Stein and Wendy Williams (Church of England)
- 4.4 Re-admission to the roll:
Martin Nicholls, Janet Webber

Church Related Community Workers

Admissions to the roll of church related community workers

(from 1 February 2016 to 31 January 2018)

- 5.1 By commissioning:
Vicky Longbone

Assembly accredited lay preachers

6.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 February 2016 and 31 January 2018 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination.

Northern:	Hannah Middleton
Mersey:	Paul Duncan, Doris Rimmer, Ron Williams
Yorkshire:	Jenny Horton, Teresa Raddings
East Midlands:	James Hodgkinson
West Midlands:	Mark Pickering, Pauline Whateley
South Western:	Sarah Jang, Richard Wainwright
Wessex:	Anna Crawford, Laurence Devlin, Linda Pain
Southern:	Sonia Weston
Scotland:	Derek McDonald.

Assessment board

Subcommittee members

Convenor: Ewen Harley

Secretary: Craig Bowman

Members: Ruth Allen (until 2018), Alex Bediako (until 2017), Karen Campbell, Lesley Charlton, Sohail Ejaz, Bill Gould (until 2017), Peter Henderson (until 2017), Shahbaz Javed (until 2017), Sue McCoan, Pat Oliver, Kim Plumpton (until 2018), Stuart Radcliffe, Peter Rand, Jill Shelton, Mary Thomas (until 2018)

Commitment

1. The commitment of those who serve on the board is much appreciated and grateful thanks are expressed for the time, energy and focus given to this work. Some members of the board are called infrequently to attend conferences as a result of the need to have a balance between female and male, lay and ordained, at each conference and taking into account the synods from which candidates have come. However, the willingness of board members to make themselves available even when they are not always used is recognised and appreciated.

The work

2. The board meets annually in September and receives reports on the progress of all students in ministry training. Following a satisfactory penultimate year report the board gives approval for that student to enter the settlement process. At each meeting the board reviews the processes involved in the selection of candidates for training for ministry of Word and Sacraments (MWS) and Church Related Community Work ministry (CRCW). Each year the board reflects on the manner in which the decision, whether positive or negative, is conveyed to the candidate, recognising the need for a balance between speed (perhaps involving insensitivity) and delay (perhaps causing unnecessary anxiety to the candidate). Whilst the current practice of giving the decision in person to the candidate, usually in their synod with synod people present, is not the preferred choice for some, the board still believes it is the best way of meeting the balance mentioned above.

3. A member of staff representing the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) is invited to attend the annual meeting of the board. This helps the board members to have a realistic understanding of the demands of ministerial training and gives an opportunity for the RCLs to raise particular matters of concern. Catherine Price, the personal development officer who supplies reports on candidates as part of the assessment process, attended the 2017 meeting so that her work could be discussed in some depth. A session on equalities is planned for the 2018 meeting.

Number of candidates

4. Two assessment conferences are held each year, alternating between Westminster College and Northern College. At the five conferences since we last reported 35 candidates have attended.

- 21 for MWS in stipendiary service (15 accepted for training)
- Ten candidates for MWS in non-stipendiary service (eight accepted for training but one candidate subsequently declined the offer)
- Two candidates for CRCW in stipendiary service (both accepted for training)
- Two candidates for transfer from non-stipendiary to stipendiary service (both accepted)

Assessment interview training and consultation

5. This is an annual event providing training both for assessment board members and for those in synods involved with the interviews of candidates. It also provides a valuable point of contact between the board and synods. We are grateful to Mary Thomas and Peter Henderson who continue to lead this event.

Church related community work programme subcommittee

It 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.

Subcommittee members

Convenor: Simon Loveitt

Secretary: Steve Summers

Members: Rosie Buxton (until 2018), Leonora Jagessar (from 2016), Derek Estill, Ruth Maxey (from 2016), Helen Stephenson (until 2017), Simon Walkling (synod moderator, until 2018), Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee).

In attendance: Samara Andrews (CRCW Administrator)

The ministry

1. Churches participate in Church Related Community Work ministry because they believe that the process of community development is an empowering and enabling way to express their beliefs in action. They do so with the knowledge that engaging in this ministry will change not only the community, but also the congregation. They also understand that this journey cannot be neatly pre-planned, but that it will surely be Spirit filled and exciting.

CRCW @ 30 and counting ...

2. Although the first CRCW project began in Bradford in 1981, we are celebrating 30 years and counting ... of CRCW Ministry since it was at the 1987 General Assembly in Cardiff that:

'The Assembly acknowledges that in Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) properly trained and appropriately employed, the Lord Jesus Christ is giving particular gifts for a particular ministry and is calling such individuals to exercise them in an office which is duly recognised within His Church (URC General Assembly 1987: 76.1).'

3. Please come along to our celebration and thanksgiving event on Saturday lunchtime at General Assembly. Since those early days, the CRCW ministry has been firmly established within the United Reformed Church, and is making a real difference by enabling local churches to 'create change both within the Church and the community'.

Numbers

4. General Assembly has set a target of at least twenty-six Church Related Community Workers across the denomination to receive a stipend at any one given time. Currently, 14 CRCW's are in post and four are at various stages of training. There are three vacant CRCW projects and a further ten at various stages of enquiry/ exploring/application.

5. Since ministry is provided for five years in the first instance, with a possible second five-year term available as a maximum, we are constantly looking for new church-in-community projects.

6. We are also always on the lookout for new people who are interested in exploring this exciting ministry and are continually working on raising awareness of the opportunities that this ministry offers to individuals, to local churches and to groups of churches. Please see; <https://www.urch.org.uk/crcw-projects.html> for more information.

CRCW news articles

7. Since March 2017, two articles per month have been posted on the URC website with some very interesting insights into the work of CRCW's and their projects. The articles can be found at: <https://www.urch.org.uk/crcw-news-events>

TLS Developing community experiences/Stepwise

8. We would like to place on record our thanks to those who wrote, tutored and participated in the TLS (Training for Learning and Serving) Developing Community Experiences programme. It was a ground-breaking course, which has led some students into the CRCW Ministry and many others into a more active and prophetic role within their local Church and community.

9. A particular thank you on the record must go to John Saunders who, as tutor, was central to the success of the programme.

10. We look forward to the launch of Stepwise and the continued learning that it will bring to those wishing to understand community development and how this process can play a role in the life of individuals, local churches and communities who are attempting to faithfully walk the way of Jesus today.

Maintenance of the ministry subcommittee

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.

Subcommittee members

Convenor: Pamela Ward

Secretary: Craig Bowman

Members: Keith Berry, David Black, Margaret Brock (from 2017), Chris Evans (convenor of pensions executive), Sue Kirkbride, Peter Rippon (until 2017), Richard Turnbull (until 2017), Eilidh Young (until 2017), Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee), John Piper (assistant treasurer)

1. The MOM subcommittee meets twice a year, but conducts much of its business by email, as and when a decision is called for concerning stipends or allowances for individual ministers.

Plan for Partnership

2. Our main role is to interpret the Plan for Partnership and to propose such changes as we consider necessary. When a particular situation does not exactly fit the terms of the Plan, we try to apply the Plan fairly and reasonably. When a question is raised by an individual, synod or other body, we consider it carefully; sometimes this leads to an amendment to the Plan, and sometimes we decide it is adequate as it stands. One recent change which arose from a particular request is to allow more discretion regarding the maximum removal grant, to cover special circumstances. We have also increased the maximum rate of refund for pulpit supply in a vacancy to £40.

Stipend increase

3. Our proposal for the stipend increase each year is based on a formula using the consumer price index (CPI). When the formula was applied in 2017, the CPI increase was 2.7%, producing a stipend increase of 2.4%. This, though not large, is considerably higher than it has been for some time.

Long-term sickness absence

4. We continue to monitor and improve our care for ministers who, having been on sick leave for six months, come to the end of their entitlement to full stipend. We sometimes have painful decisions to make, and we strive to bring wisdom and compassion to the judgments that are entrusted to us. We are very grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MOM office, who pays the stipends, tells us when we need to make a decision, organises medical and moderator reports, and deals with all the correspondence.

Ill health guidelines

5. These are updated and amended as necessary. A recent discussion has concerned ministers wishing to do what work they can while officially off sick. Admirable though this is, the conclusion was that it cannot be allowed.

General concerns

6. We have spent considerable time discussing ministerial stress and mental ill health, and relaying our concerns to the ministries committee. It is clear that these are often a factor in long-term sickness in ministers; but it is not easy to see what the Church can do to help, particularly as those most in need of help are often the ones least likely to seek or accept the help that is available.

Retired ministers' housing subcommittee

This subcommittee 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.

Subcommittee members

Convenor: Anne Bedford

Members: David Bedford (until 2017), John Ellis (until 2017), Nicola Furley-Smith (synod moderator), Ian Hardie (from 2018), Malcolm Lindo, Ken Summers, Peter West, Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee).

Secretary: Andy Bottomley (until 2017), Peter Shearer (2017), Chuka Agbasiere (from 2017)

1. The work of the Retired Ministers' Housing Society has been through a period of change since the last Assembly. Most obviously, there have been changes in staff, with two appointments still to be made as this report is prepared. Ms Chuka Agbasiere has been appointed as General Manager of the Society and she and her team are responsible for the ongoing work of 'providing housing for retired ministers and their spouses who could not otherwise be adequately housed'.
2. The governance arrangements of the Society and its structural relationship with the Retired Ministers' Housing subcommittee of the Assembly's ministries committee have also had to be reviewed, to keep in step with charity legislation. A review of the governance was carried out by Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones, and a working group continues to consider the findings. It seems likely that some amendment of the Rules of the Society will be needed. Legal advice is currently being sought.
3. The focus of all these arrangements is the support, through housing at a modest rental, of retired ministers, their partners and widow(er)s. At present we have 311 properties in England, Scotland and Wales (although none in the Channel Islands or Isle of Man, where the laws are different).
4. During the past year tenants have been asked to respond to a survey as to their feelings about the work of the Society. The response rate was very high and whilst there was a general level of satisfaction there were also useful pointers to ways in which we need to move. A regular newsletter is now proposed to improve communication, and a fuller list of policies and procedures will enable closer attention to the maintenance and upkeep of the houses.
5. The Society continues to rely on the generosity of synods, churches and individuals for much of its funding. Legacies are very important and we are grateful to former tenants and others who remember us in this way. For example, in 2017 we were given a property in the South-East. Occasional property sales and the monthly rents are also significant sources of income. The Society wishes to express its sincere thanks for every gift.
6. Another way in which synods and church members offer support is by providing oversight of a few of our properties in a certain area. This is very valuable to the Society and we give our sincere thanks to those who have helped us in the past. New volunteers are being sought and guidelines and training for what the job entails will be available.
7. The provision of housing in London and South East England, and indeed in some other parts of the country, has become much more difficult in recent years as prices have risen steeply. The Society is now considering not selling properties in London

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when tenants cease to need these, but retaining them to offer to those who wish to retire in this area. Letting these properties, should there be a limited period between tenants, would also contribute to income.

8. The work of the Society continues to be valued very highly by those we are able to help. It is one way that the Church expresses its care for people who have given much to its life and work.

Ministries committee

Active Ministers

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	27. General Assembly adopts the definition of an active Minister on page 134 of the <i>Book of Reports</i>.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides a definition of an active Minister.
Main points	Having a definition of an active minister is now essential in order to establish who needs to participate in mandatory training, to undertake DBS/PVG check and anything similar.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	The synod moderators.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No immediate impact on the budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Active Ministers

1. The United Reformed Church values the contribution of its ministers.
2. For the most part, clarity about who is and who is not an active Minister is easily established. However, there are times when it is important to have a clear definition. This includes such areas as safeguarding, mandatory training and discipline.
3. Even with a clear definition there will be rare instances when it is not entirely clear whether an individual should be defined as an active Minister. The definition provides for this by identifying the synod as arbiter in such instances.
4. General Assembly is asked to approve the definition in order to provide clarity as to who has the privileges and responsibilities of being an active Minister.
5. The roll of Ministers will continue to include others who are rightly listed but not undertaking an active role, mainly retired Ministers who do not wish, or are not able, to remain active.

Definition of an active Minister

A Minister of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker is considered active if they are on the URC roll of Ministers and at least one of the following applies. They are:

1. in a pastorate or post for which they are receiving a stipend (either full or part) from the United Reformed Church (e.g. deployed post, SCM post, Assembly appointment);
2. in non-stipendiary service in a recognised ministry post (e.g. model 1, 2 or 3)
3. exercising a ministry with another organisation (e.g. chaplaincy, educational establishment, ecumenical body) for which they receive a stipend, salary or serve in a voluntary capacity;
4. providing recognised voluntary service on behalf of the Church (e.g. Interim Moderator, serving on a synod or area committee, representing the URC on an external body);
5. not in a formal position but whose expertise and experience means that, enjoying the confidence of synod officers, they are asked to undertake pieces of work from time to time;
6. frequently leading worship in a church other than where they are a member (this criterion does not apply in the case of Church Related Community Workers).

Where there is uncertainty as to whether or not a Minister of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker falls within any of the six descriptions given above the judgment shall be made by the Minister's synod, which may delegate the responsibility to one of its committees. Any appeal against the decision of a synod in this respect should be directed to the Secretary for Ministries.

Ministries committee

Discerning God’s call to URC Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	28. General Assembly encourages a flexible approach to how ministerial calls are issued and concurred, noting the variety of existing practice and the provisions of sections 1(1)(b), 1(1)(c), 2(1)(vii), 2(4)(A)(iii) and 2(4)(A)(vii) of the Structure of the URC.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This is an important reminder that ministers are, and can be, called in a variety of ways.
Main points	This paper recognises the various ways in which ministers are called to particular posts. It values the traditional calling of a minister by church meeting(s), but also recognises the value of flexibility, and believes it right to call the attention of General Assembly to what is possible. It emphasises the importance of undertaking such processes with clarity and good order.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H2 Mission Council October 2016. Paper H1 Mission Council May 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council. The synod moderators.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No immediate impact on the budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No direct immediate impact.

Discerning God’s call to URC Ministers of Word and Sacraments

1. The United Reformed Church believes that all are called by God. There is a ministry for each one of us, and those ministries are many and varied, but all are valued. We also recognise that calls come in many different ways just as, for example, David was picked out of a procession of candidates, Mary was visited by an angel, and Matthias was appointed through the drawing of lots.
2. One particular point of interest, not least because it is where we spend much of our money, but also because it is how we deploy one of our largest resources, is the matter of calling ministers of word and sacraments to particular roles.
3. Though there is, and increasingly so, a variety of practice, the ‘normal’ way in which this has happened is by a congregation, or group of congregations, through the church meeting(s), issuing a call to a prospective minister. If that call is accepted, it then requires concurrence from the synod. The issuing and accepting of a call in this way creates a valuable bond between minister and congregation(s). However, this is not normal practice for NSM, SCM and Assembly-appointed ministerial posts, amongst others.
4. Since General Assembly last met, Mission Council has spent a significant amount of time discussing questions around the provision and distribution of ministry, and how individuals are called to ministry. One of the key points, supported by the vast majority at Mission Council, has been the importance of flexibility as we look to offer effective ministry in a changing society and a changing church.
5. Ministries Committee was asked to explore whether the locus of call should change and move away from the local church meeting, though in a way that did not exclude church meeting from the decision.
6. However, consideration of this question led us to realise that there are already examples in several synods of calls from a group of churches, and even of changing pastoral responsibility during a ministry, in some of those situations where the ministry has been provided by a team.
7. The Manual already provides an appropriate framework for such an approach in those situations where such seems to be right – see Part B, the Structure of the URC, sections 1(1)(b), 1(1)(c), 2(1)(vii), 2(4)(A)(iii) and 2(4)(A)(vii).
8. The resolution offers a reminder of the range ways in which a call may appropriately be issued and concurred, stressing that where a call comes from a group, that group must be properly constituted with agreement from all church meetings with clarity as to how pastoral responsibility is established and, if relevant, altered.

Ministries committee

Non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>29. General Assembly authorises a model four non-stipendiary ministry which will provide for locally ordained ministers, taking account of how that fits with the other ministries of the church, including stipendiary ministry, non-stipendiary ministry as it currently is, local leadership (recognising that there is no denominational scheme as such) and the eldership, including the specific role of authorised elders, this model to be as outlined on pages 138 to 139 of the <i>Book of Reports</i>.</p> <p>30. General Assembly instructs the ministries committee and education and learning committee to implement model four non-stipendiary ministry in consultation with the assessment board and the Resource Centres for Learning.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Welcoming the contribution of non-stipendiary ministry since its introduction, this paper offers a way of extending this form of ministry.
Main points	This paper recognises the value of non-stipendiary ministry and its contribution to the current challenges of church leadership. It introduces a form of locally ordained non-stipendiary ministry, model four.
Previous relevant documents	Numerous reports which have concerned non-stipendiary ministry, notably reports to General Assembly 1982 and reflections on non-stipendiary ministry within the 1995 Patterns of Ministry Report.
Consultation has taken place with...	All 13 Synods. The Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary for Education and Learning. The Revd Rosalind Selby, Principal, Northern College. The Revd Neil Thorogood, Principal, Westminster College. Faith and order committee. CRCW programme subcommittee.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No immediate impact on the budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No direct immediate impact.

