



To: Members of Mission Council, staff in attendance and observers

Dear Colleagues,

February 2020

Mission Council

Tuesday to Thursday 17 to 19 March 2020 – High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire

I look forward warmly to seeing you at Mission Council and write now to mention several practical matters as we prepare for the meeting.

1. There will be an introduction session at 12 noon on the first day for new Mission Council members, to outline processes and procedures, introduce the Assembly officers, and explain some items of business. Old timers who would like to attend are welcome too. A full version of our rules for doing business is in the 'Standing Orders' (which are also used at General Assembly). These can be found on the URC website at www.urc.org.uk/about-mission-council.html
2. At General Assembly and Mission Council meetings we take certain business *En Bloc*. These are items where the Moderators think that decisions might be reached responsibly without further discussion. You will see that the agenda includes a slot when these items will be voted on.

I suggest you read the *En Bloc* papers first. This will give you time to contact the author of a paper if you have questions. Authors' names and email addresses are noted on the cover sheets. If you think any of these papers do need discussion at Mission Council, particularly if you disagree with a proposed course of action, you may ask that a piece of business be removed from *En Bloc*. A sign-up sheet will be available at the meeting, where you can list the paper you wish to be withdrawn. If an item gets three signatures by close of business on the first day, it will be withdrawn from *En Bloc* and added to our agenda, with time given for discussion.

I need to remind you too that we really rely on every Mission Council member to read the papers and take note of information to relay back to their synods. In using the *En Bloc* method of decision-making there is no wish to bury information or to avoid discussions which Mission Council ought to have. We must all ensure the appropriate flow of information from Mission Council to the synods.

3. You should already have several papers from the first mailing: a cover letter, an expenses form, directions to our venue, a list of members, and (for new members) 'What we are about in Mission Council.' If any of these are missing, please contact Helen Munt at Church House, 020 7916 2020, helen.munt@urc.org.uk
4. Observers and URC staff who are not members of Mission Council do not participate in decision-making. Staff members are welcome to speak but, like observers, they should not use orange and blue cards.
5. We are not expected to post on social media sites during business sessions. This restriction only applies when Council is in session; members may join in online debates during breaks, about business that is completed (although not on business that has only been adjourned to a later session of the meeting). As ever, everything shared on these sites is the responsibility of the author and subject to the same defamation laws as any other written communication.

6. All bedrooms are en-suite. To comply with the venue's health and safety regulations, please do not bring food from outside into the Centre, nor take food from the dining room to your room.
7. Below are the papers expected at the meeting, listed according to the ways the Moderators presently mean to address them:

Category A: En Bloc

C1	Communications update
I1	Mission update
I3	Walking the Way update
J1	List of Nominations
M1	Re the Assistant Clerk
M2	Revised Risk Review process
P1	Responses to Resolution five from General Assembly
U1	Presenting of business to General Assembly
Y1	Remote participation in Councils and Committees of the Church

Category B: majority voting

No items at this meeting.

Category C: consensus decision making

B1	Children's and Youth Work: Child Friendly Churches	
C2	Communications: support for Reform magazine	
D1	Education and Learning: pathways to lay preaching	
G1+G2	Finance: planning and overseeing our pension funds	
I2	Mission: Legacies of Slavery	
J2	Nominations: supplementary list of nominations	*
R1-R3	Safeguarding Advisory Group	
T1-T3	MIND: revising the Ministerial Disciplinary Process	

Group discussion

F1	Faith and Order: language, gender and God
I4	Walking the Way: the Jubilee of 2022 (this will go on to consensus decision making)

Two of these discussions – of papers C2 and T1-3 – are designated by the Moderators as urgent. In each case we have reason for wanting to come to a clear mind, rather than deferring the discussion until another day. So if consensus eludes us in either of these discussions, other options will be available.

A small number of papers, identified above*, have to be prepared late, and will be available online a few days before the meeting – or, if you have requested hard copy, on arrival at the meeting.

As always, please come to share, listen, reflect and discern together, and to support each other in fellowship outside the formal timetable. Let us treat one another with grace as we seek the guidance of God.

With best wishes,
Yours sincerely,

John

**MISSION COUNCIL
17 to 19 MARCH 2020**

GROUPS

The first named person in each group is asked to act as group leader and the second named person in each group as reporter

<p>A</p>	<p>IAN HARDIE <i>Leader</i> JENNY MILLS <i>Reporter</i> Elaine Colechin Paul Franklin David Greatorex Carole Marsden David Pickering Sam Richards Maureen Shepherd Phil Wall Kevin Watson</p>	<p>B</p>	<p>JOHN PIPER <i>Leader</i> VAL MORRISON <i>Reporter</i> Rosie Buxton Lorraine Downer David Herbert Keir Hounsome Brian Jolly Mark Kirkbride Ellen Mulenga Fiona Thomas Alan Yates</p>
<p>C</p>	<p>ALAN SPENCE <i>Leader</i> RUTH WHITEHEAD <i>Reporter</i> Melanie Campbell Clare Downing Jo Harris Nick Jones Andrew Middleton Marilyn Piper Bill Robson Steve Summers Sandra Wallace</p>	<p>D</p>	<p>REUBEN WATT <i>Leader</i> MARION TUGWOOD <i>Reporter</i> John Bradbury Tim Crossley George Faris Nicola Furley-Smith Gwen Jennings Rosie Martin Peter Pay Andrew Prasad Peter Stevenson</p>
<p>E</p>	<p>FRAN KISSACK <i>Leader</i> SIMEON MITCHELL <i>Reporter</i> Jane Baird Martyn Coe Ken Forbes Philip French Rita Griffiths Richard Lockley Sally Martin Pam Tolhurst Paul Whittle</p>	<p>F</p>	<p>MARIA MILLS <i>Leader</i> GRAHAM HOSLETT <i>Reporter</i> Bridget Banks Richard Church Elizabeth Clark Jacky Embrey Andrew Evans Simon Fairnington Ken Howcroft Anne Lewitt John Samson</p>
<p>G</p>	<p>LYTHAN NEVARD <i>Leader</i> ADRIAN BULLEY <i>Reporter</i> Francis Brienen Philip Brooks Sue Brown Nneoma Chima Geoffrey Clarke David Coaker Bernie Collins Steve Faber Charles Mather</p>	<p>H</p>	<p>GEORGE WATT <i>Leader</i> HELEN LIDGETT <i>Reporter</i> Chuka Agbasiere James Breslin Ruth Dixon Joan Grindrod-Helm Andy Jackson Jim Merrilees Victoria Turner Simon Walkling</p>

Mission Council agenda

17 to 19 March 2020, High Leigh, Hoddesdon

Notes:

1. This running order can only be provisional. The Moderators will adjust it if items get dealt with more quickly, or take longer, than we initially expect.
2. Rooms for any group work in this agenda will be made known when you arrive.

Tuesday 17 March		
12:00 to 12:45	Introduction session for new MC members	
12:00 to 13:00	<i>Registration in the Main House reception area</i>	
1:00	Lunch	
Session one 14:00 to 15:30	Worship, including Bible study and Holy Communion	
3:30	Tea break <i>Access to rooms available</i>	
Session two 16.15 to 18.15	Introductions and admin Minutes and Matters Arising Ministerial Disciplinary Process	T1-3
18:30 to 20:00	Dinner	
Session three 20:00 to 21:00 21.00	Pensions Planning Children's and Youth Work Evening prayers	G1+G2 B1
Wednesday 18 March		
8:15	Breakfast	
Session four 9:15 to 11:00	Worship and Bible study Education and Learning, with Stepwise update	D1
11:00	Coffee	

Session five 11:30 to 13.00	Legacies of Slavery Speaking of God (groupwork)	I2 F1
13:00 to 14:00	Lunch	
Session six 14:00 to 16:00	Free time or remaindered business	
16.00	Tea available	
Session seven 16.30 to 18.30	Communications: supporting <i>Reform</i> En bloc resolutions Nominations tabled paper Matters removed from en bloc Discipleship – Footsteps along the Way – Richard Church	C2 J2
18:30 to 20:00	Dinner	
Session eight 20:00 to 21:00 21.00	Groupwork on URC Jubilee Evening prayers	I4
Thursday 19 March		
8:15	Breakfast	
Session nine 9:30 to 10:45	Worship, including Bible study Safeguarding	R1-3
10:45 to 11:15	Coffee	
Session ten 11:15 to 12:45	Remaindered business Thanks and greetings Closing prayers	
13:00	Lunch and departures	
13:45 to 15.00 (max)	Meeting of committee convenors	

Paper B1

Children and Youth Friendly Church Scheme

Children's and youth work committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Jenny Mills (committee convenor) revdjmill@btinternet.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council welcomes the review of the United Reformed Church's Child Friendly Church Award and commends the new Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme to replace this from 2020 as an award to be made by children's and youth work committee on behalf of the denomination to churches completing the approval process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A review of the Child Friendly Church Award and recommendation for a new process to replace this in the United Reformed Church.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2006: Youth and Children's Work Committee report, and Resolution 42.
Consultation has taken place with...	CYDO+ team, a number of local churches Oxford, Southwark and Liverpool Dioceses of the Church of England.

Summary of impact

Financial	To be met from children's and youth work committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Other churches may be interested to adopt a similar scheme, and some Church of England Dioceses are currently reviewing their schemes along similar lines.

1. The United Reformed Church Child Friendly Church Award (CFCA)

- 1.1 The Child Friendly Church Award scheme was created after the Anglican Diocese of Liverpool carried out a review of its life and work. The resulting report made a keynote recommendation that parishes 'welcome and integrate children and their families into the worshipping life of their church'. It concluded that it is desirable that churches advertise to the community that they take provision for the young seriously. Churches inviting children in this way should provide a quality service which should be accountable to the church leadership and meet with certain set criteria. A new scheme was introduced to encourage churches to put children and families on their agendas, to work towards certain targets and obtain a certificate and an award to be displayed as appropriate.
- 1.2 Having seen the scheme, the URC Assembly Youth and Children's Work Committee felt it was a good idea and adapted it for use within the United Reformed Church. 'Towards a Charter for Children in the Church', introduced at General Assembly 1990, challenged churches to become fully inclusive in their work with children. This scheme offered a way to measure progress towards that goal.
- 1.3 In 2006 General Assembly resolved, 'General Assembly commends the Child Friendly Church Award scheme to local churches and recognises the award as a sign of good practice.
- 1.4 The accompanying report said 'This is a voluntary programme with a light touch, but it is not just an exercise in ticking boxes. It is more about recognising the importance of children and young people in the local church and continually improving how we welcome them and minister with them.'
- 1.5 The URC version of the Child Friendly Church Award scheme began in 2006 and was reviewed and updated in 2012. It was further reviewed and updated in 2017 and the renewal period extended to every five years (from every three years). Churches were presented with a plaque to display, a letter confirming approval, and a register of all Child Friendly Churches was kept by Church House.

2. CFCA impact

The CFCA has proved of interest and value to local churches in the URC. In total 117 churches have successfully completed the application process and been awarded plaques. There is a notable disinclination by over half of the churches involved to date to renew. Feedback suggests that this is in part due to the onerous process and the lack of perceived benefit in repeating it for the local church. Although the intention was to avoid a 'tick box' mentality, in practice the form requires a large number of boxes to be ticked, is rather 'one size fits all', and focusses on the current situation rather than aiding future development. There is a desire shared by the CYWC and the CYDO+ team to increase the accessibility of this scheme.

SYNOD	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	TOTAL
2006	1				2									3
2007	1				2	1	2		1	1	2		1	11
2008	2	2	1		2		3	1	4	1	4		2	22
2009 (renewed)	1		1		4	1	2	1	3	2	3		1	19
2010 (renewed)		1			5									6
2011 (renewed)	1	1					1	2	4		1			10
2012 (renewed)		1	1	3	1 3			1	1		2 1		1	11 5
2013 (renewed)		2		2				1 1	3 1		1 8			9 10
2014 (renewed)	1		1		2			1	1	1				3 5
2015 (renewed)		2			4				1	1	1			3 7
2016 (renewed)					1 6			1 2	3		1	1		7 8
2017 (renewed)	1		1		4 3					1		1		7 5
2018 (renewed)				2	2		1		1		1			4 3
2019 (renewed)		1		1	1				1		2			4 2
TOTAL no churches	6	10	5	6	24	2	9	7	22	7	14	2	5	117
TOTAL current	1	3	1	2	21	0	1	3	6	3	4	2	0	46

3. CYDO+ team review of CFCA process

3.1 In February 2019 the team of children and youth development officers and other synod lead workers for children’s and youth work (CYDO+ team) set up a working group to revise the existing CFCA process following feedback from new team members. There was general agreement that the existing approach was too similar to an inspection with a tick-box approach. The paperwork and process were too complicated, and did not actively encourage engagement with children and young people beyond Sunday provision and running programmes. The working group discovered that the originator of the scheme, Liverpool Diocese, and another key participant, Oxford Diocese, had each separately overhauled their processes, changed their logos and in the latter case changed the name and introduced two levels. Both had moved to a more reflective process, inviting open-ended responses from the churches.

3.2 The working group agreed underlying principles:

- An accompanied process – by a synod appointed person (CYDO+ or their representative)

- An appreciative and affirming process – appropriate for every church, regardless of their starting position in relation to children and young people
- A reflective process – inviting churches to grow and develop in an on-going way
- Promoting children's and young people's spirituality
- Promoting an intergenerational ethos.

3.3 The working group developed a new pack for churches and a process to use with churches. This was taken to the CYDO+ team meeting and children's and youth work committee for discussion and subsequent further amendment, and then approval by both. The children's and youth work committee proposed a new name to reflect the new emphasis.

The children's and youth work team have produced a draft plaque, leaflet and booklet to support this proposal, and some sample material will be circulated at Mission Council.

4. Proposal for replacement: Children and Youth Friendly Church

A new scheme is proposed with a new name, to replace the Child Friendly Church Award: Children and Youth Friendly Church Scheme:

A church can apply to join the scheme through their CYDO+ or **directly to Church House.**

- The CYDO+ or their representative will then take the role of accompanier and meet with the church and provide a booklet outlining a reflective process to be worked through.

They would then meet with the church again to reflect **together on their engagement with children and young people, and agree an action plan and whether the church is to be recommended for approval.**

Their **completed booklet would be submitted for approval by the children's and youth work team** along with the action plan and an outline 'pen portrait' of the church's engagement with children and young people completed by the accompanier.

A plaque stating **'this is a Children and Youth Friendly Church' showing the year it was approved and the year it expires (five years later) will be presented by the synod on behalf of children's and youth work committee to the church. A record shall be kept of all churches approved by the scheme.**

- The CYDO+ or representative would keep in contact with the church to review progress in relation to the action plan, and to prepare them for re-approval is appropriate after five years.

5. Currently being tested

The new scheme is being trialled by a couple of churches to ensure it is as easy to engage with as intended, and that it promotes excellence in children's and youth work. Minor amendments may then be made by the CYDO+ team to the supporting paperwork.

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.urc.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.urc.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).

Paper C2

Reform magazine

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	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Mission Council recognises the contribution of <i>Reform</i> to the life and work of the United Reformed Church and notes the commitment of the Communications Committee and staff team to continue its growth and development over the five-year period from January 2021 to December 2025, a period that includes the 50th anniversary of the URC and the magazine. 2) Mission Council acknowledges with thanks the work of the <i>Reform</i> team and the wider Communications Team in making savings and reducing the financial cost to the Church, and endorses the further changes outlined in the report. 3) Mission Council resolves to support <i>Reform</i> over the five-year period to December 2025 by continuing with a reduced annual subsidy, not to exceed £62,000 in 2021 and £50,000 thereafter, and asks the Communications Committee to make regular reports to Mission Council.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	An update on Reform in 2019, and a report on progress made since the last formal report to Mission Council to increase sales of the magazine, to improve its finances, with a recommendation for continued support and investment.
Main points	The value of <i>Reform</i> ; marketing work undertaken; increased URC content; increased engagement with distributors; introduction of marketing tools for local churches.
Previous relevant documents	Paper C1, Mission Council, November 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Communications Committee, General Secretariat, Finance Department.

Summary of impact

Financial	Reform continues to need financial investment from URC central funds. This amount has been reduced, due to savings made by the <i>Reform</i> team and the wider Communications Team, to a £50,000 cap (the previous amount was £90,000). This would end on 31 December 2025, an extension of the existing agreement but at a reduced level.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	<i>Reform</i> is well read outside the denomination. Passing this resolution (and therefore supporting the continued development of <i>Reform</i>) will enable continued promotion of the magazine, especially to ecumenical partners and members working in, and attending, LEPs.

1. Background

Mission Council last discussed the future for *Reform* in November 2017. There was consensus that the magazine continues to make a valuable contribution to the life of the United Reformed Church, and it was agreed to extend the denomination's existing investment in *Reform* – not to exceed £90,000 in any one budget year – a period that finishes at the end of 2020.

2. The value of *Reform*

- 2.1 The feedback that the team continues to receive online, by email, in verbal comments and by letter says that *Reform* inspires and challenges, provokes debate, keeps readers informed about the life and work of the Church, and continues to add something to our denominational identity.
- 2.2 The editor of *Reform* regularly preaches in churches, contributing to local church life and building relationships with *Reform*.
- 2.3 *Reform* and *Digest* is one of the channels through which 'Walking the Way' and Stepwise is promoted in churches.
- 2.4 The digital edition of *Reform*, launched in April 2015, offers alternative and cheaper ways to read the magazine. The app is also more accessible for people with visual impairments, and it comes with a searchable online archive.
- 2.5 The communications committee believes that *Reform* contributes to the mission, discipleship and identity of the URC is well worth the annual investment that the denomination makes. But the *Reform* team, and the committee, have been mindful of the investment and has been working hard to reduce costs:
 - In 2019 the mailing house was changed which saved the magazine around £12,000 per year
 - The printing of the magazine is under review, as there is a possible £5,000 saving achieved by combining the printing and mailing service
 - The subscriptions service is currently under review, especially since a recent price rise. The team will look at other ways to manage subscriptions, renewals and the marketing of the magazine.

- 2.6 *Reform* generates money but not at the level of a commercial enterprise. It is a tool for the mission and discipleship of the URC. *Reform* is also used to promote URC publications and merchandise, which improve awareness of the URC. Without *Reform*, sales opportunities will be lost.
- 2.7 We should not think of *Reform* simply in terms of its cost to the denomination, but as a tool which we would invest in like any other. If someone interested in the URC or becoming a member was given a copy, they would read a whole range of interesting features about the URC and Christianity in general.
- 2.8 The magazine should be thought about in terms of interesting those interested in becoming members and sustaining those who are Ministers, Elders, other leaders, CRCWs, volunteers and members.
- 2.9 Many charities spend large amounts of money to recruit and retain regular donors. The URC is also doing that but instead of regular giving, it is making disciples of Christ, and *Reform* is a regular tool to help with persuasion, conversion and maintenance of that discipleship.

3. Editorial board

The editorial board meets annually with members from across the URC giving feedback on the content, ideas for future content (such as the Here & Now column for younger writers), how *Reform* is received in local churches and how well it is serving their needs.

4. Content

As well as the monthly Editorial from Stephen Tomkins, the magazine also includes:

- News items from the UK and the world which have a religious slant or impact on the church's work (e.g. Church and Society, Global and Intercultural Ministry)
- Readers' letters
- A Letter From ... location-based features covering a diverse range of subjects. In the past year it has included articles from the area of the Amazon where large fires are taking place to clear land; the Faith Bridge, the focal point in London for religious climate emergency activists; Budapest, Uganda, New Zealand and Angola.
- Art in Focus, fresh religious perspectives on well-known and little-known works of art
- Interviews with a wide range of people, including some controversial figures. In the past year this has included Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Amnesty International; Jack Monroe, chef and activist; Nadia Bolz-Weber, writer, speaker and church leader; Benjamin Kwashi, Archbishop of Jos, in central Nigeria; Tim Farron MP; Ben Lindsay and Martin Mosebach
- Chapter and verse, new Bible studies that are also available from Reform's website for churches and groups to use
- I am ... articles based on roles, lifestyles or other usual and unusual perspectives. These have included articles from a farmer, someone on sick leave, an addict, survivor of economic abuse and a haemophiliac
- Commitment-Phobe, charting the journey of a former atheist on her church-based Christian journey
- Here & Now, a new column for younger writers in the Church

- A Good Question, where up to four people offer their reflections on a major question. Questions have included 'What do you think of the virgin birth?', 'Are you afraid of dying?', 'What is the Gospel?' and 'Is democracy broken?'.
- Sheila Maxey's column on her continuing pilgrimage. Sheila also edits the book reviews.
- Local church initiatives
- Film and book reviews
- The Reform Crossword, set by the Revd Colin Richards
- Do Stay for Tea and Coffee, a humorous column from Christian comedian and co-writer of *Miranda*, Paul Kerensa.
- Digest includes news from the URC and notices about its Ministers.

