

Paper I3

Walking the Way: Living the Life of Jesus today

Walking the Way Steering Group

Just keep on walking...

Basic information

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Action required	Consider the future of Walking the Way following the end of CWM funding.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Provide an update on the work of the Walking the Way steering group and assist Mission Council's thinking about the future of Walking the Way.
Main points	Walking the Way continues to grow from strength to strength. Evaluation data and gathered stories highlight this. A more detailed evaluation will be prepared for General Assembly. Work on communications, online church and accompaniment continues.
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 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission committee Education and learning Communications Children's and youth work London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC).

Summary of impact

Financial	Post 2020, Council for World Mission (CWM) funding for Walking the Way will cease.
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 with more detailed conversations due to take place with the Methodist Church.
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1. Continuing the journey

- 1.1 As a denominational focus on whole-of-life discipleship, *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today* is making a significant impact. The stories which are shared, the resources which are promoted and the thinking which continues to flow from the reflections and explorations of the steering group are all met consistently with warm responses from across the denomination.
- 1.2 Each synod continues, in its own way, to develop whole-of-life discipleship as a significant part of its strategy. There is much to celebrate, to connect with, and to grow and learn from. A greater emphasis is needed on cross-fertilisation to help share the collective wisdom of these different approaches. Continued visits to synods by the *Walking the Way* project manager, further Life Size meetings of synod contacts and growing relationships with different networks will all continue to help with this.
- 1.3 Questions, thoughts or suggestions about *Walking the Way* are always welcome, as well as stories and examples of how whole-of-life discipleship is being lived out in different places across the URC. Please call 020 7520 2718 or e-mail wtw@urc.org.uk

2. Good News

- 2.1 A piece of good news which stands out is that over twenty thousand *Walking the Way* prayer cords have been distributed. In one case a URC congregation shared the cords with over 300 schoolchildren who came into contact with the church over the summer break, a tangible reminder that God and the Church are walking with them and their families through life's journey. In another, a server at a café noticed people wearing the prayer cords and wanted to know more. She took some away with her to give to her friends, a simple, but effective way of opening up a conversation about God.
- 2.2 Simon Peters, *Walking the Way's* project manager, has also found inspiring stories of individuals and local congregations living out their faith.
- 2.3 On visiting one project in Derbyshire, which supports families in difficult social circumstances with healthy eating, a chef approached Simon, saying 'The work that's going on here makes a huge difference to the people here, and I want you to know that'.
- 2.4 Vicky Longbone, a URC Church-Related Community Worker (CRCW) who helps to run the project, says that 'the project is not a religious one, but people know that Christians play a vital role, as a result of their faith, in making this happen. Whatever people coming along might believe themselves, they know that, in followers of Jesus, they find people they can trust, people who will be there for them, people who will love them unconditionally'.

- 2.5 The success of this project is not due to the involvement of experts or highly-qualified specialists. It is down to ordinary people recognising the presence of God in their own everyday realities and giving of their time and talents in response. This is what it means to Walk the Way of Jesus, to live the life of Jesus today! 'It's great that church folk are involved in things like this,' one of the parents in the group said, 'I hope they keep doing it, 'cos we need it.'

3. Thinking about the future

- 3.1 With an acute awareness that Council for World Mission (CWM) funding for *Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today* would always be limited, the steering group has long sought to consider the impact which *Walking the Way* has had at every stage of its journey in order to help the URC consider what should happen in the future.
- 3.2 The starting point of evaluation has been the question 'What would not have happened within our churches had *Walking the Way* not been in place?' This has led to the collection of helpful data, including annual church returns in 2018 about *Holy Habits* and 2019 about *Walking the Way* more explicitly, the numbers and purpose of orders for prayer cords and applications for logo use, email queries and comments received, as well as data relating to our social media accounts, to name but some of the sources. Data continues to be gathered and analysed in order to support the denomination in making decisions about the future of *Walking the Way*.
- 3.3 Already this data is revealing good news about the development of *Walking the Way*, including the revelation that, just a few months in, significant numbers of local churches had already heard of *Holy Habits*, one of the resources recommended by *Walking the Way*, and spoke positively about its impact on the life of the congregation. In addition, the vast majority of queries received by the *Walking the Way* have been overwhelmingly positive in their feedback about the worthwhile nature of the focus, and have sought more information or support for congregations in deepening their involvement.
- 3.4 A detailed report focusing on the annual returns data from 2019 about *Walking the Way* and summarising important findings from the other sources mentioned above will be prepared for General Assembly in July 2020 as the denomination considers the future of its long-term focus on whole-of-life discipleship.

4. Resources and communications

- 4.1 Whilst helping people to navigate the plethora of existing resources available to support their discipleship remains a high priority for the Steering Group, it is clear from the feedback we have received across our networks that there are materials which it would be useful for the Steering Group to produce.
- 4.2 As such, a plan for 2020 is being finalised to ensure effective resource production throughout the year, including resources for the different seasons of the year (Lent/ Easter, Pentecost, Summer, Harvest, Remembrance and Advent), as well as developing other resource ideas (Worship/Spirituality resources, Educational events/opportunities, visual/photographic resources, highlighting/signposting

resources on social justice and stewardship). Updates will be provided on these as they progress.

- 4.3 At time of writing (end of January) we have enough stories and social media posts to take us to the end of March, with more to be uploaded. The addition of Hootsuite to our available tools has helped hugely in reducing the time needed for social media planning. Small amounts of sustainable *Walking the Way* merchandise have been purchased, as requested by the steering group. We are awaiting delivery of this now. Efforts to replace *Walking the Way* logos which do not contain the strapline are well underway.

5. Online Church

- 5.1 The steering group, in continuing its explorations into the concept of online church, has continued consultations with various groups across the URC, including synod clerks and moderators. The group considers it worth continuing to unpack the many issues which this important topic raises.
- 5.2 This has been inspired in part by a desire to support young adults in their whole-of-life discipleship development, but it is by no means only relevant for younger people.
- 5.3 Questions of funding, pastoral care, security and safeguarding are important, and these are being considered very carefully by the steering group.
- 5.4 The steering group plans to set up a small task group of people with appropriate experience and knowledge to help the group analyse findings thus far and develop more detailed proposals about how to proceed.
- 5.5 Some possibilities include setting up a space connected with the URC website to support groups within the United Reformed Church who wish to explore online church to do so safely and securely, supporting people in developing their discipleship through their existing online presence and signposting people to existing online communities which may be of interest to them.

6. Accompaniment

- 6.1 Work continues with the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity (LICC) on a pilot accompaniment programme to support local churches in exploring whole-of-life discipleship.
- 6.2 Participant churches in Southern Synod have commenced their work with the LICC and have already shared positive feedback from their experience.
- 6.3 Northern Synod is still working on recruiting churches, with a Vision Day planned to take place before Mission Council meets, which should hopefully help with recruitment.
- 6.4 Plans are in place with the LICC to review data from the pilot programme, as the

Steering Group seeks to shape the programme for use across different URC contexts. This includes feedback from churches across the denomination which already have experience of working with the LICC. Any churches with anything to feed into this process should contact the Walking the Way desk (simon.peters@urc.org.uk).

7. Stepwise

- 7.1 The Steering Group continues to work closely with Education and Learning to develop *Stepwise* as an intergenerational, participant-focused learning experience for whole-of-life discipleship development, offered as a programmatic element of *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today*. The Walking the Way project manager sits on the Stepwise Task and Finish Group, and the Stepwise programme manager sits on the Walking the Way Steering Group to help this process.