Non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments (Model four)

1. Like all ministries, non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments (NSM) is both a gift and a calling. Much valuable ministry has been undertaken within the United Reformed Church by non-stipendiary Ministers (NSMs). In many cases this could equally have been undertaken by stipendiary ministers. It is an important principle that there is parity within the ordained ministry of Word and Sacraments. It is also an important principle that we sometimes respond to God's call to new, emerging and pioneering ministries, as well as ministry in particular sectors, often referred to as chaplaincy. NSM has often been an important component of such initiatives.

2. The original vision for NSM within the URC was established by resolutions passed in 1979 and 1980 and was incorporated into Section K of the Manual as follows:

There are three models of non-stipendiary ministry:

Model I – service in a congregation as part of a team. The pattern is taken from the former eldership of the Churches of Christ and is limited in scope and local in nature.

Model II – pastoral charge of a small congregation, or service as part of a team of ministers caring for a group of churches.

Model III – ministers in secular employment. Service set apart to be a focus for mission in the place of work or leisure. It is related to a local church or district council.

3. In practice the majority of NSMs now serve under model two, arguably filling gaps in deployment. However, as the decrease in the number of congregations is much slower than the decrease in the number of ministers, the question arises as to whether the number of ministers is sufficient. One of the frequent 'cries' is to stop spreading ministers ever more thinly, but the number of churches readily offering to accept lengthy periods without a minister remains very small.

4. In a denomination well served by ordained eldership in every congregation and with a strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, it might be suggested that this should be unimportant.

5. However, while great value is placed on all forms of ministry within the URC, it is clear that most congregations want to be able to relate to an ordained minister and to have a sufficient 'slice' of that person. The introduction of authorised elders at General Assembly 2016 clarified and strengthened questions of lay presidency at the sacraments, but was not intended to address broader questions of ministry provision.

6. The ministries committee believes that General Assembly should authorise a model four NSM, a non-stipendiary form of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, aimed at engaging those with an appropriately tested sense of call to ministry, but who wish to train locally and to serve primarily in a localised ministry.

7. The call to ministry for model four NSM should be determined in the same way as other calls to ministry of Word and Sacraments through both the synod candidating process and the Assembly Assessment Conference. It shall be for the assessment board with the guidance of the education and learning panel to determine what training needs to be undertaken.

8. Training would be tailored according to previous experience (e.g. elders' training, TLS and Stepwise would be considered in determining a training programme) with a minimum standard. Training should be placement-based and should include distance learning, under the auspices of one of the RCLs, and, as well as addressing any need for biblical and doctrinal studies, should ensure a clear understanding of practices within the URC and include personal formation for ministry. Should a model four NSM wish to move into another sphere of non-stipendiary ministry, it shall be for the assessment board to test that call and, with guidance from the education and learning panel, determine what further training may be required.

9. Each synod should determine the boundaries of model four NSM according to their need in planning for mission. There is no definitive list of ways in which a model four NSM might serve, but likely options include pastoral charge of one congregation under the oversight of a pastoral advisor; being attached to a particular congregation or grouping to offer support within a ministries team; and offering key support in priority areas to enable other leadership locally.

10. Such a minister would be appointed by the synod to a termed, but renewable, post, possibly for three years in the first instance.

Mission committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Bernie Collins: bernie.collins@thecrocker.net Francis Brienen: francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an overview of the work of the mission committee and mission team in the period from July 2016 to March 2018. It describes completed and ongoing work.
Main points	A progress report is given on the work of: Church and society, Commitment for Life, ecumenical and interfaith relations, global and intercultural ministries, mission and evangelism, Fresh Expressions, and rural mission.
Previous relevant documents	Mission committee report to General Assembly 2016. General Assembly 2016: Resolutions 31, 32, 33, 34, 37 and 50.
Consultation has taken place with...	All synods are represented on the committee, and between Assemblies it reports regularly to Mission Council.

Summary of Impact

Financial	The committee works carefully within its allocated budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	All the committee's work concerns the external impact of the Church's life – on ecumenical and international Church partners, on public life and on the wider community.

General report

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

Convenor: Bernie Collins

Staff: Francis Brienen (Deputy General Secretary, Mission), Philip Brooks (Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations), Elizabeth Clark (National Rural Officer), Michael Jagessar (Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries), Linda Mead (Commitment for Life Programme Coordinator), Simeon Mitchell (Secretary for Church and Society) and Linda Rayner (Coordinator for Fresh Expressions)

Members: Chris Eddowes (Northern Synod), Stuart Nixon (North Western Synod), Hilary Smith (Mersey Synod), John Cornell (Yorkshire Synod), Lesley Moseley (East Midlands Synod), John Davey (West Midlands Synod), David Sebley (Eastern Synod), Stephen Newell (South Western Synod) until February 2018, Ray Stanyon (Wessex Synod), Vivien Andrew (Thames North Synod), Martin Hayward (Southern) John Collings (Synod of Scotland) and Sue Fender (Synod of Wales) until February 2018, after which she will be replaced by Branwen Rees.

Introduction

1.1 The work of the mission committee and the staff team during the past two years, seeking to fulfil our remit, has concentrated around major concerns in society and some significant anniversaries. In these, we have endeavoured to resource, stimulate and help to coordinate local mission efforts, as well as bring our combined influence to bear, with partners, on national and international issues.

1.2 The Deputy General Secretaries (Mission and Discipleship) have collaborated to lead preparations for the United Reformed Church’s emphasis on ‘Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today’. The mission committee convenor, reading the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20 in Greek to try to see how the early Church understood it, finds that Jesus said: ‘As you are going, disciple all the nations/ethnic groups, baptising them into the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe/live out all that I have commanded you.’ The mission team is developing links between the focus on whole-life discipleship and mission, and their particular pieces of work.

1.3 Areas of work will be reported here in alphabetical order. There will be opportunity to engage with current concerns and issues, with staff and invited guests, in the parallel sessions at General Assembly. Our thanks to all who have contributed, and our encouragement for further participation. We would welcome feedback and suggestions for future work through your representatives on the committee.

Church and Society

2.1 The church and society programme helps the Church to speak prophetically about justice and peace issues in the public square, and supports local churches by providing resources and campaigns that help individuals make the links between faith,

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politics and social action. In January 2018 we welcomed Simeon Mitchell as the new Secretary for Church and Society.

- 2.1.1 Most of the United Reformed Church's church and society work is carried out through membership of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), a partnership between the URC, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland. Over the last two years, JPIT's work has been focused around helping the Church to work, witness and pray for:
- a society that welcomes the stranger;
 - a society where those who are the poorest are at the centre;
 - a society which values young people;
 - a world which shares a single planet fairly;
 - a society which works for global peace; and
 - a society which participates fully in democracy.

Political engagement

2.2 Since June 2016, British political life has been dominated by the outworking of the referendum decision that Britain should leave the European Union. Recognising the deep divisions exposed by the Brexit vote, a new resource, 'Conversation Welcome', was launched to encourage constructive discussions about the big political issues. With supporting videos, it has equipped churches to have healthy conversations about the sort of society we wish to live in.

- 2.2.1 A range of materials were produced to help church members to engage with the snap general election in June 2017, including Bible reflections, an issues briefing and a hustings guide. Church leaders issued a statement reflecting on the election in the light of Jesus' promise of abundant life. After the vote, postcards were produced to encourage people to write and welcome their new MPs.
- 2.2.2 Each autumn, our General Assembly Moderators and other URC representatives have attended political party conferences as part of the Free Church leaders' delegation. The representatives attend fringe events and meet with MPs and government ministers. Our presence is notable and often elicits productive conversations on policy areas of concern to the church.

Influencing policy

2.3 A major issue of continuing concern to the Church over this period has been poverty and inequality in Britain, and especially the impact of welfare changes. Through briefings, statements and engagement with policymakers, we have highlighted the cruelty of the benefit sanctions policy and the growth of food poverty, and raised concerns about the implementation of universal credit and about the benefits cap. The Church has become a prominent, outspoken and respected voice on these issues and it will continue to be a major focus for our work.

- 2.3.1 Another area of longstanding concern for the Church has been nuclear weapons. Since the URC added its voice to the call for a nuclear ban treaty through the resolution at the last General Assembly, this global initiative has gained further momentum and support, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons opened for signatures at the United Nations in September 2017. Over 50 nations have already signed up. A short film was created to encourage church members to add their names to the call for the UK to support the treaty, and a photo petition was presented to the Foreign Office.
- 2.3.2 The plight of refugees and asylum seekers has continued to generate headlines since our last Assembly. Church leaders joined calls for the government to provide more help to refugees fleeing Syria, Iraq and other areas of conflict, while the publication of the resource 'Made for Goodness' supported reflection on a Christian response to the refugee crisis. In Advent 2016, JPIT's film, 'A Very

British Nativity' was very successful in drawing attention to the challenges facing asylum seekers in the UK, and enabled the team to campaign widely and to new audiences. We have used evidence from churches and church members supporting asylum seekers and refugees to respond to relevant government consultations.

2.3.3 JPIT has also enabled our churches collectively to respond to government consultations and proposed legislation on a number of other issues of longstanding concern, including alcohol policy (especially minimum unit pricing), gambling policy (regulation of fixed odds betting terminals), organ donation, climate policy and the persecution of religious minorities. Submissions were supported with media activities and meetings with MPs, ministers and other policymakers.

Resourcing churches

2.4 Through this period, JPIT has given increasing priority to engaging, communicating with and equipping local church members and congregations.

2.4.1 **Events:** A major conference was held in Manchester in March 2018, enabling over 250 people to reflect on the theme of a 'brave new world', with guest speakers and practical workshops. A new youth forum was established to bring together young leaders in the churches and equip them for advocacy. During 2016 and 2017, the URC participated in the Act Community, a joint project with Christian Aid and Tearfund which sought to train and support a new generation of environmental activists.

2.4.2 **Resources:** Several new resources have encouraged reflection on faith and political participation. 'The art of the possible' is a set of Bible studies exploring what Christianity has to say about politics. During Advent 2017, 'Prepare ye the way' worship materials enabled congregations to consider how and where we would want Christ to find us on his return. In the spring of 2018, the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act was marked by a series of blog posts from female church leaders and the launch of 'Women and the vote', which invited learning, reflection and prayer on the experience of women around the world today. JPIT has also produced periodic briefings on other public issues of interest to churches, such as fracking.

2.4.3 In 2018, a monthly JPIT podcast was launched. Each edition of *Faith in Politics* includes an interview with a leading political figure about how their faith impacts their politics, and discussion of news stories. A Twitter account, @URCCAS, has been established to provide daily inspiration and useful links.

2.4.4 **Networks:** Although staff resources are limited, we have welcomed opportunities to speak at synod meetings, training days and network events, and would be keen to receive further invitations. JPIT staff have also supported the development of regional JPITs, though there has not yet been as much progress with these as was originally hoped.

Living out the Gospel

2.5 Alongside political engagement and policy work, we also support churches and church members in living out the Gospel in daily life, working closely with Commitment for Life.

2.5.1 **Fairtrade:** The URC is a strong supporter of Fairtrade and many URCs are Fairtrade Churches. There was therefore great concern about the decision by Sainsbury's in May 2017 to drop the Fairtrade Mark from their own label tea, losing the assurances about standards and producer prices provided by the independent consumer label. The General Secretary issued a statement of concern, and members were encouraged to write to the supermarket. We also encouraged participation in Fairtrade Fortnight.

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2.5.2 Environmental responsibility: The environmental task group, established by General Assembly 2016 to champion and implement the environmental policy adopted by the same meeting, has developed its work in partnership with the reinvigorated network of Green Apostles from the synods. It is encouraging every URC to register with A Rocha's Eco Church scheme (for England and Wales) or Eco Congregation (in Scotland) to help churches to reduce their carbon footprints and become more environmentally aware. It is also looking forward to the first Eco Synod award. The group continues to liaise with the finance committee on the issue of disinvestment in fossil fuels.

Commitment for Life

3.1 Commitment for Life has been working in partnership with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now since 1992. The report to General Assembly stated: 'Commitment for Life was offered to the Assembly, congregations and members of the United Reformed Church as a challenge and an invitation, one way of expressing our obedience to the words of Jesus as we follow in his way, our solidarity in the Spirit with our partners and the poor with whom they are striving for justice, and our faith in the God of hope, of peace, of love.' The money-raising scheme grew out of the 1% appeal that called on Christians across the world to give 1% of their disposable income to aid development in southern countries.

3.1.1 The programme is promoted by the Commitment for Life Coordinator, Linda Mead, with a volunteer reference group and network of synod advocates and church link people. The Revd Alan McGougan, from the Synod of Scotland, is the present reference group convenor. The group meets twice a year and is the regulating and supportive body for the programme's coordinator.

3.1.2 The group always saw the intern scheme, through Christian Aid, as a legacy for the future, so we are delighted to report that Charis Ollerenshaw (2011 to 2012) is part of the URC environmental group. Miriam Webb (2012 to 2013) now works as the sustainability engagement manager for the University of Gloucestershire. She saw her internship as a very positive and influential catalyst in the direction her career took. Ian Rowe (2013 to 2014) volunteers with Christian Aid's South-East Team. Tom Hackett (2014 to 2015) is now a children and youth development officer in Southern Synod and Amelia Sutcliffe (2015 to 2016) went on to study theology in New York, with thoughts of seeking ordination. We should be proud of all they have achieved.

3.2 Our partner countries of Bangladesh, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT) and Zimbabwe all continue to struggle with environmental and political concerns that affect those living with poverty.

3.2.1 Christian Aid partners in Bangladesh are focusing on resilience, climate change, inclusion and market and humanitarian responses. Christian Aid is the site manager for the Jamtoli Camp, and with over 650,000 Rohingya refugees fleeing Myanmar and seeking safety in camps, this is a huge responsibility.

3.2.2 Recent news of the Trump administration not being sympathetic to Central American countries or people will have implications for the work of non-governmental organisations. Projects continue on political transparency, tackling gender violence, inclusive markets, resilience in the face of climate change and reforming institutions.

3.2.3 The conditions in IOPT continue to deteriorate. Christian Aid's work focuses on the issues common across the region, which include displacement, livelihoods (particularly for young people) and the need to tackle violence and build peace. Advocacy is fundamental to their work in IOPT, and they are unequivocal in their support for the rights of all Palestinians and Israelis to live safely and securely, and for a viable, sustainable peace based on accountability and justice for all, guided by international law.

3.2.4 The political changes in Zimbabwe have been significant in the last few months and have raised a number of challenges for Christian Aid's work there. During the few days of the coup in November 2017, Christian Aid programmes were suspended due to the uprising. However, work now continues as normal on household resilience and strengthening livelihoods. Advocacy work on gender has been very successful with more training through churches.

3.3 The usual yearly cycle of mailings, finance, thank-you letters, database updating and providing useful educational and worship resources continues. The website (www.urch.org.uk/our-work/commitment-for-life.html) offers information and inspiration for churches. Campaigns and events are publicised, together with resources which are available to download and print.

3.4 Commitment for Life is part of the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition. We have become an associate of the Jubilee Debt Campaign and remain a stakeholder for the Fairtrade Foundation. We publicised the 'Show the Love' campaign, encouraging people to think about what would be lost with rising sea levels and changing climates. Christian Aid's 'Big Shift' campaign saw much activity in 2017 with over 20,000 people taking action, including visiting local bank branches to take the campaign directly to them. Future work will include research to find examples of banks' funding new coal power plants in South East Asia.

3.5 Global Justice Now's campaign for migrants' rights has taken a grassroots approach to tackling discrimination and challenging the hostile environment that has been created for migrants and refugees in the UK. Early 2017 saw a push to get Marks & Spencer to drop its advertising in the *Daily Mail*. They also launched an action on the wider problem of anti-migrant propaganda in the media. Resources for these campaigns were sent to Commitment for Life churches.

3.6 Other ecumenical work has included being part of the planning group for One World Week and the World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel, as part of the World Council of Churches initiative.

3.7 July 2017 saw the 25th anniversary of the Commitment for Life programme. A special service outline, written by the Revd Dr Susan Durber, was well received. A supporter trip, in May of that year, to visit Christian Aid Zimbabwe and projects there, provided a wealth of resources to share with churches and build our network of speakers. We were also featured in the resource materials for 'Feasts and Festivals' and, during April 2018, in Christian Aid's daily reflections. Ordinands at Westminster College produced pieces of art and prayers at an event arranged by our last intern, Amelia. These went into the *COMMIT25* web based booklet.

