



## Follow-Up to the “Better Together” joint meeting of the Methodist Council and the URC Mission Council in October 2010

### Background

- 1) At the *Better Together* joint meeting between the United Reformed Church Mission Council and the Methodist Council in October 2010 the two denominations met together as a result of the resolutions that were agreed at the Methodist Council and Mission Council in 2008-9. The aims of the event were to promote fellowship and understanding, to explore mission issues of common interest between the Churches and to identify ways of working together on these issues in the future.
- 2) Engaging group discussions took place at the Joint Council on what the group participants thought were important issues that were facing the Church. These discussions provided the basis for ten follow-up workshops where the issues that participants said they were most interested in were planned as workshops. The workshop facilitators recorded the main feedback that they received about their workshops from the participants which helped in the analysis of the workshops.
- 3) At the end of the Joint Council, questionnaires were distributed to attendees that invited participants to rate their experience on the sessions that they had attended and asked them to comment on any other aspects of the event that they wished to. Once the Joint Council had taken place there was an opportunity to reflect on whether the aims of the joint event had been fulfilled and to examine attendee views on the first Joint Council between the two denominations. In order to analyse the event two papers were written entitled ‘Better Together Joint Council Workshops’, which examined the feedback given by workshop facilitators on feedback in their workshops, and ‘Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire’ which analysed attendee responses to questions regarding the event on the questionnaire. These papers are attached as appendices.
- 4) The feedback was mostly positive and some very enthusiastic with a number of requests for another joint meeting as soon as it could be arranged. Others were positive in principle but felt the format of the event was not as good as it could have been and that the discussions were too superficial and determined to be “nice”. They wanted to move to grappling more directly with some of the blockages felt locally that inhibited easy closer working for the sake of the Kingdom. The questionnaire and workshops feedback also highlighted reasons why a small minority of attendees did not want to have another joint meeting. Key reasons these attendees gave were they felt that the information presented to them was too basic as they already had knowledge of these subjects, there was not enough time to deal with each Council’s business in the separate sessions, and that they did not have enough opportunity to find ways of working together in the future. Most workshops received similar scores for usefulness, however the one area where participants thought more work is urgently needed is with regard to how our structures enable us to ‘lighten the load’ in order to make progress in joint work locally.

## Strategic Oversight Group

- 5) The papers *Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire* and *Better Together Joint Council Workshops* went to the Strategic Oversight Group in January 2011 for discussion where the SOG discussed the feedback received from the questionnaires, analysis of ratings, workshops feedback, and the SOG's own views of the event. The reasons that attendees gave for not wanting to have another joint Council were carefully looked at. Open to learning the practical lessons from the 2010 meeting, on balance the SOG felt that it would definitely be beneficial to hold a follow-up event to the joint meeting in order to maintain the momentum on the issues that both Churches felt that they could successfully work on together, such as buildings opportunities and children and youth work. It would be important to address the reasons some attendees gave for not wanting to have another joint Council by looking at the level of information provided to attendees, the time allocated to Council business, exploring ways for both denominations to work together and giving more attention to implications for looking at local structures.
- 6) The SOG thought that a follow-up joint meeting between the two Councils should be held in autumn 2012 for the following reasons.
  - a) Holding another joint Council within two years would ensure continuity of personnel from the previous joint meeting to the follow-up Council.
  - b) A joint event would enable the two denominations to work more closely together, to use resources more efficiently and therefore enhance mission, as detailed in the Methodist Council and URC Mission Council 2008 resolutions.
  - c) Momentum would be maintained on issues that were of combined interest to both denominations such as Building Opportunities and Children & Youth Work which were presented and debated at the Joint Council.
  - d) Local structures could be explored further at a follow-up Council as attendees at the joint meeting felt that this subject had not been fully addressed.
  - e) The feedback given by attendees would be incorporated into the follow-up event in order to ensure a smoother running and better resourced event.

## Future Joint Event Development

- 7) If the proposal of a follow-up joint Council were to be taken forward future developments to be considered include the following:
  - increased joint worship helping the churches to increase awareness of God's presence and share God's love;
  - more time for interaction via discussion in workshops, providing the opportunity to debate issues of significance to both Churches where the diversity and unity on issues can be openly and honestly explored;
  - fewer and shorter presentations so that there would be more time for attendees to interact via plenary debate and group discussion;
  - a balance between decision making and information to ensure that attendees received relevant information on the projects taking place within the teams as well as enough time to deal effectively with Council business;
  - measuring the success of the event by including within any feedback questionnaires the event's objectives in order to assess how well the attendees thought that the objectives had been met.

