

**The United Reformed Church**  
**Minutes of a meeting of Mission Council held 13-15 May 2019**  
**at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire**

**MONDAY 13 MAY**

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**Session 1**

The meeting of Mission Council began at 1400 with worship including Holy Communion led by the Revd David Coaker; Bible study was led by the Revd Neil Thorogood. The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, was in the chair and declared Mission Council open.

**19/01**

The Moderator welcomed everyone, identifying new members and those attending as alternates.

Apologies had been received as follows:

Mr Reuben Watt	<i>URC Youth Representative</i>
Dr Nicola Robinson	<i>Synod of Scotland Representative</i>
The Revd Philip Brooks	<i>Secretary for Ecumenical and Inter-Faith Relations</i>
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	<i>Secretary for Global and Intercultural Relations</i>
The Revd Elizabeth Clark	<i>National Rural Officer</i>
The Revd Chris Parker	<i>Mersey Synod Representative</i>

Those attending for the first time or attending in a new capacity were:

The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson	<i>Convenor-elect of Communications Committee</i>
Mr AJ Mills	<i>URC Youth Representative</i>
Mr Tim Crossley	<i>Yorkshire Synod Representative</i>
Mrs Rosie Buxton	<i>Yorkshire Synod Representative</i>
Miss Sandra Wallace	<i>Synod of Wales Representative</i>
Mr Mark Kirkbride	<i>Synod of Scotland Representative</i>
Mr Philip French	<i>Ecumenical Observer, Church of England</i>
The Revd Paul Rochester	<i>Ecumenical Observer, Free Churches Group</i>
Mr Geoff Shaw	<i>HRAG</i>
The Revd John Durell	<i>MIND</i>
Dr Augur Pearce	<i>MIND</i>
The Revd Neil Thorogood	<i>Bible Study Leader</i>

At the Moderator's suggestion, Mission Council enthusiastically agreed to send congratulations and warm wishes to the Revd Dr David Cornick on his award of the Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism for an 'outstanding sustained contribution to the development of ecumenical life and witness in England'.

**19/02**

The General Secretary, the Revd John Proctor, proposed and Mission Council appointed Mrs Sue Brown, the Revd David Herbert, the Revd Fran Kissack and Mrs Jane Baird to be a Facilitation Group. Mr Proctor advised Mission Council on the procedure for electing members of the Mission Council Advisory Group.

### **19/03 Minutes of the Meeting of Mission Council held 16-18 November**

These were accepted as an accurate record and signed by the Moderator. There were no matters arising.

### **19/04 Paper N1**

The paper was presented by the Convenor of the General Assembly Task Group, Mrs Val Morrison, who outlined the process by which Mission Council would address the paper.

Mission Council adjourned at 1530

## **Session Two**

### **19/04 (continued) Paper N1**

Mission Council split into eight groups to discuss paper N1. Group reporters were asked to provide feedback to Mrs Morrison.

Mission Council resumed at 1700. The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, took the chair.

### **19/05 Paper O1 Recruitment to the General Secretariat**

Mr Geoff Shaw, on behalf of Human Resources Advisory Group, presented Paper O1. Mrs Jane Baird responded to questions and the paper was discussed, and the Resolutions were proposed:

- 1. Mission Council approves the updated job descriptions and person specifications (appendix 1) for the recruitment of the next General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).**

After a minor amendment to the job description, Resolution 1 was agreed by consensus.

- 2. Mission Council supports the creation of a task group to formulate a strategy that will ensure that the URC is equipped to meet the challenges of being Church in the next decade and beyond.*

During discussion, a variety of views were expressed, and Mission Council was unable to reach a consensus. On the motion of the Revd James Breslin, Resolution 2 was referred back to the general Secretariat for further consideration, to be returned to Mission Council at a future date. Mission council *agreed*.

### **19/06 Paper I3 Carbon Emissions Target**

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, the Revd Bernie Collins, presented Paper I3, and moved the resolution:

**Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly:**

- a. urges the UK government to set a target and establish policies to achieve net zero emissions of greenhouse gases in the UK by well before 2050, and updates section 5.3(h) and 5.5(b) of the URC Environmental Policy accordingly**
- b. makes a corresponding commitment that as a Church we shall strive to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of Church life in line with this target, and updates section 4.2 of the Environmental Policy to give effect to this**
- c. calls on URC members, local churches, and synods to support these commitments in word and in deed.**

The Resolution was agreed by consensus.