3.8 As part of this 25th anniversary year, it was felt right to review the achievements of the programme to see if it was still relevant in the current economic and political climate. In late 2016, the mission committee set up a review group to look at the ongoing and future needs of the programme. The programme was assessed against its aims, vision and mission statements as well as vision2020. The programmes' income over the last five years, the number of participating churches and resources available – including how these are used in worship, education and action – were also considered.

3.8.1 Churches (both Commitment for Life and non-Commitment for Life), advocates, link persons and external agencies were canvassed for their views and the responses collated.

- From the responses gathered it was evident that the programme was still highly thought of. With the Gospel message of 'good news for the poor' at its heart, it is seen as part of the whole mission of the Church.
- Millions of pounds have been raised by local churches which has enabled Christian Aid to work with those most in need and Global Justice Now to campaign for justice and peace.

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- Commitment for Life has kept churches informed of all major campaigns such as Make Poverty History, Jubilee Debt, the IF campaign and climate justice. It has provided a significant Christian voice at many campaign meetings.
- Through Commitment for Life, churches have been enabled to be involved in campaigning for justice. It was felt that the Church could speak out where charities could not.
- Resources produced have enabled churches to be well informed and knowledgeable. The yearly outline service and prayer sheets are well used.
- Trips to and visits from the partner areas have enriched the lives of many people and inspired them to take action and share that passion for justice.
- The intern programme with Christian Aid ran for five years and was hugely successful. All five interns brought many gifts and still speak on our behalf.

3.8.2 The responses also included concern over the average age and number of members and congregations. The preference for small projects, often with personal connections and where results could be seen quickly, were deemed more popular than long-term development projects. A good many people saw Christian Aid and Commitment for Life as the same. This confusion was one of the most quoted responses. When a church does leave the programme, it is usually to support Christian Aid directly. The unique selling point of the programme as a denominational appeal does not ring so true today. Many people attending churches were not aware of the denomination or were in a Local Ecumenical Partnership and found giving to one denominational programme difficult. Many churches preferred to campaign on issues that were ecumenical and/or interfaith, such as Fairtrade or climate change. There is still confusion with the 'Belonging to the World Church' scheme, with effective synod linking affecting the programme. The steady decline in giving was also seen as a major concern.

3.8.3 The review group brought their recommendations to the mission committee in September 2017. The committee:

- a) affirmed the work of Commitment for Life as part of the mission of the United Reformed Church for justice in God's world;
- b) recognised that the added value of worship, education and action by Commitment for Life are still important and relevant today;
- c) further recognised that in the light of the present global economic and political climate there is a need for the programme to develop and reignite a passion for justice through: new technology; engagement of a new generation of people; and the creation of a new relationship with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now to suit their changing working models; and
- d) urged the programme to undertake this work without delay.

The committee intends to take stock of the impact of the new approaches in 2020.

3.8.4 Work is now progressing, in discussion with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now, on action to implement these recommendations and raise the profile of Commitment for Life. We welcome the presence of Christian Aid's new CEO, Amanda Khozi Mukwashi, at General Assembly to help us reignite the passion and challenge more churches to be part of the programme.

3.9 Commitment for Life has been a wonderful way in which the URC has been committed to overcoming poverty and tackling injustice. We have been brave, over many years, in giving in a committed way, whilst campaigning for the life of the world. Our partner's work is still there and needed more than ever. They rely and plan on the contributions we give, and we thank the over 400 local churches who are active in Commitment for Life. We will continue to resource churches to show how their contributions are used and the difference it makes for the sake of those whose lives might be transformed. Can your church be part of that commitment and transformation?

Ecumenical relations and interfaith work

4.1 With its unions in 1972, 1981 and 2000, the United Reformed Church has ecumenism rooted in its very existence. Whilst further structural unity does not appear at all likely, the Holy Spirit is still at work in a wide range of creative ecumenical possibilities and amongst a broader number of churches and organisations. The Greek word *oikoumené* is often translated to indicate the ‘whole household of God’. It is appropriate that within the mission committee, the staff secretary, the Revd Philip Brooks covers ecumenical and interfaith relations. Developing positive relationships is central to the work and the section below provides just a flavour of the URC’s interaction with faith partners.

Ecumenical relations

4.2 The Churches Together in England (CTE) document, *A new Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, is now the broadly accepted resource paper for ecumenical working in England but is still a work in progress. It provides a realistic and up-to-date picture of the state of ecumenism in England. The document helpfully encourages a more creative and lighter touch approach to ecumenical ways of working. Earlier this year, CTE published some guidance about its implementation. These resource documents are available on the CTE website.

4.3 The work of CTE was affirmed in the 2017 Theos report, particularly with reference to the way in which CTE has been successful in substantially widening its membership to include 47 churches. CTE is now actively working on the recommendations contained in the report. Former URC General Secretary, the Revd Dr David Cornick, retires as CTE General Secretary in September 2018. His successor, the Revd Dr Paul Goodliff, is a minister in the Baptist Union and brings considerable ecumenical experience to his new appointment.

4.4 In 2018, Theos published a report on Scotland’s ecumenical instrument, *Action of Churches Together in Scotland* (Acts). In contrast to their report on CTE, Theos felt there was the need for more radical change within Acts. It recommended a major restructure as well as identifying the need to broaden its membership.

4.5 A key ecumenical development has been the Church of England and Methodist Church’s ‘Mission and Ministry in Covenant’. The covenant aims to provide full interchangeability of ministry between the two Churches. The Methodist Church would have to agree to recognise the office of a president-bishop, expressing in a personal form its Conference’s ministry of oversight. The URC faith and order committee provided feedback and reflection to a process which still has several years to run before its potential acceptance by the Church of England and Methodist Church.

4.6 The ecumenical county of Cumbria continues to provide inspiration for churches across the country. The vision of ‘God for all’ sets the challenge that by 2020 every person in Cumbria of all ages and backgrounds will have had an opportunity to discover more of God and God’s purpose for their life. The Revd Sarah Moore, a URC special category minister, serves as our area president for Cumbria.

4.7 A good deal of the URC’s ecumenical work at national level operates through bilateral groups such as the Methodist/URC Liaison Group. It is encouraging to report that we move to new rounds of dialogue with the Church of England/URC Contact Group and the Catholic/URC Dialogue Group.

4.8 The year 2017 saw the commemoration of 500 years since the Reformation. Many events took place including an ecumenical act of worship at Westminster Abbey and the CTE conference ‘Responding to the Reformation’. In 2018, conversations have begun about how the legacy of these events can be carried forward in new areas of ecumenical cooperation.

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European ecumenical relations

4.9 In 2016, General Assembly passed resolution 50 which, in the light of Brexit, committed the URC to ‘ongoing ecumenical relationships with partner churches across Europe’. This is expressed in several different ways:

- 4.9.1 The URC provides representation to European ecumenical groupings. This includes delegates taking part this year at assemblies for the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Novi Sad, Serbia and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) in Basel, Switzerland.
- 4.9.2 The URC continues to be involved with the Reuilly Contact Group which encourages Anglican-Reformed dialogue in France.
- 4.9.3 In 2017, the URC celebrated 60 years of table and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz – churches in the Palatinate area of Germany.
- 4.9.3.1 This long-standing area of active participation operates at local church level. There are 20 partnerships in England, including active youth participation. This year will see St Andrew’s URC, Roundhay, Leeds, hosting young visitors from the Lutherkirche in Frankenthal and the Martinskirche in Bernburg for a week of activities. Purley URC will welcome around 30 young people plus 11 leaders from partner churches in Germany, the Czech Republic and the US. Lincoln URC will have an exchange weekend for all-age groups with their German partner church in Neustadt.
- 4.9.3.2 There is to be a theological consultation in September in the Palatinate which will look at the unifying nature of churches in relation to Brexit.
- 4.9.3.3 The URC and Palatinate churches are working on a joint resource to commemorate 100 years since the end of the First World War.
- 4.9.4 In 2017, a group of 15 people put on a URC stand at Germany’s major church festival, the Kirchentag, in Berlin. This is a huge event with an attendance of more than 100,000 people and over 600 displays. The URC stand proved extremely popular. It used the ‘Scrap the Church?’ construction from Greenbelt 2016.

Interfaith relations

4.10 Within the mission committee, this area of work is facilitated by the interfaith relations reference group (IFRRG) which works in close cooperation with Methodist colleagues. Over the last 12 months, the reference group has been conducting a review of its activities and has made some initial observations:

- 4.10.1 Interfaith understanding is vital to the life of our churches. In terms of ‘Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today’, we all need the confidence to share our stories within a multi-faith society.
- 4.10.2 We need to strengthen the network of interfaith advocates/enthusiasts, ideally linking with ecumenical partners on a national and regional level. The group is looking at how we might map our combined ecumenical network of interfaith advocates and ‘enthusiasts’.
- 4.10.3 Within the review of its activities, the group highlighted areas of worthwhile engagement:
- The IFRRG has conducted work around use of buildings.
 - It has cooperated with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) on the 2017 Lent Course ‘Returning Home: Christian Faith in Encounter with Other Faiths’.³

3 CTBI <https://ctbi.org.uk/lent-course-2017/> (Lent Course 2017)

- It is recognised that we are already working in closer consultation, primarily with our Baptist and Church of England partners and their interfaith networks.
- The Jewish Fund has now become the Interfaith Fund with a focus on providing local grants.
- The URC is now a full member of the Interfaith Network.

4.11 There is a wide range of interfaith work taking place at local level, of which the following are only a few examples. The IFRRG was pleased to hold one of its meetings at the London Interfaith Centre, where last year the Revd Dr John Parry, a URC minister, was appointed co-director. Earlier this year, Grassroots Luton celebrated its 25th anniversary. Grassroots works to empower Luton's faith and cultural communities. It supports community work in the Beech Hill Bury Park area of Luton through the ministry of Karen Campbell who is the Church-related Community Worker based there. In Blackburn, Mal Breeze, a Church-related Community Worker, is working with two local churches situated in areas with high Asian populations. Mal reaches out to local mosques and other places of worship to forge closer links. Although misunderstandings and suspicions inevitably exist, the situation is far from the picture of 'divided communities' portrayed by the *Panorama* episode 'White Fright: Divided Britain', which aired in January 2018.

Response to the 2016 General Assembly Resolution 37 on Israel/Palestine

4.12 The mission committee set up the Israel/Palestine task group, bringing together a team of people with considerable experience of the subject. The Revd Brian Jolly was appointed as the group's convenor. Other members included the Revd David Tatem and the Revd Philip Brooks (past and present URC secretaries for ecumenical and interfaith relations), Grace Pengelly (URC Secretary for Church and Society from January 2016 to July 2017), John Davey, Andy Lie, the Revd Sally Thomas and Derek Estill (General Assembly Moderator-Elect). The task group met several times to listen to a wide range of knowledgeable and interested parties, to explore the URC's existing active involvement with Israel/Palestine and to consider carefully how Resolution 37 might be implemented. The group's report and recommendations were discussed and approved at the February 2018 meeting of the mission committee.

4.13 From the outset, the task group agreed that the key words in the Assembly resolution were 'explore and develop ... in order to enable synods, local churches and individuals to become more aware and respond'. It was noted that because of the nature of the polity of the URC, it is difficult to make statements from the denomination. This led to a focus on how we might help raise awareness so that as a denomination we can promote a dialogue which will add to peace initiatives. Taking into account the intensely polarised nature of the debate around Israel/Palestine, the following programme was agreed by the mission committee with the request for the Israel/Palestine task group to oversee its implementation.

4.13.1 The mission committee welcomed the inclusion in the 2018 General Assembly of an interfaith panel from the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, modelling positive interfaith dialogue and engagement.

4.13.2 '12 Faces of Hope' – This year's General Assembly displays the World Council of Churches (WCC) exhibition '12 Faces of Hope', which launched in 2017 coinciding with the 50-year mark of the Six-Day War and the resulting occupation in Palestine. The exhibition offers 12, individual, short narratives written by people from different backgrounds, sharing their hopes for justice and peace in the Holy Land. The exhibition is now available to synods and local churches to use and display as a focus for discussion. It can be booked by contacting the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations.

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- 4.13.3 Pilgrimage – In June 2017, the National Coalition of Christian Organisations in Palestine issued an open letter to the WCC with a desperate plea for support from Churches across the world. Within the letter was an appeal for Christians to visit Palestine and actively see the situation on the ground.⁴ One of the criticisms of most pilgrimages is that they are conducted almost in the way of a biblical Disney tour, with tour operators and guides airbrushing out the suffering and injustice of those people trapped in the day to day realities of life in the region. The URC gave financial support to the Forum for Discussion of Israel and Palestine (FODIP) for the production of a short film entitled ‘Walking the Tightrope’ which highlights this issue. The DVD provides an invaluable way of preparing anyone who might be considering a pilgrimage.
- 4.13.4 Denominational educational visit – General Assembly Moderators normally undertake an overseas visit as part of their term in office. Derek Estill has chosen to go to Israel and Palestine, but in planning this trip he is committed to ensuring that it should have benefit for the wider denomination. Given that Resolution 37 originated in three synods, it is hoped that there would be interest amongst the synods in sending a representative to take part in the Moderator’s planned visit, which will take place during 2019. URC Youth are very keen to be involved and there is the intention to identify at least one young adult to take part. This visit will require funding support and it is suggested that selected delegates should contribute by raising some of the money locally, as well as seeking support from the URC’s Interfaith Fund. It is hoped that their synods might also consider offering a contribution.
- 4.13.5 Study guide – With the impetus of a denomination-wide visit to Israel and Palestine, the task group has agreed to identify as well as write study material to be made available pre- and post-visit.
- 4.13.6 The denominational visit is intended to raise awareness within our synods and local churches. To qualify as a delegate, participants would be expected to engage with the study material, ideally alongside local synod and church groups. They will be asked to commit to feeding back to the wider Church on the learning experience of their visit. The aim is that the build up to the visit and the subsequent debriefing after it will be invaluable in raising awareness. As a result, more people can be equipped to engage with the issues around Israel and Palestine.
- 4.13.7 Resource list – A list of helpful resources has been produced with the aim of providing accessible information, so that local churches and synods are better able to educate themselves about the issues involved. This list will be particularly useful for those people engaging with the study guide.
- 4.13.8 Theology of the land – The recent decision by President Trump to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel significantly adds to the difficulties of finding a two-state solution. It would seem good timing to encourage some in-depth reflection about the theology of the land itself and explore how this could be carried out with ecumenical partners. Such ideas as ‘two states, one homeland’ or ‘shared land theology’ could be considered.

⁴ See <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/christian-organizations-in-palestine-release-open-letter> (2017 Open letter from National Coalition of Christian Organizations in Palestine)

Global and intercultural ministries

5.1 Global and intercultural ministries (GiM) covers the work of the United Reformed Church's world Church partnerships and its focus on multicultural church, intercultural habit. The work is serviced by the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar (Secretary), Dr Eve Parker (Programme Officer) and Veronica Daniel (Administrator). During the Programme Officer's maternity leave, Will O'Brien, a postgraduate student at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (Soas) and from the United Church of Christ (US), offered excellent support work.

5.2 **Strategic work:** Significant attention has been given to the streamlining and rewriting of policy documents. These included travel-related items, risk assessment, insurance, funding, briefing/debriefing, representation, various application/information forms, the process of recruiting and supporting partners in mission, and progressing memoranda of understanding with world partner Churches who have congregations across England.

5.3 **Partnering with the Council for World Mission:** Since 2016 we have worked assiduously to develop and strengthen our partnership role within the Council for World Mission (CWM).

5.3.1 We have, for instance, supported and participated in the seven-week 'Face to Face' programme which was held in the UK in June and July 2017 on the theme of migration and human trafficking.

5.3.2 Through CWM's 'Partners in Mission' (PiM) programme, Alison Gibbs is our current PiM serving with the United Church of Zambia, while the Revd Shou-Hui Chung of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan serves as Chaplain for Mandarin and Taiwanese-speaking students and families at St Peter's Chaplaincy, Manchester. Her term ends in July 2018. We are delighted to be receiving the Revd Yufen Chen to work in London (Lumen URC) serving the Taiwanese Fellowship in London.

5.3.3 The URC continues to play a significant role through active participation in two, short-termed projects of CWM: the New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) process and the Legacies of Slavery hearings. The NIFEA process is a series of three colloquia (Kingston, London, Georgetown) in which the regions of Europe and the Caribbean participate. The expectation of the colloquia is to inspire member Churches to work on injustices in their context rather than to expect the process will change global structures. The recommendations from each colloquium (Kingston and London thus far) have been commended to the URC for consideration and action.

5.3.3.1 Legacies of Slavery is a series of hearings across London, Accra, Kingston and Virginia as a response to the call from black communities of the Caribbean, UK and the US for the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade to be addressed. This is a further part of CWM being a postcolonial organisation and is intended to help us deepen our sensitivity to the issues of mission in the context of empire and to show fresh connection with the issue of empire now in its many forms, from how black people and communities are treated to issues of human trafficking. This is an opportunity for CWM and its members to face our own story, honour the righteous pain and cause of the reparations movement, and to commit to a shared journey of witness and challenge that looks to restore, with Christ, fullness for all.

