

Book of Reports 2020



The
United
Reformed
Church





© The United Reformed Church, 2020

ISBN: 978-0-85346-345-0

Published by

The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT

All rights reserved. This material may be used freely within the churches. No part of this publication may be reproduced outside the Church in any form or by any means – graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping or information storage and retrieval systems – without the prior permission in writing of the publishers.

The publishers make no representation, express or implied, with regard to the accuracy of the information contained in this book and cannot accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may take place.

Environmental credentials

All paper used in the production of the Book of Reports are sourced from responsibly managed and sustained forests, certified in accordance with the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council).

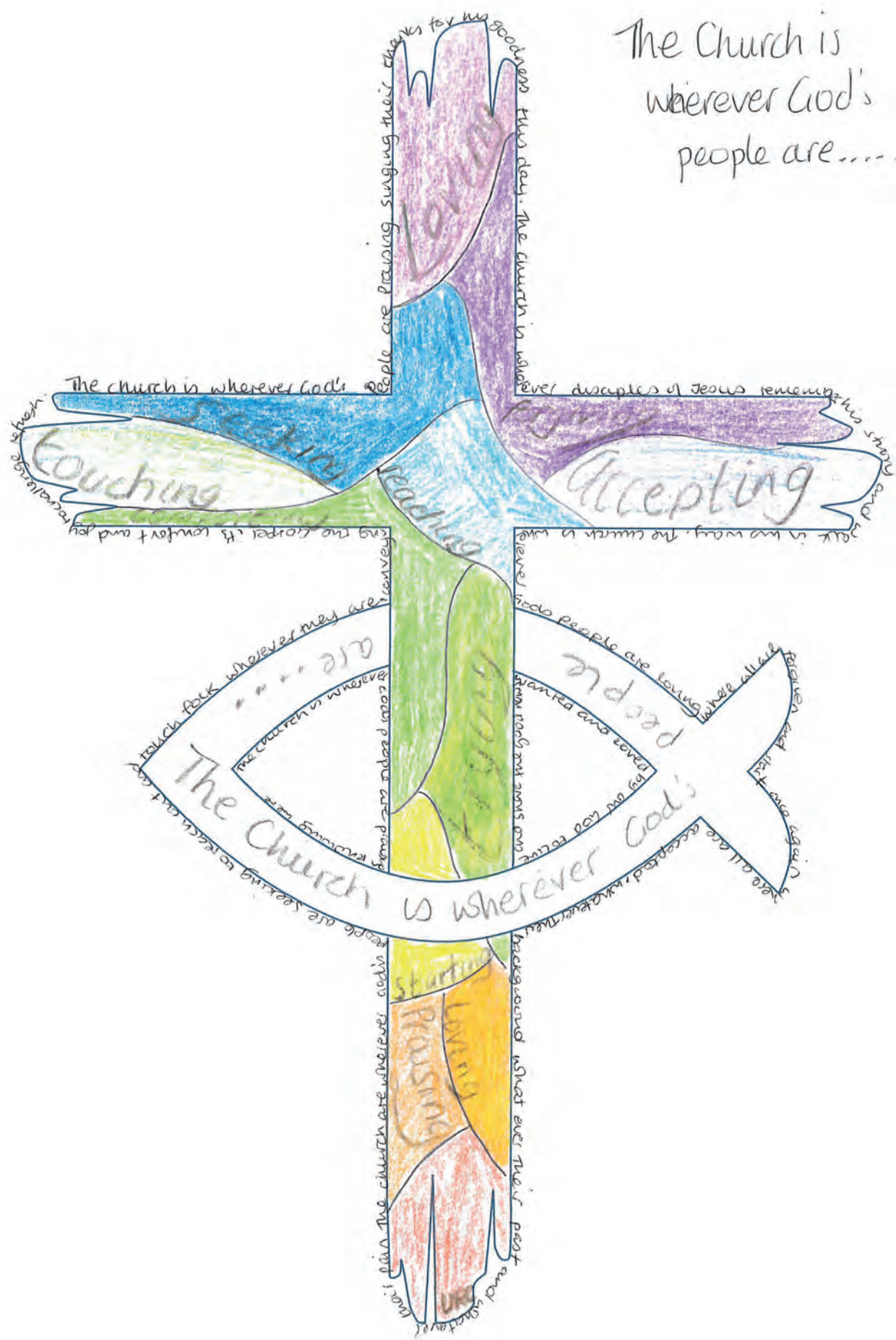
Produced by the Communications Team, on behalf of the Assembly Arrangements Committee
The United Reformed Church, Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT

If you require this text in another format please contact the graphics office on 020 7916 8628 or email graphics@urc.org.uk. Please allow two weeks.

Contents

Introduction	3
Mission Council	4
Assembly 2018 Resolution 5: New Ordination Promises for Elders	12
Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure – MIND Appendix A	15
MIND Appendix C	40
Church changes	44
Synod Moderators' report	48
Committee papers index	55
Assembly Arrangements	56
Children's and Youth Work	58
Communications	65
Education and Learning	77
Way forward	91
Students by Synod	99
Students in Training statistics	101
Equalities	102
Faith and Order	105
Finance	109
URC Pension Schemes	114
Ministries	142
Gift Policy	156
Schedule E	159
Pastoral Supervision	162
Mission	168
Environmental Task Group	188
Walking the Way Steering Group	195
Nominations	203
Pastoral reference and welfare	224
Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG)	227
Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025	231
Annual Safeguarding Report 2019	246
Wessex Synod resolution	255
Information papers index	259
URC History Society	260
URC Spirituality	263
URC Music Network	264
Women's World Day of Prayer, England, Wales and Northern Ireland	266
Resolutions index	269
Standing Orders	277
Online papers: bit.ly/GA-Papers	
MIND Appendix B	
Appendices to paper on Walking the Way	
Appendix A – Evaluation Overview	
Appendix B – Annual Church Returns 2018 Sample Data	
Appendix C – Annual Church Returns 2019 Sample Data	
Appendix D – Qualitative Data	
Appendix E – Finance	

The Church is
wherever God's
people are.....





July 2020

To members of General Assembly

Dear Friends,

This letter should have said, 'Welcome to Birmingham, and to the splendid facilities of Aston University.' Sadly such a letter is not possible. The restrictions and safety concerns of the Covid emergency prevent us meeting physically. Eating together, greeting each other face to face, listening at length to friends' concerns, gaining the insight that comes with meeting for a few days – none of this can be part of our Assembly, in the way we had intended.

However, this Book of Reports tells of all the important work that has been done in the name of our Church over the last two years. Many of us are keen to learn about this. Committees want to account to the Church for what they have done. The Church needs a good record of its actions and commitments. So read and rejoice, in the good work of our staff and committees. If you have questions or comments, feel free to correspond with the people whose names are at the head of each report.

There will be a virtual meeting of Mission Council for a few hours on Friday 10 July. This will allow a selection of Assembly business to be taken forward by a reasonably wide and representative forum of the Church. It may also teach us something about the potential and limitations of remote meeting. We shall aim to make this meeting interactive, with an opportunity for everyone on Mission Council to feel fully involved.

There will also be a short online meeting of General Assembly on Saturday 11 July. Its main content will be worship, as we induct the new Assembly Moderators and General Secretary into office. This will not be very interactive. About a dozen people will be visible on screen, and a great many more will be able to tune in, as it were from the pew. I hope that many of you will want to join us for this.

All of the above is both short of what we originally wanted, and a positive outcome of the efforts of many of the Church's staff and volunteers. I thank all of them, and look forward to seeing many of you on screen in July.

Finally, thank you for the privilege of serving as your General Secretary for six years. I have met many wonderful people around our Church, and have seen a great deal of inspiring, imaginative and effective work. Thank you for your part in all of this. I commend confidently to you our new General Secretary, John Bradbury. John is gifted, thoughtful and energetic. You will surely offer him the same warm welcome and strong support you have given me.

Yours sincerely,

Mission Council

Report on the work of Mission Council, 2018-20

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	General Secretary: john.proctor@urc.org.uk
Action required	Partly for information; partly for decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 1 General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that: There shall be one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister (of word and sacraments or CRCW) or an elder. Each Synod may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected. Resolution 2 General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that: The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive. Other resolutions come in appendices.

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. Most of those that require Assembly decision appear in the various appendices.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council papers from November 2018, May and November 2019 and March 2020, available on the URC website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The committees and synods of the Church.

Summary of Impact

Financial	The first resolution above would involve a modest saving on the costs of Assembly and on Moderatorial expenses.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The Methodist Church and Church of England are represented on Mission Council, and thus contribute helpfully to its work.

Introduction

1. Mission Council oversees, prepares and sifts 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 carries delegated power to deal on Assembly's behalf with matters that require prompt attention.
2. 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 spring, for 48 hours each time. It was thus due to meet four times since the last meeting of Assembly. However, the March 2020 meeting was cancelled, when the Covid-19 situation became critical.
4. Preparatory papers for these four meetings of Mission Council are available on the URC website. For two meetings there are confirmed minutes. For the third there are draft minutes, which Mission Council has not yet confirmed.
5. When the meeting in March 2020 was cancelled, members of Mission Council were consulted by email to suggest that a number of decisions could be taken by the Officers of Assembly. A formal record of the actions then taken by the Officers on Mission Council's behalf is available on the website.

General Assembly and Mission Council

6. Mission Council addressed several matters that were either considered at a previous Assembly or that relate directly to the business of this 2020 Assembly, as follows.
7. The 2018 Assembly received a lengthy commissioned report from its Task Group on General Assembly and took various decisions about arrangements for Assembly in the period 2020 to 2030. Some of these decisions required changes to the Structure of the URC and they were therefore referred to Synods, none of which objected. Mission Council then confirmed these changes in May 2019 as decisions of the Church. These changes were as follows:
 - 7.1 Each Synod will have the same number of representatives to Assembly (and for the moment this figure will be 16).
 - 7.2 A Synod may include its Moderator in its overall representation, if it wishes to. There will not be additional places designated for Synod Moderators.
 - 7.3 Among a Synod's representation, no more than two thirds (no more than 10 out of 16) are to be elders or lay, and no more than two thirds are to be ministers of word and sacraments or CRCWs.
 - 7.4 The Convenor of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee is no longer identified as a member of Assembly.

8. Mission Council in May 2019 also agreed two further changes that would affect the Structure of the URC. These have since been referred to Synods, none of which objected. They will require final approval at General Assembly if they are to become decisions of the Church. The following resolutions are therefore brought:

**8.1 General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that:
There shall be one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister (of word and sacraments or CRCW) or an elder. Each Synod may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected.**

**8.2 General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that:
The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.**

The main reasons for these two proposals are listed in the May 2019 Mission Council reports, Paper N1, sections 1.5 and 2.12-13 respectively, on pp72-76.

9. In November 2019 Mission Council reviewed its own membership, last fixed at the 2014 Assembly. Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council decided that its membership shall be, from Assembly 2020 forward:

1. Moderator(s) of Assembly
2. Moderator(s)-elect of Assembly
3. Immediate past Moderator(s)
4. General Secretary
5. Deputy General Secretaries
6. Clerk and Assistant Clerk
7. Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer
8. Convenors of all Assembly standing committees, except the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee
9. Four further representatives of each Synod, normally from among that Synod's representatives to the immediately preceding General Assembly.
10. Three representatives of URC Youth
11. Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust.

With the exception of those in categories 5 (the Deputy General Secretaries) and 10 (youth representatives), all the above shall be members of the United Reformed Church.

The Legal Adviser and the Convenor of the Law and Polity Advisory Group shall be in attendance with the right to speak at all times, but not to use consensus cards or to vote.

The three Deputy General Secretaries, who are members of Mission Council, are expected to attend, and they may direct other staff members to attend, with the right to speak (except during the decision stage of the consensus process) but not to use consensus cards or to vote, when the business so requires. These other staff members should therefore only expect to be at Mission Council where this has been negotiated and agreed in advance.

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

Also present shall be the Moderators'/Moderator's Chaplain(s), the Secretary of the Nominations Committee, and the Minute Secretary. These may participate in group sessions, and may speak during plenary sessions with the consent of the Moderator.

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

All references to the Mission Council shall be taken as referring to the Assembly Executive or another successor body unless and until the General Assembly decides otherwise.

10. As support for the work of Assembly and Mission Council, Mission Council determined that the work of the Mission Council Advisory Group and that of the Assembly Arrangements Committee would be merged from July 2020 in a Business Committee, whose Convenor will replace the Convenor of Assembly Arrangements as an Officer of General Assembly. The proposed make-up of the Business Committee is detailed in the Nominations report.
11. Pursuant to Resolution 7 of the 2016 Assembly, on the marriage of same sex couples in Scotland, England and Wales, Mission Council agreed a response to new marriage law in Jersey. Our Church has now responded to legislation on this matter in all the jurisdictions where we serve.
12. Resolution 5 of the 2018 Assembly agreed an addition to the promises made by our elders at ordination and induction. This was referred to synods and to congregations, and an appendix to this report returns it to Assembly for formal consideration and potentially for final approval.

Projects and tasks

13. 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 reports, so they need just a mention here rather than lengthy exposition. They all, however, claimed time and care in Mission Council, which was concerned to develop them as wisely and effectively as possible.
14. Mission Council received regular reports on *Walking the Way*, with its focus on missional discipleship. An account of this work, its vision and its progress, is appended to the report of the Mission Committee – although it bridges, in both intent and organisation, the work of Mission and of Discipleship.
15. A major review of our work among children and young people (Paper B2, November 2018) led on to a five-year strategy, which is already well under way.
16. The Safeguarding Advisory Group brought forward in November 2018 a Learning Report, following the Past Case Review that had begun in 2015. This led on to a five-year Safeguarding Strategic Plan (November 2019) and the publication of an updated safeguarding manual for the Church, *Good Practice 5*, in January 2020. A public apology to survivors of abuse in our Church was issued by the General Secretary and Head of Communications in November 2018, as follows:

The United Reformed Church offers a heartfelt apology to survivors of abuse and to their families, supporters and communities.

We acknowledge the past failures of the United Reformed Church and the courage of survivors, some of whom disclosed exceptionally difficult, life-changing experiences of abuse as part of the past case review. Any harm and abuse inflicted by people we trusted is, and will remain, a deep source of grief and shame to the Church.

The Church calls on anyone who serves our congregations, synods, institutions and offices to continue taking significant steps to support and protect children, young people and adults from suffering and experiencing any form of abuse.

17. The Finance Committee consulted Mission Council about its oversight and support of the Church's pension funds and commitments amid changing regulatory expectations.
18. MIND, the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group, has given much care and effort to a thorough revision of our Ministerial Disciplinary Policy, and has consulted Mission Council on the principles and emerging content of the new draft. A lengthy set of proposals comes as an appendix to this paper. These would have been considered in full by Mission Council in March 2020, had that meeting gone ahead. In the event Mission Council has not discussed the detail of the proposals. However, its members do support the bringing of this material to Assembly by the Clerk and General Secretary.
19. The Mission Committee presented to Mission Council sobering and weighty reflections arising from a Council for World Mission project on the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade in various parts of the world. Mission Council supported continuing work on this matter, in order that the Church as a whole may be able to consider necessary steps towards new hope and healing.
20. The Ministries Committee led a lengthy discussion at Mission Council about proposals for pastoral supervision for the Church's ministers.

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. Some of the detail is as follows.
22. The Finance Committee consulted Mission Council about the Church's investment policies, and in May 2019 Mission Council asked those who steward our central funds to disinvest from companies where more than 10% of the turnover depends on fossil fuels. Our investment managers have made this change.
23. In similar vein, the Mission Committee brought new recommendations about the Church's environmental policy, which now aspires to reduce carbon emissions to net zero well before 2050, and calls on Government to do the same.
24. Several measures were approved that shape the work of our ministers:
 - 24.1 The introduction of a new pattern (Model 4) of non-stipendiary ministry of word and sacraments, with a strong local focus (H2, November 2018).

- 24.2 A decision that our ministers should not, unless certain factors apply, be concurrently on the ministerial roll of another church, in Britain or elsewhere (H2, November 2019).
- 24.3 A revised version of the 'Marks of Ministry' that we seek in our ministers of word and sacraments. This is now printed at the start of Section K in our Manual.
- 24.4 A related matter – Mission Council recalled the Guidelines for the Conduct of Lay Preachers that the Church had approved in 2012, and these are restated in Paper H1, May 2019.
25. The Law and Polity Advisory Group was directed to review the intersecting responsibilities of Synods and their Trust Companies in dealing with property matters according to the Schedules to the URC Acts of Parliament. The Church wishes to learn from the Synods about good practice they have developed and about problems they have encountered. This work of review is well under way.
26. Under the convenorship of Alan Yates, with staffing leadership by Jane Baird and Sandi Hallam-Jones, new clarity and consistency has been brought to the management of risk in our Church. New policy documents have been prepared and new practice is already being implemented.
27. Mission Council was due to discuss in March 2020 a five-year financial plan for *Reform* magazine. In the event, the Officers of Assembly approved a one-year arrangement for 2021, to allow longer-term plans to be properly considered when the councils of the Church are able to meet again.
28. The URC contributed substantially to the Greenbelt Christian arts and music festival from 2016 to 2018. Mission Council heard reports on this work and agreed that we would contribute as a Greenbelt Associate to the festivals of 2019 to 2021 (although the 2020 festival has since been cancelled).
29. There was a conference in November 2019 between representatives of the URC and the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz, to mark the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Mission Council welcomed and supported a declaration from the conference of our two Churches' joint commitment to work to overcome new 'walls' of division and mistrust, and agreed to commend this to a number of ecumenical partners.
30. Terms of Reference were drawn up or revised for several committees and working groups that manage and co-ordinate various aspects of our Church's life.
- 30.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Sub-Committee – bringing together two specialist sub-committees of the Ministries Comm (Paper H1, Nov 2019)

30.2 Church House Management Group (Z1, November 2018)

30.3 Human Resources Advisory Group (O1, November 2018)

30.4 Pensions Committee (formerly Pensions Exec) (G2, March 2020)

30.5 Pilots Sub-Comm, of the Children's & Youth Work Comm (B1, Nov 2019)

- 30.6 Safeguarding Advisory Group (R1, March 2020)
- 30.7 Synods' Safeguarding Practice Group (R2, March 2020)
- 30.8 Walking the Way Steering Group (I2, November 2018)
- 30.9 Worship Reference Group (M1, November 2019)

People and posts

31. A number of changes in Assembly appointed staff at Church House were agreed or noted by Mission Council, in every case after due process.
32. At Church House, John Bradbury was appointed as our next General Secretary, to start in June 2020 and work for three months alongside John Proctor, who retires in August. This appointment is for an initial term of seven years, with the possibility of a further term or terms of up to seven years each.
33. Richard Church retires as Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) in July 2020, and the vacancy has not at present been filled.
34. Andy Jackson became Head of Communications in November 2018, taking up work previously done by Gill Nichol.
35. Nicola Furley-Smith arrived as Secretary for Ministries when Craig Bowman returned to local ministry in November 2019. Two further appointments post-date the preparation of papers for the March 2020 meeting of Mission Council: Michael Jagessar, our Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, moved on in February 2020 to work for CWM's European Region, and was succeeded in April by Karen Campbell; Fiona Thomas will step down as Secretary for Education and Learning in August 2020, to be succeeded in September by Jenny Mills.
36. Those ministerial appointments at Church House mentioned in the paragraph above have an initial term of not more than seven years, with the possibility of a further term or terms of not more than five years each.
37. Several Synod Moderators moved on in these years, and names to succeed them were duly agreed. Andrew Mills left North Western Synod in January 2019 for local pastoral ministry, and Brian Jolly began as Moderator in January 2020, to serve for five years. In the East Midlands Peter Meek retired in December 2019, with Geoffrey Clarke succeeding him in May 2020 for an initial seven-year tenure.

In Yorkshire Kevin Watson retires in June 2020, and Jamie Kissack will take over in July, also for seven years. Names are being sought for Southern Synod, after Nicola Furley-Smith's move to Church House, and for Thames North, where Andrew Prasad will retire in February 2021.
38. A further five-year period of Moderatorial tenure was agreed for Ruth Whitehead in South Western Synod, extending her ministry there to June 2025.
39. At Westminster College, Cambridge, Jonathan Soyars arrived to teach New Testament in summer 2019, in the post that Tan Yak-Hwee had left a year earlier.

Neil Thorogood will return to pastoral ministry in the summer of 2020, and Samantha White will then move into the post of Principal.

40. A new voluntary post was created – Assistant Clerk of General Assembly – to support the Clerk, and to create a small pool of people who understand more of the role before Michael Hopkins completes his tenure in 2024. Sarah Moore has taken up this post for three years from January 2020.
41. Various nominations to committee and representative roles were agreed by Mission Council on behalf of Assembly, and are reported by the Nominations Committee in this Book of Reports.

Properties

42. The General Assembly in 2018 heard of the extensive refurbishment in 2017 of our central office building in London. There was at that stage one major piece of builders' snagging to sort out – damp in the lower ground floor. After careful work in the winter of 2018-19, we retook possession of the lower ground floor at Easter 2019 and it has served us very well indeed.
43. The General Assembly in 2018 noted that the URC Trust was in close discussion with a potential purchaser of our Windermere building, which had closed a year earlier. A sale was concluded shortly after that Assembly, releasing more than £800k, to be made available by the Education and Learning Committee as a Discipleship Development Fund. Plans for the deployment of the Fund are now being put in hand, so that the Centre's former role as a place of learning and welcome for all the Church's people may be handed on in new opportunities.

Leadership, worship and admin

44. Throughout these two years Mission Council has been wisely and carefully led by the Moderators of General Assembly, Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, supported pastorally and in worship by their chaplains, David Coaker and Elaine Colechin. All four have contributed consistently and very creditably to the fellowship and work of the Council.
45. Mission Council was led in Bible study at its three meetings by Susan Durber, Neil Thorogood and Alison Gray, and members valued their input very much indeed.
46. Administration for our meetings has been handled by Helen Munt, who served as PA to the General Secretary until April 2020. Her care, thoroughness and warmth have been an immense support to everyone on Mission Council.
47. Finally, Mission Council was delighted to extend congratulations to David Cornick, who served as our General Secretary from 2001 to 2008 and then as General Secretary of Churches Together in England until his retirement in 2018. David was awarded the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 2019 for his 'outstanding sustained contribution to the development of ecumenical life and witness in England'.

Mission Council: appendix

Assembly 2018 Resolution 5: report on responses

Responses to General Assembly 2018 Resolution 5 –
New Ordination Promises for Elders

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 3 General Assembly gives final approval to its resolution 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.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To inform Assembly of the responses from Synods and Local Church Meetings to the consultation on the proposed new ordination promise for Elders, in order that Assembly may consider giving final approval to this addition.
Main points	The response was overwhelmingly positive.
Previous documents	General Assembly 2018 Resolution 5.
Consultation has taken place with...	Local Churches and Synods.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The proposed changes will raise the profile of our commitment to the unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church through making this integral to the ministry of Elders.

1. From the approximately 1350 local congregations of the United Reformed Church, 187 churches responded to the consultation on the proposed change to the ordination promises for Elders accepted by the General Assembly in 2018. Many more congregations may well have considered this, but as not responding to the consultation is in effect to agree with the proposed change, many may not have felt the need to write formally to the General Secretary to express this.
2. Of the 187 Church Meetings to respond formally, only 32 opposed the change or expressed reservations. Of these, about three-quarters of the reservations expressed were about the promise to 'cherish love towards all other churches'. This promise mirrors one that Ministers make at ordination. The concern is whether 'all other churches' is too ill defined, and might include groups who call themselves churches which we might not consider such.
3. The General Secretary and the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations have prepared a paper which sets out the position of the United Reformed Church regarding how we understand the statement and our relationships with other churches. This is appended to this report and we believe allays the fears expressed by the few churches expressing reservations.
4. A tiny number of churches objected on what might be termed 'congregationalist' grounds, that Elders only serve the local church. But from the inception of the URC, it has been the constitutional practice that Elders serve the wider councils of the Church, and through the Synod all congregations are represented in the wider councils of the Church. Whilst not every Elder will personally serve in this way, this is nonetheless an expression of how the URC lives together, and the way we form the family of the Church. We would invite congregations who responded in that way to understand the promise in the light of these foundational commitments we made to one another at the formation of the denomination.
5. The proposed changes have been viewed positively by the overwhelming majority of churches who responded. None of the Synods and only a tiny number of Church Meetings objected, and we hope their objection is met in the statement below. A constitutional change only falls if more than one third of Synods or Local Churches object. This piece of business is therefore returned to the Assembly, where its final approval and adoption may be considered.

Appendix: Response from the General Secretary and Secretary for Ecumenical Relations to questions raised in the consultation:

A response to concerns about the new form of elders' promises

1. This response specifically considers the proposal that the commitment made by elders should include 'love towards all other churches'.
2. A first point to note is that the words have been in the ordination and induction promises for URC ministers for several decades, and therefore are not new.

Elders already commit to share with the minister in the oversight and leadership of the local church. Part of that oversight and leadership is the way we relate to other churches.

3. What do we mean by 'all other churches'? The simple answer is 'all those groups that we would recognise as churches'. If we recognise another group as really being a church, then part of our commitment and witness as URC is that we do all we can to love them and build bridges with them. If we don't recognise another group as really being a church, we wouldn't have the same commitment to them.
4. So, the churches with which we are linked in national and international fellowships of churches, such as Churches Together in England, are our main partners. We ought to cherish love towards them, even though not all of them are from our tradition and would not do everything in a way we would ourselves.
5. There are some groups which do not belong to Churches Together or anything like that, but we would still recognise as genuine churches – churches who understand God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who expect to discover and discern God's word in the Bible, who love Jesus and seek to live by his commands. It would be hoped that URC ministers and elders could cherish love towards these fellowships too.
6. Then there are other groups that would not fit well into a fellowship like Churches Together in England, and probably would not want to belong, like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. These groups surely have some good people among them, but they would answer some big questions, like, 'Who is Jesus?' or 'How do we know God?' in ways that don't really reflect the faith that has carried the Church through 2000 years. In general, we would not expect to find ways of working with them, and they probably would not want to work with us anyway.
7. As we think about this broader view of church, and think about groups that might not fall under that category, it is also helpful to look at the full wording of the promise. In particular, notice how the promise refers to *the one holy, catholic and apostolic church*.

Q: *Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its wellbeing, 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?*

8. Those groups which would profess a very different faith to our own may not see themselves as being part of a larger Christian family – *the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church* – and so would not for us fall under what we would define as church. The promise is specifically referring to churches which could feel part of *the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church*.
9. Finally, when we respond to the question, we do so *by the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit*. We are therefore not relying on our own discernment, gifts and strength but on those of the trinitarian God.

John Proctor and Philip Brooks – November 2018

Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure

The Clerk and General Secretary, for MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group)

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Secretary of MIND: The Revd Chris Copley chrismvivan@gmail.com
Action required	<p>Decision by General Assembly in July 2020</p> <p>Synods to consider Basis & Structure changes, and elect to Standing Panels for Discipline, in Autumn 2020</p> <p>Names to be proposed by Nominations Committee to Assembly Executive in November 2020</p> <p>MIND to offer training between November 2020 and July 2021, and to prepare Guidance Notes before the March 2021 meeting of the Assembly Executive</p> <p>Basis & Structure changes to be considered for ratification by General Assembly in July 2021, and redrawn Process to come into effect at the close of that Assembly.</p>
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 4 General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC:</p> <p>Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church</p> <p>Schedule E, Paragraph 4 – delete the word ‘ministerial’ before ‘rights of membership’.</p> <p>The Structure of the United Reformed Church</p> <p>Paragraph 1(4) – Add heading ‘Definitions’ and reword:</p> <p>1.(4) Unless otherwise expressly stated or clearly excluded by the context,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the expressions ‘Minister’, ‘Ministers’, ‘ministry’ and ‘Ministerial’ when used in the Structure shall refer to the ministry of Word and Sacrament; (b) the expression ‘the Disciplinary Process’ shall refer to the Process established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxi), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision;

	<p>(c) the expression ‘the Incapacity Procedure’ shall refer to the Procedure established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxiii), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision.</p> <p>Paragraph 2(1) – in function (ix), insert (subject to paragraph 2(7)(ii)) before ‘to suspend or remove names’.</p> <p>Paragraph 2(4) – add to the duties of Moderators of Synods:</p> <p>‘fulfil the responsibilities ascribed to the Moderator of Synod under the Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure’.</p> <p>In the Functions of Synod, delete the initial ‘A’ and the words in brackets.</p> <p>Function (xvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <p>‘To discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide’.</p> <p>Function (xviii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <p>‘To discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide’.</p> <p>Function (xxi) after ‘Disciplinary Process’ delete ‘contained in Section O’.</p> <p>Paragraph 2.(5) – In sub-paragraph (A), after ‘the following functions’, delete the words in brackets.</p> <p>In the Functions of Ecumenical Area Meetings, Function (viii), delete ‘contained in Section O’ and the cross-reference in brackets.</p> <p>Functions (xxi) to (xxvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(xxi) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Process for dealing with cases of Discipline involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;(xxii) to discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through
--	--

	<p>other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide;</p> <p>(xxiii) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Procedure for dealing with cases of Incapacity involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;</p> <p>(xxiv) to discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide.</p> <p>Renumber the last two functions (xxv) and (xxvi).</p> <p>Insert new paragraph 2(7) as follows:</p> <p>Restriction on exercise of conciliar functions</p> <p>2(7)</p> <p>(i) As soon as any Minister or Church-Related Community Worker becomes the subject of a case under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure, no council of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that person in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the conduct of that case, save as provided for by the Process or Procedure itself.</p> <p>(ii) The function of the Church Meeting to maintain standards of membership shall not be exercised in a disciplinary context in respect of any member of the local church who is at that time a Minister or Church-Related Community Worker; nor shall any such member be removed from the Roll of Members or the membership of that person be suspended by the Church Meeting for disciplinary reasons.</p> <p>(iii) The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding, and once so initiated that case shall be resolved only by the steps for which that Process or Procedure provides.</p> <p>Paragraph 5 – delete existing opening text and replace with the following:</p> <p>5. The procedure for dealing with references and appeals not concerned with the Incapacity Procedure or the Disciplinary Process is as follows:</p> <p>Paragraph 5.4 – delete final sentence and replace with the following:</p>
--	--

No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review or appeal against decisions reached under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure.

Delete paragraphs 6 and 7 in their entirety.

Resolution 5

General Assembly adopts the ‘Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers’ (‘Disciplinary Process’) accompanying this Resolution in place of the existing Process.

Resolution 6

General Assembly makes the amendments accompanying this Resolution to the ‘Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers and church related community workers’ (‘Incapacity Procedure’).

Resolution 7

The provisions of the new Disciplinary Process concerning appointments to the Assembly and Synod Standing Panels for Discipline, the Disciplinary Investigation and Commission Panels, and the posts of Assembly Representative for Discipline and Secretary to Assembly Commissions are to come into force at the close of this session of the General Assembly. The Assembly instructs Synods to make their appointments to Standing Panels at the earliest opportunity, and instructs Nominations Committee to bring nominations for Assembly appointees under the new Process to the Assembly Executive in November 2020, so that all those appointed can receive initial training in the new procedures before the remainder of the Process comes into force. The new Process is to come fully into force at the close of the meeting of Assembly in 2021 and govern cases coming to the notice of Moderators of Synods or the Assembly Representative for Discipline on or after that date, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in Resolution 4 have by then been ratified. Cases pending under the current Process at that date are to be dealt with as the transitional provisions of the new Process provide. The amendments to the Incapacity Procedure are to take effect at the close of the meeting of Assembly in 2021, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in Resolution 4 have by then been ratified.

Resolution 8

The Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group to the Assembly Executive (MIND) is instructed to make arrangements to offer the training mentioned in

	Resolution 7, and also to prepare Notes for Guidance to assist those engaged or concerned in the new Process, the first edition of such Notes to be published online before the Assembly Executive's meeting in March 2021.
--	--

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Redrawing of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process
Main points	New definition of the basis for discipline, investigation by a team drawn from a denomination-wide panel. <i>Prima facie</i> case to be shown to a judicial Standing Panel representative of the Synod, option of a negotiated caution in less serious cases, reduction in size of Assembly and Appeal Commissions, new interface between the Process and the Incapacity Procedure
Previous relevant documents	Paper T1 for Mission Council November 2018, Paper T1 for Mission Council March 2019, Papers T1-T4 prepared for Mission Council March 2020
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Advisory Group; Legal Adviser; Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure. Also external assistance through Scrutiny Groups, as explained in text below.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No net increase of cost anticipated in operating the Process, though costs of Mandated Groups now borne at Synod level will be replaced by costs of denominational Investigation Teams. Provision is made for certain expenses of parties to a case to be borne from denominational funds if approved by the responsible Commission.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Please refer to Appendix B to the draft Process (Ministers under other denominational jurisdictions)

Ministerial Disciplinary Process

1. In May 2019 Mission Council approved the preparation of a new Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers. It directed MIND (the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group) to proceed with redrafting and to report in March 2020.
2. MIND had already identified certain principles to underlie the redrafting, as proposed to Mission Council in November 2018. The first version of the Framework to form the backbone of the new Process had also been prepared. That version was included amongst the papers for Mission Council in May 2019: members were guided through it and had the opportunity to ask questions. It was indicated that the Framework would be complemented by Appendices, ranking equally with it and giving detail on specific aspects of the Process, whilst the Framework itself would present an overview of the main principles and stages.

3. During the summer of 2019 the draft Framework and all Appendices then drafted were divided among three Scrutiny Groups. Each Scrutiny Group comprised members of MIND and individuals with relevant experience from outside MIND. Mission Council approved this way of working last May, and agreed some of its own members might volunteer to join each Scrutiny Group. MIND is extremely grateful to members of Mission Council and others who gave up their time to support MIND's work in this way.
4. After the Scrutiny Groups had completed their work, the entire package of documents came back to a plenary meeting of MIND in September 2019. MIND then sought a meeting between representatives of itself and of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, to discuss overlapping concerns: this took place at the end of October 2019. Finally, there was a meeting at the end of November 2019 between the drafter of the new Process and the Church's Legal Adviser. The draft documents were amended further as a result of each meeting, and returned again to MIND in plenary session in January 2020, at which point they were commended to Mission Council for adoption. Since Mission Council was unable to meet in March 2020, the papers were circulated to its members at the same time as consultation continued: another meeting with representatives of Ministries Committee and of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, consideration of the material at a meeting of Synod Moderators, circulation of the Incapacity proposals among members of the Incapacity Procedure's Standing Panel and a final discussion with the Legal Adviser. The changes suggested as a result of the first two discussions noted above were also circulated to Mission Council members as an update paper (T4). The new Incapacity Procedure changes were made too late for that, and appear here for the first time.
5. The final version of our proposals accompanies this report. The changes formerly in paper T4 and those to the Incapacity Procedure have now been merged into the main papers. The Appendices are numbered from A to Z, save that there is no Appendix I, while Appendix Z (transitional provisions for cases pending under the current Process when the new Process comes into force) has not yet been completed.
6. No attempt is made here to summarise the content of the new Process Framework and Appendices. It is hoped their effect will be clear from a careful reading, although they contain a substantial volume of material. Those members of Assembly who were at Mission Council in May 2019 will already be familiar with the main principles and stages, but MIND representatives will be glad to offer further explanation as desired at the meeting of Assembly.

Ministerial Incapacity Procedure

7. The current Disciplinary Process provides for ministers facing disciplinary proceedings to be referred into the Incapacity Procedure instead, or *vice versa*, if the situation appears to justify this. The new Process therefore also needed to make some corresponding provision; but in the course of drafting this, it became clear some changes of substance might be called for, rather than merely carrying over the existing rules. MIND's current proposals are contained in Appendix W to the draft Process, and in a set of proposed changes to the rules of the Incapacity Procedure itself.

8. To give a brief summary of the main changes currently proposed as regards the interface:
- 8.1 A case may be transferred from the Disciplinary Process (DP) to the Incapacity Procedure (IP) if the disciplinary forum (Synod Standing Panel, Assembly Commission or Appeal Commission) currently responsible for the case believes that an incapacity factor
- a) may have contributed to, and may possibly excuse, the alleged misconduct; or
 - b) may render the minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry even if the minister is innocent of culpable misconduct; or
 - c) may prevent the minister from answering disciplinary allegations. But it will be possible for the case to be returned to the DP if the Review Commission considering it under the IP concludes that none of these situations in fact exists.
- 8.2 A case which begins in the IP may only be transferred to the DP if the Review Commission suspects misconduct and is persuaded that none of the three situations just outlined exists or, having examined the possibility of mitigation due to an incapacity factor, still considers the minister may have a disciplinary case to answer.
- 8.3 Since a case will only enter the IP by the 'normal' route (i.e. with no disciplinary issues) after consideration by the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Commission (PRWC), which itself will have looked into the possibility of retirement on ill-health grounds recognised by the Church's pension scheme, corresponding provisions have been inserted into the Procedure for cases which reach the IP through the DP. However, since the circumstances of such cases could vary greatly, a measure of discretion has been built in, that discretion being conferred on the IP Review Commission, which can (but does not have to) make a reference to the PRWC and can (but does not have to) approve a final outcome in the form of ill-health retirement. As in the DP, there is a provision that the Procedure will not end merely because a minister purports to resign (unless that is a resignation or retirement approved on incapacity grounds).
- 8.4 The Special Appeals Body which, under the current IP, can reverse a Review Commission's decision to refer a case into the DP, will continue to exist. But there will be no corresponding Appeals Body empowered to reverse a DP judicial forum's decision to refer a case into the IP.

Changes to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC

9. At present the Structure of the URC contains a number of references to the Disciplinary Process (DP) and Incapacity Procedure (IP), but does not contain an express power for the General Assembly to make disciplinary and incapacity rules in the first place. MIND accepts there are various constitutional 'pegs' on which the current Process can be argued to 'hang', but suggests that a provision

devoted specifically to rule-making in this area is desirable, especially if the general powers of church councils are themselves going to be limited, and their functions expanded, by reference to the rules so made.

10. On the other hand, MIND suggests the overall length of the Structure can be reduced, and duplication avoided, if detailed provisions of the DP and IP are not repeated in Structure paragraphs. Such repetition brings the risk that later changes to DP or IP will also necessitate a Structure change, taking up further time of Assembly and Synods on something which may be quite minor and technical.
11. There are various places where, with the laudable aim of separating the Assembly's judicial functions exercised through Commissions from its (or a Synod's) executive and legislative roles, the Structure currently spells out that neither level of council should intermeddle in disciplinary or incapacity cases, save as the DP or IP provides. MIND suggests it will be adequate for this to be stated in one place only. On the other hand, the Structure does not at present (but, MIND suggests, it should) make clear that a Church Meeting's disciplinary authority (to remove an individual from the membership roll or to suspend membership, in the exercise of its concern for membership standards) is not to be exercised in respect of a member who is on the Roll of Ministers or of CRCWs. The rationale behind this is that, if a disciplinary issue arises concerning a minister or CRCW, it should be handled first with the additional safeguards of the DP.
12. MIND also proposes a minor change to the functions of an Ecumenical Area Meeting in the disciplinary context. Such a Meeting does not have any direct function in ministerial discipline, but may need to bring Assembly Commission recommendations regarding a former minister deleted from the Roll to the notice of appropriate people. The suggested changes are intended to make clear that, although an Ecumenical Area Meeting may share in this task of passing on recommendations, the primary responsibility for so doing will always lie with the Synod.
13. Finally, there is one proposed change to the Basis of Union Appendix E, which deals with suspension of ministers pending disciplinary investigation. It is currently stated that such a suspended minister 'may not exercise the *ministerial* rights of membership of any council of the Church' (emphasis added). MIND suggests removing the word 'ministerial', so that during suspension all rights of membership are suspended. The chief right of membership which a minister may have, but which is not 'ministerial', is the right to attend, speak and vote at the Church Meeting of which he/she is a member. It seems to MIND that it may be counter-productive, if a minister is suspended (for example) in order to prevent undue contact with witnesses in a case, for the Structure to give that minister the right to attend the Church Meeting. Basis of Union Appendix F – the corresponding provision for CRCWs – does not contain the word 'ministerial' at this point, and thus already prohibits a suspended CRCW from such attendance.

The Resolutions and the timing of their implementation

14. MIND hopes it will be possible to work towards the redrafted Process superseding the current Process with effect from the close of the General Assembly's 2021 session. The goal is for any allegations of misconduct which reach Moderators after that date to be dealt with completely under the new Process by judicial bodies, Investigation Teams and officers appointed under it. This means that the members of Synod Standing Panels, the Assembly Standing Panel, the Disciplinary Investigation Panel and the Commission Panel will need to be named and receive initial training between the Assembly sessions of 2020 and 2021. This, in turn, calls for the Assembly of 2020 to give as much certainty as possible to the content of the Process, and to instruct Synods and the Nominations Committee to make the necessary appointments on time for this to happen.
15. The changes to the Basis and Structure, however, cannot be finalised in 2020, since they will have to be referred to Synods under paragraph 3 of the Structure and reconsidered for ratification at Assembly 2021. MIND hopes this is the last time that alterations in the Disciplinary Process will call for changes at the level of the Church's constitutional texts.
16. Accordingly MIND is grateful for the willingness of the Clerk and General Secretary to propose five resolutions to the 2020 General Assembly. The first will represent the first stage in making the desired changes to the Basis and Structure; the second will adopt the new Disciplinary Process; and the third will make the Incapacity Procedure changes.
17. All changes made by the resolutions 5 and 6 will, however, be deferred until the close of the meeting of Assembly in 2021 and will then be conditional on the Basis and Structure changes having been ratified. This is set out in the resolution 7. An exception is made for the provisions of the Process under which appointments take place: those provisions, it is proposed, should come into effect on 14 July 2020, so that Autumn meetings of Synods can make Standing Panel appointments, and names for other roles can be brought by Nominations Committee to the Assembly Executive (formerly Mission Council) in November 2020.
18. The individuals so appointed can then be offered training in the new Process before their duties commence at the close of Assembly 2021. Resolution 8 calls on MIND to offer such training, and also to prepare Guidance Notes. As these Notes will not be authoritative, they will not need conciliar approval; but the suggested timing is for them to appear online before the Assembly Executive meets in March 2021. This will enable any member of the Executive wishing to raise matters arising from the Notes to do so.
19. The timetable set out here and in the Resolutions is that envisaged at the January meeting of MIND. It is of course subject to change in the light of any deferment of meetings necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic, which was not then anticipated. But it continues to be set out in its original form until more is known about the need for such deferments.

Ministerial Disciplinary Process

Table of Appendices

(These are available online at address bit.ly/GA-Papers)

A	Affirmations
B	Ministers under other denominational jurisdictions
C	Oversight
D	Moderator's recorded warnings
E	Double jeopardy
F	The Synod Standing Panel for Discipline
G	Safeguarding
H	The Assembly Representative and Standing Panel for Discipline
J	Suspension
K	Investigation Teams and the Disciplinary Investigation Panel
L	The Investigation Stage
M	Cautions
N	Assembly Commissions for Discipline and the Commission Panel
O	The Hearing Stage
P	Abandonment of allegations by an Investigation Team
Q	Admission of allegations by an accused minister
R	Hearing Procedure
S	Disciplinary sanctions
T	Reasons for Commission decisions
U	Appeal Procedure
V	Disciplinary Appeal Commissions
W	Interface with the Incapacity Procedure
X	Non-co-operation and non-appearance
Y	Dissemination of information and record-keeping
Z	Transitional provisions [cases pending under the old Process] – <i>not yet prepared</i>

There is no Appendix I

	The Framework	
1.	<p>The expectations of ministers</p> <p>At their ordination or commissioning, Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church-Related Community Workers make affirmations about their Christian belief, about the motives leading them to enter their ministry, and about their future conduct.</p> <p>It is expected</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ that, during the process of candidature for the ministry in question, they will not have misled the Church or those who, on its behalf, assessed their readiness for that ministry; ◆ that they will make the affirmations at ordination or commissioning honestly; ◆ that they will serve in the ministry of the URC only so long as they can still with integrity teach and claim to hold the understanding of the Christian faith expressed in the Basis of Union; and ◆ that their conduct after ordination or commissioning will accord with the affirmations then made. <p>It is also expected that if they are arrested on a criminal charge, convicted of any criminal offence by a court or accept a police caution in respect of such an offence, they will report that fact to the Moderator of the Synod exercising oversight of them.</p>	<p>The affirmations are set out at Appendix A.</p> <p>Throughout this statement of the Process, Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church-Related Community Workers are both referred to as ‘ministers’. The expressions ‘ministry’ and ‘Roll of Ministers’ should be construed accordingly.</p> <p>Appendix B relates to ministers under other denominational jurisdictions.</p> <p>Arrest, conviction or formal police caution has the same consequences whether within or outside the United Kingdom.</p> <p>The Synod with oversight is defined in Appendix C. As indicated in Paragraph 3, the Assembly Representative for Discipline may in certain cases take the place of a Synod Moderator.</p>
2.	<p>The place of the Disciplinary Process</p> <p>Even if these expectations are not met, in many cases a pastoral approach can be taken and a matter resolved by informal advice or an apology. But there are other cases in which a breach of expectations</p>	<p>A separate procedure exists for cases of possible ministerial Incapacity.</p>

	<p>undermines the credibility of a person’s ministry or the Church’s witness. Allegations of such a breach (here called ‘misconduct’) call for a formal process of investigation, following the requirements of natural justice, and possibly for sanctions. It is with allegations of misconduct that this Disciplinary Process is concerned.</p>	<p>A Moderator’s recorded warning (see Appendix D) may be given as part of the pastoral approach to apparent minor breaches of the expectations.</p> <p>Church meetings possess a disciplinary competence over their members, but this will not be exercised over a church member whose name remains on the Roll of Ministers.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Allegations</p> <p>(1) Convening the Synod Standing Panel for Discipline</p> <p>Any allegation suggesting a failure to meet the expectations in paragraph 1 amounting to misconduct within the meaning of paragraph 2 must be referred to the Moderator of the Synod exercising oversight of the minister concerned. Concerns coming to the notice of the Moderator without a report from any complainant may be treated as allegations of misconduct. A report of a criminal conviction, arrest or police caution is to be treated as though it were an allegation of misconduct.</p> <p>On identifying any allegation as one of misconduct, the Moderator must call together the Synod Standing Panel for Discipline (‘SSPD’) and seek safeguarding advice, which must be passed on forthwith to the remaining members of the SSPD.</p> <p>(2) The Assembly Representative for Discipline and Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline</p> <p>Allegations respecting a minister treated under this Process as falling under the direct oversight of the General Assembly are to be referred to the Assembly Representative for Discipline (‘ARD’) who (if they are identified as allegations of misconduct) is to call together the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline (‘ASPD’).</p>	<p>The Synod which exercises oversight of a minister is to be identified in accordance with Appendix C.</p> <p>Rules on double jeopardy appear at Appendix E.</p> <p>The composition of the SSPD is set out at Appendix F. ‘Calling together’ does not necessarily imply a physical meeting.</p> <p>The interplay of the Process with the Church’s Safeguarding Policy, the participation of safeguarding professionals in the work of the SSPD, and the circumstances in which early steps in the Process may be</p>

	<p>(3) Striking out</p> <p>The SSPD may strike out allegations that are, in its view, patently frivolous, malicious, vexatious or unrelated to the expectations, stating why it considers that to be the case. Otherwise it must pass the allegations and any supporting evidence on for further consideration in the Investigation Stage.</p> <p>(4) Decisions on suspension</p> <p>As soon as it is aware of the allegations the SSPD may suspend the minister, with the consequences set out in the Basis of Union. The Moderator may suspend, acting alone, on first receiving the allegations if there is delay in calling together the SSPD and the Moderator considers immediate suspension necessary. However, neither the Moderator nor the SSPD should proceed to suspension without considering whether an alternative course of action is available. If the SSPD believes such an alternative could be considered but an interview with the accused minister would assist the decision, the minister must be offered the opportunity to meet with at least one member of the SSPD before the suspension decision is taken. Decisions to suspend or not to suspend must be accompanied by reasons, and reviewed by the SSPD on first convening and regularly thereafter: they may be revised at any time.</p>	<p>deferred during external investigation are explained at Appendix G.</p> <p>The identity of the ARD and the composition of the ASPD are set out at Appendix H. References to a Synod Moderator and to the SSPD apply equally to the ARD and ASPD.</p> <p>Rules concerning suspension and extracts from Schedules E and F to the Basis of Union, listing its consequences, are set out at Appendix J.</p>
4.	<p>Pastoral care</p> <p>(1) of the accused minister</p> <p>When a minister is suspended (or, if there is no suspension, when allegations of misconduct are passed on to the Investigation Stage) the Moderator must arrange as soon as possible for another experienced minister to offer ongoing pastoral care to the accused minister. The role of the pastor so appointed is only to offer pastoral care and support. He/she is to operate independently of the Moderator, to have no involvement in any aspect of the Process and to observe the Church's normal practice regarding the confidentiality of pastoral conversations. The Moderator's own pastoral responsibility for the minister is suspended so long as the case remains under the authority of the SSPD. The Moderator must also inform the accused minister of the contact details of the person appointed to give guidance under paragraph 8.6.</p>	

	<p>(2) of others</p> <p>The Moderator must also consider what pastoral care is available to the accused minister’s dependants, the complainant(s) and others directly affected by the case, including the members of local churches within the accused minister’s pastorate, and must seek safeguarding advice if it appears possible that children or adults at risk may be involved.</p>	
<p>5.</p>	<p>The Investigation Stage and its outcomes</p>	
<p>5.1</p>	<p>(1) Investigation and report</p> <p>The purpose of the Investigation Stage is for the original allegations (and any further allegations of misconduct which this stage may bring to light) to be fairly and expeditiously investigated by an Investigation Team, whose findings are to be reported to the SSPD. At this stage the Team is concerned with three issues: (i) the facts of the case, and in particular whether there is a <i>prima facie</i> case for full investigation; (ii) the seriousness of the allegations if proven, and (iii) whether the case can be appropriately disposed of by a caution. It may also, at any time, recommend the suspension of the accused minister or the lifting of a current suspension.</p> <p>(2) Decisions by the SSPD</p> <p>Based on the Team’s report and the accused minister’s response, the SSPD (acting in the name of the Synod) decides, giving reasons, whether to end the Process, initiate proposals for an agreed caution, or send the case to the Hearing Stage.</p> <p>The role of the SSPD during this stage is judicial. As such it takes no part in the investigation but weighs impartially the facts and arguments presented by the Investigation Team and by the accused minister.</p>	<p>The composition of an Investigation Team, and of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel from which it is drawn, are set out at Appendix K.</p> <p>The work of the Investigation Team is explained at Appendix L.</p>
<p>5.2</p>	<p>If the Investigation Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a <i>prima facie</i> case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the SSPD. On receiving such a report the SSPD must take safeguarding advice, and must then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, save that it may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration.</p>	

<p>5.3</p>	<p>If the Investigation Team believes its investigation into allegations against a minister reveals a <i>prima facie</i> case, on the basis of which, if the allegations were proven, it would seek the imposition of a disciplinary sanction, the Team will report accordingly to the SSPD. The accused minister is to receive a copy of the Team's report and to be advised of the time allowed for a written answer.</p> <p>On considering the report and any answer the SSPD must do one of the following: (i) refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration and further investigation, (ii) declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, if (after receiving safeguarding advice) it does not agree that the report supports the Team's conclusions, (iii) (after receiving safeguarding advice) propose an agreed caution in accordance with paragraph 5.4, or (iv) pass the report, any answer and all supporting evidence on for consideration at the Hearing Stage.</p>	<p>The time allowed for the minister's answer is to be 14 days unless another period is set by the SSPD when the Team's report is delivered</p>
<p>5.4</p>	<p>An agreed caution may be an appropriate outcome in disciplinary cases where ministers accept the allegations against them (other than any allegations which the Investigation Team would not pursue for the reasons in paragraph 5.2), display convincing remorse and are willing to undertake appropriate precautions against recurrence. A caution may be considered at the close of the Investigation Stage if the Investigation Team recommends this in its report, or if the SSPD, on receiving that report and the minister's answer, proposes a caution on its own initiative. Safeguarding advice must be taken on the terms of a caution as finally negotiated.</p> <p>A caution is not appropriate where a minister denies allegations being pursued by the Investigation Team; nor, normally, in the case of allegations similar to allegations found proved under this Process on an earlier occasion.</p> <p>If a caution is agreed by the minister, the Investigation Team and the SSPD, delivered formally by the SSPD and acknowledged by the minister, the Process and any suspension are terminated from that point.</p> <p>If a caution is recommended by the Investigation Team or proposed on the SSPD's own initiative, but the SSPD is satisfied it will not be possible to reach agreement on a caution in appropriate terms and within a reasonable time, then the SSPD must pass the Team's report, any answer and all supporting</p>	<p>Appendix M sets out how a caution is to be drafted, negotiated and finalised.</p>

	evidence on for consideration at the Hearing Stage. Correspondence entered into (subsequent to the Team's report) in connection with the proposal and attempted negotiation of a caution is not to be passed on, and will not be admissible at the Hearing Stage.	
6.	The Hearing Stage	
6.1	As soon as the SSPD passes a case on to the Hearing Stage, an Assembly Commission for Discipline ('ACD') is constituted to oversee and hear the case. Once a Commission is in being for a particular case, authority over that case passes from the Synod to the General Assembly, in whose name the Commission acts. Any procedural directions, or decisions regarding suspension of the accused minister, are thereafter to be given by the Commission (after receiving safeguarding advice in respect of any lifting of suspension).	The composition of an ACD, and of the Commission Panel from which it is drawn, are set out at Appendix N.
6.2	Having satisfied the SSPD of a <i>prima facie</i> case against the accused minister at the close of the Investigation Stage, the task of the Investigation Team in the Hearing Stage will be to present the evidence in such a way as to assist the ACD in determining the truth of the allegations on a balance of probabilities, and to make submissions regarding the seriousness of the case and an appropriate sanction. Unless the Team abandons the allegations, its investigation will continue for this purpose until the date for submitting case material.	Rules for the timetable of the Hearing Stage (including a date for submission of the Investigation Team's case material) are set out at Appendix O. Abandonment of allegations during the Hearing Stage is governed by Appendix P.
6.3	If, at any time after the appointment of an ACD, the accused minister notifies the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline ('SACD') of a desire to admit some or all of the allegations under investigation and to submit to the imposition of a sanction, the Commission may accede to the request after considering a response from the Investigation Team.	Rules for the admission of allegations are set out at Appendix Q.
6.4	The ACD is to hear the case presented by a single member of the Investigation Team or by another person appointed by the Team for that purpose. The accused minister has the right to be present and to reply. Witnesses may be called on behalf of the Team and by the minister, and cross-examined by them or by any member of the Commission. The Commission may call witnesses on its own initiative on theological questions, issues of discrimination, disability or cultural sensitivity, safeguarding issues or other matters on	Rules concerning procedure at hearings, reception of evidence given other than verbally, representation, persons permitted to accompany the accused minister or witnesses and the

	which it considers impartial specialist testimony to be essential.	role of Commission witnesses are set out in Appendix R.
6.5	At the conclusion of the hearing the ACD is to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether any or all of the allegations made against the minister have been proved. In respect of any proven allegation, it must decide either to impose no sanction, or that the accused minister should receive a written warning, or that his or her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers. If the accused minister is the subject of an earlier written warning which remains current, the ACD must take that into account. A written warning may be accompanied by directions regarding the minister's future ministry, conduct or remedial steps to be taken.	Rules for written warnings and directions, and concerning deletion from the Roll are set out in Appendix S.
6.6	If the ACD determines that none of the allegations made against the minister has been proved on the balance of probabilities, it must so declare. If there is no appeal, the Process and any suspension imposed as a consequence of those allegations will terminate from the end of the last day for lodging an appeal under paragraph 7.1.	
6.7	The ACD is to prepare a written statement of reasons for reaching its decision. The decision and reasons are to be circulated. In this statement it may make recommendations concerning the future activity of any accused person whose name is deleted from the Roll, or (if allegations are not proved) for precautions which might reduce the risk of future allegations of a similar nature. Such recommendations are of an advisory nature and not subject to appeal.	Appendix T also sets out rules for the circulation of written reasons.
7.	The Appeal Stage	
7.1	Notice of any appeal must be lodged, with a summary of the appeal grounds, within twenty-four days of posting of the ACD's written statement of reasons.	If the accused minister lives abroad the Commission may (but only when the statement of reasons is sent) direct an extension of the time for appealing to allow for postal delays.
7.2	Either the accused minister or the Investigation Team or both may appeal, but only on the ground of (i) a material failure to comply with rules of the Disciplinary Process, (ii) a breach of the rules of natural justice, (iii) a serious misunderstanding by the ACD of the facts before it, or (iv) new evidence which could not	Rules concerning the timetable for, and procedure and evidence at appeal hearings, are set out in Appendix U.