5. Community awards

Reform is again leading the Community Project Awards, in partnership with Congregational Insurance, which the magazine founded more than 20 years ago, which offers three local URC projects up to £2,000 each for innovative projects which have positive effects on local communities. These awards are presented at the General Assembly.

6. Reader survey

- 6.1 In 2019, the *Reform* team conducted a reader survey. The respondents described themselves as subscribers, past subscribers and those who read the magazine but don't necessarily subscribe. They were made up of URC members, adherents and users of church premises.
- 6.2 70% said *Reform* was either Excellent, Very Good or Good. As regular readers will know, the amount of URC-based content has been increased or made more obvious by the editorial team in the past year. A large majority of respondents agreed that *Reform* improves the way they see the URC.
- 6.3 The feedback received about the magazine has been, and will continue to be, responded to, by the editorial team along with the input by the editorial board.
- 6.4 One recent introduction is the Here & Now column, for younger writers in the Church. This is being greatly assisted by the Children's and Youth Work team, for which we are indebted.
- 6.5 Digest, the URC news supplement, which is included with every issue, and includes reporting from Mission Council, is read by nearly all of the subscribers.

7. The financial position

- 7.1 *Reform* continues to stay within the budget extended by Mission Council in 2017, and has not exceeded the £90,000 cap.
- 7.2 **Annual net cost of Reform 2015-2020**
2015 - £88,571
2016 - £88,172
2017 - £75,002

2018 - £75,294
2019 - £87,341
2020 up to £74,000 (budgeted)
2021 up to £62,000 (proposed)
2022 up to £50,000 (proposed)

- 7.3 The 2020 budgeted figure shows a reduction of £16,000. The subsidy has always been granted on the basis that it may not be used and the team is constantly aware of the financial support the Church gives it and is extremely grateful for that support.
- 7.4 The challenge has always been to keep costs as low as possible while not sacrificing the quality of the magazine. As stated above, following reviews about various aspects of its operation, savings have already been made and more will follow later this year.
- 7.5 The outcome of all this is that the Communications Committee is confident *Reform* can continue to help the mission and discipleship of the URC, with a reduction in the level of investment that Mission Council has agreed in the past.

8. Subscriptions

- 8.1 The price of an annual subscription to *Reform* was raised in December has been held at £29.50 after the results of the reader survey. The following charts the level of subscriptions:

8.2 Subscriptions to Reform (paper and digital)

March 2015	3,661
September 2015	4,108
March 2016	3,786
September 2016	3,765
March 2017	3,656
September 2017	3,669
March 2018	3,486
September 2018	3,489
March 2019	3,292
September 2019	3,541

8.3 Subscriptions and church membership

The saturation of the magazine in the membership remains constant. If you take the membership figures from the yearbook and divide it by the subscriptions in the September of the last three years, you get the following figures, which do not include the total number of readers as there is no way to monitor accurately how many people read *Reform* in households, churches or other groups.

2017 – 7.4%

2018 – 7.6%

2019 – 7.9%

9. Marketing *Reform*

The communications staff have introduced the following new marketing initiatives:

- A free magazine holder for Reform distributors

- A £1 for three issues direct debit offer
- Letter campaign to lapsed subscribers
- Regular updates about the latest issue on social media
- A presence as part of the URC stand at the Christian Resources Exhibition
- Increased incentives and communications to church distributors, a loyal band of volunteers who play a crucial role in the life of the magazine. We thank them regularly when we communicate with them and we urge Mission Council, Synods and churches to do the same
- A presence at the Greenbelt festival as part of the URC's associate partnership, with a special offer for those at Greenbelt.

10. Supporting *Reform*

- 10.1 Read the magazine, especially if you've not read a copy for a while, and letting *Reform* know what you think of it. All feedback is always welcome.
- 10.2 Spread the message to your synods and churches - it is a resource for preachers, worship leaders, Bible study leaders, house group leaders and more. It challenges, inspires, and helps to guide to Christian life. Please encourage local churches and people to subscribe.
- 10.3 As has been said to Mission Council before, 'Don't lose *Reform*.' We are delighted that people value *Reform* enough to share it, but we hope it is shared with a plea for those receiving second or third hand copies, or photocopies of an article, to consider subscribing. Another 1,700 subscribers and *Reform* would not need a subsidy from the Church.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 *Reform* continues to be valuable to the URC and worth the investment that the denomination makes in it. Because of savings made, *Reform* continues to reduce the cost to the church and this will continue.
- 11.2 The Communications Committee therefore asks Mission Council to extend the provision of funding to *Reform* for the period from 2021 to 2025.

Paper D1

Encouraging worship leading and preaching in the United Reformed Church

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mr Alan Yates, Convenor alan.yates@urc.org.uk Revd Fiona Thomas, Secretary fiona.thomas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision – adoption of resolutions
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council resolves: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. That from 2021, the normal route to becoming a Synod-Recognised Lay Preacher in the United Reformed Church will be based on Stepwise, in accordance with the proposals given in Appendix A of this paper;2. To request the Education and Learning Committee in consultation with the Ministries Committee and appropriate committees and officers of the Synods, to develop and publish detailed guidance by the end of 2020 for implementing resolution one.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The aim of the resolution is to ensure that there is continuity of provision for equipping worship leaders and lay preachers in the United Reformed Church, within changing times and contexts.
Main points	There are many strengths in the current system through which people gradually develop their ability to lead worship in the United Reformed Church. Stepwise seeks to equip people for whole life discipleship and an element of this for some people will be to exercise leadership of worship in a variety of contexts. The denomination has an opportunity to create a more coherent system of lay preacher development than has been possible in recent years.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council Paper D2 on the successor to TLS, November 2017; Mission Council Paper D2 on a Discipleship

	Development Strategy, March 2018; Mission Council Paper M1 Resourcing Worship Research, November 2019; Lay Preaching Strategy Proposal (Resolution 35) accepted by General Assembly 2002.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Ministries Committee, the Education and Learning Committee, Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod Training and Development Officers, the Stepwise Task and Finish Group (which has overall responsibility for the development of Stepwise), the design group for the Faith-Filled Worship stream of Stepwise, and the convenors of the committees in each Synod responsible for lay development.

Summary of impact

Financial	It is likely to cost much less to become Assembly-Accredited than previously, when Stepwise is fully in place. The proposal is in tune with the Discipleship Development Strategy adopted by Mission Council in March 2018 which advocated for more 'joining the dots' between resources from Synods and General Assembly.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	It is important that lay ministries can be seen to be ecumenically equivalent. This proposal will be useful for conversations with ecumenical partners, particularly the Methodist Church. It would be an advantage to Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) including the URC if there could be stronger parallels between Methodist Worship Leaders and Synod-Recognised Lay Preachers than has been the case previously.

Encouraging worship leading and preaching in the United Reformed Church

1. Introduction/context

- 1.1 We are thankful to those in our Synods who are ably navigating through the period of *Transitional TLS* to the introduction of Stepwise, the denomination's new discipleship development programme. In the intervening period some Synods have continued to use TLS Lite as the core of their preparation for Lay Preaching, others have introduced their own Synod courses, and others have simply waited to see what will be produced by Stepwise. The result of this has inevitably been some inconsistencies in the approach to lay preaching and worship leading across the Synods. This gives the denomination a challenge in how it can most ably support those who feel called to lay preaching and worship leading within our local churches.
- 1.2 At the same time the Discipleship Development Strategy agreed at Mission Council in March 2018 called for greater 'joining of the dots' between resources from Synods and General Assembly.

- 1.3 This paper aims to give the denomination a clear steer on how it can contribute to the confidence and competence of people called to help others to offer worship to God through the United Reformed Church whilst keeping the needs and expectations of congregations in mind.

2. Origin and development of the paper

- 2.1 This paper has been written after consultation with the Ministries and Education and Learning Committees, the annual meeting of the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod Training and Development Officers, the design group for the Faith-Filled Worship stream of Stepwise and the Stepwise Task and Finish Group which has overall responsibility for the development of Stepwise. A draft was circulated for comment to the convenors of the committees in each Synod responsible for lay development. Insights from these groups have shaped this paper.
- 2.2 The term 'Lay Preacher' has limitations in describing the breadth and variation of what is happening on the ground amongst some congregations. One observation is that there is an increasing lack of those currently training as lay preachers to become Synod-Recognised or Assembly Accredited simply because they are meeting an immediate need in their local congregation. In some cases, those preaching or leading worship have no formal training at all. So how can we as a denomination help each other to discover that there is more light and truth to break forth from God's Holy Word?
- 2.3 'Breaking open the Word' i.e. wrestling with the Bible and drawing meaning from it for today is part of who we are as the United Reformed Church. This is as much about facilitating discussion, prayer, reflection, and teaching as it is about preaching a sermon. The Resourcing Worship Research report of 2019¹ endorsed creativity, depth, imagination, flexibility, diversity, and accessibility in worship. It identified the importance of resourcing people to start where they are and keep developing. Stepwise seeks to value and nurture this 'seedbed' for worship leading. Beyond this, Stepwise will also provide the normal route to equip people for the public role of lay preacher through Synod-Recognition. In addition, we are anticipating that the normal route for Assembly Accreditation will also use Stepwise.
- 2.4 Mindful that the United Reformed Church seeks to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches whilst cherishing people's gifts and vocations, the proposals in this paper also seek to ensure that there is proper order and accountability of people who somehow represent the church.

3. Beginning to lead worship: seedbed development

- 3.1 It can start with being asked to read one of the lessons on Sunday, or offer prayers during a house group, or use musical or artistic skill in some way during the service – every individual who is involved in leading worship in the URC begins somewhere.

¹ Paper M1 accepted by Mission Council November 2019

- 3.2 Through a series of small, possibly faltering steps someone is taken further in their journey of discipleship and may be enabled to lead other disciples in worship. The means through which they decide to develop their skills and insight so that they keep deepening their abilities will vary.
- 3.3 Support structures include church members and friends, Elders, ministers of all kinds, involvement in house groups and bible studies, local church training sessions including TLS-LITE, Synod events, Resource Centre for Learning summer schools and conferences – what works for an individual will be particular to them although the awareness that someone has a gift for helping others to worship is collectively discerned, in the congregation, through trust.

4. Lay Preachers in the URC – current system

- 4.1 It should be remembered that the elders meeting of any United Reformed Church congregation or pastorate is free to ask anyone they wish to lead worship, other than presiding at the Sacraments.
- 4.1 At present the United Reformed Church has two kinds of formally authorised Lay Preachers: Synod-Recognised (sometimes called Locally Recognised) and Assembly Accredited.
- 4.2 A Synod-Recognised Lay Preacher usually pursues a programme of training which takes about 12 months through their synod. Having successfully conducted an assessed service the applicant will usually be recognised by the synod and listed in their yearbook as a Lay Preacher. Someone recognised in their own synod as a Lay Preacher is not automatically recognised as such if they move to a different synod. The financial support for ongoing development of Synod-Recognised Lay Preachers varies between Synods.
- 4.3 An Assembly-Accredited Lay Preacher pursues an approved programme which takes three years and is overseen by both their Synod and the Education and Learning Committee of the General Assembly. The programme includes mentored reflective practice designed to give the potential preacher a wide experience of shaping and leading different kinds of worship with the support of an experienced mentor. Assembly Accreditation is transferable to wherever the preacher finds themselves in the United Reformed Church. More importantly, it is also recognised by our ecumenical partners. Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers are eligible to apply for up to £200 per year towards their ongoing development.
- 4.4 Two areas for improvement which the new system will address are:
- i. The intention is to develop a new and much clearer progression route from Synod Recognition to Assembly-Accreditation
 - ii. Enabling transfer of Synod-Recognition when a Lay Preacher moves to another Synod.
- 4.5 Synods have a significant part to play in supporting all kinds of worship leading and lay preaching, through their Training and Development Officers, Lay Preaching Commissioners, and education/discipleship/ministries committees.
- 4.6 Synods often organise conferences and events which are open to anyone wishing to develop their confidence and competence in leading worship, regardless of being recognised or accredited as a Lay Preacher.

- 4.7 Clearly, Synods are also key to the development of Stepwise as a locally supported discipleship development programme with five streams, including Faith-Filled Worship. In Autumn 2020, the Faith-Filled Worship Stepwise stream will become available for anyone who, having completed Faith-Filled Life is drawn to delve deeper in order to experience more of shaping and leading worship, for whatever purpose.
- 4.8 The majority of people who engage in the Faith-Filled Worship stream are likely to use what they learn simply for their own faith development and to serve their local church. That will be a valuable, considerable outcome. Much of the rest of this paper discusses how someone who finds themselves called to serve the URC in more public roles and wider responsibility could draw on their involvement in Stepwise for this.

5. Taking forward the best qualities of the current system

- 5.1 *Starting where people are:* Development from within the context of congregations creates a strong foundation which can be built upon in ways that suit individual and local needs, strengths, resources and conditions. There are opportunities built into the system to encounter disciples with contrasting expectations and experiences.
- 5.2 *Comparability between Synods:* Prior to the introduction of LITE (Local Introductory Training Experiences) each Synod had its own programme for preparing people for leading worship locally. These programmes varied and so LITE responded to a demand for a self-contained, easily accessed, locally available set of courses with in-built consistency. One Synod has recently designed its own course which can result in Synod-Recognition, although most continue to use LITE.
- 5.3 *Progression:* Since 2016, *Transitional TLS* has been a way of someone undertaking LITE and having the option of either seeking Synod-Recognition on completion or progressing to Assembly-Accreditation as a Lay Preacher through further study and practice.
- 5.4 *Flexibility, consistency and rigour:* These apparently contradictory aspects are observed and valued in the current system. Using TLS as the standard (in its previous form and currently in *Transitional TLS*) has made it possible to acknowledge the previous learning and experience which individuals have evidenced when seeking Synod-Recognition or non-standard progression to Assembly-Accreditation. The URC is a small denomination and is able to respond to individual circumstances through the insights of the local church, Synod, and General Assembly.
- 5.5 *Leadership development:* Synod-recognition and Assembly-Accreditation gives individuals and their Synod some confidence that the person can be called upon to exercise leadership locally in an accountable way. They are exercising a ministry on behalf of the whole church, in widening circles of influence and responsibility if called to do so and if a vocation to this is discerned.

6. Ecumenical considerations

- 6.1 Assembly-Accreditation by the URC is recognised by the Methodist Church as being equivalent to a Local Preacher with mutual recognition of each other's training routes. Someone who has trained through the other denomination's route is able to complete an additional module to show that they understand the ethos of the Methodist Church or URC in order to be accepted by that church as Local Preacher or Assembly-Accredited Lay Preacher respectively.
- 6.2 The URC has similar ways of recognising prior learning of people who have trained as an Anglican Reader. The ecumenical equivalence of Synod Recognition is not applied consistently.
- 6.3 Steps are currently being taken to assist Methodist Local Preachers Meetings to understand and accept Synod-Recognition, in conjunction with the appropriate officers of the Methodist Connexion. Ecumenical equivalence is yet to be fully explored with other denominations across the three nations of the URC, on a denomination by denomination basis, or within ecumenical alliances e.g. EMU (Episcopal, Methodist, United Reformed Church) in Scotland.

7. The proposed system using Stepwise

- 7.1 The proposed system aims to address
 - a) the need for consistency across the denomination which provides for smooth progression from being Synod-Recognised to Assembly Accredited as a Lay Preacher
 - b) transferability of Synod-recognition across the boundaries of Synods
 - c) mutual recognition of training by our ecumenical partners
 - d) accountability to the United Reformed Church.
- 7.2 Through engagement with their local Faith-Filled Life Stepwise group and discussion with their Stepwise mentor in exploring what discipleship means for them, it is anticipated that some people will come to feel that they would like to develop their skills in leading worship and helping to break open the Word. The routes through which they will be able to pursue this from Autumn 2020 using Stepwise are described in Appendix A. The key features of the proposed system are:
 - i. As described in section three above there will be local, seedbed development. Stepwise Faith-Filled Worship will be available for people who simply want to develop their abilities to lead worship and preach where they are, for the benefit of their local congregation(s) without seeking Synod-Recognition or Assembly Accreditation
 - ii. Synod-Recognition will become the accepted initial objective of anyone seeking to be known publicly as a Lay Preacher in the URC. Synod Recognition will be transferable between Synods. Subsequent progression to Assembly Accreditation will be offered as one means among others of encouraging further development.
 - iii. A range of Stepwise extension tasks to be available for completion by someone seeking Synod-Recognition or Assembly-Accreditation as a Lay Preacher will be agreed jointly by the Education and Learning Committee and the Ministries Committee, with input from appropriate bodies including

the Stepwise Learning Standards Board and the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners.

8. Routes other than Stepwise

- 8.1 Someone called to ministry as a Lay Preacher in the URC may have had relevant training from another denomination or education and experience elsewhere. A Synod may feel that the person is ready for Synod-Recognition, when measured against the marks of ministry for Lay Preachers agreed and published by the denomination. It would be for the Synod to make such a decision and Synod-Recognition remains an important step.
- 8.2 Where an experienced person seeks progression to Assembly-Accreditation through routes other than Stepwise the Synod will make an application on their behalf to the URC Studies Panel² for recognition of prior learning. The anticipated Stepwise route to Assembly-Accreditation is expected to be the normal route against which the prior learning of applicants is calibrated.

9. Continuing development for lay preachers

- 9.1 Times and contexts change, and it is important that people who are entrusted to break open God's Word with congregations are continually nourished in their hearts and minds, as has been reiterated in the Worship Research Project report of November 2019 which found 'a desire for more diversity in times of public worship; creative approaches to be adopted, with the opportunity to meet others engaged in worship preparation particularly valued for the dissemination of new materials and fresh approaches'.
- 9.2 An increasing emphasis on local leadership of congregations requires that resources are devoted to re-equipping lay preachers to take on new roles as these emerge.
- 9.3 The URC will look to Synods and Resource Centres for Learning to continue to offer development opportunities through local events, and regular lay preaching conferences. Peer support is also important and strengthening of local and regional networks of worship leaders and lay preachers is something that Synods have encouraged.
- 9.4 A specific area where local equipping is of particular relevance is that of preparing Lay Preachers to conduct occasional offices. Synods already prepare people to be authorised for presiding at the sacraments of communion and baptism. Some Synods and the Resource Centres for Learning are also offering training in presiding at funerals. It would seem best to continue and develop this provision as it is, rather than try and include it as a core part of the Stepwise Faith-Filled Worship stream. Such skills and knowledge are best addressed when people find themselves required and ready to exercise them.

² The URC Studies Panel, meeting electronically, is chaired by the Convenor of the Education and Learning committee and includes the Secretaries for Education and Learning and Ministries, the Stepwise Programme Manager, the Convenor of the Stepwise Learning Standards Board, and the Assembly Advocate for Leading Worship.

9.5 Continuing development opportunities would be helped if there were a consistent programme of assistance across Synods, supported by a combination of Synod and Assembly funds.

10. What happens for people currently in TLS Transition?

10.1 Transitional TLS is currently still available. TLS LITE and LITE PLUS are continuing to be offered, and Gateways into Worship is running for the final time in the academic year 2019/20. Anyone who has been given Synod-Recognition through TLS-LITE or other equivalent routes should be able to seek progression to Assembly-Accreditation if they so choose, using the Stepwise route highlighted in Appendix A or its equivalent as described in section eight above.

Appendix A

1. Stepwise and Lay Preaching: A proposal

1.1 Through engagement with the local Stepwise group and discussion with their Stepwise mentor in exploring what discipleship means for them, it is anticipated that some people will come to feel that they would like to develop their skills in leading worship and breaking open the Word, i.e. wrestling with the Bible and drawing meaning from it for today. This is as much about facilitating discussion, prayer, reflection, and teaching as it is about preaching a sermon.

1.2 The following proposal is written as if:

- a) it is 2021 and all the Stepwise streams are available;
- b) the proposal is addressed to an individual;
- c) the individual has completed Faith-Filled Life previously
- d) the individual has discerned a calling to develop their skills in leading worship

2. Working on the fine detail

2.1 There is further work to be done to make this proposal into a thorough and sustainable scheme which will cope with the range of expectations from local congregations, Synods and ecumenical partners. The Education and Learning and Ministries Committees organised a consultation meeting of Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners in January 2020 which identified some specific steps forward, including the drafting of 'marks of ministry for lay preachers'. The two committees will continue to work with the Lay Preaching Commissioners, and relevant Synod committees to provide the necessary guidance and agreements on practice by the end of 2020.