5.3.4 For the 2017 CWM 'Training in Mission' programme, the URC participant was Agnes Nteziyayo, a member of Islington URC. Agnes described the experience as transformative. For the CWM 'A New Face' programme, there was a URC participant in 2017 (the Revd Catherine McFie, from Scotland). 'A New Face' is a seven-week cross-cultural exposure that stimulates theological reflection,

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challenges participants to create a new paradigm of mission engagement and equips ministers to be engaged in mission from the perspectives of the marginalised.

5.4 Networking – collaborating – celebrating: Much of our work is done in partnership with synod-based and interest-specific networks and gatherings. The synod-based include synod global coordinators and synod intercultural/racial justice coordinators. Previously these groups used to meet separately. From 2017 we have introduced one joint residential meeting. The methodology meant joint work on a common theme and then breakout sessions into the two areas for their specific discussions. Among the outcomes are intentional efforts to see how the areas of work intersect and a joint resolution being brought to General Assembly through the mission committee. Thematic focus included: rethinking partnerships; new advocacy methods; our world – here and there; and the other reformation – talking back.

5.4.1 Interest-specific networks and gatherings include a variety of events. For networks this included TeamURC, Cascades of Grace and black and minority ethnic ministers/church-related community workers. This is also one joint residential meeting around themes such as ‘better church hosting’, ‘intersecting injustice’ and ‘minority voices on the Reformation’.

5.4.2 After bringing the biennial multicultural-intercultural celebration to an end, we have encouraged four smaller gatherings across the synods. These were held in St David’s Uniting Church in Pontypridd (Synod of Wales, March 2017, ‘Together Stronger’); Crowstone URC, Southend (Eastern Synod, September 2017, ‘Down in the River’); New Malden and Kingston URC (Southern Synod, September 2017, ‘Fabric, Food, Flower and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat Musical’) and in Sheffield Cathedral (Yorkshire Synod and Ecumenical, June 2017, ‘Pentecost’).

5.5 Edgy conferences: Our work also includes a yearly conference/event around a theme that challenges and pushes boundaries as relevant to the remit of GiM. Our December 2016 focus was on multiple religious belonging. The WCC and CWM (Europe Region) were partners to this event. The 36 participants included members of different faith groups, renowned theologians and grassroots activists who engaged with the lived reality of multiple religious belonging and religious hybridity. The December 2017 conference was on the theme ‘The other Reformation – marginal/global voices and perspectives’. It explored the Reformation of the Church in the contemporary secular/interfaith/postcolonial context. It was a platform for a diversity of voices to ‘speak back’ to the dominant Reformation discourse. Participants came from partner Churches across Europe and North America. All the contributions are being edited to be made available through online access.

5.6 Resourcing: We continue to produce resources, largely accessible in PDF format and as online resources. These included: ‘@home in a strange place’ (conversation points on migration); racial justice resources (for Racial Justice Sunday); ‘Diversity Awareness Resource’ (seven conversation starters/points); ‘In our own words’ (black and minority ethnic ministers writing their own stories); ‘Better Church Hosting’ (a resource to help local congregations). There are several video resources available on YouTube which were produced by Kevin Snyman on GiM’s behalf. And we have commissioned a film about the Windrush (‘Belonging together’) which was scripted by Richard Becher. The ‘A letter from...’ column is another of GiM’s contributions – a regular column in *Reform*. This is an opportunity for our global partner Churches and mission partners (in Cuba, South Africa, Middle East, North America, Zambia, Tuvalu and Europe) to bring to our attention any matter of urgency and concern.

5.7 Visits, presence and engagement: Part of GiM’s work is to facilitate visits. Our commitment to partnership that honours mutuality in giving and receiving means that we have had a fresh and intentional look at the ways we engage with our global

partners. For visits that we manage, we encourage briefing and debriefing, wider representation of our membership and the connecting of issues/concerns and themes is emphasised. Visits between the two assemblies included:

- 5.7.1 Synod Global Partners visits, both incoming and outgoing, to/from India, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Cuba, Taiwan, South Korea, the Caribbean, Myanmar, Zambia, Botswana, Europe, North America, Ghana and South Africa.
- 5.7.2 Representational visits to partner Churches' assemblies, world Church bodies and world ecumenical gatherings: the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana (August 2017), Waldensian and Methodist Churches Synod, Italy (2017); United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (September 2017), World Communion of Reformed Churches General Council, Germany (June/July 2017); Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (June 2017); and the Council for World Mission Youth Assembly, Johannesburg (August 2017). For those invitations that we were unable to accept, we sent official greetings and messages.
- 5.7.3 Our presence and engagement also see us represented as members, for instance, at CWM's Members Meeting and Regional Assembly, the World Communion of Reformed Churches' European Regional Council, and the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, at which we participate fully.
- 5.7.4 Our commitment to ensure that all those training for ministry have a global exposure has seen visits to partner Churches in Canada (United Church of Canada), Germany (Church of the Palatinate), Cuba (the Presbyterian Church of Cuba) and Taiwan (the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan).
- 5.7.5 Our work also includes receiving visits from partner Churches and representatives of world bodies. In September 2017, for instance, we received a delegation of the leadership team (12 colleagues) of the United Church of Christ (US) and United Church of Canada. Their time with us included the sharing of work, current mission and ministry challenges, an introduction to the URC's missional discipleship focus, 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today', and opportunities for learning about the UK's ecumenical context(s). We also received representational visits from the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana, and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

5.8 Representation and nurturing new voices: One piece of intentional work has been to look strategically at where we are represented or what events we should participate in. Alongside this we are developing a wider network of people across synods and areas, representative of the whole Church. While it is impossible to list all those who have participated since 2016, we can report an intentionally proactive and different approach to representation aimed at newer voices (the next generation). It is also the case that quite often, some world Church bodies (WCC, WCRC, CWM) will stipulate the representational make-up and giftings of our representatives/participants. A frustration is the lateness of many of the invitations and of the notices about opportunities. This can limit our ability to find suitable participants. We have tried to pre-empt this by creating a working schedule of all upcoming events until 2020. We have developed a helpful briefing and debriefing process for all who participate in gatherings and events related to these bodies. Reporting back is a requirement, as is suggesting helpful ways for the experience of those who have had an international exposure to be deployed locally, across the synods and the wider URC.

5.9 Appeals-funding-sharing: While funding is not the only way we both give and receive, it is a reality that through the generosity of the URC we have been able to support ongoing empowerment, development and emergency relief of partners and their communities.

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5.9.1 We have partnered with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar to facilitate work in theological formation (£4,000 to support ten ordinands), providing water supply for students (£2,500) and women's empowerment programmes (£6,500 to train six nurses for rural areas). We have also supported the Presbyterian Church of Cuba's series of interfaith conversations among young people with a grant of £1,000.

5.9.2 We have responded to several disaster appeals from our partner Churches working in relief and the rebuilding of displaced communities. We have contributed to our partners' response to earthquakes in Taiwan (£5,000) and Papua New Guinea (£5,000). For two significant appeals we launched the response has been overwhelmingly generous: for the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon's work with displaced Syrian children (over £13,000) and for work among the Rohingya people that our partners in Bangladesh and Myanmar are involved in (over £10,000).

5.10 The international exchange reference group (IERG) plays a key role in GiM's work, especially in relation to partners in mission (PiM) and synod global partnerships. This very small group of committed colleagues supports the PiM work through visits, taking on specific pieces of necessary work, interviewing prospective candidates and serving on the management/support group of partners in mission in the UK.

5.11 Communicating our work: We have striven to maintain a high standard in both communicating about and responding to all queries directed to us. To this end, GiM has deployed Facebook, Twitter and a revamped webpage to excellent use.

- a) Facebook page: www.facebook.com/urcglobalandinterculturalministries
- b) Twitter page: twitter.com/urcglobal
- c) Webpage: www.urch.org.uk/about-us/global-and-intercultural.html

Mission and evangelism

6.1 Mission is the reason why the Church exists. It is God's work, in which God calls us to participate. Like the disciples, God calls us to be witnesses and to live out the good news of God's love for the sake of the world. Supporting local churches and synods in their engagement with God's mission, especially in sharing the good news and reaching out to the community, is a key part of our work and in the mission department this is supported by the Deputy General Secretary (Mission), Francis Brien, and the PA for Mission, Carole Sired.

Vision2020

6.2 We are now in the eighth year of exploring the vision2020 framework for mission. Recent feedback to the mission committee meeting suggests that synods engage with vision2020 in a variety of ways: e.g. linking it to the synod mission strategy, encouraging churches to use it in the Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) process and pastorate profiles, using it to guide mission grants and loans funding, or encouraging local churches to use it to set their own mission priorities. The mission committee is planning to evaluate vision2020 and bring a report to General Assembly in July 2020.

6.3 The vision2020 grants funding continues to be used well by local churches and others. The grants continue to enable local churches to reach out to their communities in innovative and creative ways. Examples of the use of the one-off grants (for up to £1,000) include providing lunch for children in poverty during the school holidays, organising a festival of nonviolence during interfaith week, developing worship aimed at children and young people, and setting up a fresh expression of church. Three-year developmental grants (up to £2,000 per year for three years) were awarded for children and family community outreach, developing mission and ministry to tourists, theological education for students in Uganda, supporting a youth worker and establishing a fresh expressions church plant, to name but a few. If your church wishes

to apply for a vision2020 grant, please visit www.urc.org.uk/vision2020.html for more information and an application form.

‘Feasts and Festivals’ and ‘Walking the Way’

6.4 The vision2020 statements express what we believe God is calling us to be and to do, as local churches and as a denomination. Faithful discipleship, focused on mission, is an integral part of that and it is for that reason that mission staff are fully involved in the development of ‘Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today’. The Deputy General Secretary (Mission) co-convenes the ‘Walking the Way’ steering group, has been involved in development and advocacy, and facilitated the process of applying for funding to CWM. More information on ‘Walking the Way’ can be found in the Mission Council report on pages 8 to 50.

6.5 In 2017 we celebrated a year of ‘Feasts and Festivals’. It was a year of many high points in the life of the United Reformed Church and it was felt that the celebratory nature of that year might be helpful in introducing and encouraging churches and individuals to engage with ‘Walking the Way’.

6.6 A general ‘Feasts and Festivals’ leaflet was produced and distributed to all local churches and monthly web resources were posted online. This was a joint initiative of the mission and discipleship departments and various mission team members wrote material, helping churches to engage with the feast or festival of that month through worship and reflection. The theme offered an opportunity to highlight, among others, the 40th anniversary of CWM, the 25th anniversary of Commitment for Life, the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation and the centenary of the ordination of Constance Coltman.

6.7 Constance Coltman was ordained to ministry in the Congregational Union on 17 September 1917 and thus became the first female minister in a mainstream denomination in the UK. To mark the centenary of this momentous occasion, we hosted three events in London with colleagues from the Congregational Federation, supported by funding from CWM. The first event was a three-day international conference on ‘Women of the Way – global pioneers gathering celebrating Constance Coltman’. The conference was attended by people from the UK, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Moldova, Italy, Zambia, the Philippines, Guyana, Jamaica and Korea. The conference was followed by two further events, a public lecture and a special thanksgiving service at the American International Church in London. We are grateful to all who attended these events and those who provided leadership.

6.7.1 The centenary was covered widely in regional and national media, including on *Woman’s Hour* and *Sunday Worship* on BBC Radio Four and in *Songs of Praise* on BBC television. There was good coverage in printed media too, with articles in *Reform*, *Christianity*, the *Congregationalist*, *Woman Alive* and the *Feminist Theology Journal*. A short film of the thanksgiving service was made by the Revd Kevin Snyman and can be found on YouTube (see ‘Celebrating 100 years of women’s ordination CONSTANCE COLTMAN’).

Projects and partners

6.8 ‘CreateTalk’ came to an end on 31 December 2016. The programme developed from ‘ArtTalk’ (2012 to 2014) into ‘CreateTalk’ (2014 to 2016), offering congregations a tool to engage with their community in faith conversations through exhibitions and other art activities. The project confirmed that many people often find it difficult to talk about their faith, but are inspired to do so more easily when they see faith-based images. The Westhill Endowment Trust in Birmingham expressed an interest in sustaining ‘CreateTalk’ and in 2017 the URC gifted the resources produced and the brand name ‘CreateTalk’ to Westhill.

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6.9 In addition to projects which support local mission, we also partner with other organisations to resource local churches. One such partner is Hope, which has designated 2018 as a special year of mission and has produced excellent resources for this. Free Christmas 2017 and Easter 2018 magazines were produced for local churches to hand out in the community with the purpose of creating opportunities for conversation. These proved very popular and offered many opportunities to open up conversations about church and faith. An undated magazine will be produced for use throughout the summer. For more information on Hope resources, visit www.hopetogether.org.uk.

6.10 The Queen will mark 4 August as a National Day of Prayer, 100 years after George V originally did this. Hope is launching a 100-day initiative leading up to Remembrance Sunday on 11 November, when the Commonwealth will mark the centenary of the end of the First World War. Hope is working with denominations and agencies to provide resources to use around this significant milestone in the UK's history. For more information about the First World War programme of commemoration, visit www.remembrance100.co.uk.

6.11 The URC became an associate partner of Greenbelt festival for the first time in 2016 and again in 2017. This partnership is supported by various committees and mission staff have contributed to the planning and delivery of the URC's contribution to the festival.

Fresh Expressions

6.12 Fresh Expressions (FXs) are defined as 'new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who do not go to church'. Since 2015 the URC has employed a full-time coordinator for Fresh Expressions, Linda Rayner, whose task it is to embed and develop the Fresh Expressions work within the URC, with a special focus on training, advocacy, pioneering and strategic development. The coordinator is part of the ecumenical Fresh Expressions team and the post is part funded from CWM's 'Mission Support' programme.

6.13 Embedding fresh expressions has been an ongoing focus in the past two years and was implemented by working with existing URC networks – such as mission enablers, training and development officers and resource centres for learning – and offering Fresh Expressions-specific training: vision events, mission shaped ministry (MSM) and mission shaped intro (MSI) courses. New learning communities were established, which tend to be synod-wide, offering opportunities for leaders to learn from each other regarding the practicalities of starting something new. Fresh Expressions will also be included in Stepwise, which forms part of the 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today' focus and embraces similar values.

6.14 Pioneer ministry is becoming more widely recognised in the URC, with eight 'official' pioneers in a variety of contexts, from setting up a mixed-economy of different church for new housing developments, to teenage cafes attached to school, to edgy missional work in secular space. Various meetings were held to enable these pioneers to meet, network and share good practice.

6.15 The URC has many potential fledgling new expressions of church, where local churches explore different ideas as they attempt to become more meaningful as faith communities in their own local contexts. They are probably not yet 'fresh expressions', and in some instances, the leadership teams do not intend to create new forms of church. However, some of these projects have set out intentionally to 'be church' with a distinct discipleship agenda. These include Love Groby Tasters in Leicestershire and Dan's Den in Yorkshire. There are many URC examples of cafe church, Messy Church and some highly creative worship emerging on beaches, in forests, via walking groups and other special interest groups. This 'mixed economy' of traditional and new is becoming increasingly important.

6.16 Embedding fresh expressions into the URC means firmly positioning the values of FX (missional, contextual, formational, ecclesial) along with a sense of mission through pioneering, into all local churches, synod committees and at every level of the URC. This will generate an awareness of different expressions of church and an understanding that future church is unlikely to look like the current model.

6.17 Embedding fresh expressions also raises questions about ministry and calling: how can a minister be called and/or ordained to a pioneering post? How might we train pioneers for ordination? How can we recognise, affirm and train the lay pioneers?

6.17.1 Further questions arise as the scope of the role of pioneer ministry is considered. The title of pioneer can be applied to a wide spectrum of ministry, from church planters who replicate a model of church in a new place, to those who adapt existing models of church, to more edgy work where there is no intention to set up a church community.⁵ Within the URC, the scoping of our pioneer ministers ranges across this spectrum.

6.17.2 More questions arise as fresh expressions become more established, e.g. which elements must be retained for recognition as a URC? How can the URC recognise members in a fresh expression? These, and many other questions are beginning to be addressed and explored.

6.17.3 It is 14 years since the 'Mission Shaped Church' report stated that 'the time has come to ensure that any Fresh Expressions of Church that emerge within the Church ... are undergirded with an adequate ecclesiology',⁶ thus recognising that fresh expressions and new ways of being church were already in existence, and would play an important role in bringing new disciples to Christ in the 21st century. This recognition has become increasingly important and has prompted questions about ecclesiology within all the partners and denominations.