	<p>reasonably have been presented to the ACD and could credibly be expected to affect the outcome.</p> <p>In addition, where some or all of the allegations against a minister are found proven, an appeal may be lodged against the decision on sanction. In such an appeal the Investigation Team may present the case for a sanction or for additional or varied directions to accompany a written warning; the accused minister may present the case against a sanction or for variation or cancellation of directions accompanying a written warning.</p> <p>No appeal may be lodged in respect of allegations abandoned by the Investigation Team under paragraph 6.2 or admitted by the accused minister under paragraph 6.3.</p>	
7.3	<p>As soon as an appeal is lodged, a Disciplinary Appeal Commission ('DAppC') is constituted to oversee and hear the case. Once a Commission is in being for a particular case, authority over that case remains with the General Assembly, but the DAppC now acts in the Assembly's name and gives any procedural directions, or decisions regarding suspension of the accused minister.</p>	<p>The composition of a DAppC is set out at Appendix V.</p>
7.4	<p>An appeal is normally heard in the presence of both parties, the cases for the appellant and respondent being heard in that order. There is to be no rehearing of the case as a whole. Fresh evidence may not be received unless the DAppC is satisfied (i) that there is new evidence which could not reasonably have been presented to the ACD and could credibly be expected to affect the outcome, and (ii) that it can hear such evidence fairly, and that this would be more convenient than for a fresh ACD to hear it.</p>	
7.5	<p>At the conclusion of the appeal hearing, the DAppC may dismiss the appeal, may substitute its own decision for any decision which the ACD could have made (including varying directions or recommendations), or may quash the previous decision and remit the case for full re-hearing by a fresh ACD. Unless it remits a case for re-hearing, the decision of the DAppC is final, the Process and any suspension terminating when it is announced.</p>	<p>The rules in Appendix O set out the procedure if a case is remitted for rehearing; in which case the rules in Appendices R-T also apply.</p>
8	<p>Miscellaneous provisions</p>	
8.1	<p>The Process may be halted by a reference into the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, and rules governing that Procedure may provide for a case commenced under it to be referred into this Process. A notice of reference into this Process from the Incapacity</p>	<p>Appendix W provides in detail for the transfer of cases from this Process to the Incapacity Procedure</p>

	Procedure will have the status of an allegation of misconduct and be acted upon as provided in Paragraph 3.	
8.2	The Disciplinary Process continues notwithstanding the fact that an accused minister declines to co-operate, fails to appear at a Hearing or declares (or implies by conduct) his or her resignation from the ministry or from the United Reformed Church, and also notwithstanding the non-appearance of any potential witness.	Appendix X sets out the consequences of non-co-operation and similar conduct, and of a potential witness declining to appear.
8.3	<p>Where this Process requires any document or written notification to be delivered to the accused minister, it must be delivered by hand or sent by First Class post or an equivalent method addressed to the minister's last known address. A postal address for any officer or group to which the accused minister may need to deliver material is to be supplied to the accused minister either at the outset of the Process, or before the time at which the need for such delivery may arise, and the minister must deliver such material by hand or send it by First Class post or an equivalent method addressed to that address. No method should be used which requires a recipient's signature before delivery.</p> <p>Directions under paragraph 8.4 may vary these requirements, and must set a period for deemed delivery if an accused minister lives outside Europe. All documents required to be served shall be placed in a sealed envelope addressed to the addressee and marked 'Private and Confidential'.</p>	Documents and notifications are deemed to arrive three days after posting (First Class) or seven days after posting (Republic of Ireland or Continental Europe)
8.4	Directions may be given by the Panel or Commission under whose authority a case currently falls, either on application or of its own motion, covering matters of evidence, timing or procedure not otherwise provided for, if it considers this conducive to the fair, effective and expeditious operation of the Process. But the time allowed for lodging an appeal may only be extended if an extension is sought before the current time limit expires.	
8.5	Information about a case heard or investigated under the Disciplinary Process is confidential, save as the Process itself provides.	Appendix Y sets out rules regarding sharing of information and retention of records.
8.6	A consultant unconnected with the case against an accused minister is to be appointed to offer him/her	So long as it exists, the Ministerial

	<p>guidance through the steps of the Disciplinary Process. It is no part of the consultant's duty to carry out investigative work or advocacy, nor to offer legal advice, nor to attend a Hearing.</p>	<p>Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group (or, in cases of urgency, its Convenor) is to appoint the consultant.</p>
<p>8.7</p>	<p>The costs incurred in the work of a SSPD shall be charged against funds of the United Reformed Church under the control of the Synod. The costs incurred by an ASPD or by any Commission or Secretary of Commissions in operating the Process and the reasonable expenses of any witness attending a Hearing shall be charged against funds of the Church under the control of the General Assembly.</p> <p>After a case is referred into the Hearing Stage and an ACD appointed, the accused minister and the Investigation Team may each apply to the Commission for the approval of costs to be incurred in connection with that Stage, and any costs so approved may also be charged against funds of the Church under the control of the General Assembly. If this includes the fees of one or more experts, the parties are required to consult with a view to calling (if possible) a single expert by agreement.</p>	<p>Necessary travel and meeting expenses of the Investigation Team will normally be allowable; but neither party shall be entitled to claim the cost of professional advice in formulating their position at any stage of the Process, nor costs of preparing the case for Hearing or professional representation at that Hearing</p>
<p>8.8</p>	<p>Both columns of the text of the Framework, and the Appendices to which the Framework refers, are integral parts of the Disciplinary Process and carry equal weight.</p>	<p>Guidance Notes and diagrams published from time to time to assist those engaged in or affected by the Process are not to be considered part of the authoritative text, and in any conflict with the Framework or Appendices, the Framework and Appendices are to prevail.</p>
<p>8.9</p>	<p>Cases still pending under the previous Disciplinary Process at the date determined by the General Assembly for this Process to come into force are to be dealt with in accordance with transitional provisions.</p>	<p>The transitional provisions appear at Appendix Z</p>

Ministerial Disciplinary Process

Table of acronyms and defined terms

For guidance only; not forming part of the Process

Term	Acronym	Brief description	First Framework reference (para.)	Main Appendix references
abandonment		an Investigation Team's request, after a case has entered the Hearing Stage, to be discharged from proceeding with it	6.2	P
admission of allegations		an accused minister's voluntary admission of allegations and submission to a sanction	6.3	Q
admission notification		an accused minister's notification to the SACD of a desire to admit allegations	---	Q
affirmations		affirmations made at ordination or commissioning	1	A
Appeal Stage		from the lodging of an appeal until its final disposal by the DAppC	7.1	U
Assembly Commission for Discipline	ACD	a three-person Commission representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, controlling the Hearing Stage of the Process and adjudicating allegations on the balance of probabilities	6.1	N-T
Assembly Representative for Discipline	ARD	officer responsible for initial steps in regard to a minister under direct Assembly oversight	1	H (applying references to the Moderator)
Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	ASPD	a three-person panel representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, controlling the	3	H, J, L, M (applying references

		first steps in the Process and determining the existence of a <i>prima facie</i> case relating to a minister under direct Assembly oversight		to the SSPD)
caution (sometimes called 'agreed' or 'negotiated')		a text, agreed in writing between an accused minister and the Investigation Team but approved and finally read aloud by the SSPD, in which an accused minister admits allegations, shows remorse and agrees steps to prevent recurrence	5.3	M
Commission Panel		a 30-person pool from which members of an ACD are drawn	6.1	N
Commission witnesses		expert witnesses called by an ACD of its own motion	6.4	R
deletion		deletion from the Roll of Ministers, imposed as a sanction by an ACD in respect of proven allegations	6.5	S
directions (in the context of a written warning)		ACD directions regarding the future ministry or conduct of a minister given a written warning, or remedial steps to be taken by and in respect of that minister	6.5	S
Disciplinary Appeal Commission	DAppC	a three-person Commission representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, determining appeals from decisions of an ACD	7.3	U-V
Disciplinary Investigation Panel		a 15-person pool from which members of Investigation Teams are drawn	5.1	K

expectations		the expectations set out in Framework paragraph 1	2	---
Hearing Stage		from the SACD receiving the papers in a case until the case is dismissed by the ACD, or a sanction is imposed and reasons given	6	O, R
Initial Stage		from a Moderator identifying an allegation as one of misconduct to the case being struck out or an Investigation Team appointed	3	G
Investigation Stage		from the appointment of an Investigation Team until the case is dismissed by the SSPD, an agreed caution administered or the SSPD passing the papers to the SACD	5	F-G
Investigation Team		A three-person team appointed from the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to investigate, and if appropriate to present, the case against a minister	5.1	K, L, O, R
minister (and cognate expressions)		minister of Word and Sacraments (but includes CRCWs where context allows)	1	---
misconduct		a breach of expectations which would, if proven, undermine the credibility of a person's ministry or the Church's witness	2	---
Moderator		includes a person acting in place of a Moderator of Synod under the Process. Where the context allows, references to a Moderator apply also to the ARD.	1	F, H
Moderator's recorded warning		a warning given by a Moderator to a minister, outside the Disciplinary Process, regarding conduct	2	D

		which might if repeated warrant disciplinary steps		
oversight		defined for purposes of the Process in Appendix C	1	C
recommendations		ACD recommendations as to restrictions to be placed on activities involving a person deleted from the Roll of Ministers	6.7	S
responsible forum		generic term for the judicial forum (SSP, ASP, ACD or DAppC) currently responsible for a disciplinary case	---	W
safeguarding advice		explained further in Appendix G	3	G
safeguarding professional		safeguarding officer appointed by a Synod ('SSO') or by the General Assembly; explained further in Appendix G para 3	---	G
Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline	SACD	officer appointed by the General Assembly to service ACDs and collate Disciplinary Process records	6.3	N, O, R, U
Secretary of Disciplinary Appeal Commissions	SDAppC	officer appointed by the General Assembly to service DAppCs	---	U, V
striking-out		determination by a SSPD that allegations are patently frivolous, malicious, vexatious or unrelated to the expectations	3	---
suspension		a direction by a judicial forum with the effect set out in Schedules E and F to the Basis of Union	3	J
Synod Safeguarding Officer	SSO	officer appointed by a Synod to advise and keep records on safeguarding	---	G

		matters arising within the province or nation		
Synod Standing Panel for Discipline	SSPD	a three-person panel representing the judicial authority of the Synod, controlling the first steps in the Process and determining the existence of a <i>prima facie</i> case	3	F, J, L, M
written warning		formal warning imposed as a sanction by an ACD in respect of proven allegations	6.5	S

Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure

Appendix C to MIND Paper to General Assembly 2020

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Secretary of MIND: The Revd Chris Copley chrismvivan@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Below are the proposed amendments referred to in Resolution 6 of the main MIND paper (page 18) to the 'Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers and church related community workers' ('Incapacity Procedure').

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	See main MIND paper.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers

LP.1 – Replace ‘whilst not’ by ‘whether or not’, and delete ‘nevertheless’.

Insert new provision:

LP.1A In cases transferred into the Incapacity Procedure by a direction given during the Disciplinary Process after disciplinary allegations have been made against a minister or CRCW, the Review Commission and Appeals Review Commission are also to consider (i) whether incapacity factors could have contributed to any misconduct covered by those allegations (and if so, to what extent those factors may excuse or mitigate such misconduct if proven); and (ii) whether incapacity factors prevent the affected minister or CRCW from answering disciplinary allegations.

LP.4 – replace text down to ‘commissioning’ by the following:

Although the operation of the Incapacity Procedure is in most cases not based upon disciplinary allegations,

LP.5 – replace ‘recommendation from the Disciplinary Process’ by ‘direction given for transfer from the Disciplinary Process’ and delete the remaining wording from ‘giving rise’.

A1.1 – replace existing definitions (and insert new definition of ‘Incapacity factors’) as follows:

‘General Assembly Representative’ shall mean the Assembly Representative for Discipline appointed under the Disciplinary Process

‘Incapacity factors’ means the three factors referred to in Paragraph LP1 as potentially rendering a minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry

‘Special Appeals Body’ means the body appointed to hear appeals under Section H6 against a direction transferring a case into the Disciplinary Process

‘Synod’ means that Synod which in relation to any minister or CRCW would be considered to exercise oversight for the purposes of the Disciplinary Process

B.6 – delete existing text and replace as follows:

A direction given by a Synod or Assembly Standing Panel, Assembly Commission or Appeal Commission under the Disciplinary Process for the transfer of a case into the Incapacity Procedure and the reasons given for that direction shall have the same effect, and be treated in the same way, as a Certificate of Entry and Commencement Notice respectively.

E.7 – replace ‘the issue of a Commencement Notice’ by ‘a direction given in that Process’, and replace ‘hereunder’ by ‘under the Incapacity Procedure’.

- F.4.4 – replace ‘question of whether, based on the criteria set out in Paragraphs LP1 and LP4 the minister is or is not capable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, ministry?’ by ‘matters arising for the Commission’s consideration under Paragraphs LP1, LP1A or LP4?’

Insert new provisions:

- F 4.5 In the light of the Church’s current Safeguarding Policy, what safeguarding considerations are raised by the possible incapacity factors engaged in the case, and what safeguarding advice should the Commission take before reaching a final decision on possible deletion from the Roll?
- F 4.6 Should the PRWC be invited to consider a case transferred from the Disciplinary Process, including in appropriate cases the possibility of retirement on pension on grounds of ill health, and make recommendations to the Commission? (This step may also be taken at a later stage, before a final decision whether deletion from the Roll is or is not appropriate. Any invitation to the PRWC must state a time within which the PRWC is requested to report, although that time may be extended by the Commission.)
- F 7 In any case entering the Incapacity Procedure under paragraph B6 by a direction for transfer from the Disciplinary Process, the Procedure is to continue, and the power to transfer the case back to the Disciplinary Process remains unaffected, notwithstanding any declaration by the minister concerned that he or she has resigned from the pastoral charge or other office formerly held, or completely from the Ministry of Word and Sacraments or of a Church-Related Community Worker, or from membership in the United Reformed Church. However the Procedure will terminate in such a case if the Review Commission considers it appropriate in the light of incapacity factors to approve a proposal by the minister to retire from ministry, whether on pension or otherwise.

H.1 and H2 – delete existing text and replace as follows:

- H.1 If it considers that, in a case within the Incapacity Procedure, the minister may be guilty of misconduct as defined in paragraph 2 of the Disciplinary Process, the Review Commission may, at any time during the Incapacity Procedure and whether or not a Hearing has taken place, adopt the procedure set out in paragraphs H2 and H17 to transfer the case into the Disciplinary Process.

If the Review Commission believes (or considers further investigation may show) that any of the factors listed in paragraph LP1 may have contributed to, and may possibly excuse, the suspected breach of expectations, it must not direct such transfer until it has investigated how far that is the case. It must also not direct such transfer if, or so long as, it believes (or considers further investigation may show) that

- (i) any such factor may render the minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry even if the minister is guilty of no such breach; or
- (ii) any such factor may prevent the minister from answering disciplinary allegations.

- H.2 It shall instruct the Secretary of the Review Commission to inform the minister by written notice of its decision to direct a transfer of the case to the Disciplinary Process. This notice shall contain a statement of its reasons for reaching its

decision and it may indicate what papers, if any, should be passed to the body responsible for conduct of the case within the Disciplinary Process. The notice shall inform the minister that she or he may within a period of twenty-one days from the receipt of the said notice give written notice to the Secretary of the Review Commission of his/her intention to appeal against the proposed direction. If at the end of the period no such notice of intention to appeal has been received (time being of the essence for this purpose) then the procedure set out in Paragraphs H.14 and H.17 shall be followed. The notice shall draw the attention of the recipient to the strict time limit for serving a Notice of Appeal.

- H.11 – replace ‘person to whom the reference back will be made’ by ‘body responsible for conduct of the case within the Disciplinary Process’.
- H.13 – replace ‘reject the proposed reference back’ by ‘cancel the direction for transfer’.
- H.14 and H17 to H20 – delete existing text and replace as follows:
- H.14 If the decision of the Special Appeals Body is to reject the appeal and to uphold the direction for transfer, or if there is no appeal against the direction, the Secretary of the Review Commission shall send to the minister (i) a notice advising him/her of that fact, (ii) copies of the direction for transfer and the statement of reasons appended to the decision, and (iii) copies of any papers being sent with the direction in accordance with Paragraph H.2 or Paragraph H.11 as the case may be.
- H.17 If the decision is to reject the appeal and uphold the direction for transfer, or if there is no appeal against the direction, the Secretary of the Review Commission shall forthwith send or deliver to the Moderator of the Synod having oversight of the affected minister (or, if the minister is under the direct oversight of the General Assembly, to the ARD), for the attention of the Synod or Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline as the case may be, (i) a written notice setting out the decision of the Review Commission, or in the event of an appeal, the Special Appeals Body, incorporating both the Review Commission’s direction and (where applicable) the order of the Special Appeals Body dismissing the appeal, together in either case with the reasons given, and (ii) such other papers (if any) as are referred to in Paragraph H.2 or Paragraph H.11 as the case may be.
- H.18 In the event that a case transferred into the Incapacity Procedure by direction of an Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission is transferred back, the notice is to be sent instead to the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline or to the Secretary of Disciplinary Appeal Commissions, as applicable.
- H.19 The Secretary of the Review Commission shall at the same time send copies of the direction for transfer (but not the accompanying documentation) to the Moderator of the Synod of the province or nation where an affected minister under direct Assembly oversight resides, the Synod Clerk, the General Secretary, the Press Officer, the Secretary for Ministries and the Convener of the PRWC.
- H.20 As soon as the direction for transfer has been sent in accordance with paragraph H17, the Review Commission shall declare the case within the Incapacity Procedure to be concluded and no further action shall be taken in respect thereof.

Delete H22 and H23 in their entirety.

Church changes not previously reported to General Assembly

- 1.1 This report notes all churches that have closed – or opened – between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2020 (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. We are grateful to the Revd Mark Meatcher for his careful work in compiling this list.

Church closures

Synod 1: Northern Synod

Erskine & St Cuthbert’s, Belford, 31 March 2019
St Andrew’s, Blackhill, 28 July 2019

Synod 2: North Western Synod

Alexandra United Reformed Church, Blackpool, 1 August 2018
Bolton Road United Reformed Church, Darwen, 20 October 2019
Brampton United Reformed Church, 24 November 2019
Christ Church, Broadway, Morecambe 5 July 2018
Cornerstone Community Church, Sedbergh, 6 October 2018
Read United Reformed Church, 2 September 2018
St George’s The Hoskers, Westhoughton, 30 November 2017
St George’s United Reformed Church, Blackpool, 30 November 2018
Union Church, Stockport, 20 October 2019
Urswick United Reformed Church, 13 May 2018

Synod 3: Mersey Synod

Blundellsands United Reformed Church, 13 October 2019

Synod 4: Yorkshire Synod

Clayton West United Reformed Church, 24 March 2019
Little Lane United Reformed Church, Bradford, 31 August 2019

Synod 5: East Midlands Synod

Clifton United Reformed Church, 24 March 2019
Kilby United Reformed Church, 16 June 2019
Langley United Reformed Church, December 2019
Westwood United Reformed Church, 7 October 2018

Synod 6: West Midlands Synod

Gloucester United Reformed Church, 29 July 2018



Synod 7: Eastern Synod

David Livingstone, Harlow, 15 September 2019
Duxford United Reformed Church, 9 June 2019
Little Abington United Reformed Church, 15 September 2019
North Avenue United Reformed Church, Chelmsford, 30 September 2018
Shipdham United Reformed Church, 30 September 2019
Writtle United Reformed Church, 1 June 2019

Synod 8: South Western Synod

Falmouth United Reformed Church, 27 October 2019
Henbury, New Kingsland, 30 April 2019

Synod 9: Wessex Synod

Finchdean United Reformed Church, 12 January 2019
Freemantle United Reformed Church, 8 September 2019
Medstead United Reformed Church, 1 December 2019
Winton United Reformed Church, 11 January 2020

Synod 10: Thames North Synod

Iver, St Andrew's United Reformed Church, 28 April, 2019

Synod 11: Southern Synod

West Langdon, Dover, 1 December 2019
Whitfield United Reformed Church, 16 February 2018

Synod 12: Synod of Wales

Carmarthen Road United Reformed Church, Swansea, 20 January 2019
Christchurch with Caebach United Reformed Church, Llandrindod Wells, 23 June 2019
Christchurch, Fairwater, Cardiff, 29 December 2019
St David's, Bettws, Newport, 2 March 2019
St David's Uniting Church, Pentwyn, Cardiff, 19 October 2019

Synod 13: Synod of Scotland

Beith United Reformed Church, 24 March 2019
Mosspark United Reformed Church, 23 June 2019
Salem Chapel United Reformed Church, Dundee, 24 November 2019

Resolution 10

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

A new congregation and a new Mission Project – East Midlands Synod

Church Without Walls

- 1.1 In 2013 Walton Churches Partnership, an ecumenical group of three congregations supported by the Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and URC, appointed a full-time Pioneer to work in the new expansion areas of Broughton and Brooklands in Milton Keynes. The Pioneer (Ruth Maxey) is a URC minister, and over the last six years, she has worked with a ‘bottom up’ approach, working in partnership with local community groups and statutory bodies to meet the key focus of the post – ‘supporting community and growing faith’.
- 1.2 Within the first six months, Ruth gathered a small leadership group around her from ‘providential encounters’ in the community, and a new congregation, Church without Walls, was born. This new community is formed predominately of people with no church background, and there is a high number of those with disabilities and special needs. CWW has around 50 adults who regularly attend, and approximately 30 children. It has a strong focus on discipleship, with 25 adults committed to regular small groups, and it continues to reach new people.
- 1.3 As a new Christian community, CWW is trying to work out what it means to follow Jesus and reflect God’s love in today’s context. In some ways, CWW might seem a bit different to ‘normal’ church, as it has no building and no fixed way of doing things. The community gathers monthly for Quiet Church, Café Church, Dinner Church and Forest Church, and there are no assumptions about what people know or believe about God.
- 1.4 **Church without Walls is a place where the walls between people can begin to come down, where everyone is welcomed and can find space to flourish.**

*The Revd Ruth Maxey
Minister*

Resolution 11

General Assembly celebrates Church Without Walls as a new ecumenical worshipping congregation within Walton Churches Partnership, Milton Keynes, and therefore receives it as a congregation of the United Reformed Church.

New Lubbesthorpe Ecumenical Mission Project

- 2.1 New Lubbesthorpe is a new housing development on the edge of Leicester. In 2013, Churches Together in Leicestershire (CTiL) formed a partnership with the local council to help build a healthy community. The result was the appointment of a Pioneer Community Worker (PCW), employed by CTiL, when the building work commenced in the autumn of 2016.
- 2.2 Sue Steer was appointed as the PCW, and quickly developed a loving and serving relationship with the growing population. Several groups were formed, relationships quickly grew, and a healthy start was achieved in the development of good community relations. In addition to this work, Sue ensured that individual events were organised to celebrate principal Christian festivals.

- 2.3 The arrival of the 'Hub' building provided a much-needed community gathering space where community activities for all age ranges could take place. This, along with the opening of the school, led to the formation of active partnership leading to many more community activities such as Tea, Toast and Toy sessions run by participation of the residents either helping or leading. The 'Hub' continues to be our base of operations and operates as a 'Welcome and Well-being Centre' and is supported financially by the Land Developer.
- 2.4 Sue has also worked with Christian residents who wish to see a worshipping community grow. This is in its infant stages, and involves those who come along showing the community how much as Christians we care for our neighbours and the environment. Meetings are held on a Sunday afternoon, and usually consists of faith-based talks, prayer and conversations, along with community and environmental action.
- 2.5 The New Lubbesthorpe Project is supported by CTiL in partnership with the Local District Council, Land Developer, the Building Contractors and the residents.
- 2.6 You can read more of Sue's journey at Lubbesthorpe in this article written in July 2019: <https://bit.ly/Lubbesthorpe>

*Sue Steer
New Lubbesthorpe Pioneer Community Worker*

Resolution 12

General Assembly receives the ecumenical New Lubbesthorpe Project as a Mission Project of United Reformed Church.

New Mission Projects – Eastern Synod

- 3.1 Two important pieces of work in this Synod are ready to be commended to Assembly for recognition as Mission Projects of the United Reformed Church. The Synod is presently preparing statements in support of their commendation. In order to expedite process in the coming year, Assembly is invited to resolve as follows:

Resolution 13

General Assembly authorises Mission Council to act on its behalf in considering applications for new Mission Projects at Love's Farm, St Neots, and at North Avenue, Chelmsford, both in Eastern Synod.

Synod Moderators' report

Receding but Reseeding

Synod Moderators

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Simon Walkling simon.walkling.urcwales@urc.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)	The report is offered to General Assembly and local churches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to consider how we balance talk of managing decline with the hope-filled things that are happening in many local churches; to help us think about what connects us with God as the source of our life and hope; to grow disciples; to find renewed vision.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receding and re-seeding are descriptions of our reality which lead us into different patterns of thought. Working with metaphor can give varied insights; 'garden' and 'meadow' are fruitful images with Biblical resonance. We see shoots of new growth and re-growth, but there are still difficult decisions to be made. We can talk about decline and closures with despondency, or we can discuss dying to unfruitful ways and rising to new life with hope
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' Reports to General Assembly
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of Impact

Financial	No direct impact from the report.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Potential for local churches to reflect on mission and partnerships.

Receding but Reseeding

1. At the time of preparing this report, it is hard to know how much will have changed by the time it is printed and again by the time it is read. The coronavirus and COVID-19 will have changed many lives. There may be more information about the impact of climate change. Changes in the relationship between the UK and the European Union may be clearer. Some United Reformed Churches will have closed, others will have grown. It is not easy to create an overview across different timescales and various contexts.
2. The synod moderators occasionally say that, between us, we know all the churches and all the ministers across the URC. That might give us the possibility of providing an overview of our Church, but the situations of congregations are varied and their life-cycles unpredictable. We can identify that key factors in growth are a core group of committed people with a vision undergirded by prayer. Likewise, we notice that for churches that are dying, a lack of vision is as significant as lack of numbers.
3. It is easy to tell each other stories of how we are 'receding', but we have been working on ways of 'reseeding'. We have shared synod strategies for supporting churches and new ways of being church. We have talked about the congregations where positive things are happening, some of them small shoots and others lush growth. There is a great range of activity, from seed-trays for discipleship like synods developing small intentional missional communities, to churches with significant projects serving their communities and a weekly footfall of 2,000 people. Congregations are varied and so are synods, but we find support and encouragement in each other. We have also found challenge and have asked how we can continue to be expansive in talking of God's Kingdom whilst realising that we are now a small denomination. That may free us to lay down some things and work on developing others, keeping our primary purpose in mind.



Garden and Meadow

4. Some of the stories we have shared grew from careful planning, involving building confidence among members, establishing community support, developing business plans and putting funding bids together. Seeds of ideas have been planted and nurtured, then potted on until they are hardy enough to survive in the open air. We worked with the metaphor of the garden, deciding what crops could thrive in rotation and what flowers would produce a riot of colour giving joy.

Jesus also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

Mark 4:30-32 NRSV

5. Other situations arose because of something unpredictable: new people turned up; members had personal experience of the reality of life for homeless people, refugees or food-bank users; or an unexpected opportunity was grasped, rather than being seen as too much trouble. Seeds of possibility blew in on the wind and found fertile ground in a faith-filled environment. We worked with the metaphor of the meadow, with the Spirit scattering wild-flower seed and biodiversity developing to enrich the environment.

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.
John 15:1-5 NRSV

We reminded ourselves that sometimes congregations don't always know where the effect of their work bears fruit. Sometimes scattered seed grows somewhere different. We may help seeds of faith to germinate within people who then become active somewhere else. We don't always see what happens, nor can we count the yield. It has always been so in the Church, as Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9.

We could add references to John's metaphor of the vine, with God as the gardener (John 15), or the parable of the sower and mustard seed (Mark 4 and parallels). The phrase 'spiritual meadow' goes back to the writings of John Moschus in the early 7th century.

"Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.' And he said, 'Let anyone with ears to hear listen!'"
Mark 4:30-32 NRSV

6. Since March 2020, we have seen how a virus can blight our hopes and concerns, and disrupt habitual ways of working. Whilst recognising the real existential threat, we are heartened to see the response of intentional pastoral care in many of our fellowships, and changes which might have been resisted when they were a choice have been embraced once they became a necessity. There has been lots of creativity in developing ways of staying connected in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and using phone, newsheets and social media to develop discipleship.

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labour of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.
1 Corinthians 3:6-9 NRSV

Examples of Small Shoots

7. We shared about places where small things had made an impact. A church where a homeless person had joined in with discussion groups and been baptised, creating different conversations over coffee, and changing the answers to how Jesus helps us live our lives.
8. We heard about the church in Kidderminster that hosts a food bank and found community support when it was burgled. Or the church in Gillingham where the local church leader had thankful letters from addicts and offenders for the ways they had found support there. We were told about the pies and peas in Stockton and the drama therapy workshop where broken people found space enough to offer a welcome, and God's economy of love can be seen in action.
9. There are churches like Purley where an international link has changed the outlook and opened up multi-faith links.
10. In each of these situations, there is an authentic experience which has opened up new areas of reflection on faith in action.

Examples of Re-growth

11. We shared about places where new energy was generated. Paulerspury URC had reduced to five members, yet a conversation about supporting their vision with some level of stipendiary ministry has led to that number more than doubling.
12. We heard about Totteridge, where there were 19 members, but by working through conversations about resources and mission, stronger churches have been able to support them in connecting with Latin American people in the area, doubling the congregation.
13. We have also talked about churches that have rediscovered something of the vision which grew them in the first place. In Dartmouth, Flavel URC was named after an itinerant preacher who wanted to bring the Good News to the town. There were six members remaining when the Synod's Interim Minister came to help them renew their vision and address some building issues. A Pioneer Network couple arrived and worked with the church, and the congregation has grown to 25, including young families.
14. St John's URC-Methodist in Stone had a failing building. The Trust was happy to sell the building and to invest the proceeds back into the congregation for mission. The congregation now worship in a Community Centre, having had a time in a school using a 'Church in a Box'. They became more visible to the community using public buildings than they had been behind closed church doors, and they are flourishing.
15. Stoke in Coventry have united with another URC and sold their buildings, but are looking at having a shopfront in their original area and are working with a Church Related Community Worker to connect with the community.
16. In Doncaster, Hall Gate URC was left with a tenth of the members they had at the start of the last decade. They decided to begin a journey of discovery to develop their engagement with the town centre and its night culture, moving out of the

listed worship area, but retaining the schoolrooms and a shop to work with the community and Street Pastors. People are now excited about the future.

17. On Holy Island, St Cuthbert's had no elders left and the future was not clear, yet pilgrims were knocking on the door when they visited the island. The St Cuthbert's Centre may not have a traditional congregation, but it now offers prayer and hospitality in a flexible space, with a ministry to visitors that is not just about the heritage, but living faith.

Difficult Decisions

18. As synod moderators, we have sat and listened to faithful servants in local churches who have no-one to whom they can hand on their roles. There can be a sense of failure, but also a realisation that the mission of their congregation has been accomplished in that place at this time.
19. We have heard how exploration does not always lead to easy answers. A congregation of four members, after three failed applications to rebuild the church, wanted to develop their buildings as a gym for the village, but whenever major redevelopments are suggested there need to be people who can carry them through.
20. We heard from one synod where they could see the merit of telling of stories where things have not worked. There can be good news in trying something different, even if it does not produce the desired results, and this shows that we need to take the risk of a number of failures to achieve some successes.
21. Sometimes input of ministry gave leadership for a congregation to choose to close, rather than drifting. We also heard of churches that became so minister-dependent that they could not cope when the ministry came to an end, and they closed.

Dying and Rising

22. In all this, we have seen that it is tempting to look for someone to blame: leaders past or present for not reading the signs of the times aright; people 'out there' for not responding to our welcome or God's call; and sometimes God for not honouring our faithfulness and hard work. It is also easy to be undermined by shame: that decline has worsened in our time and we can't find the answer that can solve everything. The antidote to blame and shame is God's grace. When we are open to God's free gift of love, we can find healing for hurt, forgiveness for failings and freedom from guilt. That can renew us for our future life as part of God's people and partners in God's work.
23. We have shared how closing congregations can leave a legacy of life. Returning to the gardening metaphor, there can be compost from the resources released. South Western have development grants that are possible because of sold redundant buildings. In Yorkshire, legacy funds allowed for each church to receive £3,000 to spend on mission; this changed the mood and attitude of many congregations, encouraging fruitful thought and action, even when the ideas did not cost a lot of money. In Mersey, there is a church extension fund from

building sales, and some redundant pews were even used to make beds for homeless people.

24. We can talk about decline and closures with despondency, or we can discuss dying to unfruitful ways and rising to new life with hope (John 12:24-25).

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:24-25 NRSV

Personalia

25. Since our last report to General Assembly, Andrew Mills has moved on to ministry in a local pastorate; Nicola Furley-Smith has been appointed as Secretary for Ministries; and Peter Meek and Kevin Watson have retired. We have welcomed Brian Jolly, Geoffrey Clarke and Jamie Kissack. We look forward to welcoming new colleagues who will be called to Southern and Thames North Synods.

Questions for discussion in local churches

1. What gives us hope?
2. Where do we see seed-trays for new disciples?
3. What gives us life and renews our energy?
4. From our experiences of church life during the COVID-19 pandemic, what do we want to sustain when we can meet physically again? What did we have to stop that would be unwise to resume?
5. How do we connect with the risen Christ for the miraculous to happen?
6. What is our vision, and what is the first step towards that vision?

New Revised Standard Version Bible: Anglicized Edition, copyright © 1989, 1995 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. All rights reserved worldwide. <http://nrsvbibles.org>

Copyright: photo can be used according to Creative Commons CC-BY-SA
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/michaelheiss/14272922640/in/dateposted/>



Committee papers index

Assembly Arrangements	56
Children's and Youth Work	58
Communications	65
Education and Learning	77
Way forward	91
Students by Synod	99
Students in Training statistics	101
Equalities	102
Faith and Order	105
Finance	109
URC Pension Schemes	114
Ministries	142
Gift Policy	156
Schedule E	159
Pastoral Supervision	162
Mission	168
Environmental Task Group	188
Walking the Way Steering Group	195
Nominations	203
Pastoral reference and welfare	224
Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG)	227
Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025	231
Annual Safeguarding Report 2019	246
Wessex Synod resolution	255



Assembly Arrangements Committee

The History and work of the Committee

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd James Breslin james_breslin2@outlook.com
Action required	None
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the work of the Committee
Main points	To give thanks for the work of the Committee
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	Assembly Clerk

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

The History and work of the Committee

1. Created in 1992 to replace the then Business Committee of Assembly, the Assembly Arrangements Committee has had a wide-ranging remit. This not only included the timetabling of business, but also identifying and booking venues, booking and allocating accommodation for the staff, members and guests of the Assembly, arranging catering for the various official dinners and latterly dealing with all catering. Although not responsible for the *Book of Reports*, this remit included all other printed and otherwise circulated materials. The Revd Michael Davies, who is probably the only person to have attended every URC Assembly, has acted as minute secretary to the Committee and compiler of the information booklet sent to every member of the Assembly as part of their papers.
2. Although the actual membership of the committee is small, its functions relate to every part of the Church's work. Accordingly, attendance is often far greater than the official membership. Three committees in particular, Children's and Youth Work, Equalities and Communications, have contributed greatly to its work, and this should be recognised as the committee's life ends.
3. The Committee sought to ensure that members of the Assembly had good experiences and that the business of the Church was completed as expeditiously as possible. To do so required a large staff. Some were Church House staff, working both before and during each Assembly, some were specialist contractors with several of whom the Church built strong links over many years, but most were volunteers serving as stewards and in a variety of behind-the-scenes roles. The greater proportion of these were drawn from the synod in which the Assembly was meeting, but a small permanent team provided continuity and expertise. In recent years, the Revd Phillip Jones headed up and organised both the permanent team and the recruitment and allocation of the local team; without his diligence and hard work, often involving early mornings and late evenings, the work of the Assembly would have been much more difficult.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously impacted on the work of the Committee. Most of the fine tuning and detail for our 2020 Assembly would have been carried out in the period from early March to late May. However, even without that, many of the things which would normally have been included in this report would not have appeared, for this is the last time that the Assembly Arrangements Committee will report. With a move to an annual meeting in a fixed venue, the Church has decided to return to having a Business Committee, with a different remit. Accordingly we end by recording the gratitude of the committee and of the Assembly to those who have served it over the last 28 years, in particular its Convenors: Mrs Wilma Frew, the Revd Alasdair Pratt, Mr William McVey, Dr David Robinson, the Revd Michael Hopkins and the Revd James Breslin.

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Children's and Youth Work Review and Five-Year Strategy

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Jenny Mills, Convenor: revdjmill@btinternet.com Dr Sam Richards: sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 14 General Assembly urges all United Reformed Churches (especially those near universities and colleges) to use Fusion's Student Linkup and SCM Connect, enabling students to explore a wider range of churches and have more opportunity to commit to a place of worship that they feel is appropriate.</p> <p>Resolution 15 General Assembly recognises the climate emergency and challenges all councils, committees and local churches to do everything possible to make URC events and activities eco-friendly, as urged by URC Youth Assembly.</p>

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on work undertaken, and bringing URC Youth Assembly issues to the attention of General Assembly
Main points	Update on the implementation of five-year strategy Summary of work since GA2018 URC Youth Assembly resolutions pertaining to GA2020
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2018 Mission Council Report Appendix 5 20-40s Task Group B1 B2 B3 Mission Council November 2018 B1 Mission Council May 2019 B1 Mission Council November 2019
Consultation has taken place with...	Youth Exec 2019; Youth Exec 2020 URC Environmental Task Group URC Equalities Committee URC Education and Learning Committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	Potential short-term financial implications of adopting more eco-friendly practices
External (e.g. ecumenical)	



The Review of the URC's Children's and Youth Work was received at Mission Council in November 2018, along with the five-year strategy developed in response. This is summarised here.

Vision: children and young people playing their part in the mission of God – experiencing, exploring and expressing the Way of Jesus in, through and beyond the church

Ethos: inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational

Five key areas CYWC are seeking to support local churches in their engagement with children and young people (*fanning the flames*):

- faith/spiritual resources
- community/relational resources
- belonging/sense of identity
- engagement/connecting with wider context
- growth/change & development.

Nine key actions were identified, and this is a summary of work undertaken since the start of 2019 in relation to these:

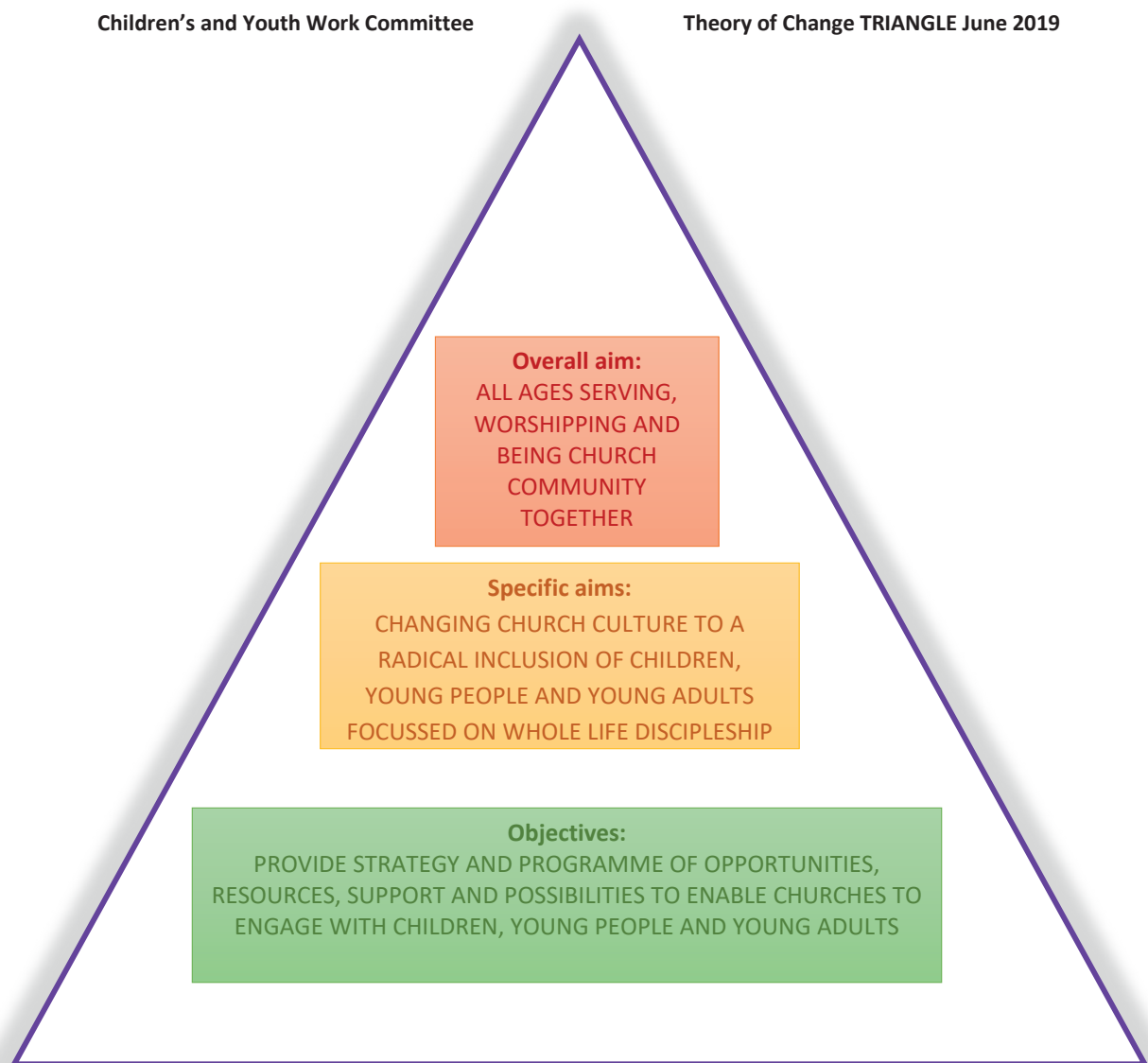
1. Re-unite all the parts of Children's & Youth Work – we have been working with Crossfire Camp and the URC Guide and Scout Fellowship (URCGSF) to establish firm links and good communication. Both now report annually to CYWC. The new Pilots Remit, which replaces the previous constitution, approved at Mission Council November 2019, expresses structurally the integral place Pilots has within URC Children's and Youth Work. The new resources produced to support our theme for the year (One Body in 2019, Common Ground in 2020) include material contributed by URC Youth, Pilots and URCSGF as well as the C&YW team. These resources are suitable for all ages across the range of URC children's and youth work and a range of contexts, and they demonstrate the goal of bringing everything into a welcoming shared space. A single Resources Group has been set up to serve all areas, including Pilots.
2. Initiate deliberate culture change – intergenerational whole life missional discipleship – we have started a two-year research project with Messy Church to deepen discipleship; included Walking the Way challenges in our resources for all ages; and supported Stepwise development in taking an intergenerational approach. A series of resources on Holy Habits for children and young people was produced by the CYDO+ team. At our request, LICC offered a day on Fruitfulness on the Frontline for those working with children and young people. We have contributed sessions on intergenerational ministry at the EM1 summer school, The Well (Methodist webinar) and Joined Up conference. We produced *The Gift* for grandparents and godparents to encourage them to invest in intergenerational relationships. The review of the Charter for Children and proposed replacement for the Child Friendly Church Award are taking an intergenerational approach.
3. Focus on churches with 'no' children and young people – this was a clear focus in 2019, with resources created with these churches particularly in mind, such as *Where Are the Children*, and *The Gift*, targeted mailings, and CYDO+ team being encouraged to visit them. We are inviting churches to become prayer partners to support the new FOFA groups.

4. Focus on under 5s, then 5-11s, then 11-18s, then 18+ – in 2020 our particular focus is on enabling churches to engage with 0-5s. Each month, a new area is added to a resource bank covering all aspects of early years. We have planned an all-churches mailing and conference for this focus, but plans are currently on hold due to Covid-19 measures. We are developing resources to support infant baptism and dedication. We are developing a breast-feeding policy. The next three years will focus on the subsequent age ranges in ascending order.
5. Reshape CYDO programme – all synods and Church House as learning community and team – a collaborative approach is taken by the CYDO+ team, involving all synods as they are able, identifying projects and programmes, and negotiating 'allocations' and 'invitations' to contribute according to capacity, expertise and passion. Places at conferences and on training events are offered to the team, who then share their learning. CYWC are very appreciative of the initiative and professionalism the CYDO+ team have brought to all areas of the work. They are recognised as representing the team and CYWC on various URC projects and committees. The proposed new scheme to replace the Child Friendly Church Award and the creation of Families on Faith Adventures@Home in response to the period of lockdown are examples of initiatives from the CYDO+ team which have been welcomed by CYWC.
6. **Reshape Pilots** – Pilots has embraced change, updating the Pilots Prayer, replacing a magazine with a more frequent electronic newsletter, integrating their annual worship resources within a whole church resource for 0-25s reflecting the CYWC theme for the year (One Body and Common Ground), and embracing a closer relationship with CYWC. Pilots materials for their annual *Overseas Voyage* (South Korea 2018, Taiwan 2019-20) have been given to visiting church leaders from those countries. Pilots has developed, trialled and launched a new resource for 5-11s, Friends on Faith Adventures (FOFA), designed to help churches set up new groups for children. We aim to have FOFA in 10% of our churches by 2022. This has been a period of flux for Pilots with some companies closing, a couple finding ways to continue after their church has closed, and some new companies starting up.
7. Develop an accessible go-to resource bank – we have been developing URCLÉ as a site to host resources for particular groups such as Pilots, FOFA and the CYDO+ team, as well as public resources for all. Downloadable versions of publications, resources for groups and families, and information packs (such as the 0-5s series) can be found there. We look forward to the redevelopment of the URC website to further aid this.
8. Develop communication – we have a bi-monthly e-newsletter and a twice-yearly training digest, and we have produced additional supplements to highlight resources during the period of lockdown. We liaise closely with URC Communications to ensure a presence in *Reform*, *Digest*, NewsUpdate and the URC website. We have prioritised face-to-face contact, from the URC stand at CRE and offering seminars, to visiting synods and churches around the country. We have developed our social media profile and run campaigns to highlight the 30th anniversary of UN Rights of the Child, Children's Mental Health, and Month of Prayer for Toddler Groups.

9. Celebrate!! – we have established the Lundie Memorial Award for children and young people playing their part in the mission of God, enabling us to share stories of young disciples. We collect and share good news stories from local churches about their engagement with children and young people. We share reports from URC Youth about opportunities they have taken up within the URC and the world church. We share reports from individuals and groups who have received small grants from CYWC. We hold events to celebrate all that the URC is doing with children and young people.

Report of other work since GA2018

10. CYWC have developed their theory of change:



11. A number of events and programmes have been run. For young people, these have included The Big Speak Out (for 11-18 year olds) and Greenbelt Youth Ambassadors (2018 and 2019). For those working with children and young people these have included Making Space day conference and Leaders' Gathering weekends, along with the LICC day.

12. CYWC have prioritised inclusivity, welcoming the newly created post of URC Youth Equality and Diversity Rep as member of the committee (representing the Equalities Committee); buying a group licence for Widget software so that every synod is able to produce more accessible documents with symbols; creating 'Tips and Practical advice for the support of transgender and non-binary young people in church settings'; encouraging Youth Assembly to offer a creche; and monitoring visible diversity in all publications, with support from the Racial Justice Advocates.
13. CYWC have considered their practice in response to the URC Environmental Policy. They have created a checklist for all meetings and events venues concerning energy usage, distance from public transport, single use plastic, recycling, food waste policy and have requested reduced meat menus. All papers are sent electronically, and members are encouraged to use public transport and arrange taxi sharing.
14. We have been engaged ecumenically through active involvement in the CTBI Children's Ministry Network, and Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer, represents this network on the ECCE European Conference planning group; and through actively working with ROOTS to produce and promote resources. We have supported Action for Children, writing material for their 150th anniversary, and CTE's Education Sunday resources. Lorraine Webb, Programme Officer, has joined the committee for 1277 (Toddler Groups) and Sam Richards, Head of C&YW, is a member of the National Youth Directors' Roundtable and HOPE Youth Directors' network.
15. Within the URC, we have continued to champion the 20-40 report from GA2018 and taken on responsibility for building contact with the URC linked schools. Sam Richards, Head of C&YW represents C&YW on the Learning Standards Board, the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group, and the Safeguarding Advisory Board, contributing to the production of Good Practice 5.
16. Recent work has focused on responding to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and supporting children, young people, families and local churches. Our strategic focus was firstly relational, making direct contact with all Pilots Captains and FOFA leaders, and supporting the CYDO+ team in their roles. Secondly, collating resources that local churches could use themselves and signpost for children, families and young people. Thirdly, producing a weekly URC resource for families to use (Families on Faith Adventures@Home). These draw on the sessions already created for FOFA and expand and adapt these to suit families of differing ages at home together, and for grandparents to use with children they were not able to visit. In addition, we signposted online training and development opportunities in children's and youth work; resources to support children and young people through bereavement; guidance for good practice within online engagement with children, young people and families; and top tips for producing and engaging with online worship intergenerationally.
17. Resolution 22 (2018): General Assembly tasks the Children and Youth Work Committee to re-evaluate the Charter for Children and to bring a Charter to General Assembly 2020 for the URC to commit to, taking into account all that has been referred to in General Assembly 2018 and in the Children and Youth Review and in the wider church.

A task group of CYWC members, CYDO+ team members and URC Youth Executive members worked on this across 2019. They have produced a radically different approach to the original charter, proposing 'Marks of an inclusive, intercultural and intergenerational church'. Recognising that this had a much broader reach, following its approval by CYWC and at Youth Assembly 2020, a draft version has now been sent to Equalities Committee and Global and Intercultural Ministries for wider consultation. It is hoped that a final version can be brought to General Assembly 2021 as a joint committee proposal, to be adopted as part of the URC's preparations for our 50th anniversary, and to set out our aspirations for the church of the future.

URC Youth

18. Youth Assembly 2019 was reported to May Mission Council 2019, and in RoundUp 2019. Resolutions included encouraging churches to enable young people to have a meaningful voice in local church structures; supporting young people's mental health and responding to loneliness through championing good practice; and supporting churches in offering wifi and internet services.
19. Youth Assembly 2020 is reported in *RoundUp 2020*. To explore the theme 'Common Ground – where is it?' a discussion panel and buzz groups replaced the normal keynote speaker. Highlights included a wide variety of workshops, a campfire, Ceilidh, a Sensory Assembly session, and late-night communion. Resolutions included setting up a task group to look at the creation of a URC Youth-focused event to celebrate the United Reformed Church's 50th Anniversary; and responding to the GA2018 discussion on isolated members to ensure the needs of URC Youth are considered, by working with the appropriate councils of the URC to create options whereby people can formally recognise their commitment to the URC regardless of personal circumstances. They also resolved to send an official letter to CTE explaining URC Youth's distress over the Fourth Presidency controversy, stating '... URC Youth Assembly 2020 understand ecumenism as 'oikumene,' the whole body of God, which stretches beyond ecclesiastical boundaries. We are therefore disappointed that the full diversity of society and of CTE's member Churches cannot be represented among the leadership of one of the UK's important ecumenical instruments... URC Youth Assembly 2020 feel outraged and not represented by CTE on this matter...[We] request that the necessary reconciling conversations within CTE are prioritised...'
20. Two further resolutions are now brought to General Assembly:

General Assembly urges all United Reformed Churches (especially those near universities and colleges) to use Fusion's Student Linkup and SCM Connect, enabling students to explore a wider range of churches and have more opportunity to commit to a place of worship that they feel is appropriate.

- 20.1 Youth Assembly 2020 highlighted a current lack of awareness and support to help college and university students find places of worship whilst away from their home environments, and noted the positive impact resources such as Fusion's Student Linkup and Student Christian Movement's (SCM) Connect programmes have had on students, aiding them when looking for a place of worship where they

are studying. Both organisations are passionately focussed on enabling students to grow in faith and to connect with like-minded students and student workers at a point in life which is often considered daunting.

20.2 Fusion UK and SCM are charitable organisations whose primary focus is equipping students to engage with local churches and peers. Both offer programmes that are free, easy and effective ways for local churches and groups to grow their congregations. As of January 2020, just under 1% of the nearly 2,500 churches registered for Fusion's Student Linkup and SCM Connect were of URC association. It is encouraging to see a handful of URC churches already involved, but it would be very beneficial for this number to rise, allowing more Christians and yet-to-be-Christians the opportunity to learn about and engage with the URC. Three simple steps are all that stand in the way of churches becoming 'linked-up' with students. 1) Connect: assigning a designated contact from within the church and having them log into the app. 2) Detail: providing basic church information (addresses, names etc). 3) Creating a profile: letting students know who you are and what you're about.

21. General Assembly recognises the climate emergency and challenges all councils, committees and local churches to do everything possible to make URC events and activities eco-friendly, as urged by URC Youth Assembly.

At Youth Assembly 2020, a resolution was passed by consensus by URC Youth stating that they recognise that we are currently experiencing a climate emergency. As part of the resolution, they encourage local churches, synods, committees and task groups consciously to make choices towards being more environmentally friendly. As the future of the URC, they think that the wider church should acknowledge the reality of our current global situation and take heed of the advice given by our government and experts. The Youth Executive are now all green apostles, with one internally elected 'head' who is passionate about the environment. They dedicate time in their meetings to discuss what they are doing and fresh ideas that they can adopt to help our environment. They recommend as URC Youth that the wider church take similar proactive steps to help halt the effects of the climate emergency.

Communications Committee

Communications update, including *Reform* magazine

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson, Convenor: revdpete@btinternet.com Mr Andy Jackson, Head of Communications: andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 16 General Assembly encourages all churches without websites to set one up as a matter of urgency, and to consider using the URC's iChurch initiative.</p> <p>Resolution 17 General Assembly welcomes the new look and feel of print publications used since 2019, and encourages all Synods, committees and departments to use the design and digital visual identity guidance from the communications team, so that all materials produced by the Church can share the same quality and consistency.</p> <p>Resolution 18 General Assembly encourages all members and friends of the Church to read <i>Reform</i>, the magazine of the United Reformed Church, and to subscribe to it so that, as it also approaches its 50th anniversary, it can continue to challenge, debate, refresh, enrich and inform.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	An update of the work of the Communications Team since 2018.
Main points	To update General Assembly about the work overseen by the Communications Committee, including the work of the URC Communications Team, the Publishing Board and <i>Reform</i> magazine.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Communications Committee, Publishing Board, General Secretariat, Finance, teams at Church House, Synod Moderators, other Synod staff, ministers and church members via social media.

Summary of impact

Financial	Reduction in budgets and subsidy for <i>Reform</i> .
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Reports of more members; increased engagement on social media; clearer design for URC identity and continuity purposes.

1. Purpose

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.

2. Head of Communications

In the summer of 2018, a recruitment process began to find a new Head of Communications after Gill Nichol decided to step down after nine years of service.

The process selected Andy Jackson, a journalist and manager who has worked for the Methodist Church, Christian Aid, the Trinity Mirror Group, and also for the United Reformed Church as the Editorial Assistant for *Reform* in the mid-1990s. Andy is an Elder in the URC, a former Chair of FURY and his father is a minister who served at Over URC, Winsford, and Park URC, Reading.

Following consultations and his review of each of the areas of the team, the following changes took place.

3. Editorial guidance

The URC's House Style guide has been revised by Head of Communications, the Editor of *Reform*, Communications Officer and the Production and Marketing Officer of *Reform*. It is now available on the URC website. Simpler than previous House Style guides, this latest version shows how the Church will edit and format most documents, and the committee encourages all URC churches and bodies to follow it.

4. Graphics

- 4.1 Several long-standing, internal administrative processes were stopped after they had been reviewed. The team can now offer even more services to the URC.
- 4.2 The design of the 2020 Prayer Handbook, *Prayers from the heart*, demonstrates the impact of those changes. The standard edition sold out and the A4, lectern edition, which is also a large print version, has very low stocks.
- 4.3 In 2019 the team produced, amongst other items:

- *Join the family*, a leaflet about membership of the URC, which is free and has been ordered in its thousands. A Facebook post in October revealed that at least 15 people had become members of the URC after receiving a copy of the leaflet, and we hope the actual total will be much bigger
- a redesign of the *What is the URC?* leaflet, which as above is free and has been widely distributed. Both leaflets are available to download from the URC website and to order from the URC Bookshop, www.urcshop.co.uk (p&p applies)
- a redesign of the URC *Yearbook*, making it easier to use
- a redesign of the Prayer Handbook, again making it easier to use and to read. The price was reduced as well, making it more affordable to a greater number of people. The standard A5 edition has now sold out.
- a Lectern (large print) edition of the Prayer Handbook
- a set of URC merchandise, including logo lapel pins, lanyards made from recycled plastic bottles, name badges, sticky notes, notepads, window stickers, branded clothing, the Commitment for Life chocolate bar (a percentage of the sale goes to CfL), new logo design mugs, pens and pencils
- the *Church Engagement Diary*, an A4 diary for secretaries and lettings officers to use for the benefit of all church members. This is a product the URC used to produce many years ago and was commissioned when several requests for a replacement came in the same week!
- a range of Christmas resources including leaflets, posters and *Rejoice and Sing at Christmas*, a carol and song book for use away from local churches when the transportation of full hymn books is impractical
- a redesign of the URC Diary, making it much more useful for ministers and worship leaders, and the reintroduction of the A5 Diary
- Easter and Harvest posters, leaflets and service sheets
- URC Youth and URC Children's logos, the Lundie medal resources, *The Gift* – a resource for grandparents and godparents
- *Good Practice 5*, which will be distributed to all URCs
- a rebrand for Commitment for Life including eco-friendly merchandise
- the first in a series of URC Daily Devotions booklets, for group or individual use. The first was on Vocations; others are being planned
- *They've asked me to be...* series – written by Gill Nichol and relevant URC bodies, such as the Faith and Order Committee and CRCW Coordinator. These leaflets are free to download and explain a variety of paid and voluntary roles in the URC.
They currently include:
 - *They've asked me to be a ... Committee Convenor*
 - *... Committee Member*
 - *... Church Related Community Worker*
 - *... Church Secretary*
 - *... Interim Moderator*
 - *... Church Treasurer*
 - This range of leaflets is being expanded to include Minister, Synod Moderator, General Assembly representative, Youth Elder and more. www.urc.org.uk/ask. Other suggestions are welcome.
- At the request of Youth Assembly and others, a leaflet about how to make public wifi available in churches was produced.

- This is available along with a new leaflet about making podcasts at www.urc.org.uk/information-guides.

4.4 Work in 2020

- resources for URC Youth Assembly
- a redesign of all certificates
- a low-cost family engagement kit for Advent
- revisions to the copyright and social media guidebooks
- materials for the General Assembly, including this Book of Reports
- more titles in the *They've Asked me to be...* series: Elder, Minister, member of General Assembly, Church Welcomer, Moderator, Children's and Youth Elder, children's work volunteer, youth work volunteer, and Safeguarding Coordinator
- updates to *The Manual*
- a new logo and website for the Retired Ministers' Housing Society
- marketing materials for *Reform*
- updated information guides about social media, dealing with the media, copyright
- a cardboard leaflet holder for the Church's booklets and leaflets
- Easter giveaway booklet
- *Walking the Way* merchandise and digital resources
- Children and Youth-Friendly Church resources
- *Stepwise* resources
- Updates on the resources available via www.cpo.org.uk/urc, a range of banners and posters for churches to customise and order
- Pilots booklets and resources
- Friends on Faith Adventures
- Logos for the General Assembly, Mission Council and Synods
- 2021 prayer handbook – 'Conversations'
- 2021 diaries
- Assembly Accredited Lay preacher badges
- Lent resources
- Constance Coltman book
- Commitment for Life resources
- Child Friendly Church Award
- Community Awards resources.

4.5 Equipment

After a cost and usage analysis, various pieces of equipment were sold off and leases ended. This not only saved the Church money on maintenance contracts but also freed up space at Church House. The committee will review the use of equipment again next year.

5. Digital

- 5.1 The URC website has undergone several changes in the past year, but it was quickly clear that more capacity was needed. In March, Catherine Kelliher joined the team as Digital Content Officer. The budget for this role was created after the Admin Assistant, Marketing Assistant and Yearbook Coordinator roles were

disestablished. The primary task of the Digital Content Officer will be to help transform the URC website.