## Recommendations

1. The Council supports a proposal to hold a further joint meeting of the Mission Council and the Methodist Council in the autumn of 2012.
2. The Council agrees a planning group should be set up to facilitate the event and should include representatives of both Councils and the Faith & Order bodies of each denomination.

## Methodist Council update

- 8) The April 2011 meeting of the Methodist Council passed resolutions that supported Recommendation 1. The Council made a suggestion for a date in October 2012; the present planned dates for Mission Council of 30 November to 2 December 2012 were not given to the Methodist Council.
- 9) The Methodist Council passed a resolution to support Recommendation 2.

## Resolution

**Noting the support from the April meeting of the Methodist Council, Mission Council:**

- (i) **supports a proposal to hold a further joint meeting of the Mission Council and the Methodist Council in the autumn of 2012;**
- (ii) **agrees a planning group should be set up to facilitate the event and should include representatives of both Councils and the Faith & Order bodies of each denomination.**

## Appendices

**Appendix 1** - Better Together Joint Council Workshops

**Appendix 2** - Better Together Joint Council Questionnaire

# Appendix 1

## Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Workshops Paper

See Appendix 1A for a list of the Better Together October Joint Council workshops

### Introduction

- 1) At the Better Together Joint Council in October 2010 ten workshops were facilitated based on feedback given by groups which met earlier at the Council. The workshops consisted of a mixture of United Reformed Church and Methodist Church participants (with one senior participant from each of the denominations) who met to explore the key challenges facing the Church locally and denominationally. The themes that arose from the workshops were arranged into categories of recurring and emerging themes. A recurring theme has been defined as a theme that arose from the discussions on a number of occasions in the groups. An emerging theme has been defined as a theme that arose from the discussions that was not expected to have arisen.

Of the topics discussed, the evident recurring themes were: The Big Society, Leadership and Mission and Discipleship. The themes that emerged from the group discussions were: Ecumenism, Coalition Churches, The Role of Ministers, Overload of Work and Shortage of Leaders for Children & Youth Work.

### Recurring Themes

- 2a) The theme that recurred the most from the workshops was The Big Society, in particular 'how to help Churches meet the challenges of the Big Society' which arose from the Finding the Missing Generation workshop, and 'how the local Church engages with issues around climate change and the government spending review', which arose from the How the Local Church Engages workshop.
- b) The workshops which focused on The Big society were: 'Big Society: an Opportunity?' and 'Big Society: how the Local Church Engages'. The key messages from these workshops were that finance needed to be available in order to support, implement and properly resource Big Society projects, focus needed to be placed on discipleship when exploring Big Society ideas, and locally, people should be encouraged to feel welcome in the space used for worship.
- c) Leadership was another recurring theme that was explored. At the Articulating and Communicating Faith SCC workshop the main points that emerged were the need for strong leadership whilst not encouraging a leadership that was driven from above, and the necessity for tools to be explored that would encourage strong leadership from the Church's leaders without leading to alienation of its membership. Galvanising the Church to act was discussed at the Growing Local Leadership IP workshop.
- d) Discipleship and the need for authenticity, resourcing people for Christian discipleship, were issues discussed at the Developing Ecumenical Local Visions FLEPC workshop. Mission Shaped Structures LLL produced discussion on discipleship with regards to equipping disciples and personal discipleship in any setting.
- e) The recurring themes of Discipleship, The Big Society and Leadership are interlinked. The Connexional Team's discipleship mission which is to 'enable the making of effective, purposeful and intentional Team decisions that support the wider Church in being and making disciples in the Methodist tradition', can be linked to The Big Society theme. The Connexional Team can demonstrate discipleship by showing how its decisions support the

wider Church. This can be done by communicating the message that the Connexional team is committed to tackling The Big Society through the third emerging theme, strong Leadership. The Reverend Alison Tomlin, President of the Methodist Conference, demonstrated her commitment to a version of The Big Society in her address to the TUC on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2010 when she said: “John Wesley, and the Methodist Church he founded, believe it is inconceivable to follow Christ and not have the welfare of the poor and the vulnerable close to your heart, and we are proud to stand beside others who share those concerns today.”

- f) Other recurring themes were: Mission, which highlighted the need for mission and purpose, discussed at the Articulating and Communicating Faith: SCC workshop, Finding opportunities to do mission outside Church resources, which was discussed at the Finding the Missing Generation workshop, and the importance of mission in the local Church in order to reduce poverty was a key point raised at the Spending Cuts a Bias to the Poor EIP workshop.