- 2.2 Please note that the Stepwise streams are currently in various stages of development, and therefore what's provided here is necessarily an overview outline of the suggested process to gain Assembly Accreditation. Once more detail is available, we will provide a definitive process for consultation and agreement.

3. Becoming a Lay Preacher in the URC (from 2021)

If you simply want to be better at leading worship in your local church

- 3.1 You would complete the core of Faith-Filled Worship through the usual means. Beyond the core blended learning you could choose to undertake additional activities for your own development:
- i. producing a portfolio of evidence during Faith-Filled Worship through assignments which help you to reflect on your experience and skill development
 - ii. an assessed service at the end of the stream which you can ask to be conducted to give you feedback on your progress.

If you feel called to become a Lay Preacher in the URC

- 3.2 Everyone seeking to become a Lay Preacher in the URC will be expected to seek Synod-Recognition in the first instance.
- 3.3 When pursuing the Stepwise route, you would complete the core of Faith-Filled Worship through the usual means. In addition, you would be expected to:
- i. produce a portfolio of evidence during Faith-Filled Worship through extension tasks which help you to reflect on your experience and skill development;
 - ii. undertake an assessed service at the end of the stream. If your Synod is satisfied with your competence according to URC-wide standards they will grant you Synod-Recognition as a Lay Preacher. This will be subject to you meeting safeguarding requirements set by the URC for Synod-Recognised Lay Preachers.
- 3.4 Synod-Recognition (whether gained through Stepwise or other routes) will be transferable to other Synods if you subsequently move. All Synods will be expected to provide a reasonable and consistent level of resourcing for the continuing development of Synod-Recognised Lay Preachers. They will be helped to do so, where necessary, from the URC's Discipleship Development Fund and the Inter-Synod Resource Sharing Scheme.

Progression to seeking Assembly-Accreditation

- 3.5 For many people it will be enough to be Synod-Recognised as a Lay Preacher. However, progression has the following advantages for individuals and the United Reformed Church:
- i. developing an individual's abilities
 - ii. formal acknowledgement of the deepening and broadening of competence
 - iii. greater flexibility in lay ministry to meet a variety of contexts
 - iv. ecumenical equivalence to Licensed Lay Ministers/Readers in the Anglican Church and Local Preachers in the Methodist Church.

3.6 There are two parts to progression:

- a) While serving as a Synod-Recognised Lay Preacher you will need to show evidence of having conducted a minimum of 12 services of worship, within a period of 12-24 months, in a range of styles and settings.

Your synod will be encouraged to provide an experienced worship leader to spend two to three sessions helping you to reflect on your strengths and development needs as a Lay Preacher, in order to decide which of the Stepwise Streams is the most appropriate for you to pursue. This could be the person who was your mentor for Faith-Filled Worship or it may be someone else set aside for the purpose.

- b) You will then be expected to complete one of the other Stepwise Streams, or a programme of equal rigour and depth. The stream you choose will depend on:
 - i. the possibilities and needs of the context that you and the Synod have agreed is where your calling lies;
 - ii. the experience you already have, so either deepening what you've already done in a subject area or branching out into a new subject area.

The portfolio that you create in this stream through carefully devised extension tasks will show how you have related the content of the stream to the ministry of leading worship and preaching. Having completed the stream, you will have another assessed service.

If the Synod, representing the Assembly, is satisfied with this and the evidence from your portfolio they will recommend you to the existing routes for Assembly Accreditation. This is essentially commendation from the URC Education and Learning Committee to the URC Ministries Committee, which then grants Assembly Accreditation as a Lay Preacher. This is under the authority of the General Assembly.

- 3.7 Assembly-Accreditation is valid throughout the whole of the URC. Once accredited, you will be eligible to apply for a reasonable and consistent level of resourcing for your continuing development from the relevant committee of General Assembly, through your synod.

Paper F1

Language, gender and God

Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr Alan Spence alanandsheila@googlemail.com
Action required	Groupwork.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To think afresh about how we speak of God, and especially about gendered language for God.
Main points	A God beyond gender. The limits and potential of language. Ecumenical concerns. A wide horizon.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly papers 1984, 1997 and 2014, noted below.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Council Advisory Group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Nil.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	A chance to reflect on our particular contribution to the life, testimony and worship of the whole Church.

1. Recent years have seen a marked increase in the Church's use of gender sensitive language. For instance, most recent translations of the bible employ expressions such as 'brothers and sisters' or 'sons and daughters' where before the text would have simply spoken of 'brothers' or 'sons'. There is now a general recognition that one-time generic words like 'men' can no longer be taken to mean both men and woman without causing offence.
2. The motivation for the widespread use of gender sensitive language both in society and in the church has to do in part with a commitment to affirm the status and defend the rights of women in today's world. What appears to be merely a linguistic issue is held by advocates of gender equality to be a matter of justice. One of their claims is that patriarchal societies unconsciously use the language of male dominance to perpetuate unjust social structures. If we are to reform those structures, so the argument goes, we need to reform our language.

3. The logic of this movement for language reform leads us inevitably to ask questions about the language we use of God. In particular, how are we as Christians to employ gender sensitive language in our affirmations of the Trinity, of the one God who has historically been worshipped in the Church as Father, Son and Holy Spirit? This question raises a number of important issues.

A. Does God have a gender?

4. In the Jewish and Christian scriptures and their worshipping traditions male pronouns are consistently employed with reference to God. It is important, however, to recognise that these same scriptures also affirm God to be spirit or immaterial in being. This means that they do not recognise in God any physical attributes which we would normally associate with gender. In the divine being there are no X or Y chromosomes, no testosterone levels that might be measured, no long grey beard. It is, however, argued that it is the divine character or attributes of God that makes it appropriate for us to speak of (him) as male. God is, for instance, recognised to be all-powerful and this dominant or leadership role is more naturally associated, it is held, with the male sex. But there is a flaw in such an argument. A number of characteristics that we ascribe to God such as love and compassion are clearly not the sole preserve of men. It is interesting that in the creation story Eve is spoken of as a helper (*ezer*) for Adam. Some view this as a principal role of women in society. But in the Old Testament the word *ezer* is predominantly used with reference to God (16 times). 'My father's God was my *helper*; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh' (Ex18:4). Being our helper is in the bible a notable characteristic of God.
5. It is the shared faith of Christians that we, as humans, have been created as image bearers of God.

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them. (Gen1:27)

It is significant that we carry the reflection of the divine character together, as men and women. There is nothing that is determinatively masculine about the being, character or attributes of God.

B. Personal pronouns and God

6. Is it appropriate to use personal pronouns like 'he' or 'she' with reference to God? Some might argue that God is so absolutely different from us as humans that to speak of God in personal terms is as meaningless as to refer to light or music or love as 'he' or 'she'.
7. This is a philosophically important question. It raises the question of what words creatures can use of their creator when all the language we have at our disposal is shaped by our creaturely experience. If we do not use personal pronouns for light or music or love why, it is asked, should we use them of God? We need to

take a step back. Even a term like 'love' refers to a distinctively human experience. Can 'love' be appropriately applied to God?

8. Our response as Christians is that we believe humans are created in the divine image, that in some amazing way we reflect the character of God. It is not that we have constructed a loving God but rather that a God of infinite love has created us. Similarly it can be argued that an intensely personal God has made me to be a person. In short, personhood, like love, comes before humanity. The God revealed in the Scriptures seeks our total love in response to the divine love that first found us.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut6:4,5)

The fountainhead of all our moral duties lies in our calling into a personal relation with a personal God. Although we might struggle to develop the appropriate personal pronouns to use of God, it is important that we do not undermine the divine personhood by the use of impersonal language. God is not an 'it'.

C. The place of metaphor

9. It was suggested above that human language of God can never move beyond our creaturely experience. It will consequently always be inadequate in speaking of a creator who is totally other than creation. But just as a person who is blind might use a white stick to engage with and come to know in part a world that lies beyond his or her sight, so language can be a tool by which we encounter and so understand in some measure a reality that lies beyond our immediate sensory experience.
10. One way we do this is through metaphor. For instance a 'virus' can be defined as a small infectious agent that replicates only inside the living cells of an organism. To speak of a computer having a virus is to use the word 'virus' as a metaphor. It offers a way of understanding how the complex and invisible codes of binary data controlling the computer are no longer functioning as originally intended because a 'malignant' code has been surreptitiously introduced into the system. Through its flexibility a metaphor can creatively extend our understanding of a world that lies beyond our present experience.
11. Consider the expression 'The Lord is my shepherd'. The word 'shepherd' is here being used as a metaphor. Only sheep have shepherds. Yet Psalm 23 has unrivalled poetic power in portraying the confidence a believer might have in the care of a loving God. Shepherding is a rural occupation of the inhabitants of a minor planet of an insignificant star in one of countless galaxies. And yet this humble metaphor has the potency to help us understand a central characteristic of the one who created all that is seen and unseen.
12. To speak of God as our father is also to speak metaphorically. The word 'father' refers primarily to a particular human who played a specific role in our conception. But the word 'father' when used as a metaphor for God can open our minds to understand something of divine, infinite, freely given love. Metaphors are of course flexible. To speak of God as father is not to say that God is male any more

than to refer to God as the 'rock of my salvation' indicates that the divine nature is some sort of stone.

13. Certain metaphors are not helpful to some people. After gaining independence from Britain many republican-minded Americans struggled with the concept of kingship as a characteristic of God. Their low view of English kings made them deeply suspicious of any notion of monarchy. For similar reasons there will be those for whom fatherhood has been so negative an experience or conjures up such ugly images that to speak of God as father is for them an unhelpful metaphor as they seek to engage meaningfully with the reality of God.

D. Male gods and patriarchal societies

14. To what extent does our language regarding gender shape our social structures? In particular how does a society's interpretation of the gender of its god or gods give support and legitimacy to its patriarchal institutions?
15. These are important questions that are worthy of serious study. It should be noted, however, that ancient Greek, Roman and Middle Eastern societies had many female deities. Athena, the Greek goddess of war, was the guardian of Athens. Isis was a leading goddess among the Egyptians. Ishtar, the Sumerian and Babylonian goddess, symbolised war and conflict. Anat was the virgin goddess of war among the Canaanites. Diana was the hunter goddess of the Romans. Such a list somewhat undermines the widely-held theory that patriarchal communities inevitably view their gods as male as a way of maintaining their own dominant status. It is interesting that many of the 'warrior' gods of these ancient societies were female.
16. What part has a Christian understanding of God as Father played in the subjection of women within Christendom? This is not easy to answer and we need to remain open to the findings of historical and social research. It is important, however, for us to take particular care before making bold assertions on this matter. We should remember that many believers have found expressions of the fatherhood of God expressed in passages such as the Lord's Prayer to be an integral feature of their experience of God.

E. Talking of the Trinity

17. Discussions and controversies in the Early Church led to some ways of speaking about God that have become very familiar to us. Arian contemporaries argued that Jesus was acknowledged to be the divine Son through his life of obedience: his God-ness came through what he did. Whereas Athanasius and others who came to be considered 'orthodox' held that Christ's deity flowed from his being: his God-ness was inherent in who he was. So it is that the early creeds came to affirm that Christ was of one being or substance with the Father. Similarly, the Church's affirmation of God as Trinity emphasised that the three persons shared in or had in common the one being of God.
18. The value for the Early Church of using the language of Father and Son was that it offered a conceptual account of how these two persons participated in the same

being and so shared equally in divine honour. The Son was begotten of the Father, the Spirit (in the Western Church) proceeded from the Father and the Son. The Church might today find new, gender sensitive language to delineate the divine persons but it would be faithful to the theological tradition only if it was able to indicate that they were of the same being. For instance, to speak of the triune persons as Creator, Saviour and Life Giver adequately identifies the persons by their activity, but does not offer any help in understanding how they relate to one another as one being.

19. In the twentieth century the German theologian Karl Barth formulated an imaginative new expression of the Trinity in his doctrine of the Word of God. He spoke of the Triune God in terms of Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness, holding the persons together around the concept of Jesus as the revealing Word of God. However when expounding the doctrine of reconciliation in the fourth volume of his monumental *Church Dogmatics* Barth reverted back to the traditional language of Father, Son and Spirit. His early Trinitarian formulations appeared not to have had enough 'personal' depth to describe adequately the saving action of the one loving God.
20. The United Reformed Church has given serious attention to the development of gender sensitive language in its Trinitarian formulations. See *the Manual*, Section 18, the Basis of Union:

At the General Assembly of 1997 the United Reformed Church adopted the following alternative version of the statement in paragraph 17 to be available alongside the 1972 statement:

1. We believe in the one and only God, Eternal Trinity, from whom, through whom and for whom all created things exist. God alone we worship; in God we put our trust.
2. We worship God, source and sustainer of creation, whom Jesus called Father, whose sons and daughters we are.
3. We worship God revealed in Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God made flesh; who lived our human life, died for sinners on the cross; who was raised from the dead, and proclaimed by the apostles, Son of God; who lives eternally, as saviour and sovereign, coming in judgement and mercy, to bring us to eternal life.
4. We worship God, ever present in the Holy Spirit; who brings this Gospel to fruition, assures us of forgiveness, strengthens us to do God's will, and makes us sisters and brothers of Jesus, sons and daughters of God.
5. We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, united in heaven and on earth: on earth, the Body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit to glorify God and to serve humanity; in heaven, eternally one with the power, the wisdom and the love of God in Trinity.
6. We believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in heaven and on earth through Christ, and be perfectly honoured and adored.

7. We rejoice in God who has given us being, who shares our humanity to bring us to glory, our source of prayer and power of praise; to whom be glory, praise and adoration, now and evermore.

F. Considering our neighbours

21. People are deeply sensitive about both their religious language and the role of gender in society. We need to take care where possible not to offend one another, even as we seek not to be too easily offended ourselves. Some have determined not to use gendered pronouns of God at all so as to avoid causing offence. Although expressions like 'Godself' appear somewhat clunky to us now, within a comparatively short time we are likely to get used to them. For those who continue to use gender suggestive pronouns such as 'he' or 'she' we need to keep reminding ourselves that there is nothing determinatively male or female in the being, character or attributes of God and that we use such words metaphorically.
22. As to our Trinitarian formulations, there appears to be no theological reason why we may not find alternative, gender-sensitive words of the three divine persons who have in common the one being of God. The difficulty we have is rather an ecumenical one. The expression Father, Son and Holy Spirit is deeply embedded in the Christian tradition and has strong biblical support.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Mt28:19).

23. If we as a church avoided this expression altogether in our worship, it might well drive a wedge between us and the Orthodox, Catholic and Anglican communions as well as others for whom such changes are not at present conceivable. The formal addition of the *filioque* clause ('and the Son') in the Nicene Creed in the eleventh century played a significant role in the breach between the Western and Eastern Churches. To harden our present ecclesial divisions by introducing changes in our Trinitarian formulae in the act of baptism, for instance, would be a high cost for a denomination which believes it is called to facilitate unity in the wider Christian community. However, our human language of the divine is always inadequate, and so there is every reason to encourage one another to use a rich variety of scripturally inspired expressions or metaphors in referring to God.
24. Indeed we as a church have already committed ourselves to the use of such language, at General Assembly in 2014.

General Assembly affirms the commitment made in 1984 to use inclusive language in all publications. It now seeks to build on that commitment by encouraging all those who lead and participate in worship, all those who train worship leaders – including resource centres for learning and lay preachers conferences, children's and youth leaders, local churches and synods, to explore and give intentional consideration to their use of inclusive and expansive language in worship. (Resolution 15, 2014 General Assembly)

It offers this helpful explanation of what is meant by such language:

Inclusive language affirms all human beings, their sexuality, gender, ethnic and cultural background, stages of maturity, disability, and mental health. Expansive language aims to use as many names and metaphors for God as possible – to stretch the imagination towards God, in order to allow us to discover that there is novelty, challenge and joyful surprise in our encounter with the divine. (Page 95 of the Book of Reports 2014).

Questions for discussion

1. Do you view God as male? Why?
2. Can the personal pronouns 'he', 'his' and 'him' be properly used with reference to God?
3. It is helpful to continue to speak of God as 'Our Father' in our public worship?
4. Should we as a church relook at our affirmation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in baptismal services?
5. What are some of the ways we might refer to God that would help us to a wider appreciation of a God who is beyond gender?

Paper G1

URC Pension Schemes – Integrated Risk Management Project – Update

Pensions Executive and Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact names and email addresses	The Revd John Piper john.piper30@ntlworld.com Dr Chris Evans chris.evans@thestyle.net
Action required	None – for information only at this stage.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This is a brief update only. The main aim is to describe the consultation process that is underway. It is hoped that a more substantial paper can be presented to the November 2020 meeting of Mission Council in November 2020.
Main points	<p>The Pensions Regulator has decided not to re-open the 2018 valuation of the Ministers Pensions Fund.</p> <p>Regarding the issues that ideally need to be resolved by the end of 2020: initial consultations with the synod trusts and the URC Trust took place in November / December 2019.</p> <p>Regarding the future pensions benefits in both URC pension schemes: a group has been set up to take this work forward, including, at an early stage, seeking appropriate and necessary professional advice.</p> <p>Regarding long-term funding requirements: we await further guidance from the Pensions Regulator, expected later in 2020.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper G3 at Mission Council, November 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Representatives of the URC Trust and synod trusts, and the directors of the trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme.

Summary of impact

Financial	None at the moment.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Valuation of the Ministers Pensions Fund as at 1 January 2018

- 1.1 It was reported to Mission Council in November 2019 that:
- i) The actuarial valuation of the Ministers Pensions Fund (MPF) as at 1 January 2018 showed a deficit of £3.9 million on assets of £140 million.
 - ii) The Pensions Regulator had expressed serious concerns about the basis of this valuation – in particular, the decision to reduce the annual deficit contributions by around £0.5 million from 2019.
 - iii) The Pensions Regulator has the power to require that the 2018 valuation be re-calculated on a more prudent basis. This would create a larger deficit which would require an immediate increase in contributions.
 - iv) The URC Trust had made a payment of £1.5 million to the MPF in October 2019 which had the effect of reversing the reduction in the annual deficit contributions for the three years up to the next triennial valuation.
- 1.2 The Pensions Regulator has now written to the URC Ministers Pensions Trust (URC MPT), as trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme, saying that it does not currently intend to require that the 2018 valuation be revisited. However, the Regulator has made clear that the 2021 valuation will have to be on a much more prudent basis.

2 Current URC consultation process

- 2.1 The Integrated Risk Management (IRM) project group was set up by the URC MPT and the URC Pensions Executive to co-ordinate the work required to address the significant issues facing both the Ministers Pensions Scheme and the Final Salary (Lay Staff) Pensions Scheme. The IRM group is, therefore, accountable to both the URC MPT as trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme and to the URC as employer. The group comprises Chris Evans (convenor of the Pensions Executive), Ian Hardie (URC Treasurer), Bridget Micklem (now Chair of the URC MPT board), John Piper (URC Deputy Treasurer) and Lyndon Thomas. All but Ian are directors of URC MPT. Ian is a director of the URC Trust.
- 2.2 It is likely that a number of significant decisions will have to be taken as the result of this consultation process. Those decisions will have to be taken by councils of the Church as well as by various trust bodies. The IRM group decided to start by talking to representatives of the synod trusts and the URC Trust.
- 2.3 In November /December 2019, consultations were held with representatives of the synod trusts and with the board of the URC Trust. Attendance from the synods was uneven, but the IRM group met with 50 synod trustees and officers in five regional meetings as well as with the board of the URC Trust. The content of these meetings was similar to the content of Paper G3 presented to the last meeting of Mission Council. However, the main focus was on the three issues on which we need agreement, at least in principle, by the end of 2020 (i.e. before the next valuation of the MPF):
- i) The need for much stronger legal backing for the URC's commitment to the MPF
 - ii) The need to plan for a likely deficit of around £20 million on the MPF as at 1 January 2021, resulting from a much more prudent basis of valuation.
 - iii) The need for a plan to deal with the effect on the value of the assets of the MPF of any future shock on the financial markets.

