

The United Reformed Church
Minutes of a virtual meeting of Mission Council held 15-17 March 2021

Monday 15th March

FIRST SESSION

The Moderator, Mr Peter Pay, was in the Chair.

21/01

The meeting of Mission Council began at 1100. The Moderator welcomed everyone and identified new members.

Apologies were received, for all or part of the meeting, from:

Philip French	<i>Observer from the Church of England</i>
The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson	<i>Wessex Synod Representative</i>
Ms Sarah Lane Cawte	<i>Convenor, Mission</i>
Mrs Val Morrison	<i>Chair, United Reformed Church Trust</i>

Those attending for the first time or attending in a new capacity were:

The Revd Richard Bradley	<i>North Western Synod Representative</i>
The Revd Richard Eastman	<i>East Midlands Synod Representative</i>
Mrs Adella Prichard	<i>Synod of Wales Representative</i>

Worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard; Bible study was led by the Revd Dr Janet Hopewell on pre-recorded video.

21/02

The Minutes of the Mission Council meeting of November 2020 were approved unanimously.

The Assembly Clerk noted that the Communications Committee wished to withdraw Paper C3, in order to consult further, and bring a revised proposal to future meeting.

The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, took the Chair.

The General Secretary moved en bloc, Resolutions:

C1: Communications Committee update

C2: URC digital charter

D1: Education and Learning Committee update

D2: Education and Learning Committee sizing

D4: Integration consultation update

F1: Faith and Order update

G1: Pensions update

H1: Capability Policy

I1: Mission Committee update

21/04

URC website

Mr Andy Jackson introduced a presentation on the current usage and potential future development of the URC website.

Mission Council met in groups to discuss the questions:

1. What is the purpose of the United Reformed Church?
2. How would you explain the URC to Christians and other faiths and to non-Christians?
3. How does the URC fulfil its purpose? Does it do this better than others?
4. How do you measure the delivery of that purpose?

Feedback from the groups was sent directly to Andy to be a part of the ongoing work.

21/05

Paper M1

Daily Devotions and Sunday Worship

The General Secretary presented Paper M1 and proposed the Resolution:

Mission Council instructs the General Secretariat to consult widely and bring costed proposals to General Assembly 2021 with a view to making the Daily Devotions and the Daily Devotions Sunday Service a continuing feature of the life of the United Reformed Church.

Mission Council *agreed* unanimously.

The session ended in prayer led by the Revd Helen Everard; Mission Council adjourned at 1500.

Tuesday 16th March

THIRD SESSION

Mission Council resumed at 0930. The Moderator, Mr Peter Pay, was in the chair.

Opening worship was led by the Revd Helen Everard; Bible study was led by the Revd Samantha Sheehan.

21/06

Paper G2

URC Future Pensions

The Deputy Treasurer, the Revd John Piper, introduced paper G2.

Mission Council met in groups to discuss the questions:

1. Do you agree that this is the right time to consider this matter? If not, why?
2. Which parts of this paper do you not adequately understand?

3. What questions have you got that are not answered by this paper?
4. Do you have a view on the examples of possible rates of Church and member contributions used in the modelling in section 5.4 and section 6?
5. Do you have any other suggestions about how we should prepare the members of General Assembly for its discussion of these matters?

Mission Council adjourned at 1100.

FOURTH SESSION

Mission Council resumed at 1130. The Moderator, Mr Peter Pay, was in the Chair.

Paper G2 was discussed. Among points raised were:

- impact of pension changes on younger ministers
- how this might be presented to General Assembly in a clear way – perhaps a pre-recorded video?
- would it be helpful to General Assembly to have a definite proposal?
- currently ministers are not encouraged to be responsible for their retirement provision
- while the URC offers the same stipend to all ministers, pensions may greatly vary
- how to prepare ministers for the discussion
- is retirement age a factor in the discussion?
- the duty of the church to look after its ministers
- should all serving stipendiary ministers be consulted before this goes to General Assembly?

