

Paper C1

Communications update

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson (Convenor) revdpete@btinternet.com Mr Andy Jackson (Head of Comms) andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	An update of the work of the Communications Team in 2019.
Main points	To update Mission Council on the work of the Communications Committee. Reform magazine is dealt with in a separate paper.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Communications Committee, Publishing Board, General Secretariat, Finance, most teams at Church House, Synod Moderators, other Synod staff, church members via social media.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Reports of more members; increased engagement on social media; clearer design for URC identity and continuity purposes.

1. Purpose

The communications department exists to promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- Giving voice to good news
- Facilitating regional/national communications
- Supporting the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly
- Resourcing the local churches.

2. Head of Communications

In the summer of 2018, a recruitment process began to find a new Head of Communications, after Gill Nichol decided to step down after nine years of service.

The process selected Andy Jackson, a journalist and manager who has worked for the Methodist Church, Christian Aid, the Trinity Mirror Group, and also for the United Reformed Church as the Editorial Assistant for *Reform* in the mid-1990s. Andy is an Elder in the URC, a former Chair of FURY and his father is a minister who served at Over URC, Winsford, and Park URC, Reading.

Following consultations and his review of each of the areas of the team, the following changes took place.

3. Editorial guidance

The URC's House Style guide has been revised by Head of Communications, the Editor of *Reform*, Communications Officer and the production and Marketing Officer of *Reform*. It will soon be available on the URC website. Simpler than previous House Style guides, this latest version shows how the Church will edit and style most documents.

Graphics

- 4.1 There were several long-standing, internal, administrative processes that were stopped after they had been reviewed. The team is now able to offer even more services to the URC.
- 4.2 The design of the 2020 Prayer Handbook, *Prayers from the heart*, demonstrates clearly the impact of those changes. The design of the Prayer Handbook, which has now sold out of the standard edition, is part of an ongoing review of the look and feel of the church's printed materials and merchandise, a process which is ongoing.
- 4.3 In 2019 the team produced, amongst other items:
 - *Join the family*, a leaflet about membership of the URC, which is free and has been ordered in their thousands. A Facebook post in October revealed that at least 15 people had become members of the URC after receiving a copy of the leaflet, and we hope the actual total will be much bigger
 - a redesign of the *What is the URC?* leaflet, which as above is free and has been widely distributed. Both leaflets are available to download from the URC website and to order from the URC Bookshop, www.urcshop.co.uk (p&p applies)
 - a redesign of the URC Yearbook, making it easier to use
 - a redesign of the Prayer Handbook, again making it easier to use and to read, and the standard A5 edition has now sold out. The price of the Prayer Handbook was reduced as well, making it more affordable to a greater number of people
 - a Lectern (large print) edition of the Prayer Handbook
 - a set of URC merchandise including logo lapel pins, lanyards made from recycle plastic bottles, name badges, sticky notes, notepads, window stickers, branded clothing, the Commitment for Life chocolate bar (a

percentage of the sale goes to CfL), new logo design mugs, pens and pencils

- the Church Engagement Diary, an A4 diary for secretaries and lettings officers to use for the benefit of all church members. This is a product the URC used to produce many years ago and was commissioned when several requests for a replacement came in the same week!
- a range of Christmas resources including leaflets, posters and *Rejoice and Sing at Christmas*, a carol and song book for use away from local churches when the transportation of *Rejoice and Sing*, and other hymn books, is impractical
- a redesign of the URC Diary, making it much more useful for ministers and worship leaders, and the reintroduction of the A5 Diary
- Easter and Harvest posters, leaflets and service sheets
- URC Youth and URC Children's logos, the Lundie medal resources, *The Gift* – a resource for grandparents and godparents
- *Good Practice 5*, which will be distributed to all URCs
- a rebrand for Commitment for Life including eco-friendly merchandise
- the first in a series of URC Daily Devotions booklets, for groups or individuals to use. The first was on Vocations, and others are being planned
- They've asked me to be series – written by Gill Nichol and relevant URC bodies, such as the Faith and Order Committee and CRCW Coordinator. These leaflets are free to download and explain a variety of paid and voluntary roles in the URC. They currently include:
 - They've asked me to be a ... Committee Convenor
 - ... Committee Member
 - ... Church Related Community Worker
 - ... Church Secretary
 - ... Interim Moderator
 - ... Church Treasurer
 - This range of leaflets is being expanded to include Minister, Synod Moderator, General Assembly representative, Youth Elder and more. www.urch.org.uk/ask. Other suggestions are welcome.
- At the request of Youth Assembly and others, a leaflet about how to make public wi-fi available in churches was produced. This is available along with a new leaflet about making podcasts at www.urch.org.uk/information-guides.

