

Mission Council resolutions regarding the campaign of radical welcome May 2011

Mission Council has been debating the URC's campaign of radical welcome; discussing the content and the implications of the campaign. During hours of debate, over three business sessions, during which many opinions were expressed, what came through was strong support for radical welcome and the desire that the campaign be the best it can be. Mission Council set up a small group to work alongside the steering group to help widen the reach of the campaign and to help our churches understand the campaign better.

Preamble to Mission Council's resolution on the URC's campaign of radical welcome

On behalf of the steering group a summary of what it had heard from Mission Council and what it needed Mission Council to hear, was offered. A précis of this preamble is below:

These things had been heard:

- a) that there was a groundswell of support for radical welcome as a worthy and exciting expression of the way of Jesus for our time, which had been reflected not only in the campaign but in several other items on the agenda;
- b) that the steering group needed to do better in communicating the theology and meaning of radical welcome to the church;
- c) that the training in radical welcome offered through the campaign would benefit every church, regardless of whether it chose to affiliate with the campaign;
- d) that there were concerns about the campaign as it had been unveiled, but that criticism had been offered in a spirit of, "We want it to be the best it can be";
- e) that there was a small number of people who rejected the campaign altogether;
- f) that Mission Council took seriously its responsibilities as steward of the CWM grant and protector of the church from division and therefore wanted to feel confident in the campaign, this being the reason behind proposals offered including requests for changes to the campaign;
- g) that concern around the campaign was not with the headlines but the body copy, with its assertion that only "radically welcome campaign" churches were Jesus-shaped and that gay people should be welcome on the basis of, "Love – no conditions apply";
- h) that there had been serious concern over the statement referring to "the sexuality issue" with its perceived exclusion of some churches from the campaign;
- i) that the possibility that radical welcome should entail sending visitors to a different church should be revisited;
- j) that work was needed elsewhere in the church on the question of eligibility for church membership;
- k) and that there were fears about finding enough volunteers to serve as companions to churches in training.

The steering group needed these things to be heard:

- a) that the number of responding churches had grown from 80 to 173;
- b) that the body copy could be changed
- c) but that there would be no compromise on the principle of radical welcome;
- d) that the campaign needed to communicate to its audience or it was not worth doing;

- e) that it was outward facing and that this might involve using wording that caused certain offence within the church;
- f) that they were voluntarily withdrawing not only the statement referring to “the sexuality issue”, but the website on which it had been posted;
- g) that instead a simply list of Frequently Asked Questions would be made available;
- h) that the steering group had not invented the sexuality issue and that it was urgent that it be addressed properly under the guidance of the Human Sexuality Task Group.

The resolution, as previously offered, with an amendment to paragraph 4, was presented to Mission Council. The wording for paragraph 4 was supplied by Elizabeth Lawson.

Resolutions agreed:

Mission Council agreed the following four-point resolutions.

Mission Council resolves to form a group that will:

1. Comprise a representative of Mission Committee, two representatives of Mission Council, one FURY representative and two Synod moderators, not involved in the Campaign Steering Group;
2. Work closely with the Steering Group, involving members in discussion about proposed ways forward;
3. Ask Synods for feedback from synods where possible, and from at least some of their local churches;
4. If, by 31st August 2011, the review and steering group have reached a consensus they may proceed to organise the campaign along the lines agreed by them, and shall arrange for the circulation of a summary of their conclusions to members of Mission Council. If there is no consensus, the groups shall notify the deputy general secretary of that, and the matter will go back to the mission committee to consider with a view to formulating proposals for the matter to be further considered by Mission Council in November 2011.

ends

19 May 2011