6.18 These have been exciting years, which have seen Fresh Expressions change from being an organisation with a considerable central core team to a movement with minimal core members and a widespread impact. The focus of the third five-year phase has been to begin a process of embedding FX into the partner denominations and organisation. Within the URC, a small embedding group, commissioned by the mission committee, is considering where we go next. The group will report to the mission committee in June 2018.

Rural Mission

7.1 Rural churches can make a huge difference to their communities. The work of the National Rural Officer, a post shared with the Methodist Church, is aimed at supporting and promoting small rural churches as they engage in mission. The National Rural Officer post is held by the Revd Elizabeth Clark, who is based at the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) in Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth.

7.2 A major piece of work since the last Assembly has been the production and publication of a new resource, called *A Discipling Presence*, to help rural churches make a difference where they are. *A Discipling Presence* was written by members of the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church. The fact that this is a joint publication is a great strength, as ecumenism is now a mission imperative in the countryside. The resource begins with the belief that 'every community if it is to be whole, balanced and healthy, needs at its heart a committed group of Christians'.⁷ We know, however, that many rural churches can seem fragile and so there is a need to change and grow. This resource can help churches to look at their mission and take small steps towards growing that mission.

5 See Paul Bradbury, CMS Pioneer Hub: 'Pioneer mission is...a spectrum' <https://pioneer.churchmissionsociety.org/2018/03/pioneer-mission-is-a-spectrum>

6 'Mission Shaped Church' report, 2004, p147.

7 *A Discipling Presence*, 2017, p11.

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7.3 The resource describes what a discipling presence might look like and includes material on context, ecumenical cooperation, worship, missional use of buildings, community engagement, discipleship and children and young people. The resource fits well with the URC's missional discipleship focus, 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today' and is warmly recommended to local churches and synods.

7.4 Church buildings can feel like a burden sometimes rather than a blessing. The National Rural Officer has written a resource, called 'Open Welcome', which reflects on the ideas of sacred space and how we can use the buildings we have in a missional way. A recent survey by the National Churches Trust found that 57% of British adults said they had visited a church, chapel or meeting house in the last year, equivalent to 33 million people. Clearly this interest in church buildings and heritage is something we need to be part of. Many of our small rural churches have a story to tell. If we could find out the stories behind our churches they could inspire a new generation. 'Open Welcome' looks at some of the reasons why opening your church could be a great idea and provides practical advice.

7.5 Rural Mission Sunday, now in its fourth year, is an opportunity for rural churches to celebrate who they are and to challenge themselves to do something new. This year the theme is 'Growing Together', growing as individuals and as churches across denominations and communities. The date is 15 July but the material can be used at any time. Participation continues to grow: 300 churches signed up last year. Materials will be available from www.germinate.net.

7.6 For three years we have been sending all full-time Methodist ministry students on a rural placement to give them a taste of rural issues and rural ministry. This has had a positive effect on helping people consider rural ministry. We are involved in conversations with Westminster College to provide a similar experience for URC student ministers, which will hopefully take place this summer.

Conclusion

8.1 Mission is always about looking to see how God is at work in the world and joining in. God is engaged in the life of the world in rich, broad and diverse ways. And so, the agenda that we embrace together as a Church is equally multifaceted. The challenges and opportunities are huge. While we are small, our greatest resources are found in the faithful people who serve in and through this Church. We express our thanks to the many people in the synods, networks and churches engaging in mission and to the members of the mission committee and mission team.

8.2 On behalf of the whole Church, we would like to record our special appreciation to the Revd David Tatem, former Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, and Wendy Cooper, former Administrator for Church and Society and a longstanding member of staff at Church House. Both retired in July 2017. In the same month we also bid a fond farewell to Grace Pengelly, Secretary for Church and Society, who moved to a new post. We thank them for the excellent contribution they have made to the life and work of the URC.

Mission committee

Expressing commitment to global and intercultural ministries

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Bernie Collins: bernie.collins@thecrocker.net Michael Jagessar: michael.jagessar@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>31. General Assembly:</p> <p>a) reaffirms its longstanding commitment to engage with global and intercultural themes (including justice, peace, partnerships, mutuality in giving and receiving, solidarity and discipleship) and its desire to make this engagement integral to the whole life of the United Reformed Church;</p> <p>b) encourages synods in their mission and ministry to recommit to give appropriate time for, and attention and intention to, the sharing and development of these themes;</p> <p>c) directs Mission Council to reflect and report to Assembly on how the Church's agenda and resources (spiritual, human and financial) are deployed to support its global and intercultural commitment.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	A call for renewal of the United Reformed Church's commitment to the Jesus project of full life for all and the deepening habits that will promote God's justice for all.
Main points	As per above resolution.
Previous relevant documents	Various relevant General Assembly resolutions related to racial justice, multicultural ministry, 'Belonging to the World Church', equalities and global and intercultural ministries (1990, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2005, 2012).
Consultation has taken place with...	All global and intercultural ministries networks, the mission committee, the General Secretary and the Clerk of General Assembly.

Summary of Impact

Financial	A renewed and more intentional commitment to support and benefit from the opportunities provided through global and intercultural ministries.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Increasing the integrity of the URC in its unique commitment to the interrelationship between global and intercultural ministries (at home and abroad).

Expressing commitment to global and intercultural ministries

1. From as early as 1987, the United Reformed Church took a public stand against racism and all related forms of discrimination. Likewise, the URC (and its predecessors) has always valued being part of a global Church. Consequent General Assembly resolutions have seen us declaring ourselves an equal opportunities organisation (1990), affirming the diverse cultural make up of our congregations (1994), endorsing a specialised multiracial-multicultural ministry (1996), committing to work together with partners around the world and learn from one another (1998), renewing our understanding of what it means in practice to be part of a world Church family (2004), declaring the URC a multicultural Church (2005) and endorsing the newly-named focus of multicultural church, intercultural habit (2012).
2. Together, we have journeyed a long way towards our commitment to embody God's love, live out God's word, promote God's justice and practice expansive hospitality the Jesus way, locally and internationally, and in partnership. Indeed, we rejoice in and treasure the variety of gifts that our diverse family has brought and continues to bring to our common life together as people of the way. It is through our global and intercultural partnerships that we are enriched in our understanding of the Gospel and our engagement in mission.
3. At the same time, our changing landscape and the complex ways in which justice themes intersect locally and globally call for a renewal of our commitment to the Jesus project of full life for all and the deepening of habits that will promote God's justice for all. It is for this reason that the mission committee brings this resolution.

Nominations committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ray Adams: ray.adams12@btinternet.com George Faris: gfaris48@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	32. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 163 to 178 of the <i>Book of Reports</i>, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint members of various committees.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with synods, local churches and the committees and groups where appointments are needed.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

General report

This committee nominates to General Assembly the names of people to serve as convenors, secretaries and members of all Assembly committees. It also suggests names of United Reformed Church representatives on other bodies. It recommends people to make up appointment and review groups for synod moderators and Assembly-appointed staff.

Each synod is represented on the nominations committee: some by their synod clerk or moderator, others by individuals with a good knowledge of their own people. One of the former Assembly Moderators and the General Secretary are also committee members.

Committee members

Convenor: Ray Adams (Irene Wren to September 2016)

Secretary: George Faris (Carol Rogers to June 2017)

Synod representatives:

1. Melanie Campbell
2. Brian Jolly (Martin Smith to November 2017)
3. Bill Gould (Robert Shallcross to November 2016)
4. Chris Reed
5. Helen Lidgett
6. Margaret Marshall
7. Paul Whittle
8. Douglas Burnett (George Faris to June 2017)
9. Sue Brown
10. Simon Fairnington
11. Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor
12. Adrian Bulley (Shelagh Pollard to November 2017)
13. Morag Donaldson

Current work

1.1 The main task of this committee is to maintain the work of all Assembly committees and working groups by bringing names for General Assembly (or Mission Council acting in its name) to appoint to serve on them. To achieve this, we depend on the gifts and the goodwill of members of the Church. Nominations committee seeks to ensure that invitations are issued which result in committees being appointed where every member contributes to the work of the whole.

1.2 Synod representative members, through consulting their own synod networks, bring names which are then discussed as vacancies occur in Assembly committees and groups. An annual letter, which lists forthcoming vacancies, is usually sent to the synods for them to respond with suggested nominees. Other committees are welcome to make suggestions, where appropriate, recognising that often they have the clearest understanding of their own needs. To keep a healthy balance between established expertise and new members, between lay and ordained, and male and female is sometimes challenging, not least when people – for a variety of reasons – are unable to complete their term of appointment. However, the committee remains deeply grateful to members of local churches who willingly accept invitations to participate in the life of the Church in this way.

1.3 The committee is also responsible for appointing members of Assembly panels and for ensuring that the URC is represented on outside bodies. The last section of this report indicates the scope of this task. Even where the responsibility for appointing some of these representatives lies in other parts of the URC, they are included below in order to give a comprehensive picture.

Monitoring

2.1 Those invited to serve on the Church's committees and working groups are asked to complete a monitoring form. The results are shared with the equalities committee.

2.2 Seventy-eight acceptances were received between July 2017 and March 2018. The ordained/lay and male/female figures are as follows:

Ordained	36	46%
Lay	42	54%

Male	45	58%
Female	33	42%

2.3 An analysis of 37 forms shows the following age spread:

Under 26	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
3	0	0	3	8	23
8%	0%	0%	8%	22%	62%

These figures are similar to those previously reported to Assembly.

2.4 Consideration is being given to making it easier to accept invitations and to improve the analysis of the monitoring data provided.

Thanks to all who serve

3. The Church continues to be blessed by many willing members who give their time and gifts to serve on its committees, panels and working groups, or who represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows is offered with a real sense of gratitude for all who serve in this way.

Those to be appointed or reappointed

4.1 General Assembly is invited to appoint or reappoint those listed below.

4.2 Key:

† = extension of term of service, the default is a new appointment.

GA18 = from the end of General Assembly 2018

Jul19 = from 1 July 2019

GA20 = from the end of General Assembly 2020

Years = term of service

Ref	Committee/group	Name	Role	From	Years
1.6	Resource sharing task group	The Revd Jacky Embrey	Synod Moderator and convenor	GA18	4
2.1	Faith and order committee	The Revd Dr Robert Pope	Member	GA18	6
2.1	Faith and order committee	The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby	Member	GA18	6
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	The Revd Alison Hall	Member	GA18	5
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	Mrs Barbara Ellis	Member	GA18	5
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	Mrs Helen Lidgett	Member	GA18	5

Nominations

Ref	Committee/group	Name	Role	From	Years
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	The Revd Hugh Graham	Member	GA18	5
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	Ms Helen Stenson	Member	GA18	5
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	Dr Jim Merrilees	Member	GA18	5
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly appointments	The Revd Ruth Whitehead	Member	GA18	5
2.3	Mind (Ministerial incapacity and discipline) advisory group	The Revd Chris Copley	Secretary	GA18	4
2.5	Standing panel for the incapacity procedure	The Revd Simon Walking	Synod Moderator	GA18	5
2.5	Standing panel for the incapacity procedure	Dr Ewen Harley	GP Member	GA18	5 [†]
2.5	Standing panel for the incapacity procedure	Mr David Nash	Member with legal experience	GA18	5 [†]
2.5	Standing panel for the incapacity procedure	The Revd Roy Lowes	Commission officer	GA18	5
2.6	Pastoral reference and welfare committee	The Revd David Grosch-Miller	Convenor-elect	GA18	1
2.6	Pastoral reference and welfare committee	The Revd David Grosch-Miller	Convenor	Jul19	4
2.6	Pastoral reference and welfare committee	The Revd David Pickering	Synod Moderator	GA18	4
3.1.1	International exchange reference group	The Revd Paul Whittle	Synod Moderator	GA18	4
3.1.3	Methodist/URC interfaith reference group	The Revd Tracey Lewis	Co-convenor-elect	GA18	1
3.1.3	Methodist/URC interfaith reference group	The Revd Tracey Lewis	Co-convenor	Jul19	6
4.1	Ministries committee	The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith	Synod Moderator	GA18	4
4.1.1	Accreditation subcommittee	Mr Rob Moverley	Member	GA18	4
4.1.2	Ministries – CRCW programme subcommittee	Ms Ann Honey	Member	GA18	4
4.1.2	Ministries – CRCW programme subcommittee	The Revd Peter Meek	Synod Moderator	GA18	4
4.1.3	Ministries – Maintenance of Ministry Subcommittee	The Revd David Coote	Convenor	GA18	4
4.1.3	Ministries – Maintenance of ministry subcommittee	Mr David Black	Member	GA18	1 [†]
4.1.3	Ministries – Maintenance of ministry subcommittee	Mrs Jean Wyber	Member	GA18	4
4.1.3	Ministries – Maintenance of ministry subcommittee	Mr David Gartside	Member	GA18	4
4.1.4	Retired ministers' housing subcommittee	The Revd Andrew Mills	Synod Moderator	GA18	4
4.1.5	Assessment board	Mr Dan Morrell	Member	GA18	5
4.1.5	Assessment board	The Revd John Danso	Member	GA18	5
4.2	Education and learning committee	Mr Alan Yates	Convenor-elect	GA18	1
4.2	Education and learning committee	Mr Alan Yates	Convenor	Jul19	4
4.2	Education and learning committee	Mrs Sandra Ackroyd	Member	GA18	4
4.2	Education and learning committee	Ms Adella Pritchard	Member	GA18	4

Ref	Committee/group	Name	Role	From	Years
4.2	Education and learning committee	The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby	Member	GA18	4
4.2	Education and learning committee	The Revd Martin Truscott	Member	GA18	4
4.3	Children's and youth work committee	Mrs Ruth Roddison	Member	GA18	2 [†]
4.3	Children's and youth work committee	Mrs Alison Tansom	Member	GA18	2 [†]
4.3	Children's and youth work committee	Ms Charmaine Mutare	Member	GA18	4
4.3.1	Pilots management subcommittee	Mrs Margaret Smith	Convenor	GA18	4
5.1	Assembly arrangements committee	The Revd Adrian Bulley	Convenor-elect	GA18	2
5.1	Assembly arrangements committee	The Revd Adrian Bulley	Convenor	GA20	6
5.2	Communications committee	Mr Stan Hazell	Member	GA18	4
5.3	Equalities committee	Ms Pam Gold	Member	GA18	4
5.3	Equalities committee	Mr Jake Convery	Member	GA18	4
5.3	Equalities committee	Mr Clive Curtis	Member	GA18	1 [†]
5.4	Finance committee	Mr Frank Liddell	Member	GA18	4
5.5	URC Trust	Mrs Val Morrison	Member	GA18	2
5.5	URC Trust	Ms Catriona Wheeler	Member	GA18	4
5.5	URC Trust	Mr David Lathbury	Member	GA18	4
5.5	URC Trust	The Revd Leslie Morrison	Member	GA18	4
5.6	URC Ministers Pensions Trust	Mr Richard Nunn	Convenor	GA18	4 [†]
5.6	URC Ministers Pensions Trust	Miss Margaret Atkinson	Member	GA18	2 [†]
5.6	URC Ministers Pensions Trust	Mr Lyndon Thomas	Member	GA18	4
5.8	Investment committee	The Revd Dick Gray	Convenor	GA18	4
5.8	Investment committee	Mr David Martin	Member	GA18	4
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	The Revd June Colley	Governor	GA18	4
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	The Revd Carole Elphick	Governor	GA18	4
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	The Revd Derek Lindfield	Governor	GA18	4 [†]
11.12	URC History Society council	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	Member	GA18	1 [†]
11.12	URC History Society council	The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe	Member	GA18	5 [†]
11.14	Westhill Endowment Trust	Mrs Julie Grove MBE	Member	GA18	4 [†]

Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. General Assembly Moderators, Assembly Moderators-elect, the Immediate-past Assembly Moderators and the General Secretary are members ex officio of every standing committee. Deputy General Secretaries are members ex officio of every standing committee within their department. Any ex officio member may arrange for an appropriate deputy, such as any Deputy General Secretary or an officer of Assembly, to attend on their behalf. Any committee may invite other Assembly officers (or their deputies) or staff members to attend in a non-voting capacity where the business so requires.
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;
3. Numbers in round brackets following names indicate 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.

Nominations

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 convenors serve an additional preliminary year as convenor-elect. In sections one to four of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. Dates in square brackets following names indicate 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 Assembly does not meet, they normally begin on 1 July.
9. Nominations to Assembly committees and their subcommittees, and to advisory and task groups serving Assembly and Mission Council, should be of members of the United Reformed Church, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly. A term of service may normally be completed if someone ceases to be a member of the URC during their term.
10. Nominations of URC representatives to external bodies should either be URC members, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly, or URC staff who have relevant expertise. The nomination of a staff member would automatically lapse if the person concerned ceased to hold a URC post.

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, one of whom is usually, but not necessarily, the synod clerk, together with the convenors of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three members for URC Youth, including the URC Youth Moderator. In attendance are staff secretaries, Assembly Moderators' chaplains and others as appropriate.

