

# Paper M1

## Constitutional review

### Clerk

#### Basic information

<b>Contact</b>	The Revd Michael Hopkins <a href="mailto:michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk">michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	For information only.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>None.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The operation of synods and synod trust companies in regard to transactions affecting local church property. This paper is to let Mission Council know that some questions have been raised and practices are being reviewed.
<b>Main points</b>	A recent constitutional review identified a general point that may affect practice in a number of synods. The review commission therefore directed the law and polity advisory group to review the requirements of the URC acts, in order to help synods and synod trust companies to maintain an appropriate pattern of working in regard to transactions affecting local church property.
<b>Previous documents</b>	Nothing recent.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Law and polity advisory group. The moderators' meeting. Synod Clerks and PLATO are also being consulted.

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	Some advisory legal costs may be involved in the work of LPAG, as outlined above.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	We do need to check that we are following both charity law and the URC Acts appropriately.

## **Excerpt report of a constitutional review by the General Assembly of some processes of Thames North Synod called by the Church meeting of the City Temple**

1. The Church meeting of the City Temple called a constitutional review to consider some processes relating to finance and property decision-making within Thames North Synod.
2. The constitutional review followed the procedure laid down under the structure of the United Reformed Church paragraph five and the Rules of Procedure paragraph nine.
3. The Officers of the Assembly appointed the following to serve as members of the commission. Neither City Temple nor the Thames North Synod objected to any of the names:  
The Revd Nigel Uden, Moderator of General Assembly, to convene the commission  
The Revd Ruth Whitehead, Moderator of South Western Synod  
The Revd Dr John Bradbury, Eastern Synod  
The Revd Andy Braunston, Synod of Scotland  
Ms Catriona Wheeler, East Midlands Synod
4. The Clerk of the Assembly was present to advise both the commission and the two parties, to facilitate the process, record the decision, and prepare the report for Assembly.
5. The City Temple was represented by the minister, the Revd Dr Rodney Woods and Mr Olusina Anifowose. Thames North Synod was represented by Ms Memuna Levan-Harris and Mr Michael Gould.
6. Papers, submitted by both parties, were circulated in advance. Upon receipt of the papers, the Commission asked both parties for further information. These responses were circulated, along with a counsel's opinion issued by John Bradburn QC.
7. The hearing took place at The Wesley Hotel, London. The commission began its work at 9.30 am and completed its business at 3.40 pm. The Convener led those present in prayer.
8. Dr Woods presented the City Temple's case.
9. Mr Gould and Ms Levan-Harris presented the response of Thames North Synod.
10. Members of the commission questioned both parties. The Convener thanked the parties for their time and submissions. The parties were asked to leave the room while the panel considered the submissions of the parties.

11. After discussion, the parties were recalled, and the Convener gave the decision:

The commission:

- a) reaffirms the centrality of a carefully balanced partnership of local church, synod, and Synod Trust Company as the covenant which forms the United Reformed Church, and which the United Reformed Church Acts attempt to enshrine
- b) recognises that there are variations of practice of all synods and Synod Trust Companies caused by difficulties in interpreting the schedules of the United Reformed Church Acts, and therefore instructs the law and polity advisory group to consult widely, identify the key issues, and propose clear and accessible guidelines for the whole of the United Reformed Church in order to bring parity across the denomination in the application of the schedules to the United Reformed Acts. ....