

Paper 14

URC's 50th Anniversary

Walking the Way Steering Group

Let's get this party started!

Basic information

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Action required	Setting up a task group to begin planning for the upcoming 50 th anniversary of the United Reformed Church.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council instructs the Walking the Way Steering Group to establish a small task group to bring forward detailed proposals for the celebration of the URC's upcoming 50th anniversary.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Reasons to celebrate the URC's 50 th anniversary, and a proposal about planning for this.
Main points	There is much to be thankful for in the life of the URC. Celebrating this during the upcoming 50 th anniversary of the URC will keep the Church in touch with its own story and help us to focus on the future. If we want to celebrate well, we must start planning now. A task group will help us to do this.
Previous documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	MCAG, Children's and Youth Work, Communications, Ministries, Mission (Ecumenical and Interfaith, Global and Intercultural).

Summary of impact

Financial	Apart from task group meeting costs, all other costs dependent on findings of task group.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Good opportunity to work with our ecumenical, interfaith and international partners, recognising their importance in the URC's story, as well as vice-versa.

1. Why celebrate?

- 1.1 Moments of celebration are important. They enable us to give thanks to God as we reflect on how God has led us thus far and consider where God might be calling us to as we continue our journey.
- 1.2 The Bible reminds us that times of jubilee should begin with the blowing of trumpets. In this Golden Jubilee of the URC, we have a chance to engage with all that has gone well on in the denomination's pilgrimage thus far. We can look around and see the impact which the Church has had on people's lives locally, regionally, nationally and internationally, both within its own life and the global ecumenical movement.
- 1.3 There are many different elements within the jubilee which can be focused on at different points, in different places, and in different ways:
 - a) We give thanks for the Extraordinary General Assembly on 05 October 1972 which enabled the union of the Congregational Church in England and Wales and the Presbyterian Church of England, as well as the Act of Parliament which gave legal support to the founding of the denomination. These were crucial milestones in the UK's ecumenical landscape.
 - b) We give thanks for the life and witness of local congregations and communities.
 - c) We give thanks for further crucial milestones in 1981 and 2000 when Churches of Christ and the Congregational Union of Scotland joined, respectively, to bring about the United Reformed Church as we know it today.
 - d) We give thanks for the many ways in which the URC and its antecedents were trailblazers for the Church in the UK. E.g. the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman (Constance Coltman) to the ministry of word and sacraments; the first campaign group for racial justice, the League of Coloured People, was initiated by an elder from our tradition, Dr Harold Moody; the URC was one of the first major organisations to campaign for people with AIDS; and the URC produced the Charter for Children, paving the way for intergenerational awareness.

2. Why think about it now?

- 2.1 The year 2022 may seem far away at the moment, but the experience of our ecumenical partners, for example the Church of North India which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, and the Council for World Mission which celebrated its bi-centennial in 1995, suggests that, if celebrations are to involve and enable the whole Church, planning must begin well in advance.
- 2.2 The Walking the Way Steering Group has consulted with representatives from Children's and Youth Work, Communications, Ministries, and Mission (Ecumenical and Interfaith, Global and Intercultural) to share some initial thoughts about the jubilee and how it might be celebrated.

3. What should be done?

- 3.1 Given the multifaceted nature of this jubilee, it is likely that different committees, synods, local churches and other groups within the URC will wish to celebrate in their own ways.
- 3.2 In order to do this, they will need encouragement at Assembly level with a chance to see their own events as being part of one united celebration across the denomination. This could, perhaps, culminate in an in October event which would accommodate as many people from across the denomination as possible. Resources will also be needed to help people reflect on the many questions and topics which the jubilee will raise.

Following the success of the first ministers' gathering in 2018, another is already being planned for 2022 with generous funding being offered by Synods from their existing ministers' school funds. This will enable ministers and CRCWs to take advantage of the opportunities which the jubilee year brings.

- 3.3 This will not, however, cater for the many elders, lay preachers, members and others who are part of our Church's life. Work will be needed to support and engage them.

4. How might this be taken forward?

- 4.1 Communications is already starting to enquire into possible venue hire and logistics for an event, and some initial ideas have already been noted by the Walking the Way steering group in consultation with the others mentioned above. Now the most effective way forward seems to be a small, well-remitted task group to develop plans further, establish more detailed budget plans, and report back to Mission Council in November.
- 4.2 Some of the main ideas which the group might focus on include:
- a) A denominational event in central London, where the URC came into being and many of the activities associated will take place, surrounded by parallel events and activities run by synods and local churches in venues and settings around the denomination
 - b) Noting and establishing ways of joining up ideas and proposals from different groups and committees within the United Reformed Church, including:
 - i) Children's and Youth Work's existing theme of 'Jubilee', Youth Executive's proposal for an intergenerational gathering of those who have been involved, are involved, or will be involved in URC Youth
 - ii) the desire of Resource Centres for Learning to be used as resources to enable and enhance the celebrations
 - iii) Reform magazine's 50th anniversary
 - c) The production of resources to help people engage with the celebrations including promotional materials, worship resources, event organisation guidance, social justice resources (e.g. 'Steps on the Way: What is the URC's footprint?') and materials related to other areas of potential engagement, making full use of Church House's communications and graphics capabilities. Resources which will be produced elsewhere such

as Children's and Youth Work's annual theme materials and the Prayer Handbook, etc. must also be promoted.

5. How much might this cost?

- 5.1 The main bulk of the costs at Assembly level would come in the organisation of an event for the denomination, and with any resources which are produced to encourage or enable a wide audience to get involved in celebrating this important milestone. In addition, there will be meeting costs for the proposed task group, but these will be modest, with the group meeting virtually whenever possible.
- 5.2 To meet these costs, we would apply to the Legacy Fund, as this celebration affects the denomination so widely and deeply. We would also encourage the various General Assembly committees to make some funding available for jubilee-related work. We would also look at general fundraising. It is our hope that, from these various streams, we will be able to put together a sufficient budget for organising an Assembly level event and resources related to the jubilee.