1.1 Mission Council advisory group

Convenor: Moderators of General Assembly

Secretary: General Secretary

The Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor [2019]

Mr Peter Knowles [2020]

Mrs Helen Lidgett [2020]

The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2020]

Moderators-elect and Immediate-past Moderators of General Assembly

URC Treasurer

In attendance: The Clerk of General Assembly

1.2 Human resources advisory group

Convenor: Mr Geoff Shaw [2021]

Mr Mike Gould [2017]

Mr Peter Pay [2017]

Mr Alistair Forsyth [2017]

Mrs Bridget Fosten [2019]

Vacancy

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Note: The terms of service on this group are under review.

1.3 Law and polity advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Dr John Bradbury [2022]**

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2020]

Ms Morag McLintock [2020]

Ms Denise FitzPatrick [2022]

Mr Keir Hounsome [2022] (Synod Clerk)**
 Mr Raoul Hewitt (Property, legal and Trust officers: PLATO)
 General Secretary
 [ex officio: Clerk of General Assembly, legal adviser]

1.4 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: Mr Peter West [2019] (nominated by the group)
 Secretary: The Revd James Mather
 The Revd Ray Anglesea (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)
 General Secretary, Clerk of General Assembly, Secretary for Ministries, legal adviser

1.5 Resource sharing task group

Convenor: The Revd Jacky Embrey [2022] (Synod Moderator)**
 Secretary: Mr Chris Atherton
 Treasurer: The Revd Dick Gray
 Miss Margaret Atkinson Mr Mike Gould
 [ex officio: URC Treasurer]

1.6 The Church's engagement with 20 to 40 year olds task group

This group expects to complete its work at the 2018 General Assembly.
 Convenor: Ms Victoria Paulding
 Mr Stewart Cutler The Revd David Downing
 Ms Sabrina Groeschel Ms Emma Pugh
 The Revd Mike Walsh
 General Secretary

1.7 Methodist/United Reformed Church faith and order conversations

These conversations are not presently active.

1.8 General Assembly task group

Convenor: Mrs Val Morrison
 The Revd Adrian Bulley The Revd Dick Gray
 Mrs Margaret Marshall
 together with the Clerk of General Assembly.

1.9 Environmental task group

Convenor: The Revd Rob Weston
 The Revd Trevor Jamison Ms Charis Ollerenshaw
 Mr Tom Veitch

2. General Secretariat

2.1 Faith and order committee

Members normally serve for six years.
 Convenor: The Revd Dr Alan Spence [2023]
 Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
 The Revd Dr Catherine Ball (7) [2020] Ms Anna Briggs (13) [2020]
 The Revd Samuel Silungwe [2023] The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2024]**
 The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby [2024]** General Secretary

2.2 Nominations committee

Synods appoint and decide terms for their representation.
 Convenor: The Revd Ray Adams [2021]
 Secretary: Mr George Faris [2021]
 Mrs Melanie Campbell (1) The Revd Brian Jolly (2)
 Mr Bill Gould (3) Mr Chris Reed (4)

Nominations

Mrs Helen Lidgett (5)
 The Revd Paul Whittle (7)
 Mrs Sue Brown (9)
 The Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor (11)
 Miss Morag Donaldson (13)
 General Secretary

Mrs Margaret Marshall (6)
 The Revd Dougie Burnett (8)
 Mr Simon Fairnington (10)
 The Revd Adrian Bulley (12)

In attendance: Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, advising on black and minority ethnic (BAME) nominations.

2.2.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Retiring 2019

Mrs Sue Brown (9)
 The Revd Paul Bedford (9)
 The Revd Raymond Singh (11)

The Revd Nick Adlem (9)
 The Revd Sohail Ejaz (7)
 The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)

Retiring 2020

Mrs Sheana Dudley (4)
 Mrs Gwen Jennings (8)
 The Revd Samuel Silungwe (5)

Mr Clive Curtis (12)
 The Revd Dick Gray (8)
 The Revd Bill Young (6)

Retiring 2021

The Revd David Sebley (7)
 Mrs Kate Yates (10)

Mrs Val Morrison (4)

Retiring 2022

Mr John Ellis (11)

The Revd Mary Irish (7)

Retiring 2023

Mrs Barbara Ellis** (3)
 The Revd Alison Hall** (3)
 Dr Jim Merrilees** (13)
 The Revd Ruth Whitehead** (8)

The Revd Hugh Graham** (10)
 Mrs Helen Lidgett** (5)
 Ms Helen Stenson** (12)

2.3 Ministerial incapacity and discipline (Mind) advisory group

Convenor: The Revd John Durell [2020]

Secretary: The Revd Chris Copley [2022]**

Synod Moderator: The Revd Clare Downing [2021]

Convenor of the Assembly commission

Secretary of the Assembly commission

Convenor of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Secretary of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Consultant for ministers and CRCWs: The Revd Ken Chippindale

Consultant for mandated groups: The Revd Alison Davis

Training coordinator: Mr Keith Webster

General Secretary; Clerk of General Assembly

Secretary for Ministries; legal advisor

Co-opted: Mr Hartley Oldham

2.4 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.

Convenor: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington (7) [2020]

Deputy convenor: Mr Keith Webster (10) [2022]

Secretary: Mr Philip Laws [2022]

Members:

Retiring 2019

The Revd Debbie Brown (3)
 The Revd Peter Flint (11)
 Mr Andrew Harvey (8)
 The Revd Graham Maskery (2)
 The Revd Sue McCoan (6)
 Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

Mr Peter Etwell (1)
 Mrs Barbara Goom (8)
 The Revd Naison Hove (10)
 The Revd Deborah McVey (7)
 The Revd Sarah Moore (2)
 The Revd Wendy Swan (9)

Retiring 2020

The Revd Martha McInnes (6)
The Revd Hilary Collinson (1)
Mr Patrick Smyth (13)

The Revd Rachel Poolman (1)
The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson (11)
The Revd Andy Braunston (13)

Retiring 2021

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe (2)
Mrs Diane Moverley (12)
Mr David Jones (5)
The Revd Nigel Adkinson (2)

The Revd David M Miller (6)
Mrs Janet Virr (4)
Mr Ian Corless (9)

Retiring 2022

Mr Alan Kirby (11)
Mrs Cathy Glazier (11)
The Revd Craig Muir (6)
Mr Alastair Forsyth (4)

The Revd Ian Kirby (12)
Mrs Mary Kelly (11)
The Revd Jane Campbell (5)

2.5 Standing panel for the incapacity procedure

This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience. Members serve one or two five-year terms.

Secretary: Dr Augur Pearce (7) [2022]

Synod Moderator: The Revd Simon Walkling [2023]**

Past Moderator of General Assembly: The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe (2) [2022]

Commission officer for the incapacity procedure: The Revd Roy Lowes [2023]**

Mr David Nash (legal experience) [2023]† Dr Ewen Harley (GP) [2023]†

2.6 Pastoral reference and welfare committee

Convenor: Mrs Wilma Frew [2019]

Convenor-elect: The Revd David Grosch-Miller [to serve as convenor 2019-23]**

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

The Revd Dr David Pickering (Synod Moderator) [2022]**

Mrs Pam Sharp (9) [2019]

The Revd Camilla Veitch (6) [2020]

Professor Malcolm Johnson [2022]

[ex officio: URC Treasurer; General Secretary; secretary for welfare]

3. Mission department**3.1 Mission committee**

Convenor: The Revd Bernie Collins [2020]

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

Ms Chris Eddowes [2021] (1)

Vacancy (2) [2022]

The Revd Hilary Smith (3)

Mr John Cornell (4) [2019]

The Revd Lesley Moseley (5) [2019]

Mr John Davey (6) [2022]†

The Revd David Sebley (7) [2019]

Vacancy (8) [2022]

The Revd Ray Stanyon (9)

Ms Vivien Andrews (10) [2019]

Mr Martin Hayward (11) [2015]

The Revd Branwen Rees (12) [2022]

Mr John Collings (13) [2019]

3.1.1 International exchange reference group

Convenor: Mrs Judith North (5) [2020]

Members: The Revd Paul Whittle (Synod Moderator) [2022]†

Ms Angela Bogg [2019]

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

3.1.2 Commitment for Life (CfL) reference group

Convenor: The Revd Alan McGougan [2020]

At least two CfL advocates

Representative of mission team

Representative of mission committee

Representative from Christian Aid

Representative of Global Justice Now

Mrs Linda Mead (Programme Coordinator, Commitment for Life)

Nominations

3.1.3 Methodist/URC interfaith reference group

Members normally serve for six years in parallel with Methodist terms.

Co-convenor: The Revd Clare Downing [2019]

Co-convenor-elect: The Revd Tracey Lewis [to serve as co-convenor 2019-25]**

Mr John Mellor (4) [2020]

The Revd Ann Jack (10) [2021]

The Revd Bob Day (2) [2021]

3.1.4 Joint Public Issues Team strategy and policy group

Deputy General Secretary (mission)

The Revd Steve Faber

3.1.5 Rural strategy group (United Reformed Church/Methodist)

Co-chair: The Revd Steve Faber (Synod Moderator) [2022]

The Revd Peter Ball [2020]

Mr Charles Jolly [2021]

The Revd Elizabeth Kemp [2021]

4. Discipleship department

4.1 Ministries committee

Convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle [2020]

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

The Revd Dr Martin Camroux (7) [2021]

The Revd Sally Thomas (12) [2019]

The Revd Allison Claxton (3) [2020]

Mr Sam Elliot (11) [2021]

Vacancy

Leadership in worship advocate: Mrs Jenny Sheehan

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Synod Moderator) [2022]**

Convenor, assessment board

4.1.1 Ministries – accreditation subcommittee

Convenor: The Revd Russell Furley-Smith [2021]

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad (Synod Moderator) [2020]

The Revd Dr Susan Durber (8) [2021]

Mr Rob Moverley (12) [2022]**

4.1.2 Ministries – CRCW programme subcommittee

Convenor: Mr Simon Loveitt [2020]

Secretary: CRCW Development Worker

Mrs Rosie Buxton (4) [2018]

Mr Derek Estill (2) [2019]

The Revd Ruth Maxey (5) [2020]

Ms Ann Honey [2022]**

The Revd Leonora Jagessar Visser t’Hooft (10) [2021]

The Revd Peter Meek (Synod Moderator) [2022]**

4.1.3 Ministries – maintenance of ministry subcommittee

Convenor: The Revd David Coote [2022]**

Mr David Black (6) [2019]†

Mr Keith Berry (7) 2019

Mrs Margaret Brock [2021]

Mr David Gartside [2022]**

Mrs Jean Wyber [2022]**

4.1.4 Ministries – retired ministers’ housing subcommittee

Members normally serve four years but appointments may be extended for two more years.

Convenor: The Revd Anne Bedford [2020]

Secretary: Secretary of Retired Ministers’ Housing Society Ltd

Mr Peter West (7) [2019]

Mr Malcolm Lindo (10) [2018]

The Revd Ken Summers (3) [2020]

The Revd Andrew Mills (Synod Moderator) [2022]**

ex-officio: URC Treasurer

Properties are managed by a company, Retired Ministers’ Housing Society Ltd.

Details of the members of its board etc may be obtained from the Company Secretary at Church House.

4.1.5 Assessment board

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Convenor: Dr Ewen Harley [2019]

Convenor-elect: Professor Bill Gould (3) [to serve as convenor 2019-24]

Retiring 2019

The Revd Stuart Radcliffe (2)

The Revd Peter Rand (1)

The Revd Sohail Ejaz (7)

Ms Pat Oliver (9)

Retiring 2020

The Revd Lesley Charlton (11)

Mrs Jill Shelton (12)

Retiring 2021

Ms Karen Campbell (10)

The Revd Sue McCoan (10)

Retiring 2022

Mrs Bridget Akinyombo

Mrs Faith Paulding (7)

Mr Keith Reading

The Revd Jamie Kissack (4)

The Revd Lis Mullen (2)

Retiring 2023

The Revd John Danso**

Mr Dan Morrell**

4.2 Education and learning committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Neil Messer [2019]

Convenor-elect: Mr Alan Yates [to serve as convenor 2019-23]**

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

The Revd Dr Jill Thornton (9) [2020]

Mr Robert Pettigrew (3) [2020]

Mr Rudolph Wontumi (10) [2021]

Mrs Sandra Ackroyd [2022]**

Ms Adella Pritchard [2022]**

The Revd Martin Truscott [2022]**

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby (resource centre) [2022]**

The Revd Mary Thomas (Synod Development Officer)

4.2.1 Education and learning finance subcommittee

Chair: Vacancy

Minutes Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Member: The Revd Edward Sanniez

Ex-officio: URC Treasurer, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), convenor of the education and learning committee

Staff in attendance: Chief Finance Officer

Members of the subcommittee are appointed by the education and learning committee.

4.2.2 Stepwise task and finish group

Convenor: Professor Graham Handscomb

Administrator: Ms Philippa Linton

Members:

Mr Pete Atkins (Fresh Expressions)

Mr Iain Johnston (Faith in Community Scotland),

The Revd David Downing (children's and youth work committee),

The Revd Stuart Nixon (mission committee),

The Revd Zaidie Orr (global and intercultural ministries nominee),

The Revd Anne Sardeson (training and development officers' nominee),

Vacancy (resource centres for learning)

Ex-officio: Secretary for Education and Learning, Walking the Way Programme Manager

Members of the group are appointed by the education and learning committee.

4.3 Children's and youth work committee

Convenor: The Revd Jenny Mills [2021]

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

Mrs Ruth Roddison (4) [2020]†

Mrs Alison Tansom (12) [2020]†

Mr Adam Woodhouse (4) [2019]

Mr Sam Brown (11) [2019]

The Revd Jake Tatton (13) [2020]

The Revd Paul Robinson (12) [2021]

Ms Camilla Quartey [2021]

Ms Charmaine Mutare [2022]**

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

Nominations

4.3.1 Pilots management subcommittee

Convenor: Mrs Margaret Smith [2022]**

Member: Mr Derek Goodyear [2021]

Other members of the subcommittee are appointed by the children's and youth work committee.

5. Administration and resources department

5.1 Assembly arrangements committee

Convenor: The Revd James Breslin [2020]

Convenor-elect: The Revd Adrian Bulley [to serve as convenor 2020-26]**

Secretary: Facilities Manager

Assembly Moderators

Assembly Moderators-elect

General Secretary

Clerk of General Assembly

Local arrangements committee convenor

5.2 Communications

Convenor: Mr Peter Knowles [2019]

Convenor-elect: Vacancy [to serve as convenor 2019-23]**

Secretary: Head of Communications

Mrs Heather Carr (1) [2019]

Ms Rebecca Gudgeon (2) [2019]

Mr Tim Llewelyn (9) [2019]

Ms Eilidh Cameron (13) [2020]

Ms Lesley Caddy [2021]

Mr Stan Hazell (8) [2022]**

5.3 Equalities committee

Convenor: The Revd Anne Lewitt [2022]**

Secretary: The Revd David Salsbury (12) [2021]

Mr Clive Curtis (12) [2019]†

Mrs Pat Poinen (1) [2019]

Ms Rosie Martin (9) [2020]

Mr Jake Convery [2022]**

Ms Pam Gold [2022]**

5.4 Finance committee

Convenor: URC Treasurer

Chief Finance Officer

Deputy treasurer

Chair of URC Trust

The Revd Iain McLaren (11) [2019]

Mr Brian Hosier (10) [2019]

Mr Ian Simpson (9) [2019]

Mr Gordon Wanless (1) [2020]

Mr William Potter (6) [2021]

Mr Bob Christie [2021]

Mr David Greatorex [2021]

Mr Frank Liddell [2022]**

5.5 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: The Revd Richard Gray [2018]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr John Samson

Members:

Group one (synods 1, 2, 3,13)

Mr Neil Mackenzie (3) [2020]

The Revd Leslie Morrison (13) [2022]**

Group two (synods 6, 8, 9, 12)

Dr Ian Harrison (8) [2020]

Mr Peter Pay (9) [2022]

Mr David Lathbury (6) [2022]**

Group three (synods 4, 5, 7, 10, 11)

Mrs Margaret Thompson (7) [2020]

Mr Alastair Forsyth (4) [2020]

Ms Catriona Wheeler (5) [2022]**

Mrs Val Morrison (4) [2020]**

Nominations

6. Representatives to meetings of sister Churches

6.1	Presbyterian Church in Ireland	Assembly Moderator
6.2	General Synod of Church of England	The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad
6.3	Methodist Conference	The Revd Roy Fowler
6.4	Congregational Federation	Assembly Moderator
6.5	Church of Scotland	Assembly Moderator, chaplain and synod representative
6.6	United Free Church of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.7	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation	Synod nomination
6.8	Scottish Episcopal Church	Synod nomination
6.9	Methodist Church in Scotland	Synod nomination
6.10	Baptist Union of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.11	Presbyterian Church of Wales	Synod nomination
6.12	Union of Welsh Independents	Synod nomination
6.13	Covenanted Baptists	Synod nomination
6.14	Church in Wales Governing Board	Synod nomination
6.15	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	The Revd Edward Sanniez

7. Representatives on ecumenical Church bodies

The following have been nominated as United Reformed Church representatives at the major gatherings of the ecumenical bodies listed.