## Emerging Themes

- 3a) The discussion on Ecumenism at the Realising Ministers’ Potential workshop highlighted the issue that ecumenism only seemed to work at grass roots. This is enlightening as promoting engagement or even unity between The Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church and other Christian Churches is defeated if unity between Churches is only fostered and promoted locally, preventing the knowledge and lessons learned between Churches from being translated into strategic implementation nationally.
- b) United Churches was an emerging theme that was highlighted during the Developing Ecumenical Local Visions FLEP concept workshop. The importance of this theme is that it relates to the discussion that emerged on ecumenism in the workshop detailed above. The main factor highlighted was that group participants felt that there were parallels between the forming of the Liberal Democrat/Conservative coalition government, and the opportunity that this presented for forming coalition Churches. If the government was able to form a coalition that is committed to shared common interests and goals in order to better serve the electorate, this demonstrates that it is possible for the Church to form a coalition with other Churches that have common interests in order to better serve their congregations and engage with the public.
- c) The Role of Ministers was an emerging theme that came out of the workshop Growing Local Leadership IP. The discussion was centred on ministers training in order to successfully deal with the contemporary issues that the Church is facing. There was great awareness of the importance of galvanising the Church to act by showing confidence in the gospel and challenging society’s ideals.
- d) Other emerging themes were: an overload of work due to a focus on breadth rather than depth which emerged from The Big Society an Opportunity workshop and a shortage of leaders for children and youth work which arose from the Finding the Missing Generation workshop.
- 4) The workshops highlighted issues which were both key and of common interest to both Churches. On the basis of these discussions, key areas of focus should include: The Big Society, Leadership, Discipleship, Ecumenism, The Role of Ministers, Overload of Work and Shortage of Leaders for Children & Youth Work.

## Appendix 1A

### **Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Discussion Groups**

1. Realising Ministers' Potential
2. Developing Ecumenical Local Visions including Future for the LEP concept
3. Growing Local Leadership including the Inspire Project
4. Articulating & Communicating Faith: Speaking into Contemporary Culture
5. Finding the Missing Generation
6. Making Buildings Assets: Adapting Within the Rules
7. Mission Shaped Structures: Lightening the Load on the Local
8. Big Society: an Opportunity?
9. Big Society: How the Local Church Engages
10. Spending Cuts with a Bias to the Poor: Explaining Issues of Poverty



# Appendix 2

## Better Together Joint Council October 2010 - Questionnaire Feedback Paper

### Introduction

1. At the first Better Together Joint Council held in October 2010 between The Methodist Church and The United Reformed Church questionnaires were distributed to attendees to gather their overall feedback on the event. The Joint Council was attended by approximately 160 attendees, of which 87 attendees completed the questionnaire. 39 participants were from the Methodist Church, whilst 49 participants were from the URC. 47 participants were male and 40 were female. There were 55 lay and 32 ordained participants.

The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions which related to the joint sessions, workshops, worship, networking and event location with a section for attendees to provide comments. For questions which required attendees to rate their experience a scale was provided where the value attributed was: 1=least positive & 5=most positive.

The overarching feedback from the questionnaire was that most attendees enjoyed the opportunity to interact with each other and found the workshops were a useful tool in allowing discussion on issues relevant to both denominations.

### Summary

2. The average scores were calculated for questions that required a rating from attendees. The average ratings are listed in **Appendix A**.
3. The average rating for the sessions/workshops from both Methodist Church and URC attendees was 3.4.

The average lowest rating for a workshop was Mission Shaped Structures which scored 2.6. This suggests that participants were not persuaded that the existing structures are as flexible as they wish.

The Big Society - an Opportunity workshop received the highest average rating of 4.3.

4. The session that received the lowest average rating was session 6, which included Ways ahead for Children & Youth Work and Building Opportunities, with an average Methodist Church and URC combined score of 2.9. The highest average rating for a session (excluding the question on individual sessions which scored 3.6) was session 3, groups exploring the key challenges facing the Church locally and denominationally, which scored 3.6.

These scores demonstrate that attendees valued the opportunity to discuss joint issues of interest in groups, but were less enthusiastic about the presentations on Children & Youth Work and Building Opportunities, mainly due to their length, as commented on in the feedback received from attendees.

5. The average rating for the sessions given by Methodist Church attendees was 3.4, and the average rating for the sessions given by URC attendees was also 3.4. These averages show that Methodist Church and URC attendees had the same experience overall as they gave similar ratings for the sessions/workshops.

The comments given by attendees in the final section of the questionnaire were divided into three categories which were: Event Format, Sessions/Workshops and Ecumenism. The main comments given by Methodist and URC attendees can be found in **Appendix B**.