- 2.4 Following these meetings, all synod officers and trustees and the directors of the URC Trust were sent copies of the presentation, a summary of the main issues, and a list of questions from the IRM group to those trustees and officers from the IRM group. Initial responses to these questions were requested by the end of January 2020 – recognising that the time allowed was very short and, therefore, these would only be initial responses. They would not involve any definite commitments by anyone.
- 2.5 The responses received at the time of writing this paper demonstrate a wide range of views about the best way to proceed and about what each of the trusts might be able and willing to do. The next task of the IRM group will be to facilitate a conversation between representatives of all the trusts to see if, together, we can develop a planned way forward which is acceptable to the participating bodies and also to the URC MPT as trustee. It is likely that the next meeting(s) with representatives of the synod trusts and the URC Trust will be in April or May 2020.
- 2.6 The rate of progress after that will depend on how long it takes to reach consensus on the best way forward. Ideally, the IRM group would like to be able to report to the November 2020 meeting of Mission Council that an agreement in principle on these matters has been reached. This would enable the trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme to consider and hopefully approve this draft agreement at its board meeting in December; synod trusts that wanted to could then take their commitments to the 2021 synod meetings; and General Assembly in July 2021 could approve the commitments made by the URC Trust and could note with thanks that an overall agreement in principle had been reached. This is a tight timetable, but it is necessary in order to meet the timetable for the 2021 valuation of the Ministers Pensions Fund.

3 Future pensions schemes – benefits and costs

- 3.1 Any changes to the existing pensions arrangements can only affect future accruals of pensions benefits. People who have already retired will be unaffected. The benefits already earned by active members for their past service will also be unaffected – they are a legal entitlement.
- 3.2 Any changes to the existing URC pensions schemes will be complex; will affect different members in different ways, depending on their circumstances; and those effects cannot be precisely determined. However, the cost of the current schemes has risen substantially, and continues to do so – mainly because of the historically low interest rates that show no sign of changing. There is also the possibility that further significant increases in cost will be caused by the Pensions Regulator’s long term funding requirements. This raises questions about value for money as well as affordability. It is necessary to at least consider alternatives.
- 3.3 The Pensions Executive has set up a working group to take this work forward. There are any number of possible alternatives to the current pensions schemes. Exploring any one of these in detail could cost a six-figure sum of money. Initially, the focus of this work will be on developing frameworks for good Defined Contribution schemes that could replace the two existing Defined Benefit

Schemes. This will enable a clear comparison to be made. Other options could be explored later, if that is the wish of the Church. An early task will be to seek some initial expert professional advice. It will be important to ensure that an informed and appropriately broad conversation about this matter takes place before General Assembly is asked to consider any proposals for change.

4 Long-term funding requirements

- 4.1 A Pensions Schemes Bill has, again, been introduced to Parliament in the recent Queen's speech. This legislation will introduce the requirement for all schemes to have a long-term funding and investment strategy. After this Bill has passed into law, the Pensions Regulator must then issue its new guidance to bring these new requirements into effect. The first of what are likely to be several consultation documents is due to be published in March 2020.
- 4.2 It is, therefore, not possible to make any real progress on this issue until further guidance and information has been issued by the Pensions Regulator.

5 The Final Salary (or Lay Staff) Pensions Scheme

- 5.1 The Lay Staff Pensions Scheme is administered by an external trustee, TPT Retirement Solutions. TPT has always taken a prudent approach to its scheme valuations and to its funding approach. This means that some of the issues that currently apply to the MPF do not apply to the Lay Staff Scheme.
- 5.2 A valuation of this Scheme is currently being carried out as at 30 September 2019. Partly because of the capital injected into this scheme by the Church in 2017 and 2018, we do not expect this valuation to give rise to a significant deficit.
- 5.3 The other issues affecting the Ministers Pensions Scheme may also affect the Lay Staff Scheme, though the amounts involved will be smaller.

6 Declaration of interest

- 6.1 A current member of the Pensions Executive is a non-executive director of The Pensions Regulator. This person has taken no part in the preparation of this paper nor, more generally, in this consultation process.

Paper G2

URC Pensions Executive – name, membership, and terms of reference

Pensions Executive and Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact names and email addresses	The Revd John Piper john.piper30@ntlworld.com Dr Chris Evans chris.evans@thestyle.net
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council renames the Pensions Executive as the Pensions Committee; designates it a sub-committee of the Finance Committee; and sets its membership and Terms of Reference as proposed in Paper G2.2) Mission Council thanks those who have served the Church faithfully on the Pensions Executive in the past and is grateful for those who will serve on the Pensions Committee in the future, recognising that this is an important and inherently complex responsibility.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper proposes a new name for the Pensions Executive; clarifies its lines of reporting and accountability; proposes minor changes to its membership; and provides more comprehensive and up to date Terms of Reference.
Main points	<p>The Pensions Executive should be re-named as the Pensions Committee – mainly for the sake of contacts outside the URC.</p> <p>The Pensions Committee should operate as a sub-committee of the Finance Committee, through which it will report as necessary to Mission Council or General Assembly. However, it will also maintain and further develop its close links with those at Church House responsible for Ministries and for Lay Staff and with the synods and trusts.</p> <p>The membership and Terms of Reference of the Committee should be updated as set out in this paper.</p>

	The Committee will no longer be responsible for matters delegated to it by the URC Ministers Pensions Trust.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Board of the URC Ministers Pensions Trust and the IRM group.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Pensions Executive is currently seen as a task group. Its lines of reporting and accountability are unclear. Its Terms of Reference are set out in the report of the Nominations Committee to General Assembly. These Terms of Reference are well over ten years old and do not reflect the scope of the actual work and the actual responsibilities exercised by this group.
- 1.2 The role of the Pensions Executive is to advise and inform the URC as ‘employer’ in relation to pensions matters and, in some circumstances, to act on its behalf. The URC currently has two pensions schemes. The URC Ministers Pensions Scheme is mostly for ministers and church related community workers and its trustee is the URC Ministers Pensions Trust (URC MPT). The URC Final Salary Scheme is mostly for lay staff at Church House and in some of the synods, which are legally, therefore, participating employers in that Scheme. The external trustee of this Scheme is TPT Retirement Solutions.
- 1.3 The Pensions Executive has acquired some delegated responsibilities from the URC MPT, the trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme. This has the potential to create confusion about the role of the group and to cause concern for the Pensions Regulator both of which can and should be avoided.
- 1.4 The proposals in this paper are intended to clarify the role of the Pensions Executive and its accountability; to change its name; to update its terms of reference and make minor changes to its membership; and to separate it from the work of the trustees of the URC pensions schemes.

2 Change of name

- 2.1 **The resolution proposes that the name of this group should be changed from ‘Pensions Executive’ to ‘Pensions Committee’.** This change will make the role of the group clearer, especially to external pensions scheme trustees and other external bodies.

3 Clarifying lines of reporting and accountability

- 3.1 The Pensions Executive has in the past and when necessary reported to General Assembly or Mission Council through Finance Committee, although it has not been understood to be a sub-committee of the Finance Committee.
- 3.2 The resolution proposes that the Pensions Committee should be designated a sub-committee of the Finance Committee and thus it will, when necessary, report to General Assembly or Mission Council through Finance Committee.
- 3.3 The Pensions Committee needs to have clearer lines of reporting and accountability into General Assembly and Mission Council. However, making the Pensions Committee itself an additional committee of General Assembly seems disproportionate. The proposal is, therefore, to make the Pensions Committee a sub-committee of the Assembly Committee with which it works most closely, which is the Finance Committee. The matters for which the Pensions Committee has responsibility can have a significant impact on the finances of the Church. The Finance Committee is the body responsible for ensuring that the commitments of the Church as a whole are properly budgeted and that resources are available to meet those commitments. The Pensions Committee will continue to work closely with the Finance Committee, which will be represented on the Pensions Committee by the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer. The Finance Committee also has existing and regular mechanisms for meeting with synod colleagues to discuss matters of common interest.
- 3.4 The Pensions Committee is not only concerned with matters of Church finance. The provision of pensions is an important part of the way in which the Church looks after its ministers and lay staff. The Pensions Committee will continue to have close links with the Ministries Committee and with those at Church House responsible for the terms and conditions of lay staff. The current Integrated Risk Management project has also demonstrated that there are times when the Pensions Committee needs to have close links with the URC Trust, the Synod trusts, and the officers of the Synods and of General Assembly. These links will be maintained and developed. It is not intended that the Finance Committee should need to micro-manage all these other relationships of the Pensions Committee, but it will need to be kept informed of all significant developments and any that have financial implications.

4 Focusing on the responsibilities and needs of the URC as 'employer'

- 4.1 The trustee of a pensions scheme and the 'employer' which sponsors the scheme both have responsibilities in relation to the scheme, defined by the rules of the scheme and the legal/regulatory requirements. These responsibilities are different and it is possible that the interests of the 'employer' and the trustee may conflict. The Pensions Regulator envisages that there will be occasions when it is necessary for the trustee to be robust in its discussions with the 'employer'. In the context of the URC, it is likely that there will always be good and close relations between the URC as 'employer' and the URC MPT as trustee of the Ministers Pensions Scheme, and that the two will work together to find solutions to whatever challenges arise. Nevertheless, it is important that both parties are clear about their respective responsibilities.

- 4.2 There is clarity regarding the role of the Pensions Executive in relation to the Final Salary (Lay Staff) Scheme because the trustee of that Scheme is an external body. There is more opportunity for confusion in relation to the Ministers Pensions Scheme where the trustee is part of the URC family, albeit an independent trust company. There should be a clear distinction between the bodies acting for the 'employer' and the bodies acting for the trustees, each acting independently in its own interests, and taking its own independent advice. This does not, of course, imply that individual persons cannot or should not serve the 'employer' and the trustee in different capacities.
- 4.3 The Pensions Executive has acquired some delegated responsibilities from the URC MPT as trustee of the Ministers Pension Scheme. These are relatively minor, usually relating to individual cases. Examples are the approval of an application for early retirement on grounds of ill health, or the agreement to combine the benefits from two discrete periods of qualifying service. Although minor, it would be better if these responsibilities were delegated to a different body.

The proposed new terms of reference of the Pensions Committee exclude these tasks previously delegated by the URC MPT. It will be for the directors of the URC MPT to decide how these matters will be dealt with in future.

5 Revised membership and new Terms of Reference

- 5.1 The resolution proposes the adoption of the revised membership of and Terms of Reference for the Pensions Committee. These are attached as an Annex to this paper.
- 5.2 There are only minor changes to the proposed membership of this group. The membership of the Deputy General Secretary for Administration and Resources is made explicit, with a particular focus on the Final Salary Scheme for lay staff. Nominations Committee is asked to ensure that all those nominated to serve on this group have a reasonable understanding of pensions matters, without any expectation that they will be 'experts' or practitioners.
- 5.3 The terms of reference have been brought up to date and made more comprehensive. They reflect what is currently happening, with the exception that the responsibilities delegated by the URC MPT have been removed.

Annex

Membership and terms of reference of URC Pensions Committee

Terms of Reference

- a) To provide expertise and guidance to the URC in relation to all matters relating to the provision of pensions for ministers, CRCW's and staff. In particular, to:
 - i) advise the Finance Committee on the monetary requirement, needs and obligations of both the schemes and in relation to the benefits and financial status of the various charitable funds connected to ministers
 - ii) when requested, support the consideration of any changes to the level or nature of pension provision by the URC for General Assembly or Mission Council
 - iii) inform the URC of the nature and impact of legal and regulatory changes affecting its pension arrangements
- b) To act on the URC's behalf in dealings with the trustees of its pension schemes and with the professional advisers of the pension schemes. It may where necessary also respond to contact with the Pensions Regulator on behalf of the URC
- c) To take decisions on behalf of the URC within the guidelines for delegation agreed with General Assembly or Mission Council
- d) To liaise with the Investment Committee to ensure that the URC's view of suitable investment strategy is communicated to the trustees of the pension schemes
- e) To monitor the services provided by external pension providers and the internal pensions administration of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund
- f) To secure advice and support from external advisers as is necessary to provide clear guidance to the URC.

Membership

- a) Ex-officio members:
 - i) the Treasurer, or Deputy Treasurer, of the URC
 - ii) the Convener of the Investment Committee
 - iii) the Convener of the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee
 - iv) the Deputy General Secretary Administration and Resources.
- b) A Convener of the Pensions Committee and two further members appointed by the General Assembly for four-year terms, renewable once
- c) Up to three additional members co-opted by the Committee
- d) Staff in attendance:
 - i) The Chief Finance Officer
 - ii) The Pensions Manager, who acts as secretary
 - iii) The Secretary for Ministries, who may attend for matters relating to the Ministers' Pension Fund.

Links between Committees

The Pensions Committee convener sits ex-officio on the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee, the Investment Committee and may be invited to join the board of the URC Ministers Pensions Trust. This complements the ex-officio members of the Pensions

Committee in facilitating good inter-committee communication. When matters need referral for information or decision to Mission Council or General Assembly, these will be presented by the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer under the auspices of the Finance Committee.

Delegated authority

- a) The Ministers Pension Fund Rules place certain responsibilities upon the URC. The following are delegated to the Pensions Committee; all others will be referred by the Committee to Mission Council or General Assembly for decision:
 - i) Acceptability of suitable occupation (for ill-health rule purposes)
 - ii) Admission of a late joiner
 - iii) Service credit for ill health pension purposes when engaged in ecumenical work
 - iv) Participating bodies: Consent for new participating body (where we have decided to admit no more), contributions and expenses chargeable to participating bodies and various other actions
 - v) Consent to the trustees providing an augmentation of benefit (in agreement with the Treasurer)
 - vi) Consent to the trustees making a benefit payment in excess of HM Revenue and Customs limits
 - vii) Receive the trustee's recommendation re any deficit/surplus (this effectively includes agreement to contribution rate changes and deficit contributions) – but the resulting actions would be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.
- b) There are similar responsibilities in relation to the lay staff pension scheme. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters but will refer any significant financial matters to the Treasurer and liaise with the Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) where members' benefits are concerned.
- c) Some responsibilities fall to the employer as a result of legislation and the actions of the Pension Regulator. These may include liaison with the Regulator and the trustees over the strength of the 'employer covenant', the investment strategy and the level of risk undertaken, the agreement of contribution levels and a plan for any recovery payments. The Pensions Committee will seek to manage these matters on behalf of the URC, whilst recognising that all matters of significant financial consequence should be managed in liaison with the Treasurer.

Desirable skills for General Assembly appointees

- a) All members should have a good knowledge of pensions, though not necessarily as practitioners
- b) The Convener needs a comprehensive understanding of pensions, a willingness to keep up to date, and a willingness to contribute a considerable amount of time to the role outside meetings. He/she does not necessarily need to be an actuary, but a strong financial orientation and Board level experience are necessary
- c) If appointed as a member of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust board, the Convener will also, in a personal capacity, offer experience and support to the Chair of the Trustee Board.

Method of working

- 1) The Committee will normally meet twice each year
- 2) Further meetings, perhaps of a subset of members, may be held to address any current and pressing matters
- 3) Where possible, progress will be made between meetings by electronic means and agreement to matters of decision may also be made in this way.

March 2020

Paper I1

Update on current work

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Revd Bernie Collins, Convenor of Mission Committee bernie.collins@thecrocker.net Francis Brienen, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) francis.brienen@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Mission Committee.
Main points	Updates on Legacies of Slavery, Partners in Mission, Commitment for Life, URC group visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Greenbelt 2020, engagement with the environmental policy, the review of the National Rural Officer post, and the evaluation of vision2020.
Previous documents	Paper I2 to Mission Council, November 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Legacies of Slavery Task Group Environmental Task Group Greenbelt Planning Group Rural Strategy Group and NRO review group.

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various items in the paper are covered by the Mission Committee budget.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Legacies of slavery

- 1.1. Mission Committee accepted the action plan from the Legacies of Slavery task group. A follow up paper including the plan is given as Mission Council paper I2.

2. Partners in Mission

- 2.1. Mission Committee noted with gratitude the work of the Revd Yufen Chen, working with the Taiwanese Fellowship in Lumen, London, who is developing this ministry and mission with enthusiasm and vision.

- 2.2. A new Partner in Mission application for Ms So-Young Jung (from the Presbyterian Church of Korea working with the Bridge ministry in Southern Synod) is currently being finalised.
- 2.3. Ms Alison Gibbs, working with the United Church of Zambia, recently moved at their request to a school in Mbereshi where she serves as Head Teacher. Mission Committee approved in principle the extension of Alison's term of service by one year (until December 2021). The extension has already been approved by the UCZ and we are now awaiting formal approval from CWM.

3. Commitment for Life

- 3.1. An end of year update for 2019 was presented and discussed. Commitment for Life's 'look' has been updated in line with the new URC logo and can now be found on the resources, posters, giving boxes and communications. Responses to the new look have been very positive. Bringing Commitment for Life into the sphere of Global and Intercultural Ministries has sharpened its *raison d'être* and has made communicating its purpose easier. The rebranding of Commitment for Life and the very active advocacy undertaken by staff, reference group and advocates have resulted in greater engagement from churches and an increase in funds raised.

4. Ecumenical and Interfaith matters

- 4.1. Mission committee received a report of the visit of a group of 22 people, including representatives of all synods, to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (IOPT) in September 2019. The visit has resulted in an enthusiastic, committed fresh cohort of people who between them have already delivered more than 100 presentations across the denomination. Members of the group also wrote the Advent and Lent materials for *Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today*, and there has been a series of articles in Reform. At General Assembly 2020, there will be a main stage discussion, sharing the experiences of the participants, as well as a special interest meeting. All of this lives out the 2016 General Assembly resolution mandating Mission Committee 'to enable synods, local churches and individuals to become more aware and to respond with informed prayer, grace and solidarity.'

5. Greenbelt 2020

- 5.1. The URC team of 16 members is planning its contribution to this summer's festival, which will take place over the August Bank Holiday. The theme of the URC's programme will be Revolting Christians, linking with Greenbelt's theme 'Wild at Heart'. The planning team is actively seeking to increase the involvement of the wider URC in Greenbelt, through appealing for volunteers, inviting people to make Christian symbols and send them in for display in the URC tent, and by inviting local URC church groups to consider attending Greenbelt for their first time. Help and advice will be available. If you know of a local URC which might be interested, please ask them to contact Samara Andrews on crcw.admin@urc.org.uk

6. Environmental Policy

- 6.1. Following Mission Council's decision in November 2019 to ask all synods and Assembly committees to report back to the Environmental Task Group about their progress in implementing the environmental policy by 29 February 2020, questionnaires were designed by the Secretary for Church and Society and sent out.
- 6.2. In response Mission Committee considered various areas of its work: travel (both in the UK and international), meetings, advocacy and resourcing others to act. Mission Committee endorsed the practice that travel in the UK and to the European continent on URC/Mission related business should be by train, unless there was a compelling reason not to do so. The committee also agreed that venues for meetings should be selected based on maximum accessibility by public transport. Mission committee members further agreed to sign up to the Living Lent campaign of the Joint Public Issues Team and to promote it to others (www.livinglent.org). A fuller report will be sent to the Environmental Task Group.

7. Review of the National Rural Officer post

- 7.1. The Mission Committee received an update on the review of the National Rural Officer post. The post, which is shared between the URC and the Methodist Church, is currently held by the Revd Elizabeth Clark, who is due to retire in 2021. The review has taken a different course, in light of the Methodist Church's new strategy for Evangelism and Growth, God for All, which places a stronger emphasis on rural mission and ministry. The adoption of the strategy is likely to result in the employment of a full-time Methodist rural officer when Elizabeth retires. The Mission Committee discussed the implications of this development for the shared post and will bring an update to Mission Council in November 2020 at the latest.

8. Evaluation of Vision2020

- 8.1. Evaluation material has now been collected from local churches (through the Annual Church Returns), Synods and Assembly staff. A full report with recommendations will be brought to General Assembly in July 2020.

9. Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

- 9.1. Mission Committee expressed its thanks to the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar, who moved on in mid-February from his role as Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries after 12 years of service. He has taken up a new post with CWM, as Mission Secretary – Europe, and in that role we shall still see him and benefit from work that he does on or behalf. The post has been advertised, and if there is news in March about a new appointment, we shall of course report this to Mission Council.

