

## **Mission Council March 2018**

### **Day one – 19 March**

#### **Session one**

##### **Opening Worship**

The March meeting of Mission Council opened at the High Leigh Conference Centre with prayers and a sermon led by the Revd Mark Robinson, Chaplain to the Revd Kevin Watson, Moderator of the General Assembly.

##### **Administrative matters**

John Proctor announced that there were two questionnaires which members of Mission Council were requested to complete while at High Leigh – one from the Children and Youth Work department and one concerning the Church's hymnody. The council were also reminded of the process from formally removing a paper from en bloc and announced that three papers had already removed from – Papers P1, T1 and H2, and these had been added to the agenda. Two additional papers were tabled – Papers D4 and P2, and both of these were scheduled for session seven.

##### **Matters Arising: Peace in Korea**

In matters arising, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, immediate-past Moderator of the General Assembly, following a recent visit to South Korea, raised the issue of peace between North and South Korea. Referring to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics, reflecting on how the teams representing North and South Korea walked out together to cheering crowds under a united flag. 'Those watching were witnesses both to the opportunity and chance for reconciliation and peace in Korea,' he said.

Under the initiative 'Cultivating Peace – Proclaiming Hope', Mr Grosch-Miller said the World Council of Churches (WCC) is campaigning for a world free of nuclear weapons, and is looking for a starting point where relationships between North and South Korea can be normalised and become a safe place for all. He informed moderators that the URC has become a member of the WCC forum in Korea – supporting the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK) – and asked if support can be obtained from Mission Council for a message of support and encouragement to be sent from the URC at this 'critical stage'.

The letter read: 'Mission Council, meeting on 19 March, was pleased to receive a report from the Revd David Grosch-Miller following his participating in the International Conference in Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of 88 Declaration of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK). At this critical moment, in the search for a lasting and just peace for the people of Korea, Mission Council affirms the continued commitment of the United Reformed Church to support ecumenical engagement towards peace and reconciliation of the Korean peninsula.

'We send warmest greetings and heartfelt prayers to our partner churches the PCK and PROK and to the NCCCK. We look forward to further engagement through the participation of the URC in the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Forum for Korea.'

This request was passed by consensus.

## **Paper H2: Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for authorised elders**

Paul Whittle, convenor of ministries committee, introduced Paper H2 on Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for authorised elders. This was the first of the papers removed from en bloc.

Mr Whittle explained that, in writing these guidelines, the ministries committee was responding to a request from GA 2016. Paper H2 details the Guidelines and the resolution asks for formal approval for the code of conduct for all lay people appointed to preside at the sacraments, whether elders or accredited lay preachers. He further explained that the paper has been removed from en bloc because of some queries on whether Assembly accredited lay preachers need a separate code of conduct

At its next meeting, the ministries committee will review the existing code for Assembly accredited lay preachers. Paul Whittle, speaking personally, felt that a separate code was not necessary.

There were some questions about the code for elders, a follow up on whether the URC would consider producing a single code for all kinds of formal lay service, and a query on which body was responsible for the DBS checks

The resolution was passed by consensus.

## **Session two**

### **Paper G1: Update on financial projections**

Mr Ian Hardie, Treasurer and convenor of the finance committee, presented Paper G1 to update Mission Council on work done since its November 2017 meeting, and to indicate how the committee plans to prepare the 2019 budget.

In November, Mr Hardie explained that the financial projections for 2019 and 2020 showed a clear deterioration in the United Reformed Church's financial position – a result of the need to increase contributions into both the ministers' and the lay staff pension funds. But he advised that a way had been found to address the Lay Staff Pension Scheme deficit, avoiding any increase in the annual contributions required by the URC Trust and other employers within the Scheme.

At a meeting with the employers within the scheme in November 2017, those present agreed to recommend to those bodies – synod, college or the URC Trust – that a lump sum proportionate to each one's share of the overall Scheme deficit should be paid over via the URC Trust to the Lay Staff Scheme Trustee by end of June this year, to avoid any increase in annual contribution rate before 2021 at the earliest. A further sum of £1.4 million to reduce the deficit, which includes a URC Trust contribution of £628,000 – in addition to the £2 million transferred to the Trustee in 2017 – would be needed.