5.2 The Communications Officer and Head of Communications have helped to grow the Church's social media channels, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook by targeted advertising, using money that would otherwise have been used to promote URC products such as the 2020 Diary in print media.

5.3 The growth in Facebook and Twitter, both in terms of those who Like or Follow the URC's channel, and the development of its Instagram channel, has helped to get key messages and campaigns of the Church to even more people.

5.4 Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheUnitedReformedChurch

Likes (Jan 1 – Dec 31)

2019: 1,504 to **2,247**

2018: 1,366 – 1504

2,247 was a 49% growth on the final figure of 2018. This was achieved by starting to share the URC Daily Devotions every day and by introducing a content sharing policy of up to four posts every day. Any more and the Facebook algorithm thinks you are oversharing and reduces the number of people who see your content.

Reach (the number of people who saw content from the URC's page or about the URC)

2019: 1,043,232

2018: 365,473

An increase of 185%.

Using promotions on Facebook, the URC's content was seen 767,903 times by 288,820 people. This generated 3,800 clicks to the corporate or bookshop website.

5.5 Twitter: www.twitter.com/UnitedReformed

Twitter impressions (the number of times a tweet appears in a user's timeline)

2019: 854,700

2018: 387,900

A growth of 120% year on year.

5.6 Instagram: www.instagram.com/unitedreformed

This was launched in 2019 and currently has 396 followers. The content is usually the same as that shared on Facebook and Twitter but there have been experiments with Instagram-only content, such as using the Bible Lens app, which generates Biblical quotes based on the photos you want to share. This channel will be developed further now that the Digital Content Officer is in post.

5.7 Daily Devotions recordings

Following the massive success of the Daily Devotions, which in 2019 included a very large and positive response to a user survey, the devotions are now available to listen to on its website, recorded by volunteers. It is hoped that these recordings will become downloadable podcasts in the near future.

You can read the Daily Devotions and sign up to receive them by email at devotions.urc.org.uk. The series on Vocations is also available as a printed booklet from the URC Bookshop.

6. Communications and media relations

6.1 After the review by the Head of Communications, some administrative processes were stopped. There was also a full review of the paper documents and those stored digitally. All electronic documents are independently backed up in an offsite location away from Church House.

6.2 This freed up more time for the Communications Officer to curate the URC's corporate social media channels, continue to help the URC when dealing with ongoing and new reputation management cases, to curate and deliver News Update, the URC's monthly news email, to curate and publish multiple news stories in the URC website each week, to help with media training of Moderators and others in the church, to lead sessions at RCLs, and to assist others in the staff team with digital needs, including the development of the Walking the Way stories and new regular email.

4.3 The News Update email lost many of its subscribers after the introduction of GDPR in 2018 due to a historic lack of a confirmation email to verify that the person had signed up to the email. However, the numbers are building back up. At the start of 2019, there were 2051 subscribers and that number increased to 2531 by the end of the year, a 23% increase. www.urc.org/nu.

7. Publishing board

The Publishing board, a sub-committee of the Communications Committee, is chaired by the Revd Heather Whyte. The board's remit, agreed by the Communications Committee of October 2019, is to:

- assess publishing proposals from URC writers and unsolicited manuscripts and synopses and decide if they are publishable in line with the URC's publications policy (Paper C1, Mission Council 2016)
- identify gaps in the market and advise on publications that the URC may consider commissioning
- work with authors, editors and proof readers, voluntary and paid, along with URC ministers, CRCWs and staff when appropriate, in taking books through the publishing process, including copy editing
- publish approximately four URC titles a year in addition to the established annual titles, unless there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. notable anniversaries).

The Board has been involved with the following, each of which are at different stages in the writing and production cycle:

- the publishing of the essays about Constance Coltman, the first woman ordained into Trinitarian Christian ministry in the UK, edited by the Revd Janet Wootton
- publications to mark the 50th anniversary of the United Reformed Church
- a booklet about death and dying by the Revd Sue Walker, one of a planned series for churches about life events
- *A Great Cloud of Witnesses* part 3 by the Revd Barbara Bennett
- A series of reflections based on the film *Hook*
- A recipe book for foodbank users to be produced with and for the Trussell Trust, the nationwide network of food banks which provides emergency food support to people locked in poverty, and has offices at 86 Tavistock Place, London
- Exploring co-publications with GEAR.

8. iChurch

iChurch is the low-cost website platform for churches to set up and maintain websites quickly and easily. Some technical experience is necessary, but if you can add an image to a Word document, you can create an iChurch website.

The iChurch web platform had a difficult period in late 2018 and early 2019 due to long-term illness and support for iChurch web managers outside of the 20 hours per week that the iChurch Coordinator works.

The Head of Communications reached out to the founder of iChurch, Lawrence Moore, and VTS, the hosting company used by the Church, who agreed to further support the initiative. We are grateful to both for their help.

iChurch now has support via email, its own Facebook page and support website. There are backup contingencies in place using the Head of Communications, the hosting company and, should there be a large number of new website commissions, others who can assist with the building or redevelopment of church websites.

Lawrence Moore has run training events for iChurch in London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Newcastle, and further webinars and physical training events are also planned.

iChurch costs £9.99 per month, which is much cheaper than other church website providers, and the basic website set up cost is £150 (both excl. VAT).

If any church is interested in finding out more, visit www.interactivechurch.org.uk or email iChurch@urc.org.uk.

9. Bookshop

The URC Bookshop, urcshop.co.uk, is the service from the church that delivers all manner of publications and resources to the URC and beyond.

After a review of its finances, it became clear to the Head of Communications that changes were needed so that the bookshop operation didn't make a loss for the Church.

The committee agreed that a consultation about the bookshop being outsourced to a specialist sales and distribution firm should take place as there is a part-time member of staff who would be affected by any outsourcing.

An update will be available at the meeting of the General Assembly or of the Mission Council.

The bookshop's revenues continue to increase year on year.

10. **Reform**

Mission Council discussed *Reform* in November 2017. There was consensus that the magazine continues to make a valuable contribution to the life of the United Reformed Church, and it was agreed to extend the denomination's existing investment in *Reform* – not to exceed £90,000 in any one budget year – a period that finishes at the end of 2020.

When Mission Council was cancelled in March 2020, the Officers of General Assembly agreed to continue the subsidy to *Reform* until the end of 2021, with a reduction to no more than £62,000. This follows savings, detailed below, and a reduction in the 2020 budget to £74,000.

Mission Council will discuss the level of future subsidies at a future meeting, and the committee wants to acknowledge the work of the *Reform* team and the Head of Communications in reducing the subsidy by £28,000.

The value of *Reform*

The feedback that the team continues to receive online, by email, in verbal comments and by letter says that *Reform* inspires and challenges, provokes debate, keeps readers informed about the life and work of the Church, and continues to add something to our denominational identity.

The digital edition of *Reform*, launched in April 2015, offers alternative and much cheaper ways to read the magazine. The app is also more accessible for people with visual impairments, and it comes with a searchable online archive.

The communications committee believes that *Reform* contributes to the mission, discipleship and identity of the URC is well worth the annual investment that the denomination makes.

The *Reform* team, and the committee, have been mindful of the investment and have worked hard to reduce costs:

- In 2019 the mailing house was changed which saved the magazine around £12,000 per year in 2020.
- The printing of the magazine has changed so that the same company prints and distributes the magazine. A saving of up to £5,000 p.a. should be the result of combining the printing and mailing service.
- The subscriptions service is currently under review, especially in the light of a recent price rise. The team is looking at other ways to manage subscriptions and renewals and to market the magazine.

Reform generates advertising revenue but not at the level of a commercial enterprise – it is a tool for the mission and discipleship of the URC. *Reform* is used to promote URC publications and merchandise which improve awareness of the URC. Without *Reform*, those sales opportunities will be lost.

We should not think of *Reform* simply in terms of its cost to the denomination, but as a tool which we would invest in like any other. If someone interested in the URC or becoming a member was given a copy, they would read a whole range of interesting features about the URC and Christianity in general.

The magazine should also be considered in terms of helping those interested in becoming members, and sustaining those who are Ministers, Elders, other leaders, CRCWs, volunteers and members.

Many charities spend large amounts of money to recruit and retain regular donors. The URC is also doing that but instead of asking supporters for regular donations, it is making disciples of Christ, using *Reform* as a tool to help with persuasion, conversion and maintenance of that discipleship.

Reform Editorial board

The editorial board meets annually with members from across the URC giving feedback on the content, ideas for new content (such as the Here & Now column for younger writers), how *Reform* is received in local churches and how well it is serving their needs.

Content

As well as the monthly editorial from Stephen Tomkins, the magazine also includes

- news from the UK and the world which have a religious slant or impact on the church's work (e.g. Church and Society, Global and Intercultural Ministry)
- Readers' letters
- A Letter From ... location-based features covering a diverse range of subjects. In the past year this has included articles from the area of the Amazon where large fires are taking place to clear land; the Faith Bridge, the focal point in London for religious climate emergency activists; Budapest, Uganda, New Zealand and Angola.
- Art in Focus, fresh religious perspectives on well-known and little-known works of art
- Interviews with a wide range of people, some including controversial figures. In the past year this has included Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Amnesty International; Jack Monroe, chef and activist; Nadia Bolz-Weber, writer, speaker church leader; Benjamin Kwashi, Archbishop of Jos, in central Nigeria; Tim Farron MP; Ben Lindsay and Martin Mosebach
- Chapter & verse, new Bible studies that are also available from Reform's website for churches and groups to use
- I am ... articles based on roles, lifestyles or other usual and unusual perspectives. These have included articles from a farmer, someone on sick leave, an addict, survivor of economic abuse and a haemophiliac
- Commitment-Phobe, charting the journey of a former atheist on her church-based Christian journey
- Here & Now, a new column for younger writers in the Church

- A Good Question, where up to four people offer their reflections on a major question. Questions have included 'What do you think of the virgin birth?', 'Are you afraid of dying?', 'What is the Gospel?' and 'Is democracy broken?'
- Sheila Maxey's column on her continuing pilgrimage. Sheila is also the editor of the book reviews.
- Local church initiatives
- Film and book reviews
- The Reform Crossword, set by the Revd Colin Richards
- Do Stay for Tea and Coffee, a humorous column from Christian comedian and co-writer of *Miranda*, Paul Kerensa.
- Digest includes news from the URC and notices about its Ministers.

Community awards

Reform is again leading the Community Project Awards, in partnership with Congregational Insurance. The magazine founded the awards more than 20 years ago, and they offer three local URC projects up to £2,000 each for innovative projects which have positive effects on local communities.

Reader survey

In 2019, the *Reform* team conducted a reader survey. 70% said *Reform* was either Excellent, Very Good or Good.

Over the past year, the amount of URC-based content has been increased or made more obvious by the editorial team in the past year. A large majority of respondents agreed that *Reform* improves the way they see the URC.

One of the most recent introductions is the Here & Now column, which is for younger writers in the Church, and is being greatly assisted by the Children's and Youth Work team, for which we are indebted.

Digest, the URC news supplement, which is included with every issue, and includes reporting from Mission Council after it meets, is read by nearly all subscribers. A question still remains about whether it should be a supplement or part of the magazine.

The financial position

Reform continues to stay within the budget extended by Mission Council in 2017, and has not exceeded the £90,000 cap.

2018 - £75,294 (advertising revenues were unusually high)

2019 - £87,341

2020 up to £74,000 (budgeted)

2021 up to £62,000 (agreed by Assembly officers)

2022 up to £50,000 (to be discussed at Mission Council)

The 2020 budgeted figure shows a reduction of £16,000. The subsidy has always been granted on the basis that it may not be used, and the team is constantly

aware of the financial support the Church gives it and is extremely grateful for that support.

The challenge has always been to keep costs as low as possible while not sacrificing the quality of the magazine. As stated above, following reviews about various aspects of its operation, savings have already been made and more will follow later this year.

The outcome of all this is that the Communications Committee is confident *Reform* can continue to help the mission and discipleship of the URC, with a reduction in the level of investment that Mission Council has agreed in the past.

Subscriptions

The price of an annual subscription to *Reform* was held at £29.50 after the results of the reader survey. In April 2020, the number of subscriptions was 3,239. 10% of these are paid subscriptions to the digital edition of the magazine.

After the outbreak of coronavirus and the global lockdown, the digital edition was made free, as were back issues going back six years.

Marketing *Reform*

The communications staff have introduced the following new marketing initiatives:

- A free magazine holder for *Reform* distributors
- Free bars of Fairtrade chocolate for subscribers
- A £1 for three issues direct debit offer
- Letter campaign to lapsed subscribers
- Regular updates about the latest issue on social media
- A presence at the Greenbelt festival as part of the URC's associate partnership, with a special offer for those at Greenbelt
- A presence as part of the URC stand at the Christian Resources Exhibition
- Increased incentives and communications to church distributors, a loyal band of volunteers who play a crucial role in the life of the magazine. We thank them regularly when we communicate with them and we urge Mission Council, Synods and churches to do the same.

Supporting *Reform*

Read the magazine, especially if you've not read a copy for a while, and let *Reform* know what you think of it. All feedback is welcome.

Spread the message to your synods and churches – it is a resource for preachers, worship leaders, Bible study leaders, house group leaders and more. It challenges, inspires, and helps to guide to Christian life. Please encourage local churches and people to subscribe.

As has been said to the Church before, 'Don't lose *Reform*.' We are delighted that people value *Reform* enough to share it, but we hope it is shared with a plea that those receiving second or third hand copies, or photocopies of an article, would consider subscribing.

Another 1,700 subscribers and *Reform* would not need any subsidy from the Church.

Conclusion

Reform continues to be valuable to the URC and worth the investment that the denomination makes in it.

11. URC's eco policy

The committee reviewed a paper submitted by Andy Jackson to Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society, about the environmental impact of its work and the efforts the communications team has made towards reducing the Church's carbon footprint.

As well as other measures that have already been implemented, the committee agreed to meet in person once a year, with the other meeting taking place by Zoom or Lifesize, and to look again at the packaging used for *Reform*.

12. Thanks

The impact of coronavirus has meant even more work for the communications team in different and difficult circumstances. The committee would like to thank the team for all that it has done and continues to do.

13. Resolutions

Resolution 16

General Assembly encourages all churches without websites to set one up as a matter of urgency, and to consider using the URC's iChurch initiative.

Resolution 17

General Assembly welcomes the new look and feel of print publications used since 2019, and encourages all Synods, committees and departments to use the design and digital visual identity guidance from the communications team, so that all materials produced by the Church can share the same quality and consistency.

Resolution 18

General Assembly encourages all members and friends of the Church to read *Reform*, the magazine of the United Reformed Church, and to subscribe to it so that, as it also approaches its 50th anniversary, it can continue to challenge, debate, refresh, enrich and inform.

Education and Learning Committee

Still walking the way

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Mr Alan Yates, Convenor: alan.yates@urc.org.uk The Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary: fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note and commend
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	A summary of activities pursued by the education and learning committee since the General Assembly of July 2018.
Main points	In tune with the intentions and ethos of <i>Walking the Way</i> , the committee has made considerable progress in the development and provision of the Stepwise programme, while emphasising cooperation and collaboration with the Resource Centres for Learning and a wide range of committees and networks to achieve its aims.
Previous relevant documents	Education and learning committee report July 2018
Consultation has taken place with...	A range of committees, networks and task groups mentioned in the report

Summary of Impact

Financial	The committee worked according to the budget allocated
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

The education and learning committee seeks to provide integrated education and training to equip the whole people of God for mission. It does this through liaison with relevant officers in synods and other Assembly committees; supporting Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs); providing programmes such as 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: The Revd Dr Neil Messer [2015-2019], Mr Alan Yates [2019-2023]

Secretary: The Revd Fiona Thomas

Members: Mr Robert Pettigrew [2020]; Ms Adella Pritchard [2022] CRCW; The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby [2022] Resource Centre for Learning; The Revd Mary Thomas [2019] Synod Training & Development Officer; The Revd Martin Truscott [2022]; Mr Rudolph Wontumi [2021]; Mrs Sandra Ackroyd [until 2020].

The committee also invites all the principals of the RCLs, the convenors of its subcommittees, a representative of the Methodist Church, and a representative of the CYDO+ team to its meetings. The Secretary of the Resource Sharing Task Group, Mr Chris Atherton has been a co-opted member during this period. The General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) are members *ex officio*.

Part 1: Progress since 2018

1. Developing discipleship

1.1 The United Reformed Church's emphasis on missional discipleship is expressed through its commitment to *Walking the Way. Living the life of Jesus today* as commended by General Assembly in 2016. The work of the education and learning committee is all about discipleship – helping followers of Jesus in the URC to shape their lives in response to God's call with the help of the Holy Spirit. From the committee's discipleship development strategy endorsed by Mission Council in 2018 came the discipleship development fund in May 2019. Managed by the Mission Council's resource sharing task group in conjunction with synods, this began to offer small grants to individuals to help them with their growth in discipleship in the latter part of 2019. The committee has gone on to address other aspects of the strategy, based on encounter, equity, enabling, and equipping. Concretely the strategy is being implemented through the development of the Stepwise programme, described in greater detail later in this report. The three Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) which serve the URC are an integral part of the committee's life. They have been actively refocusing their work through the prism of discipleship in the past two years, observing that almost everything they do could sit under this title.

- Westminster College helps discipleship through its "In the company of..." scheme. This welcomes individuals and groups to Westminster for short stays of a day to a week. Participants give advance notice of a topic they wish to explore and one of the teaching team is allocated to act as conversation partner and advise on suitable resources. Westminster has also developed plans to offer an ongoing programme for pioneer ministries and started in 2020 to run, three times a year, a residential for those involved in pioneering projects in the URC, in partnership with the URC mission team.
- Northern College has been involved with *Walking the Way* since its initial stages and has kept in touch with the Assembly staff most closely involved in its development. The RCL is beginning to work with others on a day event on 24/7 discipleship that can be offered in synods.
- The Scottish College has taken up the theme of discipleship in events, retreats and meetings.

2. Stepwise

Introduction

- 2.1 Stepwise is a programme within *Walking the Way*. The opening Stepwise stream, *Faith-filled Life*, was launched in September 2018, with further streams becoming available in 2019 and 2020. More than 100 participants have enrolled for Faith-filled Life in 15 groups across nine synods so far.
- 2.2 Stepwise has a clear coherent framework, is built upon firm foundations, and is implemented in a careful and consistent way. Arrangements for robust evaluation and review have been established, drawing on feedback from early participants in Stepwise streams and a wide range of evaluation data. The overall aim has been to provide a URC discipleship learning and development programme to benefit both individuals and the Christian communities to which they belong.

Staff team

- 2.3 The Stepwise Programme Manager was appointed in October 2018, joining the Stepwise Programme Assistant (part time) appointed in August 2018. The development of Stepwise has benefitted from the Education and Learning Instructional Designer appointed in July 2018, as well as the support of the three existing members of the Education and Learning team.

Stream development

- 2.4 The five Stepwise streams have each been created by their own design group comprising of people with a range of experience and backgrounds. Included in the design groups are those who represent children and youth, TeamURC, ordained and lay ministries and theological diversity. The committee is grateful to the members of these design groups and their convenors for their diligence and capable work.
- 2.5 At the time of writing, *Faith-filled Life* and *Faith-fuelled Leadership* are both fully available. A review of *Faith-filled Life* is scheduled, based on the experiences and feedback of the participants who have completed this stream. *Faith-fuelled Leadership*, which uses the Church Pastoral Aid Society's *Growing Leaders* course as its core, is currently being road-tested by a group of elders in Bristol, whilst being available to others who have completed *Faith-Filled Life*. In permitting the use of their material, CPAS have been impressed with the way Stepwise has adapted its course, including the online element of blended learning.
- 2.6 *Faith-filled Confidence* and *Faith-filled Community* will both be ready in Spring 2020, with the bulk of the material now written. Final editing and adaptation of the material so it can be uploaded to the Stepwise Hub is taking place at the time of writing. *Faith-filled Worship* is currently in the design phase, and will be ready for launch in Autumn 2020 as planned.

Advocating Stepwise

- 2.7 Promoted initially by flyers and fold-out cards, information about the programme was distributed widely throughout the Church. The Stepwise pages on the URC website were reworked in early 2019, and have been kept up to date with relevant information. The video *A taste of Stepwise*, explaining how Stepwise works and how to get involved, is available on the URC website and YouTube channel. The Stepwise team has attended synod gatherings and meetings of various URC networks to introduce the programme, explaining what it offers for developing discipleship and deepening faith.

- 2.8 A series of taster events for potential group facilitators has been part of the advocacy strategy. Eight of these days have taken place so far in different locations, engaging with more than 80 potential facilitators and those in synods who have responsibility for advocating and coordinating Stepwise regionally. This is proving to be a very worthwhile exercise and further events are planned.

Stepwise group experience

- 2.9 Stepwise is intentionally an intergenerational programme, and the group in Bolton has children as well as adults working through *Faith-filled Life* together. The group is facilitated by the CYDO for North Western Synod, in partnership initially with the CRCW who was based at the church. They have been creative and flexible in how they have organised the group, and the participants are gaining much from this approach. Other groups are based around local churches, pastorates or wider mission areas. In two synods, groups have been formed by people who are interested in facilitating their own group as an opportunity to work through the material and experience Stepwise for themselves.

Stepwise Hub

- 2.10 This online platform which hosts the material for Stepwise is continually developing as streams are added and material revised. An accessibility audit was carried out on the Hub in 2019 to ensure that it is compliant with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act as well as following best practice. We've also commissioned work to review and edit the Stepwise material as presented on the Hub to ensure consistency, coherence and readability. All this seeks to ensure that the online offering of Stepwise is accessible and of high-quality, giving participants a good experience of online learning.

Stepwise as a denominational programme

- 2.11 The *Stepwise task and finish group* has continued to meet approximately four times a year, with overall responsibility for the programme. Reporting to the Education and Learning Committee, it has been invaluable in setting direction and maintaining momentum as the programme has moved from initial planning to stream roll-out. Over the coming months, the task and finish group will become the Stepwise development group, with revised terms of reference and a new convener. Stepwise is moving to a different phase in its lifecycle from scoping, construction and promotion to continuing development and sustainability. This will be a long-term programme which continues to resource the URC and meets the needs of people who wish to develop further their discipleship and faith.
- 2.12 The Stepwise Learning Standards Board has met regularly to review and monitor the overall quality of the material and other processes and procedures associated with the programme. It is a subgroup of the task and finish group, with members drawn from the three RCLs and other networks including CYDO+ and synod training officers. It has prepared guidelines for participants and churches on how to make the most of their Stepwise experience; produced guidance on portfolios and journaling; and considered how participants can show evidence of learning where they are seeking to use Stepwise as a route to recognised roles or ministries in the church.
- 2.13 The RCLs have all played their part in Stepwise by active participation in the Task and Finish Group and Learning Standards Board, hosting and supporting of advocacy meetings, and significant input of time in some cases. They have a particular interest in ensuring that the material and extension tasks for Stepwise

develop in ways that will help to support the formation and accreditation of lay preachers and pave the way for some participants candidating for ministry.

3. Lay preachers and worship leaders

- 3.1 Working closely with the Ministries Committee, we have sought to equip people as worship leaders and preachers. The Secretary attends the annual meeting of synod lay preaching commissioners which is organised by the Ministries Committee. An annual letter to Assembly-accredited lay preachers was revived in 2019, in conjunction with the Assembly Advocate for Worship Leading.
- 3.2 The final year of Gateways into Worship will be completed in July 2020, with eight students participating from four Synods. The committee is deeply grateful for the support given by group tutors, regional coordinators, Westminster College, and the voluntary Course Manager. Depending on the route through which they reached Gateways into Worship, some of the students will achieve their Assembly Accreditation in July 2020 and others will be expected to complete a further year of mentored reflective practice first.
- 3.3 The cancellation of the March 2020 Mission Council delayed discussion of a paper drafted with the involvement of the Ministries Committee and the synod lay preaching commissioners regarding the ways in which synod-recognition and Assembly-accreditation as lay preachers could be achieved in future using Stepwise streams. The drafting of the paper highlighted the need to formulate 'marks of lay preaching' which would offer a basis for consistency of standards throughout the denomination.
- 3.4 The RCLs have been paying increasing attention to this constituency, often in direct partnership with synods:
- Northern College, through Luther King House Educational Trust, offers an annual ecumenical conference for lay preachers and worship leaders. Recent themes have been 'Preaching on the Old Testament,' and 'Preaching in "Ordinary Time"'. The RCL's 'Worship Basics' course for EM1 students who come with little prior preaching experience has been opened up to people from local churches alongside students. It is also being offered to groups of churches, and in the last year nearly 100 people have participated in such events. This is in addition to offering a 'preparing to preach on the lectionary Gospel' event in response to synod requests.
 - Westminster College has continued to develop summer conferences for lay preachers and worship leaders, offering the same material mid-week and over a weekend, and devoting significant teaching resource to these events. Most of the six-strong Westminster teaching team are involved. 'Our links to local bookshops ensure available resources are keyed into the theme. We focus major biblical input around the lectionary gospel for the coming liturgical year. Other teaching has recently explored such topics as inter-generational worship, creativity and imagination within worship and hymnody.'
 - The Scottish College sees lay preaching as a strong and valued feature of life in the Synod of Scotland. The College organises an annual residential

consultation for lay preachers on the Isle of Cumbrae every year, and has also provided training for lay presidency, funeral services and other opportunities.

4. Elders

- 4.1 During 2019, it became apparent that the *Resourcing our Elders* material on the URC website would benefit from significant overhaul and redesign, to take into account both new materials and better ways of online presentation. Being responsible for commissioning this material, the committee prepared terms of reference for a task group to implement the work. An established Elders group in the synod of Yorkshire is undertaking this work, with the intention of a revised resource becoming available during 2020-21.
- 4.2 Most support for Elders is provided locally by synod officers, drawing on Assembly and RCL materials and personnel as appropriate.
- Westminster College shares fully in Synod-based support for elders, responding to invitations to deliver material and run workshops locally. Individual elders' meetings and the leadership of local pastorates increasingly call upon the teaching team to resource their planning. This has included sharing in events locally and welcoming elders and others to Westminster for reflection shaped by their specific needs.
 - Northern College has played a particular part in the development of Eldership in the newly-formed Missional Partnerships in NW Synod, attending various Steering Group meetings and offering pastoral care training.
 - The Scottish College has provided refresher training for Elders, responded to Synod requests, and been involved in training for presiding at Communion and guidance for Interim Moderators.

5. Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1)

- 5.1 Mission Council adopted in November 2019 new 'marks of ministry' replacing papers from 1982 and 1991. The marks had been worked on jointly by the Education & Learning and Ministries Committees over a number of years. Mission Council further resolved to encourage the two Assembly committees, RCLs, and relevant committees in the synods to use this paper as the basis for consistency in expectations and reporting in relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. A similar paper was already in existence for the ministry of Church Related Community Work. The 2019 paper is the basis for a standard format for the annual reports of EM1 students at all three RCLs, which has been welcomed by synod moderators. There is mention later in this report of how the marks of ministry are being used in later phases of ministerial development.
- 5.2 In November 2018, Mission Council agreed a ministries committee resolution on a new local model of non-stipendiary service known as NSM4. This significant expression of collaboration between the two Assembly committees, synods, and RCLs continued with the subsequent release of guidelines for establishing the ministry and formation of individuals called to this model of ministry.

- 5.3 The first draft for both the marks of ministry paper and the NSM 4 formational approach were provided by the staff team at Northern College in consultation with the other two RCLs.
- 5.4 Teaching and formational work with EM1 students continues to be a core calling for all three RCLs:
- Northern College's student body has varied between 19 and 27 students over the past two years. Their formational programme has been significantly developed to include specific work on resilience and extend existing work on self-awareness. For many years, Manchester University had been the validator of degrees provided through the Luther King House Educational Trust (LKHET) but following Manchester's decision to pull back from partnerships with smaller institutions, LKHET have sought alternative validation. After a great deal of work, it can be confirmed that (subject to the final stage of the approval process) diploma, BA and MA teaching will be validated by Durham University from September 2020. As part of LKHET, Northern College will continue to teach to its outstanding ethos of contextual theology in an inclusive environment which has been welcomed by Durham.
 - Westminster College currently has 11 candidates for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. Most students are with it for four years, undertaking a wide range of placements, formational programmes and academic courses. All of these are constantly evolving as the RCL responds to changing denominational needs and requirements. Most students undertake an undergraduate degree in Mission and Ministry awarded through Durham University, with the College continuing to share in programmes validated through the Universities of Cambridge and Anglia Ruskin. Much teaching and learning takes place within the ecumenical classrooms of the Cambridge Theological Federation, with 11 institutions representing a rich range of traditions. The Durham awards can be delivered in block weeks with students attending college for six to seven weeks each academic year, and extensive use of online learning. This enables the delivery of EM1 to be highly flexible, with students no longer needing to relocate to Cambridge. Placements are arranged near to where a student lives.
 - The Scottish College currently has four URC students pursuing EM1. Placement and formational programme are complemented with accredited qualifications pursued with either the Scottish Episcopal Institute or the University of Glasgow as partners. College staff are involved in teaching in both places.

6. Education for Ministry phases 2 and 3: Continuing Ministerial Development

- 6.1 In the past two years there has been steady implementation of the EM2/3 programmes, assisting ministers in individual and collective ways to address the changing facets of ministry. In a new development, the marks of ministry endorsed by Mission Council in November 2019 are being used as a basis for a new self-assessment tool in EM2/3, which will carefully move on from reporting formats used in EM1.

- 6.2 In 2020, the Continuing Studies Fund, originally created from legacies given for ministerial development, was reframed as a routine part of the committee's budget. It offers financial support for higher degrees and longer term activities. One of these is the Church Leadership Programme (CLP), which is now well established as a key learning opportunity for leadership. In all, 14 participants completed this in 2018/19, of whom four were lay people; nine participants are in the process of completing it in 2019/20, of whom four are lay people. The Education and Learning Committee has set aside bursaries for lay people to enable them to undertake the programme.
- 6.3 It was agreed at General Assembly 2012 that there would be mandatory training in EM3, and in 2014 it was agreed that safe sexual boundaries, under the title Safer Sacred Space (SSS), should be the first mandatory EM3 training. All ministers have now participated in SSS initial training, and update training is active. Each synod and RCL uses *The Professionalism Game*, a resource commissioned by the committee, covering all aspects of boundary safety, warning or infringement, for use in many environments, well beyond mandatory SSS. Safeguarding training already widely available through synods became mandatory with acceptance of the Past Case Review recommendations (Mission Council November 2018), and an implementation plan is in progress. The E&L Programme Officer is a member of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, and works in close liaison with the URC Safeguarding Officer to ensure a cohesive approach to all safe boundary issues across the URC.
- 6.4 The RCLs have continued to take an active part in EM2/3:
- The Scottish College held a Synod of Scotland ministers' conference in May 2019 in Northern Ireland with the theme 'Ties that Bind'. The College co-operates with the General Assembly's EM2 Officer in the support of ministers in their early years of ministry, and is grateful to those who act as pastoral advisers through regular meetings with their colleagues and offering a listening and responsive ear at other times. With increasing pressures of time and commitment, it is hoped that experienced ministers will continue to agree to serve in this role.
 - Northern College staff have contributed bible studies and resilience sessions to ministers' schools in various synods. They also provide a tutor for ministers on the MA course at Luther King House, and offer tailored sabbatical/study reading guidance.
 - Westminster College reinstated the annual Ministers' Refresher Course in spring 2019 when Revd Dr David Cornick helped participants to explore John's Gospel. The 2020 event was due to explore inter-faith issues. The RCL has welcomed a steady stream of ministers for formal sabbaticals and more informal shorter periods of study and refreshment.

7. Supporting synods in discipleship development

- 7.1 The practice continues of holding regular meetings of the training and development officers from synods, which are useful for peer support and sharing ideas and practice. For the past two years, all three RCLs have had staff members who are directly members of this gathering, which has assisted

collaboration and closer relationships. For their part, the RCLs have strengthened their direct contacts with synods, building on existing relationships and initiating new ones:

- The Scottish College has seen changes to its life in the past year through the purchase of premises to serve as the common offices of the College and the National Synod of Scotland. The new premises include a dedicated office for the Principal with meeting space, as well as a training suite with audio-visual facilities. The new office arrangements provide an opportunity for Synod and College to renew and reframe their relationship. The College acknowledges with thanks the many years when the College enjoyed office accommodation without cost in return for offering training and development support for the Synod. Opportunities for the whole people of God to reflect and learn together have included series of lunchtime lectures, as well as public workshops. In February 2019, seminars on “Brexit and the Book of Ruth” were offered at Glasgow University and an Edinburgh church.
- Westminster College has offered input for a wide range of events in various synods, with an exciting new initiative in the form of a ‘Roadshow’. A team of four teachers spent a week in summer 2019 resident in South Western Synod, leading workshops around topics the local churches had identified. A similar week-long visit was due to take place in Wales in June 2020.
- Northern College’s response to specific requests has included offering training on conducting funerals, ‘worship basics’, events for groups of lay preachers, input at synod meetings such as worship/bible studies/presentations, and participation by staff in various synod committees through general membership or by invitation for a particular session.

8. Ecumenical work

8.1 Three direct ecumenical relationships are maintained on behalf of the committee by the Secretary – involvement with the Ecumenical Liaison Group for Ministerial Training, which was started by Churches Together in England; board membership of the Luther King House Educational Trust; and work with the Appreciating Church Development Group. Each of the RCLs is involved in specific ecumenical networks:

- Northern College works significantly with the British Province of the Moravian Church, offering the equivalent of EM1 to their students, and continuing ministerial development (eg Safer Sacred Space). Since the Unitarian College formally withdrew from Luther King House, Northern College has supported Unitarian students studying through the LKH Open College by offering training on specific subjects and advising the denomination on formation for non-stipendiary ministry. One tutor is involved in Congregational Federation training, and another is giving support to local Methodist Districts. The cross-fertilisation across the denominations is fruitful.
- The continued development of the Westminster campus means that the greater proportion of members of the Cambridge Theological Federation are based there, giving the College access to richly diverse ecumenical and inter-faith relationships. The past two years has seen major restructuring in

the Federation, with Westminster taking an active and positive role in negotiations.

- The Scottish College relates to the CTBI China Forum, is a participant in ACTS Education meetings, is a board member of the Scottish Episcopal Institute, has pursued conversations with the Congregational Federation Scotland, and is part of the CTBI Programmes Reference Group.

9. Vocations

- 9.1 The Secretaries for Ministries and Education and Learning have taken the lead in coordinating two vocations events each year since 2017, in place of similar events which synods used to organise. These are hosted and resourced by Northern College and Westminster College in rotation, and have seen a regular gathering of about a dozen participants who explore diverse ministries including eldership, lay preaching, pioneer ministry, chaplaincy, church-related community work, children and youth ministry, and the ministry of word and sacraments. The Scottish College organised a Vocations Enquiry Day in Glasgow, in conjunction with others in the Synod of Scotland, in June 2019. All the RCLs are open to individual visits from people considering candidating for ministry as they seek to explore their sense of calling.

10. International work

- 10.1 The committee Secretary attended the World Appreciative Inquiry Conference in Nice in March 2019, presenting an academic poster showing the work of Appreciating Church. It was a remarkable opportunity for learning from practitioners from all parts of the world.
- 10.2 The Belonging to the World Church programme, which is coordinated by colleagues in the Global and Intercultural Ministries team, has continued to aid learning for all ages and ministries in the church. The RCLs organise placements for EM1 students through this programme, as well as maintaining contacts with the Council for World Mission (CWM), World Communion of Reformed Churches and World Council of Churches.
- Northern College students have visited, or are planning to visit, Taiwan, Canada, Netherlands, Zimbabwe, Cuba, Eastern Europe, Israel/Palestine, and Germany. Tutors have attended CWM Conferences and contributed papers at international conferences.
 - Westminster College offers the Cheshunt sabbatical programme, which continues to fund several visitors each term, from the URC and world churches, at the college. Uptake has broadened, and the first sabbatical visitor from Botswana was welcomed in early 2020. The RCL benefits greatly from a reciprocal term abroad with Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, US. An ongoing study programme with Wessex Synod and the Lusaka Presbytery of the United Church of Zambia has, to date, welcomed two Zambians into the Westminster community. Two EM1 students were due to attend the programme at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute outside Jerusalem in summer 2020. Teaching staff on sabbatical have been

enabled to study abroad, and in summer 2019 the College welcomed its newly appointed Tutor in New Testament from the US.

- At the Scottish College, both staff and students have pursued contacts and opportunities beyond Great Britain, with visits to Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Ireland and Taiwan. The principal presented a paper at the CWM Discernment and Radical Engagement (DARE) Forum in Taiwan in June 2019.

11. Preaching engagements

- 11.1 Members of the Education and Learning team respond to requests to lead worship and preach in their personal capacities, and have used the opportunities this offers to explore the themes of *Walking the Way*.
- 11.2 The tutors of the RCLs are in regular demand for leading worship, which may be local or further afield. On most Sundays, and at other times, a good proportion of the RCL tutors are likely to be preaching and leading worship. Conversations with congregations before, during and after services help to earth the RCLs in the life of the local church.

12. Writing material

- 12.1 Most members of the Education and Learning team have been involved in producing material for Stepwise, including drafting news stories for the URC website. Some have also contributed to Daily Devotions.
- 12.2 Most of the public output of the Education and Learning Committee is provided by the RCL tutors, who regularly contribute to *Reform* with bible studies and longer articles, write for Daily Devotions, and provide content for publications directed at local churches. Northern College has a particular emphasis on environmental issues in theological and policy work, both within and beyond the URC. Westminster staff have provided a diverse range of material, including book reviews and articles for academic journals, alongside biblical reflections for the online Visual Commentary on Scripture.

13. The 20-40 age group

- 13.1 The committee discussed the report of the 20-40 task group presented to General Assembly 2018, concluding that the actions which the committee could take would be to find an appropriate way to connect Stepwise and Youth Assembly, and to continue to explore intergenerational thinking with the Children and Youth Work Committee. Progress on both these actions has been modest yet persistent, complemented through the RCLs:
- The Scottish College has pursued engagement with Synod Youth in Scotland, and local youth and children's workers.
 - Westminster College's Tutor in Old Testament took part in the 2020 Youth Assembly, and is Chaplain to the current Youth Moderator. Preparations are continuing to launch a vocational community for those aged 18-25 from

across the denomination to be based as full residents of the college for 11 months at a time. These plans have been developed in careful consultation with the Mission and Discipleship departments, alongside synod and ecumenical experience of such intentional communities. It is hoped that the first cohort of participants might arrive in September 2021.

- Northern College hosted an event in December 2019 to hear from URC Youth, CYDOs and practitioners about the needs of the younger people who are active and committed to this church. New ideas are emerging, and a further similar event may be on the horizon. The College is involved in discussions about online church in conjunction with Walking the Way, who are keen to see what emerges from the consultation.

14. Interfaith work

- 14.1 One of the main elements within the Stepwise stream *Faith-filled Confidence* is about encountering world faiths, and the design group for this stream has consulted people in the URC who are experienced in inter-faith understanding. This includes tutors from the Northern and Scottish Colleges, who variously participate in the CTBI Inter-Faith Theological Advisory Group, the URC Inter Faith Enabling Group, and InterFaith Scotland.
- 14.2 The Woolf Institute for Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue is now based in its own building on the Westminster campus. It offers an excellent library and access to a wide range of expertise in many aspects of such work. Cambridge Federation students gain first-hand experience on interfaith matters through visits and teaching led by Institute staff. Major Woolf conferences make use of the dining facilities of Westminster, creating many informal opportunities for interfaith conversation. Students have also shared in Scriptural Reasoning groups based at the Divinity Faculty in Cambridge.

15. Ongoing scholarship

- 15.1 Research mapping started in 2015, and a URC research conference was hosted by Northern College in 2017. The committee's search for ways of sustaining a research network came to fruition in 2019 when Northern College undertook to include coordination of the denominational research network in the job description of the incoming Old Testament tutor.
- Northern College's output from tutors in recent times has included a book on theologies of religions, regular publishing in journals, particularly on the Old Testament and the emerging field of trauma and the Bible, as well as significant work alongside the CRCW network, the English Standards Board and Durham University to update CRCW modules to bring new areas of community development theory into teaching for students.
 - A number of Westminster College students, from across the denomination and beyond it, are engaged in research degrees. Tutors prepare material that encourages further research and writing in a variety of theological disciplines, and teaching to URC and other groups often demands tutors' own research ahead of the material being delivered. Staff have offered

papers at the Society for Biblical Literature conference in the US, given Bible studies at Mission Council, taught at the annual conference for the United Board of Armed Forces Chaplains, and contributed to the British and Irish Association for Practical Theology.

- The previous Principal of the Scottish College continues as Emeritus Research Professor of Nordic Theology, and since retirement has built up an impressive record of publications and conference participation on an interdisciplinary basis, as well as giving input to the College's own programmes. Partners at the Scottish Episcopal Institute and Glasgow University are at the cutting edge of pastoral and theological scholarship, and one of the College tutors leads a renowned team of scholars at the University alongside contributing to College teaching and events. The current Principal has published a theological commentary on issues related to Scotland and Brexit, and presented papers at a number of academic conferences.

16. Cooperation and collaboration

- 16.1 The past two years have been characterised by increasing cross-committee work within the discipleship department and beyond. The committee participated actively in the second gathering of the main Discipleship committees in 2019. The redevelopment of Church House is bearing fruit by the whole department sitting together encouraging natural collaboration and serendipity. Further work remains to be done on working closely with synod committees and task groups on implementing the discipleship development strategy endorsed by Mission Council.
- 16.1 The RCLs are integral to the wider work of the committee, taking part in the education and learning boards at Assembly Assessment Conferences, and being active in Stepwise oversight. They have attended meetings of the northerly synods, and now have an annual meeting with the synod Moderators and representatives of the Ministries and Education and Learning committees. Additionally, Westminster College currently provides a member of the Faith and Order Committee and the Walking the Way Steering Group.

Part 2: Looking forward

- 17.1 In September 2019, the committee started on a strategic review of its intentions, activities and ways of working. The results of this so far are discussed in the Way Forward paper given as a paper with resolutions for General Assembly. The key to the committee's strategy for the coming four years is greater integration between committee, synods and RCLs, in order to enhance intergenerational and life-long learning.
- 17.2 This is likely to involve:
- a) the implementation of the discipleship development strategy;
 - b) pursuing Stepwise;
 - c) further collaboration in the provision of learning opportunities;
 - d) formulation and adoption of lay preaching standards and recognition routes;
 - e) agreement on an education and learning environmental charter;
 - f) further work on blended learning;
 - g) participation in a digital review group;

- h) adjustments to the financial support model for RCLs; and
 - i) recommendations for the reconfiguration and ways of working of the committee so that it is fully effective in doing the work for which it has been established.
- 17.3 The RCLs are already working together, and this is a trend which will be strengthened as they seek to respond to the needs of the church. In addition to continuing the work described in this report, Northern College sees itself in a position to offer supervision training as the URC moves to a model of mentoring and supervision, whilst Westminster hopes to offer a Durham BA block-learning course in pioneering and fresh expressions in the 2020-21 academic year, and the Scottish College is developing close relationships with ecumenical partners in educational provision for all parts of the church.
- 17.4 At the time of writing, the whole church in three nations is in lockdown due to Covid-19. We have already seen that this is likely to have a transformational effect on the church, and there will be much learning to draw together in the coming months. The committee is well placed to help the church to learn from experience, and to make changes that will reduce our carbon footprint, enhance our inclusivity, broaden our intergenerational appeal, and make us more agile.

Education and Learning Committee

The Way Forward

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Mr Alan Yates, Convenor: alan.yates@urc.org.uk The Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary: fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 19 General Assembly endorses the direction for the Education and Learning Committee described in the Way Forward paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To define the strategic agenda of the E&L Committee for the next three or four years
Main points	The E&L Committee remains committed to the aims expressed in Resolution 51 at General Assembly 2005. The paper recognises significant progress already made, and identifies several actions needed to meet the aims more fully.
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	Limited consultation on some of the key elements has taken place.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No significant budgetary requirements have been identified.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. Introduction

The Education and Learning Committee started to consider its ongoing strategy at a meeting in September 2019. In preparation for that meeting, a questionnaire was sent to our stakeholders, and about a quarter of them responded.

This strategic review has been intentionally ‘low key’ on the basis that most of our work is ongoing and still highly relevant to the denomination. The changes identified build on our core goals and work, rather than replace them.

This document contains the following sections:

1. Aims: revising the statement of the aims of the E&L Committee;
2. Context;
3. Previous strategies: a glimpse of our journey since 2005;
4. Current work: stating what elements of our work are to be continued;
5. Strategic agenda: prioritising our ideas for development;
6. Implementation identifying the immediate actions expected to be taken by the end of 2020;
7. E&L Budget: estimating the financial impact of these plans; and
8. Next steps: defining what we need to do next.

2. Aims of Education and Learning Committee

The key goal of the Education and Learning Committee, paraphrased from Resolution 51 at General Assembly 2005, is to cultivate:

'a church committed to life-long learning where there is integrated education and training offered to the whole people of God'.

There is no need to change this overarching aim, as it still perfectly describes our challenge today. The strategic directions taken by the committee since 2005 have been driving towards that aim. Much progress has been made, but there is still some work to do to achieve its three key intentions, those being 'life-long', 'integrated' and 'whole people of God'.

3. Context

Although the overall aim of education and learning within the URC remains unchanged, the culture and context are significantly different from when this aim was formed. Our church membership has almost halved, EM1 student numbers that were counted in three-digit figures are now under 40. When the URC was formed, the largest Synod was almost as large as the entire denomination is today. As the average age of our congregations rises and the numbers of children (and their parents) who regularly attend traditional services fall, many congregations struggle to 'recruit' the volunteers needed to maintain a healthy church. Yet awareness of spirituality does not seem to have dimmed, and the general decline in church attendance in the UK is not felt by all denominations.

In many parts of our church, there is a palpable need for change, but a consensus for *what* change has yet to be reached. Some change, such as multi-congregation pastorates, is the result of pragmatic deployment policies and some, such as new forms of non-stipendiary and pioneer ministry, are being willingly explored. The role of the Education and Learning Committee is, along with the Synods and our other partners, to equip our denomination to respond to these changing times: mitigating the undesirable effects and accentuating the desirable ones.

4. Previous Strategies

There has been evident continuity and development in the committee's strategic agenda over the last decade and a half. Each of the elements of our continuing work, and most of the recent strategic choices we have made, can be traced back

to *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* (LCNC) process, which in turn addressed the direction set by the 2006 Training Review, following resolution 51 in General Assembly 2005. The detail of this strategic journey can be found in Appendix 1.

5. Current Work

A list of the continuing work of the committee is given in Appendix 2. This is quite a long list, and while all of it is important, there are five elements to which most of our resources are directed: Stepwise, EM1, EM2/3, Resource Centre for Learning support, and implementing the agreed Discipleship Development Strategy (summarised in Appendix 3).

6. Strategic Agenda

In September 2019, the committee developed a broad range of strategic options to consider in planning for the next few years. These options have been prioritised to form the basis of the medium-term strategic agenda for the committee.

- 6.1 Managing the long list of continuing current work will require adequate resources and a continued focus on our key priorities of Stepwise, EM1, EM2/3, Resource Centre for Learning support and implementing the agreed Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS). For the DDS, the implementation plan needs to be updated and integrated more directly with the Walking the Way steering group's plans.
- 6.2 The committee endorses the URC's aim to become carbon neutral long before 2050. As part of our commitment, a charter for the committee is being developed in conjunction with the Church & Society team in the Mission department. Part of this will be to develop a simple carbon tracker to enable the committee to assess the impact of adopting the charter, and the use of carbon offsetting will be explored.
- 6.3 The committee already significantly contributes to Walking the Way (WtW) by the Stepwise programme. Through its membership of the WtW Steering Group, the committee will further integrate the Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS) into the life of the denomination, and act on other opportunities to support missional discipleship as these become apparent.
- 6.4 One of the three key clauses in the committee's aim is to achieve integrated education and training. How the committee works with other Assembly committees needs to better reflect the way we are mutually dependent on each other. In order to nurture integration, we will develop a shared understanding of what this means at many levels in a learning church.
- 6.5 The fundamental shift that took place as a result of the 2006 Training Review was the identification of three Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) working together to serve the United Reformed Church. They grow ever closer, and have a vital part to play in the committee's emphasis on integration and collaborative working.

- 6.6 The other two essential elements in the committee's aim of supporting lifelong learning for the whole people of God are being pursued through the intergenerational, accessible approach of Stepwise. This relies on partnership with the Children and Youth Work committee, Mission team, Synods, and ecumenical partners. There is already a strong overlap with the Ministries committee in much of our current work, and this will be strengthened and deepened.
- 6.5 The final part of the strategic agenda focuses on the ways of working of the committee. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee was planning to trial the use of videoconferencing techniques to reduce our carbon footprint, enhance our inclusivity, and make us more agile. This preparatory work enabled us to respond quickly to the lockdown. We have been able to hold successfully the equivalent of an all-day meeting via videoconference with 21 active participants. Our vision is that we will hold a single, 24-hour, residential meeting each year, complemented by about four videoconferences, and e-mail discussions as necessary. A key task will be to review the size and composition of the committee, taking into account involvement and representation of stakeholders, ownership of decisions, inclusivity, necessary skills and experience, manageability, effectiveness, and appropriate running costs.

7. Implementation

Appendix 4 offers an outline of the core tasks to implement the strategic agenda, showing the next steps, timetable, and the lead individuals or groups responsible for delivery (but not necessarily doing all the development work).

8. Education and Learning Committee Budget

Throughout all our deliberations, it has been important to remember that we are serving a denomination whose membership and revenue are declining which, despite all efforts in recent years, shows no signs of abating. This has not provided too many constraints on the committee's budget in the past, mainly because the numbers candidating for ministry and the cost of supporting them have shrunk more quickly than the URC's membership. It is important that the management of the committee's budget is not disguised by lower ministerial training costs. Our planning needs to acknowledge that the URC's Chief Finance Officer predicts that the budget for the education and learning committee will decrease over the next few years.

The initial assessment of the Way Forward plan is that it will not require more central staff resource. Possible minor impacts from the expenses needed for the task groups are expected to be managed within our existing budget.

9. Next Steps

Two key areas of work lie ahead. Firstly, to extend the duration and detail in the plan, so that it covers more than the initial tasks and provides more detail in all the tasks; and secondly, to consider how, and with whom, we will work collaboratively to implement the strategy effectively.

Appendix 1 – Our Journey since 2005

The General Assembly of 2005 (resolution 51) determined that in United Reformed Church educational provision there shall be:

1. Integrated education and training to equip the whole people of God for mission promoted with coherence and in tune with the policies flowing from the Equipping the Saints and Catch the Vision reports;
2. Ecumenical engagement at every stage;
3. The presentation of a distinctive Reformed ethos and history in that ecumenical engagement;
4. The delivery of this policy in a manner appropriate to the circumstances of the three nations in which the United Reformed Church is situated.

The training review, accepted by the General Assembly of 2006, designated Westminster College, Northern College, and the Scottish College as Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) for the United Reformed Church. The Windermere Centre became the fourth RCL in November 2008 through a resolution of Mission Council. The Centre closed in 2017, and a 2019 Mission Council resolution led to the proceeds from the sale of the building being used to seed a new Discipleship Development Fund as part of the Discipleship Development Strategy.

In the General Assembly of 2012, Education and Learning introduced a number of key concepts:

1. New kinds of Assembly-accredited lay ministries;
2. Emphasis on blended learning and a virtual learning environment (Moodle);
3. A theological research network to link with theology in the academy;
4. Developing relationships in the wider network of trainers, developers and educationalists (CYDO, TDO etc).
5. The agreement of the mandatory EM2 period and the creation of some mandatory training in EM3.

To Mission Council of May 2013, we introduced *The Learning Church. The Next Chapter* (LCNC) to assess the progress made towards realising the aspirations of the United Reformed Church Training Review of 2006. At Mission Council in March 2014, Safer Sacred Space was identified as the first mandatory training for ministers in EM3. September 2018 saw the launch of Stepwise.

Progress since 2013

Up to 2013, whilst there was constant reference to being more integrated, in practice it was possible for various bodies, networks and committees to operate separately. Budgetary restrictions in 2012 focused the priorities of the committee, whilst the request to RCLs to draw on their own resources and the significant investment of the wider church in the redevelopment of Westminster College prompted greater self-sufficiency of RCLs.

The LCNC report of January 2014 offered 12 recommendations, and much of the continuing work of the committee since then has been shaped by implementing those recommendations, even though they were never taken to General Assembly as originally anticipated. The recommendations spoke of equipping all disciples, using

consistent marks of ministry throughout EM1/2/3, emphasising varied models of teaching and learning in EM1, integrating inter-cultural and all-age learning within E&LC programmes, developing digital learning, consulting and collaborating across the discipleship department, finding ways of protecting funding to elders and other disciples, finding new models of EM1, mapping and developing the extent of URC involvement in academic research, and re-constituting the E&LC to express partnership between Assembly, Synods and RCLs.

Appendix 2 – Current Work

Many of the key elements of work undertaken by the committee have been influenced by the appreciative inquiry approach which the committee has championed denominationally and ecumenically since 2014.

Support the URC's emphasis on missional discipleship: Maintain Stepwise as part of Walking the Way; keep contact with the 'online church' group.

Discipleship Development Strategy: Continue the implementation of the strategy and maintain the policy for awarding development grants from the Discipleship Development Fund in conjunction with the Resource Sharing Task Group.

Developing the Stepwise programme: Policy, strategy, management and administration of the blended learning programme, in conjunction with synods and in support of *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today*.

Supporting three Resource Centres for Learning: Regular contacts with Principals; support and attend annual RCL tutors gathering; encouraging the hosting of E&LC events through the RCLs, including the research network; attendance at Governors meetings by invitation; significant funding support.

Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1): initial ministerial development: Overall authority for EM1 maintained for the URC, in conjunction with RCLs, Synods, and Ministries committee; financial support of EM1 students; policy development and implementation, including establishing NSM Model 4 as a distinctive new route and embedding the use of Marks of Ministry.

Education for Ministry Phases 2 and 3 (EM2/3): ongoing ministerial development: Maintain overall authority for EM2 and EM3 in conjunction with Synods; support the Church Leadership Programme; administer 'preparing for retirement' courses for Ministries & Finance; develop and implement agreed policies and mandatory training; embed the use of Marks of Ministry

Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers: Provide clear and consistent routes, with Ministries committee, through which people can become Synod-recognised and/or Assembly-Accredited lay preachers; support RCLs and Synods in providing ongoing development for worship leaders and lay preachers.

Eldership: Responsible for providing accessible, accurate and relevant elders resources through the URC website, including course materials for 'Presiding at the Sacraments'.

Keeping in close contact with relevant officers in Synods: Follow up leads, bring TDOs together, keep in contact with Mission Enabler and Children & Youth workers networks, liaise with Synod Moderators, Clerks, Convenors of relevant committees, and a host of individual conversations.

Maintaining positive relationships with ecumenical partners: Continue ecumenical engagement through RCLs; involve ecumenical partners in Stepwise and ensure that it is open to churches beyond the URC; participate in the Ecumenical Liaison Group for Ministerial Training; provide support for Appreciating Church; keep in touch with wider conversations on blended learning and digital discipleship.

Digital review: Encourage contemporary approaches to adult and intergenerational learning in the church, with the aim of ensuring that the URC implements relevant digital projects successfully. We will support this General Secretariat review, via the Church House Management Group.

Appendix 3 – Discipleship Development Strategy

Strategy summary

As God has loved you, so love the world and its people as you encounter them, with all the imagination, energy, wisdom and resources available to you.

There are four intertwined aspects to this strategy, each of which have defined objectives and implementation tasks endorsed by Mission Council:

- Accounting for hope
- All are pilgrims on the journey
- Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning
- Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Accounting for hope

Creating opportunities to encounter, develop a relationship with and enjoy a dynamic prayer life with the living God.

All are pilgrims on the journey

Intended to address the realities of inequality (due to vocation, age, specific learning differences, economic or time poverty, culture, geography, etc) by emphasising equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning

Developing the necessary gifts, skills and aptitudes, as educators and learners, in order that we all continue to grow in our own vocation and discipleship.

Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Evolving our strategy to develop people and congregations through the continued equipping of all in leadership as facilitators of learning, identifying strengths and needs, and advocating policies to share resources in a spirit of generosity.