Evaluating the comments from The Methodist Church and URC attendees in the comments listed under Event format highlighted similarities between the two organizations. Both denominations agreed that the programme was crowded and that there should be more adherence to the time-table.

In the comments listed under Sessions/Workshops both the URC and Methodist Church attendees agreed that they valued the group discussions/workshops. Both denominations felt that the presentations given were too long.

The comments listed under Ecumenism showed that both denominations valued the opportunity to interact with each other at the Joint Council, but felt that they would like to explore further ways of working together.

6. The feedback from questions that required attendees to respond by choosing between two/three options is provided in the table below.

The feedback highlights that the majority of attendees thought that the amount of worship was appropriate and enjoyed the style of worship. 18% of attendees thought that the event was too long, so whilst not a huge proportion, a number of people were dissatisfied with the length of the event.

<b>Appropriate amount of worship</b>	Ten attendees thought the amount of worship was not appropriate.
<b>Style of worship</b>	Twelve attendees did not enjoy the worship style
<b>Length of event</b>	Sixteen attendees thought the event was too long, five attendees thought the event was too short whilst 66 thought the length of event was just right.

## Conclusion

7. In conclusion, the feedback received from attendees indicated that they welcomed the interaction between the Methodist/URC attendees, and would have liked to have had more opportunity to discuss issues relevant to both denominations, via the provision of more workshops at the Council.

Attendees felt that the differences between the denominations were not explored/challenged in order to identify common goals, whilst keeping individual identities, and wanted further ways of working together to be identified.



## Appendix A

### Average Ratings for Sessions/Workshops

Sessions/Workshops	Methodist Church & URC Average Rating	Methodist Church Average Rating	URC Average Rating
Individual Sessions	3.6	3.6	3.5
Joint Session 2	3.4	3.4	3.4
Joint Session 3	3.6	3.6	3.6
Joint Session 4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Joint Session 5	3.2	3.2	3.2
Joint Session 6	2.9	2.9	2.9
Joint Session 7	3.4	3.4	3.3
Joint Session 10	3.5	3.5	3.5
Releasing Ministers Potential Workshop	3.2	3.2	3.3
Developing Ecumenical Local Visions Workshop	3.5	3.5	3.2
Growing Local Leadership Workshop	3.4	3.4	3.4
Articulating & Communicating Faith Workshop	3.6	3.6	3.6
Finding the Missing Generation Workshop	3.3	3.3	3.3
Making Buildings Assets Workshop	3	3	3
Mission Shaped Structures Workshop	2.6	2.6	2.6
Big Society an Opportunity Workshop	4.3	4.3	4.3
Big Society – How the Local Church Engage Workshop	3.3	3.3	3.3
Spending Cuts – Bias to the Poor Workshop	4	4	3.8
Knowledge Learnt from other Denomination?	3.3	3.3	3.3
Valuable Opportunity to Network?	3.4	3.4	3.5
Happy with Event Location?	4.2	4.2	4.2

## Appendix B

### Methodist Church/URC Comments

Methodist Church Comments		
Event Format	Sessions/Workshops	Ecumenism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Thought given to not holding particular sessions in the evening if concentration is minimal at that time of the day</li> <li>▪ Should be more adherence to time-table</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fresh Expressions, Children &amp; Youth and Buildings presentations were too long with too much information</li> <li>▪ Group discussions were valued</li> <li>▪ Council should have been more challenging with concrete outcomes</li> <li>▪ Strategy was missing</li> <li>▪ Little time for debate during joint sessions</li> <li>▪ Methodist sessions were rushed</li> <li>▪ Helpful if all reports had recommendations in the summary/ section of report where they are all together</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good opportunity to meet with counterparts and sister denomination</li> <li>▪ Not enough opportunity to find ways of better working together</li> <li>▪ Joint meetings in danger of leading to ‘middle of the road’ resolutions</li> </ul>

URC Comments		
Event Format	Sessions/Workshops	Ecumenism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not enough time to deal with Council business</li> <li>▪ Programme too crowded, not space between sessions and meals) with no time for reflection</li> <li>▪ Needed more time to debate the contentious issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Would have liked to have attended more than one workshop</li> <li>▪ Children &amp; Youth presentation was too long</li> <li>▪ Did not think consensus voting was helpful</li> <li>▪ Joint sessions added little</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Difference between Methodist Church and URC were not challenged</li> <li>▪ Would like further specific ways of working together</li> <li>▪ Unclear about purpose of joint meeting</li> <li>▪ Not enough time to talk with each other</li> </ul>