

Paper 12

Anti-racism update

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on progress following Resolution G2 adopted on behalf of General Assembly by Mission Council November 2020.
Main points	This paper summarises the actions taken since the adoption of resolution G2, including work on a template letter and FAQ document, conversations about a racial justice audit, work with the racial justice networks, development of legacies of slavery webpages, and further ecumenical collaboration.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution G2, Mission Council November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ecumenical partners, including the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England; CWM; Christian Aid.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Increased collaboration with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, Churches Together in England.

1. These are very early days since Mission Council November 2020 adopted Resolution G2, committing the URC to a journey towards being an actively anti-racist Church. The resolution was written to be deliberately wide reaching, with scope to address and effect change in every aspect of the Church's life. This will necessarily take time. Indeed, it can be regarded as a journey which has no end; our commitment must be ongoing if significant and lasting change is to take place.
2. Resolution G2 speaks of identifying barriers within all parts of the United Reformed Church's life, initiating strategies to combat racism within its own body and in the wider community / society. It instructs the mission committee to explore and develop initiatives

to address the barriers within our structures, and to develop resources to equip and empower the United Reformed Church to begin the process of education and change in all parts of its life. The resolution also instructs the mission committee to report on progress of this work to subsequent meetings of Mission Council and General Assembly. This paper is the first such feedback.

3. As expected, the Mission Council resolution has received some pushback. Some members of the Church question the need for the resolution, wishing to reject or question the idea of the URC being in any way racist. In other quarters, it has initiated heated conversations and frustration – ‘Haven’t we been here before?’ and ‘Doesn’t this just repeat previous commitments which have not been acted upon?’ There is a real sense that this time, we MUST make it count!

Mission Committee is listening – an important step in the Church’s journey – and seeking to respond sensitively to its Mission Council remit in light of what is being heard.

Progress to date includes:

a. Template letter

Recognising that some members of the URC are unfamiliar with the issues underpinning the Mission Council resolution, and / or some of the terms used in the text of the resolution, a template letter has been prepared, enabling Mission Committee / global and intercultural ministries to offer a quick and informed response to any queries received.

b. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document

Closely linked to the template letter, an FAQ document is being prepared, responding to the most commonly heard queries and concerns, e.g. ‘Why “Black Lives Matter” rather than “All Lives Matter”?’ and ‘What is the difference between “not racist” and “anti-racist”?’ It is intended that this will be a ‘living document’, being updated as necessary in response to ongoing conversations, and will be made available online in a printable format for wide and easy access.

c. Racial justice audit

Mission Committee is exploring the practicalities of a racial justice audit of the Church, to be undertaken by an independent, external body. Such an audit is important to enable an unbiased picture of the status quo to be established and inform the specific initiatives to be developed in response. Christian Aid has recently undertaken such an audit and is working through its responses. Mission Committee is in conversation with partners at Christian Aid to learn more about the potential scope, expectations and related costs of the audit process.

d. Racial justice networks in the URC

Global and intercultural ministries is supporting the work of the Racial Justice Advocates and Cascades of Grace, two URC networks engaged in different aspects of racial justice work. The aim is to join the dots, so that the two networks complement each other and support the overarching anti-racist journey of the denomination. The networks will be resourced and strengthened, including relevant training, to enable them to play an active role in engaging local churches and individuals in conversations, learning and the shift from ‘not racist’ to ‘anti-racist’.

e. Legacies of Slavery

Legacies of Slavery (LoS) remains an ongoing initiative in the URC, with clear links to the anti-racist commitment. Autumn 2020 saw the successful launch of the LoS webpage with materials geared towards Black History Month. The page

is now being revamped, with resources placed under the headings originally agreed for the LoS 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 (Zoom) initiative being launched in February 2021: Black History Monthly will focus on various aspects of Black History throughout the coming year using a variety of approaches (e.g. conversations ensuing from film, articles, poetry by Black writers), keeping issues on the agenda and inviting wide engagement across the URC and beyond.

f. Ecumenical relationships

Collaborative working relationships have been developed with partners in the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and in Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI). In January 2021, Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, participated in the first gathering of the new Racial Justice Advocacy Forum arising from the BUGB / CTBI contacts, seeking to enable more effective and prophetic action by the Churches regarding racial injustice. She has accepted an invitation to be part of a small core group taking this work forward. Karen is also representing the URC on a new Churches Together in England (CTE) Racial Justice Working Group, which had its first meeting in early February. Through her participation, mission committee is seeking to ensure the URC has a presence in relevant ecumenical conversations which may contribute to the URC's own anti-racist journey, learning from our partners, and supporting them in their journeys too.