Paper I2

Planning for the Legacies of Slavery (LoS) task group

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Bernie Collins bernie.collins@thecrocker.net Mr Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council accepts the plan to develop the Legacies of Slavery recommendations presented to MC in November 2019 and to consult with synods and local churches between the General Assemblies of 2020 and 2021, with the aim of bringing refined resolutions to General Assembly in 2021 or 2022.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To develop an agreed plan for the LoS task group to consult widely and bring refined resolutions to General Assembly.
Main points	Mission Council in November 2019 broadly welcomed the report from the LoS task group. Further consultation is needed to refine the recommendations. As with all plans, timings and actions may change.
Previous documents	Paper I1: Healing: hope in action (Mission Council November 2019) - the LoS task group report on the URC's response to CWM's report into the legacies of transatlantic slavery. The Legacies of Slavery Group Work Feedback provided in session ten of that Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	Initial communications have taken place with Children and Youth Work Committee, Youth Executive, Assembly Arrangements Committee, General Secretary and Clerk to General Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	A relatively small budget is needed to execute the plan which will be covered by the GIM part of the Mission budget. Subsequent financial impacts will be identified as part of the final submission to General Assembly.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The plans identify the need for significant consultation with other denominations.

1. Paper I1: Healing: hope in action, the LoS task group report on the URC's response to CWM's report into the legacies of transatlantic slavery, was presented to Mission Council in November 2019. The report highlighted the main legacies remaining from the evil of transatlantic slavery, despite the passage of two centuries since the slave trade was abolished in the UK. The report recommended that the URC should:
 - make an apology for its, and its predecessors', role in slavery and its legacies
 - make suitable reparations
 - work towards eliminating white privilege in the URC and beyond.
2. The conversations within Mission Council in November 2019 broadly supported the paper. There was a deep sense that there is a 'job to be done', a strong desire to act and a recognition that more conversation was needed.
3. This paper puts forward a plan of how the conversations will be taken forward with the aim of refining the recommendations to a position where they can be brought to a General Assembly in 2021 or 2022. The plan targets General Assembly 2021, but there is much to do, and we may find even more needs doing as the plan unfolds; hence the uncertainty in the target General Assembly.
4. There will be many strands to the consultation. The primary internal consultations will be with:
 - the synods and through them with the local churches
 - specific targeted consultations, for example with black URC members and ministers
5. There are a range of possible external consultations, which include:
 - The Baptist Union of GB, who are already well down this path
 - The Church of England; the Archbishop of Canterbury has recently apologised for racism in the church
 - Partner churches in Jamaica and Guyana who could be the recipient of an apology
 - UK Presbyteries of our two Ghanaian partner churches
 - CTE with its significant representation of black churches in England
 - CWM as it continues its work on the Legacies of Slavery
 - Selected additional CWM partner churches, such as our fellow member churches in Europe: the Congregational Federation, the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the Union of Welsh Independents.

6. The committee therefore proposes the following resolution above, going forward to a plan for consultation around the Church and report to Assembly in 2021 or 2022.
7. An A3 printed version of this plan will be given to members of Mission Council on arrival at High Leigh. The Excel version of the plan is available on the URC website: www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2020/I2b_-_Plan_by_categories.pdf. The Excel version has two worksheets, one showing the plan in time sequence and the other by task category.

Paper I3

Walking the Way: Living the Life of Jesus today

Walking the Way Steering Group

Just keep on walking...

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen francis.brienen@urc.org.uk Richard Church: richard.church@urc.org.uk
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 (LICCC).

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.

Paper 14

URC's 50th Anniversary

Walking the Way Steering Group

Let's get this party started!

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brien francis.brien@urc.org.uk Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
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.

Paper J1

List of nominations

Nominations committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ray Adams ray.adams12@btinternet.com George Faris nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Mission Council notes the changes set out in Section 1 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the November 2019 meeting of Mission Council.2) Mission Council notes and approves the changes set out in Section 2 of the report to the list of Nominations agreed at the November 2019 meeting of Mission Council.3) Mission Council appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) To clarify various details of the nominations list.2) To appoint and reappoint members of various committees and representatives of the Church.3) To appoint a new moderator for the East Midlands Synod.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Nominations list as at November 2019: www.urc.org.uk/images/Yearbook/Nominations-List.pdf
Consultation has taken place with...	All synods are represented on the Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Some roles involve ecumenical contact and collaboration.

1. Amendments to published list of nominations to be noted

Mission Council is asked to note the following amendments to the Nominations list that was agreed at the November 2019 meeting of Mission Council.

1.2 Human Resources Advisory Group

Correct Alistair Forsyth to Alastair Forsyth.

1.8 Environmental Task Group

The November 2019 meeting of Mission Council appointed the Revd David Coleman and Ms Alison Greaves to the group (Paper I2).

1.9 Business Committee

Ms Sandra Bailey will serve to General Assembly 2023, not General Assembly 2024 – see Mission Council May 2019 Paper N1 paragraph 3.6.

2.1 Faith and Order Committee

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby has resigned.

3.1.3 Interfaith Enabling Group

The Revd Bob Day has resigned.

The Revd Dr John Parry serves on the group as a co-opted member.

4.1 Ministries Committee

Mrs Jenny Sheehan is serving as Leadership in Worship Advocate to the end of General Assembly 2021.

4.2.2 Stepwise Task and Finish Group

Mr Leo Roberts has replaced the Revd David Downing as the Children's and Youth Work Committee representative.

5.1 Assembly Arrangements Committee

The General Secretary has replaced the Facilities Manager as secretary of the committee.

5.3 Equalities Committee

- i. Ms Pam Gold and Mr Jake Convery have resigned.
- ii. Ms Katherine Buckland has resigned on ceasing to be URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative.
- iii. The Equalities Committee and the URC Youth Executive have agreed that the URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative will represent URC Youth on the committee.

5.5.2 Remuneration Committee

The Chief Finance Officer is not a member of the committee but is in attendance. The Church House Staff Representative is not a member of the committee but attends when invited.

11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust

- i. Mrs Margaret Thompson is serving to General Assembly 2020.
- ii. The Revd Derek Wales is serving to General Assembly 2021.
- iii. Mr John Ellis and Mr Simon Fairington are serving to General Assembly 2023.
- iv. Representatives serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

11.5 English Heritage's places of worship forum

- i. This has become Historic England Places of Worship Forum.
- ii. The URC representative is the convenor of the Listed Buildings Advisory Group.

2. Amendments to published list of nominations for approval

Mission Council is asked to note and approve the following amendments to the Nominations list that was agreed at the November 2019 meeting of Mission Council:

Further to Mission Council's approval of a new remit for the Pilots subcommittee (see: www.urc.org.uk/images/B1_-_Update_November_2019.pdf):

- i. The membership of the **Children's and Youth Work Committee** includes the Convenor, Pilots subcommittee and the Pilots representative.
- ii. The membership of the **Pilots subcommittee** is:
 Convenor: Mrs Margaret Smith [2022]
 Members:
 Resources: vacancy
 Pilots representative on Children's and Youth Work Committee:
 Mr Derek Goodyear [2021]
 Regional Pilot officers: two vacancies
 Children and Youth Development Officer and team representative: vacancy
 URC Youth Pilots representative: vacancy
 Pilots company representatives/Friends On Faith Adventures group representatives: two to four vacancies
 Members are nominated by the children's and youth work committee and serve one or two two-year terms.

8.5 Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group

The Mission Committee has appointed the following to represent the URC in phase three of the Roman Catholic/URC dialogue:

The Revd Dr John Bradbury (Co-chair), the Revd Philip Brooks (Co-secretary), Mr John Cornell, the Revd Dr Sarah Hall, the Revd Jason McCullagh and the Revd Lindsey Sanderson.

3. New appointments and re-appointments

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council makes the following appointments:

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	From	To
1.3	Law and Polity Advisory Group	Ms Morag McLintock	Convenor-Elect**	Mar20	GA20
1.3	Law and Polity Advisory Group	Ms Morag McLintock	Convenor**	GA20	GA24
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	The Revd Sal Bateman	Member**	Mar20	GA24
11.4	Congregational Memorial Hall Trust	Mrs Margaret Thompson	Representative [†]	GA20	GA24

Key: ** = new appointment, † = extension of term of service.

East Midland Synod Moderator

The East Midlands Synod Moderator Nominating Group brings forward the name of the Revd Geoffrey Clarke, presently serving in East Midlands Synod.

Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, is invited to resolve as follows:

Mission Council appoints the Revd Geoffrey Clarke to be Moderator of the East Midlands Synod from 1 May 2020 to 30 April 2027.

Paper M1

The Assistant Clerk

From the Clerk

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council resolves that, with immediate effect the Assistant Clerk: a) shall be a member of Mission Council and of General Assembly; b) is authorised to attend any committee or church body that the Clerk attends, and may deputise for the Clerk as a member of those either occasionally or on an on-going basis, noting the caveat on membership of the URC Trust, subject to the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary. c) shall be a full member <i>ex officio</i> of both the Law and Polity Advisory Group and the Business Committee. d) may assist with the running of any Appeal, Reference, Constitutional Review, or any aspect of the Disciplinary Process involving the Clerk, or may deputise for the Clerk with the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Removing ambiguity over the role of Assistant Clerk.
Main points	Clarifying the Assistant's responsibilities and membership of governance bodies.
Previous documents	Mission Council minutes May 2019 and November 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Assistant Clerk, the General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
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External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A
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1. Mission Council agreed to create the role of Assistant Clerk in May 2019, and in November 2019 Mission Council appointed the Revd Sarah Moore to the role. The church is most grateful to Sarah for taking on this role.
2. The church has not yet made decisions which enable the role to function as it was envisaged, namely about committee and governance body membership.
3. It is therefore proposed, for the avoidance of doubt, that the Assistant Clerk is a member of Mission Council/Assembly Executive and of General Assembly with immediate effect. As it happens this is academic in March 2020 as Sarah had a prior commitment before taking on the role, and so is unable to attend Mission Council.
4. It is also proposed, for the avoidance of doubt, that the Assistant Clerk is able to attend any committee or church body that the Clerk attends, and may deputise for the Clerk as a member of those, subject to the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary, either occasionally or on an on-going basis. The caveat about the URC Trust is that its constitution does not permit a deputy to be a voting member.
5. It is also proposed that the Assistant Clerk be a full member *ex officio* of both the Law and Polity Advisory Group and the Business Committee.
6. It is also proposed that the Assistant Clerk may assist with the running of any Appeal, Reference, Constitutional Review, or any aspect of the Disciplinary Process involving the Clerk, or may deputise for the Clerk with the agreement of the Clerk and the General Secretary.

Paper M2

The Church's risk assessment and management process

URC Trust

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Jane Baird jane.baird@urc.org.uk Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information – an update on progress since May 2019.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	For information – an update on progress since May 2019.
Main points	Training has taken place. The updated process was initiated in August 2019 with the majority of committees/groups returning their spreadsheets before 31 December 2019. A risk process for churches is being developed.
Previous relevant documents	Paper L2 Mission Council March 2018 Paper L2 Mission Council May 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	The risk process review panel; convenors and secretaries of various committees/groups and synod representatives who attended training sessions.

Summary of impact

Financial	Limited to expenses for those attending meetings and training events.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. The members of the risk process review panel are: Alan Yates (chair), Jane Baird, Michael Davies, Gordon Wanless, Sandi Hallam-Jones, John Samson, Neil Mackenzie and Bill Potter.
2. Training was delivered to around 50 people at sessions in High Leigh, London, Nottingham, Bristol, Manchester and Glasgow. 60% of attendees were from synods.

3. Ten Assembly Committees and synods were represented at the training events. Representatives from advisory and other groups also attended.
4. The training was well received. Some minor tweaks to the spreadsheet were made as a result of feedback from the training sessions.
5. A modified version of the spreadsheet was distributed to synods to use if desired.
6. The updated process was initiated in August 2019 with an overwhelming majority of committees and groups making their returns by the deadline of 31 December 2019.
7. An initial review of the spreadsheets received indicates that the process has been taken seriously and that committees have given careful consideration to the risks that they hold and the management or mitigation of those risks.
8. Distinguishing between a 'risk' and an 'issue' has proved, as expected, to be the most challenging part of the exercise.
9. Responses are being collated and the resulting report, in addition to the usual reporting to URC Trust, will come to Mission Council in November 2020.
10. Whilst the process was originally intended for Assembly committees and other central groups and bodies, a number of synods have expressed an interest in using the updated methodology.
11. A number of attendees at the training sessions expressed the need for a risk management process for local congregations. Alan Yates spoke to a meeting of the Synod Clerks who endorsed the requests.
12. A simplified risk management process for churches has been devised and will be available at Mission Council.
13. The risk process review panel will meet by conference call on 2 March 2020 to assess the success (or otherwise) of the first use of the updated process and to determine if any changes are needed to the process or the training based on the actual submissions.
14. The group thanks all those involved for their attendance and participation at training events and for their willingness to use a new methodology.

Paper P1

Assembly resolution five: report on responses

Law and Polity Advisory Group

Responses to General Assembly 2018 resolution five – New Ordination Promises for Elders

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr John Bradbury jpb44@cam.ac.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To inform Mission Council of the responses from Local Church Meetings to the consultation on the proposed new ordination promise for Elders.
Main points	The response was overwhelmingly positive.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2018 resolution five.
Consultation has taken place with...	Local Churches and Synods.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The proposed changes will raise the profile of our commitment to the unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church through making this integral to the ministry of Elders.

1. From the approximately 1350 local congregations of the United Reformed Church 187 churches responded to the consultation on the proposed change to the ordination promises for Elders accepted by the General Assembly in 2018. Many more congregations may well have considered this, but as not responding to the consultation is in effect to agree with the proposed change, many may not have felt the need to write formally to the General Secretary to express this.
2. Of the 187 Church Meetings to respond formally, only 32 opposed the change or expressed reservations. Of these, about three-quarters of the reservations expressed were about the promise to 'cherish love towards all other churches'.

This promise mirrors one that Ministers make at ordination. The concern is whether 'all other churches' is too ill defined, and might include groups who call themselves churches which we might not consider such.

3. The General Secretary and the Secretary for Ecumenical Relations have prepared a paper which sets out the position of the United Reformed Church regarding how we understand the statement and our relationships with other churches. This is appended to this report and we believe allays the fears expressed by the few churches expressing reservations.
4. A tiny number of churches objected on what might be termed 'congregationalist' grounds, that Elders only serve the local church. But from the inception of the URC, it has been the constitutional practice that Elders serve the wider councils of the Church, and through the Synod all congregations are represented in the wider councils of the Church. Whilst not every Elder will personally serve in this way, this is nonetheless an expression of how the URC lives together, and the way we form the family of the Church. We would invite congregations who responded in that way to understand the promise in the light of these foundational commitments we made to one another at the formation of the denomination.
5. The proposed changes have been warmly responded to by the overwhelming majority of churches who responded. Only a tiny number of Church Meetings objected, and we hope their objection is met in the statement below. A constitutional change only falls if more than one third of Synods or Local Churches object. This piece of business can therefore confidently return to the Assembly for final adoption.
6. This report is coming to Mission Council because it was Mission Council that brought the resolution to Assembly in 2018. It does not need Mission Council's further endorsement. But it is important that Mission Council know how its proposal has been received around the Church.

Appendix: Response from the General Secretary and Secretary for Ecumenical Relations to questions raised in the consultation:

A response to concerns about the new form of elders' promises

1. This response specifically considers the proposal that the commitment made by elders should include 'love towards all other churches'.

2. A first point to note is that the words have been in the ordination and induction promises for URC ministers for several decades and therefore are not new. Elders already commit to share with the minister in the oversight and leadership of the local church. Part of that oversight and leadership is the way we relate to other churches.
3. What do we mean by 'all other churches'? The simple answer is 'all those groups that we would recognise as churches'. If we recognise another group as really being a church, then part of our commitment and witness as URC is that we do all we can to love them and build bridges with them. If we don't recognise another group as really being a church, we wouldn't have the same commitment to them.
4. So, the churches with which we are linked in national and international fellowships of churches, such as Churches Together in England, are our main partners. We ought to cherish love towards them, even though not all of them are from our tradition and would not do everything in a way we would ourselves.
5. There are some groups which do not belong to Churches Together or anything like that, but we would still recognise as genuine churches – churches who understand God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who expect to discover and discern God's word in the Bible, who love Jesus and seek to live by his commands. It would be hoped that URC ministers and elders could cherish love towards these fellowships too.
6. Then there are other groups that would not fit well into a fellowship like Churches Together in England, and probably would not want to belong, like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. These groups surely have some good people among them, but they would answer some big questions, like, 'Who is Jesus?' or 'How do we know God?' in ways that don't really reflect the faith that has carried the Church through 2000 years. In general, we would not expect to find ways of working with them, and they probably would not want to work with us anyway.
7. As we think about this broader view of church, and think about groups that might not fall under that category, it is also helpful to look at the full wording of the promise. In particular, notice how the promise refers to *the one holy, catholic and apostolic church*.

Q: Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its wellbeing, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always so far as you are able to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?
8. Those groups which would profess a very different faith to our own may not see themselves as being part of a larger Christian family – *the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church* – and so would not for us fall under what we would define as church. The promise is specifically referring to churches which could feel part of *the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church*.

9. Finally, when we respond to the question, we do so *by the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit*. We are therefore not relying on our own discernment, gifts and strength but on those of the trinitarian God.

John Proctor and Philip Brooks – November 2018

Paper R1

Safeguarding Advisory Group: New terms of reference

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approves new Terms of Reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group as set out in Paper R1, with membership as indicated in the paper.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Mission Council directed the Safeguarding Advisory Group to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025). New terms of reference aim to enable current and future members of the Group to oversee this enormous task for the Church and deliver the plan in fuller and more holistic ways.
Main points	The new terms of reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group/Committee will support the monitoring and delivery of the safeguarding strategic plan (2020-2025).
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2, Mission Council, November 2019 Paper R, Mission Council, November 2013 Paper N, Mission Council, May 2013.
Consultation has taken place with...	SAG members General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. In November 2013, Mission Council confirmed the appointment of the Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG thereafter), to meet at least three times per year. Its membership included the Safeguarding Officer, the Secretary for

Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, the appropriate Deputy General Secretary, and up to three co-opted members with relevant experience.

2. Current Terms of Reference for SAG describe the group's responsibilities as follows:

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. to oversee the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the Church in the safeguarding of children, young people, and adults in need of protection, making recommendations to Mission Council as appropriate2. to ensure that Good Practice documents are published, circulated and updated as appropriate3. to develop systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice, and to devise strategies for addressing identified weaknesses4. to foster collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy specifically to work closely with the Baptist Union in the development of policy, the delivery of safeguarding education, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers5. to oversee the service which the United Reformed Church receives from the Churches Agency for Safeguarding and other relevant agencies. |
|---|

3. Many changes since 2013 indicate the need to review these Terms of Reference: the approval of the URC's Safeguarding Strategic Plan 2020-2025 (November 2019), continuous and extensive changes in public policy and legislation and the increasing attention by government to matters of safeguarding in faith-based settings and institutions have all prompted the Group to review its responsibilities and objectives in alignment with the requirements of *Good Practice 5 - Safeguarding for Children and Adults at Risk* (URC's safeguarding policy).
4. Mission Council is invited to approve new terms of reference for the Safeguarding Advisory Group. SAG also requests Mission Council to increase their overall membership by two in order to bring additional professional skills into the group. These requests reflect the strategic priorities of the plan (especially instilling ethos and providing safeguarding training) and the increased workload of SAG.
5. Members of the Group have discussed whether it is time for the SAG to be constituted as a committee of General Assembly in view of its increasing interface with statutory bodies on behalf of the Church and its growing responsibility to ensure that measures to keep children and young people and adults at risk safe are properly implemented across the denomination. Advice has been received to suggest, however, that this step may not be appropriate at the moment, as the Church ought not to adjust substantially the pattern of its committee work until it has taken up the new rhythm of an annual Assembly.
6. Nonetheless, SAG notes that the area it oversees has become more complex and prominent in recent years, and for this reason it asks for a direct reporting line to General Assembly, rather than always working through Mission Council. The Church's proposed new pattern of meeting – more Assemblies, and fewer Mission Councils – makes this access, in the Group's view, important.
7. The proposed terms of reference and the current membership of SAG are attached below for Mission Council's consideration and approval.

Appendix I: Proposed terms of reference

1. Background

The Safeguarding Advisory Group (SAG thereafter) is the main body of the Church to maintain a whole-church approach to safeguarding and protection for children, young people and adults at risk throughout the URC as well as to oversee the development, implementation, review and monitoring of the Safeguarding Strategic Plan (2020-2025).

2. Membership of the SAG

The SAG will be chaired by the appropriate Deputy General Secretary (or the General Secretary in the absence of the DGS) and administered by the URC's safeguarding adviser, who will act as secretary for the SAG and will be the central point of contact for all SAG matters.