The Revd John Piper responded that an explanatory video would be planned, and noted that this is a preliminary discussion and that General Assembly will be asked only for approval to continue the discussion. There is likely to be a proposal that the General Assembly agree to explore a possible move towards a Defined Contribution scheme.

The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing took the Chair.

21/07

Paper D/H1

Ministries and Education and Learning Committees

The Convenor of Ministries, the Revd Paul Whittle, presented Paper D/H1 and proposed the Resolution:

Mission Council adopts the Marks of Ministry of a Worship Leader and Lay Preacher.

Mission Council *agreed*.

21/08

Paper D/H2

Ministries and Education and Learning Committees

The Convenor of Education and Learning, Mr Alan Yates, presented paper D/H2 and proposed the Resolution:

Mission Council adopts the process for becoming a Worship Leader or Lay Preacher as detailed in this paper.

Following clarifications and considerable discussion, the Resolution was put.

Mission Council *agreed*.

21/09

Safeguarding

The General Secretary reported on safeguarding, noting that no safeguarding experts currently work at General Assembly level. The Rev Adrian Bulley has been appointed as Assistant General Secretary with responsibility for safeguarding.

The Revd Adrian Bulley reported on three matters to be brought to General Assembly:

1. Despite all safeguarding policies, there has never been a General Assembly safeguarding statement of policy.
2. Safeguarding is not currently mentioned in the URC Structure.
3. The Safeguarding Advisory Group should be replaced by a Safeguarding Committee, a standing committee of General Assembly.

Prayers were led by the Revd Helen Everard.

Mission Council adjourned at 1256.

Wednesday 17th March

FIFTH SESSION

Mission Council resumed at 0930. The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, was in the Chair.

Worship was led by the Revd Helen Everard.

21/10

Paper A2

General Assembly 2021

The Revd Adrian Bulley presented paper A2.

21/11

Paper D3

Education and Learning Committee

Mr Alan Yates presented Paper D3, and proposed the Resolution:

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council accepts the revised discipleship development strategy and its complementary discipleship development fund policy and operation.

No formal amendment was tabled, but Mission Council, at the suggestion of the Revd Ruth Whitehead, recommended that wealthier synods be advised to provide funding for discipleship development, and less wealthy synods encouraged to use the fund. At the suggestion of the Revd Graham Hoslett, Mission Council recommended that the amount available to synods (Paper D3 6.6.3) be increased to £2000.

The resolution was put. Mission Council *agreed* unanimously.

The Moderator, Mr Peter Pay, took the Chair.

21/12

Paper J3

Nominations Committee

The Convenor of Nominations, the Revd Ray Adams, moved Resolution J3:

Mission Council appoints the Revd Geoffrey Felton to be Moderator of the Mersey Synod for a seven-year term from 1st August 2021.

Mission Council *agreed* unanimously with virtual applause.

The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, took the Chair.

21/13

The Deputy General Secretary Mission, Ms Francis Brien reported on the URC's response to the government's recent announcement of its intention to increase the number of Trident nuclear warheads in the UK.

21/14

Paper I4

Walking the Way

The Deputy General Secretary Mission, presented paper I4.

In discussion, the Steering Group was commended for its work on Walking the Way, and offered the encouragement of Mission Council.

Mission Council adjourned at 1042.

SIXTH SESSION

21/15

Mission Council resumed at 1115. The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, was in the Chair.

The Moderator thanked those leaving Mission Council – the Revd Andrew Prasad and Mrs Rosie Martin – for their service, the Chaplain and Bible study leaders, and all members of Mission Council for their participation. She thanked those who had arranged the meeting: Samantha Bircham for Admin support; the tech teams from Affinity and the URC; the General Secretary and staff members; the minute secretary, and the Assembly Clerk and Assistant Clerk.

The General Secretary thanked the Nominations Convener, the Revd Ray Adams who is at Mission Council for the last time, and the Moderators for their leadership of the meeting.

Worship was led by the chaplain, the Revd Helen Everard, during which the Moderator, Mr Peter Pay, preached.

Mission Council adjourned at 1149.