7.1 Council for World Mission (CWM) Assembly

Four representatives will be appointed in 2019 for the 2020 CWM Assembly.

7.1.1 CWM European region meeting

The Revd Peter Ball

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

7.2 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Ms Camilla Quartey

The Revd Dr Phil Wall

Programme Officer for Global and Intercultural Ministries

7.3 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and one other

7.4 The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

The Revd Rowena Francis

The Revd Professor David Thompson

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

7.5 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) Church leaders' meeting

General Secretary

7.5.1 CTBI senior representatives' forum

General Secretary

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.5.2 CTBI environmental issues network

The Revd Mike Shrubsole

7.5.3 CTBI stewardship network

Mrs Faith Paulding

7.5.4 CTBI consultative group on ministry amongst children (CGMC)

Head of Children's and Youth Work and one other

7.5.5 CTBI interreligious network

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.5.6 CTBI China forum

The Revd John Scott

7.6.1 CTE enabling group

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.2 CTE coordinating group for local unity

The Revd Kevin Watson

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.3 CTE Churches Together for Healing

The Revd Deborah McVey

7.6.4 CTE Churches' theology and unity group

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.5 CTE group for evangelisation

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

7.6.6 CTE spirituality coordinating group

The Revd Sue Henderson

7.6.7 CTE minority ethnic affairs group

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

7.6.8 CTE joint liturgical group

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale

7.7 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Acts) members meeting

Appointed by the URC Synod of Scotland

7.8 National Sponsoring Body for Scotland

Appointed by the URC Synod of Scotland

7.9 Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN)

Appointed by the URC Synod of Wales

7.10 Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales

Appointed by the URC Synod of Wales

7.11 Free Church education committee

Professor Graham Handscomb

Mrs Gillian Kingston

7.12 European Churches' environmental network

Mr Charles Jolly

7.13 Churches' refugee network

The Revd Fleur Houston

7.14 Churches' committee on funerals and crematoria

The Revd Sally Thomas

7.15 Churches' forum for safeguarding**7.16 Churches' network for nonviolence**

Head of Children's and Youth Work

Nominations

7.17 Fresh Expressions
Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

7.18 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association
Mrs Valerie Jenkins

8. Representatives on formal bilateral and multilateral committees

8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group
Co-convenor: The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith (Synod Moderator) [2020]
The Revd Kay Alberg The Revd Roy Fowler
The Revd Sally Thomas
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

8.1.1 Methodist/ United Reformed Church strategic oversight group
General Secretary A General Assembly Moderator
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

8.2 Church of England/United Reformed Church bilateral dialogue
This dialogue will be restarted shortly.

8.3 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland) [see note 7]
Appointed by the URC Synod of Scotland

8.4 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion
The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

9.1 Northern College
The Revd Raymond Singh [2019] Mrs Sheila Davies [2021]
Mr Willie Duncan [2021] The Revd Mark Bates [2022]
Mrs Rosie Buxton [2022] Mr Bill Potter [2022]
In attendance: Secretary for Education and Learning

9.2 Westminster College: board of governors
Governors serve six-year terms, which may be renewed.
Convenor: The Revd Nigel Uden [2020]
Clerk to the governors: Mr Chris Wright [2020]
Honorary treasurer (Westminster College): Mr Andrew Grimwade [2022]
Principal: The Revd Neil Thorogood
Dr Jean Stevenson [2019] Mr Mark Hayes [2022]
The Revd Dr Rick Mearkle [2022] Mr John Ellis [2023]
The Revd Jan Adamson [2024]
Note 1: A further six governors are appointed by the Cambridge Theological Federation, the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, the college's teaching staff, its students and the Cheshunt Foundation.
Note 2: The Secretary for Education and Learning and the URC Treasurer are normally in attendance.

9.2.1 The Cheshunt Foundation
Mr Guy Morfett

9.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation
Convenor, Westminster College governors

10. Governors of colleges and schools with which the United Reformed Church is associated

- | | |
|---|--|
| 10.1 Caterham School | The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith |
| 10.2 Eltham College | Mr Martin Fosten |
| 10.3 Walthamstow Hall | Mrs Isabel Heald |
| 10.4 Milton Mount Foundation
Mr Ray Dunnett [2019]
The Revd June Colley [2022]**
The Revd Derek Lindfield [2022]† | The Revd Kevin Swaine [2019]
The Revd Carole Elphick [2022]** |
| 10.5 Silcoates School
Dr Moira Gallagher
The Revd Steven Knapton
Mrs Tessa Henry-Robinson | The Revd Dr Janet Lees
Mrs Sue Lee |
| 10.6 Taunton School | Baptist governor at present |
| 10.7 Bishops Stortford College | Mr Anthony Trigg |

11. Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 11.1 Arthur Rank Centre
The Revd Elizabeth Caswell | |
| 11.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service
Mrs Sheila Duncan | General Secretary |
| 11.3 Congregational Fund Board
Mr Anthony Bayley
The Revd Eric Allen
The Revd Kate Hackett | The Revd Geoffrey Roper
Mrs Jackie Haws |
| 11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust
The Revd Derek Wales
Mr Simon Fairnington
Mr John Ellis | Mrs Margaret Thompson
Dr Brian Woodhall
Mr Philip Bonnier [2021] |
| 11.5 English Heritage's places of worship forum
Mr Peter West (convenor of the listed buildings advisory group) | |
| 11.6 Lord Wharton's Charity
The Revd Derek Lindfield | |
| 11.7 Methodist faith and order committee | |
| 11.8 Retired ministers' and widows' fund
The Revd Julian Macro
Mrs Liz Sharples | Mr Anthony Bayley |
| 11.9 Roots for Churches Ltd
The Revd John Proctor [2022] | |

Nominations

11.10 Samuel Robinson's Charities

Mr Tony Alderman

11.11 Scout Association – URC faith adviser

The Revd David Marshall-Jones

11.12 United Reformed Church History Society Council

Members serve five-year terms which may be renewed.

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar [2019]†

Mrs Jean Wyber [2022]

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2023]†

11.13 Women's World Day of Prayer

The Revd Heather Pencavel

11.14 Westhill Endowment Trust

Mr Simon Rowntree [2019]

Mrs Julie Grove MBE [2022]†

Pastoral reference and welfare committee

General report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on the work of the committee and on its use of welfare funds.
Main points	Much work is necessarily confidential. It is always done with care.
Previous relevant documents	Paper K1 at Mission Council, March 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Representatives of the Finance Committee, regularly, and with Synod Moderators, in individual cases.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No new proposals are in view. Some cases do require financial help from the Church, according to agreed policies.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

General report

This committee considers the cases of ministers who are referred to it, usually by synods, often at times of difficulty. It also deals with welfare and emergency matters including the use of welfare funds. Its work is necessarily confidential and is reported in general terms only, directly to the General Assembly.

Committee members

Convenor: Mrs Wilma Frew (2019); the Revd David Grosch-Miller (from 2019)
Members: the Revd Richard Church (DGS Discipleship) (secretary ex officio from May 2015), the Revd Clare Downing (from July 2013), Mrs Pam Sharp (from July 2015), the Revd Camilla Veitch (from July 2016), Professor Malcolm Johnson (with immediate effect until Assembly 2022), ex-officio: URC Treasurer, deputy treasurer and the General Secretary

Pastoral reference work

1.1 We continue to value the work of the churches' ministerial counselling service from which ministers – whether in active service, training or retirement – and their families can receive completely confidential support. The counselling service grants totalled £8,924 in 2016 and £7,501 in 2017.

1.2 Requests vary in their complexity, but each one is looked at carefully, either in full committee or by email consultation depending on the urgency of the matter. We value the wisdom available to us from the members of the committee, who respond conscientiously and usefully both in committee and in our email consultations between meetings.

1.3 We seek to handle all the matters before us securely and confidentially. The need to do this is underlined by new legislation on data protection coming into force on 25 May 2018.

1.4 The committee meets three times a year, having discussed other options but still feeling that this is the best arrangement for our agenda. We reserve the right to cancel a meeting if we feel it is not necessary, and indeed did this in November 2016.

1.5 The transfer of oversight of certain functions (which had originally come from the former sexual ethics advisory group) from the pastoral reference and welfare committee to the safeguarding advisory group was approved by the March Mission Council.

Welfare grants

2.1 From time to time, a letter is sent to all ministers and CRCWs with their payslips, explaining the nature of these funds. New ministers and CRCWs receive that letter with their first payslip. There are dedicated educational welfare funds and we make disbursements totalling in the region of £70,000 each year. As this normally exceeds the income from the designated funds, the subventions from the ministry and mission fund were £15,000 in 2016 and £15,000 in 2017.

2.2 We would like to thank John Ellis and Douglas Hay and the Revd Clare Downing for their years of service to the committee and their invaluable contribution to the many issues which came before us.



The
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URC History Society

Registered charity number: 279213

1.1 Since last reporting to General Assembly, the Society has organised study occasions in Cardiff and Manchester. The first included a paper by the Revd Dr Tom Arthur on the seventeenth century cleric Robert Whitehall, and a lecture by the Revd Dr Robert Pope, then at the University of Trinity St David's, entitled *Conscription, Conscience and Building God's Kingdom: Welsh Nonconformists and the Great War*. Images of the *dramatis personae* assisted understanding, as Dr Pope asked the audience to consider a nation which had responded to the call to arms in considerable numbers, yet one where individuals were uneasy about or opposed to, conscription – did the government have the God-given right to oblige citizens to defend the state? The prime minister was also a Welshman, and identified himself as a Nonconformist. Religious and political loyalties were stretched to the limit in particular situations, and a century later the decline of the chapels may, in part, be linked to an undermining of a sense of corporate identity from that period.

1.2 The centenary, in 2017, of Constance Coltman's ordination to ministry in the Congregational Union of England and Wales provided a focus for the conference in Manchester, all the main papers being delivered by women ministers. The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe, former Moderator of the United Reformed Church, posed the question: 'Constance Coltman – role model for women's ministry or complete one-off?' She directed attention to the pioneering role played by Mrs Coltman, and from her survey of the evidence a case could be made for answering both parts of the question affirmatively. 'The Constance Coltman centenary in international perspective', given by the Revd Dr Julia Pitman from the Uniting Church in Australia, provided a survey across the English-speaking world, along with some reflections on the suggestive links between women's involvement in suffrage issues and reform of the liturgy within the marriage service. The third lecture by the Revd Dr Charlotte Methuen from the University of Glasgow focussed on 'Luther and the shaping of Reformed identity', where she illustrated in image and quotation how the issues of salvation and grace resonated across the protestant 'family', as they still do.

1.3 The archives at Westminster College, Cambridge attract scholars from across the world, often to consult material connected with the Presbyterian Church of England's mission to Taiwan – the Church there values its inheritance. Cataloguing of the archives of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ has continued. Within the library, sermons composed before 1700 have been examined by Professor Jeanne Shami of the GEMMS project, (Gateway to Early Manuscript Sermons), based at the University of Regina, Canada. A digitised copy of the manuscript of the Westminster Confession of 1646 was secured through the good offices of Cambridge University Library at the end of 2017.

1.4 Volume nine of the Society *Journal* has been completed and Volume 10 begun. Past issues (1972 to 2012) may be read online via the biblicalstudies.org.uk website. It is anticipated that other activities of the Society will be publicised shortly at www.urchistory.org.uk. Editor (Dr Robert Pope, now teaching at the College), Archivist (Mrs Helen Weller) and Secretary (Mrs Margaret Thompson) may all be contacted at Westminster. A membership subscription costs £20 per year – there is a reduction for students and newly retired ministers.

URC Music

1.1 URC Music aims to be a network connecting worship leaders and music makers throughout the United Reformed Church.

1.2 Twice each year we publish and distribute our magazine *Making a Joyful Noise* to members and like-minded organisations. Each edition contains interesting articles commissioned by our editor, along with reports of music days and music reviews and advice. Music is definitely still alive in our URC worship traditions but where do we hear about it? We can do better than we currently do at singing our praises and making them known to everyone! If you are reading this and thinking: 'I could write about our fantastic worship band', do not delay in contacting us at carannrog@aol.com

1.3 Our Annual Music Day is held in a different synod area each year so that our far-flung members, and others, can attend at least occasionally. In 2017 we were given a warm welcome at Hungerford where we had an exciting and challenging day rehearsing and then performing a Bach Cantata. Music days are such a good way of bringing people together to sing, to play an instrument, to write new worship songs and generally to enjoy fellowship and shared worship. If you think that your church could organise or host something like this, please do offer. If a church in every synod held a music day once a year, with help from our synod training officers, music in our churches would surely broaden and expand to provide the vital element in our Christian worship that we know it is in many places – but where also it sometimes isn't!

1.4 Our organ advisory service helps churches enhance their worship through the appropriate use of an organ, whether it be a traditional pipe organ or an electronic instrument. URC Music, working with synod property officers, also advise on the best course of action if a church decides to dispose of its organ, for whatever reason. URC Music does not currently have a coordinator for this advisory service and is actively looking for a person with a good working knowledge of pipe organs and some knowledge of electronic instruments who can help put churches in touch with our regional organ advisors. Our regional advisors have a wide range of skills and knowledge; a church's nearest advisor geographically may not necessarily be the one who can give the best help, but they are always willing to help.

1.5 Our website is currently being redeveloped but, hopefully by the time you read this, it will be up and running again at www.urcmusic.org.uk

1.6 Finally, even if you think that nothing much is happening musically in your area, you can be certain there is! Surely there cannot be a single church in the URC that does not sing hymns on Sunday mornings? We can all 'sing up and sing out' to the glory of God with all the joy and enthusiasm we can muster.

1.7 If you would like to become a supporting member of URC Music, please do get in touch via the website.

Schools relating to the URC

1.1 The following schools have formal and long-standing connections with the United Reformed Church. We appoint governors to many of them, either within the Assembly nominations list or through the appropriate synods:

- Barrow Primary, near Clitheroe
- Bishop's Stortford College
- Bournemouth Collegiate School
- Caterham School, Surrey
- Christ the Sower Primary, Milton Keynes
- Eltham College, London
- Holt Primary, Wiltshire
- Queen's Park Primary, St Helens
- Silcoates School, Wakefield
- Taunton School
- Walthamstow Hall, Sevenoaks.

Women's World Day of Prayer

England, Wales and Northern Ireland

1.1 At the September 2017 committee meeting preparations for the 2018 services (from Suriname) were in full swing; the income from the 2017 services was being allocated to the large number of charities supported by the movement; and preparations begun for the annual residential meeting where committee members would start work on the text of the 2019 services (from Slovenia).

1.2 The residential meeting in November, held in beautiful surroundings in rural Gloucestershire, focussed on preparation for 2019. We worked in small groups to look at different aspects of the service: liturgy, Bible study, music, children's work and more. The final results of our (very enjoyable) labours will be distributed to local groups. And, like most residential meetings, it helped to build relationships, so that what had been a sea of faces and a muddle of names became colleagues and friends.

1.3 In January Heather Pencavel attended as an observer one of the Preparation Days for 2018, where the Suriname service –titled 'All God's Creation is very good' was presented to a group of area organisers. Its relevance to their local settings was discussed and some good ideas generated.

1.4 At an International Committee Meeting last year, it was agreed that the service scheduled to be held on 4 March 2022, will be written by the women of England, Wales and Northern Ireland! The theme is 'I know the plans I have for you' based on Jeremiah 29:11. We have already begun the process of recruiting writers.

1.5 For more information please look on the website www.wwdp.org.uk and/or the Facebook page – Women's World Day of Prayer – England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

World Day of Prayer, Scotland

1. World Day of Prayer Logo

1.1 The symbol of the World Day of Prayer was designed by a young Irish artist in 1982, the year when the service was prepared by the women of Ireland, and adopted as the International logo.



1.2 The design comprises arrows converging from the four points of the compass, four figures kneeling in prayer, the Celtic Cross and a circle representing the world and our unity through all our diversity.

2. International structure

2.1 The international committee, which is composed of delegates from the National committees, meets every four years to:

- select themes and writers for the services
- elect an executive committee (from seven geographical regions)
- prepare a budget from funds provided by national committees
- consider ways to extend the movement
- share experiences of the World Day of Prayer.

The international executive is composed of two representatives from each of seven regions: Latin America, Asia, Europe, Africa, Caribbean/North America and Pacific; and is led by the chairperson and executive director.

2.2 The regional committees are composed of delegates from the national committees in that region, led by two executive representatives. The European committee meets every four years.

