

Paper I3

Mission and discipleship Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today

Scratching where it itches

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk Francis Brienens: francis.brienens@urc.org.uk
Action required	Consideration and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This is an update on the continuing work of Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today, supporting the United Reformed Church's denomination-wide focus on whole-of-life discipleship, requiring Mission Council to consider the future of the work which the steering group has started.
Main points	The message of Walking the Way is still being well received across the URC, especially its open approach to celebrating and sharing existing wisdom. This is demonstrated in the various pieces of work which are summarised in this report. Serious decisions will need to be made in time about the future of this work. It is important to consider and discuss this now.
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
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission committee Education and learning Communications Nominations Children's and youth work Neil Hudson, London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC)

Summary of impact

Financial	Post 2020, Council for World Mission (CWM) funding for Walking the Way will cease.
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External (e.g. ecumenical)	Conversations continue with Churches Together in England, the Church of Scotland, the United Church of Canada and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands.
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Scratching where it itches

1. The lie of the land

- 1.1 It is clear from the energy which questions of whole-of-life discipleship have generated at all levels of the United Reformed Church's life, that the denomination's focus on 'Walking the Way: Living the life of Jesus today' is still scratching where it itches. There has been an especially warm welcome to its open approach, which seeks not to impose particular responses to whole-of-life discipleship, but rather to encourage the asking of questions, to celebrate the success of different approaches in differing contexts and to help share the wisdom of what God is doing across the denomination to build and equip people to live out their faith in their own, everyday reality.
- 1.2 In considering the following summary of Walking the Way's progress, Mission Council is invited to reflect on the significance of this focus, not just for now, but for the future of the URC, and to think about how the successful and useful elements of the focus might be harnessed, moving forward.

2. Visits to synods and other places

- 2.1 As part of the steering group's aim to celebrate and build on existing work and wisdom across the URC, Project Manager Simon Peters has continued his visits to synods and local churches. Most recently, he has spent time in Northern, North Western, East Midlands and Wales, as well as attending events in Mersey and Thames North synods. Stories and findings from these visits will be shared in due course as Simon takes time to digest and unpack all he has seen. It continues to be very encouraging to see lots of different, effective ways of nurturing whole-of-life disciples across the denomination and opportunities to support this further.

3. Communications

- 3.1 Work has continued with colleagues in communications to ensure effective plans for keeping the Walking the Way webpages and social media, as well as publications such as News Update and Digest up to date with Walking the Way news and stories. Such plans are in place to take us through to the end of the year, with one individual discipleship story and one church story being posted online per month, with three social media posts scheduled each week.

This means that, regardless of anything else we might share, there will always be regular news and stories planned for release ahead of time.

- 3.2 Work continues to ensure that resources available through the Walking the Way resource map and page are up to date and as easy to access as possible, especially given feedback that the busy nature of the resource map can be quite overwhelming.

4. Merchandise, resources and opportunities

- 4.1 Following discussion, the steering group agreed to look further into the production of more Walking the Way resources for use during important times in the Christian year. The Lent and Advent materials have been particularly popular in providing simple, accessible ways for people to explore whole-of-life discipleship.
- 4.2 The production of more merchandise to help share the message of whole-of-life discipleship more widely has also been agreed on the understanding that any merchandise purchased will be as ecologically sustainable as possible.
- 4.3 With the URC's 50th anniversary coming up in 2022, it is clear that whole-of-life discipleship is at the heart of the celebrations. The steering group is currently considering ideas for this.

5. Accompaniment

- 5.1 Work with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) on a pilot accompaniment programme for whole-of-life discipleship continues.
- 5.2 Participant churches have been identified in Southern Synod and are ready to begin work this month. Northern synod is still working on recruiting churches.
- 5.3 Work with the LICC is ongoing to establish effective ways of gathering and analysing data from the pilot which will be useful as the Steering Group seeks to shape the programme for use across different URC contexts, including analysing feedback from churches across the denomination which already have experience of working with the LICC.

6. Stepwise

- 6.1 The steering group continues to work closely with education and learning to develop Stepwise as an intergenerational, participant-focussed learning experience for whole-of-life discipleship development, offered as a programmatic element of Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today.

7. Spirituality

- 7.1 Across the URC and beyond, people seem to find it challenging to describe why we do what we do in worship and to articulate why this is relevant for those parts of our lives which sit outside the Church. Research is currently being carried out into the worship needs of the denomination by the Discipleship department. We each have a role to play in contributing to the quality of worship in our local contexts/communities.
- 7.2 The continued refinement of the Walking the Way resource map, along with the production of more seasonal Walking the Way resources will help to alleviate this in part by encouraging people to engage more confidently in leading and sharing worship. An upcoming event at Westminster College in early 2020, hosted by URC Spirituality, will also be useful, as will the results of the worship research, which will help to determine further action.
- 7.4 Generally, people need encouragement and confidence in worship and spirituality. As such, the steering group will continue to hold this as an important priority. Working ecumenically on whole-of-life discipleship is vital. This could be a particularly useful place to continue building connections with fellow denominations and groups.

8. Online Church

- 8.1 Following conversation with four existing online churches, URC Youth Executive and a wider discussion within the steering group, it seems worth pursuing the possibility of an online space where different groups within the United Reformed Church could explore the development of community and faith online. This has been inspired in part by a desire to support young adults in their whole-of-life discipleship development, but is by no means only relevant for younger people.
- 8.2 Such an approach, if successful, would involve significant long-term investment and work, particularly on issues such as pastoral care, security and safeguarding. As such, a paper is being prepared for the spring 2020 meeting of Mission Council with some more detailed information and proposals.

9. Diversity

- 9.1 Following acceptance that, as with many aspects of the URC's life and work, there is a lack of diversity in the people involved in leading and developing the Walking the Way focus, the steering group recently enjoyed a fruitful

discussion on the underlying issues behind this imbalance as well as ways in which the group might deal with the situation.

- 9.2 Along with other groups and committees, the steering group will be accepting the advice of Global and Intercultural Ministries to agree a set of questions, so that the steering group will be able to ask about all of its life and work with regards to nurturing and growing diversity.

10. Impact and future

- 10.1 As we move towards the end of CWM Mission Support Programme funding for Walking the Way at the close of 2020, it is becoming increasingly important to consider the impact which Walking the Way has had thus far, noting the unique contributions which it has made to the development of whole-of-life discipleship across the United Reformed Church so that we can establish ways of enabling this to continue.
- 10.2 The steering group is currently in the process of refining its evaluation plan to ensure that this will bring forth information, stories and data to help in this task, as well as continuing, more generally, to ask every synod, church and group we come into contact with, 'how is, or could, Walking the Way be useful to whole-of-life discipleship development?'
- 10.3 It is already clear from conversations across the URC that questions and concerns about worship, spirituality, mission and ministry in relation to whole-of-life discipleship are very much shared by everyone, and that there is a strong case for continuing the work which the steering group has started, but this is, of course a matter for General Assembly and Mission Council to consider.