The membership will include the Head of Children's and Youth Work, the Secretary for Ministries, and up to five further members with relevant skills and experience, including safeguarding children and adults at risk, safeguarding law, police, and employment issues. These five shall include up to three nominated members and up to two whom the Group may co-opt. All of these members may vote, and count towards a quorum.

Nominated members will be appointed to terms of three years and will normally serve no more than two terms. Nominations for membership are to be brought by Nominations Committee to General Assembly (or to Mission Council acting on its behalf).

Co-opted members will be appointed for a term of service relevant to their contribution to the work of the SAG.

The Secretary may invite others with specialist knowledge or to contribute to meetings as occasional visitors if required.

3. Meetings

The members of the SAG will meet at least three times per year, normally at URC Church House.

A meeting quorum will be one half of the current members of the SAG.

Meeting agendas and minutes will be provided by the Secretary of the SAG, and these will include supporting papers or documents for review in a timely manner.

4. Responsibilities of the SAG

The SAG oversees the development of policy and the implementation of Good Practice across the United Reformed Church in safeguarding and protecting children, young

people, and adults from harm, abuse or neglect, making recommendations to Mission Council as appropriate.

The SAG ensures that Good Practice documents are updated, published, and circulated as appropriate.

The SAG develops systems for monitoring local church and synod compliance with Good Practice and devises strategies for addressing identified weaknesses.

The SAG fosters collaboration with ecumenical partners across the full range of safeguarding issues, including engagement in the development of public policy.

The SAG advises on the development and delivery of safeguarding training, and the support of synod/regional safeguarding officers and coordinators.

The SAG oversees services which the United Reformed Church receives from external or other relevant agencies and contractors to support its safeguarding policies and practices.

The Safeguarding Advisory Group reports to Mission Council and General Assembly when appropriate.

5. Amendment, modification or variation

This Terms of Reference may be amended, normally after recommendation by SAG, and always subject to the approval of Mission Council or General Assembly.

Appendix II: Current membership of the Safeguarding Advisory Group

Chair

The Revd Richard Church, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary

Mr Ioannis Athanasiou, URC Safeguarding Adviser

Members

The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries Committee

Dr Sam Richards, Secretary for Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Revd Zaidie Orr

Mr Paul Smillie

Co-opted members

The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King, Education and Learning Officer

Paper R2

Synod Safeguarding Practice Group: Terms of Reference

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	On behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council approves the Terms of Reference for the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group as a sub-group of the Safeguarding Advisory Group.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (SSPC) continues and formalises the existing group of synod safeguarding officers and advisers who meet three times a year.
Main points	The Terms of Reference are a further step to value the expertise of synod safeguarding officers and advisers and their role in supporting local churches and ensuring consistency of safeguarding practice in alignment with Good Practice 5.
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2 at Mission Council, November 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of SAG Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of Impact

Financial	No further resources will be needed to continue the meetings of this group. The budget of the Safeguarding team at Church House already covers the costs.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. The last Mission Council meeting, acting on behalf of General Assembly, endorsed the URC's Safeguarding Strategic Plan. Under the strategic objective 4, the Church recognised the commitment of synod safeguarding officers and advisers as an essential element of this plan. The regular meetings of all synod safeguarding officers have played a significant role in the last four years to increase safeguarding awareness and establish structures within the Church for

the benefit of vulnerable groups. The Terms of Reference formalise this valuable work, to provide a peer-to-peer supportive context that equips synod designated persons with the right skills to lead on all aspects of safeguarding practice in their synods and local churches and align their work with the requirements of Good Practice 5 and the expectations of the safeguarding strategic plan.

2. The Terms of Reference were already approved by the Safeguarding Advisory Group [5/2/2020] and are attached below for Mission Council's approval:

Synods' safeguarding practice (SSP) group terms of reference

This group is a sub-group of the Safeguarding Advisory Group and comprises all synod safeguarding designated persons and professionals of the United Reformed Church, including synod safeguarding officers and synod safeguarding advisers. The group reports to the secretary of SAG and denominational safeguarding adviser of the Church.

Purpose

- To act as a confidential reference body for safeguarding practice with children, young people and adults at risk throughout the denomination.
- To ensure that safeguarding procedures are reviewed and implemented consistently in practice.
- To provide an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange between and across the synods.
- To contribute to the development of good practice guidance and training resources.
- To offer training and professional development opportunities for synod safeguarding designated persons.

Membership

The Safeguarding Advisory Group shall determine the group's membership (seeking, if it wishes, advice from the group about this). Membership will include ex officio all synod safeguarding leads of the URC and the denominational safeguarding adviser, who will chair the meetings. Members should have suitable skills and experience in safeguarding matters, relating to children and adults. A meeting quorum will be representation from at least 7 synods regardless of the number of attendees in each meeting. For reasons of confidentiality, the group should be restricted to those who lead and oversee safeguarding policy and practice in all URC Synods on a paid or voluntary role. There will always be remote access and reasonable adjustments for participants as well as a minute taker external to the group who should not be a member of the SSP group.

Meetings

The group will normally meet at least three times per year, although it may determine to meet more frequently. Meetings will be planned, supported by an agenda and recorded.

Confidentiality

Because of the nature of its remit, it is essential that the discussions of the Safeguarding Practice Group shall be treated as confidential. Individuals and churches may be named in the course of the group's discussions. The minutes of the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group will be kept securely. If they need to be released beyond the group, they will be reviewed and redacted as needed by the chair. All members of the group will be asked to

sign a confidentiality agreement on an annual basis and any other attendees will be asked to sign one at the meeting.

Conflict of Interest

At each meeting members will be asked to declare any conflicts of interest.

Remit

- Promote consistency and quality of safeguarding practice across URC Synods
- Contribute to the development and implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures across the Synods
- Support the provision of training and professional development to synod safeguarding leads
- Maintain an overview of cases and safeguarding incidents
- Work with URC's safeguarding adviser to monitor issues
- Review the role of the group biannually.

Approval

These Terms of Reference were approved by the Safeguarding Advisory Group (5 February 2020).

Review

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed biannually by the Safeguarding Advisory Group, after taking advice, if it wishes, from the group.

Paper R3

Attendees at URC's Basic Safeguarding Training

Safeguarding Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mr Ioannis Athanasiou safeguarding@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council expects a standardised approach to safeguarding training across the United Reformed Church and strongly encourages all those who are working with children, young people and adults at risk in the life of the Church to access the new basic safeguarding training.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Past Case Review indicated the need for a standardised mandatory safeguarding training for those working with children, young people and adults at risk of harm (page 21 in the Learning Group report). This paper introduces the basic safeguarding training module in the URC and provides a list of those the training is for.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Paper R2 at Mission Council, November 2019 Paper R2 at Mission Council, May 2019 Paper R2 at Mission Council, November 2018.
Consultation has taken place with...	Members of SAG Safeguarding Training Review Working Group Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	Synods will make their own funding arrangements to enable them to offer basic safeguarding training to local churches, depending on their current resources and existing practices. They will be able to access Assembly-level support if further support is required.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	URC is already a member of a national ecumenical group that works on sharing good practice and resources on safeguarding training with other denominations. ¹

1. It is everyone's responsibility to safeguard others. The United Reformed Church needs to ensure that some specific categories of people are equipped to protect vulnerable groups.
2. In 2018 Mission Council, in alignment with the recommendations of the PCR Report, agreed that safeguarding training is mandatory for those working with children and young people. The last Mission Council meeting also noted that one of the priorities of the URC's Safeguarding Strategy is providing appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults at risk.
3. The introduction of a standardised basic safeguarding training aims to ensure that all individuals working with children, young people and adults at risk understand the processes and policies of the URC. The basic training module is based on good practice standards, covers both areas of safeguarding (children and adults at risk) and provides advice in respect to abuse and protection of children, young people and adults from any form of abuse. Additionally, those involved in such work must be aware of the necessity of referring cases to the appropriate staff (synod safeguarding leads) or civil authorities or agencies (police, social services, etc.) as well as of not attempting to make decisions themselves.

4. Core list of attendees (identified by SAG)

- Synod Safeguarding Officers and Advisers
- Church Safeguarding Coordinators and their Deputies
- Members of the Safeguarding Advisory Group
- Active Ministers, including Synod Moderators and retired ministers who meet the requirements of active ministry
- Youth/Children/Adult/Pastoral Workers
- Synod Clerks
- Section O Investigation, Commission and Appeal Panel Members
- Worship leaders
- Lay preachers
- Pastoral visitors
- URC trustees, synod trustees, and Elders as local church trustees.

5. Optional attendance

- Synod officers
- Church Secretaries

6. Basic safeguarding training will be run by synods. Synods will lead the delivery and dissemination of regular safeguarding training for relevant staff and volunteers. It is the responsibility of the SSO to provide further details about training available in their Synod. A person's safeguarding training will have to be refreshed every three years.
7. A safeguarding training review group will continue developing the framework of safeguarding training across the denomination to develop an advanced safeguarding training module as well as specialist modules tailored to the internal culture of the URC.

Paper T1

Ministerial disciplinary process and incapacity procedure

Ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group (MIND)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Chris Copley chrismvivian@gmail.com
Action required	Resolutions to come before General Assembly in July 2020. Synods to consider Basis and Structure changes, and elect to Standing Panels for Discipline, in Autumn 2020. Names to be proposed by Nominations Committee to Assembly Executive in November 2020. MIND to offer training between November 2020 and July 2021, and to prepare Guidance Notes before the March 2021 meeting of the Assembly Executive. Basis and Structure changes to be considered for ratification by General Assembly in July 2021, and redrawn Process to come into effect on 13 July.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council resolves to propose the following resolutions to the July 2020 session of the General Assembly: See foot of numbered section of paper below ... for proposed Assembly resolutions one-five.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Redrawing of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process.
Main points	New definition of the basis for discipline, investigation by a team drawn from a denomination-wide panel. <i>prima facie</i> case to be shown to a judicial Standing Panel representative of the Synod, option of a negotiated caution in less serious cases, reduction in size of Assembly and Appeal Commissions, new interface between the Process and the Incapacity Procedure.
Previous relevant documents	Paper T1 for Mission Council November 2018, Paper T1 for Mission Council March 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Advisory Group; Legal Adviser Also external assistance through Scrutiny Groups, as explained in text below.

Summary of impact

Financial	No net increase of cost anticipated in operating the Process, though costs of Mandated Groups now borne at Synod level will be replaced by costs of denominational Investigation Teams. Provision is made for certain expenses of parties to a case to be borne from denominational funds if approved by the responsible Commission.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Please refer to Appendix B to the draft Process (Ministers under other denominational jurisdictions).

Ministerial Disciplinary Process

1. The numbering of the paragraphs below is for the purposes of this paper only, and does not correspond to numbering in any other document.
2. In May 2019 Mission Council approved the preparation of a new Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers. It directed MIND (the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group) to proceed with redrafting and to report in March 2020.
3. MIND had already identified certain principles to underlie the redrafting, as proposed to Mission Council in November 2018. The first version of the Framework to form the backbone of the new Process had also been prepared, That version was included amongst the papers for Mission Council in May 2019: members were guided through it and had the opportunity to ask questions. It was indicated that the Framework would be complemented by Appendices, ranking equally with it and giving detail on specific aspects of the Process, whilst the Framework itself would present an overview of the main principles and stages.
4. During the summer of 2019 the draft Framework and all Appendices then drafted were divided between three Scrutiny Groups. Each Scrutiny Group comprised members of MIND and individuals with relevant experience from outside MIND. Mission Council approved this way of working last May, and agreed some of its own members might volunteer to join each Scrutiny Group. MIND is extremely grateful to members of Mission Council and others who gave up their time to support MIND's work in this way.
5. After the Scrutiny Groups had completed their work, the entire package of documents came back to a plenary meeting of MIND in September 2019. MIND then sought a meeting between representatives of itself and of the Safeguarding Advisory Group, to discuss overlapping concerns: this took place at the end of October 2019. Finally there was a meeting at the end of November 2019 between the draftsman of the new Process and the Church's Legal Adviser. The draft documents were amended further as a result of each meeting, and returned again to MIND in plenary session in January 2020; at which point they were commended to Mission Council for adoption. They accompany this report, the Appendices being numbered from A to Z, save that there is no Appendix I and

Appendix Z (transitional provisions for cases pending under the current Process when the new Process comes into force) has not yet been completed.

6. No attempt is made here to summarise the content of the new Process Framework and Appendices. It is hoped their effect will be clear from a careful reading, and although they contain a substantial volume of material, there is really no alternative to such reading if Mission Council is responsibly to commend the Process to Assembly. Those who were members of Mission Council in May 2019 will already be familiar with the main principles and stages, but MIND representatives will be glad to offer further explanation as desired at the March 2020 meeting.

Ministerial Incapacity Procedure

7. The current Disciplinary Process provides for ministers facing disciplinary proceedings to be referred into the Incapacity Procedure instead, or *vice versa*, if the situation appears to justify this. The new Process therefore also needed to make some corresponding provision; but in the course of drafting this, it became clear some changes of substance might be called for, rather than merely carrying over the existing rules. MIND's current proposals are contained in Appendix to the draft Process, and in a set of proposed changes to the rules of the Incapacity Procedure itself. The detail will be found in the Mission Council papers as Paper T3.
8. Although these proposals on the interface of Discipline and Incapacity are made now for completeness, Mission Council should be aware that they have so far undergone a less thorough review than the purely disciplinary provisions. They were finalised too late in Summer 2019 for Scrutiny Group consideration, and the members of the Incapacity Procedure's Standing Panel (who have not yet been consulted) may well have an important contribution to make to the proposals. MIND hopes there may be scope for any necessary changes to be made between the March meeting of Mission Council and the General Assembly papers deadline..
9. To give a brief summary of the main changes currently proposed as regards the interface:
10. A case may be transferred from the Disciplinary Process (DP) to the Incapacity Procedure (IP) if the disciplinary forum (Synod Standing Panel, Assembly Commission or Appeal Commission) currently responsible for the case believes that an incapacity factor:
 - a) may have contributed to, and may possibly excuse, the alleged misconduct; or
 - b) may render the minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry even if he/she is innocent of culpable misconduct; or
 - c) may prevent the minister from answering disciplinary allegations.
11. But it will be possible for the case to be returned to the DP if the Review Commission considering it under the IP concludes that none of these situations in fact exists.

12. A case which begins in the IP may only be transferred to the DP if the Review Commission suspects misconduct and is persuaded that none of the three situations just outlined exists or, having examined the possibility of mitigation due to an incapacity factor, still considers the minister may have a disciplinary case to answer.
13. The Special Appeals Body which, under the current IP, can reverse a Review Commission's decision to refer a case into the DP, will continue to exist. But there will be no corresponding Appeals Body empowered to reverse a DP judicial forum's decision to refer a case into the IP.

Changes to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC

14. At present the Structure of the URC contains a number of references to the Disciplinary Process (DP) and Incapacity Procedure (IP), but does not contain an express power for the General Assembly to make disciplinary and incapacity rules in the first place. MIND accepts there are various constitutional 'pegs' on which the current Process can be argued to 'hang', but suggests that a provision devoted specifically to rule-making in this area is desirable, especially if the general powers of church councils are themselves going to be limited, and their functions expanded, by reference to the rules so made.
15. On the other hand, MIND suggests the overall length of the Structure can be reduced, and duplication avoided, if detailed provisions of the DP and IP are not repeated in Structure paragraphs. Such repetition brings the risk that later changes to DP or IP will also necessitate a Structure change, taking up further time of Assembly and Synods on something which may be quite minor and technical.
16. There are various places where, with the laudable aim of separating the Assembly's judicial functions exercised through Commissions from its (or a Synod's) executive and legislative roles, the Structure currently spells out that neither level of council should intermeddle in disciplinary or incapacity cases, save as the DP or IP provides. MIND suggests it will be adequate for this to be stated in one place only. On the other hand, the Structure does not at present (but, MIND suggests, it should) make clear that a Church Meeting's disciplinary authority (to remove an individual from the membership roll or to suspend membership, in the exercise of its concern for membership standards) is not to be exercised in respect of a member who is on the Roll of Ministers or of CRCWs. The rationale behind this is that, if a disciplinary issue arises concerning a minister or CRCW, it should be handled first with the additional safeguards of the DP.
17. MIND also proposes a minor change to the functions of an Ecumenical Area Meeting in the disciplinary context. Such a Meeting does not have any direct function in ministerial discipline, but may need to bring Assembly Commission recommendations regarding a former minister deleted from the Roll to the notice of appropriate people. The suggested changes are intended to make clear that, although an Ecumenical Area Meeting may share in this task of passing on

recommendations, the primary responsibility for so doing will always lie with the Synod.

18. Finally, there is one proposed change to the Basis of Union Appendix E, which deals with suspension of ministers pending disciplinary investigation. It is currently stated that such a suspended minister 'may not exercise the *ministerial* rights of membership of any council of the Church' (emphasis added). MIND suggests removing the word 'ministerial', so that during suspension all rights of membership are suspended. The chief right of membership which a minister may have, but which is not 'ministerial', is the right to attend, speak and vote at the Church Meeting of which he/she is a member. It seems to MIND that it may be counter-productive, if a minister is suspended (for example) in order to prevent undue contact with witnesses in a case, for the Structure to give that minister the right to attend the Church Meeting. Basis of Union Appendix F – the corresponding provision for CRCWs – does not contain the word 'ministerial' at this point, and thus already prohibits a suspended CRCW from such attendance.

The resolutions and the timing of their implementation

19. MIND hopes it will be possible to work towards the redrafted Process superseding the current Process with effect from 13 July 2021, the day after the General Assembly's 2021 session closes. The goal is for any allegations of misconduct which reach Moderators after that date to be dealt with completely under the new Process by judicial fora, Investigation Teams and officers appointed under it. This means that the members of Synod Standing Panels, the Assembly Standing Panel, the Disciplinary Investigation Panel and the Commission Panel will need to be named and receive initial training between the Assembly sessions of 2020 and 2021. This, in turn, calls for the Assembly of 2020 to give as much certainty as possible to the content of the Process, and to instruct Synods and the Nominations Committee to make the necessary appointments on time for this to happen.
20. The changes to the Basis and Structure, however, cannot be finalised in 2020, since they will have to be referred to Synods under paragraph three of the Structure and reconsidered for ratification at Assembly 2021. MIND hopes this is the last time that alterations in the Disciplinary Process will call for changes at the level of the Church's constitutional texts.
21. Accordingly MIND is requesting Mission Council to propose five resolutions to the 2020 General Assembly. The first will represent the first stage in making the desired changes to the Basis and Structure; the second will adopt the new Disciplinary Process; and the third will make the Incapacity Procedure changes.
22. All changes made by the second and third resolutions will, however, be deferred until 13 July 2021 and will then be conditional on the Basis and Structure changes having been ratified. This is set out in the fourth resolution. An exception is made for the provisions of the Process under which appointments take place: those provisions, it is proposed, should come into effect on 14 July 2020, so that Autumn meetings of Synods can make Standing Panel appointments, and names for other roles can be brought by Nominations Committee to the Assembly Executive (formerly Mission Council) in November 2020.

23. The individuals so appointed can then be offered training in the new Process before their duties commence at the close of Assembly 2021. The fifth resolution calls on MIND to offer such training, and also to prepare Guidance Notes. As these Notes will not be authoritative, they will not need conciliar approval; but the suggested timing is for them to appear online before the Assembly Executive meets in March 2021. This will enable any member of the Executive wishing to raise matters arising from the Notes to do so.

Resolution

The resolution for Mission Council to consider is therefore as follows:

Mission Council resolves to propose the following resolutions to the July 2020 session of the General Assembly:

Assembly resolution one

General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Basis of Union and Structure of the URC:

Basis of Union of the United Reformed Church

Schedule E, Paragraph 4 – delete the word ‘ministerial’ before ‘rights of membership’.

The Structure of the United Reformed Church

Paragraph 1(4) – Add heading ‘Definitions’ and reword:

- 1.(4) Unless otherwise expressly stated or clearly excluded by the context,
- (a) the expressions 'Minister', 'Ministers', 'ministry' and 'Ministerial' when used in the Structure shall refer to the ministry of Word and Sacrament;
 - (b) the expression ‘the Disciplinary Process’ shall refer to the Process established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxi), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision;
 - (c) the expression ‘the Incapacity Procedure’ shall refer to the Procedure established by the General Assembly under paragraph 2(6)(xxiii), but includes any process so established for similar purposes before the adoption of that provision.

Paragraph 2(1) – in function (ix), insert (subject to paragraph 2(7)(ii)) before ‘to suspend or remove names’.