Appendix 4 – Way Forward Implementation

PRIORITIES	CORE TASKS	NEXT STEPS	WHEN (initial tasks)	LEAD
Current work	EM1/2/3, Stepwise, RCL support, Discipleship Development Strategy (DDS)	Ensure resourcing, both of existing work and the new strategic projects, is sufficient and priorities are set. Maintain momentum on Stepwise. Identify next steps for DDS	Ongoing	Secretary & Staff Team
Carbon neutrality	Green Charter, carbon tracker, carbon offsetting, meeting venue assessment (together with other committees)	Finalise and publish Green Charter, develop carbon tracker, develop proposals for carbon offsetting	31/12/2020	Task group
Walking the Way	Support WtW Steering Group	Integrate WtW and DDS. Identify how E&L might enhance our support of WtW.	30/09/2020	Convenor, Secretary and DGS Discipleship
Defining integration	Define what 'success' looks like, Involve Synods and RCLs, Identify integration drivers and barriers	Define what successful integration looks like	31/12/2020	Convenor
RCL collaboration	Establish where further collaboration is valuable, evaluate ecumenical and governance needs, prepare change plans	Develop a vision of how the RCLs could develop in the future	31/12/2020	RCL Principals group (which includes Governor and E&L representatives)
Key partners	Working with Ministries and C&YW Committees, Synods and Ecumenical partners	Develop more effective collaboration within Discipleship dept. and continue meetings with relevant Synod teams	31/12/2020	Convenor, Secretary and DGS Discipleship
Ways of working	Use of video conferencing, Style and frequency of meetings, Committee size and composition, budgetary management	Finalise E&L approach to virtual meetings and its impact on meetings schedule. Develop proposals for committee size and composition.	30/09/2020	VM Task Group, Size Task Group

Students in Training, by Synod

01 Northern

CRCW

Fliss Tunnard Northern College

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Roberta Ritson Scottish College

Stipendiary Ministry

Louise Sanders Scottish College
Lisa Wilson Westminster College

02 North Western

CRCW

Katy Ollerenshaw Northern College

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Walt Johnson Northern College

Stipendiary Ministry

Jonnie Hill Northern College
Kate Hunt Northern College
Lee Battle Northern College
Sarah Fitton Northern College

03 Mersey

Stipendiary Ministry

Karen Jones Northern College
Paul Duncan Northern College

04 Yorkshire

Stipendiary Ministry

Adam Woodhouse Westminster College

06 West Midlands

Stipendiary Ministry

James Hamilton Northern College
Johnny O'Hanlon Westminster College

07 Eastern

Stipendiary Ministry

David Cumbers Westminster College

08 South Western

Stipendiary Ministry

Aiyana Gardner-Houghton Northern College
Matthew Rigden Westminster College

09 Wessex

CRCW

Alice Gilbert

Northern College

Stipendiary Ministry

Ruth Dewis

Westminster College

10 Thames North

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Solomon Aryee-Brown

Northern College

Stipendiary Ministry

Joseph Amoah

Westminster College

Stephen Ansa-Addo

Westminster College

11 Southern

Stipendiary Ministry

Adam Earle

Westminster College

Dan Harris

Westminster College

12 Wales

Stipendiary Ministry

Ceri Gardner

Northern College

Mark Rodgers

Northern College

13 Scotland

Stipendiary Ministry

Lesley Thomson

Scottish College

Nicola Robinson

Northern College

Susan Henderson

Scottish College

Students in Training statistics

as of 31/03/2020

	Students in Training		Anticipated entry into URC Service			
	Mar-18	Mar-20	2020	2021	2022	2023
STIPENDIARY						
Full-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL) MWS	11	11	5	2	3	1
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	4	3		1	2	
Scottish College (RCL)	1	3	1			2
Westminster College (RCL)	17	10	3	1	5	1
Part-time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)	1					
Scottish College (RCL)						
Subtotal	34	27	9	4	10	4
NON-STIPENDIARY						
Full-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)						
Westminster College (RCL)						
Part-Time Courses						
Northern College (RCL)	8	2	1		1	
Scottish College (RCL)		1				1
Westminster College (RCL)	3					
Subtotal	11	3	1		1	1
GRAND TOTAL	45	30	10	4	11	5

MWS: Ministry of Word and Sacraments

CRCW: Church Related Community Worker

RCL: Resource Centre for Learning

Equalities Committee

Encouraging equality, cherishing diversity

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Anne E Lewitt: aelewitt@gmail.com
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 Equalities Committee in the period from July 2018 to April 2020.
Main points	To promote equalities within the whole life of the URC, and to challenge practices which lead to exclusion and are not representative of the diversity within the denomination.
Previous relevant documents	www.urchurch.org.uk/equalities
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	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Ecumenical

1. Purpose and remit

- 1.1 The Equalities Committee encourages and supports the development of equalities in every part of the United Reformed Church. Its remit is to remind the URC that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work and, where necessary, to challenge the practice of the URC to that end. This includes promoting the URC's contribution to equality within the wider life of society.
- 1.2 This is a very wide remit, and to fulfil it the Equalities Committee collaborates with other committees, groups and individuals, both within and beyond the URC, and attempts to share ideas and best practice.
- 1.3 We were encouraged by the response of members at the 2018 General Assembly, where numbers wanting to speak to our resolutions, and wanting to speak to us afterwards, suggested that there is a deep concern within the URC around issues of equality and diversity. This concern has been reflected in contacts from members of local churches since, but at all levels within the church it needs to be translated into further action. As a committee, we are determined to find ways to facilitate this.



2. Committee membership and modes of meeting

- 2.1 As well as meeting via Lifesize when the Covid-19 lockdown made this necessary, the committee has been pleased to welcome individual members to contribute to meetings virtually when they could not attend in person. It is hoped that this can be expanded to open committee membership to some who have previously been excluded.
- 2.2 Two members of the committee left at the end of their term of service, and two more (both of whom had joined since 2018) had to resign during their tenure. We were also sad to bid farewell to the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, who, as Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, was a much-valued member. We have recently welcomed one new member, and another has agreed to stand for a second term.
- 2.3 At the 2020 Youth Assembly, a new URC Youth Equality and Diversity Representative was elected, and we were glad to welcome them as a member of the committee. Since their input is of considerable importance to our work and they are still attending college, we are looking at arranging meetings in ways that are more accessible to them, by choosing appropriate times or by virtual attendance.

3. Response to Resolution 24 from General Assembly 2018

- 3.1 The General Assembly in 2018 asked us to seek ways of supporting the work of the Nominations Committee to encourage diversity in appointments, and to further equalities within the life and nature of the whole Church. The Convenor of Nominations attended one of our meetings to discuss how this could take place. This was useful, and while there are no easy answers, the two committees will remain in close contact as we continue to grapple with the challenge. It will be helpful if awareness is raised throughout the whole church of the existence of Assembly committees and the vacancies on them.
- 3.2 Making the jump from serving in a local church to serving a synod or Assembly committee is a big step, which may need both encouragement and continuing support. However, diversity and equality are not just a challenge for wider church committees, and it is clear that many local church elderships are not fully representative of the congregations they serve.
- 3.3 The United Reformed Church is a diverse church, and this is something we need to celebrate! That diversity is both visible and invisible; it includes protected characteristics such as (but not limited to) age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and (dis)ability, but also other characteristics, including geographical location and theological perspective. The URC is also a Church that takes decisions by conciliar processes, so it is very important that all decision-making bodies are representative of our diversity – and seen to be so.
- 3.3 We have been very encouraged by reports from Youth Assembly and the Youth Executive of higher levels of awareness and diversity amongst their membership, and the positive steps they are taking to maintain this. We hope that their understanding and experience can be widely shared.

4. The URC – a Breastfeeding-friendly Church

- 4.1 We have been drafting a policy for adoption by local congregations to encourage a clear and supportive welcome for breastfeeding parents and their children. It is intended that this will integrate with work being done by the Children's and Youth Work team.

5. Questions about future ministry to churches in vacancy

- 5.1 When a church is in vacancy, conversations are held about the ministry appropriate in that situation. Questions may be asked of a church in order to clarify – for all those involved in the process – what the congregation feel about future ministry. Concerns have been expressed that questions intended to protect ministers, particularly, but not exclusively those with same-sex partners, might in fact close down options for both churches and ministers. Answering a question about a hypothetical situation is different from meeting and getting to know a real person. We have had conversations with several synod moderators, as well as interested groups and individuals, and accept that at present we must rely on the care and sensitivity of those tasked with asking the questions. However, for as long as such questions need to be asked, we must consider whether we are as equal and inclusive a church as we could be.

6. Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care

- 6.1 We hope to make the Church of Scotland booklet, *Diverse Gender Identities and Pastoral Care*, available to all congregations as a hard copy rather than just a suggested download. Whilst this publication is a couple of years old, its specific church perspective and concern for pastoral care make it particularly helpful. At a time when awareness of diversity in gender is growing and is frequently highlighted by the media, not always helpfully, we believe that this booklet's format of personal stories with questions for discussion makes it a valuable resource for the URC, and we commend it to you.

7. Bullying and Harassment

- 7.1 With others, including the URC's Safeguarding Advisor, we have updated the advice on 'Responding to allegations of bullying and harassment', which is now available as an appendix to *Good Practice 5*, and also linked from the Equalities page of the URC website.

Faith and Order Committee

Report of ongoing work

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Alan Spence: alan@thespences.org.uk
Action required	For noting
Draft resolution(s)	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	An update of the committee's work, and outline of its future plans
Main points	Summary of work on cohabitation, theological gender language, Fresh Expressions and Eldership.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Equalities Committee, Mission Committee, Fresh Expressions, Pioneer Ministers, Ecumenical Partners.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No financial implications
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Most of these areas of work are of interest to our ecumenical partners, who are facing similar issues.

1. Cohabitation – Marriage and Relationships

The Moderators' Meeting and the Ministries Committee asked Faith and Order to offer a theological view on ministers of the URC cohabiting. The original draft response of the committee was circulated to these groups, but we recognise that that early response does yet not reflect Faith and Order's final mind on this matter. We are, however, willing to participate with any who wish to engage in this ongoing discussion. We note that the recent Methodist report on marriage and relationships, 'God in love unites us', also deals with cohabitation. We have provided comment on the report to the Methodist Church, based on the experience of having taken a similar devolved decision on same-sex marriage to the one proposed to be taken at the next Methodist Conference.

We have contributed by interview and written submission to the Church of England's new document on relationships, 'Living in Love and Faith'.

2. **Gender language and the Trinity**

The Equalities Committee asked Faith and Order to consider the use of gender sensitive language in our church's Trinitarian formulations, as the only authorised form in the URC Basis of Union is that of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Initially, the enquiry related to Baptism services, but it has subsequently been considered in a wider context. Our committee has worked on a discussion paper which has continued to evolve with input from various interested parties. In its latest form, the Faith and Order response was included in the papers of the cancelled Mission Council March 2020, and can be viewed there as paper F1. We hope that this will provide an opportunity for group discussion at the next Mission Council meeting.

3. **Fresh Expressions and Pioneer Ministry**

Representatives from Fresh Expressions (FX) and Walking the Way asked Faith and Order to bring some theological clarity to the status of FX within the URC. The committee's initial response has provided the basis for further discussion, both with FX and with Pioneer ministers. Questions have also arisen about the status of communities that are no longer able to offer the basic structures of a congregation within the URC. Faith and Order will now work with other URC Committees, brought together by the Mission staff, to further this work.

4. **Baptism**

A printed leaflet has been published to aid those inquiring about baptism. This complements an earlier booklet developed by Faith and Order on membership in the URC.

5. **Eldership and LEPs**

Concerns have been raised about the role of eldership in LEP settings, and questions about whether the URC views the ordination of elders to be essential (of the essence of the church) or simply beneficial (a matter of well-being). The committee has drafted a paper on elders and ordination to underline the significance of eldership within the URC, and the gift it potentially offers to LEPs. We have sent the draft paper to ecumenical partners for consultation, and it will be developed further later in the year, once their feedback has been received.

6. **Ecumenical Participation**

The Revd Dr Callan Slipper, National Ecumenical Officer for the Church of England, has a permanent place as ecumenical observer on the Faith and Order Committee. We have benefited from his wisdom and input, particularly in the area of 'receptive ecumenism'.

We were also pleased to have as a guest at our meeting in October 2019 the Revd Dr Susan Durber, Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Susan spoke of her work, and gave insight into how WCC Faith & Order deal with difficult conversations.

7. 'What we believe about....?' series

The committee has been working for some time on a short series of two-page articles on what the church believes about 10 central theological themes, including: Jesus, God, the Holy Spirit, the Church and Salvation. The series is intended to provide basic answers for the interested outsider. We expect it to be published before the end of the calendar year and initially posted on the Faith and Order webpage as a resource for the Denomination.

We include one of the articles, as a sample of this work:

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT ... THE HOLY SPIRIT?

The Spirit is personal

The English word 'spirit' can refer to the mood or atmosphere among a group of people. While a valid use of the word, this is not what Christians mean when we talk about the Holy Spirit. With the whole Christian Church, the United Reformed Church uses capital letters and a definite 'the' when we talk about 'the Holy Spirit'.

The Holy Spirit carries the presence of God into this world and in this world. God is not just a creator who wound up the world and left it to tick. Nor is God just the one who came in Jesus, stayed with us for a few years, then moved on, back to heaven. But God is also a living presence, right up to date, active within the world today.

The Spirit brings the creative power and energy of God into our world. The Spirit breathes the life and goodness of Jesus among us. We can relate to the Spirit, in friendship and dependence and companionship.

Christians celebrate the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, Whit Sunday as it often used to be called. Pentecost means 'fifty' – just fifty days on from Easter. Acts 2 tells of the Pentecost that followed the first Good Friday and Easter. Jesus had died, risen and ascended. He was gone. Then a wind blew, a fire burned, voices spoke, and lives were filled with a new energy from heaven. The friends of Jesus realised that they were not a people deserted. They were accompanied, empowered and enabled. The life of Jesus had come among them, in the Spirit of Jesus.

Telling it this way might suggest that the Spirit was completely unknown in Old Testament times. That is not the case. But there are some differences between Old Testament and New. The New Testament tells of the Spirit as a constant presence rather than occasional; as available to all the friends of Jesus, not just to a few leaders or prophets; as 'holy' – the term 'Holy Spirit' is not common in the Old Testament; and as the Spirit of Jesus.

The Spirit is holy

To call the Spirit 'Holy' is to speak of the life of God. God is holy – distinct, perfect, not dependent upon us, yet shaping our world with goodness. The Spirit carries that holiness into our life today and helps us to respond to God and to share in God's nature.

So the Spirit calls us to faith, reminding us of the reality of Jesus and of the truths he brought us (John 14:26). The Spirit bears witness in our hearts and prompts us to reach out in Jesus' name as children of the God whom Jesus called Father (Romans 8:15-17).

The Spirit is the invisible power in Christian worship, kindling within us a desire to praise God and acting as conduit and interpreter of our prayers. The Spirit makes our sacraments deep moments of connection with the life of heaven.

The Spirit knits Christians together in fellowship, calling us to be one body in Christ, and giving us a bond of love with one another that reaches beyond the limits and boundaries of language, culture, tradition and background.

The Spirit calls us to a lifestyle that mirrors and embodies the values of Jesus. 'Sanctification' is an old name for this – the process of becoming holy in practice. Goodness is not a quality we can attain by pulling upwards on our own moral and ethical shoelaces. It needs to be a gift from God. Surely we have to respond to the Spirit. But when forces of temptation, habit or custom try to pull us off the path of Jesus, we are not in the struggle on our own. The inner strength of God's Spirit works for us, with us and within us.

And the Spirit gives the church energy to make Jesus known. There are many words for this – mission, outreach, witness. The church was never meant to be an ingrown community. The Spirit gives us the confidence and credibility to look outward, to declare by word and action that Jesus is alive, and to represent his truth and goodness by what we say and do. Again, we are not in this on our own. We are agents of the Spirit.

The Spirit is alive

Finally, it is worth noting that different people in the United Reformed Church would tell parts of this story in different ways. Some would stress the Spirit's role in creation (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 104:30) and speak of the Spirit working all over the world, not merely among Christians. Others would underline the Spirit's relationship to Jesus, and expect to encounter the work of the Spirit specifically in places where Jesus is named and known. Of one thing, however, we can be sure – God's Spirit regularly has surprises in store for us. Let us be ready to respond to these with faith, hope and joy, for Jesus' sake.

Finance Committee

General Report 2018 to 2020

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer: ianzhardie@googlemail.com John Piper, Deputy Treasurer: john.piper30@ntlworld.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. To advise General Assembly that the restrictions introduced to combat the Covid-19 pandemic have delayed the audit and signing off of the 2019 accounts, and to indicate how we intend to publicise the results in due course.
Main points	Central budgeted funds were in financial surplus in both 2018 and 2019; We are monitoring the impact of the coronavirus restrictions on our finances at all levels of the church but these have already delayed the audit of our 2019 financial statements; We are monitoring the progress of negotiations with our contractors over costs related to rectifying problems with the refurbishment of Church House; The financial support given by the Legacy and Church Building funds during 2018 and 2019 is reported; and Thanks and good wishes are offered to the chair of the pensions executive (now pensions committee) as he steps down from his role.
Previous relevant documents	Finance committee papers for General Assembly 2018
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of Impact

Financial	Nothing new in the report itself.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Revising our ethical investment guidelines led to a change of investment policy by one of our investment managers.

Financial results

1. The appendix to this paper sets out the income and expenditure account of the URC central fund for 2018 and the draft for 2019, as well as the 2020 budget agreed at the November 2019 Mission Council. Taken together, a net surplus of £2.1 million is shown as having been generated during the past two years. However, this result does not take into account the £1.5 million taken from reserves in October 2019 to reduce the deficit in the URC Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF).
2. In both years, the declared surplus was largely the result of ministerial and ministerial student numbers being substantially lower than anticipated, while our income proved more buoyant than we had expected.
3. In part, our increased income reflected a very good response to the encouragement given at the November 2018 Mission Council for synods which were not already doing so to give 10% of the net proceeds of sales of redundant church buildings (other than manses) to help meet the increased contributions the church needed to make to the MPF. We are grateful to the 11 synods currently committed to making such contributions.
4. The giving by churches to the Ministry and Mission ('M&M') fund has also continued its recent pattern of declining by only 1% a year, despite the greater drop in the number and size of congregations. Thanks are due to all those at a local church level who contribute so faithfully to financing ministry, training and mission across the URC.
5. The 2020 budget projected a modest deficit, the result of one-off or temporary expenditure items expected in that year. However, it is likely that the impact of anti-coronavirus measures will reduce the level of M&M contributions and dividend income. At the time of writing (April), it is too early to say whether the shortfall will be significant. We are monitoring the situation regularly, and have asked committee convenors and Church House budget-holders to look for ways of deferring or reducing expenditure for the present.
6. The lockdown has also impacted on the timetable for auditing and approving the URC Trust's report and financial statements for 2019. Normally, the audit would be completed during March and April, with the Trust approving and signing off the document at its meeting in May before presentation to General Assembly. This year, such work as it was possible to undertake remotely was carried out during March, but a date for examining hard-copy documents is pencilled in for early June. At present, we have no idea whether that date will prove feasible. When the audit is completed, we will arrange to have the finance committee and URC Trust directors consider the material electronically, with a view to getting finalised and signed copies of the accounts on the URC website as soon as possible. Anyone requiring a hard copy should let Bea Minta know via email at beatrice.minta@urc.org.uk, and we will arrange for one to be dispatched when available.

Church House refurbishment

In the autumn of 2017, following re-occupation of Church House, it emerged that there was a serious problem with damp in the lower ground floor. The work agreed to be required to remedy the situation was undertaken at no cost to the URC, but we did incur additional costs as a result of having to vacate the affected rooms for

some months while the work was planned and undertaken. A claim has been made against the construction firm to recover those costs, and discussions about this are proceeding slowly with the firm and its insurers. The Finance Committee receives regular reports on the progress of these discussions. [Shortly before these reports went to print, a satisfactory settlement figure was offered and accepted.]

Legacy Fund

7. Requests 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 award grants totaling around £200,000 a year to support innovative mission projects, although only about half of that was utilised during 2019.

Church Building Fund

8. This fund gave grants of £153,000 and £82,000 in 2018 and 2019 respectively via the inter-synod resource-sharing process to support churches undertaking certain types of building development. Loans are also available in some circumstances. The grants and loans are now both administered through the Resource Sharing Task Group, but the finance committee oversees the finances being so deployed.

URC Investment Committee

9. This committee does sterling work with, and overseeing the activities of, the various investment managers used by the URC Trust, and also by the URC Ministers' Pension Trust (MPT). Aware of a desire within the church to use our investments to tackle the climate crisis, the investment committee and the finance committee began working with those investment managers in 2018 to divest from companies with more than 10% of their revenues coming from fossil fuel extraction. This eventually led to a resolution passed at May 2019 Mission Council asking those responsible for investment of URC funds to complete the disinvestment from fossil fuel companies by July 2020. In fact, the MPT had no fossil fuel investments from early 2018, and discussion with the URC Trust's equity investment manager (CCLA) contributed to the decision to make the COIF Ethical Investment Fund fossil-free by December 2019 at the latest. Although all equity portfolios have been adversely affected in the market turbulence following the coronavirus pandemic, fossil fuel companies have been among those particularly badly hit by the market downturn. As a result, at the time of writing, the church and pension fund investments are suffering considerably less severely than the market as a whole.

The URC Pension Committee

10. Although there was no physical meeting of Mission Council in March 2020, some decisions were taken electronically. Among these were to agree a resolution to rename the URC Pension Executive as the Pension Committee, and to give it the formal status of a sub-committee of Finance Committee. Because there is a separate report about pension issues (directly after this one in the Book of Reports), we do not say much here other than to record the stepping down of Chris Evans

from his role as chair of the pensions executive, and stepping back from other roles with the investment committee and the MPT, on health grounds with effect from this July. Chris has been a wise and knowledgeable guide on pensions matters within the URC for many years, and he has been particularly active of late in steering us towards grappling with the current pension challenges. His services will be sorely missed – even though he has undertaken to continue to offer help and insights on a ‘consultancy’ basis (health allowing). We thank Chris and wish him well for the future.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
Ministry & Mission Fund¹
Draft Income and Expenditure account to December 2019

	2018	2019	2020
	Actual	Actual	Budget
	£	£	£
Income			
Ministry and Mission contributions	(19,016,107)	(18,816,761)	(18,476,500)
Pensions - additional funding	0	(537,976)	(300,000)
Investment and other income			
Dividends	(920,122)	(931,795)	(925,000)
Donations	(6,595)	(8,908)	0
Specific legacies	(431)	(5,000)	0
Grants/Income - Memorial Hall Trust/Fund	(286,945)	(302,842)	(288,000)
Net other interest & bank charges	(7,291)	(10,983)	(8,000)
Other income, including property rentals	(126,368)	(140,008)	(162,400)
	(1,347,752)	(1,399,535)	(1,383,400)
Total income	(20,363,859)	(20,754,272)	(20,159,900)
Expenditure			
Discipleship Dept.			
Ministry			
Local and special ministries and CRCWs	13,495,559	13,260,661	13,698,000
Synod Moderators - stipends and expenses	669,632	670,888	739,000
Ministries department	335,911	349,206	334,600
Pastoral & welfare	846	1,232	2,000
	14,501,948	14,281,987	14,773,600
Education & Learning			
Initial training for ministry	599,467	565,162	547,570
Continuing training for ministry	75,474	120,067	95,500
Resource Centres support	614,948	631,287	638,640
	1,289,889	1,316,515	1,281,710
TLS/Stepwise	107,189	130,826	121,600
Lay preachers support	4,650	5,708	7,000
On-line learning	52,859	57,814	60,000
Lay Development Fund	1,443	0	25,000
Education & Learning department	181,740	167,124	168,000
	1,637,770	1,677,986	1,663,310
Children's and Youth Work			
Staff costs	193,487	210,139	216,500
Management, resources and programmes	69,768	62,402	111,200
	263,255	272,541	327,700
Safeguarding			
Safeguarding policy and practice	148,525	93,832	199,500
Discipleship Secretariat			
Deputy General Secretary - Discipleship costs	67,052	66,051	83,600
Mission Dept.			
Mission dept staff and core costs	448,781	505,459	529,200
Mission programmes and memberships (net)	164,292	186,651	250,200
	613,073	692,110	779,400
National Ecumenical Officers	20,335	33,435	36,500
	633,408	725,545	815,900
Administration & Resources Dept.			
Central Secretariat	241,695	284,655	270,500
Facilities	438,811	376,100	385,000
Human Resources	80,503	82,001	89,000
IT Services	201,949	214,795	237,700
Finance	425,741	415,087	385,400
Communications	374,641	446,257	464,800
	1,763,340	1,818,895	1,832,400
Governance			
General Assembly	120,537	100,000	100,000
Mission Council	70,020	67,058	63,000
Professional fees	72,342	103,073	100,000
Other	73,248	79,394	76,000
	336,146	349,526	339,000
Apprenticeship levy	46,095	45,754	55,000
Irrecoverable VAT	110,768	141,374	140,000
Total expenditure	19,508,307	19,473,490	20,230,010
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	855,553	1,280,782	(70,110)

¹Includes the Ministerial training Fund and the Maintenance of Ministries Fund

NOTE: THESE FIGURES EXCLUDE THE £1.5m PAID TOWARDS THE DEFICIT ON THE MINISTERS' PENSION FUND

Pensions Committee and Finance Committee

URC Pension Schemes – Facing up to some serious challenges

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	John Piper, Deputy Treasurer: john.piper30@ntlworld.com Ian Hardie, Treasurer: ianzhardie@gmail.com
Action required	Resolutions
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 20 The General Assembly, being representative of Local Churches, Synods and the whole Church, confirms the Church’s commitment to the pensions promises already made, and wishes any consideration of future pension arrangements for the Church’s Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, missionaries and staff to keep clearly in mind:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The Church’s warm gratitude for the commitment, gifts and service of those who work among us and serve in our name; b) The Church’s desire to deal with these people honourably in their retirement; c) The Church’s desire to act as a responsible employer, for the people we employ and for our stipendiary office-holders. <p>Resolution 21 General Assembly thanks Dr Chris Evans, on his retirement as Convener of the Pensions Committee, for his conscientious and careful service in this role and thanks all those across the Church who are involved in the current Integrated Risk Management Project for their hard work and their willingness to work towards a resolution of the significant pensions challenges that face the Church.</p> <p>Resolution 22 General Assembly authorises the directors of the URC Trust to amend its guarantee of the Ministers’ Pension Fund provided to the URC Ministers’ Pension Trust in response to the changing regulatory environment, but limited to the available resources of the URC Trust.</p>

Summary of Content

<p>Subject and aim(s)</p>	<p>The URC faces some serious challenges in relation to its two pension schemes. The cost of responding to these challenges could have a significant impact on the activities of the Church. This means that the issues, and how they are resolved, affect us all. The aim of this paper is to summarise the challenges, to describe the Integrated Risk Management (IRM) project and what has been achieved so far, and to suggest a framework for the work that remains to be done and the decisions that will have to be taken, albeit in unprecedentedly difficult circumstances.</p>
<p>Main points</p>	<p>The URC has two pension schemes. Both are Defined Benefit (DB) schemes, which means that the benefits for each member are based on their length of service and their final salary / stipend. All costs, except for member contributions, and all risks are carried by the employer (see 5.4, 6.3 and 7.4).</p> <p>More than a decade of historically low interest rates has adversely affected all pension schemes and continues to do so. For Defined Benefit schemes, the cost of promised benefits increases. For Defined Contribution schemes, the expected benefits from any given cost are reduced (see 8.2).</p> <p>The Church also faces significant additional costs or cash flows in relation to the pensions already earned. This is not because anyone has made mistakes. It is because the guidance from the Pensions Regulator (TPR) is becoming increasingly onerous. This is partly, but not only, in response to recent failures of commercial enterprises, leaving their pension schemes with insufficient funds to meet their obligations. In particular, TPR is introducing two important changes for all DB schemes. First, where a pension scheme relies on the financial support of not only the sponsoring employer [URC Trust] but also other related bodies [Synod trusts], TPR now requires stronger, legally enforceable, backing from those bodies. Second, TPR wants to significantly reduce the risks to scheme members when a scheme is approaching maturity by a combination of higher levels of funding, and less risky investment strategies. These factors could greatly increase the costs of the pensions already promised. (See 7.1 to 7.5.)</p> <p>The IRM project is a way of assessing all the risks and other issues involved in the provision of pensions in a holistic way (since many of them are inter-related), and trying to agree a way forward which is acceptable to all parties. This project requires the trustees of the pension schemes to tell the URC what is required; then all parts of the URC family need to be involved in a broadly based consultation; and, finally, decisions can be taken about the way forward.</p>

	<p>The work done so far is described in section 13. There is still a considerable amount of work to be done before the way forward can be agreed (see Section 9). For this reason, this paper is primarily for information at this stage.</p> <p>There have been important changes since this subject was discussed at the November 2019 Mission Council, including the current health crisis. All these changes make the pensions issues even more challenging. (See Section 4).</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper G3 at Mission Council, November 2019 and Paper G1 at Mission Council, March 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	There has been much engagement with the trustees of the two URC pension schemes in arriving at this point, and those discussions will continue.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None at the moment, but there will be significant extra costs.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

This paper is set out as follows:

PART I: Some Serious Pensions Challenges

- 1 Draft Resolutions
- 2 Some abbreviations and definitions
- 3 Introduction and Objectives
- 4 Important Changes since Paper G3, Mission Council, November 2019
- 5 The URC Final Salary Scheme – a good situation
- 6 The URC Ministers’ Pension Fund – the current situation
- 7 The URC Ministers’ Pension Fund – a very challenging future
- 8 Future Service Pensions
- 9 The Integrated Risk Management project
– a framework for the work still to be done and the decisions to be taken

PART II: Some Background Information

- 10 Defined benefit pension schemes
- 11 Legal responsibilities and regulations
- 12 Coping with uncertainty and managing risk
- 13 The Integrated Risk Management project – the story so far

PART I: Some Serious Pensions Challenges

1. Draft Resolutions

Three draft resolutions are offered to General Assembly.

The first resolution expresses the commitment of the Church to meet its obligations to pay the pensions already earned, whatever the cost (see section 6), and provides some guidance for the process of considering future pension arrangements (see section 8).

The second resolution offers Assembly's sincere thanks to Dr Chris Evans and the many people across the Church who are working hard to find solutions to the various challenges we face which are acceptable to all parties (see 4.3 and section 13).

The third resolution concerns the guarantee of the Ministers' Pension Fund provided by the URC Trust to the Ministers' Pension Trust, which is trustee of that Fund. General Assembly in 2010 gave the URC Trust authority to 'take the necessary legal steps to give effect to the covenant' (i.e. the covenant of the URC as employer) and the result was the 2010 guarantee. Depending on the outcome of the ongoing consultation within the URC, it may be necessary to amend the wording of this guarantee. This resolution would give the URC Trust the power to do this without first coming back to Assembly.

2. Some abbreviations and definitions

DB Defined benefit: A defined benefit pension scheme is one where the calculation of the pension is pre-determined, and is based on the final stipend / salary and the years of service. This means that the costs can only be estimated, and all the risks, including investment performance, are carried by the employer.

DC Defined contribution: A defined contribution scheme is one where the contributions are fixed, these are invested, and the pension payable depends on the investment performance. The value of the pension is uncertain, and the risks are carried by the individual.

Employer Covenant: The extent of the employer's legal obligation and financial ability to support a DB pension scheme now and in the future.

IRM Integrated Risk Management: For a definition, see Section 13.

Journey plan: The plan of the trustee of a pension scheme to reach the LTO by gradually reducing investment risk and building up the level of technical provisions to that required at the LTO.

LTO Long-term Objective: The LTO is the funding and investment strategy chosen by the trustee of a pension scheme. It must specify the intended funding level, and the nature of the investments that the scheme will hold at the point when it is significantly mature. At that point, a scheme is expected to have a low level of dependency on the employer, and be invested with high resilience to risk.

MPF Ministers' Pension Fund: the assets and liabilities of the Ministers' Pension Scheme.

MPT URC Ministers' Pension Trust: trustee of the URC Ministers' Pension Scheme.

Recovery Plan: The way that the trustee and the employer agree that any TP deficit should be recovered through additional contributions. TP deficits should be recovered as soon as affordability allows, while minimising any adverse effect on the sustainability of the employer.

TP Technical Provisions: basis of valuing a pension fund.

TPR (sometimes tPR) The Pensions Regulator.

TPT TPT Retirement Solutions: the trustee of the URC Final Salary Pension Scheme.

3. Introduction and Objectives

The URC faces some significant challenges, particularly in relation to the funding of the Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF). The objective of the Integrated Risk Management (IRM) project is to find a way of dealing with these challenges which is acceptable to the Pensions Regulator (TPR), the trustee (MPT), and the Church which is seen to be manageable and fair, and which has as little impact as possible on the life of the Church.

While this paper is being written for General Assembly 2020, it will also be part of a briefing sent to the directors of the various URC trust companies, who are the ones who have been most involved so far in the consultation process that is underway.

The issues dealt with are inherently complex, but they also have serious financial implications that could have a significant impact on the life and work of the Church, especially if they are not properly managed. This means that these issues affect us all, even if the consultation is at the moment mainly with the various trust bodies, as the legal owners of the financial assets of General Assembly and the synods.

Whether or not General Assembly 2020 actually meets, all of us have a responsibility to engage with the issues, and to support and encourage those working to develop a way forward which meets these pensions challenges in an acceptable and affordable way.

This paper comes to General Assembly from the Pensions Committee and the Finance Committee. The IRM project group has also been involved. The IRM project is a joint venture with the Ministers' Pension Trust (MPT), as trustee of the Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF). It is vital that the consultation process continues to be informed by the trustee's latest understanding of the issues, and these are reflected in this paper. A co-opted member of the Pensions Committee who is also a non-executive director of TPR has taken no part in the writing of this paper or in the IRM project.

The issues are essentially the same as those identified in Paper G3, Mission Council, November 2019, but this paper describes our current and updated understanding of them. It is intended that this paper should make sense on its own, without reference back to earlier papers. We have been encouraged to keep re-telling the story, in the hope that each time the story is shared there is a little more understanding.

The story also needs re-telling because it changes and develops. There have been some significant developments over the last six months, all of which have made the challenges and the timetable to meet them more difficult. These changes are summarised in section 4. Sections 5 and 6 describe the current situation on both URC pension schemes. Section 7 explains the key issues that we face. Section 8 deals briefly with the issue of future pension provision. Section 9 summarises the work that still has to be done, and the timetable that has to be met. Part II of the paper provides background information. Sections 10 to 12 cover some general pensions matters, for those not familiar with the subject. Section 13 describes the IRM project and the work that has been done so far.

This paper is long, partly because the issues dealt with are inherently complex, and partly because it is written to be accessible to everyone.

Life feels a lot more precarious than it did six months ago, and the world of pensions is even more uncertain than it was. Nevertheless, in the body of this paper and then summarised in section 9, we attempt to demonstrate how the URC family might, together, work towards a satisfactory conclusion to the IRM project which meets the needs of the URC pension schemes within the required timetable, and in a way that is seen to be fair and which minimises the impact on the effectiveness of our Church.

4. Important Changes since Paper G3 for Mission Council, November 2019

4.1 The following are in chronological order, not necessarily order of importance.

4.2 *2018 valuation of the Ministers' Pension Scheme challenged by the Regulator*

Paper G3 was written in September 2019. It was necessary to update that paper orally at Mission Council, November 2019 and in the subsequent consultations. In October 2019, representatives of MPT and their advisers, along with the URC Treasurer, attended a meeting with our TPR supervisory team at their offices. It was made clear that they were unhappy with the level of prudence in the 2018 actuarial valuation of the MPF. In particular:

- i) they thought a more prudent estimate of investment returns should have been used, leading to an increase of around £20 million in the calculated deficit, with a corresponding increase in the deficit contributions required;
- ii) because of the inadequate legal backing for the MPF, they considered the 'employer covenant' to be tending to strong rather than strong, which would have increased the deficit by around a further £10 million; and
- iii) therefore, they were very concerned about the reduction of around £500k per year in deficit contributions (see 6.3).

In October, the URC Trust paid £1.5 million into the MPF. This had the effect of reversing the reduction in deficit contributions up to the time of the next valuation.

TPR decided not to insist on a formal 2018 revaluation. However, it was made clear that the 2021 valuation will have to be on a much more prudent basis.

4.3 *Resignation of the Convenor of the Pensions Committee*

Dr Chris Evans has served as Convenor of the Pensions Committee (formerly the Pensions Executive) and as a director of MPT since 2013. Both bodies, and the wider Church, have come to rely heavily on Chris's expertise, experience and hard work – and his patient skilfulness at explaining complex matters in relatively simple terms.

This dependence on Chris has been particularly true within the IRM project.

Chris has been suffering periods of ill health – not helped by the pressure of these pension responsibilities. Chris led the consultations that took place in November / December 2019. That took its toll. At the end of January 2020, Chris announced that he would be stepping down as Convenor of the Pensions Committee at GA 2020 – a year earlier than scheduled – and would be massively reducing his pensions work and the related travelling with immediate effect. Chris is also resigning as a director of MPT.

Chris continues to offer considerable support to his colleagues, as his health allows, but this is a massive blow – both personally and in terms of lost expertise / experience.

4.4 *TPR consultation document*

A much-delayed new Pension Scheme Bill was introduced to Parliament at the beginning of 2020, and will soon become law. Among other things, it updates and strengthens the powers of TPR in connection with scheme funding and investment strategy.

TPR is responsible for issuing detailed guidance (rules) that spells out the implications of the legislation, and for ensuring that trustees and employers comply.

At the beginning of March 2020, TPR issued a consultation document of almost 200 pages. This will be followed by a second consultation document around the end of 2020. Following this consultation, a new Code of Practice will be issued. While this will consolidate and codify many of the recent piecemeal elements of TPR guidance, it will also extend these and introduce new forms of supervision. The new Code of Practice is unlikely to formally apply to the 2021 valuation of the MPF but, in practice trustees and actuaries will immediately start taking the contents of the consultation document into account when determining their approach.

The consultation document needs much further consideration by both the pension scheme trustees and by the URC pensions committee. However, it is clear that it

represents a further move towards greater prudence and tighter regulation. In particular:

There will be a requirement for the trustee of a scheme to specify the LTO of the scheme – i.e. when it expects the scheme to reach ‘significant maturity’; what the funding level and investment strategy should be at that point; and how it proposes to transition to achieve that. TPR expects that, at the LTO, there will be a low level of dependency on the employer and the investments will have a high resilience to risk. The consultation document suggests that the maximum period allowed for moving towards the LTO may be shorter than we previously expected, which will have a material impact on the cost of getting from here to there.

TPR will expect trustees to apply a higher quality test on the forms of legal backing that can be taken into account when assessing the additional support that the employer can rely on from its ‘wider group’ – in the URC case, this is the URC Trust and the Synod trusts, respectively.

Both of these developments could be problematic and costly for the URC family, in the view of the authors of this paper. However, the board of MPT will be taking professional advice about the TPR consultation document and then responding to the document and letting the URC as employer know what difference they think it makes.

TPR is expected to issue its annual funding statement in the spring of 2020. This could also have an impact on our understanding of the challenges we face.

4.5 *The Coronavirus pandemic*

The pandemic is a health crisis but, clearly, it has financial implications, and the longer it goes on, the more serious those implications may become.

Short-term priorities

Whether as individuals, or in our local churches, synods or at Church House, the current financial concerns are the actual or potential loss of income, the control of expenditure, and our continued financial viability. This is all very real and totally understandable.

This makes consideration of these pension issues really difficult at this time. It would be easier if we could come back to them once the present crisis has passed and the new situation can be properly evaluated.

Asset values

There has been a lot of turbulence in the financial markets, and some equities have suffered very substantial reductions in value. This affects the MPF directly (though less than the headline rate), but it also affects the trust companies holding URC assets.

It is very hard for the different parts of the URC family to discuss how best and most fairly to share the burden of these pension challenges when we are not sure of the current or future financial positions of any of trusts.

Inability to meet

The URC consultation about these challenges has reached the stage where, ideally, all the URC trusts need to meet together to develop possible solutions. Virtual meetings of people from 14 trusts do not sound very attractive or likely to be successful.

Timetable

The problem is that the deadline for reaching decisions about these pension matters remains the same. Time that we are losing now will have to be made up later on.

5. The URC Final Salary (Lay staff) Scheme – a good situation

5.1 *Scope*

Almost all the members of the Final Salary Scheme are lay, though a few ministers are members. Two-thirds of the members are, or have been, employees at Church House or Westminster College. The other third of members are, or were, employees of 11 of the synods and Northern College. These other bodies are participating employers in this scheme, which means that they share direct legal responsibility for its liabilities.

5.2 *Trustee*

The trustee of the URC Final Salary Scheme is TPT Retirement Solutions (formerly the Pensions Trust). Representatives of TPT consult regularly with representatives of the Pensions Committee. However, responsibility for things like investment strategy, funding level, and the basis of actuarial valuations rests with the trustee.

TPT is a specialist pensions provider dealing with many different schemes. It has generally taken a highly prudent approach as trustee. This means that the contributions made by the URC and TPT's investment strategy have, in effect, already addressed many of the issues in this scheme which are now such a challenge for the MPF.

5.3 *Actuarial valuation as at 30 September 2016*

This valuation happened on a bad day in the financial markets. For this and other reasons, the valuation on the TP basis showed a deficit of £5.7 million on assets of £23 million. This was a much worse position than three years earlier.

The participating employers agreed to make capital contributions of £3.4 million in 2017 / 2018. This enabled the overall level of regular contributions from 1 January 2018 to stay the same, with employer future service contributions going up from 17.6% to 25.1% of salary and deficit contributions going down from 10.5% to 3.0%. The contribution of active members remained unchanged at 7.5%.

5.4 *Actuarial valuation as at 30 September 2019*

The latest valuation is under way, and is not yet concluded.

Early indications are that there was a small surplus on this scheme at the valuation date, which is an amazing turnaround, not least due to the capital contributions described above. Therefore, there will be no deficit contributions payable from 1 January 2021.

Future service contributions continue to rise. The historically low levels of interest rates have now persisted for more than a decade, and that seems unlikely to change any time soon.

Although the figures are not yet finalised, it seems likely that there will be an increase of 5% to 6% of salary in the future service contribution rate, but no 3% deficit recovery payment – so a net increase in costs of 2% to 3%.

5.5 *Long-term funding objective*

TPT has modified its approach to anticipate the likely requirements of TPR regarding a journey towards the long-term funding target. TPT does not anticipate any serious future financial challenge in meeting the LTO. However, that was before the recent turbulence in the financial markets. Conversations with TPT continue.

6. **The URC Ministers' Pension Fund – the current situation**

6.1 *Scope*

Almost all the members of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund are ministers or church related community workers who serve or have served the URC. A small number of ecumenical bodies have become participating employers in this scheme because they have employed URC ministers.

6.2 *Trustee*

The trustee of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF) is the URC Ministers' Pension Trust (MPT). This is an 'in house' corporate trustee, though it is legally obliged to act independently of the Church. It must act prudently, impartially, and solely in the best interests of the beneficiaries. Its primary role is to ensure that the benefits already earned by the members of the scheme for their past service are paid when due. All the directors of the trust company are members of the URC, but the trustee's professional advisers are different from those of the Church.

6.3 *Actuarial valuation as at 1 January 2018*

This valuation happened on a good day for the financial markets.

The actuarial valuation produces several valuations of the scheme's assets and liabilities on different bases.

The 'Technical Provisions' (TP) basis is the one used to determine the schedule of contributions payable by the employer and the members. On the TP basis, this valuation showed a deficit of £3.95 million on assets of £140 million. This compared with a deficit of £16.6 million on assets of £112 million in 2015 and a

deficit of £22.8 million on assets of £72 million back in 2009, just after the financial crash, when a 20-year recovery plan was agreed which would have lasted until 2030.

Following the 2018 valuation, it was agreed that recovery payments could be reduced by about £500k per year from 2019, with the aim of eliminating the deficit by mid-2025 (still earlier than the previous target date).

Mainly because of the persistent exceptionally low interest rates, the employer future service contributions went up from 1 January 2019 to 21.95% of stipend. This compared with 14.90% following the 2015 and 12.35% following the valuation back in 2009. Employee contributions have been 7.5% of stipend since 2010.

The solvency valuation is, in essence, the amount that it would cost to sell all the liabilities of the scheme (and the associated risks) to an insurance company. On the solvency basis, the 2018 valuation showed a deficit of £73.2 million.

Immediately after the finalising of this valuation, because the trustee and the Church were aware of some significant issues that would need to be addressed before the next valuation, the IRM project was set up as a joint venture between the trustee and the Church. That was before the intervention of TPR described in 4.2 above.

7. The URC Ministers' Pension Fund – a very challenging future

7.1 *Summary of the issues that we face*

There are two significant issues which the Church has to deal with over the next 12 months or so, before the 2021 valuation is finalised:

Legal backing (7.3)

Currently, the URC Trust as the legal owner of the assets of General Assembly provides a limited legally enforceable guarantee of the MPF to the MPT. If there is not similar legal backing from the synod trusts, then their assets will not be considered to be available to the MPF, and the employer covenant will be deemed to be much weaker.

The Church family has to decide what level and quality of legal backing it is able and willing to provide. This will impact directly on the size of the 2021 deficit and, therefore, on the size of the recovery payments required.

The strength of this legal backing will also affect the Church's ability to negotiate a 'bespoke' approach to achieving the LTO (7.2) for the MPF, and the size and timing of the required further cash contributions to the Fund.

Dealing with the 2021 deficit (7.4)

Depending on the quality of the legal backing and on the state of the financial markets at the time, the 2021 deficit is likely to be in the range £20 million to £40 million. We understand that TPR will expect this deficit to be resolved within six years.

The URC family needs to plan for how this deficit will be dealt with, in a way that minimises the impact on the life and mission of the Church in all its parts.

There are two other issues which may feel slightly longer term, but are really all part of the same situation:

Long-term funding objective (7.2)

The long-term objective (LTO) of a maturing pension scheme is the point at which its funds are held in low-risk assets, and it has little risk that it will need to rely on the employer for further funding. The TPR consultation document makes it clear that this is the key issue for TPR, and that all the others should be seen in this context.

It is not yet clear what the implications are for the MPF.

As at the 2018 valuation, the actuary estimated the cost of immediately moving to a low residual level of growth assets and an assumed overall level of return on the MPF assets of 'gilts + 0.5%'. The estimated cost was around £48 million. This figure is equivalent to the £4 million deficit in the 2018 valuation, plus the £20 million of extra prudence expected by TPR and referred to in 4.2(i), plus £24 million for the projected loss of income on the growth assets.

Providing against future shocks in the financial markets (7.5)

If the employer wants the MPF to include growth assets, then there is an unavoidable risk that a shock in the financial markets could give rise to a deficit. Because of the relatively short period now being allowed for dealing with a deficit, it is unrealistic to expect the URC to be able to do this out of normal income streams. It is, therefore, necessary to plan for how such an event would be dealt with. TPR or the trustee might insist that any such plan is backed up by some form of legal undertaking.

7.2 Long-term funding objective

The TPR consultation document seems to make clear that, for DB pension schemes that are 'approaching maturity', the long-term objective (LTO) and the 'journey plan' to reach it will become TPR's overriding issue, with other shorter term issues (like deficit recovery plans) seen as part of the 'journey' rather than as separate issues.

The TPR consultation document states as a principle: 'By the time they are "significantly mature", we expect schemes to have a low level of dependence on their employer, and be invested with a high resilience to risk'.

The trouble is that none of the terms in quotes has yet been precisely defined and, indeed, the precise definitions are the subject of a large part of the consultation. Having said that, it seems clear that the MPF is approaching maturity, and that the period to its LTO may be shorter than we had previously thought. The trustee will be consulting with its advisers before (a) responding to the TPR consultation document and (b) letting the URC as employer know the trustee's views about the implications of this document.

Virtually all DB schemes mature over time. The number of retired members receiving pensions increases whereas, typically, the number of active members remains stable. This means that there comes a point where the cash flow becomes negative. If the number of active members reduces (as is the case with the MPF) or if the scheme is closed to the accrual of future benefits, then this trend happens more quickly.

In the case of the MPF, the total value of both assets and liabilities virtually doubled from the 2009 valuation to the 2018 valuation. But now, the amount paid out in pensions is greater than the amount being received in contributions and investment income. This gap between receipts and payments will increase over time, and so the total values of the assets and liabilities will slowly reduce. This is a natural phenomenon and is not, of itself, a problem. It is what TPR describes as approaching maturity. The other related concern of TPR is the proportion of the total liabilities that are being paid out in benefits in any one year.

TPR already requires scheme trustees and employers to agree a long-term objective and a journey plan to reach it, though the new Code of Practice is likely to be much more prescriptive about this.

TPR is proposing that there will be 'fast track' and 'bespoke' options for pension schemes when defining their journey plans. Under either fast track or bespoke approaches, TPR will expect the MPT and the URC to agree on a LTO, and on a journey plan for achieving this low dependency by the date that the MPF is significantly mature.

The MPF actuary estimated that, as at the time of the 2018 valuation, it would have cost the scheme about £48 million to transfer almost all of its equity and property assets into gilts. This would have achieved the LTO at that time, if calculated on a 'gilts + 0.5%' basis. As explained above, this figure can be understood as the £4 million deficit in the 2018 valuation plus the £20 million of extra prudence now expected by TPR (see 4.2(i)), plus a further £24 million for the cost in lost future income from the growth assets. The cost today might be slightly higher because of the changes in the financial markets and because members continue to accrue benefits. Clearly, the slower the move out of growth assets the smaller the likely cost of doing so becomes – that is, of course, if the growth assets do produce better growth than gilts.

The bespoke approach will be available to employers with 'particular characteristics' which make the standard approach unsuitable. The URC may well want to argue, because of its structure and the long-term strength of the employer covenant, for a bespoke approach that allows for a slower move out of growth assets and / or a longer time before the LTO is reached. This will be dependent, among other things, on the existence of appropriate legally enforceable backing.

At the moment, there is little clarity about what characteristics might qualify for a bespoke approach, and what flexibility there might be. The tone of the consultation document suggests that this is not something we should get over-optimistic about. The URC as employer needs to wait to hear from the trustee about this and then, together, the trustee and the URC need to decide how to proceed.

Following the TPR consultation, a new Code of Practice will come into force. This may well not officially apply to the 2021 valuation of the MPF, but it is likely that the direction of travel will be taken into account by the actuary and the trustee.

7.3 *Providing stronger legal backing for the MPF*

The actual contributions payable into the MPF by the URC and by the members are agreed every three years following each actuarial valuation. They are set out in a Schedule of Contributions. Before that document is signed, the URC family needs to understand where the employer contributions will come from. The URC, whether that means General Assembly or the whole URC, is committed to meeting its obligations. The URC will not default on these schedules of contributions unless it runs out of the funds to pay them. It is hard to envisage a circumstance in which that could happen.

So, if it was up to the URC family, there would be no need for any legally enforceable commitments, guarantees or equivalent and, if they did exist, they would make no practical difference.

Unfortunately, it is not up to the URC. TPR expects that the trustee of a pension scheme will have a body or bodies with sufficient financial assets that it is certain can be accessed if the employer does not comply with the agreed schedule of contributions.

The parallel legal and conciliar structures of the URC are a real problem for the trustee and for TPR. The URC represented by General Assembly is identified as the employer, but it has no assets. Assets are held on its behalf by the URC Trust. This problem was partly dealt with through the agreement of a funding guarantee provided by the URC Trust to the MPT in 2010. This guarantee is for up to £16 million and its wording is ambiguous – hence, the third resolution at the beginning of this report which authorises the URC Trust to amend this guarantee if it decides that is the right thing to do.

But this guarantee from the URC Trust is only a partial solution. All the funding for the MPF actually comes from local churches and synods, which are legally unrelated bodies. The URC Trust has limited resources of its own, and is limited in what it can guarantee.

In the past, the actuarial valuations of the MPF have been able to take account of the commitment of the synods, evidenced by the contributions they have previously made to the MPF and the value of the assets held by the synod trusts (in total roughly twice what is held by the URC Trust). TPR has made it clear that, in future, assets will only be taken into account where there is associated legal backing. Furthermore, the TPR consultation document seems to say that the strongly preferred forms of legal backing are either what it calls ‘contingent assets’ or some form of enforceable guarantees.

Our understanding of ‘contingent assets’ is that it means assets that remain with the employer, and can earn money for the employer, but which are available to the MPF if needed in defined circumstances, and which cannot be used for other purposes without the prior consent of the MPT.

While TPR appears open to some other forms of legally binding ways of supporting a pension scheme, it seems unlikely that any of these will be of use to the URC.

As indicated earlier, having an employer covenant rated as strong has an immediate effect on the size of the scheme deficit and, therefore, on the size of deficit contributions that have to be funded. It may also have, potentially, an even more significant impact on the cost of the journey plan to the long-term objective.

We do not know the total value of such legal backing that is necessary to ensure that the URC employer covenant is rated as strong. It certainly needs to be much closer to the solvency deficit figure of £73 million than to the current guarantee of £16 million.

The total level of legal backing required will reduce over time as cash contributions are paid into the Fund, and as the value of the assets and liabilities of the scheme reduces.

We are very much aware that, for some synod trusts, the issue of providing legally enforceable backing is extremely problematic, and we do not underestimate the difficulty. However, the cost of not providing such backing is likely to be enormous, and we sincerely hope that the difficulties can be overcome.

7.4 *Dealing with the deficit as at 1 January 2021*

On a basis consistent with the 2018 valuation, at the end of 2019 the MPF showed an estimated slight surplus. As a result of the turbulence in the financial markets, by mid-March 2020 this had deteriorated to an estimated deficit of £5 to £10 million.

TPR has made it clear that the 2021 valuation will have to be on a more prudent basis. The estimated impact of this will be to increase the deficit by £20 million.

This estimate is on the assumption that the employer covenant is deemed to be strong, bearing in mind that we were told by TPR that, in its view, the covenant is currently tending to strong. It is for the URC to decide whether to take the steps to ensure that the covenant is considered to be strong. If it does not or cannot, then the calculated deficit will increase by around a further £10 million.

So, depending on the action that the Church takes and what happens to the financial markets between now and the end of this year, it looks as though the 2021 deficit will be in the range £20 million to £40 million.

TPR is now expecting deficits on schemes such as the URC MPF to be dealt with in up to six years. The Church is potentially going to have to find deficit recovery payments averaging roughly £4 to £8 million per year for six years from 2022.

It seems clear to us that this level of cash flow over several years is beyond the scope of the Ministry and Mission (M&M) Fund and / or the normal income of the various trusts. Thus, the URC family has little option but to draw most, if not all,

of this money from capital. Of course, the difficult question is how the URC family shares out this burden.

This valuation will, as with all DB schemes currently, also see a rise in future service contributions caused by the continuing low interest rates. The current estimate of this increase, even before the anticipated strengthening of the 2020 valuation basis, is that it will be around 5% of stipends. This will be an additional burden for the M&M budget.

7.5 *Providing against future shocks in the financial markets*

It may seem absurd to be thinking about future shocks in the financial markets when we have not started dealing with the effects of what is happening in 2020.

It may be that TPR will be slightly more relaxed or lenient about timetables, given the economic circumstances that are likely to prevail in 2021. However, the reality is that shocks in the financial markets are likely to happen again in the future, and that they could, again, give rise to a deficit that would be beyond the means of the Church's normal income streams. The URC needs to consider how to plan for such an event.

The scheme actuary has suggested that setting aside another £20 million would be a reasonable provision for this purpose. This would be capital retained within the URC, earning income for the URC, but available for this purpose if or when needed. So, this would really be about smoothing out the pain of a financial market shock of this kind. Again, the amount needed for this purpose would reduce over time. It is possible that either TPR or the MPT might insist on the URC taking action of this kind.

7.6 *Cost, cash flow, and contingency*

With all these large sums of money being discussed, it is important to understand that they are different in nature.

Cost

With a DB pension scheme, the amount that will be paid out in pensions in the future is unknown, and can only be estimated. In this sense, the actual cost is unknown. The basis of calculation of those liabilities is pre-determined and cannot be altered.

But the actual cost to the URC is also affected by the investment strategy – how much interest is earned on the money that has been paid into the MPF up until the time that it is needed to pay pensions. So, for example, the length of the journey towards a long-term funding objective, involving the replacement of growth assets with secure but low interest securities, could have a very significant impact on the actual cost to the Church.

Cash flow

Cash flow is, in many ways, the most important issue. It is the amount of money which the Church has to pay into the MPF according to the agreed schedule of contributions.

As explained in 7.4, the 2021 deficit is likely to be in the range £20 million to £40 million. This will have to be repaid in up to six years. Ultimately, this may not all turn out to be an increase in the actual cost. It is a payment required to reduce the risk that the MPF will end up short of funds. But, clearly, it will also increase the risk that the MPF will end up with more money than it needs. The trustee is aware of this, and will ensure that any such excess funds, if they ever arise, can be paid back to the employer – but only once the LTO has been reached and the situation is clear, which is a long way into the future.

Contingency

A contingency is a provision for the possibility of something bad happening in the future.

The legal backing required by TPR and by the trustee is a contingency against the possibility that the URC will default on the payments due to the MPF. This is a contingency that is extremely unlikely ever to be needed.

The possibility of setting up a fund or funds to deal with the effects of a shock in the financial markets is a different sort of contingency. This is an objective identified by TPR. If the Church is able to set up that sort of reserve, then it will smooth out the impact of such a shock on the Church's cash flow at the time when the shock occurs. One argument for doing this is that such a shock in the financial markets would affect the assets of the Church at the same time as it affected the assets of the MPF.

8. Future service pensions

8.1 *Past service obligations and future service responsibilities*

All the concerns discussed above relate to the pension entitlements that have already been built up by the past service of members – both those who have already retired and members who are still working. These are legal entitlements and cannot be changed.

The URC is able, if it wants, to change the terms of either or both pension schemes in relation to future service – or, indeed, to close one or both of the current pension schemes and replace them with new ones.

8.2 *Rising pension costs*

Interest rates have been at historically low levels for more than 10 years since the 2008 financial crisis. Many economists think that the effects of the current pandemic are likely to extend this situation for some years. There are others who suggest the opposite.

Providing pensions has become more and more expensive over this period, whatever the form of pension scheme. As one example, the employer future service contributions to the MPF have gone up from 12.35% in 2009 to an estimated 27% from 2022.

Most employers with DB pension schemes, outside the public sector, have closed them and replaced them with DC schemes. This fixes the cost for the employer,

but it means that each member of the scheme who has not yet retired suffers the effects of the low interest rates in lower-than-anticipated pensions unless s/he makes up the difference.

For employers of DB schemes, there are two additional factors: the risk that what has been paid in regular contributions may turn out to be inadequate giving rise to the requirement for deficit contributions; and the constraints on future investment strategy being required by TPR.

8.3 *Questions for the URC as employer*

It is our view that it is time for the URC family to have a serious conversation about future pension provision, even if the conversation ends up deciding to leave things as they are.

There are a number of questions that need to be considered, including:

Affordability	Can the Church afford the rising costs of the current DB schemes and carry the risks of further costs in the future?
Value for money	Given TPR's developing approach to the de-risking of investments, does a DB scheme still deliver value for money?
Good alternatives:	What alternatives are realistically available that would still be likely to deliver good pensions for the members of both schemes?

8.4 *Possible changes to the existing DB schemes*

There are changes that could be made to the existing schemes to reduce the benefits earned by members and, thereby, reduce the cost to the employer. But these changes would have relatively small effects, and the risks inherent in DB schemes would remain.

8.5 *Changing to some forms of DC scheme*

Changing from DB schemes to DC schemes is not at all straightforward. There are many factors to consider, including the effects on different scheme members depending on their personal circumstances.

The Pensions Committee has set up a working group to explore what a good DC scheme might look like. Its first task is to arrange for an external adviser to produce a specification of a good DC pension scheme and its likely costs.

This piece of work is likely to cost a six-figure sum of money. However, without this information, it is impossible for the Church to make a properly informed decision about what it should do.

8.6 *Timetable*

General Assembly is the body that normally decides on any changes to the terms of the URC pension schemes. That means that the earliest any change could be agreed is GA 2021. There is no certainty that the information will be available by then.

Before GA takes such a decision, it not only needs to have all relevant information and time to consider it, but it also needs to know the views of all the URC trusts which will be carrying most of the burden of the unforeseen costs discussed in this paper.

It is important for the members of both URC pension schemes to know that there will be no change to either pension scheme without formal consultation with the members, which legally has to take place before General Assembly can make any such decision.

And, to repeat, any change can only affect pensions that are earned in the future. The pensions of retired members and the pensions already earned by active and deferred members are protected.

