

Mission Council Report

Report on the work of Mission Council, 2020-21

Basic information

Contact name and email address	General Secretary: john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Partly for information; partly for decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 01</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Resolution 02</p> <p>2. General Assembly gives final approval to the proposal that: The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.</p> <p>Other resolutions come in the appendices and in the reports of MIND (Papers R) and the Safeguarding Advisory Group (Papers T) both of which are advisory groups of the Mission Council but are reporting separately.</p>

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.

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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 has met twice since it met in place of the meeting of the General Assembly in July 2020. Its meetings in March and November were both conducted virtually, under the standing orders for virtual meetings adopted by the Mission Council in July 2020. It has been possible to inhabit much of the ethos of consensus decision making but impossible to adopt it fully because of the difficulty of 'reading the room' in a Zoom meeting which extends over a number of different screens. All business has therefore required a two-thirds majority to ensure that the settled mind of the meeting has been determined.
4. Preparatory papers for these meetings of Mission Council are available on the URC website. There are confirmed minutes of the November meeting, and unconfirmed minutes of the March meeting.

General Assembly and Mission Council

5. Mission Council addressed several matters that were either considered at a previous Assembly or that relate directly to the business of this 2021 Assembly, as follows:
6. 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.
7. 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

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become decisions of the Church and this is the first meeting of the General Assembly since then. 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.

Projects and tasks

9. 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.
10. Mission Council received regular reports on Walking the Way, with its focus on missional discipleship. The Walking the Way steering group offer to this Assembly proposals on the future of its work.
11. Mission Council committed the United Reformed Church to a journey towards being an anti-racist Church and invited the Mission Committee to explore initiatives to address barriers within our structures, theology and relationships to this end. A significant resolution comes from the Equalities Committee to this General Assembly in the light of that commitment.
12. Mission Council has received regular updates on the question of the pension fund deficit and future pension arrangements. It considered this at length during group work. Significant resolutions come to this General Assembly as a result of a large amount of work and wide consultation.
13. The work of the Risk Process Review Panel was presented, and a new and comprehensive risk matrix for the life of the church was examined. Key risks included the potential for us to be unable to people our extensive structures at General Assembly level.
14. Mission Council initiated a process of review of the life of the United Reformed Church, its structures, resources and work to fit us to respond to the call of God in the generations to come.
15. Mission Council invited proposal to be brought to make the Daily Devotions, and the Daily Devotions Sunday service a permanent feature of the life of the United Reformed Church. This is subject to resolution the detail of which can be found in an appendix to this report.

Arrangements in Church life

16. Mission Council made a number of changes to arrangements that shape the life of the Church in one way or another. Some key changes were:
 - a) Adopting a Breast-Feeding Policy for local churches to adopt.
 - b) Adopting a 'Green Charter' for the Education and Learning work of the Church (which included a 'carbon calculator' available on the web with the November Mission Council papers).
 - c) Adopting updated guidelines on conduct and behaviour of Minister of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers and Elders.
 - d) Updated the terms of reference of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee
 - e) Determined the make-up of review panels when reappointment processes for the Principal of Westminster College arise.
 - f) Initiated a consultation on achieving 'integration' within our Education and Learning work.
 - g) Adopted a revised Ministerial Capability Process.
 - h) Determined that the training for non-stipendiary CRCW's would be individually determined by the Education and Learning Committee working with the relevant RCL.
 - i) Adopted processes for becoming a Worship Leader or a Lay Preacher.
 - j) Revised the Discipleship Development strategy and the development fund policy.

People and posts

17. Mission Council heard that it had not been possible, after two recruitment rounds, to appoint to the role of Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship. It was reported to the March Mission Council that particular issues around safeguarding were taking up large amounts of the time of the General Secretary, and that the officers of the General Assembly had therefore arranged to second the Revd Adrian Bulley, Synod Clerk for the national Synod of Wales, to act as assistant General Secretary for 50% of his time, with particular responsibility for safeguarding, from January to July 2021. We are very grateful to Adrian and the Synod of Wales for making this possible.
18. We are pleased to report that an appointment group, following a further recruitment round and interviewing, has appointed the Revd Adrian Bulley, who will begin in September 2021.
19. The Revd Dr David Pickering was called to local ministry from the Synod of Scotland, creating a vacancy for the Moderator role in that synod at short notice. It had been a challenging time for the synod for several reasons. The Officers of the Assembly determined, in consultation with the Synod Executive, that it would be helpful and appropriate to appoint someone for a shorter period of time than usual, to exercise what might be described as some 'interim ministry'. Following an abbreviated appointment process, where a group consisting of representatives of the synod and the Assembly Officers met with the Revd Paul Whittle, Mission Council appointed Paul to serve as Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland from January 2021.
20. The Revd George Watt has been appointed to succeed the Revd Andrew Prasad following his retirement in June 2021 as Moderator of the Thames North Synod.

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We are grateful that Andrew was willing to extend his period of service by a few months to help see the synod through the worst of the pandemic.

21. Following a call to return to local pastorate ministry for the Revd Jacky Embrey, there was a vacancy for the role of Moderator of Mersey Synod. Mission Council was pleased to appoint the Revd Geoff Felton, whose name was brought following the normal recruitment process.
22. Following Paul Whittle's move to become Synod Moderator for the National Synod of Scotland, the Revd Lythan Nevard has been nominated, following the normal recruitment process, as Moderator of the Eastern Synod. General Assembly will be asked to make this appointment.
23. 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.

Public issues

24. In March, Mission Council adopted a statement calling on all councils, committees, local churches and individuals within the URC to work towards the elimination of single-use plastics and calling for their use to be kept to an absolute minimum during the pandemic.

Leadership, worship and admin

25. Throughout the last year Mission Council has been wisely and carefully led by the Moderators of General Assembly, the Revd Clare Downing and Mr Peter Pay, supported in pastorally and in worship by their chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard.
26. Administration for our meetings has been handled by Sam Bircham, who serves as PA to the General Secretary. Her care and concern with the effective running of Mission Council has been much appreciated.