

Paper X1

West Midlands Synod

Modern Day Slavery

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Steve Faber moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 50 1) General Assembly expresses its wish that there be a statement of URC policy on modern-day slavery, and directs the General Secretariat to undertake the research and preparation of such a proposed policy for Church House and Assembly business, consulting with other officers and committees as necessary. The draft policy is to be proposed to Mission Council / the Assembly Executive or General Assembly no later than the Assembly meeting in 2023. Resolution 51 2) General Assembly directs the Safeguarding Advisory Group / the Safeguarding Committee to draft, in consultation with others as necessary, clear guidance, including any necessary amendments to Good Practice 5 and Safeguarding training, that will help churches and individuals identify those subject to this form of abuse and how to take steps to prevent it.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Synod resolution asking for a denominational policy statement on Modern Day Slavery.
Main points	Modern Day Slavery is a scourge on our times affecting nations, communities, and individuals. The West Midlands Synod believe we should have a clear policy statement to protect us from benefitting from modern day slavery through our direct actions and our supply chain.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	General Secretariat; Clerk to Assembly; Secretary for Church and Society; Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	Staff time only at this stage.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Modern Day Slavery

- 1.1. The International Labour Organization estimates that globally 40 million people are held currently in Modern Day Slavery¹, several times more than those subjected to the barbarity of the transatlantic trade from the 16th to the 19th centuries. It is not something that is just happening overseas, it is estimated that there are over 130,000 people affected in the UK². Whilst many of those people are trafficked from abroad, the third most likely country of origin was the UK itself. Modern day slaves are being held and exploited in the communities where the United Reformed Church operates.
- 1.2. It could be happening in plain sight of any one of us. It is therefore a matter about which there should be much greater awareness amongst our churches and members, and an issue about which we should speaking out.
- 1.3. Whilst many churches and groups have discussed the issue, it has never been formalised into an Assembly Policy or statement. (Under the Modern Day Slavery Act 2015, certain large businesses in England and Wales are required to have a slavery and human trafficking statement covering their supply chain, and there is a similar provision under Scottish Law.)
- 1.4. Whilst not required to under the legislation, the West Midlands Synod has adopted a policy and statement covering our supply chain, and we propose that the United Reformed Church should voluntarily undertake this measure as well, as a commitment not to knowingly allow modern day slaves to be exploited for the goods and services we purchase.
- 1.5. It has been said that the causes of Modern-Day Slavery are ignorance and indifference, “We are too busy in our own little worlds, we do not notice injustice and if we did then we did not care”. There has been much discussion of the evils of historic slavery, we may feel powerless to know exactly how to respond to that; however, we do have the power to do something about Modern Day Slavery, which is acknowledged to affect more people than historic slavery.

2. A policy for the United Reformed Church

- 2.1 In developing a policy, we ask General Assembly to produce a comprehensive and co-ordinated response, including the following elements:
 - Affirmation that the United Reformed Church deplores Modern Day Slavery
 - A commitment to educate and inform our own members about the topic
 - Ensure that it is reflected in our safeguarding
 - Examining our own practices and supply chain such as:

¹ International Labour Organization (19 September 2017) Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_575479/lang-en/index.htm.

² Office for National Statistics (26 March 2020) Modern slavery in the UK <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/modernslaveryintheuk/march2020>

- Confirm that our staff are paid at least the Real Living Wage
- Audit our own suppliers to determine whether they have adequate safeguards that seek to prevent Modern day Slavery in their supply chain
- Confirming that we have taken adequate steps to screen out from our investments any companies without adequate regard to Modern Day Slavery
- Prepare our own voluntary Modern Day Slavery statement for publication on our own website and inclusion in our annual reports, and encourage all synods to do the same.

2.2 The West Midlands Synod offers our agreed policy (see Appendix One) as a starting point or template for how the denomination might respond.

Appendix One

Modern Day Slavery policy statement for the West Midlands Synod

Modern slavery is an umbrella term which refers to slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour, and human trafficking. Due to the secretive nature of modern slavery, it is a complex and ever-evolving crime. It is an issue faced by our global church partner in India. It is also an issue here in the UK.

The United Reformed Church West Midlands Synod is committed to working in partnership with others to see the eradication of modern slavery in all its forms. We will strive to ensure that acts of modern slavery and human trafficking cannot occur anywhere within our synod, Local Churches, linked organisations and groups. We are committed to implementing and enforcing effective systems and controls to prevent modern day slavery from happening.

We adopt a zero-tolerance approach to modern slavery, and will not knowingly appoint or work with any supplier or partner who cannot demonstrate the same level of commitment in this area. We fully support the investigation and reporting of any supplier found to be in breach of our modern-slavery policy and approach to modern-slavery and human trafficking.

We seek to use our influence as investors to ensure the companies in which we invest take this issue as seriously as we do.

We also have a role to play in resourcing and mobilising local congregations of the United Reformed Church in the West Midlands Synod in the battle to eradicate modern slavery.

Underlying principle

Our policies and procedures must reflect our commitment to acting ethically in our all relationships, including our business relationships, and help us enforce effective systems and controls to mitigate the risk of modern slavery occurring in our organisations or supply chains.

Our policies and procedures

Employment and Human Resources policies – we will continue to deploy HR policies that ensure that staff are properly appointed, paid fairly, and enjoy a competitive remuneration package. Specifically, we check the eligibility to work of all new employees and no staff member is paid less than Real Living Wage. For a small fee we can register our commitment to it.

Ethical Investment policy – our investment advisors are informed of our ethical standards and there is an active screening process to keep our investment portfolio in line with those standards.

Procurement policy – synod will draw up a procurement policy which will set out factors which must be followed when selecting major and regular suppliers. This will assist in ensuring that a good business partner is selected, and includes supplier reputation and compliance with relevant laws and ethical procedures.

A supplier code of conduct – will be designed to help our suppliers understand the behaviours and standards that are expected of them when working with and for the synod.

This will include commitments to the Living Wage and to the abolition of slavery. Our Supplier Code of Conduct will be sent to all new major and regular suppliers (as defined by the Procurement Policy) as part of our due diligence process

Synod policy and local churches

The West Midlands Synod urges all local churches within the synod to be aware of this statement and to consider adopting it locally.

The synod will seek to direct local churches to resources and organisations that seek to raise awareness of modern-day slavery.

The synod, in conjunction with other partners, will endeavour to provide training in how to spot the signs and respond appropriately to suspected instances modern day slavery. In this, we will bear in mind the experience of our global partner in India.

The synod will encourage local churches to make helpline numbers and contact details of support organisations clearly available in their premises so that any victims using the premises may find access to them.

Date of adoption: 13 March 13 2021

Review due: March 2023

Responsible body: Synod Mission Council