Paragraph 2(4) – add to the duties of Moderators of Synods:

‘fulfil the responsibilities ascribed to the Moderator of Synod under the Disciplinary Process and the Incapacity Procedure’.

In the Functions of Synod, delete the initial ‘A’ and the words in brackets.

Function (xvii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

‘To discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide’.

Function (xviii) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

‘To discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Synod, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide’.

Function (xxi) after ‘Disciplinary Process’ delete ‘contained in Section O’.

Paragraph 2.(5) – In sub-paragraph (A), after ‘the following functions’, delete the words in brackets.

In the Functions of Ecumenical Area Meetings, Function (viii), delete ‘contained in Section O’ and the cross-reference in brackets.

Function (xviii) - delete existing text and replace with the following:

‘To discharge, concurrently with the Synod, such of the functions and duties conferred or imposed by the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure upon the Synod in

respect of a Minister or Church Related Community Worker (or former holder of either office) serving or resident within the Ecumenical Area, after proceedings involving that person are concluded, as the Synod may from time to time request’.

Paragraph 2.(6) – After ‘General Assembly is responsible for exercising the following Functions’ delete the words in brackets.

In the Functions of the General Assembly, Function (xviii), delete the words in brackets.

Functions (xxi) to (xxiv) – delete existing text and replace with the following:

- (xxi) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Process for dealing with cases of Discipline involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;
- (xxii) to discharge the functions required under the Disciplinary Process to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Process may provide;
- (xxiii) to establish, and from time to time to review, amend or replace a Procedure for dealing with cases of Incapacity involving Ministers or Church-Related Community Workers;
- (xxiv) to discharge the functions required under the Incapacity Procedure to be exercised by the Assembly, either directly, or indirectly through other officers or bodies, as the Procedure may provide.

Renumber the last two functions (xxv) and (xxvi).

Insert new paragraph 2(7) as follows:

‘Restriction on exercise of conciliar functions

- 2(7)(i) As soon as any Minister or Church-Related Community Worker becomes the subject of a case under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure, no council of the Church shall exercise any of its functions in respect of that person in such a manner as to affect, compromise or interfere with the conduct of that case, save as provided for by the Process or Procedure itself.
- (ii) The function of the Church Meeting to maintain standards of membership shall not be exercised in a disciplinary context in respect of any member of the local church who is at that time a Minister or Church-Related Community Worker; nor shall any such member be removed from the Roll of Members or the membership of that person be suspended by the Church Meeting for disciplinary reasons.
 - (iii) The decision reached in any particular case (whether or not on appeal) under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure shall be made in the name of the General Assembly and shall be final and binding, and once so initiated that case shall be resolved only by the steps for which that Process or Procedure provides.’

Paragraph 5 - delete existing opening text and replace with the following:

5. The procedure for dealing with references and appeals not concerned with the Incapacity Procedure or the Disciplinary Process is as follows:

Paragraph 5.4 – delete final sentence and replace with the following:

No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review or appeal against decisions reached under the Disciplinary Process or the Incapacity Procedure.

Delete Paragraphs 6 and 7 in their entirety.

Assembly Resolution two

General Assembly adopts the ‘Process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers’ (‘Disciplinary Process’) accompanying this Resolution in place of the existing Process.

Assembly Resolution three

General Assembly makes the amendments accompanying this Resolution to the 'Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers and church related community workers' ('Incapacity Procedure').

Assembly Resolution four

The provisions of the new Disciplinary Process concerning appointments to the Assembly and Synod Standing Panels for Discipline, the Disciplinary Investigation and Commission Panels, and the posts of Assembly Representative for Discipline and Secretary to Assembly Commissions are to come into force at the close of this session of the General Assembly. The Assembly instructs Synods to make their appointments to Standing Panels at the earliest opportunity, and instructs Nominations Committee to bring nominations for Assembly appointees under the new Process to the Assembly Executive in November 2020, so that all those appointed can receive initial training in the new procedures before the remainder of the Process comes into force. The new Process is to come fully into force on 13 July 2021 and govern cases coming to the notice of Moderators of Synods or the Assembly Representative for Discipline on or after that date, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in resolution one have by then been ratified. Cases pending under the current Process at that date are to be dealt with as the transitional provisions of the new Process provide. The amendments to the Incapacity Procedure are to take effect from 13 July 2021, provided that the amendments to the Basis and Structure mentioned in resolution one have by then been ratified.

Assembly Resolution five

The Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group to the Assembly Executive (MIND) is instructed to make arrangements to offer the training mentioned in resolution four, and also to prepare Notes for Guidance to assist those engaged or concerned in the new Process, the first edition of such Notes to be published online before the Assembly Executive's meeting in March 2021.

THE FRAMEWORK		
1.	<p>The expectations of ministers At their ordination or commissioning, Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church-Related Community Workers make affirmations about their Christian belief, about the motives leading them to enter their ministry, and about their future conduct. It is expected</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that, during the process of candidature for the ministry in question, they will not have misled the Church or those who, on its behalf, assessed their readiness for that ministry • that they will make the affirmations at ordination or commissioning honestly • that they will serve in the ministry of the URC only so long as they can still with integrity teach and claim to hold the understanding of the Christian faith expressed in the Basis of Union; and • that their conduct after ordination or commissioning will accord with the affirmations then made. <p>It is also expected that if they are arrested on a criminal charge, convicted of any criminal offence by a court or accept a police caution in respect of such an offence, they will report that fact to the Moderator of the Synod exercising oversight of them.</p>	<p>The affirmations are set out at Appendix A. Throughout this statement of the Process, Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church-Related Community Workers are both referred to as ‘ministers’. The expressions ‘ministry’ and ‘Roll of Ministers’ should be construed accordingly. Appendix B relates to ministers under other denominational jurisdictions. Arrest, conviction or formal police caution has the same consequences whether within or outside the United Kingdom. The Synod with oversight is defined in Appendix C. As indicated in Paragraph 3, the Assembly Representative for Discipline may in certain cases take the place of a Synod Moderator.</p>
2.	<p>The place of the Disciplinary Process Even if these expectations are not met, in many cases a pastoral approach can be taken and a matter resolved by informal advice or an apology. But there are other cases in which a breach of expectations undermines the credibility of a person’s ministry or the Church’s witness. Allegations of such a breach (here called ‘misconduct’) call for a formal process of investigation, following the requirements of natural justice, and possibly for sanctions. It is with allegations of misconduct that this Disciplinary Process is concerned.</p>	<p>A separate procedure exists for cases of possible ministerial Incapacity. A Moderator’s recorded warning (see Appendix D) may be given as part of the pastoral approach to apparent minor breaches of the expectations. Church meetings possess a disciplinary competence over their members, but this will not be exercised over a church member whose name remains on the Roll of Ministers.</p>
3.	<p>Allegations (1) Convening the Synod Standing Panel for Discipline Any allegation suggesting a failure to meet the expectations in Paragraph 1 amounting to misconduct within the meaning of Paragraph 2 must be referred to the Moderator of the Synod exercising oversight of the minister concerned. Concerns coming to the notice of the Moderator without a report from any complainant may be treated as allegations of misconduct. A report of a criminal conviction, arrest or police caution is to be</p>	<p>The Synod which exercises oversight of a minister is to be identified in accordance with Appendix C. Rules on double jeopardy appear at Appendix E. The composition of the SSPD is set out at Appendix F. ‘Calling together’ does not necessarily imply a physical</p>

	<p>treated as though it were an allegation of misconduct. On identifying any allegation as one of misconduct, the Moderator must call together the Synod Standing Panel for Discipline ('SSPD') and seek safeguarding advice, which must be passed on forthwith to the remaining members of the SSPD.</p> <p>(2) The Assembly Representative for Discipline and Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline Allegations respecting a minister treated under this Process as falling under the direct oversight of the General Assembly are to be referred to the Assembly Representative for Discipline ('ARD') who (if they are identified as allegations of misconduct) is to call together the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline ('ASPD').</p> <p>(3) Striking out The SSPD may strike out allegations that are, in its view, patently frivolous, malicious, vexatious or unrelated to the expectations, stating why it considers that to be the case. Otherwise it must pass the allegations and any supporting evidence on for further consideration in the Investigation Stage.</p> <p>(4) Decisions on suspension As soon as it is aware of the allegations the SSPD may suspend the minister, with the consequences set out in the Basis of Union. The Moderator may suspend, acting alone, on first receiving the allegations if there is delay in calling together the SSPD and the Moderator considers immediate suspension necessary. However, neither the Moderator nor the SSPD should proceed to suspension without considering whether an alternative course of action is available. If the SSPD believes such an alternative could be considered but an interview with the accused minister would assist the decision, the minister must be offered the opportunity to meet with at least one member of the SSPD before the suspension decision is taken. Decisions to suspend or not to suspend must be accompanied by reasons, and reviewed by the SSPD on first convening and regularly thereafter: they may be revised at any time.</p>	<p>meeting. The interplay of the Process with the Church's Safeguarding Policy and the term 'safeguarding advice' are explained at Appendix G.</p> <p>The identity of the ARD and the composition of the ASPD are set out at Appendix H. References to a Synod Moderator and to the SSPD apply equally to the ARD and ASPD. Rules concerning suspension and extracts from Schedules E and F to the Basis of Union, listing its consequences, are set out at Appendix J.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Pastoral care (1) of the accused minister When a minister is suspended (or, if there is no suspension, when allegations of misconduct are passed on to the Investigation Stage) the Moderator must arrange as soon as possible for another experienced minister to offer ongoing pastoral care to the accused minister. The role of the pastor so appointed is only to offer pastoral care and support. He/she is to operate independently of the Moderator, to have no involvement in any aspect of the Process and to observe the Church's normal practice regarding the confidentiality of pastoral conversations. The Moderator's own pastoral responsibility for the minister is suspended so long as the case remains under the authority of the SSPD. The Moderator must also inform the accused minister of the contact details of the person appointed to give guidance</p>	

	<p>under Paragraph 8.6.</p> <p>(2) of others The Moderator must also consider what pastoral care is available to the accused minister's dependants, the complainant(s) and others directly affected by the case, including the members of local churches within the accused minister's pastorate, and must seek safeguarding advice if it appears possible that children or adults at risk may be involved.</p>	
5.	The Investigation Stage and its outcomes	
5.1	<p>(1) Investigation and report The purpose of the Investigation Stage is for the original allegations (and any further allegations of misconduct which this stage may bring to light) to be fairly and expeditiously investigated by an Investigation Team, whose findings are to be reported to the SSPD. At this stage the Team is concerned with three issues: (i) the facts of the case, and in particular whether there is a <i>prima facie</i> case for full investigation; (ii) the seriousness of the allegations if proven, and (iii) whether the case can be appropriately disposed of by a caution. It may also, at any time, recommend the suspension of the accused minister or the lifting of a current suspension.</p> <p>(2) Decisions by the SSPD Based on the Team's report and the accused minister's response, the SSPD (acting in the name of the Synod) decides, giving reasons, whether to end the Process, initiate proposals for an agreed caution, or send the case to the Hearing Stage. The role of the SSPD during this stage is judicial. As such it takes no part in the investigation but weighs impartially the facts and arguments presented by the Investigation Team and by the accused minister.</p>	<p>The composition of an Investigation Team, and of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel from which it is drawn, are set out at Appendix K. The work of the Investigation Team is explained at Appendix L.</p>
5.2	<p>If the Investigation Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a <i>prima facie</i> case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the SSPD. On receiving such a report the SSPD must take safeguarding advice, and must then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, save that it may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration.</p>	
5.3	<p>If the Investigation Team believes its investigation into allegations against a minister reveals a <i>prima facie</i> case, on the basis of which, if the allegations were proven, it would seek the imposition of a disciplinary sanction, the Team will report accordingly to the SSPD. The accused minister is to receive a copy of the Team's report and to be advised of the time allowed for a written answer. On considering the report and any answer the SSPD must either (i) refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration and further investigation, (ii) declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, if (after receiving safeguarding advice) it does not agree that the report supports the Team's</p>	<p>The time allowed for the minister's answer is to be 14 days unless another period is set by the SSPD when the Team's report is delivered</p>

	conclusions, (iii) (after receiving safeguarding advice) propose an agreed caution in accordance with paragraph 5.4, or (iv) pass the report, any answer and all supporting evidence on for consideration at the Hearing Stage.	
5.4	<p>An agreed caution may be an appropriate outcome in disciplinary cases where ministers accept the allegations against them (other than any allegations which the Investigation Team would not pursue for the reasons in paragraph 5.2), display convincing remorse and are willing to undertake appropriate precautions against recurrence. A caution may be considered at the close of the Investigation Stage if the Investigation Team recommends this in its report, or if the SSPD, on receiving that report and the minister's answer, proposes a caution of its own motion. Safeguarding advice must be taken on the terms of a caution as finally negotiated.</p> <p>A caution is not appropriate where a minister denies allegations being pursued by the Investigation Team; nor, normally, in the case of allegations similar to allegations found proved under this Process on an earlier occasion.</p> <p>If a caution is agreed by the minister, the Investigation Team and the SSPD, delivered formally by the SSPD and acknowledged by the minister, the Process and any suspension are terminated from that point.</p> <p>If a caution is recommended by the Investigation Team or proposed of the SSPD's own motion, but the SSPD is satisfied it will not be possible to reach agreement on a caution in appropriate terms and within a reasonable time, then the SSPD must pass the Team's report, any answer and all supporting evidence on for consideration at the Hearing Stage. Correspondence entered into (subsequent to the Team's report) in connection with the proposal and attempted negotiation of a caution is not to be passed on, and will not be admissible at the Hearing Stage.</p>	Appendix M sets out how a caution is to be drafted, negotiated and finalised.
6.	The Hearing Stage	
6.1	As soon as the SSPD passes a case on to the Hearing Stage, an Assembly Commission for Discipline ('ACD') is constituted to oversee and hear the case. Once a Commission is in being for a particular case, authority over that case passes from the Synod to the General Assembly, in whose name the Commission acts. Any procedural directions, or decisions regarding suspension of the accused minister, are thereafter to be given by the Commission (after receiving safeguarding advice in respect of any lifting of suspension).	The composition of an ACD, and of the Commission Panel from which it is drawn, are set out at Appendix N.
6.2	Having satisfied the SSPD of a <i>prima facie</i> case against the accused minister at the close of the Investigation Stage, the task of the Investigation Team in the Hearing Stage will be to present the evidence in such a way as to assist the ACD in determining the truth of the allegations on a balance of probabilities, and to make submissions regarding the seriousness of the case and an appropriate sanction. Unless the Team abandons	Rules for the timetable of the Hearing Stage (including a date for submission of the Investigation Team's case material) are set out at Appendix O. Abandonment of

	the allegations, its investigation will continue for this purpose until the date for submitting case material.	allegations during the Hearing Stage is governed by Appendix P.
6.3	If, at any time after the appointment of an ACD, the accused minister notifies the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline ('SACD') of a desire to admit some or all of the allegations under investigation and to submit to the imposition of a sanction, the Commission may accede to the request after considering a response from the Investigation Team.	Rules for the admission of allegations are set out at Appendix Q.
6.4	The ACD is to hear the case presented by a single member of the Investigation Team or by another person appointed by the Team for that purpose. The accused minister has the right to be present and to reply. Witnesses may be called on behalf of the Team and by the minister, and cross-examined by them or by any member of the Commission. The Commission may call witnesses of its own motion on theological questions, issues of discrimination, disability or cultural sensitivity, safeguarding issues or other matters on which it considers impartial specialist testimony to be essential.	Rules concerning procedure at hearings, reception of evidence given other than verbally, representation, persons permitted to accompany the accused minister or witnesses and the role of Commission witnesses are set out in Appendix R.
6.5	At the conclusion of the hearing the ACD is to determine, on the balance of probabilities, whether any or all of the allegations made against the minister have been proved. In respect of any proven allegation, it must decide either to impose no sanction, or that the accused minister should receive a written warning, or that his or her name should be deleted from the Roll of Ministers. If the accused minister is the subject of an earlier written warning which remains current, the ACD must take that into account. A written warning may be accompanied by directions regarding the minister's future ministry, conduct or remedial steps to be taken.	Rules for written warnings and directions, and concerning deletion from the Roll are set out in Appendix S.
6.6	If the ACD determines that none of the allegations made against the minister has been proved on the balance of probabilities, it must so declare. If there is no appeal, the Process and any suspension imposed as a consequence of those allegations will terminate from the end of the last day for lodging an appeal under paragraph 7.1.	
6.7	The ACD is to prepare a written statement of reasons for reaching its decision. The decision and reasons are to be circulated. In this statement it may make recommendations concerning the future activity of any accused person whose name is deleted from the Roll, or (if allegations are not proved) for precautions which might reduce the risk of future allegations of a similar nature. Such recommendations are of an advisory nature and not subject to appeal.	Appendix T also sets out rules for the circulation of written reasons.
7.	The Appeal Stage	
7.1	Notice of any appeal must be lodged, with a summary of the appeal grounds, within twenty-four days of posting of the ACD's written statement of reasons.	If the accused minister lives abroad the Commission may (but only when the statement of reasons is sent) direct an extension of the time for appealing to allow for postal delays.
7.2	Either the accused minister or the Investigation Team or	Rules concerning the

	<p>both may appeal, but only on the ground of (i) a material failure to comply with rules of the Disciplinary Process, (ii) a breach of the rules of natural justice, (iii) a serious misunderstanding by the ACD of the facts before it, or (iv) new evidence which could not reasonably have been presented to the ACD and could credibly be expected to affect the outcome.</p> <p>In addition, where some or all of the allegations against a minister are found proven, an appeal may be lodged against the decision on sanction. In such an appeal the Investigation Team may present the case for a sanction or for additional or varied directions to accompany a written warning; the accused minister may present the case against a sanction or for variation or cancellation of directions accompanying a written warning. No appeal may be lodged in respect of allegations abandoned by the Investigation Team under Paragraph 6.2 or admitted by the accused minister under Paragraph 6.3.</p>	<p>timetable for, and procedure and evidence at appeal hearings, are set out in Appendix U.</p>
7.3	<p>As soon as an appeal is lodged, a Disciplinary Appeal Commission ('DAppC') is constituted to oversee and hear the case. Once a Commission is in being for a particular case, authority over that case remains with the General Assembly, but the DAppC now acts in the Assembly's name and gives any procedural directions, or decisions regarding suspension of the accused minister.</p>	<p>The composition of a DAppC is set out at Appendix V.</p>
7.4	<p>An appeal is normally heard in the presence of both parties, the cases for the appellant and respondent being heard in that order. There is to be no rehearing of the case as a whole. Fresh evidence may not be received unless the DAppC is satisfied (i) that there is new evidence which could not reasonably have been presented to the ACD and could credibly be expected to affect the outcome, and (ii) that it can hear such evidence fairly, and that this would be more convenient than for a fresh ACD to hear it.</p>	
7.5	<p>At the conclusion of the appeal hearing, the DAppC may dismiss the appeal, may substitute its own decision for any decision which the ACD could have made (including varying directions or recommendations), or may quash the previous decision and remit the case for full re-hearing by a fresh ACD. Unless it remits a case for re-hearing, the decision of the DAppC is final, the Process and any suspension terminating when it is announced.</p>	<p>The rules in Appendix O set out the procedure if a case is remitted for rehearing; in which case the rules in Appendices R-T also apply.</p>
8	<p>Miscellaneous provisions</p>	
8.1	<p>The Process may be halted by a reference into the Ministerial Incapacity Procedure, and rules governing that Procedure may provide for a case commenced under it to be referred into this Process. A notice of reference into this Process from the Incapacity Procedure will have the status of an allegation of misconduct and be acted upon as provided in Paragraph 3.</p>	<p>Appendix W provides in detail for the transfer of cases from this Process to the Incapacity Procedure</p>
8.2	<p>The Disciplinary Process continues notwithstanding the</p>	<p>Appendix X sets out the</p>

	fact that an accused minister declines to co-operate, fails to appear at a Hearing or declares (or implies by conduct) his or her resignation from the ministry or from the United Reformed Church, and also notwithstanding the non-appearance of any potential witness.	consequences of non-co-operation and similar conduct, and of a potential witness declining to appear.
8.3	Where this Process requires any document or written notification to be delivered to the accused minister, it must be delivered by hand or sent by First Class post or an equivalent method addressed to the minister's last known address. A postal address for any officer or group to which the accused minister may need to deliver material is to be supplied to the accused minister either at the outset of the Process, or before the time at which the need for such delivery may arise, and the minister must deliver such material by hand or send it by First Class post or an equivalent method addressed to that address. No method should be used which requires a recipient's signature before delivery. Directions under paragraph 8.4 may vary these requirements, and must set a period for deemed delivery if an accused minister lives outside Europe. All documents required to be served shall be placed in a sealed envelope addressed to the addressee and marked 'Private and Confidential'.	Documents and notifications are deemed to arrive three days after posting (First Class) or seven days after posting (Republic of Ireland or Continental Europe)
8.4	Directions may be given by the Panel or Commission under whose authority a case currently falls, either on application or of its own motion, covering matters of evidence, timing or procedure not otherwise provided for, if it considers this conducive to the fair, effective and expeditious operation of the Process. But the time allowed for lodging an appeal may only be extended if an extension is sought before the current time limit expires.	
8.5	Information about a case heard or investigated under the Disciplinary Process is confidential, save as the Process itself provides.	Appendix Y sets out rules regarding sharing of information and retention of records.
8.6	A consultant unconnected with the case against an accused minister is to be appointed to offer him/her guidance through the steps of the Disciplinary Process. It is no part of the consultant's duty to carry out investigative work or advocacy, nor to offer legal advice, nor to attend a Hearing.	So long as it exists, the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group (or, in cases of urgency, its Convenor) is to appoint the consultant.
8.7	The costs incurred in the work of a SSPD shall be charged against funds of the United Reformed Church under the control of the Synod. The costs incurred by an ASPD or by any Commission or Secretary of Commissions in operating the Process and the reasonable expenses of any witness attending a Hearing shall be charged against funds of the Church under the control of the General Assembly. After a case is referred into the Hearing Stage and an ACD appointed, the accused minister and the Investigation Team may each apply to the Commission for the approval of costs to be incurred in connection with that Stage, and any costs so approved may also be charged against funds of the Church under the control	Necessary travel and meeting expenses of the Investigation Team will normally be allowable; but neither party shall be entitled to claim the cost of professional advice in formulating their position at any stage of the Process, nor costs of preparing the case for Hearing or professional representation at that Hearing

	of the General Assembly. If this includes the fees of one or more experts, the parties are required to consult with a view to calling (if possible) a single expert by agreement.	
8.8	Both columns of the text of the Framework, and the Appendices to which the Framework refers, are integral parts of the Disciplinary Process and carry equal weight.	Guidance Notes and diagrams published from time to time to assist those engaged in or affected by the Process are not to be considered part of the authoritative text, and in any conflict with the Framework or Appendices, the Framework and Appendices are to prevail.
8.9	Cases still pending under the previous Disciplinary Process at the date determined by the General Assembly for this Process to come into force are to be dealt with in accordance with transitional provisions.	The transitional provisions appear at Appendix Z

