

Paper I1

Update on current work

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Francis Brienen, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Mission Committee.
Main points	Updates on Legacies of Slavery task group work, resolution on becoming an anti-racist church, Partners in Mission, Beirut emergency appeal, Commitment for Life, Church and Society/JPIT work, Ecumenical and Interfaith matters, review of the National Rural Officer post.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G1 to Mission Council, November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Legacies of Slavery task group, Commitment for Life reference group, NRO review group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various items in the paper are covered by the Mission Committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Global and Intercultural Ministries

- 1.1. Autumn 2020 saw the successful launch of the **Legacies of Slavery** webpage with materials geared towards Black History Month (October). The page will shortly be revamped, featured resources being placed under the headings originally agreed for the task group's work – Apology, Reparations / Restorative Justice, White Privilege, plus Anti-Racist Living – emphasising the commitment made by Mission Council in November 2020. The task group has devised a new initiative proposed to be launched in February: Black History Monthly will aim to keep issues on the agenda throughout the year, rather than having an October focus only. The task group membership has also been under discussion. Following the resignation of Alan Yates as convenor conversations are being held with a potential new convenor, while two more members are sought from the Mission Committee and the Racial Justice network respectively. Victoria Turner has agreed to represent URC Youth.

- 1.2. Following the November Mission Council's acceptance of the **resolution on anti-racism**, work has started to implement the actions proposed. An overview of the follow up to the resolution is given in a separate paper.
- 1.3. The Global and Intercultural Ministries team continues to support the ministries of three formal **Partners in Mission**: Alison Gibbs (Zambia), Yufen Chen (Lumen, London), and So Young Jung (Kingston and New Malden, London), as well as Selena Tai (Manchester). Particular focus has been given to the unfolding situation regarding Yufen Chen. With the closure of Lumen URC as a worshipping community, conversations have taken place with Thames North Synod to understand how / where the project might continue, as well as with the Partner in Mission, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and CWM.
- 1.4. A number of **global partnership** relationships have been solidified in the past few months, with the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries attending online meetings of NESSL Partners (National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon) and the TEF (Taiwan Ecumenical Forum). The URC appeal to support the **Beirut Hope project** following the explosion in August 2020 raised over £15,000 (including match-funding from the World Church and Mission Fund). Considerable time was spent responding to a funding request for a women's project in Myanmar, which unexpectedly gave rise to conversations with the Presbyterian Church in New Zealand.

2. Commitment for Life

- 2.1. **Visibility** is a key focus identified for 2021. We aim to widen the visibility of *Commitment for Life* to the two-thirds of URC congregations that are not yet active supporters. Efforts include an all-church mailing, with a contact card containing useful information; running a series of adverts in *Reform*; a Zoom-to-Zimbabwe event on 9 March 2021, and a Zoom meet-up with Helen Howe (National Church Liaison Officer at Christian Aid) for all URC members with an interest in Christian Aid.
- 2.2. There was concern earlier in the year that lockdown might reduce the 2020 **income** by 50% (compared with the 2019 income of £329,000). We are pleased to report, however, that around half our *Commitment for Life* congregations managed to donate and together raised approximately £253,000 – over 75%.
- 2.3. Research into the question of potentially reducing the **number of regions** supported by *Commitment for Life* has shown a strong preference for a reduction to three regions – that is, to withdraw from Central America in light of Christian Aid's restructuring in the region, and possible further withdrawal in the future. Mission Committee supports this and staff are currently considering how this will be implemented.

3. Church and Society / Joint Public Issues Team

- 3.1. **International Development budget**: Following the emergency resolution at the November Mission Council, the Assembly Moderators wrote to the Prime Minister objecting to proposed cuts in the UK's commitment to devote 0.7% of national income to addressing global poverty. The URC's Secretary for Church and Society has been working with a broad group of ecumenical colleagues to make our concerns about this known in advance of the decision coming before parliament. A briefing to help church members raise the issue with MPs has been issued through CTBI, and is available at www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/aid
- 3.2. **Reset the Debt**: Since its launch in October, this major Joint Public Issues Team campaign has continued to highlight the crisis facing millions of families in Britain who have been forced into unavoidable debt as a result of Covid-19, and to call for a 'jubilee' debt write-off to be part of the solution. The campaign has generated significant national media coverage and engagement by church members. Over 1000 emails have been sent to MPs, and 500 church leaders signed an open letter to the Chancellor during Advent.

A roundtable event hosted by the Bishop of Durham in January indicated that there is a growing alliance around the issue and increasing interest in parliament, though we need to keep up the pressure for action. To read the report, watch video stories, access small group and prayer resources, and add your support, visit www.ResetTheDebt.uk

4. Ecumenical and Interfaith matters

4.1. At the October **Enabling Group of Churches Together** in England, Victoria Turner from URC Youth Executive was elected a Trustee of CTE. She is also part of CTE's working group relating to the issue of the fourth presidency, where Quaker Hannah Brock-Womack is still unable to take up her role as one of the Presidents because of her same sex marriage.

4.2. We now have updated **model constitutions** available for Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs). Unfortunately, the model documents for Methodist / URC Ecumenical Areas have been delayed because the Charity Commission have raised some objections about trusteeship in these settings.

4.3. The **Free Churches Group** (FCG) has just launched its report, *The Church and Social Cohesion*, produced in partnership with the Theos think tank. It looks at the churches' grass roots contribution to social cohesion, offering several practical recommendations for how churches can maximise their potential to foster social cohesion in the community. (<https://www.freechurches.org.uk/commission-report>)

The Revd Canon Helen Cameron, Chair of the Northampton Methodist District has been elected as FCG Moderator-Elect and will take over from the current moderator in April 2022.

4.4. The **international Reformed-Anglican Dialogue** has just published a major report on its work: *Koinonia: God's Gift and Calling* (<http://wrcr.ch/news/dialogue-report-sees-koinonia-as-gods-gift-and-calling>). In partnership with CTE, the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and his Church of England counterpart are planning an online 'residential' for May 2021 to look at the report and consider its application at local level.

4.5. Following on from the 2016 General Assembly resolution 37, the United Reformed Church has developed its work around the issues of the **Israel / Palestine** situation under the remit of the Mission Committee. The work in response to Resolution 37 has been extensive and one major aspect was the educational visit to Israel and Palestine in September 2019. Close links were made with members of indigenous churches and these have continued even during the extensive lockdowns of 2020-2021.

4.6. Resolution 37 calls for 'Synods, local churches and individuals to respond with informed prayer, grace and solidarity'. As the situation has worsened for the Palestinian people since 2016 and informed by the denomination's subsequent work and direct experience, the Mission Committee agreed a number of resolutions which will enable the Church to express its solidarity more strongly. The resolutions need further work in conversation and consultation with other committees and will be brought to General Assembly in July 2021.

5. Review of the National Rural Officer post

5.1. The Methodist Conference has approved the creation of a full time National Rural Officer post, starting in the summer of 2021. This effectively means the end of a shared post with the United Reformed Church. Mission Committee expressed strong support for the continuation of a National Rural Officer post in the URC and encouraged further exploration and conversation as to how this might be put into effect. Aware of the current financial challenges to the Church the committee accepted the proposal that following the retirement of the Revd Elizabeth Clark in August 2021 recruitment for a new post is put

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on hold until early 2022; that an evaluation is carried out into the impact of the post on the URC, which will shape the future resourcing of rural mission and ministry in the URC; that options for joint staffing with the Arthur Rank Centre are explored further; and that a proposal for resourcing rural ministry is brought to the Mission Committee in February 2022.