Mr Hardie said this would reduce the projected deficit for 2019 but not eliminate it. He added, that the committee would need a little time before it could be certain that every employer in the URC had agreed its share of contribution, although half of the employers had given oral confirmation and the others a written one.

Regarding the URC Ministers' Pension Fund (URCMPF) Scheme, Mr Hardie said: 'things remain a bit more uncertain'. He advised that he still anticipates an increase in future benefit contributions, but

by how much would not be known until towards the end of the year. Therefore, the assumption that an increase of around £500,000 per annum in employer contributions as needed for the URCMPF, to provide for future benefits, could not be dispelled.

Synod treasurers have been approached over the past year about the potential increase in future pension contributions and some synods had already agreed to donate a percentage of the proceeds of non-manse property sales to the URCMPF to assist in offsetting the proposed increase.

A question was posed from the floor about the percentage of proceeds being offered by the three synods. Mr Hardie explained that three synods had already committed to giving 10% and one 15%.

Mr Hardie presented three options for Mission Council to consider addressing the issue:

1. Seek £500,000 additional M&M from already struggling churches.
2. Slash £500,000 from existing programmes that the denomination runs.
3. Look to synods for support.

Mission Council showed no enthusiasm for 1 or 2, and Mr Hardie noted this response on behalf of the finance committee. He advised that a budget would be presented in November.

#### **Paper Z1: Criteria for doing things well**

Introduced by the Revd Simon Walking, Moderator of the Synod of Wales, speaking on behalf of the Synod Moderators meeting – Paper Z1 asked: ‘Where is God calling the URC?’ He stated that, to be purposeful and significant we [the URC] needs to do less and to do it well. The thrust of the Moderators’ paper was on the need to sharpen the focus of the work the URC does – not work for its own sake, but work with purpose, relevance and necessity as its heart – work that allows the local churches and the councils of the Church to flourish.

After some lively discussion, which ended in a detailed look at the three-part resolution, Mission Council agreed to pass the resolution to the facilitation group, and they will return with fresh wording in a later session.

#### **Paper T1: Update on review of disciplinary process**

The second of the papers removed from en bloc, Paper T1 – a statement from the MIND advisory group to Mission Council – was introduced by the Revd Michael Hopkins.

Paper T1 is an update from the MIND advisory group regarding the current review of the disciplinary process. Members of Mission Council commented on the existing disciplinary process, with several speakers reflecting on their experience of operating it. The Clerk and the Legal Advisor undertook to take these comments back to MIND to inform the review of the Disciplinary Process, and to update each meeting of Mission Council until further notice.

## **Session three**

### **Paper M1: Resourcing worship in the URC**

This paper, presented by the Revd Richard Church, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), invited Mission Council to make clear whether it supported, or did not support, the forming of a worship reference group – that would report to faith and order committee – to regularly look at the need to refresh the denomination’s worship materials. A long and varied discussion followed, including whether local churches were asking for this; the development of a central resource pool for access as and when required; concerns about staff undertaking more work and enabling URC members to share material.

A resolution – directing the General Secretariat to consult and make further proposals to General Assembly (or Mission Council acting on its behalf) – was not passed, but the General Secretariat undertook to think further about the issue.

### **Paper M2: The Church’s Hymnody**

This paper, introduced by the Revd John Proctor, General Secretary, simply asked the members of Mission Council to complete a short questionnaire regarding the congregations(s) they know best, to gain an impression of whether there is a need and appetite within the URC for new work on hymn resources. Responses will be collated by Mr John Ellis and fed back to a later session of this meeting of Mission Council.

### **Evening prayers**

The Revd Mark Robinson, Chaplain, and the Revd Kevin Watson, Moderator of the General Assembly, led evening prayers. The worship included the commissioning of Mr Simeon Mitchell (pictured), recently appointed Secretary for Church and Society.