Ministerial Disciplinary Process

Table of appendices (found on the website as Paper T2 Appendices, at the address www.urc.org.uk/images/MissionCouncil/March2020/T2_-_Appendices.pdf)

A	Affirmations
B	Ministers under other denominational jurisdictions
C	Oversight
D	Moderator’s recorded warnings
E	Double jeopardy
F	The Synod Standing Panel for Discipline
G	Safeguarding
H	The Assembly Representative and Standing Panel for Discipline
J	Suspension
K	Investigation Teams and the Disciplinary Investigation Panel
L	The Investigation Stage
M	Cautions
N	Assembly Commissions for Discipline and the Commission Panel
O	The Hearing Stage
P	Abandonment of allegations by an Investigation Team
Q	Admission of allegations by an accused minister
R	Hearing Procedure
S	Disciplinary sanctions
T	Reasons for Commission decisions
U	Appeal Procedure
V	Disciplinary Appeal Commissions
W	Interface with the Incapacity Procedure
X	Non-co-operation and non-appearance
Y	Dissemination of information and record-keeping
Z	Transitional provisions [cases pending under the old Process] – <i>not yet prepared</i>

There is no Appendix I

Table of Terms

Ministerial Disciplinary Process**Table of acronyms and defined terms***For guidance only; not forming part of the Process*

Term	Acronym	Brief description	First Framework reference (para.)	Main Appendix references
abandonment		an Investigation Team's request, after a case has entered the Hearing Stage, to be discharged from proceeding with it	6.2	P
admission of allegations		an accused minister's voluntary admission of allegations and submission to a sanction	6.3	Q
admission notification		an accused minister's notification to the SACD of a desire to admit allegations	---	Q
affirmations		affirmations made at ordination or commissioning	1	A
Appeal Stage		from the lodging of an appeal until its final disposal by the DAppC	7.1	U
Assembly Commission for Discipline	ACD	a three-person Commission representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, controlling the Hearing Stage of the Process and adjudicating allegations on the balance of probabilities	6.1	N-T
Assembly Representative for Discipline	ARD	officer responsible for initial steps in regard to a minister under direct Assembly oversight	1	H (applying references to the Moderator)
Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	ASPD	a three-person panel representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, controlling the first steps in the Process and determining the existence of a <i>prima facie</i> case relating to a minister under direct Assembly oversight	3	H, J, L, M (applying references to the SSPD)
caution (sometimes called 'agreed' or 'negotiated')		a text, agreed in writing between an accused minister and the Investigation Team but approved and finally read aloud by the SSPD, in which an accused minister admits allegations, shows remorse and	5.3	M

		agrees steps to prevent recurrence		
Commission Panel		a 30-person pool from which members of an ACD are drawn	6.1	N
Commission witnesses		expert witnesses called by an ACD of its own motion	6.4	R
deletion		deletion from the Roll of Ministers, imposed as a sanction by an ACD in respect of proven allegations	6.5	S
directions (in the context of a written warning)		ACD directions regarding the future ministry or conduct of a minister given a written warning, or remedial steps to be taken by and in respect of that minister	6.5	S
Disciplinary Appeal Commission	DAppC	a three-person Commission representing the judicial authority of the General Assembly, determining appeals from decisions of an ACD	7.3	U-V
Disciplinary Investigation Panel		a 15-person pool from which members of Investigation Teams are drawn	5.1	K
expectations		the expectations set out in Framework paragraph 1	2	---
Hearing Stage		from the SACD receiving the papers in a case until the case is dismissed by the ACD, or a sanction is imposed and reasons given	6	O, R
initial stage		from a Moderator identifying an allegation as one of misconduct to the case being struck out or an Investigation Team appointed	3	G
Investigation Stage		from the appointment of an Investigation Team until the case is dismissed by the SSPD, an agreed caution administered or the SSPD passing the papers to the SACD	5	F-G
Investigation Team		A three-person team appointed from the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to investigate, and if appropriate to present, the case against a minister	5.1	K, L, O, R
minister (and cognate expressions)		minister of Word and Sacraments (but includes CRCWs where context allows)	1	---
misconduct		a breach of expectations which would, if proven, undermine the credibility of a person's ministry or the Church's witness	2	---
Moderator		includes a person acting in place of a Moderator of Synod under the Process. Where the context allows, references to a Moderator apply also to the ARD.	1	F, H
Moderator's recorded warning		a warning given by a Moderator to a minister, outside the Disciplinary Process, regarding conduct which might if repeated warrant disciplinary steps	2	D
oversight		defined for purposes of the Process in Appendix C	1	C
recommendations		ACD recommendations as to restrictions to be placed on activities involving a person deleted from the Roll of Ministers	6.7	S
responsible forum		generic term for the judicial forum (SSP, ASP, ACD or DAppC) currently responsible for a disciplinary case	---	W

safeguarding advice		explained further in Appendix G	3	G
Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline	SACD	officer appointed by the General Assembly to service ACDs and collate Disciplinary Process records	6.3	N, O, R, U
Secretary of Disciplinary Appeal Commissions	SDAppC	officer appointed by the General Assembly to service DAppCs	---	U, V
striking-out		determination by a SSPD that allegations are patently frivolous, malicious, vexatious or unrelated to the expectations	3	---
suspension		a direction by a judicial forum with the effect set out in Schedules E and F to the Basis of Union	3	J
Synod Standing Panel for Discipline	SSPD	a three-person panel representing the judicial authority of the Synod, controlling the first steps in the Process and determining the existence of a <i>prima facie</i> case	3	F, J, L, M
written warning		formal warning imposed as a sanction by an ACD in respect of proven allegations	6.5	S

Paper T3

Ministerial disciplinary process and incapacity procedure

Ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group (MIND)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Chris Copley chrismvivan@gmail.com
Action required	Take note. MIND will welcome any comment on detail from members of Mission Council.
Draft resolution(s)	None. The detail of this paper is presently provisional.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	These are the changes to the Incapacity Procedure that would be entailed by the proposed new Disciplinary Process.
Main points	See Paragraphs 7-13 of the introductory section of Paper T1. Paragraph 8 makes clear that the proposals below are provisional in their detail, pending further scrutiny.
Previous documents	See Paper T1.
Consultation has taken place with...	See Paper T1 – although the consultation was not about the detail of this paper.

Summary of impact

Financial	See Paper T1.
External	See Paper T1.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH CASES OF INCAPACITY INVOLVING MINISTERS OR CHURCH-RELATED COMMUNITY WORKERS

Necessary changes to the Procedure, entailed by the proposed changes to the Disciplinary Process. The numbers below refer to sections and paragraphs of the present Incapacity Procedure.

LP.1 – Replace ‘whilst not’ by ‘whether or not’, and delete ‘nevertheless’.

Insert new provision:

- LP.1A In cases transferred into the Incapacity Procedure by a direction given during the Disciplinary Process after disciplinary allegations have been made against a minister or CRCW, the Review Commission and Appeals Review Commission are also to consider:
- (i) whether incapacity factors could have contributed to any misconduct covered by those allegations (and if so, to what extent those factors may excuse or mitigate such misconduct if proven)
 - (ii) whether incapacity factors prevent the affected minister or CRCW from answering disciplinary allegations.
- LP.4 replace text down to 'commissioning' by the following:
- Although the operation of the Incapacity Procedure is in most cases not based upon disciplinary allegations,
- LP.5 replace 'recommendation from' by 'direction given in'
- A1.1 replace existing definitions (and insert new definition of 'Incapacity factors') as follows:
- 'General Assembly Representative' shall mean the Assembly Representative for Discipline appointed under the Disciplinary Process
- 'Incapacity factors' means the three factors referred to in Paragraph LP1 as potentially rendering a minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry
- 'Special Appeals Body' means the body appointed to hear appeals under Section H6 against a direction transferring a case into the Disciplinary Process
- 'Synod' means that Synod which in relation to any minister or CRCW would be considered to exercise oversight for the purposes of the Disciplinary Process
- B.6 delete existing text and replace as follows:
- A direction given by a Synod or Assembly Standing Panel, Assembly Commission or Appeal Commission under the Disciplinary Process for the transfer of a case into the Incapacity Procedure and the reasons given for that direction shall have the same effect, and be treated in the same way, as a Certificate of Entry and Commencement Notice respectively.
- E.7 replace 'the issue of a Commencement Notice' by 'a direction given in that Process'.
- F.4.4 replace 'question of whether, based on the criteria set out in Paragraphs LP1 and LP4 the minister is or is not capable of exercising, or of continuing to exercise, ministry?' by 'matters arising for the Commission's consideration under Paragraphs LP1, LP1A or LP4?'
- Insert new provisions:

- F 4.5 What safeguarding considerations are raised by the possible incapacity factors engaged in the case, and what safeguarding advice should the Commission take before reaching a final decision on possible deletion from the Roll?
- F 4.6 Should the PRWC be invited to consider a case transferred from the Disciplinary Process and make recommendations to the Commission? (This step may also be taken at a later stage, before a final decision whether deletion from the Roll is or is not appropriate; but will not normally be appropriate if the Commission anticipates the possible return of the case to the Disciplinary Process.)
- H.1 and H2 delete existing text and replace as follows:
- H.1 If it considers that, in a case within the Incapacity Procedure, the minister may be guilty of misconduct as defined in Paragraph 2 of the Disciplinary Process, the Review Commission may, at any time during the Incapacity Procedure and whether or not a Hearing has taken place, adopt the procedure set out in Paragraphs H2 and H17 to transfer the case into the Disciplinary Process.
The Review Commission must not, however, direct such transfer if, or so long as, it believes (or considers further investigation may show) that:
- (i) any of the factors listed in Paragraph LP1 may have contributed to, and may possibly excuse, the suspected breach of expectations;
 - (ii) any such factor may render the minister incapable of exercising, or continuing to exercise, ministry even if the minister is guilty of no such breach; or
 - (iii) any such factor may prevent the minister from answering disciplinary allegations.
- H.2 It shall instruct the Secretary of the Review Commission to inform the minister by written notice of its decision to direct a transfer of the case to the Disciplinary Process, stating its reasons for such recommendation. This notice shall contain a statement of its reasons for reaching its decision and it may indicate what papers, if any, should be passed to the body responsible for conduct of the case within the Disciplinary Process. The notice shall inform the minister that she or he may within a period of twenty-one days from the receipt of the said notice give written notice to the Secretary of the Review Commission of his/her intention to appeal against the proposed direction. If at the end of the period no such notice of intention to appeal has been received (time being of the essence for this purpose) then the procedure set out in Paragraphs H.14 and H.17 shall be followed. The notice shall draw the attention of the recipient to the strict time limit for serving a Notice of Appeal.
- H.11 replace 'person to whom the reference back will be made' by 'body responsible for conduct of the case within the Disciplinary Process'.
- H.13 replace 'reject the proposed reference back' by 'cancel the direction for transfer'.

H.14 and H17 to H20 delete existing text and replace as follows:

- H.14 If the decision of the Special Appeals Body is to reject the appeal and to uphold the direction for transfer, or if there is no appeal against the direction, the Secretary of the Review Commission shall send to the minister:
- (i) a notice advising him/her of that fact
 - (ii) a copy of the notice of the decision and the statement of reasons appended to the decision
 - (iii) a copy of the direction for transfer and
 - (iv) copies of any papers being sent with the direction in accordance with Paragraph H.2 or Paragraph H.11 as the case may be.
- H.17 If the decision is to reject the appeal and uphold the direction for transfer, or if there is no appeal against the direction, the Secretary of the Review Commission shall forthwith send or deliver to the Moderator of the Synod having oversight of the affected minister (or, if the minister is under the direct oversight of the General Assembly, to the ARD), for the attention of the Synod or Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline as the case may be,
- (i) a written notice setting out the decision of the Review Commission, or in the event of an appeal, the Special Appeals Body, incorporating both the Review Commission's direction and (where applicable) the order of the Special Appeals Body dismissing the appeal, together in either case with the reasons given, and
 - (ii) such other papers (if any) as are referred to in Paragraph H.2 or Paragraph H.11 as the case may be.
- H.18 In the event that a case transferred into the Incapacity Procedure by direction of an Assembly Commission or Appeals Commission is transferred back, the notice is to be sent instead to the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline or to the Secretary of Disciplinary Appeal Commissions, as applicable.
- H.19 The Secretary of the Review Commission shall at the same time send copies of the direction for transfer (but not the accompanying documentation) to the Moderator of the Synod of the province or nation where an affected minister under direct Assembly oversight resides, the Synod Clerk, the General Secretary, the Press Officer, the Secretary for Ministries and the Convener of the PRWC.
- H.20 As soon as the direction for transfer has been sent in accordance with Paragraph H17, the Review Commission shall declare the case within the Incapacity Procedure to be concluded and no further action shall be taken in respect thereof.

Delete H22 and H23 in their entirety.

Paper U1

Written Reporting to General Assembly

Mission Council Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, approves the pattern for the routine reporting of Assembly Committees as contained in Paper U1.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Committee Reporting to General Assembly.
Main points	To approve a biennial pattern for the routine reporting in writing of committees to General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	The three Deputy General Secretaries and most committee conveners.

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A

1. With the return to an annual General Assembly from July 2021, some thought is needed (even at this distance) to the pattern for the routine reporting of Assembly committees in order that those committees may be clear about what is required of them.
2. In order not to burden committees unhelpfully with the need to prepare a written report on an annual basis, it is suggested that each committee continue to report to Assembly every other year.

3. This is not to preclude committees from bringing business to Assembly in the years when they are not routinely scheduled to report, but it means that a full, general written report will not be required every year.
4. Some reports - Mission Council/Assembly Executive (including reference groups, advisory groups, task groups, etc.), Finance Committee, Nominations Committee and Synod Moderators - will still be required on an annual basis, but it is suggested that other committees be divided across a two-year cycle as follows:

Odd numbered years

Mission
Communications
Equalities
Pastoral Reference and Welfare

Even numbered years

Discipleship (Children and Youth
Work, Ministries, Education and
Learning)
Business
Faith and Order

5. If this pattern of reporting is acceptable, some further thought will be required about the nature of parallel sessions at Assembly. These might offer committees who are not reporting that year an opportunity to highlight a few aspects of their ongoing work and engage in conversation with members of Assembly.
6. Consultation has so far taken place with the three Deputy General Secretaries and most committee conveners, with this direction of travel being universally welcomed.

Paper Y1

Video-conferencing and decision-making

Steve Faber and Clare Downing

Contact name and email address	The Revd Steve Faber moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk The Revd Clare Downing moderator@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) affirms the policy agreed by resolution M4 of November 2015, that postal and proxy votes are not accepted in the councils of the church, except where the United Reformed Church Structure, Rules of Procedure, the URC Act or Local Church constitutions applyb) understands this policy to mean that members must be present in person at meetings of the councils of the church in order to cast a votec) agrees that when councils of the church meet to exercise their functions under the Structure, members joining the meeting by video-conferencing or telephone conference call may, at the discretion of the person chairing or convening the meeting, have their views considered at the meeting but may not cast a vote or take part in the decision phase of the consensus process (and for the avoidance of doubt, the same provision applies to committees exercising functions under the Structure under devolved powers from councils)d) welcomes councils and committees of the church exploring the potential of new forms of communication where these aid the operational running of the church, or facilitate ongoing work on topics between meetings in the same physical space; ande) directs the Clerk to write into Standing Orders the clarification of policy regarding decision-making through video-conferencing, recognizing that

	Standing Orders may be suspended if the occasion warrants this.
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To clarify the place of video-conferencing in making decisions in the councils of the United Reformed Church.
Main points	Affirms and clarifies the statement of policy from November 2014, that postal and proxy votes are not accepted in councils of the Church except where specific provision is made, and extends this to clarify the place of video-conferencing as a means of making decisions under the Structure. Welcomes further exploration of appropriate use of video-conferencing to aid the operation of the Church.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council Paper M4, November 2014.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators, General Secretary, Clerk of the General Assembly, convenor of law and polity advisory group.

Summary of impact

Financial	None, although developing appropriate video-conferencing should lead to financial and environmental savings.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

1. A recent Church Meeting that was discerning whether a candidate should be called as Minister to a pastorate used FaceTime – a person to person mobile phone video messaging system – to allow an Elder of the church to participate who was unable to attend in person. There was some discussion afterwards as to whether that Elder’s vote could be counted in deciding to issue a call to the Minister.

2. The Synod Moderator sought advice from the Assembly Clerk, raising as concerns the facts that:
 - Only one person had been given the opportunity to connect like this (although nobody else had asked for the facility)
 - The facility had not been offered to the other church in the two-church pastorate
 - The person chairing the meeting was the only one who could see the Elder connecting remotely, and the meeting chair had to relay salient points to and from the meeting.

The Moderator and Assembly Clerk agreed that in these circumstances it was inappropriate for the Elder’s vote to be counted. Happily, discounting that vote did not affect the outcome of the call.

3. Discussion with other Synod Moderators makes clear that the concerns above are shared. Further, questions were raised about how we ensure equal opportunity to those who cannot access the internet, and for churches that do not

have internet connection or appropriate projection/video-conferencing equipment, and how the dynamic of the meeting and remote users' participation is affected if the connection drops. There may be environmental benefits to video-conferencing through reducing unnecessary travel, and surely wider participation in our decision making is to be welcomed. There are also ecclesiological questions of how we discern the mind of Christ in our meetings. Is it any different to use video- and telephone-conferencing for our committee meetings than it is to use it for the councils of our Church? Should it be?

4. The Charity Commission of England and Wales accepts that telephone and video conferencing may be appropriate in some circumstances, but states that 'for a meeting to be valid, the people attending must be able to see and hear each other.'¹ (Their guidance is that telephone conference calls are only permissible if the charity's governing document permits it.)
5. Having discussed the situation with other Moderators who share the same concerns, we bring the following resolution to Mission Council to clarify the denominational position, bearing in mind our long-held belief that in the councils of the church we make our decisions through seeking to discern together the mind of Christ.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-meetings-making-decisions-and-voting> retrieved 28/1/2020