9. Integrated Risk Management Project – a framework for the work still to be done

9.1 Ongoing need for clarification and updating of the issues

The IRM group and the Pensions Committee will continue to work closely with the trustees of both pension schemes. In particular, the board of the MPT will need to come to a view about the implications of TPR's consultation document, and communicate this to the Church. The soonest this will happen is following its June 2020 board meeting.

9.2 Short-term actions

A briefing will be issued to all URC trust directors, officers of General Assembly and synods by early May that will comprise:

- this paper;
- a collation of all the synod responses to the first round of consultations (see 13.3);
- a brief covering note that will include answers to questions asked by the synods.

This paperwork will, no doubt, cause some concern and plenty of thought. Any questions, comments or suggestions will be very welcome – preferably by email.

9.3 Conflicting timetables

It would be ideal if all the different strands of this process could be tied together in one coherent timetable. In particular, some people would like a decision about the future service pensions to be taken before agreement is reached about dealing with the past service pension challenges. Unfortunately, this is just not possible – even without the extra logistical problems caused by the Covid-19 lockdown.

9.4 Timetable for the 2021 valuation of the Ministers' Pension Fund

The deadline for agreeing this valuation and the new schedule of contributions is regulated, and is 31 March 2022.

The board of the trustee meets quarterly and, working backwards, the timetable it is working to in order to achieve is:

December 2021	Sign off the 2021 valuation and the new schedule of contributions (to come into effect from January 2022).
September 2021	Agreement of the basis of the valuation, including the strength of the employer covenant.
June 2021	The trustee needs to receive proposals from the URC about how it plans to respond to the challenges that have been presented.

As this paper is being finalised, TPR has announced that there might be some slight relaxation of the deadlines for 2021 valuations, in response to the Covid-19 crisis. Even so, the above dates represent targets that we should aim at.

9.5 *Timetable for producing a URC family response to the challenges we face*

Again, working backwards: to meet the MPT June deadline we really need to be aiming for an agreement in principle between all the URC trusts that can be approved by their board meetings in March 2021. Some synod trusts may want to seek approval from their synod meetings. It now seems unlikely that this will be possible by March 2021.

The IRM group strongly believes that the best, and most likely, way to achieve an agreement that is acceptable to all parties would be to hold a series of face-to-face meetings of representatives of all the trusts. It was intended to hold the first such meeting in May 2020. The pandemic makes such meetings impossible, but a virtual meeting of so many people would be very difficult, and less likely to be successful.

The IRM group is still hopeful that the above timetable may be possible if face-to-face meetings can begin in autumn 2020. If such meetings are not possible, then it may be necessary to adopt a different approach, even though this would be less satisfactory.

9.6 *Possible elements of a URC family agreement*

Legal backing for the MPF

If the URC had a typical hierarchical corporate structure, then providing a larger legal guarantee would be relatively straightforward – and it would be desirable because of the ways in which this would reduce the cash flow, if not the actual cost of the MPF. It would not create any further risk to the URC, and it would not imply any costs except those that the URC will have to meet anyway. Trying to achieve agreement of a similar arrangement, but potentially involving 14 legally separate trusts, is a very different matter. The logic of the argument is exactly the same, but that doesn't make it easy for directors of a synod trust company to sign a guarantee or set aside contingent assets (or something similar) for the purposes of meeting URC pension costs.

The problem is that, without such legal backing, the assets and commitment of the synods will not be taken account of, the employer covenant will be considered

weaker, and the actuarial valuation will be more prudent and, therefore, more expensive. It remains to be seen whether the URC family can find a way of dealing with this.

Dealing with the deficit that will arise from the 2021 valuation

Whether or not the employer covenant is deemed to be strong, the URC will be facing a large deficit, and a relatively short time in which to deal with it. This will be beyond the resources of the normal Ministry and Mission Fund budget, and also beyond the scope of the normal income streams of the various URC trusts.

It seems clear, therefore, that this deficit will have to be dealt with by drawing on existing capital. That capital does exist, but this is not a free option. The interest on the capital helps to support the mission of the Church centrally, in the synods and in local churches.

Possible buffer against future financial shocks and long-term funding requirement

These matters cannot really be discussed in more detail at this time, until the Church receives greater clarity from MPT. However, they are important, and could add significantly to the cash flows required from the URC to the MPF.

It may be that the income stream from future property sales can go some way to meeting the extra cash flow that will be required to deal with this.

9.7 *Coping with different cash flow timetables*

It is possible that the URC family will be able to reach agreement about how this burden will be shared, but that the funds cannot all be made available within the timetable required by the MPF schedule of contributions.

It has been suggested that the URC might consider taking out one or more loans secured against buildings that are owned (not those held in trust) to cover such timing differences. Whichever trust was taking on such a loan would need to be absolutely sure that the income stream to repay the loan was secure.

9.8 *Ministry and Mission Fund and local church contributions*

There has been no mention so far of individual local churches and their possible contributions to resolving this situation. Local churches are contributing almost £20 million per year to support the work of the United Reformed Church. That is a staggering total.

As already described, the 'normal' Ministry and Mission Fund budget supported by local churches will be facing increased costs because of the increase in future service contributions.

It is the view of the IRM group that this is enough of a burden to expect our local churches to bear. Nevertheless, it will be important to keep local churches informed about these pension challenges and how they are being dealt with – and extra donations from any individuals or local churches that feel able to do so will not be refused!

9.9 *This is still a challenge rather than a crisis*

Given all that has gone before in this paper, to use the same heading as in the MC November 2019 paper may seem foolhardy.

The financial reality is, however, that even after the falls in asset values that have occurred in 2020 (up to mid-April!) the URC family does have the resources to meet these challenges. The combined total financial assets of all the URC trusts had grown by about £70 million over the previous five years or so. So, even on a worst-case basis, these challenges will take us back collectively to where we were five or six years ago. That will not be pleasant or pain-free, but nor will it be life-threatening.

PART II: Background Information

10. Defined benefit pension schemes – some general information

10.1 *The URC schemes*

The URC operates two pension schemes – one for ministers and church related community workers, and the other primarily for lay staff. Both these schemes are Defined Benefit (DB) schemes. This means that, in each case, the benefits are fixed by the rules of the scheme.

For each month of service, a member accrues a small percentage of their salary or stipend as a pension. When the member retires, their pension is calculated based on their final salary or stipend and their years of service.

For each month of service, the employer and the employee make contributions into the pension fund at rates agreed after each actuarial valuation. The size of these contributions is estimated by the actuary to deliver the pension required when it is due.

If there is a gap between the value of the money that has been invested and the pension that is payable, then the employer is legally obliged to make up the difference. All the risks to do with investment performance, inflation and mortality, among other things, are carried by the employer.

10.2 *Actuarial valuations*

Every three years, a DB scheme must be subject to a valuation by an independent actuary. The assets and liabilities of the scheme are estimated, taking account of all the risks and uncertainties. Expected investment returns, inflation rates and life expectancy over perhaps 70 years are just three of the important factors.

The effective date of this valuation is fixed for each scheme. This means that a valuation can be affected by a short-term fluctuation on the financial markets. Nevertheless, the results of the valuation determine the levels of contribution required to be paid into the scheme for the three years up to the next actuarial valuation.

The actuarial valuation in fact produces several different valuations, based on different assumptions.

The 'technical provisions' (TP) basis is the one used to determine the level of contributions. It is based on what are considered to be a prudent set of assumptions. Currently, these assumptions are agreed between the actuary and the trustee, after discussion with the employer. This is one area where the new TPR Code of Practice will be more prescriptive, and where its requirements are expected to vary according to the maturity of the scheme and the assessed strength of the employer covenant, with greater prudence required where the sponsoring employer is perceived to be weaker.

The most prudent valuation is called the 'solvency basis', which is defined by regulation. It is, in effect, the cost of selling the scheme's net liabilities to an insurance company, which then takes over the legal responsibility for paying future pensions and carries all the associated risks.

10.3 *Dealing with deficits*

If the valuation of the liabilities is higher than the valuation of the assets, then there is a deficit on the pension scheme. Based on the actuary's assumptions, the assets of the scheme will be insufficient to pay for the benefits that have already been earned.

If there is a deficit on the scheme, then a 'recovery plan' is agreed with the employer which requires additional deficit contributions to be paid into the scheme over a number of years until the deficit is eliminated.

10.4 *Schedule of contributions*

A key outcome of each actuarial valuation is a 'schedule of contributions' agreed between the actuary, the trustee and the employer. This sets out the contributions that will be paid into the scheme by the employer and by the active members. This schedule remains operational until a new one is agreed, usually after the next valuation, or if not then until the end of the recovery plan.

The URC is currently paying future service contributions and deficit contributions in respect of both its pension schemes.

10.5 *Maturing pension schemes*

Members of DB pension schemes may be; active, which means they are currently working and building up their entitlement to pension; deferred, which means they have left the service of the URC, but are not yet retired; or retired, which means they are already in receipt of their pension.

In the early years of a DB pension scheme, the employer and employee contributions are paid into the scheme and there are very few outgoings. Hence, the assets and the future liabilities of the scheme grow – hopefully in line with one another.

For any DB pension scheme, the number of retired members increases, and there comes a point where the total outgoings exceed the total income from contributions and investment income. The total value of the assets and liabilities begins to reduce.

This happens slowly if the number of active members remains around the same, but it happens more quickly if the number of active members is reducing. The former applies to the Final Salary Scheme. The latter applies to the Ministers' Pension Fund (MPF). The fact that the cash flow of the MPF has gone negative is not in itself a problem. However, there are extra risks associated with that situation – for example, if investments have to be sold at the time of a market downturn.

TPR is increasingly concerned about maturing schemes, and is expecting them to move towards a low risk investment strategy that is less dependent on the employer by the time that outgoings represent around 5% of total liabilities.

11. Legal responsibilities and regulations

11.1 *The Pensions Regulator*

Parliament enacts legislation which provides a framework for the operation of pension schemes. The Pensions Regulator (TPR) is then responsible for providing detailed guidance (rules), and for monitoring the compliance of both trustees and employers.

TPR has been gradually strengthening the regulatory environment over several years. The latest Pension Schemes bill, which is currently going through parliament, enables TPR to take this further. In March 2020, TPR issued a large and complex consultation document, which will be followed by a second one later in the year. Based on this consultation process, TPR will issue a new Code of Practice – probably not until 2021. Although this new Code of Practice will not, legally, apply either to the current valuation of the Final Salary Scheme or to the 2021 valuation of the MPF, it is inevitable that actuaries and scheme trustees will start to take it into account in their approach. In any event, the requirement already exists for agreement between the actuary, the trustee and the employer of a LTO, and a journey plan to achieve it.

The TPR annual funding statement, due in spring 2020, will be another document that may influence our approach to these pension issues.

The requirements of TPR are becoming increasingly onerous for both trustees and employers. TPR is, in part, responding to problems that have arisen in practice which have put the security of people's pensions at risk. TPR is particularly concerned with the potential for employers to fail or become unable to meet their legal responsibilities in relation to their pensions schemes, the proportion of income being used to meet pensions costs compared with other items, the investment risks being taken by pensions trustees, and the particular cash flow problems that can arise with maturing schemes.

TPR may well be ready to be flexible with 'bespoke' pension schemes on some of the issues and timings, but only if there is sufficient legally enforceable support in place.

11.2 *Responsibilities of the trustee*

The primary responsibility of the trustee of a DB pension scheme (and of TPR) is to ensure that the benefits that have already been earned will be paid when they are due. Before each actuarial valuation, this responsibility includes deciding on an appropriate investment strategy, agreeing with the actuary and the employer on an appropriate funding level, and monitoring the financial strength of the employer and its ability to meet its present and future obligations (referred to as the 'employer covenant' by TPR and those involved in managing pension schemes).

After each valuation, the trustee is responsible for monitoring the employer's compliance with the schedule of contributions and its continued financial strength, and for taking appropriate legal action if the employer defaults on paying what is due.

11.3 *Responsibilities of the employer*

As already described, the employer is legally responsible for paying the benefits already earned by members of a Defined Benefit scheme – whatever the cost. If the money already invested in the pension fund proves to be insufficient, then the employer is legally obliged to provide the difference. The failure of some employers to meet their responsibilities to their pension funds, whether by accident or design, is part of the background to the increasing regulation.

The employer is also generally responsible for deciding what pensions benefits will be offered to scheme members in the future, albeit in accordance with the scheme rules. It is, therefore, important for the employer to keep under review the continued appropriateness, as well as the affordability of the present arrangements.

The URC is the principal employer in relation to both URC pension schemes. But an important question to ask is: who is the URC in this context? General Assembly takes the important decisions regarding future pensions benefits. But all the money to pay for those pensions comes from local churches and synods. Whatever the legal answer might be to the question, it is clear that all in the URC share this responsibility.

11.4 *URC Pensions Committee*

The Pensions Committee (formerly the Pensions Executive) is the group that liaises with the trustees of the two URC pension schemes on behalf of the Church. This group is responsible for understanding what the responsibilities of the Church are as an employer, and that these responsibilities are taken seriously by the Church. New terms of reference for this group were approved as at Mission Council, March 2020.

12. Coping with uncertainty and managing risk

12.1 *Risk is inherent and unavoidable*

The purpose of pension schemes is to invest money paid by employers and scheme members now in order to pay pensions to scheme members in the future. Those pensions might be payable 70 years after the money has been paid over to the scheme. Uncertainty and risk are, therefore, unavoidable and significant elements of the operation of pension schemes – especially defined benefit schemes.

TPR is always seeking to minimise these risks. One of the primary roles of the trustee, in consultation with the employer, is to manage these risks.

12.2 *Risks associated with the assets*

Money paid now for pensions that might be payable long into the future has to be invested. Investments carry risks often in proportion to their likely returns. Low risks usually mean low returns, which mean the cost of pensions rises. Higher returns usually involve taking higher risks.

To enjoy long-term higher returns, the employer has to be able to cope with the risk of short-term falls in value caused by fluctuations in the financial markets.

Whatever investment strategy is adopted, there will always be a considerable degree of uncertainty about what the value of the assets will be at the time when the liabilities have to be met. The trustee and the employer have to strike a balance between the needs of the pension scheme and the needs of the employer, taking a long-term view.

12.3 *Risks associated with the liabilities*

Although, as explained above, the benefits to be paid by a defined benefit scheme are pre-defined, that does not mean that they are known.

Every month worked by a member of a defined benefit scheme entitles them to a fixed percentage of their final salary / stipend as a monthly pension from the date when they retire. The main uncertainties are around inflation and life expectancy. What will that final salary / stipend be? For how many years will the member or the member's spouse or dependants receive a pension?

12.4 *Risks associated with the employer*

For TPR and the trustee, a key issue is the strength of what is called the employer covenant. The questions which they must address are: What is the strength of the legally binding obligations to the scheme of the employer and other bodies and what is their financial capacity to support the scheme – now and in the future – particularly in the event of a significant fall in the financial markets? It is important to remember that the trustee and TPR are primarily concerned about the benefits already earned by members of a DB scheme for past service, not about what benefits might be earned in the future.

The risk is that the money already provided may prove to be insufficient, and the issue is that the employer may then be unable to pay what is needed. TPR is increasingly concerned about this, not least because of the number of employers that, for whatever reason, have failed to meet their obligations and left their staff pension schemes significantly underfunded.

13. Integrated Risk Management Project – the story so far

13.1 *Integrated risk management*

Integrated risk management (IRM) is the way in which TPR requires trustees to assess and manage all the risks that affect pension schemes in an integrated way, recognising that many of them are inter-related. The aim of this approach is to arrive at a way forward which is acceptable to all parties – TPR, the trustees, and the employer.

Following the 2018 valuation of the MPF, an IRM project group was set up consisting of Chris Evans (Convenor – until July 2020), Bridget Micklem, Ian Hardie, John Piper and Lyndon Thomas. Four of these are directors of MPT, and the group includes the Convenor of the URC Pensions Committee, and the URC Treasurer and Deputy Treasurer. Others, such as the URC Investment Committee, are involved in the work when needed.

The role of the IRM group is to carry out or co-ordinate the work that is necessary to enable the URC as employer and the respective trustees of the two URC pension schemes to plan appropriately for the future. This work involves: first, getting as much clarity and precision as possible about the issues that the Church faces; second, facilitating a URC family conversation about how these challenges will be dealt with; and third, hopefully securing an agreement that is satisfactory to all parties.

13.2 *Initial clarification of the issues*

Briefing documents were issued in the Spring of 2019, to Mission Council in November 2019, and then to the consultations that took place in November / December 2019.

As demonstrated in this paper, the issues are not static and so it is necessary to work closely with the trustee and its advisers to ensure that we understand the current position, and then communicate that to the right people in the Church.

13.3 *Initial consultations and feedback*

There were some preliminary discussions with the URC Finance Committee and with synod treasurers.

The IRM project group decided that the initial and detailed work on these issues needs to be done with the various URC trust companies, as the legal owners of the financial assets of the Church, and that the results of this work could then be shared, as appropriate, with the councils of the Church.

In November / December 2019, consultations took place with representatives of the synod trusts and the URC Trust. Five meetings took place around the UK with synod trust representatives, and a meeting was also held with the directors of the URC Trust. All synod trusts were represented, but not evenly – for a couple of synods, only one person attended, whereas for one synod, the whole trust board was present.

Following these consultations, towards the end of December a summary was issued with answers to the frequently asked questions, and the IRM group asked a series of questions of the synod trusts. Quick responses to these questions were requested for the end of January 2020. It was emphasised that these initial responses would not represent any firm commitments by anyone. The intention was that they would help frame the subsequent conversations / negotiations / decisions.

Responses were received from all the synods by the middle of February. Some of these were responses from the individuals who attended the autumn consultations. Some followed discussions at a meeting of the relevant trust board. We were very grateful for the speedy work of these synod representatives. The responses are very interesting, but extremely varied in just about every respect.

The intention was to issue a further briefing to the synods, and then hold a second conversation with representatives of all the trusts together in the spring of 2020. That was before Covid-19! Suggestions for the way forward are outlined in Section 8 above.

Ministries Committee

General Report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Nicola Furley-Smith: 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 2018 and subcommittee reports.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Ministries report to General Assembly 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination.

Summary of Impact

Financial	
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 Assessment Board and is assisted by four subcommittees.

Convenor: Paul Whittle

Secretary: Craig Bowman (to 2019), Nicola Furley-Smith (from 2019)

Members:

Martin Camroux, Allison Claxton, Stuart Dew (to 2019) Sam Elliott (from 2019), Stuart Scott (from 2019), Sally Thomas (to 2019), Sally Willett (from 2019), Peter Meek (synod moderator to 2019) Jacky Embrey (synod moderator from 2019), Anne Bedford (convenor of the Retired Ministers' Housing subcommittee), Ewen Harley (convenor of the assessment board to 2019), Bill Gould (convenor of the assessment board from 2019), Pamela Ward (convenor of the maintenance of the ministry subcommittee to 2019), David Coote (convenor of the maintenance of the ministry subcommittee from 2019), Russell Furley-Smith (convenor of the accreditation subcommittee), Simon Loveitt (convenor of the CRCW programme subcommittee), Jenny Sheehan (leadership in worship advocate).

1 The changing face of ministry

Ministry is about building up the church. Ministry should be people-shaped, even mission-shaped, but it is always God-shaped. What matters is that we, as disciples, must never forget that our calling is always a partnership between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and one another. Therefore, our calling to be God's companion is always the subtext of our vocation to ministry within the church. Since March 2020, how we 'do' ministry within the United Reformed Church – how we support local churches and individuals both inside and outwith the church community to be the people of God – has been challenging. We are so blessed to have ministers of word and sacraments, church related community workers and lay people who have risen to the challenge and embraced new ways of being church as we tackle the current crisis.

2 Pastoral Supervision

- 2.1 Following General Assembly 2018, Ministries Committee established a working group to explore the requirement for ministers of word and sacraments and church related community workers of the United Reformed Church to have regular pastoral supervision, and how such a scheme may be introduced.
- 2.2 The Group conducted an initial period of high-level consultation during the summer and autumn period. The intention was to be as open as possible, capturing a wide range of ideas and views without prejudging the outcome, and include internal URC stakeholders, ecumenical partners and specialists in pastoral supervision.

- 2.3 The Group reviewed the feedback received and discussed the key issues, principles and dilemmas, including finance and capacity, that were emerging, and then set out a series of propositions which were tested with Ministries Committee, Mission Council and others over the autumn of 2019. The outcome of this further consultation is the resolution on pastoral supervision.

3 NSM Model 4

- 3.1 In November 2018, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, authorised a model 4 non-stipendiary ministry which provided for locally ordained ministers of word and sacraments. It directed the Ministries Committee to ensure that plans for this model of ministry were appropriately complementary to other ministries of the church – including stipendiary ministry, current models of non-stipendiary ministry, local leadership (recognising that this is currently directed by Synods) and the eldership, including the specific role of authorised elders.
- 3.2 Mission Council ruled that the training for this model of ministry need not be bound by the standard set out in resolution 37 of General Assembly 1997, and that further training might be required before an NSM model 4 could transfer to other models of non-stipendiary or to stipendiary ministry.
- 3.3. Mission Council instructed the Ministries and Education and Learning Committees to implement model four non-stipendiary ministry in consultation with the Assessment Board and the Resource Centres for Learning.
- 3.4 The Assessment Board in April 2020 assessed two candidates for NSM Model 4, with further expressions of interest pencilled in for the November Assessment Conference.

4 Extension of stipendiary ministerial service beyond the fixed retirement age

The decision of Mission Council (2018) to define what it means to be an active minister of word and sacraments has led to a review of the current policy of full-time work beyond the normal retirement age to include the additional criteria of being able to take up a new full-time ministry, where possible. Deployment figures, demographics and financial resources suggest that the number of stipendiary ministers we can afford to support is not much larger than the number we expect to have in the coming years. Therefore, convention dictates that any ministry beyond the normal retirement age will need to be termed to allow for those in training to enter and exercise ministry, and will be the decision of the Accreditations Committee (CRCW and SCMs), whose role it is to monitor ministry figures. The change in policy and process is subject to a resolution.

5 Funding Other Ministries

- 5.1 Two Synods, Mersey Synod and the National Synod of Wales, are piloting the scheme whereby ministry and mission fund monies can be released to Synods to support ministry other than stipendiary ministry of word and sacraments and

church related community work. This ministry could be either full, part-time, sessional or expense-only work. The projects range from regional officer to pastoral worker to youth worker and family and community worker. A review will take place in the autumn to evaluate whether this scheme should be rolled out to other Synods.

- 5.2 A further development sees the partnership with Mission Committee in exploring lay pioneer ministry which is happening in many of our churches, with one conference held in February and another planned for July.
- 5.3 Additional work has begun on the accreditation of other lay ministries. Accreditation is not merely about determining whether we are meeting or exceeding the minimum standards of that ministry, but provides support and validation for those undertaking the ministry as part of their discipleship.

6 Gift Policy

The Ministries Committee began considering gifts to ministers following an enquiry regarding a bequest to a minister of the United Reformed Church. The committee has considered the propriety of this, and offers the gift policy for discussion and resolution.

7 Thank you

The work of Ministries could not be achieved without the expertise and commitment of the volunteers who make up the Ministries Committee and its subcommittees. Our thanks go to those who will have retired from our committee since General Assembly last met: Allison Claxton, Stuart Dew, Ewen Harley, Peter Meek, Sally Thomas and Pamela Ward. However, perhaps the most significant change in the Ministries Committee has been the departure of Craig Bowman back into pastoral ministry. We are indebted to Craig for his care and wisdom in guiding the Ministries Committee in their shaping and support of the variety of ministries within the United Reformed Church.

Accreditation Sub-committee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training, and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries.

Convenor: Russell Furley-Smith

Secretary: Craig Bowman (to 2019), Nicola Furley-Smith (from 2019)

Members: Susan Durber, Ewen Harley (convener of the assessment board to 2019), Bill Gould (convener of the assessment board from 2019), Rob Moverley (from 2019), Andrew Prasad (synod moderator), Paul Whittle (convener of ministries committee)

Introduction

- 1.1 This is the final report of the Accreditation Sub-Committee. We look forward to being part of the new Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Sub-Committee, particularly as it will bring closer working practice between CRCW and Special Category Ministries.

Certificates of Eligibility

- 2.1 Certificates of Eligibility are issued so that ministers of other Churches might be introduced to a pastorate in the URC and, if called, enter our roll of ministers. 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.
- 2.2 In light of projections it was agreed that 10 certificates for Stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacrament would be available for issuing between 2017 and 2019. In fact, only six certificates were issued during this period.
- 2.3 In light of future projections, it has been decided to continue offering certificates, with up to five being available in 2020.

Certificates of Limited Service

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Three new certificates have been issued in the last two years, and none have been renewed or extended.

Special Category Ministries

- 4.1 Special Category Ministry 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.
- 4.2 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. This means, at the moment, that there is a limit of 25 FTE SCM posts.
- 4.3 Currently (March 2020), there are 21 SCM posts (20.75 FTEs).
- 4.4 The administration of SCMs has been done diligently and efficiently since its inception by Mary Stacy. She is now retiring, and we acknowledge the debt of gratitude the denomination owes to Mary for her many years of service.

The Roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Admission to the roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments (from 1 February 2018 to 31 January 2020)

- 5.1 By ordination and induction:
Catherine Atkinson, Jacob Bali, Edward Bellingham, Lisa Maria Browning, Cristina Cipriani, Joanne Clare-Young, Alex Clare-Young, Fiona Elvins, Helen Everard, Alma Fritchley, Helen Garton, John Grundy, Cara Heafey, Tessa Henry-Robinson, Julie Kirby, Amanda Linney, Andrew Mudharara, David Scott, Memona Shahbaz, Barnabas Shin, Alison Smith, Paul Stein, Daleen ten Cate, Joshua Thomas, Gillian Thomson, Jennifer Travis, Christine Watson and Naomi Young-Rodas.
- 5.2 By transfer from other churches:
Confidence Bansah (Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana), James Fields (Church of Scotland) and Terry Jin (Presbyterian Church of Korea).
- 5.3 By changes within the roll of ministers:
There have been no changes within the roll of ministers.
- 5.4 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process
Nicholas Adlem, Heather-Ann Adlem, Janet Lees, Jonathan Morgan, Brian Norris, Timothy Poh, Adrian Skelton, Eric Wain, Roger Whitehead and Steven Whiting.
- 5.5 Re-admission
There have been no readmissions to the roll.

Roll of Church Related Community Workers

Admissions to the roll of Church Related Community Workers (from 1 February 2018 to 31 January 2020)

- 6.1 By commissioning:
Maria Lee, Andrew Littlejohns, Joanne Patterson
- 6.2 Deletions from the roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process
Diane Benson, David Twine

Roll of Assembly-accredited Lay Preachers

- 7.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 February 2018 and 31 January 2020 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination.

North Western	Margaret Dexter-Brown (re-accredited), Deborah Hoddinott (re-accredited), Stuart Hoddinott (re-accredited), Christopher Whitehead
Mersey	Kevin Hogan, Andrew Jeens
Yorkshire	Debora Story
East Midlands	James Hodkinson, David Litchfield
Eastern	Graham Watson
Wessex	Maggie Larkin, Phebe Mann
Thames North	David Akoli, Frank Atta-Dankwa, Joseph Dankwa, Kathleen Laing, Olaoluwa Lawal, Joan Manning, Valerie Williams
Wales	Sarah Edwards
Scotland	Brian Kirkwood, Nicola Robinson

- 7.2 Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by Resignation, Removal and/or Transfer to other Churches:

There have been no deletions from the Roll of assembly Accredited Lay Preachers

Assessment Board

Convenor: Ewen Harley (to 2019), Bill Gould (from 2019)

Secretary: Craig Bowman (to 2019), Nicola Furley-Smith (from 2019)

Members: Peter Rand (to 2019), Lis Mullen, Stuart Radcliffe (to 2019), Keith Reading, Jamie Kissack (from 2019), Dan Morrell (from 2019), Sohail Ejaz (to 2019), Mark Tubby (from 2019), Faith Paulding, Gerald England (from 2020), Pat Oliver (to 2019), Bridget Akinyombo, Karen Campbell, John Danso, Sue McCoan, Lesley Charlton (to 2020), Mercy Nimako (to 2019), Jill Shelton to (2019), Jan Adamson (from 2019).

Commitment and thanks

1. The members of the Assessment Board, lay and ordained ministers or CRCWs, are identified by Nominations Committee, drawn from all Synods, each for a five-year period, to be representative of the whole church, with a broad mix of male and female, young and old. While not all assessors are called in any given year to serve on assessment panels, all make themselves available for a period of intensive work to discern God's will for the candidates and for the whole URC. Their commitment and willingness to add to their usually already busy workload is a matter for grateful thanks, and is greatly appreciated by the Church. In this year, particular thanks are due to the retiring Convenor, Ewen Harley (after five years), the Committee Secretary, Craig Bowman (after 11 years), and Catherine Price, a personal development analyst who undertook psychometric testing of candidates (after several years). Their very substantial accumulated knowledge of the candidates and the whole assessment process, and the wisdom and grace with which they have applied their experience and skills, have been exemplary, and warmly recognised by candidates, assessors and Synod link officers.

The work of the Board

2. The Assessment Board has an annual meeting, normally in September, at which the progress of all students in training in our three Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) for EM1 (Education for Ministry level 1) is tabled. It also reviews and reappraises particular issues in the assessment process, such as diversity and inequality awareness in 2018 (led by the Revd Dr John Campbell and Ms Alex Bediako), and in 2019 Assessment issues arising from NSM4 and Marks of Ministry decisions of General Assembly. A representative member of the RCLs is invited to contribute to the Annual Meeting, and is a major conduit of information between the Board and the RCLs.
3. Assessors are invited from the Board membership, after training in the annual assessment training conference, to be members of assessment panels for candidates nominated by Synods for training for a Ministry of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs. Each panel has four members, typically comprising two male and two female, two lay and two ordained members, and at an Assessment conference they work in pairs to interview four or five candidates, each candidate having two assessment interviews. The panels come prayerfully to a view of the nature and strength of the call to each candidates, and their suitability for entry to training for EM1, and this is then considered by the whole Board. If the Board supports the candidacy, the candidates are informed at a meeting in Synod, with

Synod officers present. Also formally presented at that meeting is the personalised EM1 training programme, considered in parallel by a panel of the Education and Learning Board, meeting separately with each candidate at the time of the Assessment Conference. If the Board finds it cannot support the candidacy, each candidate is informed in a similar way.

4. The Board also convenes an annual assessment interview training consultation, attended not only by new Assessment Board members, but also by synod representatives to satisfy the considerable needs for appropriate training for synod and local panel members who consider possible candidates early in the assessment cycle. The consultation further strengthens the communication links between the Board and synods. The consultation has been held at High Leigh Centre in this reporting period, facilitated by the Revds Peter Henderson and Mary Thomas. Our thanks are due to them and to the several ministers and others who have contributed to 'role-play' exercises as a key element of practice in the training.

The flow of candidates

5. Since the last General Assembly, three conferences have been held (March 2019, November 2019, April 2020). The planned conference in November 2019 was cancelled due to small numbers. The March 2020 conference was done in virtual mode in April 2020, with special arrangements to support candidates and assessors through the exceptional pandemic circumstances that precluded travel and assembly at that time, though the emergency arrangements were designed to be as far as possible similar to established procedures. A new Personal Development Analyst was engaged for this occasion.

Overall, 27 candidates were considered by the Board, of whom 22 were accepted, 13 in Stipendiary Ministry, five in Non-Stipendiary Ministry 1-2-3, two in Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4, and one for CRCW, with one transfer from Non-Stipendiary to Stipendiary ministry.

Date of Conference	No. of candidates	Number accepted
November 2018	8	7 (SM = 5 NSM =2)
March 2019	10	7 (SM = 4 NSM =2 CRCW=1)
March/April 2020	9	8 (SM = 4 NSM 1-3= 1 NSM 4= 2 Transfer NSM to SM = 1)
Total	27	22

Church Related Community Work Programme Sub-committee

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.

Convener: Simon Loveitt

Secretary: Steve Summers (CRCW Development Worker)

Members: Leonora Jagessar-Visser 't Hooft, Ruth Maxey, Ann Honey, Marie Trubic, Derek Estill (to 2019), Rosie Buxton (to 2019), Peter Meek (synod moderator to 2019), Dave Herbert (synod moderator from 2020), Paul Whittle (convener of ministries committee)

In Attendance: Samara Andrews (CRCW Programme Administrator)

1. The CRCW ministry

- 1.1 Using Community Development principles, Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) enable churches to strategically engage with, to transform, and to become more relevant to their local neighbourhoods.
- 1.2 Churches participate in CRCW ministry because they believe that the process of community development is an empowering and enabling way to express their faith in action. They do so with the knowledge that engaging in this ministry will not only change local communities, but also congregations. They understand that this journey cannot be neatly pre-planned, but it will certainly be Spirit-filled and exciting.

2. Numbers

General Assembly has set a target of at least 26 Church Related Community Workers across the denomination (a minimum of two CRCWs per Synod) to receive a stipend at any one given time. Currently, 14 CRCWs are in post, and three are at various stages of training.

3. Challenge to the Church

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

However, the priority at the moment is to encourage individuals to candidate for this particular ministry.

- 3.2 We 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 www.urch.org.uk/crcw-projects for more information.

- 3.3 If you would like to know more, please speak to Steve Summers in the CRCW office, one of the CRCWs in post, on Facebook: www.facebook.com/churchrelatedcommunitywork, on Twitter: [@CRCWteam](https://twitter.com/CRCWteam) or the URC website: urc.org.uk/our-work/church-related-community-workers

4. CRCW News Articles

Since March 2017, two articles per month have been posted on the URC website, with some very interesting insights into the work of CRCWs and their activities. The articles can be found at www.urc.org.uk/crcw-news-events

Maintenance of the Ministry

Sub-committee

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 (now known as the Pensions Committee).

Convenor: Pamela Ward (to 2019), David Coote (from 2019)
Secretary: Craig Bowman (to 2019), Nicola Furley-Smith (from 2019)

Members: Keith Berry (to 2019), David Black, Margaret Brock, David Gartside (from 2019), Sue Kirkbride (to 2019), Jean Wyber (from 2019), Chris Evans (convenor of pensions executive), Paul Whittle (convenor of ministries committee), John Piper (assistant treasurer)

1. The MoM sub-committee meets twice a year, but conducts much of its business by emails, as and when a decision is called for concerning stipends or allowances for individual ministers.

2. Plan for Partnership

Our main role is to interpret the Plan for Partnership and to agree such changes as we consider necessary. When situations are referred to us which do not exactly fit the terms of the plan, we try to apply the Plan fairly and reasonably. The situation is considered carefully, and can lead to amendments to the Plan. Sometimes it is decided that the Plan is adequate, or might need a small clarification to make its intent clearer. We have been dealing with some concerns around part-time ministers, and it has been concluded that the Plan will need some clarification.

3. Stipend Increase

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 2019, the CPI increase was 2.1%, producing a stipend increase of 2.7%. This was a similar level to the previous couple of years' stipend increases.

4. Long-term sickness absence

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 know that these can be stressful times for those involved, and while we sometimes have painful decisions to make, we strive to bring wisdom and compassion to the judgements that are entrusted to us. We are grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MOM office, who pays the stipends, alerts us when decisions are needed, organises medical and moderator reports, and deals with all the correspondence.

5. Committee changes

The committee has, since its last report, had a change of convenor, and we record our thanks to the Revd Pamala Ward for her guidance and wisdom in that role. We have also seen changes among members of the committee, and there will be further changes ahead. We again wish to record our thanks to those who have completed, or will complete, their service this year.

Retired Ministers' Housing Sub-committee

This sub-committee continues to be responsible for policy in matters of the provision of retirement housing for ministers, their spouses, widows and widowers. It uses the United Reformed Church Retired Ministers' Housing Society Limited as its agent for the implementation of policy, and the practical steps associated with the provision of housing.

Convenor: Anne Bedford

Secretary: Secretary of Retired Ministers' Housing Society Ltd

Members: Ian Hardie (Treasurer), Malcolm Lindo, Cliff Patten (from 2020) Ken Summers, Simon Walkling (Synod Moderator), Peter West, Paul Whittle (convener of ministries committee), Craig Bowman (secretary for ministries to 2019), Nicola Furley-Smith (secretary for ministries from 2019)

- 1.1 We have welcomed Mr Clifford Patten to join our team, and we look forward to working with him.
- 1.2 This year, we have completed the work on new rules for the Society, and have had them passed by all the relevant authorities. This would not have been possible without the steady work of the General Manager of the Society, Chuka Agbasiere, to whom we owe a great debt.
- 1.3 At the pre-retirement courses for Ministers and their partners, we have endeavoured to explain the foundations of the Society's work, and we have carried out personal interviews for those who are seeking help.
- 1.4 The increasing amount of legislation around property, including issues such as electrical checks and asbestos removal, has absorbed the time of our surveyors, but we have been able to find suitable properties and, in some cases, have helped individuals whose health needs have necessitated a second move.
- 1.5 Considerable work has been done to provide disability adaptations for residents who have become frailer.
- 1.6 We are grateful to individual members, churches and Synods who continue to support our work, and especially those who remember us in their wills.
- 1.7 We will continue to do our best to serve those Ministers and CRCWs who need us.

Ministries Committee

Gift Policy

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 23 General Assembly adopts the policy contained in this paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Ministers will sometimes be given and/or offered personal gifts from individuals or families. This policy safeguards ministers against any allegation of malpractice by establishing a procedure for registering such gifts.
Main points	a) A minister may appropriately be offered a gift. b) It is good practice for that to be appropriately known and recorded.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Partner denominations.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

1. Generosity is one of the marks of our faith. As part of that, ministers will sometimes be offered personal gifts by individuals or families.
2. Sadly, there have been cases in other contexts where an individual has used their position to attract such benefits from vulnerable individuals. The URC wants to safeguard its ministers from any accusation of such malpractice.
3. The appended gift policy provides an appropriate opportunity for registering such gifts, whether accepted or not.

Appendix 1

Gift Policy for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers

The Bible is rich in its encouragement of generosity: the command to give freely in Matthew 10:8; the cheerful generosity of the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2; sacrificial giving in 1 John 3:16-18. It is a biblical imperative.

Gifts may be given to Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs (hereafter referred to as 'ministers') for all sorts of reasons, and can come in all shapes and sizes, from the gift for speaking at a church event other than a normal preaching engagement through to a gift from a member of the congregation to express thanks for a 'job well done', or to help out at a difficult time. This policy is written according to UK legislation, and is about protecting the reputations of ministers and the church, ensuring good practice and expectations of ministry.

The Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour include the following for ministers:

3a Personal integrity and health

- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material.

This policy refers to gifts from individuals rather than leaving gifts from local pastorates or other posts, and gifts received from speaking engagements. Neither does it apply to wedding or funeral fees, which are received as part of general ministerial duties.

Keeping the above in mind:

1. Gifts and hospitality, within certain limits, remain a legitimate means of fostering good relationships.
2. Gifts and hospitality can, when excessive, constitute a bribe and/or a conflict of interest. Care and due diligence should always be exercised when giving or receiving any form of gift or hospitality on behalf of the Church.
3. The following factors should be considered to test whether gifts, hospitality or expenses are made for the right reason
 - if a gift or hospitality, it should be given clearly as an act of appreciation;
 - if an expense, then for a *bona fide* business purpose;
 - no obligation – the gift, hospitality or expense should not place the recipient under any obligation;
 - no expectation – expectations are not created in the giver or an associate of the giver;

- made openly – if made in secret and undocumented, then the purpose will be open to question;
 - reasonable value – the size of the gift is small and the value of the hospitality or expense accords with general business practice. Cash should be neither given nor received as a gift under any circumstances;
 - appropriate – the nature of the gift, hospitality or expense is appropriate to the relationship and accords with general business practice;
 - legal – the gift or hospitality is compliant with relevant laws;
 - reported and documented – the gift, hospitality or expense should be recorded and reported to the Synod Moderator, and a note placed on the minister's/CRCW's file.
4. All gifts and hospitality offered, unless of a nominal value (under £100), will be recorded and documented as above, whether accepted or not.

Ministries Committee

Schedule E

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 24 General Assembly approves the changes to Schedule E of the Basis of Union as outline in this paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To reflect the actual categories of ministers who comprise the roll of ministers within our denomination
Main points	a) To make an addition to 1e to reflect Synod appointments b) To remove the category 1f, which no longer exists
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Clerk to General Assembly

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

1. We live in a changing world. Attitudes towards ministry and the shape of ministry within the United Reformed Church has changed since Schedule E was written. As a result, Ministries Committee have been reflecting on the categories of ministry within our denomination which comprise the roll of ministers.
2. It is not surprising that there have been changes. Ministries Committee sees this paper as a tidying up exercise to reflect the categories of minister that do indeed comprise the roll.
3. It is no longer the case that a minister of another church could transfer to the United Reformed Church without either receiving a call to a local pastorate or being appointed to a post approved by Synod. Ministers transfer to the United Reformed Church through being granted Certificates of Eligibility or of Limited Service where there is a clearly defined ministry within the United Reformed Church.
4. The changing nature of ministers deployed to Synod posts or to General Assembly appointments also needs to be reflected within the categories. It would

be possible for ministers on Certificates of Eligibility to be eligible to be appointed to such posts.

Therefore, Ministries Committee proposes

- c) a change to para 1(e) with the additions of the words *or upon appointment within a synod or wider church*;
- d) the removal of 1(f).

Appendix 1 Schedule E

1. The following constitute the categories of ministers comprising the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church:
 - a) Ministers of the former Congregational Church of England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England who became Ministers of the United Reformed Church at its formation in 1972;
 - b) Ministers of the former Re-formed Association of the Churches of Christ who became ministers of the United Reformed Church in 1981;
 - c) Ministers of the former Congregational Union of Scotland who became ministers of the United Reformed Church in 2000;
 - d) Ministers who have been ordained as ministers of the United Reformed Church and inducted to a local pastorate (or some other post approved by the synod) after having received a call with the concurrence of the synod or have been appointed to a post by councils of the Church or are associate members of a synod;
 - e) Ministers of other churches who have been granted a Certificate of Eligibility by the General Assembly, or the committee designated by the General Assembly with the responsibility to grant Certificates of Eligibility, and who subsequently transferred to the United Reformed Church upon ordination and/or induction to a local pastorate following a call with the concurrence of the synod *or upon appointment to a post within a synod or wider church*;
 - f) [*Ministers of other churches who, with the approval of a synod, have been permitted by the General Assembly, or the committee delegated by the General Assembly to act on its behalf, to transfer to the United Reformed Church without receiving a call to a local pastorate or without being appointed to a post approved by synod.*]
2. Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the

United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry.

3. Acting in due exercise of their functions as contained in the Structure of the United Reformed Church, the councils of the Church have authority in certain circumstances (without prejudice to a minister's conditions under the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration) to suspend a minister which involves a temporary ban on the exercise of ministry by the minister concerned but not his/her removal from the Roll of Ministers.
4. A minister under suspension, whether in pastoral charge or not, shall not present him/herself as a minister and shall not preside at communion. The minister shall refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as a minister of religion. Suspension also means that the minister may not exercise the ministerial rights of membership of any council of the Church. Suspension does not remove any of the rights accorded by the process of determining the matter which had led to the suspension.
5. A person whose name has been deleted from the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church and who remains a member of the URC has the privilege and responsibilities of that membership, but not those of a Minister of Word and Sacraments, and should refrain from all activity which may lead others to believe that he/she is acting as a minister of religion. However, should that person be re-instated to the Roll of Ministers, he/she would, on being called to a pastorate, need to be inducted to that pastorate, but not ordained, since ordination is not repeatable.

Ministries Committee

Pastoral Supervision for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle: moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 25 General Assembly adopts the policy for pastoral supervision as contained in this paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The Past Case Review Learning Report requires Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers to engage in pastoral supervision. This policy outlines how this is to be achieved.
Main points	The paper sets out <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a definition of pastoral supervision for the United Reformed Church b) who should engage in pastoral supervision c) frequency d) financial implications.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council, Synod Moderators.

Summary of Impact

Financial	About £100k annually.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Methodist Church, APSE

1. What is Pastoral Supervision?

- 1.1 Pastoral Supervision, as defined by the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education (APSE), is ‘a preventative rather than curative service offering care for the carer through creative, restorative support. It encourages a reflective, developmental, even transformational, approach to life in an attentive, safe, confidential, intentional, contained space. This theological/spiritual approach is psychologically informed, contextually sensitive and praxis based, thereby enabling the supervisee to be the best that they can be for those they serve.’

It is designed for people who care professionally through listening to others and who are aware that their emotional and spiritual life impacts, and is impacted by, their work, so that they carry an emotional burden of others: for example, clergy and lay church leaders, pastoral carers, nurses, doctors, care workers, social workers, teachers, politicians and employers.

- 1.2 Pastoral supervision enables:

- development of skills and self-awareness
- strengthening of vocational identity
- reconnection with vision
- clarification of ethical dilemmas
- interpretation and handling of situations differently
- boundary management
- receipt of encouragement and feedback
- discharge of feelings and recharging of energy
- healthy work/life balance
- discovery of new perspectives regarding group/team dynamics.

Reflecting with a trained pastoral supervisor helps a practitioner grow in pastoral competence and confidence, so maintaining their capacity to meet each person and situation with energy, resilience, compassion and courage.

- 1.3 Pastoral Supervision is not:

- spiritual accompaniment – for the sole or primary purpose of exploring the spiritual life and development of the supervisee(s). Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision, but are not the main focus.
- counselling – for the purpose of helping the supervisee(s) gain insight into their personal dynamics, or helping the supervisee(s) to resolve or live more positively with their psycho-social limitations. Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision and, if necessary, the supervisee(s) may be encouraged to seek counselling support.
- line management – for the purpose of addressing professional practice and development issues in relationship to the performance and accountability (whether paid or voluntary) of the supervisee(s) to their employer. Aspects of this may arise in Pastoral Supervision, but are not the main focus.

2. Pastoral Supervision in the URC

- 2.1 The Past Case Review Learning Report (Mission Council, November 2018) recommended that regular supervision be made part of a minister’s practice in order to encourage reflection about boundaries and practice, create a safe space to consider difficult issues and, ultimately, help to keep pastoral contacts safe. In

accepting the recommendations of the Past Case Review, the need for pastoral supervision to be required of all United Reformed Church ministers was agreed.

- 2.2 The Ministries Committee has, therefore, been exploring how the United Reformed Church might utilise pastoral supervision to better support its ministers.

Pastoral supervision is commonly said to have restorative, formative and normative functions (Francesca Inskipp and Brigid Proctor – 1988). It therefore will enable ministers to reflect on their work-life balance, explore healthy habits and look after their health and wellbeing (restorative); to learn and develop through reflecting on their practice and that of others (formative); and to be attentive to accountability and ethical working (normative). Supervision is also 'affirmative', giving ministers support and affirmation, and encouraging realistic self-appraisal without becoming overly self-critical or self-judgmental.

Michael Paterson, Director of the Institute of Pastoral Supervision & Reflective Practice, speaks of pastoral supervision 'encouraging a conversation between soul, role and context'. Pastoral supervision uses reflective practice as a tool for ministers to grow through their experience, or come to terms with it. It promotes personal growth in the service of a minister's practice, resourcing the minister to better carry out their role and to further God's mission.

- 2.3 We have set out a proposal for a denomination-wide scheme of pastoral supervision. This paper uses the term 'ministers' to refer to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and makes no distinction between the two regarding the type of pastoral supervision required.

3. Capacity and Resourcing

- 3.1 The principal obstacle to this goal of a denomination-wide scheme of pastoral supervision is a good supply of appropriate supervisors.
- 3.2 APSE advertise the services of around 60 supervisors across the UK, with some uneven geographical spread – there are 16 in London and the south east, nine in the south west, but just three in the north west.
- 3.3 There are hundreds of supervisors registered with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), although not all of these will be experienced in supporting those working in a faith setting.
- 3.4 The denomination will therefore also seek to identify ministers and lay people who might have the requisite gifts to become a supervisor, and encourage them to undertake training in order to support this scheme.

4. Constituency

- 4.1 The aspiration of the Ministries Committee is that, eventually, all United Reformed Church ministers considered by the denomination to be on the roll of 'active ministers' should be required to receive pastoral supervision. However, it is mindful of the issue of capacity and resourcing. It has therefore defined those who should engage in pastoral supervision as those who are in a pastoral relationship with a local congregation as a minister of word and sacraments or church related

community worker, chaplains who are not already receiving professional pastoral supervision through their current role, synod moderators, General Assembly appointments, and Special Category Ministers. Retired ministers who are not active and accredited lay preachers will not be required to receive pastoral supervision. Synods who use different models of Ministry, e.g. Local Church Leaders, should decide whether they wish to apply this scheme to them.

- 4.2 In cases where it may be unclear whether a particular minister should be required to receive pastoral supervision, the judgement of the relevant synod moderator will be considered final. The requirement to undertake pastoral supervision should be included in a minister's Terms of Settlement.

5. Beginning pastoral supervision

- 5.1 It will be the responsibility of individual ministers to find a supervisor, as the connection between those receiving supervision and their supervisor needs to work effectively. Supervisors should be accredited either by APSE or the BACP, or otherwise approved by the Synod. Information about suitable supervisors will be provided by the Ministries Committee.
- 5.2 As pastoral supervision is introduced to ministers, they will be supported and trained to make the most of supervision. This will be done through Synod Training Days, at EM2 and, for new ministers, through the Resource Centres for Learning.
- 5.3 Briefing material about the United Reformed Church and its existing expectations of ministers will be produced to enable supervisors from outside the denomination to carry out this role. This will include the Marks of Ministry and the Guidelines for Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers.

6. Format

- 6.1 Pastoral supervision in the URC should be conducted on a one-to-one basis between a trained pastoral supervisor and a supervisee minister, not in a group setting. The frequency and pattern of meetings will be decided between the supervisor and supervisee to reflect their agreed programme, but should be no less frequent than every two months, or six times a year. Exceptions will be made for ministries where this regular pattern may not be possible e.g. Armed Forces Chaplains.

7. Contracting

- 7.1 In pastoral supervision, contracting does not simply mean the transactional agreement the supervisor makes to perform their role, but a covenant that reflects a mutual agreement between the supervisor and supervisee about the supervisory process and relationship.
- 7.2 Responsibility for agreeing this contract or covenant will lie with the supervisee minister and their supervisor. Most supervisors will have their own suggested format, and the denomination will produce a model covenant that includes the flexibility for agreeing specific goals and ways of working.

8. Confidentiality and Reporting

- 8.1 Pastoral supervision in the URC is not intended to replicate a professional management relationship. Whilst issues of accountability in relation to the minister's local pastorate and Synod will arise, these are not the main focus.
- 8.2 Supervision will be confidential between supervisor and supervisee, unless the supervision raises concerns relating to safeguarding, or serious legal or wellbeing issues. Supervisors are trained to respond appropriately to such matters, and the URC briefing material will advise of appropriate places to report serious concerns.
- 8.3 More generally, the Synod will need assurance that pastoral supervision is taking place. The minister and supervisor will therefore be asked annually to jointly confirm in writing to the Synod Moderator or the appropriate Synod committee that regular supervision is taking place. Synods will, in turn, report this to the Secretary for Ministries, who will keep a denomination-wide record.
- 8.4 Supervisees are also encouraged to regularly identify any needs or concerns that might be addressed or supported by the Synod or local pastorate, and to report them to the appropriate forum, e.g. the Synod Training and Development Officer.

9. Existing appraisal, review and mentoring

- 9.1 Pastoral supervision should become the principal way of ensuring ministers reflect on their practice and identify appropriate actions to develop and find support. It will therefore replace MASA (Minister's Accompanied Self Appraisal) and any similar requirements.
- 9.2 Pastoral supervision performs a different purpose to spiritual direction and other informal mentoring relationships ministers may have. Ministers are encouraged to continue benefiting from these relationships, but they will not be considered an adequate substitute for pastoral supervision under the requirements of this policy.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 In general, pastoral supervisors charge up to £60 per session. For six sessions per year, the annual cost for an individual minister will be around £360. Across the denomination, using the number of ministers as defined in section 4, this suggests an annual cost of approximately £100k.
- 10.2 The Ministries Committee has considered carefully how this should be funded. Although it is Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly which has agreed that this scheme be mandatory, local pastorates play a crucial part in, and benefit from, keeping their minister well.
- 10.3 Pastoral supervision will therefore be funded jointly by local pastorates and the denomination. Funding will be in addition to the existing allocation for ministerial training. Pastorates are strongly encouraged to pay towards the costs of their minister's pastoral supervision, normally 50%. Remaining costs will be met by Assembly funds. The pastorate share of these costs will be proposed for inclusion in the next revision of the Plan for Partnership.

- 10.4 Where local pastorates feel they have the resources to bear the whole cost of supervision, they are encouraged to do so. Any pastorates who face particular challenges in meeting the cost may make a further request for funding from the denomination through their Synod.
- 10.5 Payment for supervision should be normally made by the minister, and claimed back from the local pastorate on production of the relevant receipts.

11. Implementation, Timing and Next Steps

- 11.1 Synods and local pastorates are asked to begin ensuring their ministers receive pastoral supervision as soon as possible. Our aim should be to have all relevant ministers receiving pastoral supervision within three years.
- 11.2 The potentially limited number of supervisors available means that Synods should prioritise those ministers currently serving in a pastoral role. New ordinands will continue to receive mentoring through EM2, and only be expected to start receiving pastoral supervision from that point on.
- 11.3 The Ministries Committee will produce a number of resources to support this process:
- a list of approved supervisors
 - a model contract
 - advice on the necessary changes to Terms of Settlement
 - guidance for funding pastoral supervision
 - introductory guidance for use at e.g. Synod training days.
- 11.4 Our proposals have placed an emphasis on individual ministers, working with their local pastorate and Synod, identifying a supervisor, establishing a contract and maintaining a productive relationship. Ministers need not wait, therefore, for all these resources to be available before they begin to approach supervisors and integrate pastoral supervision into their ministry. We would also encourage ministers and Synods who are already using pastoral supervision effectively to continue to do so.
- 11.5 Ministries Committee will liaise with Synods to monitor progress regularly during the implementation period, and recommend any additional actions necessary to promote pastoral supervision further.

Mission Committee

Report to General Assembly 2020

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 2018 to March 2020. It describes completed and ongoing work.
Main points	A progress report is given on the work of: Church and Society, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Global and Intercultural Ministries (including Commitment for Life), Mission and Evangelism, Fresh Expressions and Rural Mission.
Previous relevant documents	Mission committee report to General Assembly 2018. General Assembly 2016: Resolutions 37 and 50.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

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 (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations), Elizabeth Clark (National Rural Officer), Karen Campbell (Global and Intercultural Ministries), Kevin Snyman (Global Justice and Partnerships including Commitment for Life), Simeon Mitchell (Church and Society), Linda Rayner (Fresh Expressions)

Members: Sue Fender (Northern), Angela Bogg (North Western), Hilary Smith (Mersey), vacant (Yorkshire), Robert Bushby (East Midlands), John Davey (West Midlands), Lindsey Brown (Eastern), Robert Jordan (South Western), Ray Stanyon (Wessex), Simon Fairnington (Thames North), Alex Mabbs (Southern), Branwen Rees (Wales), John Collings (Scotland)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The days after Easter, when the introduction for this report is written, highlights **resurrection** as the start and goal of Christian mission and the life to live by, following the Great Commission and fulfilling the Lord's Prayer. Also at this time, while prevented by coronavirus restrictions from gathering, churches are finding new ways to worship with each other and serve their communities, and people are having to rethink what is essential and how to reorganise life in the future. The context and opportunities for mission as we go forward could be very different.
- 1.2 So as you read our mission staff reports and reflections on their past two years' work, you are invited to look out for major themes which you think could helpfully be implemented in your local situations, or adapted for changing circumstances; and look out for pieces of work you would like to see developed further on your behalf across your region, or nationally or internationally; and think what you could do to help make these things happen.
- 1.3 You may find encouragement in some words from Tom Wright:

'Christian hope, rooted in Jesus' resurrection, is the hope for God's renewal of all things, for his overcoming of corruption, decay and death, for his filling of the whole cosmos with his love and grace, his power and glory. ... Think through the hope that is ours in the gospel; recognise the renewal of creation as both the goal of all things in Christ and the achievement that has already been accomplished in the resurrection; and go to the work of justice, beauty, evangelism, the renewal of space, time and matter, as the anticipation of the eventual goal and the implementation of what Jesus achieved in his death and resurrection.'

Surprised by Hope (SPCK 2007 p.282)

2. 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, politics and social action. Most of this work is carried out through membership of the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), a partnership between the

United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of Scotland. Since March 2019, Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society, has served as deputy team leader of JPIT.



2.2 Over the last two years, JPIT's work has been focused around helping the Church to work, witness and pray for:

- A society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre
- A society that welcomes the stranger
- A just economy that enables the flourishing of all life
- A planet where the environment is renewed
- A world which actively works for peace
- A politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness.

Political engagement

2.3 In October 2018 we launched the **Meet your MP** initiative in England and Wales, which encourages local churches to build a positive relationship with their MP through inviting them to a meeting or event. We have been inspired by learning of how some congregations have engaged with their elected representatives, and hope to see many more getting involved in the future.

2.4 Resources were produced to enable church members to engage with the December 2019 **General Election** in an informed way, under the theme 'Love, Pray, Vote'. A briefing also helped church members to explore some of the issues raised by the May 2019 European Parliamentary Elections.



1: A delegation of church leaders, including the URC's Nigel Uden, meeting Fabian Hamilton MP, shadow minister for peace and disarmament, at the Labour Party Conference in September 2019

- 2.5 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 peers, offering an opportunity to show pastoral support, learn, and discuss issues of concern.
- 2.6 For much of this period, UK politics was dominated by the **Brexit process**, and we offered briefings, reflections and prayers at key moments. During 2019, the URC's General Assembly Moderators also joined with other national church leaders in speaking out about the dangers of a 'no deal' Brexit, because of its potential impact on the poorest and most vulnerable in society. Thousands of church ministers added their names to a letter to the new Prime Minister in July 2019. As Britain departed from the European Union on 31 January 2020, the leaders of the URC, Baptist Union, Methodist Church and Church of Scotland sent an open letter to Churches in EU member states, assuring them that the diminishing of political ties would not affect our commitment to our partnership in the gospel, and our work together around shared values and challenges.

Influencing policy

- 2.7 In this period, there has been a welcome growth in awareness of the urgency of tackling the global **climate crisis**. The Church has been active in encouraging action internationally, domestically, and within our congregations. In May 2019, the URC Mission Council 'urged the UK government to set a target and establish policies to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the UK by well before 2050', and a commitment to achieving net zero by 2050 was enshrined in law the following month. A few weeks later, we had a strong and visible URC presence at The Time is Now mass lobby of Parliament, providing the opportunity to meet MPs and call for more ambition and more urgent action.

