



## MISSION COUNCIL

13 – 15 MAY 2013



# Mission Council Advisory Group

## 1. Communications protocol

MCAG agreed the substance of a new communications protocol which will be in force with effect from the May Mission Council.

## 2. Update from the joint meeting of Mission Council and Methodist Council

Following the joint meeting with the Methodist Council in October 2012 a joint 24-hour meeting was held in January between the Methodist Connexional Leaders Forum and 26 leaders of the United Reformed Church, including the Assembly, Synod and FURY Moderators and senior staff. The combined forum reflected further on our ecumenical calling and suggested a number of specific ways in which the two denominations could work more closely together for the sake of the Kingdom. Subsequently the URC-Methodist Strategic Oversight Group met and considered the output of both meetings.

While many Methodists, especially those working in Local Ecumenical Projects (LEPs), are as keen as many in the United Reformed Church for blockages to be cleared and progress to be made in coming closer together, Mission Council needs to recognise that other Methodists more naturally look towards the Church of England from which Methodism sprang. In addition, between the time the joint meeting of the two Councils was agreed and the meeting actually taking place, the Methodist Conference agreed to a series of radical proposals under the Fruitful Field project on training. These will require a great deal of further work by Methodist leaders and staff to bring to effective fruition. This work itself could offer ecumenical opportunities and it is certainly very much in the interest of the United Reformed Church that this work is done thoroughly and creatively as vital ecumenical relationships in relation to both ministerial and lay training could be at stake.

Within this new context, the URC-Methodist Liaison Group has been commissioned to scope out what other work to bring the two Churches closer to each other might be attempted and they will report to the Strategic Oversight Group later in the year. They have copies of all the suggestions made.

In the context of other business coming to Mission Council, the implication of this update is that it is improbable that any major changes in structural or staff relations with our Methodist friends will happen quickly. Therefore Mission Council might be unwise to delay any necessary decisions, pending such possible, but unknown, changes.

### **3. Northern Synod**

The five northern synods (Scotland, Northern, North Western, Mersey and Yorkshire) held a meeting for officers and representatives in September 2011 to explore how they might work more closely together. Since that time there has been a modest sharing of staff and programme life between them. However, forthcoming searches for new synod moderators have brought this exploration back into focus. Howard Sharp is due to retire as moderator of the Mersey Synod in June 2014; Rowena Francis completes her term as moderator of the Northern Synod later this year.

When they heard about Rowena's imminent departure, the other four moderators urged the Assembly officers to delay the appointment of a new moderator for Northern Synod until new ways of working could be seriously considered. Northern Synod now has 3000 members; Mersey is slightly larger with 3800. However, the two combined are smaller than the Newcastle District was in the 1970's. Other synods will share Northern Synod's particular difficulty in finding people to do the jobs to fulfil the functions of a synod.

Val Morrison and Roberta Rominger reported to MCAG that they had met with the Mission Executive Committee of Northern Synod to discuss the possibility of appointing an interim minister to the post of synod moderator until July 2014. This person's task would be twofold: to give pastoral support to the officers, ministers and churches of the synod and to ensure that consultation with the other four synods takes place as a matter of urgency to identify the best way forward for the next chapter of their life in partnership. MCAG supported this action and recommended that Mission Council should be alerted to the situation.

A further visit was scheduled for early April and progress would be reported to Mission Council.

### **4. New format for Mission Council papers**

Those who were present at the October 2012 Mission Council meeting may have noticed that the papers prepared for our joint session with the Methodist Council were presented with headings which summarised the contents of the paper and gave other key information. Impressed by this, MCAG agreed that papers presented to Mission Council should in future contain such headings. A pro forma will be circulated in the autumn. The following information will be sought: contact name and details for the presenter; subject and aims of the paper; main points; background, context and relevant documents.