4.4 Future work

In 2020, the following work is planned:

- resources for URC Youth Assembly
- a redesign of all certificates
- a low-cost family engagement kit for Advent
- revisions to the copyright and social media guide books
- materials for the General Assembly
- more titles in the *They've Asked Me To Be...* series: Elder, Minister, member of General Assembly, Church Welcomer, Moderator, Children's and Youth Elder, children's work volunteer, youth work volunteer, and Safeguarding Coordinator
- updates to The Manual

- a new logo and website for the Retired Ministers' Housing Society
- marketing materials for *Reform*
- updates to the information guides about social media, dealing with the media, copyright
- a cardboard leaflet holder for the Church's booklets and leaflets
- Easter giveaway booklet
- *Walking the Way* merchandise
- Children and Youth-Friendly Church resources
- *Stepwise* resources
- Updates on the resources available via www.cpo.org.uk/urc, a range of banners and posters for churches to customise and order.

4.5 Equipment

After a cost and usage analysis, various pieces of equipment were sold or leases terminated. This has not only saved the Church money but has also freed up space at Church House. The committee will review the use of equipment again next year.

5. Digital

- 5.1 The URC website has undergone several changes in the past year but it was quickly clear that more capacity was needed. It is hoped that by the time you read this, the recruitment of a new Digital Content Officer will be nearing completion. The budget for this role was created after the Admin Assistant, Marketing Assistant and Yearbook Coordinator roles were disestablished, and other savings made in the department.
- 5.2 The Communications Officer and Head of Communications have helped to grow the Church's social media channels, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook by targeted advertising, using money that would otherwise have been used to promote URC products such as the 2020 Diary in print media.
- 5.3 The growth in Facebook and Twitter, both in terms of those who Like or Follow the URC's channel, and the development of its Instagram channel, has helped to get the key messages and campaigns of the United Reformed Church to even more people.

5.4 Facebook: www.facebook.com/TheUnitedReformedChurch

Likes (Jan 1 – Dec 31)

2019: 1,504 to **2,247**

2018: 1,366 – 1504

2,247 was a 49% growth on the final figure of 2018. This was achieved by starting to share the URC Daily Devotions every day and by introducing a content sharing policy of up to four posts every day. Any more and the Facebook algorithm thinks you are oversharing and reduces the number of people who see your content.

Reach (the number of people who saw content from the URC's page or about the URC)

2019: 1,043,232

2018: 365,473

An increase of 185%.

Using promotions on Facebook, the URC's content was seen 767,903 times by 288,820 people. This generated 3,800 clicks to the corporate or bookshop website.

5.5 Twitter: www.twitter.com/UnitedReformed

Twitter impressions (the number of times a tweet appears in a user's timeline)

2019: 854,700

2018: 387,900

A growth of 120% year on year.

5.6 Instagram: www.instagram.com/unitedreformed

This was launched in 2019 and currently has 396 followers. The content is usually the same as that shared on Facebook and Twitter but there have been experiments with Instagram-only content, such as using the Bible Lens app, which generates Biblical quotes based on the photos you want to share. This channel will continue to be developed once the Digital Content Officer is recruited.

5.7 Daily Devotions podcast

Following the massive success of the Daily Devotions, which in 2019 included a very large and positive response to a user survey, there has been some development with the church's podcast channel on Soundcloud, and it is hoped that the Daily Devotions recordings, currently available on its website, will become a downloadable podcast in the near future. You can read the Daily Devotions and sign up to receive them by email at www.devotions.urc.org.uk/. The series on Vocations is also available as a printed booklet from the URC Bookshop.

6. Communications and media relations

- 6.1 After the review by the Head of Communications, some of the administrative processes were stopped. There was also a full review of the paper documents and those stored digitally. All electronic documents are independently backed up in an offsite location away from Church House in case there is a catastrophic event at the premises.
- 6.2 This freed up more time for the Communications Officer to curate the URC's corporate social media channels, continue to help the URC when dealing with ongoing and new reputation management cases, to curate and deliver News Update, the URC's monthly news email, to curate and publish multiple news stories in the URC website each week, to help with the media training of Moderators and others in the church, to lead sessions at RCLs, and to assist others in the staff team with their digital needs, including the development of the Walking the Way stories and new regular email.
- 6.3 The News Update email lost many of its subscribers after the introduction of GDPR in 2018 due to a historic lack of a confirmation email to verify that the person had signed up to the email. However, the numbers are building back up. At the start of 2019 there were 2051 subscribers and that number increased to 2531 by the end of the year, a 23% increase. www.urc.org/nu.

7. Publishing board

The Publishing board, a sub-committee of the Communications Committee, is chaired by the Revd Heather Whyte. The board's remit, agreed by the Communications Committee of October 2019, is to:

- assess publishing proposals from URC writers and unsolicited manuscripts and synopses and decide if they are publishable in line with the URC's publications policy (Paper C1, Mission Council 2016)
- identify gaps in the market and advise on publications that the URC may consider commissioning
- work with authors, editors and proof readers, voluntary and paid, along with URC ministers, CRCWs and staff when appropriate, in taking books through the publishing process, including copy editing
- publish approximately four URC titles a year in addition to the established annual titles, unless there are exceptional circumstances (such as notable anniversaries).