- 2.8 A major issue of ongoing concern over this period has been **poverty** in Britain, and especially the impact of the rollout of Universal Credit on levels of poverty, debt and hunger. This was a focus for much JPIT policy and advocacy work, and regular blogs and briefings were



2: URC members at 'The Time is Now' climate lobby

produced to help people keep track of changes and continuing challenges. The URC was part of the End Hunger UK campaign, which secured a government commitment to measuring levels of food insecurity amid dramatic rises in foodbank use. We continue to support the call for an end to the five-week initial waiting period for Universal Credit payments. As the coronavirus hit the UK, JPIT played a role in helping church communities mobilise to support the most vulnerable, as well as identifying and highlighting groups which were falling through the gaps of statutory support.

- 2.9 The Church has continued to stand alongside **migrants, refugees and asylum seekers**, challenging ‘hostile environment’ policies and promoting a culture of welcome. The URC has been an active member of the Lift the Ban coalition which is calling for asylum seekers to be given the right to work after six months, and also urged action on refugee family reunion and to limit detention.
- 2.10 JPIT also enabled our Churches collectively to respond to government consultations and proposals on various other issues of longstanding concern, including alcohol and gambling policy, modern slavery, nuclear weapons, and persecution of religious minorities. We have supported efforts to defend the aid budget from attack, and encouraged Britain to fulfil its international commitments responsibly. These activities were supported with media activities, and meetings with MPs, ministers and other policymakers.

Resourcing churches and church members

- 2.11 Various **events** over this period offered church members opportunities to engage with church and society issues. In May 2019, *In the Thick of It*, a 24-hour residential gathering, brought together 54 people engaged in mission and ministry in marginalised places, in a fruitful collaboration with the church-related community work team with funding from the Council for World Mission. In a follow-up to this, we also supported a series of regional events on Speaking Truth to Power organised by Church Action on Poverty. In March 2020, JPIT hosted a major conference for 300 delegates with the timely theme *Renewal and Rebellion: Faith, Economy and Climate*. Keynote speakers included Barry Gardiner MP, economist Katherine Trebeck, Christine Allen of CAFOD, theologian Anthony Reddie, and Green MSP Ross Greer. Church and Society staff also spoke and led workshops on various topics at Synod meetings, training days, network events, Greenbelt, Youth Assembly and local churches.
- 2.12 Alongside the monthly JPIT email newsletter and podcast, regular social media posts and topical blogs, a range of **resource materials** enabled informed discussion, reflection and response to current issues of justice and peace. These included new JPIT briefings on modern slavery, housing, Universal Credit and intergenerational justice, and *Turning the World Upside Down*, a conversation



3: The JPIT conference in March 2020

starter on the economy, the climate crisis and flourishing. During Advent 2019, JPIT hosted *Natwivity*, a retelling of the nativity story on Twitter and Facebook, with content written by URC minister and JPIT poet-in-residence, Lucy Berry. This was accompanied by a series of Advent reflections on justice issues.

- 2.13 A particular focus has been on helping individuals and churches to reflect on what further action they could take in **response to the climate crisis**. In 2019 and 2020, JPIT's Living Lent campaign invited people to make a significant, personal commitment to changing their lifestyle for the environment, such as going meat-free, giving up single-use plastics, or taking up an alternative form of transport, as part of a reflective community during Lent. This generated high levels of interest and participation. In the URC, we encouraged churches and synods to enrol with A Rocha's Eco Church scheme (for England and Wales) or Eco Congregation (in Scotland) and explore how they could reduce their carbon footprints and become more environmentally aware. We did this working in collaboration with the Green Apostles network from the synods and the Assembly environmental task group, and report separately on progress in implementing the URC's environmental commitments.



3. Ecumenical and interfaith relations

- 3.1 The URC is far from unique in combining ecumenical and interfaith relations. Currently, the ecumenical officers for the Methodist Church, the Baptist Union and Salvation Army include interfaith matters as part of their portfolio. In the URC mission department, the ecumenical and interfaith brief is overseen by Philip Brooks as Secretary and Carole Sired as administrator.

Ecumenical relations

- 3.2 The URC works with the ecumenical instruments of England (CTE), Scotland (ACTS) and Wales (Cytûn) as well as with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). In October 2018, John Bremner was inducted as Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the Synod of Scotland. Following on from a report by Theos in 2018, Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) is going through a long period of reorganisation into a new entity called the Scottish Christian Forum. One of its key aims will be to widen its membership. At the end of 2019, we said goodbye to Sally Thomas after her much appreciated service as ecumenical officer for the Synod of Wales. During her time in Wales, Sally also worked closely with Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales).
- 3.3 URC ecumenical relations continue their involvement with the development of the Churches Together in England (CTE) document, *A new Framework for Local Unity in Mission*, now renamed *A Flexible Framework*. This work was described by former CTE General Secretary, David Cornick as 'one of the most significant practical ecumenical documents of our time'. The latest element of this project is to provide a toolkit helping churches to draw up 'lighter touch' ecumenical agreements and so enable a wider range of creative, locally based mission opportunities.

- 3.4 In October 2019, 21 URC ecumenical officers met with Church of England, Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army, Catholic and CTE colleagues for a 24-hour residential conference entitled *Ecumenism Today*. This gathering of local ecumenical officers was a new initiative and proved an excellent opportunity to discuss and share day-to-day ecumenical issues. A two-day residential conference will now become an annual fixture.
- 3.5 CTE continues to broaden its membership. The URC supported a recent application by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (UK), which brought the number of member churches to 50.
- 3.6 A diverse membership base also brings challenges for an ecumenical instrument. In September 2019, the CTE Enabling Group (formed from one representative for each member church) passed a controversial resolution. A Quaker, Hannah Brock Womack, who is in a same-sex marriage, was asked not to take up her appointed position as fourth president of CTE (there are six presidents in total, each representing a constituency of churches). Whilst accepting that the issue of same-sex marriage is a difficult one, the URC is firm in its commitment that no one in a same-sex relationship should be precluded from holding office. A statement expressing our deep sadness and sense of injustice was issued in the wake of the Enabling Group decision. This remains a live and challenging issue in the ecumenical movement. Within the URC itself, we have been challenged that our statement was not strong enough, whilst others have expressed concern that it fails to respect more conservative theological views. We have pledged to ensure that the conversation continues amongst CTE member churches, taking the view that CTE's present position is discriminatory. The 2020 URC Youth Assembly passed a resolution condemning the decision taken by CTE's Enabling Group. The URC Ecumenical Secretary was given time at the March 2020 Enabling Group to present the URC position. Subsequently, CTE has issued an invitation for a member of URC Youth to join a small planning group, considering ways in which CTE can enable conversations about human sexuality.
- 3.7 One positive experience of the Covid-19 lockdown period was the ecumenical response. National ecumenical officers met on a weekly basis, facilitated by CTE but with active involvement from CTBI, Cytŷn and with the Church of Scotland bringing a Scottish perspective. The sharing of advice and mutual support, together with shining examples of local co-operation, showed ecumenism in action. Amongst several initiatives, the URC's guidance papers on virtual Communion and 'New Normal' were much appreciated by ecumenical colleagues.
- 3.8 A good deal of the URC's ecumenical work at national level operates through bilateral groups, such as the Methodist/URC Liaison Group. There has been a delay in establishing the next round of dialogue with the Church of England, as the appointed Bishop co-chair has moved to another appointment, but the bilateral Contact Group should commence in late 2020. The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group has concentrated on highlighting positive examples of local engagement. A recent residential was held at Christ the Cornerstone, a five-way LEP in Milton Keynes, meeting with the Catholic priest and URC minister serving there, along with members of the congregations. We were able to affirm that Milton Keynes still represents a relevant and effective model of ecumenism. In November 2020, the Dialogue Group has arranged a residential meeting with Catholic and URC members from the ecumenical county of Cumbria.

European ecumenical relations

- 3.9 General Assembly resolution 50 in 2016 committed the URC to ‘ongoing ecumenical relationships across Europe’. We have worked hard to maintain and develop our links with European churches. In September 2018, John Bradbury was elected as one of the three presidents of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE).
- 3.10 The URC has long-standing links with the Waldensian Church in Italy, and there is an active URC Waldensian Fellowship Group. Several synods engage with European churches. Wessex Synod has an annual ‘Le Weekend’ exchange with partner Protestant Church in Northern France, and this year was set to visit Roubaix.
- 3.11 The covenant of table and pulpit fellowship with the Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz (EKP) in Germany was formally established in 1957, although its roots go back to the early post-war years. It links around 40 URC and EKP churches (plus new churches seeking partners). Several important initiatives have taken place in the last two years. A URC delegation travelled to Neustadt for a theological consultation and to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the union of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in the Pfalz. The URC and EKP produced a unique resource to mark 100 years since the WWI armistice. In November 2019, a party of 50 from the URC and EKP gathered to celebrate 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. A joint statement produced at the event was heartily endorsed by URC Mission Council and the EKP Landessynode.

Interfaith relations

- 3.12 Following a review, this work is now facilitated by the interfaith enabling group (IEG) with its emphasis on encouraging local interfaith engagement. Tracey Lewis is the new chair of the group. It is encouraging to note close ecumenical co-operation with the Baptist interfaith working group. Most meetings are now held jointly.



URC group visiting IOPT

- 3.13 The IEG oversees the interfaith fund. Some of the initiatives supported include: a local church training day; a climate crisis event hosted by the Muslim Scottish Ahlul Bayt Society and the Synod of Scotland; support for the ecumenical accompaniment programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI); support for the work of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ); visits to Israel and Palestine by a Muslim-Christian women's group from Yorkshire, and a group visit to the region bringing together members from the Forest Group of URC churches in North London, the South Woodford Mosque and the East London and Essex Liberal Synagogue.
- 3.14 The URC continues to participate in the churches' forum for inter-religious relations (overseen by CTBI) and the interfaith network (IFN). The URC's Ecumenical and Interfaith Secretary recently gave a presentation to IFN's faith communities forum on the theme of relationships and education in the Christian tradition.
- 3.15 Resolution 37 from the 2016 General Assembly mandated Mission Committee 'to enable synods, local churches and individuals to become more aware and to respond with informed prayer, grace and solidarity' to the complex and multi-layered situation in Israel and Palestine. One major resulting initiative was the Israel-Palestine educational visit. Finance for the visit came from central funds, grants, synods and personal fundraising by participants. In September 2019, a group of 22 people spent 10 days in the region, led by Brian Jolly, and with Lawrence Moore providing Bible studies throughout the visit. All 13 synods were represented, as were global and intercultural ministries, Commitment for Life, URC Youth and *Reform*. Derek Estill as General Assembly Moderator and Katie Henderson as Youth Assembly Moderator gave the visit added impetus. The deliberate focus was on meeting with indigenous Christians, who in turn requested their stories to be shared and to encourage others to visit the region. Collectively, the 22 participants have provided more than 100 presentations across local churches and synods. It has been particularly noticeable that congregations are unaware of the lived experience of Christians, particularly in Palestine. A group of participants has written the *Walking the Way* resources for Advent 2018 and Lent 2019. There has also been a series of articles in *Reform*. As a denomination, we now look to see where this learning will lead us in future responses.
- 3.16 The *12 Faces of Hope* exhibition was featured at the 2018 General Assembly. The exhibition offers 12 individual, short narratives sharing their hopes for justice and peace in the Holy Land. Since 2018, the exhibition has been on tour, visiting eight synods, as well as appearing at CTBI's 2019 Annual General Meeting. It has travelled as far afield as Helensburgh in Scotland and Tavistock in Devon. The exhibition is free to borrow (apart from carriage) and remains relevant. It can be booked by emailing carole.sired@urc.org.uk.

4. Global and Intercultural Ministries

- 4.1 Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM) covers several areas, including global partnerships, intercultural work and Commitment for Life. The global and intercultural team consists of Karen Campbell (Secretary for GIM), Kevin Snyman (Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships), Veronica Daniel (Administrator for GIM) and Suzanne Pearson (Administrator for Commitment for Life). Previous Commitment for Life Programme Co-ordinator Linda Mead retired

from her role in November 2018, while former Secretary for GIM, Michael Jagessar moved to a new post with the Council for World Mission in February 2020. We thank them for their excellent contributions to the life and work of the United Reformed Church.

Council for World Mission

4.2 Much of our global church engagement takes place through the work and programmes of the Council for World Mission. A key area of involvement is the **Partners in Mission** programme, through which we send and receive mission partners.

4.2.1 Alison Gibbs has served in Zambia since 1997. Alison recently moved to Mbereshi in northern Zambia to be head teacher at Mabel Shaw Girls' Secondary School. A request by the United Church of Zambia and the URC to CWM for her term to be extended for one more year beyond her retirement year (2020) is currently being finalised.

4.2.2 In May 2019 the Revd Yufen Chen from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan arrived in the UK to work with the Taiwanese Fellowship in Lumen (TFiL), London. This is a new phase of mission partnership with the PCT following many years of supporting a Taiwanese chaplain in Manchester. Yufen has settled in well, and is very much engaged in developing this newly focused ministry and mission.

4.2.3 So-Young Jung from the Presbyterian Church of Korea is lay missioner with the New Malden and Kingston churches in Southern Synod, working in particular with North and South Korean women and young people. After a year on secondment from the PCK, she became a formal partner in mission in March 2020.



CWM's Wayne Hawkins welcomes the Revd Yufen Chen at Lumen

4.2.4 We are grateful to the international exchange reference group whose members support the partners in mission work through visits, taking on specific pieces of necessary work and serving on the management or support group of partners in mission in the UK.

4.3 CMW offers a range of **other programmes**, such as the Face to Face programme for ordinands, Training in Mission (for young adults exploring mission) and A New Face (ANF) programme for ministers/CRCWs. Adella Pritchard participated in the ANF Programme in New Zealand in October 2019, with a focus on ministers with disabilities as agents of change in their context.

- 4.4 The URC contributed to CWM's **new international financial and economic architecture programme** (NIFEA) as it works towards a just economics of fullness of life. A final gathering in a series of three consultations took place in Guyana in 2018, and a report and action plan were received by the Mission Committee in February 2019. This resulted in the production of resources on Economy of Life, various network meetings on the role of debt upholding injustice (see 4.9) and a conference co-hosted with CWM on the theme *Forgive us our Debt?* in December 2019.
- 4.5 **The Legacies of Slavery** began as a series of hearings organised by CWM in 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. CWM has asked that member churches deepen their sensitivity to the issue of ongoing and endemic white privilege, and its adverse impact on black people and communities. In response to the report on the Legacies of Slavery hearings, mission committee established a task group to work out how to help the Church to address the issues of apology, reparation/restorative justice and white privilege. The task group, led by Alan Yates, completed its initial work in September 2019, and a report was brought to Mission Council in November 2019 for discussion. The task group intends to bring concrete proposals to General Assembly in 2021 or 2022, following a process of church-wide conversation.
- 4.6 Various URC representatives continue to play a key part in the **governance** structures of CWM: John Ellis as CWM's Treasurer, John Proctor in CWM's strategic review group, Lindsey Brown at the annual members meeting in Samoa in June 2019. CWM's Assembly due in June 2020 has been postponed to 2021.

Synod global partnerships and networks

- 4.7 Since Assembly 2018, various synod global partnership visits have taken place: from Northern Synod to Mozambique, from East Midlands to Botswana, from West Midlands to North India and from Wessex to Zambia. The Wessex visit focused on the renewal of the partner link and activities for 2020-2024.
- 4.8 Several synods have reviewed their longstanding partnership links: some may seek new partnerships; others have affirmed their partnership and seek to strengthen it, e.g. Eastern Synod with Zimbabwe (Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa) and North Western with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan.
- 4.9 A first joint meeting of the **synod global and intercultural coordinators**, as well as **Commitment for Life advocates**, took place in October 2018, to reflect how their areas of focus connect and sometimes overlap. The theme of the meeting was *Partnering for Justice*. In attendance were two partners from Zimbabwe during a visit to Eastern Synod. The annual residential gathering of these networks in 2019 focused on the theme *Forgive us our Debts?* as well as on the work related to each network. The 2020 meeting may take place online as a result of the coronavirus crisis.
- 4.10 TeamURC, Cascades of Grace, and **Black and Minority Ethnic Ministers and CRCWs** (BAME) continue to meet. At the 2018 BAME gathering, Anthony Reddie spoke on the impact of Brexit on minority and black communities in the UK. In 2019, we examined the devastating impacts of a debt-based, interest-bearing economic structure, particularly on marginalised communities. We continue to

encourage smaller gatherings focused on racial justice issues across the synods, such as the racial justice gathering held by Thames North Synod at Vine URC focusing on the environment.



BAME gathering 2019

- 4.11 We support and participate in CTBI's **Racial Justice Network** meetings. 2020 will be an opportunity to mark 50 years of Racial Justice Sunday, and we are involved in the advocacy work around this, with events planned in October 2020.

Other global partnerships, visits and engagements

- 4.12 Part of our work is to facilitate visits. 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. We facilitated **representational visits** and participation in **global or regional ecumenical bodies and gatherings**.
- 4.12.1 Representational visits to partner churches and their assemblies included the Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Waldensian Church in Italy, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, the Spanish Protestant Evangelical Church, the Church of North India, Church of South India, Guyana Congregational Union, Presbyterian Church in Myanmar, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and the United Church of Zambia.
- 4.12.2 We were represented in meetings of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and its European Regional Council, the Central Committee and the Faith and Order Committee of the World Council of Churches, and the Churches

Commission on Migrants in Europe. We also took part in a partners consultation of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum and ongoing ecumenical conversations on peace in the Korean peninsula sponsored by the WCC and the National Council of Churches in Korea.

- 4.13 Our commitment to ensure that **ministers and those training for ministry** have a global exposure has seen visits to partner churches in Zimbabwe (UPCSA), Taiwan (PCT), Jamaica (United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands) and Canada (United Church of Canada).
- 4.14 We have also expressed our global partnership by supporting ongoing **empowerment, development and emergency relief** of partners and their communities. We have contributed towards emergency relief following natural disasters in Indonesia, the Bahamas, Malawi, Australia and Zambia. We have also supported scholarships and church planting work in Myanmar, empowerment of women through theological formation in India, and work among displaced children and young people in Syria and Lebanon. As part of our carbon offsetting scheme, we supported the installation of a biogas plant at the Kerala United Theological Seminary in India.

Resourcing and policy work

- 4.15 **Resourcing local congregations** forms a key part of our work. A wide range of resources has been produced in the past two years, including a film to mark Windrush at 70 (*Longing to Belong*) with accompanying worship materials. We also produced materials for Racial Justice Sunday in 2018, 2019 and 2020, and leaflets on Partnership and Portraying Diversity. For a full range of our resources, please visit the GIM pages on the URC website.
- 4.16 The matter of the URC's carbon footprint through global travel has been raised on several occasions. Over the last two years, we have put in place a more robust **travel policy** for all international travel related to our work. The policy includes managing sensible and necessary representational travels, encouraging good stewardship of time and gifts, using airlines that are committed to the need for sustainability, deploying virtual meeting mechanisms for short gatherings, and balancing the need for engagement 'on site' with the challenge of the Church's carbon footprint in the context of a multiple set of environmental realities and challenges.



NIFEA Guyana participants

Commitment for Life

- 4.17 Commitment for Life is the distinctive global justice programme of the URC. We have partnered with Christian Aid and Global Justice Now since 1992, having grown out of the 1% appeal. Following a review of the programme, Mission Committee affirmed the work of Commitment for Life as part of the mission of the United Reformed Church for justice in God's world, and recognised that the added value of worship, education and action by Commitment for Life are still important and relevant today. However, it also recognised that, in the light of the present global economic and political climate, there was 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 model. In the past two years, much of this work has been undertaken.
- 4.18 When the programme's coordinator retired in 2018, Kevin Snyman was appointed under the new job title of Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships to reflect the decision to **integrate Commitment for Life programme into global and intercultural ministries**. This has sharpened Commitment for Life's *raison d'être* as the denomination's shared global justice programme, and has made communicating the purpose of Commitment for Life easier.
- 4.19 **Partner regions** include Bangladesh, Central America (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua), Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (IOPT) and Zimbabwe. All continue to struggle with environmental and political concerns that affect those living with poverty. Christian Aid partners in Bangladesh are focusing on resilience, climate change, inclusion, and market and humanitarian responses. The Central American team focuses on political transparency, gender violence, inclusive markets, and resilience in the face of climate change. Conditions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories continue to deteriorate. Advocacy is fundamental to our work in IOPT in support for the rights of all Palestinians and Israelis to live safely and securely. Political instability in Zimbabwe still besets ordinary people, but we focus on household resilience, strengthening livelihoods and engage in advocacy work on gender empowerment.
- 4.20 The new programme staff have worked hard to strengthen links with **Christian Aid**. Christian Aid has undergone a major overhaul, affecting many aspects of its work. This was necessitated by the changing ratio between unrestricted and restricted funding, with the former seeing significant declines over recent years. Christian Aid has withdrawn from two of Commitment for Life's partner countries in Central America, El Salvador and Guatemala. This has prompted us to ask our congregations who have supported Central America and other stakeholders whether to recommend that Commitment for Life limits its support to only three regions, or find another region to support.
- 4.21 In consultation with Mission Committee and the URC communications department, Commitment for Life updated its **presentation and look**, in line with the new-look URC logo. The response has been very positive. The new logos have been used in resources, posters, giving-boxes, communications and films. Updated resources have been in great demand, with more than 1,500 recycled plastic, one-pound trolley keyrings already shared. Suzanne Pearson has worked hard to improve the response time to queries and requests for resources from congregations.

- 4.22 Commitment for Life continues to support the **Stop Climate Chaos Coalition**. We are an associate of the **Jubilee Debt Campaign** and remain a stakeholder for the **Fairtrade Foundation**. **Global Justice Now** continues its vital role in highlighting those injustices that affect us all. These include reporting on the negotiation in secret of deeply unjust trade agreements that impoverish everyone except the already extremely wealthy in societies. Our partners rely and plan on the prayers, activism and contributions made by the more than 400 local churches who are active in Commitment for Life.
- 4.23 A strong focus of education is a priority for the 22 members of the URC's 2019 educational visit to **Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories**. A number of these members have undertaken to advocate for Commitment for Life, with a particular focus on IOPT. They have emphasised learning, listening, praying and working for justice in that region. Their impact is already being felt by Commitment for Life and across the denomination.
- 4.24 The programme is supported by a reference group and by a network of synod advocates. The reference group has made it clear that the fundamental basis of support by congregations should be clearly articulated as a list of priorities: prayer, learning, action/advocacy and sharing. Given the enormity of the social justice issues facing our partner regions, prayer must always come first, followed by learning about the situation faced by our partner regions, particularly as this pertains to justice and environmental disruption, followed by advocacy/action on behalf of our partners, and only then sharing and giving.
- 4.25 Commitment for Life has seen a steady decline in giving over the past few years. The 2017 review identified a number of factors for this, including the current economic and political situation, changing attitudes to charity giving, confusion over the difference between Commitment for Life and Christian Aid, the average age and number of members and congregations, to name but a few. In the past two years, we have tried to address the recommendations of the review, and we are encouraged by a small upturn in giving in 2019.

5. Mission and evangelism

- 5.1 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 Brienen, and administrator Carole Sired.

Vision2020

- 5.2 Vision2020 reached its final year in 2020, and an evaluation of the framework for mission is currently taking place. While it had been the intention to bring a report to the General Assembly in 2020, in the light of the potential cancellation of Assembly this has been deferred to no later than Assembly 2021. This will allow us to gather more data, including the results of the annual church returns of 2019.
- 5.3 The vision2020 grants funding continues to be well used. Since July 2018, more than 20 grants were given, providing funding for youth work, children and family outreach, social justice campaigns, messy church, debt counselling and skills development for volunteers etc. The grants continue to enable local churches to reach out to their communities in innovative and creative ways.

Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today

5.4 Mission staff are fully involved in the support and development of *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today*, the URC's long-term emphasis on missional discipleship. The project manager is part of the mission team at Church House, and the Deputy General Secretary (Mission) co-convenes the steering group. For an overview of how Walking the Way is developing, please see its pages in this *Book of Reports* (the next report but one after this one).

Projects and partners

5.5 The November 2018 Mission Council agreed to fund the URC's presence at **Greenbelt** for a further period of three years under the oversight of Mission Committee. The findings of a review of the URC/Greenbelt partnership noted that 30% of the 12,000 non-URC visitors at Greenbelt were more aware of the URC since attending the festival, and saw the denomination in a good light as a result. The review also found that 50% of URC members at Greenbelt said the partnership had a positive impact on local churches.

5.5.1 Greenbelt 2019 represented the first URC presence of the revised funding stream. It was staffed by an enthusiastic team of 28 volunteers and eight youth ambassadors. As always, the URC tent demonstrated admirable creativity, responding to the general Greenbelt theme and giving it a URC twist. The result was *Walking the Way with wit and wisdom*. The URC at Greenbelt presence includes members of local churches who will never attend the festival. Local churches from as far afield as Southampton and Fraserburgh sent in their wit and wisdom sayings, which were displayed in the tent and then given away to festival goers on the final day of the event.



URC tent at Greenbelt

- 5.5.2 It is a blow that the festival has been furloughed for 2020. However, the theme of *Revolting Christians* will carry forward to 2021. The way in which we invite contributions from local churches across the UK gives us more opportunity to offer an even more impressive presence next year. So we ask that churches continue to send in their stories of inspirational people, together with the Wanted posters. One aim for 2021 will be to encourage more URC church groups to visit the festival. Visit the Greenbelt section of the URC website for more details.
- 5.6 In addition to projects which support local mission, we also partner with other organisations to resource local churches. One such partner is **HOPE**, which designated 2018 as a special year of mission. A thousand areas/churches engaged with HOPE in 2018 through distributing the Easter, Summer and Christmas magazines, through engaging with the Talking Jesus material or in direct mission activity. The HOPE work continued in 2019 as a year of prayer and planning for 2020, the year of hope-filled presentation of the gospel under the banner of Advance2020.
- 5.7 An increasing number of local United Reformed churches participate in **Thy Kingdom Come**, the global prayer movement that originated from the initiative of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York in 2016. The Mission Committee is in the process of seeking a more active partnership with TKC so that this can be supported and promoted more widely throughout the URC.
- 5.8 The **Christian Enquiry Agency**, which works on behalf of the churches, including the URC, launched a new website in February 2020. The website is an excellent resource for people who are enquiring about the Christian faith (www.christianity.org.uk). It is also particularly useful for smaller churches without their own online presence.

Networks

- 5.9 Mission staff support the mission enablers, working in the synods, by facilitating regular meetings for sharing and support. Autumn residentials took place in 2018 and 2019 offering an opportunity to share developments in the synods, learn more about chosen themes, discuss the synods' engagement with Walking the Way and Stepwise, and synod and local involvement in Fresh Expressions.

Fresh Expressions

- 5.10 The ecumenical **Fresh Expressions board**, of which the URC has been a part, came to an end in October 2019, at the end of its third quinquennium. The new board that was formed is smaller, light-touch, and gift-based rather than representational. The URC continued its involvement in Fresh Expressions Networks (as it is now called) through the newly formed denominational leaders hub, the pioneer development hub, the denominational partners learning community and the FX gatherings. We will remain connected with all our ecumenical partners in this way and at the same time focus our energies on embedding fresh expressions thinking and practice in the life of the URC.



First FX Gathering at Westminster College

- 5.11 In order to do so, the Mission Committee set up a **Fresh Expressions enabling group**. The group brings together representatives from mission, education and learning, ministries, children and youth work, synod moderators, faith and order and the pioneers network. The intention is to enable every part of the URC to understand and embrace the importance of fresh expressions alongside more traditional forms of church in the future. Both new and inherited forms of church are important.
- 5.12 The URC pioneer ministers comprise special category ministry (SCM) posts, and synod-employed posts. Some are ecumenical. The **pioneers** are all ministers of Word and Sacraments, though not necessarily ordained into the URC. Since the last Assembly, mission staff have facilitated several meetings of these pioneer ministers to share experiences and explore challenges. Representatives from the Faith and Order committee attended the pioneers' most recent residential to research the present and future position of pioneering in the Church as they grapple with questions of ecclesiology, calling and ordination and prepare for further discussion around fresh expressions.
- 5.13 The URC also has many 'unofficial' pioneers, including lay and ordained, employed and volunteers. A **learning community-style of gathering** for these pioneers was introduced early in 2020 (with a plan for similar in future years) by Westminster College in collaboration with the URC mission department. The Gathering (as it is called) comprises three 24-hour meetings in the year, and is encouraging leaders of Fresh Expressions to network together, learn from each other, share stories and plan their future moves for bringing their members closer to God. A key part of the meetings is working with the new FX Godsend app which provides ideas and inspiration for anyone embarking on pioneering a new form of church. This year, 11 projects are represented with 22 participants, and feedback after the initial meeting has been positive. Future meetings are planned for July and October 2020.

- 5.14 The Coordinator for Fresh Expressions, Linda Rayner, continues to work closely with synod mission enablers, training officers and other synod networks, offering training for trainers as the Fresh Expressions ethos is cascaded through the Church. She also works with the team developing Stepwise to produce part of the faith-filled community module. Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM) and Mission Shaped Intro (MSI) courses continue to be available, although some of this is now superseded by the Godsend app.

Rural Mission

- 5.15 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 NRO post is held by Elizabeth Clark, who is based at the Arthur Rank Centre (ARC) in Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth.
- 5.16 It is estimated that around 25% of URCs are rural. Whilst **rural churches** are in the minority, it is important that we all have some understanding of the context where many of our colleagues, members and friends live and minister. Currently one of the biggest challenges is that of flooding, with many villages and countless hectares of farmland under water. The effects are terrible for everyone, but for some farmers any chance of growing a crop this year has disappeared, and this could have catastrophic effects on their business. Please hold them in your prayers.
- 5.17 The Rural Officer was invited to an evidence session of the Stepwise task and finish group to talk about how the rural context might affect the development and delivery of Stepwise. A serious concern is online accessibility in rural areas. Almost 12% of rural households are unable to access 10Mb/s broadband. (House of Lords, 2019). There is also a need to try and develop groups that minimise travel, since public transport can be scarce or non-existent.



Worship toolkit for rural churches

- 5.18 The rural strategy group, which supports the work of the NRO, discussed the issues around providing accredited preachers to lead worship in rural areas. This is a challenge that affects all denominations. Providing a service at a regular time each week can make it easier for new people to join in. Worship is key to who we are, and many rural Christians value worshipping in their local communities. The fellowship and sense of community that belonging to church can give is also important in rural communities, where loneliness and isolation can be an issue. This discussion led to the writing of a resource called *Worshipping Together*. This aims to give congregations the confidence to lead their own worship.
- 5.19 Rural Mission Sunday is in its sixth year and continues to grow. This year Rural Mission Sunday falls on 19 July, and the theme is *Common Ground*. It provides an opportunity for rural churches to celebrate who they are and encouragement to do this with their communities. Given the increasing divisions in society, this theme felt timely.
- 5.20 The National Rural Officer is due to retire in August 2021, and a review of the post was started in September 2019. In the course of the review, it became clear that as part of a new strategy for evangelism and growth, *God for All*, the Methodist Church would wish to employ a full-time rural officer from August 2021. This in effect means the end of a shared post between the two denominations. Conversations and exploration are now taking place to see what the implications are for the URC, for the role of the rural strategy group and for future ecumenical co-operation in the area of rural ministry and mission.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Bernie Collins, outgoing convenor, writes: 'My thanks to the whole mission staff team, to all core members of the committee representing synods during my four-year term, and others with particular responsibilities. Thanks for sharing and learning from each other's experience, leadership and insights into God's work. And our gratitude to people in local churches, synods, other Assembly departments and ecumenical partnerships, members of the body of Christ at work in his mission. Please forgive anything done unhelpfully or inappropriately, and pray for God's guidance and grace for work to go ahead well with the new convenor, Sarah Lane Cawte.'

Environmental Task Group

Environmental Policy progress review

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Rob Weston, Convenor: tavistockurcminister@gmail.com Simeon Mitchell, Secretary: simeon.mitchell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly directs the Environmental Task Group to consult on a travel and expenses policy for the URC which (i) encourages consideration of the purpose of travel and its environmental impact, (ii) introduces a carbon budget for international travel on URC business, and (iii) incentivises low-carbon travel modes, with a view that proposals should be brought to a future General Assembly, or to the Assembly Executive if necessary.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on progress in implementing the URC's Environmental Policy and recommendations for next steps
Main points	There is a huge variety of levels of engagement with, enthusiasm for and knowledge of environmental concerns across the Church. Some impressive work is going on, but others have not yet actively engaged with these issues. Overall, the URC is not yet doing enough to fulfil its environmental commitments. The report highlights examples of good practice and makes recommendations for further progress.
Previous relevant documents	URC Environmental Policy (as adopted by General Assembly in July 2016 and updated by Mission Council in May 2019)
Consultation has taken place with...	Synods Assembly Committees

Summary of Impact

Financial	None, directly – though achieving all the commitments in the Environmental Policy would require significant expenditure
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Not significant

1. Background

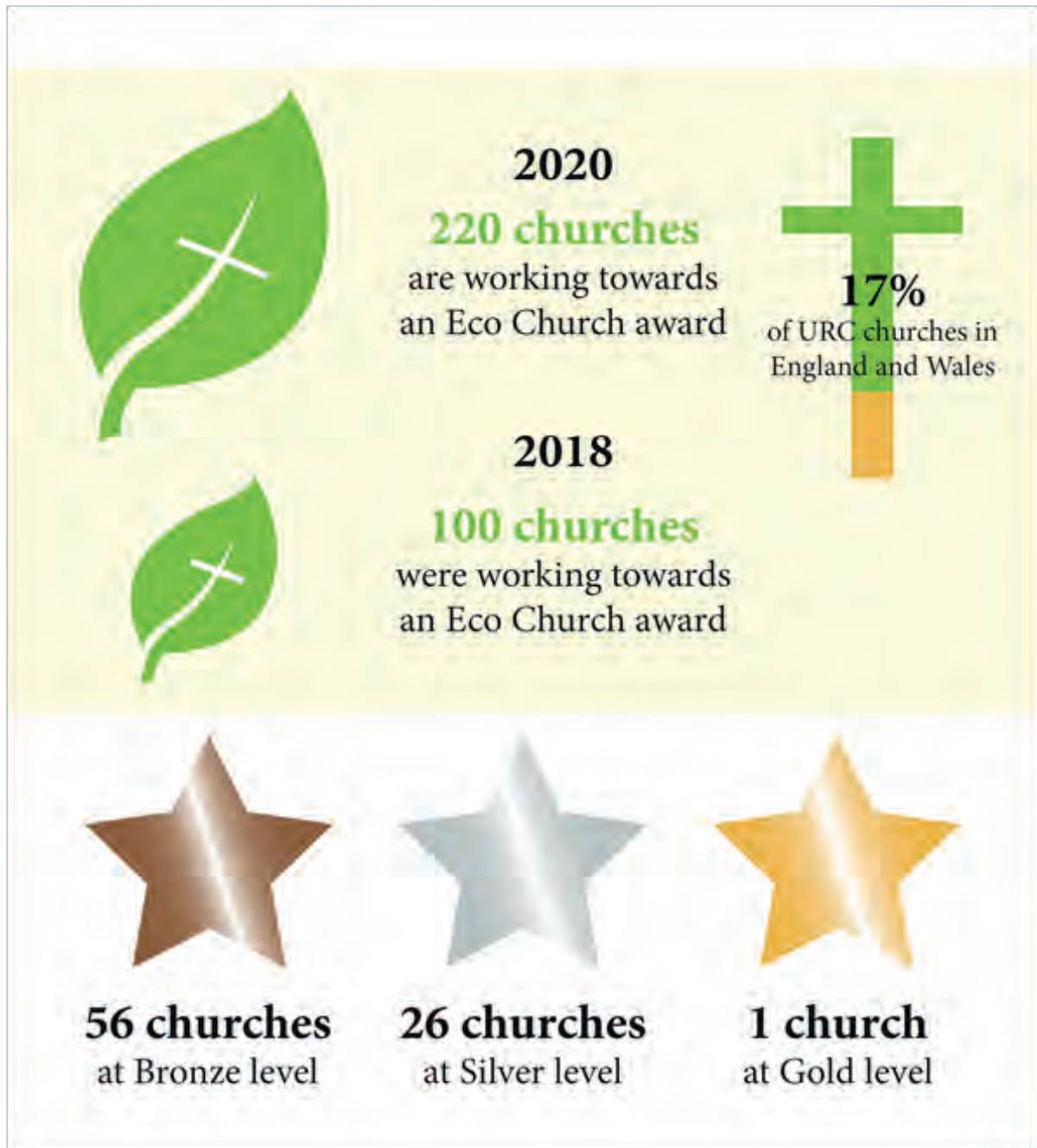
- 1.1 The URC's current Environmental Policy was adopted at General Assembly in 2016 and updated by Mission Council in May 2019. It commits the Church to 'shrink its carbon footprint (the total greenhouse gas emissions caused by the Church's activities) and to strive to protect and restore the environment' and to 'act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life in line with the target... of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by well before 2050'. It sets out specific actions which it encourages local churches, synods, and the Church as a whole to take forward in order to fulfil these commitments.
- 1.2 Recognising the increasing urgency of action in response to environmental concerns, and the importance of measuring this, the November 2019 Mission Council asked all synods and Assembly committees 'to report back to the environmental task group about their progress in implementing the Environmental Policy by 29 February 2020, with a view to a full report being made at the 2020 General Assembly and annually thereafter'. The environmental task group sent questionnaires to all synods and the main Assembly committees, asking for details of action they were taking on environmental matters, and for any specific support or resources they would find helpful to make further progress.

2. Responses

- 2.1 Ten synods and all Assembly committees responded to this request, as did URC Youth Executive and several other subcommittees, teams and task groups. The responses were analysed alongside centrally collected data. The environmental task group is grateful for all the information provided.
- 2.2 The progress review highlights a huge variety of levels of engagement with, enthusiasm for and knowledge of environmental concerns across the Church. Some incredible work is going on, but others have not yet actively engaged with these issues. Overall, the group is very encouraged by the level and content of the responses. We hope this summary of the results will be a way of celebrating success and sharing good practice (see highlighted boxes), and also provide a stimulus to further action.

3. Local churches

- 3.1 The Environmental Policy, in section 5.3, encourages local churches to consider environmental issues in their use of buildings, land and energy, and in their worship and teaching; to help church members to make lifestyle changes; and to engage in political and community action around climate change. In support of this, it recommends that churches participate in the programmes and award schemes offered by Eco Church (in England and Wales) or Eco-Congregation (in Scotland).
- 3.2 As at February 2020, 220 United Reformed Churches were registered as working towards an Eco Church award. This represents 17% of URCs in England and Wales. The number of URCs on the programme has more than doubled since the beginning of 2018, when just 100 churches were registered.



- 3.3 At the time of writing, 56 churches are at Bronze award level, 26 are at Silver award level, and one is at Gold award level. We congratulate all churches that have received awards.

Special congratulations to St John's Marsh Green (Edenbridge) in Southern Synod, which was the first URC to receive a Gold award from Eco Church, in October 2019. The church generates its own electricity from photovoltaic panels on the roof, uses rainwater for toilet flushing, banks ethically, has its own nature reserve with a wildflower meadow to improve habitats for wildlife, and runs regular eco-events.

- 3.4 In Scotland, there are 12 URC Eco-congregations, representing 27% of churches in the Synod of Scotland.

- 3.5 Congregations report that these programmes provide inspiration, information and tangible stepping stones as they grow in environmental awareness. We would strongly encourage all churches to register with the relevant scheme and to work towards each award.

4. Synods

- 4.1 The Environmental Policy, in section 5.4, mandates synods to encourage and support local churches in the areas outlined above, and also look at the environmental impact of the buildings and resources for which they are responsible, and develop and implement an environmental policy or charter.
- 4.2 Synods are invited to apply for an Eco Synod award as a way of measuring their progress. By February 2020, seven synods were registered as working towards the Eco Synod award (Wessex, West Midlands, South Western, Northern, East Midlands, Wales, Southern).
- 4.3 As of February 2020, all synods have now appointed or designated a Green Apostle or equivalent, to champion this agenda. Their impact has been felt in many places and their work is enormously appreciated.

With strong leadership commitment, sustained profile and a proactive approach to follow-up, West Midlands synod has made the most progress in encouraging take-up of the Eco Church scheme, with 39% of local churches registered with Eco Church; 18 of these 44 churches have received an award.

- 4.4 Eight synods have taken action to divest from fossil fuel investments, following the Mission Council decision in May 2019. Some local churches have also reviewed their investments and moved to divest from fossil fuels.

Synod of Scotland have committed to commission energy performance audits of all Synod-owned manses, with an aim to achieve a minimum of a 'C' rating. West Midlands Synod have also begun a programme to undertake energy audits of manses and church buildings, and to look at their suitability for solar panels and electric car charging points.

5. Assembly Committees

- 5.1 The Committees each have their own remits, but collectively can play a significant role in helping the Church to reduce its carbon footprint and take forward other commitments in the Environmental Policy.
- 5.2 Overall, eight committees reported that they had considered the implications of environmental issues for their work since 2016, but only four had looked at the Environmental Policy specifically. Several committees commented that the task group's questionnaire had been a helpful prompt to consider these matters for the first time.

The Education and Learning Committee has drafted a Green Charter and detailed environmental statement setting out changes it plans to make to its work and programmes in order to reduce carbon emissions.

5.3 Committees were asked to report on their activities in the following areas relating to section 5.5 of the policy:

- **Carbon budgeting, target-setting and monitoring:** Several committees have made concrete commitments to monitor or reduce emissions, but none have yet set a specific target. The Education and Learning committee will set a target once it has established its carbon footprint.
- **Advocacy and campaigning:** The Church has been active in advocating for more national and international action on climate change, particularly through the work of Church and Society/JPIT and Commitment for Life. The Children's & Youth Work Committee promoted the global climate strike, and climate activism and ecological issues have also been covered extensively in the URC's communications, including *Reform*.
- **Energy use, buildings, and stewardship of resources:** The Education & Learning Committee is encouraging the Resource Centres for Learning to attain high environmental standards, and the Retired Ministers' Housing Society (RMHS) Board has embarked on a programme of insulating all older housing stock. The Finance Committee has overseen the implementation of the change in ethical investment guidelines relating to fossil fuels made by the May 2019 Mission Council. Many committees are printing and posting fewer papers and materials, and making more use of electronic communications, with positive environmental benefits. The Communications Committee has reduced the use of plastic packaging in procuring printing and merchandise, and opted for surface rather than airmail shipments.
- **Travel and meeting arrangements:** The Mission Committee has recently decided that for travel undertaken within Europe on behalf of the URC, the default should now be to travel by train, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. A carbon-offsetting scheme is in place for all international travel booked through Global and Intercultural Ministries.

A number of committees are considering the environmental policies of the venues they use for meetings and events, and the accessibility of locations for public transport. The Children's & Youth Work Committee have developed an eco checklist for potential venues, with questions covering energy ratings and sources, recycling and plastic use, and menu choices. At Youth Assembly 2020, one meal was fully vegetarian for everyone, and reusable mugs were provided instead of single-use plastic cups.

Several committees are now looking at meeting physically less frequently and making greater use of videoconferencing, while recognising that it does not work well for all types of discussion and decision making. Since the survey was carried out, the coronavirus emergency has accelerated the familiarity of many of us with new ways of meeting and working virtually.

- **Promoting an environmental theology:** It was good to hear from several committees and groups about ways they were taking this forward in their work.

6. Challenges and recommendations

- 6.1 While undertaking this progress review has undoubtedly been a useful exercise, not least through the conversations it has prompted, it has not provided evidence that the URC is yet doing enough to fulfil its environmental commitments. We have highlighted points that encourage us, but progress overall is piecemeal and is really only just starting in many areas. That provides a challenge to us all.
- 6.2 As a task group, we do have concerns that some current policies and practices, especially around buildings and travel, which form the largest part of the Church's carbon footprint, are not aligned to our long-term goals of sustainability and carbon neutrality. For instance, the Retired Ministers' Housing Society has a blanket policy of not purchasing properties with solar panels, and very few synods have made assessments of the environmental performance of manses. Until recently, the only limits placed on international and UK travel were financial ones, with very little use of carbon budgeting and nothing to incentivise lower-carbon travel choices such as car and taxi sharing.
- 6.3 In other areas, progress is held back by a shortage of relevant knowledge and advice. In some instances, this need can be met by pooling knowledge and sharing good practice, such as around environmentally-aware meeting venues and use of videoconferencing. In other cases, such as improving the heating and energy efficiency of older buildings, sources of specialist advice will be needed, and offering dedicated funding for this at synod level may be a way of accelerating progress. Across the board, greater attention to target setting and monitoring would be beneficial.
- 6.4 It is apparent that some further coordinated work would enable greater progress in some areas, so we make the following recommendations:
- The development of a travel and expenses policy for the URC which encourages consideration of the purpose of travel and its environmental impact, introduces a carbon budget for international travel on URC business, and incentivises low-carbon travel modes. It is proposed that the environmental task group should consult on this, particularly with the Mission Committee and Finance Committee, with a view that proposals should be brought to a future General Assembly, or to the Assembly Executive if necessary.
 - Development of a 'meetings charter' for both face-to-face and virtual meetings, to help committees consider the purpose and function of meetings, and the best ways in which to meet. We welcome the Education & Learning Committee's proposal to lead on this.
 - Research on meeting and event venues with good environmental policies, and questions to ask venues. We have asked the Action Learning Group of Church House administrative staff to take a lead on this, building on the knowledge and good practice that already exists, and to share the results with other staff and synods.

- Training and guidance on videoconferencing. We have encouraged the Church House Communications team, IT team and Action Learning Group to continue to develop and share this widely.
- An update to the Environmental Policy to incorporate additional issues such as biodiversity and species loss, and embed the policy more deeply in the Church's ways of working, with greater accountability. The environmental task group plans to work on this over the final two years of its term of service, and to bring proposals for an updated policy to the General Assembly in 2022.

6.5 In addition to the specific points noted above, we make the following general recommendations for synods and committees:

- Please do continue reflecting on the Environmental Policy and developing specific plans in response.
- It is very helpful to set targets and indicators around the commitments made, and to monitor progress regularly. This can feed into future annual progress reports that the environmental task group will collate.
- It has proved highly beneficial to appoint green advocates or task groups to take responsibility for championing environmental concerns within each group.
- Do invite the environmental task group for support in all of this.

7. Final reflections

7.1 The varied levels of engagement with this issue in the Church reflect attitudes in society more generally. We are all at different stages in the journey of understanding our environmental impact and discerning appropriate responses to the climate crisis, both individually and corporately. Sometimes this makes discussions about the choices we might make in response to environmental concerns uncomfortable ones, especially when they are presented as a 'zero sum' game. While some choices will be difficult, others will create positive opportunities from which we will all benefit.

7.2 We need to acknowledge that some of this discomfort comes from fear, and some comes from having different starting-points from others. Experience suggests that the more we have the conversations about these issues, acknowledging our fears and our differences, the easier it gets, and the more that areas of agreement emerge. As a community of faith, we have resources to draw on which will help us in this – not least the call to live hopefully in the present climate.

Walking the Way Steering Group

Where Next?: The future of Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienens: francis.brienens@urc.org.uk Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Extend funding for Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 27 General Assembly, in affirming the work of the Walking the Way steering group, encourages those who plan the Church's budget to seek ways of funding its continuing work at the level indicated in Appendix E of this paper, according to the priorities set out in the paper.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides a summary of the journey which <i>Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today</i> has taken so far, an update on where things are now, how the focus has been received, where it might head in future and how this might be funded.
Main points	The steering group's open attitude to learning from the existing work of the Spirit on missional discipleship across the URC, and to share that wisdom more widely, has been well received. This vital focus is worth continuing but will require funding when its main external financial source comes to an end.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 3/16 paper M1 General Assembly reports 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Education and learning Communications Children's and youth work Finance Bible Reading Fellowship London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) People involved in founding/coordinating various online churches

Summary of Impact

Financial	General Assembly is being asked to approve expenditure which is currently covered by external funds. In the short term, Finance Committee projections suggest that this can be achieved through existing budgets into 2021, and possibly right through 2021, allowing more time to think about the long term.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Specific events and opportunities to engage further with ecumenical and interfaith partners on discipleship and faith development are coming up. Consultation with various online churches and external partners (listed above) continues.

1. The journey to this point

- 1.1 The Council for World Mission (CWM), a partnership to which the URC belongs, has a Mission Support Programme (MSP), offering funding to member churches to develop their mission priorities. In November 2015, following a process of discernment about which particular priority the URC should focus on in the third and fourth stages of this funding, a task group was established as a joint venture of the Mission Committee and Education and Learning Committee to pursue whole-of-life discipleship as said priority. Over time, this focus brought forth *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, which was welcomed by General Assembly in 2016, and went through a period of preparation and development before being formally launched in November 2017 and, subsequently, the task group has become a steering group.
- 1.2 *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* is the URC's focus on whole-of-life discipleship, helping everyone across the URC to recognise and engage with God's presence in all aspects of our everyday reality, at home, in the workplace, at school, in the supermarket, on the factory floor. It has a steering group and full-time project manager to help keep things running in a good direction, but it is not a programme or initiative that is designed only to last for a short time. It is intended as a long-term emphasis on whole-of-life discipleship, to celebrate and build upon the existing experience and wisdom of what God is up to already in people's lives across the URC.

2. Update on work

With excitement continuing to grow across the denomination for whole-of-life discipleship, including the different ways in which every synod is, in its own way, incorporating whole-of-life discipleship into its life, work and strategy, the steering group has sought to recognise, celebrate and build on the existing work of the Spirit in these approaches. To this end, the work of the group has naturally fallen under several headings. Here is a summary of where things are:

2.1 Resources and communications

- 2.1.1 Feedback from local churches and synods suggests that, whilst it is important to avoid needless replication or to reinvent the wheel, it is useful for the steering group to produce some materials. As such, simple resources have been

distributed to individuals and local churches, including leaflets, bookmarks, pens, notepads and prayer cords with accompanying suggestion cards. The prayer cords have been the main item of note, with more than 20,000 being distributed since they were launched in 2018.

- 2.1.2 [Seasonal resources](#) have also been produced, with a production plan in place for the remainder of 2020 to ensure effective resource production throughout the year, including resources for Pentecost, Summer, Harvest, Remembrance and Advent, as well as exploring other resource ideas (e.g. worship/spirituality resources, educational events/opportunities, visual/photographic resources, social justice and stewardship). All of these will be kept simple, accessible and aware of the needs of different audiences.
- 2.1.3 The steering group has also continued to promote [Holy Habits](#) as a worthwhile resource. This has been helped greatly by the work of the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) in developing [further resources](#) and [web materials](#) on Holy Habits, which we have been able to signpost.
- 2.1.4 With the plethora of existing materials and approaches to whole-of-life discipleship growing constantly, the importance of signposting resources and helping people to navigate them has become a major priority for the steering group. The online [resource map](#) has helped with this, but has experienced technical issues since launch which have impacted its reception and use. The resource map will be relaunched in a more accessible form. In the meantime, a [separate webpage](#) for sharing synod identified/produced resources has proved much easier to use and, along with social media posts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)), has enabled signposting to continue, albeit in a different way to that originally expected.
- 2.1.5 The most important element of resourcing and communication has proved to be the sharing of real-life stories of individuals and communities living out discipleship in everyday life. The steering group is very grateful to all individuals, local churches, mission projects and others who have given permission for their stories to be shared. This has enabled us to release at least three stories a month through the [news page](#) and social media. This has also enabled us to identify enough material to publish a minimum of three posts a week on social media, plus additional items as and when these have been identified. We continue to seek stories and examples of everyday discipleship to share more widely and hope this vital sharing of wisdom and experience will continue long into the future.

2.2 Accompaniment

- 2.2.1 Having negotiated, in 2018, the terms of a pilot accompaniment programme to be delivered in conjunction with the [London Institute for Contemporary Christianity](#) (LICC) in two synods, and having identified Southern Synod as one of the participating synods, work on the pilot began in earnest in September 2019.
- 2.2.2 Mersey Synod has been confirmed as the second participating synod, and will commence a recruitment process soon.

2.2.3 Data are constantly being gathered about how the impact of the pilot accompaniment programme might help to shape something that might be offered across the URC as accompaniment in whole-of-life discipleship in the future.

2.3 Online Church

2.3.1 Following the final report of the URC's task group on work with 20-40 year olds, and resolutions from the URC Youth Assembly asking the Church to take more seriously the fact that people live more and more of their lives online, the steering group felt it appropriate to consider the prospect of online church and its capacity for supporting people in discipleship development.

2.3.2 Following consultation with a range of existing online churches, and different groups across the denomination, the steering group will set up a small task group, mainly of people with existing experience in online church development, to establish some detailed proposals of how things might proceed, especially with regards to platforms, safeguarding and ecclesiology.

2.3.3 Many local congregations of the URC have used technology capably and imaginatively to respond to the current Covid-19 crisis. This work has kept people connected, worshipping, praying and living out their faith together, even in isolation and lockdown. The importance of this is visible in the good news stories of comfort, reassurance, hope, action and inspiration that have come directly from these efforts, shared through the [Walking the Way news](#) page and the main [URC news](#) page. There is also an increase, reported by local congregations, of people engaging in church-related activity as a result of this work. The steering group feels that our task is now to establish how, not if or when, the URC ought to develop its approach to online church, in order to support and equip this crucial area of creative development, which is already growing across the denomination.

2.4 Stepwise

2.4.1 This intercultural, intergenerational education programme for all people seeking to deepen their discipleship is being developed by the URC's education and learning committee, and is offered as a programmatic element of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*. The steering group and Stepwise task and finish group enjoy representation in each other's meetings to ensure that Stepwise can benefit from the steering group's insights and vice-versa. Further information on the development of Stepwise can be found in the education and learning report.

2.5 The URC's 50th Anniversary

2.5.1 In seeing this milestone as a chance to reflect on all that has gone well in the URC's life, consider the things we are thankful for and think where things might be heading in the future, the steering group, in consultation with mission, children's and youth work, ministries and communications, is setting up a task group to consider proposals for taking this forward, including potential sources of funding.

2.6 Synod networks

2.6.1 In addition to coordinating the above work, Simon Peters, project manager for *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, has, along with steering group members and others, spent time visiting various synods, attending events and shadowing synod staff/volunteers in their work with local churches to gain a deeper insight into the various strategies employed by different synods on whole-of-life discipleship. This includes a series of twice-yearly virtual meetings (via Lifesize) of synod contacts to share news and wisdom more widely, as well as continuing regular contact with training and development officers (TDOs), children's and youth development officers (CYDOs) and the mission enablers network (MEN), and seems to have strengthened the relationship between the steering group and synods. It has also been very encouraging to form connections with our Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs), and to see responses to whole-of-life discipleship in various offices and departments of Church House.

3. How has *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* been received?

- 3.1 From the outset, it has been vital for the steering group to monitor the effectiveness of its work. If what it is doing is not helpful to churches, communities and individuals locally, then it is not worth continuing. As such, the group has sought to view evaluation, not as a process to be employed at the end of activities, but as an ongoing process to help the group shape its work accordingly.
- 3.2 More detailed information about the evaluation process can be found in the appendices to this report, which are available online, as follows: bit.ly/GA-Papers
- i) Appendix A covers the methodology, analysis and commentary of the evaluation process.
 - ii) Appendix B contains data extracted from the 2018 annual church returns, and shows churches' level of engagement with Holy Habits, this being the main initial emphasis of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* at the time.
 - iii) Appendix C shows data from the 2019 annual church returns, by which time the steering group was able to enquire about churches' level of engagement with *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* more explicitly across a spectrum of activity.
 - iv) Appendix D is an attempt to capture more qualitative data, including data about how churches used the materials they ordered, data from email queries and data from requests to use the logo which were submitted during 2019. Please note that the spreadsheets in this appendix do not note everything, only significant comments or feedback. For examples of the real-life stories which have been gathered and shared, visit the [news page](#).
- 3.3 Some general findings include:
- 3.3.1 **The majority of URC congregations are engaging** – From the 2019 returns, taking a sample of 60 churches across six synods, we see that

42 are engaged, in some way, with whole-of-life discipleship. Doing the arithmetic of the number of churches in the URC versus sample size etc, and taking into account the fact that around 10% of churches do not respond to the annual church returns process, we arrive at 52-74% being actively involved in whole-of-life discipleship, which is between half and three-quarters of local churches. We can be confident in the lowest estimate, and assert that it is probably higher. This is very encouraging indeed.

3.3.2 People respond well to openness – The highly positive reception of synods and local churches to the steering group’s open attitude of wanting to learn more of what God is doing with them, and to share the riches of this in empowering whole-of-life discipleship more widely, demonstrates well the effectiveness of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* as a focus.

3.3.3 Resourcing and sharing are still the highest priorities – Feedback has consistently shown the importance of sharing examples of individuals and churches living out discipleship day to day. It has also shown the importance of producing simple, accessible resources which help to unpack and make sense of what being a whole-of-life disciple of Jesus looks like.

3.3.4 Clarity, quality and practicality matter most – A few things, done well, within the capacity available, to the highest quality, is better than lots of approaches which fail to meet people’s needs.

3.3.5 Other available data gives positive feedback – Monitoring shows that virtually every email query submitted in 2019 and the early part of 2020, from both local churches and synods, led to a positive outcome. Even those conversations which began with negative comments led on to gratitude and pleasure once the query had been answered or need met. Interestingly, social media content which shares personal stories or examples of real-life action on discipleship in small, achievable, realistic ways, also seems to outperform content which shares resources or events.

3.4 All of this helps the steering group to shape its work, ensuring this remains relevant for as many people across the URC as possible.

4. Future

4.1 As a result of everything mentioned above, it seems worth continuing *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*, as the URC’s long-term focus on whole-of-life discipleship. As such, here are some items which the steering group could, with General Assembly’s blessing, work on in the next 18 months:

4.1.1 Story/resource sharing – A continuation of gathering stories and resources to share, including more visits to and communication with synods and Church House offices/departments.

4.1.2 Accompaniment/mentoring – Continuation of pilot activities in participating synods, gathering of data and formation of a URC wide accompaniment /mentoring strategy for discipleship.