3. National Structure

3.1 The Scottish committee is composed of representatives of all major denominations in Scotland:

Church of Scotland	Scottish Episcopal Church	Congregational Federation
Baptist Church	Roman Catholic Church	Religious Society of Friends
Methodist Church	United Reformed Church	United Free Church of Scotland
Salvation Army	Church of the Nazarene	

3.2 The Scottish committee meets several times and works throughout the year to:

- prepare and distribute material for the World Day of Prayer service
- decide on the distribution of funds
- promote the World Day of Prayer movement.

Ruth Laing from URC and Marjorie Paton from the Church of Scotland attended the International meeting in Brazil in August 2017.

3.3 Themes from past and future years are;

2017	The Philippines	Am I unfair to you?
2018	Suriname	And God's creation is very good
2019	Slovenia	Come, everything is ready.

3.4 Due to extreme weather conditions in Scotland in March 2018 many services were cancelled or postponed. Fortunately, many went ahead later.

3.5 Through World Day of Prayer, Christians affirm that prayer and action are inseparable and that both have immeasurable influence in the world. Further information may be found at: www.wdpscotland.org.uk



The
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Resolutions 1 to 32

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution 1

Nominations: To recommend three extensions of tenure to Mission Council (p.14)
General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Michael Hopkins as its Clerk to the end of the 2024 meeting of General Assembly.

Resolution 2

Nominations: To recommend three extensions of tenure to Mission Council (p.14)
General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Simon Walkling as Moderator of the National Synod of Wales to 31 August 2024.

Resolution 3

Nominations: To recommend three extensions of tenure to Mission Council (p.14)
General Assembly extends the appointment of the Revd Paul Whittle as Moderator of Eastern Synod to 31 August 2023.

Resolution 4

Mission council appendix three: The election of Assembly Moderators (p.16)
General Assembly adopts the changes proposed to section 3 of the Rules of Procedure, with effect from the end of the 2018 meeting of Assembly.

Resolution 5

Mission council appendix four: The role of Elders in the United Reformed Church (p.20)

General Assembly, resolves to add a further question to Schedule B [of the Basis of Union] for elders as follows:

- Q: Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always so far as you are able to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?
- A: By the grace of God I do, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Resolution 6

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.51)

General Assembly resolves that:

- a) General Assembly should primarily be funded from the ministry and mission fund, rather than by synods or individuals;
- b) members of General Assembly be given fuller information on the costs of General Assembly, and a clearer invitation to consider making a donation, including the option of donating by Gift Aid;

- c) all papers be issued electronically as the primary means of dissemination, but those who wish may choose to receive paper copies at the expense of the Assembly budget;
- d) it prefers to meet in a venue either around tables or with significant breakout rooms if possible;
- e) from the close of General Assembly 2018, Moderators should be inducted at the close of the Assembly which begins their term of office and should therefore chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office.
- f) every effort be made to encourage a variety of voices to speak, by giving priority to those who have not spoken before.

Resolution 7

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly resolves to change its membership as follows:

- a) There shall be the same number of representatives from each synod
 - b) There shall be no additional representation from the Synod of Scotland (thereby rescinding a previous Assembly decision to grant six additional representatives to the Synod of Scotland)
 - c) Synod Moderators shall be included in the representation from the synods
- Details of how this would change the Structure of the United Reformed Church are set out in the body of the report.

Resolution 8

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly resolves to cease the current pattern of rotation of venue, previously informally agreed, and to meet regularly in the centre of the UK, as outlined in pages 61 to 62 of the *Book of Reports* 2018, with immediate effect.

Resolution 9

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly wishes its future pattern of meetings to be that set out in Option D.

Resolution 10

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

The number of synod representatives shall be 208, who shall be divided among the synods equally. Within each synod, at least one third of its representatives shall be either Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers, and at least one third shall be lay.

Resolution 11

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

The number of representatives of churches outside Britain and Ireland shall be five, with a further place for a representative of the Council for World Mission, and there shall be five representatives from partner churches within Britain and Ireland.

Resolutions

Resolution 12

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

The number of representatives of URC Youth, in addition to the twenty-six youth places available for appointment by synods, shall be two.

Resolution 13

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

The number of EM1 students shall be one, rather than one from each Resource Centre for Learning.

Resolution 14

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

The Convenor of the pastoral reference and welfare committee shall not be a member of Assembly.

Resolution 15

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

Those elected as Moderator of General Assembly at the 2018 General Assembly shall serve from 2020 to 2022, chairing the Assemblies of 2021 and 2022 in whatever manner they shall determine.

Resolution 16

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

After 2022 there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly at any one time, and Assembly resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church to reflect this change and make it clear.

Resolution 17

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly instructs the Mission Council to make detailed alterations to sections 1, 2, and 3 of the Rules of Procedure, upon the advice of the Clerk, to effect the decisions of principle that it has made.

Resolution 18

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly further extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to propose recommendations on the expectations of General Assembly on the activities to be undertaken by the Assembly Moderator(s).

Resolution 19

Task group on the future of General Assembly: (p.52)

General Assembly:

- a) further extends the remit of the task group on the future of General Assembly to consider changes to Mission Council in the light of decisions made by the General Assembly,
- b) instructs the task group to report to each meeting of Mission Council, and
- c) instructs Mission Council to make appropriate changes to its size, composition, and meeting pattern if these are ready to be made before the next meeting of General Assembly.

Resolution 20

Church Changes: Report to General Assembly (p.77)

General Assembly notes the closures, with praise to God for the worship and witness offered by these fellowships across the years

Resolution 21

Assembly arrangements committee: Report and resolution. (p.80)

General Assembly resolves to meet in Birmingham at the University of Aston from 3 July to 6 July 2020 or at such other time and place as may be duly determined.

Resolution 22

Children's and Youth committee: General Report (p.82)

General Assembly recommits the United Reformed Church to the Charter for Children and its implementation in this 21st century world.

Resolution 23

Equalities committee: Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity (p.105)

General Assembly extends the membership of the equalities committee to include a nominee of URC Youth.

Resolution 24

Equalities committee: Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity (p.105)

General Assembly welcomes the attention already given to diversity by the nominations committee and invites the equalities committee to seek ways of supporting the nominations committee in this aspect of its work.

Resolution 25

Faith and order committee: Report of ongoing work (p.111)

General Assembly recognises that some people who wish to continue as members of the United Reformed Church are unable to do so in the normal way, often because they live at a great distance from any local church of the URC, or their circumstances require a greater degree of mobility than enables them to be church members in the normal way. General Assembly requests each synod to consider whether they can identify one or more local churches which have a vocation to hold the membership of such people, who could be received onto the roll of that local church simply by resolution of the Church Meeting. General Assembly further requests that synods continue to treat such a local church fairly and justly in regard both to scoping and requested contributions to the ministry and mission fund.

Resolution 26

Finance committee: Annual accounts (p.121)

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2017.

Resolution 27

Ministries committee: Definition of an active Minister (p.133)

General Assembly adopts the definition of an active Minister contained on page 134 of the *Book of Reports*.

Resolution 28

Ministries committee: Discerning God's call to URC Ministers of Word and Sacraments (p.135)

General Assembly encourages a flexible approach to how ministerial calls are issued and concurred, noting the variety of existing practice and the provisions of sections 1(1)(b), 1(1)(c), 2(1)(vii), 2(4)(A)(iii) and 2(4)(A)(vii) of the Structure of the URC.

Resolution 29

Ministries committee: Non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments (p.137)

General Assembly authorises a model four non-stipendiary ministry which will provide for locally ordained ministers, taking account of how that fits with the other ministries of the church, including stipendiary ministry, non-stipendiary ministry as it currently is, local leadership (recognising that there is no denominational scheme as such) and the eldership, including the specific role of authorised elders, this model to be as outlined on pages 138 to 139 of the *Book of Reports*.

Resolution 30

Ministries committee: Non-stipendiary ministry of Word and Sacraments (p.137)

General Assembly instructs the ministries committee and education and learning committee to implement model four non-stipendiary ministry in consultation with the assessment board and the Resource Centres for Learning.

Resolution 31

Mission committee: Expressing commitment to global and intercultural ministries (p.159)

General Assembly:

- a) reaffirms its longstanding commitment to engage with global and intercultural themes (including justice, peace, partnerships, mutuality in giving and receiving, solidarity and discipleship) and its desire to make this engagement integral to the whole life of the United Reformed Church;
- b) encourages synods in their mission and ministry to recommit to give appropriate time for, and attention and intention to, the sharing and development of these themes;
- c) directs Mission Council to reflect and report to Assembly on how the Church's agenda and resources (spiritual, human and financial) are deployed to support its global and intercultural commitment.

Resolution 32

Nominations committee: General report (p.161)

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 163 to 178 of the *Book of Reports*, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.



Standing Orders of General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

1. The agenda of the Assembly

1.1 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.

1.2 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 paragraphs 3(1) & (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. At the same time the grouping of draft motions is published any matters already known to be urgent under Standing Order 2.3 shall also be published, with reasons given.

1.3 The motions in Group A shall be taken en bloc, following Standing Order 2.

1.4 The motions in Group B shall be determined by majority vote, following Standing Order 3.

1.5 The motions in Group C shall be considered by consensus decision making process, following Standing Order 4.

1.6 Standing Orders 5 to 15 shall apply at all times, regardless of the mode of decision-making in use.

1.7 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.

1.8 Motions arising from a report which have been duly seconded and submitted by individual members of Assembly under Standing Order 3.2 shall be taken at a point in the business determined by the Moderator on the advice of the convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee.

1.9 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.

1.10 The convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee may, during the meeting of the Assembly, propose that the order of business be changed.

2. En bloc business

2.1 The proposal from the Moderators of items of business to be taken en bloc should be notified to Assembly members in advance of their meeting.

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2.2 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.

2.3 When the single motion to approve en bloc business 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.

3. Majority voting

3.1 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or synod, under Standing Order 1.1, shall be **received for debate**, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 5.4 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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 only exception to this are motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given.

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

3.5 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 3.10.

3.6 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.

3.7 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.

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

- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. It shall be for the Moderator, on the advice of the Clerk, to rule when motions shall be considered as alternatives under the terms of this Standing Order.
- 3.10.1 When such draft alternative motions have been received by the General Secretary, the Moderators may ask the General Secretary to convene a meeting (physical or electronic) of the proposers, to ascertain if it may be possible to agree on a single draft motion to put before the Assembly, or to clarify the areas of disagreement.
- 3.10.2 If the Assembly has alternative motions before it, each proposer shall be given the opportunity to present their motion in an order decided by the Moderator.
- 3.10.3 After any amendments duly moved under Standing Orders 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 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.
- 3.10.4 Once a sole motion remains, further discussion is permissible and votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way and in accordance with Standing Order 7.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 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

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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 presented again at the next meeting of the General Assembly.

3.14 The motions described in Standing Orders 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13 above are exceptions to Standing Order 3.3, 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 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13 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.

3.15 Motions before the Assembly under Standing Order 3 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:

- 3.15.1 if the Assembly decides before the vote that a paper ballot be the method of voting, or
- 3.15.2 if the show of cards indicates a very close vote, and the Moderator decides, or a member of Assembly proposes and the Assembly agrees, that a paper ballot shall be the method of voting.

4 Consensus decision making¹

4.1 Those motions in Group C shall be determined using this Standing Order.

4.2 The first stage of the consensus decision making procedure is the **information session**. At the start of this session, if the Moderator 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 results in continuing disagreement it may be necessary to move to a majority decision under Standing Order 4.4.4. During the Information Session, Members of Assembly may ask questions only to seek clarification or further information.

4.3 Once the Moderator decides that the information session has ended, the Assembly moves into the **discussion session**, in which the substance of the matter may be discussed.

4.3.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Assembly, time for thinking during a break, etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage, and shall ensure that the full ranges of voices are given opportunity to contribute.

4.3.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. If a proposed change is, in the opinion of the Moderator upon the advice of the Clerk, a major change, then a proposer and seconder are required.

¹ More information on Consensus Decision Making, and its ethos, detailed methodology, and practice, can be found in the book *The Church Guide for Making Decisions Together* by Terence Corkin and Julia Kuhn Wallace, Abingdon Press (2 May 2017), ISBN 978-1501838071. These Standing Orders remain the definitive guide for United Reformed Church purposes.

4.4 When the Moderator senses that the Assembly may be ready to reach a decision, the Moderator shall state that Assembly is moving into the **decision session**, and shall check whether the Assembly is nearing consensus. If during the Decision Session substantially new material or proposals emerge, the Moderator may rule that the Assembly shall return to the Discussion Session.

4.4.1 If there is unanimous support for, or rejection of, the proposal it is declared passed or rejected by consensus.

4.4.2 If there is strong, but not unanimous, support, the Moderator shall ask if those who do not support the proposal as their first option are nonetheless prepared to accept the proposal. If so, the issue is declared resolved by consensus.

4.4.3 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, by asking if they are prepared to have the issue declared passed, recognising disagreement. Subject to Standing Order 9.3, a member may ask to have their dissent recorded in the minutes.

4.4.4 If there is continuing disagreement, the Assembly may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including but not limited to:

4.4.4.1 adjourning the discussion to another time or place, perhaps with more work before reconsideration;

4.4.4.2 asking a named person to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly;

4.4.4.3 referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;

4.4.4.4 deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;

4.4.4.5 declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;

4.4.4.6 if the issue has previously been notified as urgent, moving to majority decision;

4.4.4.7 in the event of urgency not previously notified, moving to majority decision; in that event, the Moderator shall give reasons, and test the mind of Assembly in forming that judgement.

4.5 The Assembly and Moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group, which shall be appointed at the beginning of each Assembly by the Assembly.

4.6 Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they can be helpful. Orange cards, shown at the request of the Moderator, indicate warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal. Blue cards, held at the request of the Moderator, indicate coolness about what has been heard or the need for greater clarity or disapproval of a proposal.

5. Presentation of business

5.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be printed and circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.

5.2 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.

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5.3 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 3.2 above.

5.4 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 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.

5.5 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.

5.6 It shall not be in order, whether in en bloc business, majority voting, or consensus decision-making, to move a motion or amendment which:

5.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or

5.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or

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

5.6.4 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

5.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under Standing Order 5.4.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 5.6.1, 5.6.2, 5.6.3, and 5.6.5) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 5.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

6. Timing of speeches and of other business

6.1 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.

6.2 The Assembly may meet in parallel sessions to consider the past work of Assembly committees for questions and comments. Any draft motions arising therefrom must be dealt with in a plenary session of the Assembly.

6.3 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 10 minutes, (e.g. a committee with three motions may not exceed 30 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.

6.4 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 a different specified number of minutes.

6.5 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.

6.6 Secretaries of committees and members of staff who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator.

6.7 In each debate under Standing Order 3, whether on a motion or on an amendment, and in each Decision Session in debates under Standing Order 4, no one shall address the Assembly more than once without the permission of the Moderator, 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.

6.8 The foregoing Standing Order (6.7) 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.

6.9 An invited speaker, whether speaking to a draft motion or not, may address the Assembly for such period of time as may be agreed by the Assembly arrangements committee.

7. Voting

7.1 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(1) and (2) of the Structure.

7.2 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 Assembly arrangements committee shall appoint tellers for each Assembly.

7.3 Any electronic voting system approved by the Assembly arrangements committee shall be deemed to meet the requirements of these Standing Orders.

8. Questions

8.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the convenor 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.

8.2 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.

8.3 Questions asked under Standing Orders 8.1 and 8.2 shall be put and answered without discussion.

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9. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

9.1 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.

9.2 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.

9.3 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.

9.4 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

10.1 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

11.1 Only documents authorised by the General Secretary in consultation with the convenor of the Assembly arrangements committee may be distributed within the building in which the Assembly is meeting.

12. Closed session

12.1 A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Assembly, the Legal Adviser, and any technical or venue staff required to enable Assembly to meet safely may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held *in retentis* by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.

12.2 A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Assembly, requiring a simple majority. 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 pause while non-members leave the room.

12.3 If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Assembly Officers, consulting the Legal Adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.

12.4 Where possible a closed session will begin after a break, in which event everyone must leave the hall. Once the hall is empty, only those entitled to be present shall be admitted. Members of Assembly may leave the hall during a closed session, but if they do so they may not be readmitted.

13. Use of Electronic devices and communications during the course of debate

13.1 Although many meetings take place in wi-fi enabled rooms, and many attending will have access to systems of electronic communication and to social media sites during business sessions, their primary responsibility is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business in respect of business that the Assembly has completed. All electronic devices must be silent when a meeting is in session.

13.2 Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

14. Record of the Assembly

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

14.2 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.

14.3 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.

14.4 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.

15. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

15.1 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.

15.2 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.

*Editor of the document: The Clerk of the General Assembly
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Flow Chart to guide the use of Standing Order 4 – Consensus Decision Making

NB – this flowchart is only for exploration, and is not definitive. The words always take precedence