- 4.1.3 **Online church and URC's 50th anniversary** – Continuing, through the management of task groups, to establish ways forward on these topics for the denomination.
- 4.1.4 **Ecumenical/interfaith relations** – Making use of key upcoming opportunities to connect with friends, domestic and global, on issues of discipleship and faith development.
- 4.1.5 **Seasonal resources** – Production of materials to keep whole-of-life discipleship in people's hearts and minds throughout the year.
- 4.1.6 **Stewardship** – Efforts to support people in making more explicit connections between their use of financial and practical resources (both individually and collectively) and their life as disciples of Jesus.
- 4.1.7 **Spirituality** – Supporting the work of URC: Spirituality and the development of a worship reference group for the URC (in so far as it promotes whole-of-life discipleship).
- 4.1.8 **Social justice** – Working with church and society, the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), Commitment for Life and global and intercultural ministries on issues of domestic and global justice.
- 4.1.9 **Other sources of inspiration/action** – Keeping on the lookout, with a readiness to respond, for events, opportunities, encounters and other sources of inspiration or activity in whole-of-life discipleship development.

5. Financing

- 5.1 At the end of 2020, the Council for World Mission's MSP funding for *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus* will come to an end.
- 5.2 Great savings have been made through the extensive use of virtual meetings, especially for steering group meetings, consultations, task group work and other events, as well as the use of online publishing over print materials. The steering group's aim of celebrating and building on existing work has also reduced costs.
- 5.3 However, keeping a full-time project manager, events and publications going, even with savings, will require some funding. General Assembly is asked, therefore, to consider this paper's resolution on the future funding of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today*.
- 5.4 To assist with decision-making, Appendix E offers an overview of spending on the development of *Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today* in 2019 and the first part of 2020. The full-year figures from 2019 are below.
- 5.5 In the short term, finance committee projections suggest that this can be achieved through existing budgets for some months beyond the end of 2020, and possibly right through 2021, allowing more time to think about the long term.

Appendix E: Finance

Spending in 2019									
Total Programme Budget									
238,262									
Expenditure as per original application:	Original Budget (see note)	Revised Budget, if applicable	Cumulative spend from previous periods	Current Period Expenditure/ Spend	Total Actual Expenditure /Spend	Future Periods' Expenditure /Spend	Total Estimated Expenditure	Variance from Budget	
1	Programme Manager	104,780	54,238	54,937	109,175		109,175	(4,395)	
2	Consultancy	10,500	150	4,067	4,217		4,217	6,283	
3	Publications & Communication	47,000	10,403	858	11,261		11,261	35,739	
4	Steering group & other working groups	5,000	12,299	4,131	16,430		16,430	(11,430)	
	Total	167,280	77,090	63,993	141,083	0	141,083	26,197	

Note: Original budget figures are cumulative for 2017 and 2018



Nominations Committee

Report to General Assembly 2020

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Ray Adams: ray.adams12@btinternet.com Mr George Faris: nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 28 General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 204 to 223 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	N/a
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

Introduction

This committee nominates to Assembly 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 the people to make up appointment and review groups for moderators of synods and Assembly appointed staff.

Each synod is represented on the Nominations Committee: some by their clerk or moderator; others by individuals with a good knowledge of their own people. One of the former moderators of Assembly and the General Secretary are also committee members.

Convenor: The Revd Ray Adams

Secretary: Mr George Faris

Synod representatives:

1. Mrs Melanie Campbell
2. The Revd Brian Jolly
3. Mrs Rita Griffiths
4. Mr Tim Crossley
5. Mrs Helen Lidgett
6. Mr Richard Lockley
7. The Revd Paul Whittle
8. The Revd Douglas Burnett
9. Mrs Sue Brown
10. Mr Simon Fairnington
11. The Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor
12. The Revd Adrian Bulley
13. Miss Morag Donaldson

In attendance:

The Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

A representative of the Equalities Committee

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/Assembly Executive 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. A list of forthcoming vacancies is sent annually to synods, so that they can respond with suggested nominees. Other committees are welcome to make suggestions, where appropriate, recognising that often they have the clearest knowledge of their own needs. To maintain a healthy balance that reflects the diversity of the Church can be 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 General 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 United Reformed Church, they are included below to provide as complete a picture as possible.

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 61 acceptances were received between August 2019 and April 2020. The ordained/lay and male/female figures are:

Ordained	33	54%
Lay	28	46%

Male	25	41%
Female	36	59%

- 2.3 An analysis of 29 responses providing monitoring data shows this age spread:

Under 26	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
1	1	4	4	16	3
3%	3%	14%	14%	55%	10%

- 2.4 28 responses gave ethnic origin:

BAME	Non-BAME
3	25
11%	89%

Thanks to all who serve

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The past two years have seen an exceptionally high number of appointment and review groups for General Assembly posts. The committee thanks the members of the Panel for General Assembly Appointments for their work on these groups.
- 3.3 Special thanks are due to the Revd John Proctor on his retirement as General Secretary. John's wide knowledge of, and care for, the United Reformed Church has been exemplified by his unfailing support and wise advice, which has greatly enabled this committee to do its work. We wish him a long and happy retirement.

Those to be appointed or re-appointed

4.1 General Assembly is invited to appoint or re-appoint those listed below.

Key: † = extension of term of service, the default is a new appointment.

GA20 = from the end of General Assembly 2020

GA21 = from the end of General Assembly 2021

Years = term of service

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	From	Years
1.2	Human Resources Advisory Group	Mrs Barbara Ellis	Member	GA20	4
1.3	Law & Polity Advisory Group	Mr Neil Mackenzie	Secretary	GA20	2†
2.1	Faith and Order Committee	The Revd Sue McCoan	Member	GA20	6
2.1	Faith and Order Committee	Ms Diana Paulding	Member	GA20	6
2.1	Faith and Order Committee	The Revd Kristin Ofstad	Member	GA20	6
2.2	Nominations Committee	Mrs Helen Lidgett	Convenor-Elect	GA20	1
2.2	Nominations Committee	Mrs Helen Lidgett	Convenor	GA21	4
2.3	MIND (Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline) Advisory Group	The Revd Andy Braunston	Training Coordinator	GA20	4
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Martha McInnes (12)	Member	GA20	5†
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Rachel Poolman (1)	Member	GA20	5†
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson (5)	Member	GA20	5†
2.4	Disciplinary Process Commission Panel	The Revd Wilbert Sayimani (9)	Member	GA20	5
2.6	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee	The Revd Dr Irene John	Member	GA20	4
3.1.3	Interfaith Enabling Group	The Revd Dr Mark Godin	Member	GA20	4
3.1.3	Interfaith Enabling Group	The Revd Dr Graham Adams	Member	GA20	4
4.1	Ministries Committee	Mrs Gill Bates	Member	GA20	4
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee	Mr Simon Loveitt	Co-Convenor	GA20	1†
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee	The Revd Dr Paul Dean	Convenor-Elect	GA20	1
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee	The Revd Dr Paul Dean	Convenor	GA21	4
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee	The Revd Tim Clarke	SCM Postholder	GA20	4

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	From	Years
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee	The Revd David Herbert	Synod Moderator	GA20	4
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	Mrs Margaret Marshall	Member	GA20	4
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	The Revd Tim Meachin	Member	GA20	4
4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	The Revd Paul Robinson	Convenor	GA20	4
4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	The Revd Janine Atkinson	Member	GA20	4
4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	The Revd Samantha Sheehan	Member	GA20	4
4.4	Walking the Way Steering Group	The Revd Caroline Andrews	General Member	GA20	4
4.5	Worship Reference Group	The Revd Samuel Silungwe	Convenor	GA20	4
5.1	Business Committee	Ms Ella Lemon	Member	GA20	2
5.2	Communications Committee	Ms Joy Aldred	Member	GA20	4
5.3	Equalities Committee	The Revd Jo Clare-Young	Member	GA20	4
5.3	Equalities Committee	Mrs Rosie Martin	Member	GA20	4 [†]
5.3	Equalities Committee	The Revd Mhari McLintock	Member	GA20	4
5.3	Equalities Committee	Ms Judy Rogers	Member	GA20	4
5.3	Equalities Committee	Dr Ruth Shepherd	Member	GA20	4
5.4	Finance Committee	Ms Denise Harman	Member	GA20	4
5.5	URC Trust	Dr Ian Harrison	Member	GA20	1 [†]
5.5	URC Trust	Mrs Val Morrison	Member	GA20	2 [†]
5.5	URC Trust	Mrs Margaret Thompson	Member	GA20	2 [†]
5.5	URC Trust	Mr Clifford Patten	Member	GA20	4
5.5.1	Church House Management Group	Mr Adam Lester	Member	GA20	4
5.6	URC Ministers Pensions Trust	Mr Colin MacBean	Member	GA20	4
11.3	Congregational Fund Board	Mr Mike Hart	Representative	GA20	4
11.8	Roots for Churches Ltd	The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith	Trustee	GA20	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.
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.
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. Assembly Executive

Assembly Executive is the new name for Mission Council, if Assembly so agrees. Its membership is listed in the report of Mission Council to Assembly, para 9.

1.1 Human resources advisory group

Convenor: Mr Geoff Shaw [2023]

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Nominated members:

Mr Alastair Forsyth [2021]

Mrs Bridget Fosten [2022]

Mrs Barbara Ellis [2024]**

1.2 Law and polity advisory group

Convenor: Ms Morag McLintock [2024]

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2022][†]

General Secretary

Clerk of General Assembly

Synod Clerk representative:

Mr Keir Hounsome [2022]

Property, legal and trust officers' representative: Mr Raoul Hewitt

Nominated members:

Ms Denise FitzPatrick [2022]

Vacancy

In attendance: Legal Adviser

1.3 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Dr James Mather [2022] (nominated by the group)

Secretary: Mr Geoff Milnes [2022] (nominated by the group)

General Secretary

The Revd Ray Anglesea (1)

Mr Michael Williams (2)

Ms Alison Lee (3)

Mr 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)

1.4 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

URC Treasurer

1.5 Environmental task group

Convenor: The Revd Rob Weston

The Revd David Coleman

Ms Alison Greaves

The Revd Trevor Jamison

Ms Charis Ollerenshaw

Mr Tom Veitch

2. General Secretariat

2.1 Faith and order committee

The convenor and nominated members normally serve for six years.

Convenor: The Revd Dr Alan Spence [2023]

Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

General Secretary

Nominated members:

The Revd Samuel Silungwe [2023]
The Revd Sue McCoan [2026]**
The Revd Kristin Ofstad [2026]**

The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2024]
Ms Diana Paulding [2026]**

2.2 Nominations committee

Synods appoint and decide terms for their representation.

Convenor: The Revd Ray Adams [2021]

Convenor-Elect: Mrs Helen Lidgett [2021] [to serve as convenor 2021-25]**

Secretary: Mr George Faris [2022]

Mrs Melanie Campbell (1)

Mrs Rita Griffiths (3)

Mrs Helen Lidgett (5)

The Revd Paul Whittle (7)

Mrs Sue Brown (9)

The Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor (11)

Miss Morag Donaldson (13)

A past Moderator of General Assembly

General Secretary

In attendance:

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
Equalities Committee representative

The Revd Brian Jolly (2)

Mr Tim Crossley (4)

Mr Richard Lockley (6)

The Revd Dougie Burnett (8)

Mr Simon Fairington (10)

The Revd Adrian Bulley (12)

2.2.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

Members usually serve for five years, as training is required.

Retiring 2021

The Revd David Sebley (7)

Mrs Kate Yates (10)

The Revd Raymond Singh (11)

Mrs Val Morrison (4)

The Revd Sohail Ejaz (7)

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)

Mrs Sheila Davies (3)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)

Dr Paul Ashitey (10)

Mr Matthew Barkley (9)

The Revd Lucy Brierley (9)

Mr David Gartside (3)

Ms Pippa Hodgson (5)

The Revd Paul Robinson (12)

Mr Alex Walker (4)

The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson (9)

Ms Victoria Paulding (5)

Mr Reuben Watt (11)

Ms Sandra Bailey (10)

The Revd Peter Henderson (8)

The Revd George Mwaura (5)

Mr Patrick Sheard (1)

The Revd Sal Bateman (10)

2.3 Ministerial incapacity and discipline (Mind) advisory group

Convenor: Ms Michelle Howard [2024]

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 Ian Kirby [2023]

Training coordinator: The Revd Andy Braunston [2024]**

General Secretary; Clerk of General Assembly; Secretary for Ministries; legal adviser

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) [2025]

Deputy convenor: Vacancy

Secretary: Mr Philip Laws [2022]

Members:

Retiring 2021

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe (2)

Mrs Diane Moverley (12)

Dr 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 (1)

The Revd Jane Campbell (13)

Retiring 2023

Mrs Wendy Dunnett (9)

The Revd Alan McGougan (13)

Ms Mary Slater (11)

The Revd Bill Bowman (11)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Debbie Brown (3)

Mrs Barbara Goom (8)

The Revd Sue McCoan (6)

The Revd Sarah Moore (2)

The Revd Wendy Swan (11)

The Revd Peter Flint (11)

The Revd Naison Hove (11)

The Revd Deborah McVey (7)

Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

Retiring 2025

The Revd Martha McInnes (12)[†]

The Revd Wilbert Sayimani (9)**

The Revd Rachel Poolman (1)[†]

The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson (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 [2022]

Synod Moderator: The Revd Simon Walkling [2023]
Past Moderator of General Assembly: The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [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: The Revd David Grosch-Miller [2023]
Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)
Synod Moderator: The Revd Dr David Pickering [2022]
The Revd Dr Irene John [2024]** Professor Malcolm Johnson [2022]
The Revd Bridget Powell [2023]
URC Deputy Treasurer General Secretary

2.7 Safeguarding advisory group

Convenor: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)
Secretary: URC Safeguarding Adviser
Head of Children's and Youth Work Secretary for Ministries

Nominated Members – maximum of three, serving one or two three-year terms:
The Revd Zaidie Orr [2021] Mr Paul Smillie [2022]
Co-opted members – maximum of 2, co-opted for appropriate terms of service:
Education & Learning Programme Officer

3. Mission department

3.1 Mission committee

Convenor: Sarah Lane Cawte [2024]
Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)
The Revd Sue Fender [2023] (1) Mrs Angela Bogg (2) [2022]
Vacancy (3) Vacancy (4)
The Revd Robert Bushby (5) [2023] Mr John Davey (6) [2022]
Ms Lindsey Brown (7) [2022] The Revd Robert Jordan (8) [2022]
The Revd Ray Stanyon (9) [2021] Mr Simon Fairington (10) [2023]
The Revd Alex Mabbs (11) [2023] The Revd Branwen Rees (12) [2022]
Mr John Collings (13) [2021]

3.1.1 International exchange reference group

Convenor: The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2024]
Synod Moderator: The Revd Paul Whittle [2022]
Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
Nominated member:
The Revd Ros Lyle [2023]

3.1.2 Commitment for Life (CfL) reference group

Convenor: Mr Richard Lewney [2024]
At least two CfL advocates Representative of mission team
Representative of mission committee Representative from Christian Aid
Representative of Global Justice Now
Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships

3.1.3 Interfaith enabling group

Convenor: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2023]

Secretary: The Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

Nominated members:

The Revd Ann Jack [2021]

Mr Andy Lie [2023]

Co-opted member:

The Revd Dr Graham Adams [2024]**

The Revd Dr Mark Godin [2024]**

The Revd Dr John Parry

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]

Mr Charles Jolly [2021]

The Revd Elizabeth Kemp [2021]

4. Discipleship department

4.1 Ministries committee

Convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle [2021]

Convenor-Elect: The Revd Dr Marion Tugwood [2021] [to serve as convenor 2021-2025]

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Leadership in worship advocate: Mrs Jenny Sheehan [2021]

Synod Moderator: The Revd Jacky Embrey [2023]

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Nominated members:

Mrs Gill Bates [2024]**

The Revd Dr Martin Camroux [2021]

Mr Sam Elliot [2021]

The Revd Stuart Scott [2023]

The Revd Sally Willett [2023]

4.1.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) Subcommittee

Co-Convenor: The Revd Russell Furley-Smith [2021]

Co-Convenor: Mr Simon Loveitt [2021][†]

Convenor-Elect: The Revd Dr Paul Dean [2021] [to serve as convenor 2021-2025]**

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Synod moderator: The Revd David Herbert [2024]**

Convenor of the Assessment Board

SCM postholder: The Revd Tim Clarke [2024]**

CRCW postholder: Ms Ann Honey [2022]

Nominated Members:

The Revd Dr Susan Durber [2021]

Mr Rob Moverley [2022]

The Revd Leonora Jagessar Visser t'Hooft [2021]

Co-opted CRCW: Ms Marie Trubic [2022] (not to be replaced)

4.1.2 Ministries – maintenance of ministry subcommittee

Convenor: The Revd David Coote [2022]

Mr David Black [2021]

Mrs Margaret Brock [2021]

Mr David Gartside [2022]

Mrs Jean Wyber [2022]

Pensions committee convenor

4.1.3 Ministries – retired ministers’ housing subcommittee – under review

Members normally serve four years, but appointments may be extended for two more years.

Convenor: The Revd Anne Bedford

Secretary: Secretary of Retired Ministers’ Housing Society Ltd

Mr Peter West

Mr Malcolm Lindo

The Revd Ken Summers

The Revd Simon Walkling (Synod Moderator)

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.

4.1.4 Assessment board

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Convenor: Professor Bill Gould [2024]

Retiring 2021

Ms Karen Campbell (10)

The Revd Sue McCoan (10)

Retiring 2022

Mrs Bridget Akinyombo (10)

The Revd Jamie Kissack (4)

Mrs Faith Paulding (7)

The Revd Lis Mullen (2)

Mr Keith Reading (3)

Retiring 2023

The Revd John Danso (10)

Mr Dan Morrell (4)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)

The Revd Gerald England (8)

Mr Mark Tubby (7)

4.2 Education and learning committee

Convenor:

Mr Alan Yates [2023]

Secretary:

Secretary for Education and Learning

Resource centre representative:

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby [2022]

Synod development officer:

The Revd Mary Thomas

Nominated Members:

Mr Rudolph Wontumi [2021]

Ms Adella Pritchard [2022]

The Revd Martin Truscott [2022]

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2024]**

The Revd Tim Meachin [2024]**

Vacancy

4.2.1 Education and learning finance subcommittee

Chair: Mr Alan Yates

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)

Mr Leo Roberts (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)

Secretary for Education and Learning, Project Manager for *Walking the Way*

Members of the group are appointed by the education and learning committee.

4.3 Children's and youth work committee

Convenor: The Revd Paul Robinson [2024]**

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

Convenor of the pilots subcommittee

Pilots representative

Nominated members:

Ms Camilla Quartey [2021]

Ms Charmaine Mutare [2022]

Mr Matthew Barkley [2023]

Mr Reuben Watt [2023]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2024]**

The Revd Samantha Sheehan [2024]**

4.3.1 Pilots subcommittee

Convenor: Mrs Margaret Smith [2022]

Members:

Resources: Vacancy

Mr Derek Goodyear [2021] (Pilots rep on Children's and youth work committee)

Regional Pilot officers:

two vacancies

Representatives:

Children & Youth Development Officer and team: Vacancy

URC Youth Pilots: Vacancy

Pilots company/Friends On Faith Adventures group: two to four vacancies

Members are nominated by the children's and youth work committee and serve one or two two-year terms.

4.4 *Walking the Way* steering group

Co-Chairs: Deputy General Secretary (Mission) & Deputy General Secretary (Disc)

Secretary: Project Manager for *Walking the Way*

Stepwise Programme Manager

Communications Officer

Representatives:

Children's and Youth Work:

Ms Ruth White

Global and Intercultural Ministries:

Revd Bachelard Kaze Yemtsa [2023]

Education and Learning Committee:

Mr Alan Yates

Resource Centres for Learning:

The Revd Peter Ball

Training and Development Officers:

The Revd Dr Jim Coleman

Mission Committee:

Mr John Collings

Mission Enablers:

Mr Martin Hayward

General Members:

The Revd Colin Bones [2023]

The Revd Caroline Andrews [2024]**

4.5 Worship Reference Group

Convenor: The Revd Sam Silungwe [2024]**

Secretary: The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King [2024]

Members:

The Revd Dr Anna Gobledale [2024] The Revd Dr Matthew Prevett [2024]

5. Administration and resources department

5.1 Business Committee

Convenor: The Revd Adrian Bulley [2024]

General Secretary

Clerk of General Assembly

Moderators of General Assembly

URC Treasurer

Moderator-elect and Immediate-past Moderators of General Assembly

Nominated members:

Ms Sandra Bailey [2023]

Ms Ella Lemon [2022]**

5.2 Communications

Convenor: The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson [2023]

Secretary: Head of Communications

Mr Stan Hazell [2022]

The Revd Ian Fosten [2022]

The Revd Tim Lowe [2023]

Mr Dan Morell [2023]

The Revd Heather Whyte [2023]

Ms Jo Aldred [2024]**

5.3 Equalities committee

Convenor: The Revd Anne Lewitt [2022]

Secretary: The Revd David Salsbury [2021]

URC Youth representative: URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative

Nominated members:

The Revd Naison Hove [2023]

The Revd Jayne Taylor [2023]

The Revd Jo Clare-Young [2024]**

Mrs Rosie Martin [2024]†

The Revd Mhari McLintock [2024]**

Ms Judy Rogers [2024]**

Dr Ruth Shepherd [2024]**

5.4 Finance committee

Convenor: URC Treasurer

Chief Finance Officer

Deputy treasurer

Chair of the URC Trust

Nominated members:

Mr William Potter [2021]

Mr Bob Christie [2021]

Mr David Greatorex [2021]

Mr Frank Liddell [2022]

Mrs Jane Humphreys [2023]

Ms Joana Marfoh [2023]

The Revd Wilbert Sayimani [2023]

Ms Denise Harman [2024]**

5.4.1 Pensions committee

Convenor: Vacancy

Secretary: Pensions Manager

Nominated Members: two vacancies

Co-opted members, maximum of three:

Mr David Martin

Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer

Convenor of the Investment Committee

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry Subcommittee

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

In attendance:

Chief Finance Officer

Secretary for Ministries (for Ministers' Pension Fund matters)

5.5 United Reformed Church Trust

Members normally serve for four years and may only serve a maximum of two terms (eight 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: Mrs Val Morrison

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr John Samson

Members:

Group one (synods 1, 2, 3,13):

No members

Group two (synods 6, 8, 9, 12):

Dr Ian Harrison (8) [2021][†]

Mr David Lathbury (6) [2022]

Group three (synods 4, 5, 7, 10, 11):

Mrs Margaret Thompson (7) [2022][†]

Ms Catriona Wheeler (5) [2022]

Mrs Val Morrison (4) [2022][†]

Mr Clifford Patten (7) [2024]**

URC Youth appointee: Mr Andrew Weston [2021]

Moderators of General Assembly, Clerk of General Assembly, URC Treasurer

General Secretary

In attendance:

Convenor of the investment committee minute secretary

Chief Finance Officer

5.5.1 Church House management group

Convenor: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Mr Derek Jones [2021]

Mr Robert Buss [2022]

Mr Adam Lester [2024]**

Vacancy

General Secretary

Chief Finance Officer

5.5.2 Remuneration committee

Convenor: Mr William McVey

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Ms Sushila Jetha (Methodist HR)

URC Treasurer

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

5.6 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company secretary.

Chair: Mrs Bridget Micklem [2023]

Deputy chair: Mr Richard Nunn [2022]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

URC Deputy Treasurer

Convenor of the maintenance of ministry subcommittee

Convenor of the investment committee

Members of the URC:

Mr Lyndon Thomas [2022]

Mr Colin MacBean [2024]**

Members of fund appointed by members of fund:

The Revd Dr Janet Tollington [2023]	The Revd Paul Bedford [2022]
The Revd Caroline Vodden [2022]	The Revd Daniel Cheyne [2022]

5.7 Investment committee

Convenor: The Revd Dick Gray [2022]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Members:

Mrs Jean Hudson [2023]

Vacancy

Mr David Martin [2022]

Dame Katharine Barker [2023]

URC Treasurer

convenor, pensions committee

chair of United Reformed Church Trust or another director

chair of United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust or another director

Treasurer, Westminster College

Co-opted: Mr Lyndon Thomas [2022]

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

6. Representatives to meetings of sister Churches

6.1	General Synod of Church of England	The Revd Tim Meadows
6.2	Methodist Conference	The Revd Roy Fowler
6.3	Congregational Federation	Mission Committee Nomination
6.4	Church of Scotland	Assembly Moderator and synod representative
6.5	United Free Church of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.6	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation	Synod nomination
6.7	Scottish Episcopal Church	Synod nomination
6.8	Methodist Church in Scotland	Synod nomination
6.9	Baptist Union of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.10	Presbyterian Church of Wales	Assembly Moderator
6.11	Union of Welsh Independents	Synod nomination
6.12	Covenanted Baptists	Synod nomination
6.13	Church in Wales Governing Board	Synod nomination
6.14	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	Mission Committee Nomination

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 World Council of Churches 2021 Assembly

Delegate: The Revd Sarah Moore

7.2 Council for World Mission 2021 Assembly

Representatives:

Ms Lindsey Brown

Mr John Ellis

Ms Alison Greaves

Ms Maria Lee

7.3 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Representatives are appointed for each meeting of the Council.

7.4 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and one other

7.5 The Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

The Revd Rowena Francis

The Revd Professor David Thompson

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

7.6 Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)

7.6.1 CTBI Church leaders' meeting

General Secretary

7.6.2 CTBI senior representatives' forum

General Secretary

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.3 CTBI environmental issues network

The Revd Mike Shrubsole

7.6.4 CTBI stewardship network

Mrs Faith Paulding

7.6.5 CTBI consultative group on ministry amongst children (CGMC)

Head of Children's and Youth Work and one other

7.6.6 CTBI interreligious network

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.7 CTBI China forum

The Revd John Scott

7.6.8 CTBI Korea group

The Revd David Grosch-Miller

7.6.9 CTBI Middle East contact group

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.10 CTBI Churches' refugee network

The Revd Fleur Houston

7.7 Churches Together in England (CTE)

7.7.1 CTE enabling group

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.7.2 CTE group for evangelisation

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

7.8 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Acts) members meeting

Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

7.9 National Sponsoring Body for Scotland

Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

7.10 Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN)

Appointed by the National Synod of Wales

7.11 Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales

Appointed by the National Synod of Wales

7.12 Free Church education committee

Professor Graham Handscomb

Mrs Gillian Kingston

7.13 European Churches' environmental network

Mr Charles Jolly

7.14 Churches' committee on funerals and crematoria

The Revd Sally Thomas

7.15 Churches' forum for safeguarding

URC Safeguarding Adviser

7.16 Churches' network for nonviolence

Head of Children's and Youth Work

7.17 Fresh Expressions Board (under review)

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

7.18 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Mrs Valerie Jenkins

7.19 Joint liturgical group

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale

8. Representatives on formal bilateral and multilateral committees

8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group

Co-convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle (Synod Moderator) [2020]

The Revd John Bremner

The Revd Roy Fowler

The Revd Tim Richards

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 Contact Group

Co-Chair: The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2024]

Co-Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations

The Revd Dr Susan Durber [2024]

Mr John Ellis [2024]

The Revd Tim Meadows [2024]

8.3 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland)

[see note 7]

Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

8.4 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion

The Revd Julian Templeton

8.5 Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group

Co-chair: The Revd Dr John Bradbury

Co-secretary: The Revd Philip Brooks

Members:

Mr John Cornell

The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

The Revd Jason McCullagh

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

9.1 Northern College

The Revd Raymond Singh [2023]

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 [2026]

Clerk to the governors: Mr Chris Wright [2022]

Honorary treasurer (Westminster College): Mr Andrew Grimwade [2022]

Principal: The Revd Neil Thorogood

Mr Mark Hayes [2022]

The Revd Dr Rick Mearkle [2022]

Mr John Ellis [2023]

The Revd Jan Adamson [2024]

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

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

Southern Synod Moderator

10.2 Eltham College

Mr Martin Fosten

10.3 Walthamstow Hall

Mrs Isabel Heald

10.4 Milton Mount Foundation

Mr Ray Dunnett [2024]

The Revd June Colley [2022]

The Revd Derek Lindfield [2022]

Note: Governors serve 4-year terms, which may be renewed.

The Revd Kevin Swaine [2024]

The Revd Carole Elphick [2022]

Mrs Daphne Bembridge [2023]

10.5 Silcoates School

Under review.

10.6 Taunton School

Baptist governor at present

10.7 Bishops Stortford College

Mr Richard Harrison

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

Ms Memuna Levan Harris [2023]

General Secretary

11.3 Congregational Fund Board

Mr Anthony Bayley [2023]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2023]

Mr Mike Hart [2024]**

The Revd Geoffrey Roper [2023]

Mrs Mary Steele [2023]

11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust

The Revd Derek Wales [2021]

Mr Simon Fairington [2023]

Mr Philip Bonnier [2021]

Representatives serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

Mrs Margaret Thompson [2024]†

Mr John Ellis [2023]

The Revd Melanie Smith [2023]

11.5 Historic England Places of Worship Forum

Convenor of the listed buildings advisory group

11.6 Lord Wharton's Charity

The Revd Derek Lindfield

11.7 Retired ministers' and widows' fund

The Revd Julian Macro

Mrs Liz Sharples

Mr Anthony Bayley

11.8 Roots for Churches Ltd

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith [2024]**

11.9 Samuel Robinson's Charities

Mr Tony Alderman

11.10 Scout Association – URC faith adviser

The Revd David Marshall-Jones

11.11 United Reformed Church History Society

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar [2024] Mrs Jean Wyber [2022]

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2023]

Council Members serve five-year terms which may be renewed.

11.12 World Day of Prayer

England, Wales and Northern Ireland: The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2022]

Scotland: Synod appointment.

11.13 Westhill Endowment Trust

Mrs Julie Grove MBE [2022]

The Revd Leonora Jagessar-Visser 't Hooft [2023]

Note: this list will be superseded in July 2020. The latest approved list is available at bit.ly/URCNom

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

General Report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Grosch-Miller david.grosch-miller@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To report the work of the committee and its oversight of welfare funds.
Main points	The work of the committee is necessarily confidential, but the report seeks to make the wider church aware of the increasing requests for support from ministers and their families.
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2018
Consultation has taken place with...	Finance committee and Synod Moderators as required

Summary of Impact

Financial	No proposed changes to existing provision.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Introduction

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: the Revd David Grosch-Miller (from 2018) Members: the Revd Richard Church (DGS Discipleship) (secretary ex officio from May 2015), the Revd Dr David Pickering (from July 2018), the Revd Bridget Powell (from July 2019), the Revd Camilla Veitch (from July 2016), Professor Malcolm Johnson (from July 2018), ex-officio: URC Treasurer (or Deputy Treasurer) and the General Secretary

1. Pastoral reference work

- 1.1 The committee responds to requests to support ministers and their families that are received from Synod moderators and Assembly Officers. In the last year requests have included the short term payment of stipend and housing costs for ministers at the end of fixed-term appointments and the payment of grants to assist ministers and families in financial distress; increasingly, this has included retired ministers.
- 1.2 The committee has also been asked to intervene when relationships have broken down between ministers, congregations and Synods.
- 1.3 The churches' ministerial counselling service is a confidential support available to all ministers. The service has been appreciated by a number of ministers, and was supported by grants of £9,139 in 2018 and £9,069 in 2019.
- 1.4 The existing Terms of Reference of the committee restrict the work of the committee to the assistance of ministers in service, and amendments to better reflect the needs of the Church and the work of the committee will be proposed when appropriate.

2. Welfare Grants

- 2.1 PRWC has oversight of historic funds that are held for designated purposes and available to stipendiary ministers of the United Reformed Church. The level of grants available is set from time to time by PRWC, and these are paid on application for the following purposes: education fees for children in URC-affiliated independent schools, musical instruments for children, school uniform and equipment, public transport travel costs for school attendance. Further grants are paid at bereavement, as a Christmas gift to widows and widowers, and as a contribution to the housing costs of a minister's spouse following divorce or separation. The committee also receives requests for financial assistance to ministers for purposes not covered by the historic funds.
- 2.2 Welfare grants totaling £44,000 were paid in 2018, and £49,200 in 2019. The income from historic funds was supplemented by grants from the Assembly budget of £10,000 in 2018, and £15,000 in 2019.

3. Future Trends

- 3.1 The existing sources of pastoral support are severely stretched at local church and synod level. It is likely that the need will increase as the speed of change unsettles already strained relationships, and as the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic forces further changes on individuals and communities. PRWC will respond where it is able, but there is a need for issues to be addressed as locally as possible.
- 3.2 It has become a normal practice for retired ministers to continue to receive pastoral and financial support beyond retirement. Where retired ministers are not members of a local URC, because of geography or other factors, needs may only become known when a crisis occurs.
- 3.3 Ministers and their dependents are living longer and physical needs often outstrip their financial resources.
- 3.4 The resources of finance and personnel varies considerably across the synods, and in some situations, such as with the Northerly synods, resources might possibly be shared. It would be helpful, for instance, if advice from Age UK, Citizens Advice Bureau, Lady Hewley Trust and other grant making bodies could be accessed at an inter-Synod level.
- 3.5 As resources become more stretched, the importance of financial planning by ministers is a priority. While each individual will have different needs and a differing ability to plan ahead, the Committee is unable to respond to every financial need made known to it. Conversations have begun as to how financial planning may become part of the lifelong learning culture of the church.
- 3.6 Resources vary from synod to synod, and where welfare funds are available to a synod it is expected that they will be used to respond to any request for financial assistance from ministers under their care and oversight. Where the funds do not exist and where the need is confirmed by the Synod, then PRWC may be approached for assistance.

4. With thanks

- 4.1 We have welcomed Bridget Powell and David Pickering to the committee. Pam Sharp completed her term of service, and we are grateful for her contribution to the work of PRWC. Richard Church will retire from his appointment as Deputy General Secretary in July. Richard has served the committee with diligence and sensitivity to the benefit of all our work. We wish him well as he explores other opportunities. We continue to value the administrative support given by Samantha Bircham.

Safeguarding Advisory Group

URC Safeguarding Strategy 2020-2025

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou: safeguarding@urc.org.uk Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 29 Having already endorsed the safeguarding strategic plan 2020-2025 through Mission Council, General Assembly acknowledges that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church. General Assembly directs all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church to implement the safeguarding strategic plan in ways that promote the welfare of the URC and the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	General Assembly calls all local churches, synods and bodies of the URC to work together on the six objectives of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025) with the oversight and support of the Safeguarding Advisory Group.
Main points	The Church has already set up a strategy to change the internal ethos, prevent abuse, work with survivors and support those who might be affected by child protection and safeguarding risks. In recognition of our challenges to ensure public accountability and compliance with our safeguarding policy (GP5) in all parts of the Church, change needs to begin with an overt and proactive message of the General Assembly about the priority given to keeping people safe, and with a clear stance that abuse in any form will not be tolerated. General Assembly, in its vital role to oversee the total work of the Church, marks the launch of the delivery stage of the safeguarding plan following planning and preparations in the last year.
Previous relevant documents	Paper R1, Mission Council, March 2020 Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2019 Paper R2, Mission Council, May 2019 Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2018
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of the SAG Synod Safeguarding Practice Group URC General Secretary Synod Moderators, Synod Clerks and CYDOs Finance Committee

Summary of Impact

Financial	There will be financial implications that require effective planning and management of available and shared resources among the synods. In addition to funds already secured to support synods, the costs of administration and further work with adult survivors of abuse will be additional to existing budgets and structures of the Church in the five-year period of the plan.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Building constructive partnerships with other denominations and faith-based communities constitutes one of the strategic objectives of the plan. A guidance on safeguarding in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) is under development by a joint working group with the Methodist Church and the Baptist Union.

- 1.1 In anticipation of the Past Case Review final report, General Assembly 2018 noted that the Church needs to be more systematic, careful and attentive in matters of safeguarding, and to nurture a culture where needs for protection and support for children, young people and vulnerable adults are given due priority. After the courageous process of the two phases of the Past Case Review (2016-2017) and the publication of the PCR Learning Group Report, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorsed the URC's safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025) (an appendix to this paper) as the next step of the journey. Mission Council had already made proactive decisions towards this direction; it directed the Safeguarding Advisory Group to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the plan, and approved new terms of reference for the Group to enable its members to manage this considerable task for the Church and deliver the plan in fuller and more holistic ways.
- 1.2 The adoption of the plan reflects the continuing awareness of the need to protect adults at risk and vulnerable children in society. According to statistics published by the Office of National Statistics in January this year, around 7.5% of adults aged 18 to 74 years in England and Wales experienced sexual abuse before the age of 16, which is around 3.1 million people.¹ Additionally, in the year ending March 2019, an estimated 2.4 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse (1.6 million women and 786,000 men). Although the figures do not show the personal experiences of people affected by any form of abuse, the Church should be aware that abuse happened and might happen again in any congregation, synod, office, school, property and community of the Church. As survivors of abuse alerted us in November 2019, when one suffers in the Church, the whole body suffers.
- 1.3 URC's collaboration with governments and Parliament in terms of child protection and safeguarding adults has been another aspect of the development of the plan, bringing into force issues of public accountability and media scrutiny. Apart from the involvement of the Synod of Scotland with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, the URC is engaging with the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), having been granted core participant status for their investigation into

¹ Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 2019

child protection in religious organisations and settings in England and Wales. The URC had also played an active and formal role within investigations set up by governments in the UK. The Church has contributed to public inquiries and to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Safeguarding in Faith Settings by providing information and offering insight into matters relating to child sexual abuse and protection, both within this denomination and in religious organisations and settings more widely. Our denominational Safeguarding Adviser has already submitted a witness statement to IICSA to account for the policies and procedures the Church follows to protect children from sexual abuse. The public hearing of the investigation into child protection in religious organisations and settings in England and Wales, after a break in March due to Coronavirus, is to resume virtually on 11 May 2020.

1.4 Safeguarding in the United Reformed Church (URC) is underpinned by Jesus' command to his followers and disciples to 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 13:34-35). This command entails protecting the most vulnerable and upholding the rights of the least powerful as an expression of the love of God. The URC safeguarding policy states that we all have a responsibility to help prevent the abuse and neglect of children and adults, and to ensure the well-being and pastoral care of those who are, or may be, at risk. The overall aim of the strategic plan is to ensure that everybody who engages with our local congregations, synods, institutions, groups, properties and offices across the three nations of England, Scotland and Wales is committed to protecting children and adults who are, or might be, experiencing abuse or neglect. In Scotland, elements of the URC strategy (responses to disclosures/allegations and safeguarding training) will be delivered in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy and Procedures of the Church of Scotland, to stay in line with the specifics of Scots law. Further, in the next five years, people, councils, groups and committees of the United Reformed Church will work together on the following six strategic objectives:

1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.
2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns.
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding.
4. Ensure that the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC.
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults.
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other denominations and faith-based communities.

1.5 Delivery of the Strategic Plan will occur in two phases. The first phase in Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 will focus on planning, delivery and evaluation. While we are still in the first year, many major developments have taken place in planning and making arrangements to enable our community to get child protection and safeguarding work right. Vital elements of the plan have been instigated and completed, such as the production of Good Practice 5 and the development of the basic safeguarding training course. Good Practice 5 was sent to 1125 churches, those that use URC's safeguarding policy and those that do not declare a safeguarding policy. It will enable the latter to move towards compliance, with the support of

synod safeguarding officers. The planning stage highlights that there are actions that require a sensitive approach and careful preparation, such as continuing to provide a space for the voices of survivors to be heard and continuing to map the theological foundations of safeguarding in the context of the United Reformed Church. Access to URC database for all synods and the establishment of a common safeguarding case management system are other vital elements in the delivery of the plan that require further work and resources.

- 1.6 Additional funds have been added to the safeguarding budget (£40,000 per delivery year) and a dedicated (non-Church House based) staff member has been appointed to support synods. Social Worker Penny McGee has been employed full-time to collaborate with synods to implement the plan over the next three years, and coordinate safeguarding training and development opportunities tailored to the needs of each synod. The remit is to source and co-deliver with synods, identify what works well, and embed a culture of safeguarding throughout the denomination.
- 1.7 The Safeguarding Advisory Group intends to deliver the tasks and actions of this strategy in ways that align with the conciliar traditions and policies of the Church, as well as with safeguarding statutory requirements and regulations. The Safeguarding Advisory Group will remain responsible and accountable for overseeing the priorities and activities in the plan and approving additional funding requests from synods. The synods will make their own strategic arrangements related to the whole-Church strategy, depending on available resources and existing safeguarding practices, and they will have access to continuous Assembly-level support. The local churches will feel more equipped in their mission and discipleship to serve those in need, ensure pastoral care and promote the welfare of their local church congregation.
- 1.8 Safeguarding is not just about reading and adopting policies and procedures. In order to make a difference, those policies and procedures must be put into practice. The URC's strategy for safeguarding offers direction about how this can be achieved: safeguarding people is a core part of the URC's mission. We safeguard the integrity of creation, and we develop as one Church and one body to ensure the Church is a sustained community of care where everyone – particularly the most vulnerable – finds a place of love, pastoral care and support. We are mindful that the Church is characterised by limited resources, and therefore that the growing demand for safeguarding arrangements might be restricted by our capacity to make a difference. However, the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025) (appendix I) and the first annual denomination safeguarding report (appendix II) chart the way forward, and provide a starting point to celebrate and co-evaluate. These documents follow as appendices to this paper. The URC's strategy instigates a learning process for all to safeguard people as well as to build consistency and trust in working together, to protect children and adults from any form of abuse, harm or neglect.

Appendix I

URC's Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025

Safeguarding people is a core part of the URC's mission. We safeguard the integrity of creation, and we all walk the way together as one Church and one body to ensure the Church is a sustained community of care where everyone – particularly the most vulnerable – find a place of love, pastoral care and support.



Outline of six strategic objectives: charting the way forward

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all local congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.	1.1. Ensure that each local church and community have designated safeguarding persons committed to protecting children and adults who are or might be at risk of experiencing abuse or neglect	All URC churches have at least a single point of contact to protect places of worship and all those who are working for and affiliated with them.	Each local church has identified and appointed safeguarding coordinators to whom safeguarding incidents and concerns are reported	March 2022	CSC Data/Admin staff Elders Pastoral Committees	Not enough and able volunteers to undertake the role – One CSC can be shared across a pastorate or group of local churches A transparent approach to local safeguarding arrangements is valued in practice Good practice of active safeguarding coordinators, elders and volunteers is acknowledged
	1.2. Contact details of designated safeguarding persons are added and updated in databases and shared through relevant media and communication materials, including church posters and noticeboards, URC Yearbook and Synod Directories and websites (depending on role and part of the church).	Details of designated safeguarding persons (Church Safeguarding Coordinators/ Synod Safeguarding Officers and Advisers) are public and easily accessible to raise safeguarding concerns or other general enquiries throughout the Church	Numbers of churches providing this data on church returns Number of posters displayed	On time of annual returns (normally January)	Church Secretaries CSC Admin staff SSOs S/G Adviser Publications staff	GDPR principles considered and applied when asked persons to add their contact details The risk of low rate in church returns. Using one return form and requesting data only once a year from the churches Correlate data of synod safeguarding returns and church annual returns to inform and regularly update a centralised database

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.	1.3 Raise awareness for child protection and safeguarding adults at risk within the worship and life of the URC	Keep every minister, children's and family worker, youth worker, elder, staff member and volunteer updated and well supported to place safeguarding at the heart of church life	Guidance and resources downloaded from websites, distributed and used More requests for training made by churches Training intake from children/youth workers, SSO and CSC	Ongoing	SSOs CSCs S/G Adviser S/G Training/Development Coordinator Comms team Assembly and Synod staff and leaders Church Ministers and Elders	Constant changes in public policy and legislation The use of the website, new technologies, video clips, social media, newsletters and free resource packs to disseminate up-to-date knowledge and examples of promoting good practice Churches with no electronic systems are recorded and supported accordingly Attention paid to identifying and defining spiritual abuse at the URC. A working group to look at the contested nature and theological implications of this form of abuse for the benefit of the whole denomination
	1.4 Develop shared awareness of safeguarding, and what counts as a safeguarding concern across the denomination in alignment with legislation and internal ethos	Build on common understanding of protection and safeguarding among leaders, ministers, frontline staff, elders and other volunteers and encourage teamwork and collaboration in dealing with safeguarding incidents and concerns	Training material and resources produced & accessed Working groups crossing boundaries between different URC departments and roles	June 2023	S/G Adviser S/G Training/Development Coordinator SSOs	A culture of deference & inaction to be alarmed of and discouraged A URC-standardised basic safeguarding training that reflects the needs of our Church The opportunity of updating GP4 and recognising GP5 as the only safeguarding policy and guidance document for the whole church The vital role of keeping up with the regular meetings of SSOs

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
1. Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.	1.5. Improve safeguarding communications between Church House, synods, local churches and URC designated safeguarding persons	Enable better information cascade, sharing of expertise and good practice in handling safeguarding incidents and concerns internally and externally	Agreed flow chart for sharing information within the URC Number of synods using the main database Use of URC recording form is standardised and increased	January 2023	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Recording and Sharing Information principles are clear and standardised in all parts of the Church Three national meetings with all SSOs annually Periodic 1-2-1 conversations of SSO with SA Synod-run meetings and events with local churches Relevant events, training courses and conferences are shared within the Church
	2.1 Establish ways of support that contribute to a lasting healing process for survivors and those affected by abuse, harm or neglect from the time of disclosure	This allows individuals who disclose abuse or neglect to feel they are listened to and that the Church is ready to meet their pastoral care and support needs and/or signpost them to appropriate specialist services or other sources of support	Positive feedback and evaluation by survivors Reduced number of complaints and reports Increased number of referrals to external specialist support	January 2021	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Active Ministers Elders Synod/CH Pastoral Care Committees	Limited resources impacting funding and provision of support Access to local help and/or relevant local services to be identified and offered The ongoing impact of abuse on survivors. Avoid re-traumatisation of processes, which compounds the original abuse. Standardised training established for those with pastoral care responsibilities within URC
2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who are impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns						

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who are impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns	2.2. Co-produce with synods an appropriate case management system that provides prompt and proportionate support to those children, young people and adults in greatest need	This helps assess and prevent safeguarding risks with pastoral care needs established as early as possible and followed up	Number of individual cases Number of occasions that pastoral support was offered Number of cases that pastoral care and support has taken Number of referrals to internal or external support	July 2021	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Synod/CH Pastoral Care Committees Synod and CH admin staff	Not sharing the same understanding of what counts as a case – Definitions be provided in GP5 and internal protocols Access for all synods and Church House's relevant staff to a centralised recording system of allegations and cases of abuse, harm and neglect Expectations and challenges of managing workload Need for extra specialist support and supervision for those who handle serious cases
	2.3. Consult and engage with survivors and relevant groups and organisations in all safeguarding developments	This ensures that the URC co-produces with survivors, develops and adopts appropriate approaches to supporting survivors and preventing abuse	Number of consultations and reviews with survivors and relevant groups New services of care and support	Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs SAG	Budget implications Ethical considerations - Principles of confidentiality and integrity are paramount Voices are heard in meaningful and non-tokenistic ways in all future developments Learn from/work with other denominations, organisations and specialist agencies (e.g. NAPAC)

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
2. Ensure initial and appropriate pastoral care and support to those who are impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns	2.4 Use internal or external specialists to support local congregations affected by serious incidents of abuse	A whole-congregation approach will enable local church communities to recover from trauma and crisis in a supportive environment for all	Lessons drawn and impacted on local safeguarding practice Sharing good stories of church community work in the area of safeguarding	Ongoing	Elders Active Ministers SSOs Synod moderators	Capacity problems – The vital role of leadership and collaboration (including GA appointed officers and interim moderators) High risk of stigma and conflicts to inflict more trauma on the lives of those affected by serious safeguarding situations Principles of informed consent, confidentiality and transparency to be applied. The interrelated work of pastoral committees and LEPS.
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding	3.1 Develop and implement a centralised, standardised electronic system to record and follow up safeguarding cases and concerns from the beginning of the process to resolution	This protects the rights of individuals and relationships across the URC and ensures individual cases, ministerial and case files are integrated, monitored and securely stored in one unified system	All synods access the system Adoption of <i>Appendix A8: Reporting concerns form</i> across the URC Number of resolved cases Positive reviews from those who access the system	June 2023	S/G Adviser SSOs Ministries office IT and admin staff	No clear lines of accountability and duties to record and report. Guidelines to align with Sharing Information Policies & Legislation Not all synods accessing the main database. Added costs for new systems/training to be considered at early stages of delivery. Access and permissions to appropriate staff are granted Disintegration of data in different parts of the church. Protocols are developed, applied and reviewed Different context in Scotland

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting Safeguarding	3.2 Ensure there are clear lines of accountability by use of standard reporting forms and procedures on a regular and annual basis	This helps those with safeguarding responsibilities keep an oversight of practice and share information with councils, committees and groups of the Church	Protocols established, used and reviewed Number of reports produced and shared	June 2022	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Members of relevant committees and groups	People not aware of lines of accountability Roles and Job Descriptions with clear reference to responsibilities and duties to report and share information Standardising GP5 as the main safeguarding policy and practice guidance across the URC New policies (whistleblowing, bullying/harassment, lone working) are developed and applied across the URC (by SAG, HRAG or CHMG) Cross-over with HR and Comms / Reputation management
	3.3. Each URC synod provides safeguarding data and information annually in a consistent format	Consistency of what information is required as well as regular reports and reviews of internal safeguarding policy and practice will help monitor and review changes	Evidence of review and changes on policy and practice Use of standardised forms across synods and churches	Each May in all years	Church Secretaries CSCs SSOs	Heavy workloads Risk of not meeting deadlines Provide adequate planning time for those who collate information and produce the annual S/G report for SAG and the whole church Access to appropriate systems

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
3. Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting Safeguarding	3.4 Co-produce with synods minimum standards of compliance with legislation and internal procedures and obtain benchmark progress for each synod	This will embed a culture of co-design on the journey of improving URC's safeguarding practices in open and transparent ways	Synods' positive feedback of co-production Number of consultation meetings with synods	Every May	S/G Adviser SSOs Chairs of relevant committees and groups	Avoid a hierarchical model Provide clear guidance on what is compulsory in the review of GP4 and production of GP5 Working closely with synods
	3.5. Establish tools to measure change and review adequacy and robustness of procedures and policies	Support a culture of continuous learning and improvement in the local church and identify systemic barriers across the denomination	Standardised and consistent use of audit tools Periodic independent reviews and audits	April 2024	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Elders	Fear of an independent oversight at the denomination, synods and local churches Building trust and collaboration Co-produce and co-deliver audits with survivors of abuse Avoid long-lasting reviews and excessive paperwork
4. Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC	4.1 Update URC's safeguarding policy every two years following the publication of Good Practice 5 (annually for each local church)	This ensures good practice guidance is regularly reviewed and updated in line with new legislation and policy changes	Up-to-date publications and e-resources intake	January 2020	S/G Adviser SSOs	Meeting the needs for the whole denomination
				January 2022		Consultation with all parts of the church to identify policy areas that require improvements
				January 2024		Resources (writing group, publications, etc) Update and brief people to use GP5 – GP6

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
4. Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC	4.2 Review current safer recruitment practice of the URC and develop a Good Practice Guidance for all parts of the Church	Provide specific and clear advice that ensures appropriate recruitment, induction and retention of trustees, and of paid and voluntary workers (ii) arranges lawful criminal record checks (DBS/PVG) for all who need this.	New guidance's intake Updated lists of eligible roles for DBS/PVG checks Reduced number of inquiries to CH, Synods & DDC Positive feedback in undertaking checks through DDC Satisfaction survey	October 2021 & ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs Ministries Office DBS Verifiers DDC staff	Over-checking criminal records of people affiliated with the URC Create guidance that helps people clarify when it is not appropriate to check, and which roles are eligible for criminal record checks Understanding checks as part of a wider recruitment process Scotland's different policy requires separate guidance
	4.3 Develop the capacity of designated safeguarding persons to conduct thorough safeguarding risk assessments and support offenders, alleged offenders and perpetrators of abuse across the URC	Protect against abuse and better support those who are accountable to manage risk and monitor anyone who may pose a risk	Tools and resources produced and used Number of safeguarding contracts/agree ments Number of DBS/PVG referrals	March 2021	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs Elders	Interpersonal relationships can minimise the importance of risk assessment in the life of the church Equip people with the right skills and specific guidance Regular reviews of existing risk assessment tools and relevant sections of GP4/GP5 (Risk assessment and covenants of care forms and templates)

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
<p>4. Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC</p>	<p>4.4 Connect safeguarding policy and procedures with URC's disciplinary processes, especially those related to ministers/CRCWs</p>	<p>This helps establish good practice and expertise among all members of mandated groups and those involved in safeguarding cases that lead to instigation of disciplinary procedures</p>	<p>Publications and resources intake</p> <p>Evidence of joint thinking and consultation in the review process of Section O</p> <p>Setting up disciplinary processes for other relevant roles within the Church</p> <p>Number of safeguarding cases recorded in the disciplinary processes</p>	<p>June 2020</p>	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>MIND</p> <p>Ministries Office</p> <p>SSOs</p>	<p>Information sharing protocols with other denominations</p> <p>Disconnection between safeguarding and disciplinary processes</p> <p>A clear and transparent process is jointly agreed and reviewed</p> <p>Mandatory safeguarding training for members of mandated group involved in the Section O process</p> <p>Defined role for safeguarding officers and advisers in the new disciplinary process</p> <p>Adherence to GP5/GP6 requirements and legislation (e.g. Employment Law)</p>
	<p>4.5 Ensure people in positions of leadership and accountability are aware of any changes to safeguarding policy and practice</p>	<p>New policy changes are discussed within supervision and training development of employed staff and shared within teams or working groups</p>	<p>Communication material shared</p> <p>Policy updates added on agendas</p> <p>S/G advanced training uptake is increased</p>	<p>January 2020 & Ongoing</p>	<p>S/G Adviser</p> <p>SSOs</p> <p>Synod Moderators</p>	<p>Challenges in information sharing (language, terminologies, technical issues).</p> <p>Use of newsletters, briefs and reports to MC/GA to inform the right people</p> <p>The central role of elders, ministers, synod moderators and General secretaries in understanding</p>

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults	5.1. Benchmark and co-produce with synods URC's standardised safeguarding training programme for all roles and positions within the URC expected to undertake regular and mandatory safeguarding training	Align with current synod practices and public policy requirements to equip all those working with children and adults at risk as well as those responsible for their care with the right skills	Training used consistently in each synod A system to monitor attendance and renewals is established and standardised	June 2021	S/G Adviser S/G Training/Development Coordinator Education and Learning staff SSOs Synod Training officers CSCs	Lack of consistency across synods Recording attendance and renewal of URC or other denominations' training Resistance to travel to attend training. On-line access can help but limits interaction and collaboration. Accessibility needs. Accrediting URC safeguarding training Defining training packages tailored to specific roles and positions (e.g. Elders<->SSO) Adaptation to national contexts of Scotland and Wales
	5.2. Ensure robust guidance on delivering mandatory training in both areas of safeguarding (children and adults at risk) for all identified groups involved in regulated activities	Mandatory training will ensure monitoring the delivery of standardised and refreshing safeguarding training for identified roles of accountability and leadership	Numerical evidence of training attendance Evidence of positive action taken as a result of training Number of certificates per role	December 2021	S/G Adviser S/G Training/Development Coordinator SAG SSOs Ministries	Non-attendance for those who are involved in direct work with children and adults at risk A framework of sanctions for non-attendance Mandatory safeguarding training for active ministers GA Certificates

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults	5.3. Develop and maintain quality standards of regular safeguarding training and professional development across the URC	Consistency and quality at different levels of development and delivery of safeguarding training are reviewed regularly	Positive evaluations and reviews of training provision	June 2021	SAG S/G Training/Development Coordinator SSOs Ministries	Connection with accreditation Working with Learning Resource Centres
	5.4 Develop and update a comprehensive guidance and package of support resources to make serving elders and trustees (URC and synod) aware of their legal responsibilities	The aim is that elders/trustees feel confident in preventing abuse for all people in the church as well as protecting the assets and reputation of churches	Number of interactions/meetings of designated safeguarding persons with elders Feedback from elders meeting Numbers of elders attending basic safeguarding training Evaluation of training provision Referrals to CC	June 2023 & ongoing	S/G Adviser S/G Training/Development Coordinator SSOs Education and Learning Committee	Data of elders are not recorded at CH or synods High number of elders – Cost and GDPR implications Enabling regular interactions and briefings in Elders or Trustees Meetings to minimise concerns and build trust Working closely with other departments/teams within the URC Keep elders up to date regarding changes to regulations and policies using traditional and visual methodologies (induction material, Reform, video, etc)
	5.5 Value the expertise of and contribute to continuous	Ensure synod designated persons are equipped and	Numbers of co-working groups	Ongoing	SSOs S/G Adviser	Heavy workloads and increased commitments

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
5. Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults	development of Synod Safeguarding Officers	remain resourceful to lead all aspects of safeguarding practice in their local churches with continuous support and supervision	and surveys with SSOs Records of attending relevant training and professional development opportunities Positive appraisals and feedback from SSOs		Line managers of SSOs Synod Moderators Relevant synod committees and groups	Common understanding of safeguarding between SSOs to be fostered Joint posts with CYDO roles to be reviewed Adaptations to national contexts (Wales/Scotland)
	5.6 Ensure safeguarding is part of the induction of any newly appointed persons to URC roles (particularly trustees, children's and youth workers and those in regulated activities with adults) alongside the specific role induction	This enables each new role holder to understand the personal and corporate liability should a safeguarding incident happen, while building a culture of prevention at every church setting, committee, venue.	Number of job and role descriptions where safeguarding is listed as duty	June 2022	HR CSCs Active Ministers Pastoral Committees Training Officers	Oversee essential requirements set up by Government guidance or CC HR teams to update existing recruitment and induction policies Update safer recruitment guidance for those who recruit, induct and line-manage workers and volunteers
6.1 Provide clear guidance about referring and reporting serious incidents and cases to statutory authorities	This will allow more confidence to designated safeguarding persons in setting up of information sharing protocols	Download of on-line resource Number of referrals to Police, Social	March 2022	S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs	Safe and secure systems of information sharing between different parts of the church Meet legislative requirements when updating our policy (GP5 - GP6 in three years' time)	

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other denomination and faith-based communities		and sending referrals for cases crossing statutory thresholds to statutory agencies without delay	Services, CC and LADO Increased representation & attendance in statutory services-run meetings			Learn from other denominations, e.g. CoE's recent guidance on reporting and sharing information
	6.2 Improve public awareness of URC's good practice in safeguarding across denominational, cross-denominational and ecumenical settings	Encourage personal drive and actions of URC people (particularly volunteers) to improve the safeguarding ethos at the local church and public acknowledgement of personal and collective efforts	Increased number of local initiatives and campaigns Opportunities to share expertise externally	March 2023	Synods S/G Adviser SSOs CSCs SAG	Initiatives and events Links with other developments 'Walking the way safely' Links with Methodists, Baptists and Anglicans
6. Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other	6. 3 Develop and share guidance on safeguarding when churches hire out their premises or providing space to groups/ organisations whose work involves children	Promote good practice in allowing our premises to be used by external organisations working with children and adults at risk	Increased use of the guidance	June 2023	S/G Adviser SSOs	Serious incidents not reported to CC Clear safeguarding arrangements and agreements
	6.4 Endorse close partnership and knowledge exchange of best practice with other	Promote ecumenical dialogue and co-produce partnerships for the	Publication of material & resources	Ongoing	S/G Adviser SSOs	Shared resources and common events Ecumenical and international settings

URC Strategic Objective	Key Tasks	Rationale	Success Indicators	Deadlines	Key People	Possible issues and wider considerations
denomination and faith-based communities	denominations to support LEP's and church communities	benefit of public worship, protection of the vulnerable and pastoral care of communities	Number of joint events and seminars		CSCs CFS Local ecumenical groups	

GLOSSARY

CC Charity Commission	GP4 Good Practice 4	SAG Safeguarding Advisory Group
CFS Churches Forum for Safeguarding	GP5 Good Practice 5	S/G Safeguarding
CH Church House	LEP Local Ecumenical Partnership	SSO Synod Safeguarding Officer
CRCW Church-related Community Workers	LADO Local Authority Designated Officer	GA General Assembly
CSC Church Safeguarding Coordinator	MC Mission Council	GP Good Practice
CYDO Children's and Youth Development Officer	MIND Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group	URC The United Reformed Church
DBS Disclosure and Barring Service	PVG Protecting Vulnerable Groups (Scotland Scheme)	
DDC Due Diligence Check Ltd		

Appendix II

URC Annual Safeguarding Report 2019

1. Background

The data presented in this report is taken from the annual synod safeguarding reports, collected by all synods in two consecutive years (2018 and 2019). In alignment with URC's safeguarding policy – Good Practice 5 Guidance, each synod collates safeguarding data from local churches (through the annual church returns process) and other relevant information held in their recording systems (appendix H2). A copy of the Annual Synod Safeguarding Report is given to the URC Safeguarding Adviser to allow the Church as a whole to review its commitment to safeguarding children and adults at risk, and provide suitable support and guidance to Synods and local churches. All the data and information in this report should be viewed in this context. In any report of this nature, it is important to recognise that behind each data is a person. Safeguarding is about everyone's wellbeing and means the action the Church takes to protect everyone, particularly those in greatest need and promote a safer culture across the denomination.

2. Definitions

Concern

Safeguarding concerns are matters relating to an individual and reported to a safeguarding designated person for guidance or action; this may or may not result in a referral to statutory agencies.

Worker

A person who is appointed by the church to work with children or adults at risk on behalf of the church, on a paid or voluntary basis. This includes Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), youth workers, adult workers, and others, including volunteers, who are involved in regulated work and activities with children, young people and adults at risk.

Regulated activity

Activity relating to children is defined in Schedule 4 to the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (as amended).

Safeguarding contract

A written agreement used to establish appropriate and clear boundaries for those who may pose a risk to others and want to attend church services and activities.

3. Summary of key statistics (URC database)

	May 2018	April 2020
Synods	13	13
Synod Safeguarding Officers/Coordinator (Scotland)	14	11
Churches	1400	1345
Local Church Safeguarding Coordinators (incl. Deputies)	624	1660
Churches that have declared their safeguarding policy	252	1250
Churches that have not declared a safeguarding policy	1148	95
Members	49,517	44,446
Average congregation attendees including children	53,379	49,817
Children associated with the life of the Church	30,865	32,844
Paid workers working with under 26 across the URC	257	249
Volunteers working with under 26 across the URC	8984	8884
Ministers of Word and Sacraments on roll	1369	1408
Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments	608	685
Community Church Related Workers on roll	32	31
Active Community Church Related Workers	15	15
DBS/PVG checks for ministers/CRCWs/Lay preachers	450	262
DBS/PVG checks for workers and volunteers	1640	1607
DBS signatory people recorded in the URC internal system	2667	2242
Charities with URC on the title registered with Charity Commission	110	320
Scotland-based URC charities registered with OSCR	40	38
Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) with URC	390	385
LEPs with known safeguarding policy (not URC's)	187	291
LEPs with URC safeguarding policy	38	66
LEPs with unknown safeguarding policy	165	28

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The URC consists of 1345 churches in England, Wales and Scotland; with 49,817 congregation attendees (including children) on average attending services of the Church. In 2018, we have recorded 12,748 children that have attended our church services (Children's and Youth Work review).
- 4.2 Each synod has one professional Safeguarding Officer (coordinator in Scotland) to whom all concerns or allegations relating to workers (lay or ordained, paid or unpaid) must be reported. In Scotland, responses to safeguarding incidents are handled by Church of Scotland. The Church currently has 11 Synod Safeguarding Officers, and three of them serve two synods. Their role is to support the local churches in implementing their safeguarding responsibilities, working closely with local Church Safeguarding Coordinators. There are currently 1652 Safeguarding Coordinators and Deputy safeguarding coordinators according to reports.¹ As well as responding to the needs of children and adults who may be at risk of abuse, Synod Safeguarding officers provide professional advice to promote the welfare of people in the Church.

¹ It is positive that the equivalent number recorded in the URC database (1660 safeguarding coordinators) does not differ significantly. The very small difference explained on the basis that data provided at different times.

5. Summary of data (annual synod safeguarding reports)

	2018	2019
Number of Safeguarding Coordinators	841	1096
Number of Deputy Safeguarding Coordinators	442	556
Number of churches with no Safeguarding Coordinators	152	66
Number of allegations against volunteers, workers, church goers	34	18
Number of Risk Assessments	9	21
Number of Covenants of Care/Safeguarding Contracts	52	46
Number of people attended URC safeguarding training	1717	1559
Number of people attended other non-URC safeguarding training	624	1402
Number of DBS-PVG applicants with blemished disclosures	21	15
Number of churches sought advice on safer recruitment	25	44

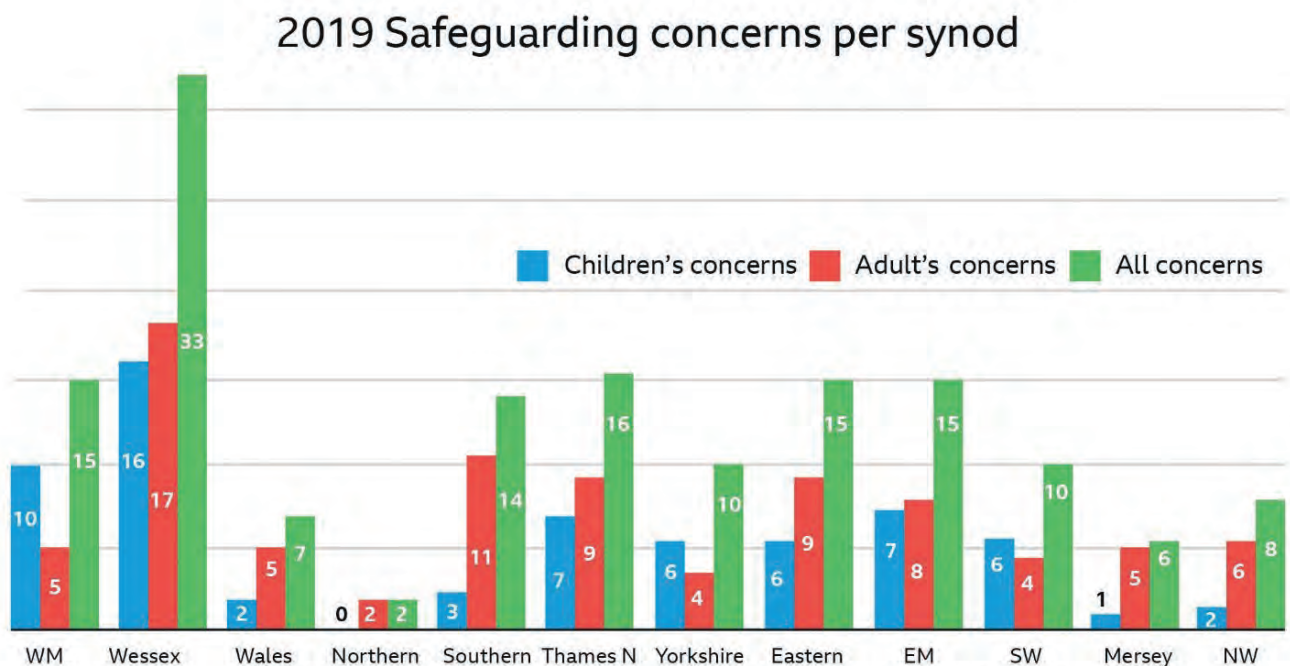
6. Key Headlines

- 1147 local churches provided annual safeguarding returns in the end of 2019. The return rate was increased from 56.45% (2017) to 71.44% (2018) to 84.8% (2019).
- 937 Churches today declare using URC's safeguarding policy, and 313 follow other denomination's safeguarding policy.
- In 2018, 11% of our churches said they had no safeguarding coordinators. This percentage dropped to 4.5% in 2019.
- In 2018, 25.84% of reported safeguarding coordinators attended safeguarding training. The same percentage dropped to 22% in 2019
- In 2018, 390 churches (28.5 % of URC churches) were part of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP). Of them, 210 churches were using different safeguarding policy to URC (53.84%). Last year, 359 churches were part of LEPs, and 245 of them were following different safeguarding policy (68.2%).
- 479 Trustees/Elders attended URC's safeguarding training in 2019. By adding last year's equivalent number (431 attendees), 910 trustees/elders in the URC so far attended safeguarding training.
- 683 workers (ministers, CRCWs, paid and voluntary staff members) attended URC's safeguarding training in 2019, dropping 47% from 1290 workers in 2018. Last year, 1402 URC workers attended other non-URC safeguarding training. The equivalent number in 2018 was 624 workers.
- The overall number of concerns reported to synods relating to children, young people and vulnerable adults in the Church has risen by 114 from 2016 to 2019 (37 concerns in 2016, 90 concerns in 2017, 125 in 2018, 151 in 2019).

- In 2019, 18 safeguarding allegations were made against workers of the church, the vast majority of which were related to churchgoers.
- In 2019, 12 synods were managing 46 safeguarding contracts for people who attend a worshipping community and may pose a risk to others. The Synod of Wales is the only synod with no safeguarding contracts because they are managed by other denominations. The number of contracts reduced 11.53% (52 contracts in 2018). 14 contracts have been terminated last year.
- 61 offenders known to synods were attending URC churches in 2019. The number of offenders known to the Church was 26 three years ago (2017).
- 2961 people attended safeguarding training, either URC or other, across synods last year.

7. Responses to safeguarding concerns and allegations

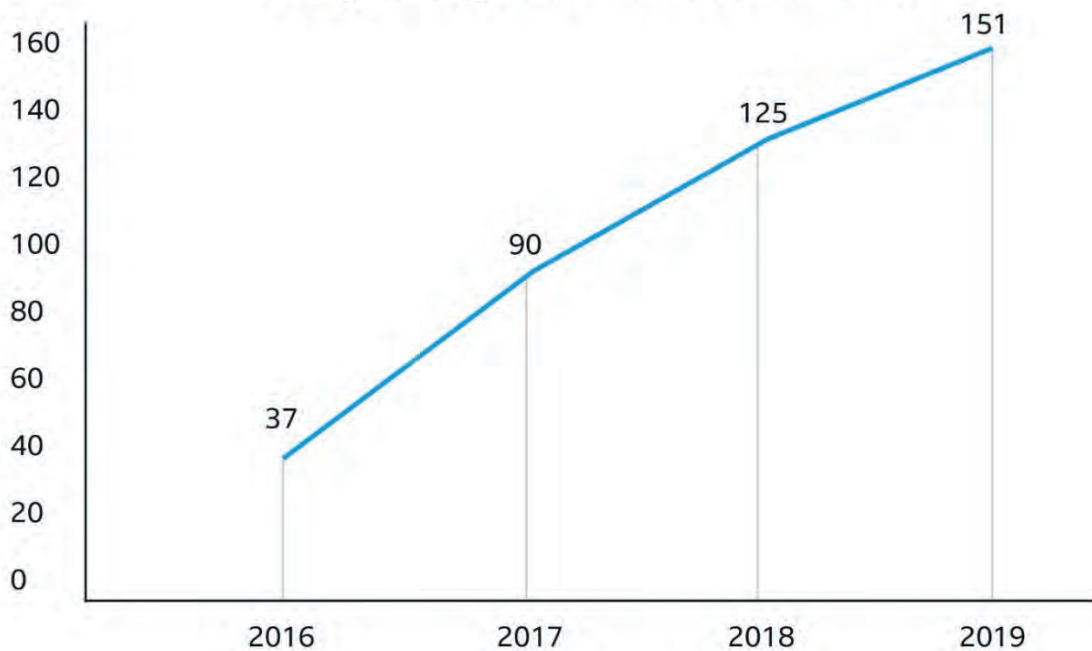
7.1 Most safeguarding-related concerns or allegations are related to children or vulnerable adults who attend or who have contact with the Church and its communities in England, Wales and Scotland. The chart below shows the number of safeguarding concerns and allegations per synod, except Scotland.²



7.2 The overall number of safeguarding related concerns or allegations in respect of children or adults reported to synods significantly increased over a three-year period (between 2016 and 2019). The number rose from 37 concerns in 2016 to 151 concerns in 2019 (see chart below).

² Scotland was unable to provide this data due to Coronavirus restrictions. In 2018, the synod of Scotland had two cases.

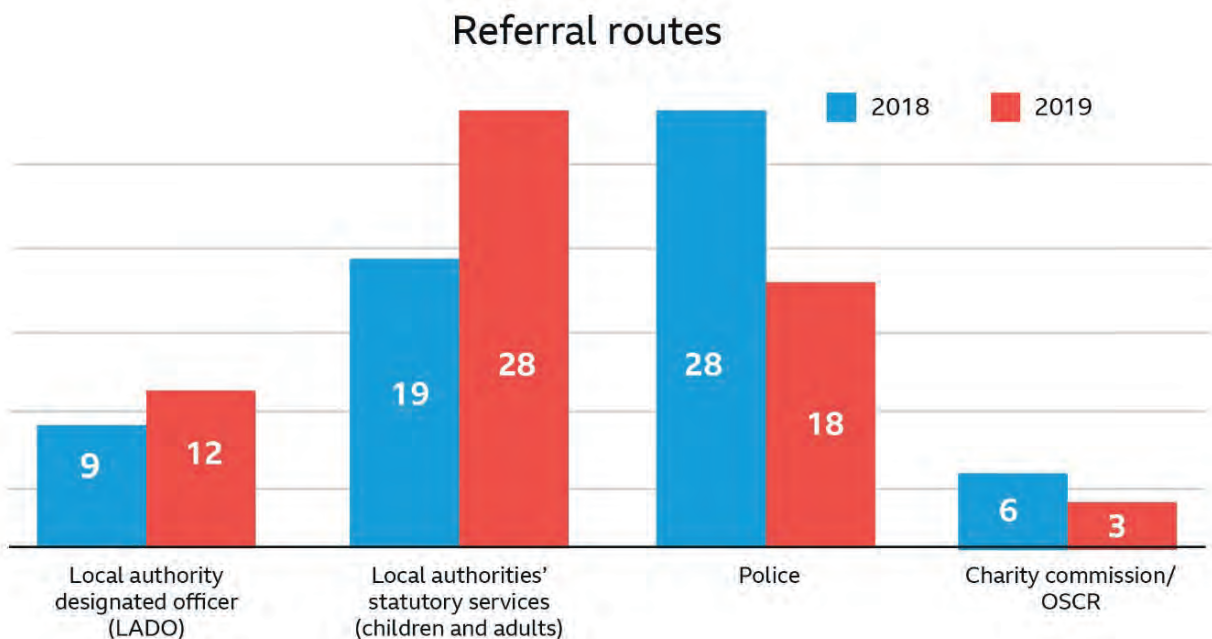
Safeguarding concerns across the URC



- 7.3 Although safeguarding concerns or allegations are reported in different ways, the incidents that they relate to may not necessarily have occurred during the same year. In terms of types of abuse, there is a consistent lack of information regarding what type of safeguarding incidents are being responded to. In 2019, there was more information available regarding the forms of abuse in the Church. The largest category of concerns or allegations relating to adults at risk, particularly those with mental health disorders and issues (e.g. dementia and Alzheimer's) and those adults at risk of financial abuse. A fair and increasing amount of concerns refers to physical abuse, domestic abuse, sexual abuse and historical cases of child abuse. Other referrals to designated safeguarding professionals relate to online abuse, child exploitation, bullying/harassment and radicalisation.
- 7.4 One of the key elements of our procedures is for people to respond promptly and sufficiently to keep people safe. However, there is a need for clarity about when to contact the Synod Safeguarding Officer. Some incidents are being managed in local churches without referring to the Synod Safeguarding Officer. Clarity about channels of reporting safeguarding concerns and the importance of involving the Synod Safeguarding Officers were highlighted in the returns from the synods.

8. Outcomes of concerns or allegations

- 8.1 Of the 151 safeguarding concerns relating to children and adults in 2019, 28 (18.6% of all concerns) were reported to statutory services (children or adult social care services). Last year, it was recorded that nine referrals to children's services and 19 referrals to adult social care services took place as a response to safeguarding concerns/incidents. The proportion of concerns or allegations which required reporting to statutory agencies has increased over the last two years. The chart below compares the referral routes to external services/agencies in the last two years.



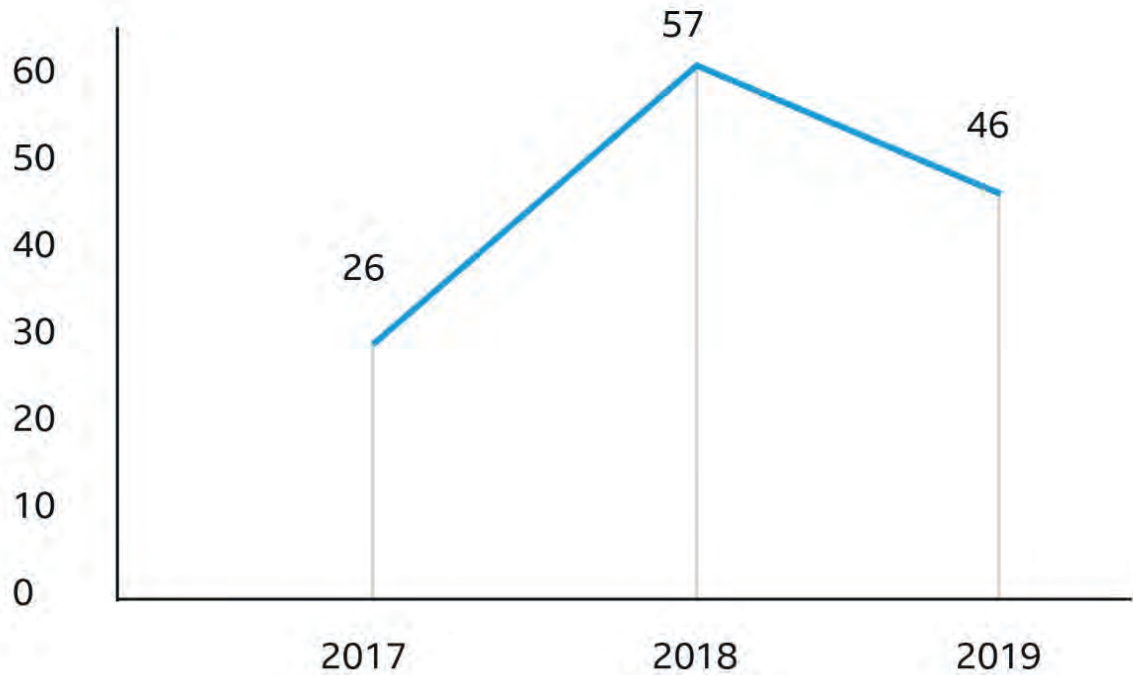
- 8.2 The data within the two-year period point at the need to prioritise a clear policy related to survivors of abuse, and how URC provides pastoral care and support. In 2019, pastoral care provision and its interrelation with safeguarding procedures are still not clear. In addition to little referral to statutory services or signposting to specialist agencies for those who have been impacted by abuse, there is no case management system, and information about pastoral care and how access to appropriate support and services is being managed in each Synod. There are safeguarding implications with providing care to survivors of abuse, but frequently synod safeguarding officers are not included in these discussions, or even informed of them.
- 8.3 The self-evaluation process does not presently capture individuals who were referred to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) for consideration of barring, or those who were suspended or placed under disciplinary measures following child or adult protection procedures. The Church has currently a defined disciplinary process only for ministers and CRCWs.

9. Risk assessments and safeguarding contracts

- 9.1 There has been significant change in the number of risk assessments in the last two years. In accordance with *Good Practice 5*, where someone is known to pose a risk, or is suspected of posing a risk, robust measures (risk assessments and safeguarding contracts) need to be put in place in order to allow this person to attend church activities and/or worship in a particular church. In 2019, 21 risk assessments were completed in the synods, compared to nine risk assessments undertaken in 2018. Last year, risk assessment processes involved 10 of the Synod Safeguarding Officers. Only three synods reported no risk assessments in 2019.
- 9.2 The Church appears in a better position to identify and support offenders. The number of offenders known to the Church three years ago was 26 (2017). 61 known offenders appear to be currently attending URC churches. The number

of safeguarding contracts put in place for known offenders or those who may pose a risk has sharply reduced from 57 in 2018 to 46 in 2019 (see chart below). Contracts are generally ongoing, although subject to review and termination. The termination of 14 contracts last year might explain the reduction of contracts.

Safeguarding contracts across the URC

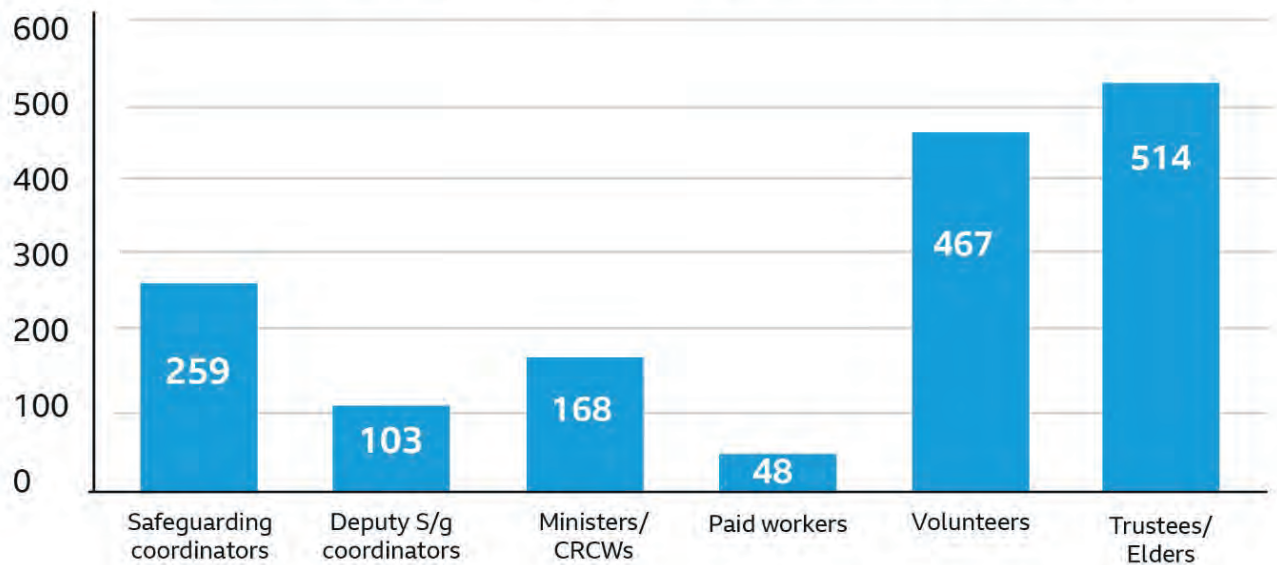


- 9.3 Although the Church shows increased understanding and capacity to assess and manage safeguarding risks and develop stronger working relationships with statutory partners, the annual synod safeguarding reports mark the need to further monitor this area of work. Some synods do not have information relating to how many offenders are in their congregations, what roles they might hold, and whether they are involved in regulated activity with children or adults at risk. Additionally, Synod Safeguarding Officers are not being informed of contracts being in place, or local Churches are refusing to draw up safeguarding contracts with ex-offenders. Safeguarding contracts also are not being reviewed consistently.
- 9.4 *Good Practice 5* provides a clear policy framework regarding the management of offenders or alleged offenders to prevent harm from those who may pose (or continue to pose) risks to the Church. The frontline practice flags up that there are no guidelines of good practice and clear lines of accountability when Churches do not follow designated safeguarding persons' advice regarding risk assessments and /or safeguarding contracts (previously known as covenants of care). In the last two years, the feedback from across the Synods confirm that managing those who pose a risk in the Church community requires urgent improvements. A guidance on managing risk and offenders will be first introduced to the Church this year (Appendix Z).

10. Safeguarding training

10.1 The data provide evidence of the importance of the Church's role in safeguarding children, young people and vulnerable adults in the community as well as increased awareness of safeguarding issues across the denomination. In 2019, 1308 persons attended safeguarding training offered by another denomination or agency. On top of these people, the synod safeguarding reports show that 1559 persons have completed URC safeguarding training with the URC. The chart below shows the role these individuals were holding when they attended URC safeguarding training last year.

URC safeguarding training attendance in 2019



10.2 In 2019, the majority of Synod Safeguarding Officers reported that there was an increased request for safeguarding training, indicating a rising awareness of why safeguarding is important. This resulted in more people looking for a safeguarding training offer in other denominations, especially the Methodist Church. Although there is still no URC training programme across the denomination, this is under review at the moment, and a package is currently being trialled, with a view to introducing a standardised safeguarding training programme for the whole Church by the end of 2020.

11. Safer recruitment

In the last two years, URC and its churches across the synods in England, Wales and Scotland processed 3247 DBS/PVG Disclosure applications. Based on the last year's figures, there is a 3% decrease on the number processed during 2019. Efforts continue to further refine DBS/PVG eligibility decision-making to ensure that we are compliant with the legislation and are undertaking checks at the appropriate level for different roles within the Church. The transfer of processing ministerial checks from in-house to DDC last year also help provide an umbrella body to the church, and support a consistent 'one-church' approach to safeguarding.

12. Conclusion

- 12.1 The collation and analysis of these data forms a key element of quality assurance work undertaken by synods and the central safeguarding office of the Church. The self-evaluation process has been an evolving tool, and the results have been collated centrally since 2017, in alignment with the safeguarding policy and guidance of the Church (*Good Practice 5*). This year's process has resulted in the production of the first annual denomination safeguarding report, and has allowed the United Reformed Church to access data and trends being analysed over a two-year period. The commitment is to provide a brief oversight of safeguarding policy and practice throughout the denomination, and to produce an update each year with further refinements on the self-evaluation process.
- 12.2 It is promising that more local churches and synods provide data and information about safeguarding through the annual church returns process to enable everyone in the Church to see what works well, and what improvements are required. The commitment and expertise of Synod Safeguarding Officers and local Church Safeguarding Coordinators are valuable, as well as the increased capacity of the Church to liaise with local authorities and statutory services. However, there are still churches that do not have a safeguarding policy in place for children or adults at risk, and there are many churches who are not using URC's common safeguarding policy (*Good Practice 5*). Appendix A of GP5 is a model local church safeguarding policy document (shorter in format) with seven appendices which help local churches align with URC's safeguarding policy. In the case of LEPs, they are generally using other safeguarding policies, and it could be worth exploring why this happens and how we can improve URC practices and procedures.
- 12.3 This annual denominational report will be used to inform current and future planning and improvement activity in the light of URC's safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025). It is vital to embed *Good Practice 5* and its appendices in the daily practice of congregations, work with survivors of abuse, increase the capacity of the Church to manage safeguarding risks and offenders and invest in the frontline by providing effective safeguarding training to church safeguarding coordinators, workers and volunteers of the Church. These priorities, along with the other strategic priorities of the plan, will help the Church create safer spaces across the denomination.

Wessex Synod Resolution

Provision of Public Access Defibrillators

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Mrs Sue Brown: clerk@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 General Assembly a) encourages Elders Meetings and/or Church Meetings to install 'public-access defibrillators' on an external wall of their Church buildings, wherever possible. b) encourages Synods to offer financial support where possible to help churches purchase and install these defibrillators. c) resolves that, if successful, this initiative be used to mount national and local press campaigns to promote the profile of our churches as safe, caring and compassionate communities.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Wessex Synod Resolution: Provision of Public Access Defibrillators

- 1.1 When a person suffers sudden cardiac arrest, prompt action by someone nearby offers their only chance of survival. A 999 call for an ambulance and starting cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) immediately are essential. Most people who survive will also have needed a shock from a defibrillator to restore a normal heartbeat.
- 1.2 The earlier that shock is given, the better the person's chance of survival. Studies have shown that a shock given within three minutes of cardiac arrest provides the best chance of survival and that even one minute of further delay reduces that chance substantially.
- 1.3 For that reason, there is an increasing need for automated defibrillators to be available for use by members of the public. Referred to as 'public-access defibrillators', they are simple to use and can be used effectively and safely by people who have had no prior training. But in many communities the availability of such defibrillators is very limited
- 1.4 As part of our service to our communities, we propose that all United Reformed Churches are encouraged to install a public-access defibrillator on an external wall of their buildings. In so proposing, we are aware that some churches have already done this, some cannot because they meet in non-URC premises, and in some areas defibrillators have already been installed on an adjacent building. Even so, a very large number of URC buildings could still consider this.
- 1.5 Wessex Trust has agreed to provide grant funding to help congregations in Wessex Synod to purchase and install public-access defibrillators, and we would like to encourage other Synod Trusts to do likewise, if they are able.
- 1.6 The Wessex Synod feels that this initiative is also an opportunity for positive publicity.

General Assembly

- a) **encourages Elders Meetings and/or Church Meetings to install 'public-access defibrillators' on an external wall of their Church buildings, wherever possible.**
- b) **encourages Synods to offer financial support where possible to help churches purchase and install these defibrillators.**
- c) **resolves that, if successful, this initiative be used to mount national and local press campaigns to promote the profile of our churches as safe, caring and compassionate communities.**





Information papers index

URC History Society	260
URC Spirituality	263
URC Music Network	264
Women's World Day of Prayer, England, Wales and Northern Ireland	266



United Reformed Church History Society

Trustees' Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 2019

Administration Details

- 1.1 The Charity is registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales with the number 279213. Its Registered Address is Westminster College, Madingley Road, Cambridge, CB3 0AA
- 1.2 The Trustees of the Society, known as the Council, manage the charity. They are the officers, up to four members elected by the Society's members, up to three members appointed by the United Reformed Church, and up to two co-opted members. The years in brackets after a person's name indicate the end of their present term of appointment/ election.

The Officers are:

The President – The Revd Professor David Thompson (2023)

The Chairman of the Council – The Revd Dr David Cornick (2023)

Vice Chairman – Mr John Ellis (2021)

Secretary – Mrs Margaret Thompson (until June 2019),

The Revd Michael Hopkins (from June 2019) (2024)

Treasurer – Mrs Jean Wyber (2022)

Librarian – The Revd Professor David Thompson (2023)

Journal Editor – The Revd Dr Robert Pope (2022)

The trustees elected by the members are:

The Revd Christopher Damp (2021)

Mr John Ellis (2021)

The Revd Fleur Houston (2020)

Those appointed by the United Reformed Church are:

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar (2024)

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe (2023)

Mrs Jean Wyber (2022)

Dr Anne Samson and Professor Clyde Binfield were co-opted throughout the period of this report.

Other Administration matters

- 2.1 The Society holds bank accounts with HSBC UK and with CAF Bank. Accounts with the latter were opened during the year, since CAF Bank provides an electronic dual authorisation for making payments which is faster and more cost-effective than writing cheques which have to be countersigned and posted to

recipients, who then have to pay them into their banks in the face of a much-reduced number of physical outlets.

- 2.2 The Society's investment holding of COIF Ethical Units is held by the United Reformed Church Trust Ltd for its benefit. The holding of Epworth Multi-Asset Fund units is held directly by the Society.

Structure, governance, and management.

- 3.1 The affairs of the Society are governed by its Constitution, which was approved by the Charity Commission in August 2005.
- 3.2 The Officers are elected annually and are eligible for re-election, but the President shall not normally be re-elected to serve for a total period of more than five years. The Council meets twice a year.

Objectives, activities, and achievements

- 4.1 The object of the Society shall be to advance the Christian faith, and in particular:
- (a) To encourage interest in and the study of the history of the United Reformed Church with its antecedents within the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Churches of Christ traditions and related movements and churches, their origins, principles, theology, churches and missions.
 - (b) To publish a Journal regularly, and such other publications as the Council shall from time to time determine.
 - (c) To provide an Annual Lecture.
 - (d) To encourage the collection and preservation of historical records and where appropriate to act as custodian, by arrangement with the United Reformed Church, of manuscripts, books, portraits, paintings and other relevant objects belonging to the Church.
 - (e) To make grants for the pursuit of historical studies in connection with the churches and movements referred to in (a).
- 4.2 During 2019, the Society has continued to fulfil its objects of encouraging interest in and study of the history of the United Reformed Church, and its antecedent traditions and related movements. Two issues of the Journal, vol. 10 issues 4 and 5, have been published, the Annual Lecture was given at the Conference, and work on the organisation of historical records continued. Risks associated with the charity have been assessed. The council has a Data Privacy Policy in place to minimise the risk of a data breach. The Council co-operates with other similar societies through the Religious Archives Group and the Association of Denominational Historical Societies and Cognate Libraries in order to raise awareness of the minority religious traditions in England and Wales.
- 4.3 The Conference and Annual Meeting was held at Westminster College Cambridge on 26-27 June, at which a number of papers were given. Since 2019 was the 30th anniversary of the re-unification of Germany, the Annual Lecture was given by Dr Stephen Brown on the subject of the influence of the Lutheran Church in the GDR in paving the way for re-unification. At the Annual Meeting, Mrs Margaret Thompson relinquished her responsibilities as Secretary, held in various forms since 1981.

- 4.4 The College archives, (Westminster and the Cheshunt Foundation), of which the Society holdings form a part, remain in the care of Mrs Helen Weller. She can be contacted every weekday morning except Friday by phone, 01223 330620, or by email, hw374@cam.ac.uk
- 4.5 The Marquis Fund, to further the study and publication of Nonconformist history, is administered jointly by the Society and representatives of Westminster College, Cambridge. Grants may be made to scholars of any denominational affiliation or none, if the criteria are satisfied. Application should be made to the Treasurer, using the College address. Two grants were approved in 2019, subject to the authors finding publishers.
- 4.6 The standard subscription rate for membership remains at £20. For all enquiries about Society membership, including a 25% reduction for students and newly retired ministers, please contact the Secretary, the Revd Michael Hopkins, michael.hopkins@mansfield.oxon.org, 01252 711359. Gift Aid declarations continue to make a valuable contribution to the society's finances.
- 4.7 Society information is available on our website: www.urchistory.org.uk

Financial Review and Reserves Policy

- 5.1 There was a surplus of receipts over payments for the year of £3842 (2018 deficit of £1444) and unrealised gains on investments of £7412 (2018 deficit of £2979), mostly due to the reduction in the cost of producing the Journal and the reduced spending on bookbinding. The Council was unable to make any grants in the year. The cash at bank at the end of 2019 of £22,559 would cover annual costs for at least five years at the current level, and therefore the Council did not suggest any change in the annual subscription to members of £20 (accredited students £15) for 2020.
- 5.1 In 2019, the Council moved £15,000 of its cash reserves to increase its investments with the Charities Official Investment Fund and Epworth Investment Funds. It also rationalised its holdings of Epworth Investment units into one holding of Multi Asset Fund units.

URC Spirituality (formerly URC Retreat Group)

Assembly report

1. A while back, we concluded that things had changed. The approach of the URC Retreat Group, and before that of the URC Silence and Retreats Network, had served well for several decades, but was in danger of becoming today's response to yesterday's call.
2. We heard in this an invitation to operate differently. There is a healthily wide range of approaches to prayer within the URC. It seems right to encourage people to deepen and to explore, to recognise the value of silence, retreats and quiet days, but also to recognise that these aren't the whole story.
3. A much closer involvement with *Walking the Way* seemed a natural next step, so that spirituality is seen as core to the URC. Much of the material on spirituality which has appeared in our magazine *Encounter* has been revised, and has been incorporated into the *Walking the Way* website.
4. Prayer – letting the breath of God breathe through our lives – is bound to be in some ways subversive. It is core to the life of the church, but it also needs to disturb and unsettle. Becoming closely involved with *Walking the Way* is a way of contributing to the core of prayer in the life of the United Reformed Church. But we're also keen to enable and encourage people's explorations.
5. The most recent part of this was a residential event at Westminster College at the end of February 2020, with contributions from Terry Hinks and Susan Durber. Besides enriching those who came, this also led to the inclusion of new people in the core group – which still sees itself as provisional – in the sense of enabling something new to emerge.
6. One of the threads being worked on is to connect people in the URC who are involved in spiritual direction (understanding the term quite broadly) and in the leading of quiet days for mutual resourcing and support. This is partly about resourcing within the URC, and partly about articulating the value of what we bring, to enrich our ecumenical contribution.
7. For now, one question to engage with is what's God's invitation to us as we engage with the struggles around Covid-19.
8. The Core Group members are: Mark Argent, Ann Barton, Richard Church, Adelaide Owusu, Geoff Wright.
9. If you'd like to know more, contact Geoff Wright wright_rev.geoff@btinternet.com
10. If you are involved in spiritual direction, please contact Sue Henderson sue@suehenderson.co.uk

The URC Music Network

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Ray Adams ray.adams12@btinternet.com
Action required	Report

Summary of Content

Main points	Update from The URC Music Network, reporting on good work, and on a recent decision to disband.
--------------------	---

1. URC Music aims to be a network connecting worship leaders and music makers throughout the United Reformed Church.
2. We publish and distribute a magazine *Making a Joyful Noise* to members and like-minded organisations, but our main activity in recent years has been to organise an Annual Music Day in different parts of the country, so that our far-flung members, and others, can gather to make music together.
 - 2.1 In 2018, at St Columba's URC, York, our leaders for the day were Alex Walker (who enables churches to develop modern yet accessible styles of multi-media worship), Laurence Wareing (a freelance writer and editor of the Methodist website *Singing the Faith Plus*), Anne Sardeson (Thames North Synod's Training Officer – who is a hymn writer and worship-enabler), and Alison Micklem (the host church's minister who spoke about her father Caryl Micklem's hymns and their inspiration).
 - 2.2 In 2019 at Palmers Green URC in North London, we explored the theme 'Music for our well-being'. Our leaders on that occasion were Jennifer Kavanagh (a Quaker retreat leader), David Tims (a practitioner of the 'Singing for the Brain' project – who put us all through our paces!) and Anne Sardeson, who had been involved in editing *Hymns for Healing* (published by Stainer and Bell).
3. The organ advisory service has existed over many years to help churches enhance their worship through the appropriate use of an organ, whether it be a traditional pipe organ or an electronic instrument. A group of regional organ advisers, working with synod property officers, advise on the best course of action to take if a church decides to dispose of its organ, for whatever reason. Thanks are due to John Corrie for coordinating this service for many years.
4. Our website (www.urcmusic.org.uk) has also been developed and maintained by Matthew Prevett, and we thank him for seeking out interesting contributions from different parts of the URC.
5. However, the Network (during the suspension of church activity caused by the coronavirus) has had to live with the uncertainty of planning future face-to-face events, and the Executive Committee reluctantly decided to cancel their plans for a Music Day in 2020.

6. Further serious discussions within the Executive Committee over several years culminated in the proposal put to a special AGM in May 2020 that the URC Music Network in its present form should not continue beyond the end of 2020. The infrastructure of local branches enjoyed in their heyday by the URC Organists' Guild and Musicians' Guild at synod level no longer exists, and it has become increasingly difficult to recruit new members of the Committee as some existing Committee members are having to resign for family or other reasons.
7. The overwhelming majority of supporters reluctantly agreed that it was time to disband the Network, offering thanks to all who have supported it (and its predecessor Guilds) over many years, and in the hope that other ways would be found to promote Church Music throughout the United Reformed Church.
8. Supporters and friends of the Network are invited to contribute articles and reminiscences to a final edition of our magazine 'Making a Joyful Noise' which will be published in the early autumn. It is also hoped that there might be an opportunity to give thanks for the contribution of the Musicians Guild/ URC Music Network at a future General Assembly.

World Day of Prayer (England, Wales & Northern Ireland)

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale RevsGobledale@hotmail.com
Action required	For report

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This ecumenical event has a long history, and we are glad to be actively involved.



World Day of Prayer

Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action
(WDP motto) [#PRAYWITHOUTCEASINGWDP](https://www.facebook.com/PrayWithoutCeasingWDP)

- For almost 100 years on the first Friday of March, Christians from more than 170 countries unite to pray at local ecumenical World Day of Prayer services. Each year a different member country creates a worship booklet, used globally, focusing on issues in their own culture and society. Last year, 95,551 services were held, connecting more than 1.5 million worshippers. Source countries are as follows:

2019 – Slovenia

2020 – Zimbabwe: a call to act in love for peace and reconciliation

2021 – Vanuatu: focusing on everyday struggles with production of food, care for the environment and the education of children (artwork by Juliette Pita depicts Cyclone Pam)

2022 – England, Wales & North Ireland: ‘I Know the Plans I Have For You’ – supporting charities, including Girls’ Brigade



- Those gathering at the annual service are enriched through this international, ecumenical expression. Through our participation in the World Day of Prayer, we affirm that prayer and action are inseparable, and that both have immeasurable influence on the world.
- Using the resources throughout the year**
The WDP service can be easily modified for use in a local Sunday worship service. It tends to be interactive with numerous visual elements, so works well for intergenerational worship. It can be used as a whole or in part, any time of year. A Junior Church or Adult Study Group might easily incorporate the resources into an extended study of another member of the world church. Free resources from

the 2020 Zimbabwe service, including Children's Activity Sheets, craft ideas, dramas, Bible Studies and worship components, can be found here:
www.wwdp.org.uk/2020-free-resources-to-download.

4. **Global outreach & connections**

Throughout the year, World Day of Prayer (England, Wales & North Ireland), through the National Committee, connects with partner World Day of Prayer groups from around the world from Palestine to Pakistan, from the UK to Uganda. During Covid-19, the firsthand accounts shared from other countries have been insightful and fascinating. Offerings collected at the annual services are distributed to numerous charities, near and far.



5. **URC Membership**

The United Reformed Church participates, through our denominational representative, on the National Committee of the World Day of Prayer in England, Wales & Northern Ireland.

6. **Helpful links**

- Current and relevant prayer, hymn and worship resources from WDP England, Wales & Northern Ireland
www.wwdp.org.uk/prayer-focus
- Resources for 2021 Vanuatu service
worlddayofprayer.net/vanuatu-2021
- World Day of Prayer England, Wales & Northern Ireland
www.wwdp.org.uk
- Worship & action opportunities throughout the year
worlddayofprayer.net/index



Resolutions index

Resolutions	269
Standing Orders	277

Online papers: bit.ly/GA-Papers

MIND Appendix B

Appendices to paper on Walking the Way

Appendix A – Evaluation Overview

Appendix B – Annual Church Returns 2018 Sample Data

Appendix C – Annual Church Returns 2019 Sample Data

Appendix D – Qualitative Data

Appendix E – Finance





Resolutions

Mission Council

Report on the work of Mission Council, 2018-20

Resolution 1

page 4

General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that: There shall be one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister (of word and sacraments or CRCW) or an elder. Each Synod may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected.

Resolution 2

page 4

General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that: The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.

Mission Council

Assembly 2018 Resolution 5: report on responses

Resolution 3

page 12

General Assembly gives final approval to its resolution 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.

Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure

The Clerk and General Secretary, for MIND (ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group)

Resolution 4

page 15

General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC:

Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church

Schedule E, Paragraph 4 – delete the word ‘ministerial’ before ‘rights of membership’.

The Structure of the United Reformed Church

Paragraph 1(4) – Add heading ‘Definitions’ and reword:

- 1.(4) Unless otherwise expressly stated or clearly excluded by the context,
- (a) the expressions ‘Minister’, ‘Ministers’, ‘ministry’ and ‘Ministerial’ when used in the Structure shall refer to the ministry of Word and Sacrament;

- (b) the expression ‘the Disciplinary Process’ shall refer to the Process established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxi), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision;
- (c) the expression ‘the Incapacity Procedure’ shall refer to the Procedure established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxiii), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision.

Paragraph 2(1) – in function (ix), insert (subject to paragraph 2(7)(ii)) before ‘to suspend or remove names’.

Paragraph 2(4) – add to the duties of Moderators of Synods:

‘fulfil the responsibilities ascribed to the Moderator of Synod under the Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure’.

In the Functions of Synod, delete the initial ‘A’ and the words in brackets.

Function (xvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

‘To discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide’.

Function (xviii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

‘To discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide’.

Function (xxi) after ‘Disciplinary Process’ delete ‘contained in Section O’.

Paragraph 2.(5) – In sub-paragraph (A), after ‘the following functions’, delete the words in brackets.

In the Functions of Ecumenical Area Meetings, Function (viii), delete ‘contained in Section O’ and the cross-reference in brackets.

Functions (xxi) to (xxvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

- (xxi) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Process for dealing with cases of Discipline involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;
- (xxii) to discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide;
- (xxiii) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Procedure for dealing with cases of Incapacity involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;
- (xxiv) to discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide.

Renumber the last two functions (xxv) and (xxvi).

Insert new paragraph 2(7) as follows:

Restriction on exercise of conciliar functions

2(7)

- (i) As soon as any Minister or Church-Related Community Worker becomes the subject of a case under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure, no council of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that person in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the conduct of that case, save as provided for by the Process or Procedure itself.
- (ii) The function of the Church Meeting to maintain standards of membership shall not be exercised in a disciplinary context in respect of any member of the local church who is at that time a Minister or Church-Related Community Worker; nor shall any such member be removed from the Roll of Members or the membership of that person be suspended by the Church Meeting for disciplinary reasons.
- (iii) The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding, and once so initiated that case shall be resolved only by the steps for which that Process or Procedure provides.

Paragraph 5 – delete existing opening text and replace with the following:

- 5. The procedure for dealing with references and appeals not concerned with the Incapacity Procedure or the Disciplinary Process is as follows:

Paragraph 5.4 – delete final sentence and replace with the following:

No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review or appeal against decisions reached under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure.

Delete paragraphs 6 and 7 in their entirety.

Resolution 5

page 15

General Assembly adopts the ‘Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers’ (‘Disciplinary Process’) accompanying this Resolution in place of the existing Process.

Resolution 6

page 15

General Assembly makes the amendments accompanying this Resolution to the ‘Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers and church related community workers’ (‘Incapacity Procedure’).

Resolution 7

page 15

The provisions of the new Disciplinary Process concerning appointments to the Assembly and Synod Standing Panels for Discipline, the Disciplinary Investigation and Commission Panels, and the posts of Assembly Representative for Discipline and Secretary to Assembly Commissions are to come into force at the close of this session of the General Assembly. The Assembly instructs Synods to make their appointments to Standing Panels at the earliest opportunity, and instructs Nominations Committee to bring nominations for Assembly appointees under the new Process to the Assembly Executive in November 2020, so that all those appointed can receive initial training in the new procedures before the remainder of the Process comes into force. The new Process is to come fully into force at the

close of the meeting of Assembly in 2021 and govern cases coming to the notice of Moderators of Synods or the Assembly Representative for Discipline on or after that date, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in Resolution 4 have by then been ratified. Cases pending under the current Process at that date are to be dealt with as the transitional provisions of the new Process provide. The amendments to the Incapacity Procedure are to take effect at the close of the meeting of Assembly in 2021, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in Resolution 4 have by then been ratified.

Resolution 8

page 15

The Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group to the Assembly Executive (MIND) is instructed to make arrangements to offer the training mentioned in Resolution 7, and also to prepare Notes for Guidance to assist those engaged or concerned in the new Process, the first edition of such Notes to be published online before the Assembly Executive's meeting in March 2021.

Ministerial Disciplinary Process and Incapacity Procedure

Appendix C to MIND Paper to General Assembly 2020

Resolution 9

page 40

Below are the proposed amendments referred to in Resolution 6 of the main MIND paper (page 18) to the 'Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers and church related community workers' ('Incapacity Procedure').

Church changes not previously reported to General Assembly

Resolution 10

page 45

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

Resolution 11

page 46

General Assembly celebrates Church Without Walls as a new ecumenical worshipping congregation within Walton Churches Partnership, Milton Keynes, and therefore receives it as a congregation of the United Reformed Church.

Resolution 12

page 47

General Assembly receives the ecumenical New Lubbesthorpe Project as a Mission Project of United Reformed Church.

Resolution 13

page 47

General Assembly authorises Mission Council to act on its behalf in considering applications for new Mission Projects at Love's Farm, St Neots, and at North Avenue, Chelmsford, both in Eastern Synod.

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Children's and Youth Work Review and Five-Year Strategy

Resolution 14 page 58

General Assembly urges all United Reformed Churches (especially those near universities and colleges) to use Fusion's Student Linkup and SCM Connect, enabling students to explore a wider range of churches and have more opportunity to commit to a place of worship that they feel is appropriate.

Resolution 15 page 58

General Assembly recognises the climate emergency and challenges all councils, committees and local churches to do everything possible to make URC events and activities eco-friendly, as urged by URC Youth Assembly.

Communications Committee

Communications update, including *Reform* magazine

Resolution 16 page 65

General Assembly encourages all churches without websites to set one up as a matter of urgency, and to consider using the URC's iChurch initiative.

Resolution 17 page 65

General Assembly welcomes the new look and feel of print publications used since 2019, and encourages all Synods, committees and departments to use the design and digital visual identity guidance from the communications team, so that all materials produced by the Church can share the same quality and consistency.

Resolution 18 page 65

General Assembly encourages all members and friends of the Church to read *Reform*, the magazine of the United Reformed Church, and to subscribe to it so that, as it also approaches its 50th anniversary, it can continue to challenge, debate, refresh, enrich and inform.

Education and Learning Committee

The Way Forward

Resolution 19 page 91

General Assembly endorses the direction for the Education and Learning Committee described in the Way Forward paper.

Pensions Committee and Finance Committee

URC Pension Schemes – Facing up to some serious challenges

Resolution 20 page 144

The General Assembly, being representative of Local Churches, Synods and the whole Church, confirms the Church's commitment to the pensions promises already made, and wishes any consideration of future pension arrangements for

the Church's Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, missionaries and staff to keep clearly in mind:

- a) The Church's warm gratitude for the commitment, gifts and service of those who work among us and serve in our name;
- b) The Church's desire to deal with these people honourably in their retirement;
- c) The Church's desire to act as a responsible employer, for the people we employ and for our stipendiary office-holders.

Resolution 21

page 114

General Assembly thanks Dr Chris Evans, on his retirement as Convener of the Pensions Committee, for his conscientious and careful service in this role and thanks all those across the Church who are involved in the current Integrated Risk Management Project for their hard work and their willingness to work towards a resolution of the significant pensions challenges that face the Church.

Resolution 22

page 114

General Assembly authorises the directors of the URC Trust to amend its guarantee of the Ministers' Pension Fund provided to the URC Ministers' Pension Trust in response to the changing regulatory environment, but limited to the available resources of the URC Trust.

Ministries Committee

Gift Policy

Resolution 23

page 156

General Assembly adopts the policy contained in this paper.

Schedule E

Resolution 24

page 159

General Assembly approves the changes to Schedule E of the Basis of Union as outline in this paper.

Pastoral Supervision for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers

Resolution 25

page 162

General Assembly adopts the policy for pastoral supervision as contained in this paper.

Environmental Task Group

Environmental Policy progress review

Resolution 26

page 188

General Assembly directs the Environmental Task Group to consult on a travel and expenses policy for the URC which (i) encourages consideration of the purpose of travel and its environmental impact, (ii) introduces a carbon budget for international travel on URC business, and (iii) incentivises low-carbon travel modes, with a view that proposals should be brought to a future General Assembly, or to the Assembly Executive if necessary.

Walking the Way Steering Group

Where Next?: The future of Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today

Resolution 27

page 195

General Assembly, in affirming the work of the Walking the Way steering group, encourages those who plan the Church's budget to seek ways of funding its continuing work at the level indicated in Appendix E of this paper, according to the priorities set out in the paper.

Nominations committee

Report to General Assembly 2020

Resolution 28

page 203

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out on pages 204 to 223 of the *Book of Reports*, subject to the additions and corrections contained in the supplementary report to Assembly.

Safeguarding Advisory Group

URC Safeguarding Strategy 2020-2025

Resolution 29

page 227

Having already endorsed the safeguarding strategic plan 2020-2025 through Mission Council, General Assembly acknowledges that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility in the United Reformed Church.

General Assembly directs all local churches and synods and those who oversee safeguarding arrangements in the Church to implement the safeguarding strategic plan in ways that promote the welfare of the URC and the well-being of the community in which the Church is placed.

Safeguarding Advisory Group

URC Safeguarding Strategy 2020-2025

Resolution 30

page 255

General Assembly

- a) encourages Elders Meetings and/or Church Meetings to install 'public-access defibrillators' on an external wall of their Church buildings, wherever possible.
- b) encourages Synods to offer financial support where possible to help churches purchase and install these defibrillators.
- c) resolves that, if successful, this initiative be used to mount national and local press campaigns to promote the profile of our churches as safe, caring and compassionate communities.

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 three(1) and (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church shall be placed in Group B. In the case of any other matter the Moderator may rule at any time that a motion be taken from group B and placed in group C. 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.
- 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

Standing Orders

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 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.
- 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.

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.

Standing Orders

- 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, held 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.
- 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, or
 - 5.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 5.6.1, 5.6.2, 5.6.3, 5.6.5, and 5.6.6) 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 ten minutes, (eg 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 ten 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.

Standing Orders

- 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.

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 Convener 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 re-admitted.

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.

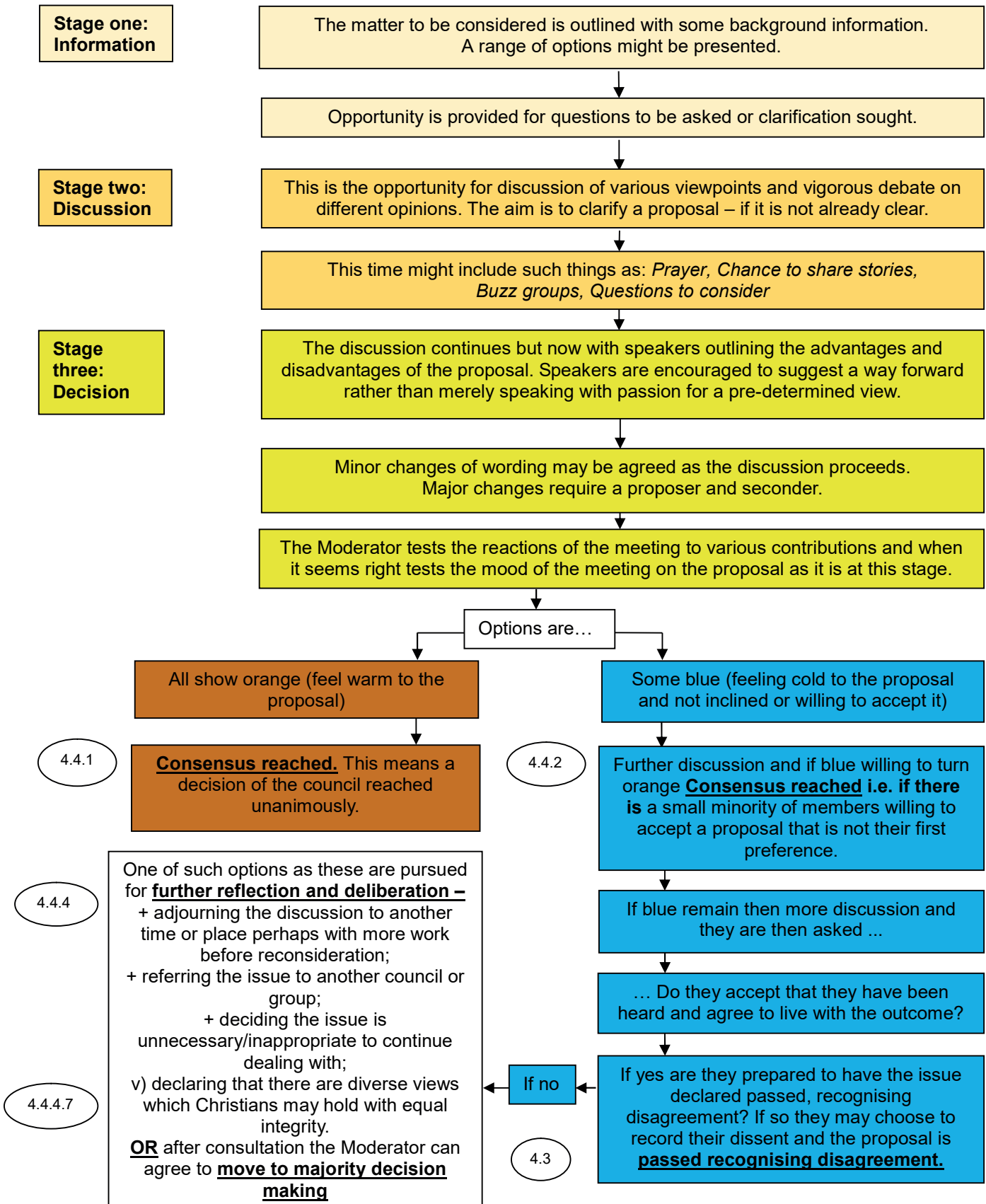
15. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

- 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
Date of last changes: 15 July 2019*

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.



Illustrations of the URC cross and fish logo, one of the many activities offered by the Church during the Coronavirus lockdown:

Carole Marsden	p2
Rosie Stone	p54
Farro, 3rd Desborough Brownies	p257
Evie Ramirez Mann	p258
Eleanor Marsden	p268

Photographs from the URC's Flickr page, www.flickr.com/theurc. Visit the URC at www.urc.org.uk, find it on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and Soundcloud.

All images submitted by members and friends of the URC and used with permission.



The
United
Reformed
Church

www.urc.org.uk