Mission Council adjourned at 1830.

### **Session Three**

Mission Council resumed at 2000. The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, was in the chair.

#### **19/07 Papers X1 and Z1**

The General Secretary proposed, and the Clerk formally seconded, that Standing Orders be lifted to allow the two papers be considered concurrently. Mission Council *agreed* by more than the required three-quarters majority.

The Revd Dick Gray on behalf of the Investment Committee introduced Paper Z1.

The Revd Dr David Pickering on behalf of the Synod of Scotland introduced Paper X1.

Mr Gray and Dr Pickering responded to questions.

The business was paused, to be resumed in Session Four.

#### **19/08**

Mission Council was addressed by the Revd Paul Rochester, General Secretary of the Free Churches Group.

The Chaplain, the Revd Elaine Colechin, led evening prayers.

Mission Council adjourned at 2114

## **TUESDAY 14 MAY**

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### **Session Four**

Mission Council was reconvened at 0915 with morning prayers led by the Chaplain, the Revd Elaine Colechin, and Bible Study led by the Revd Neil Thorogood. The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, was in the chair.

#### **19/09 (from 19/07) Papers X1 and Z1**

Dr Pickering continued his response to questions on Papers Z1 and X1.

After full discussion, Mission Council informally indicated its preference for Paper X1 as the substantive resolution over Paper Z1, and no desire was indicated for seeking a resolution from the Facilitation Group.

#### **19/10 En Bloc items A1, B1, G1, H1, I1+2, J1, L1+2, M1, O2, D3**

The General Secretary moved items A1, B1, G1, H1, I1+2, J1, L1+2, M1, O2, D3

The Moderator congratulated the Revd Ruth Whitehead on her reappointment as Moderator of the South Western Synod.

## **19/07 Paper M2**

Mr Derek Estill took the chair.

The Revd Nigel Uden presented Report M2.

## **Session Five**

The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, was in the chair.

The Revd Nigel Uden outlined the process for dealing in session six with X1 and Z1, which the Moderators had deemed urgent, and might therefore be resolved through majority voting.

## **19/08 Paper D2 Education and Learning Committee**

The Revd Prof Neil Messer presented paper D2 and moved the Resolutions:

- 1. Mission Council adopts this paper as the United Reformed Church's description of the marks of the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and in so doing replaces the 'Seven fundamental characteristics of ministry' adopted by General Assembly in 1982.**
- 2. Mission Council encourages the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee, Resource Centres for Learning, and relevant committees in all the synods to use this paper as the basis for consistency in expectations and reporting in relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments.**

During discussion, some minor revisions were suggested incorporating parts of the supporting text into the main description.

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus, subject to the revised document being recirculated to Mission Council.

## **19/09 Paper D1 Education and Learning Committee**

The Revd Prof Neil Messer presented paper D1 and moved the Resolutions:

### **Mission Council resolves:**

- 1. To accept the principles and processes for a discipleship development fund put forward in this paper by the education and learning committee, in alignment with the strategy accepted by Mission Council in March 2018**
- 2. To operate the discipleship development fund through the existing inter-synod resource sharing mechanism**
- 3. To allocate up to £100,000 to the first year of operation of the fund (June 2019 to May 2020), to be disbursed according to the policy laid out in appendix A of this paper as an initial step**
- 4. To invite the resource sharing task group (RSTG) to design the permanent DDF processes, in consultation with the finance and education and learning committees, and present this to Mission Council for approval no later than March 2020.**

Mission Council noted that in legal terms this would be a Designated Fund, not a Restricted Fund.

In Appendix A, paragraph 2, 'application' was changed to 'applicant'.

It was proposed by the Revd Steve Faber that in Appendix A, Restriction 1, to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, be removed, and this was *agreed by consensus*.

Following further discussion, Paper D1 and Resolutions were *passed, recognising disagreement*.

### **19/10 Paper R1 Introduction to Safeguarding**

The Revd Richard Church presented Paper R1 on behalf of the safeguarding advisory group.

Mission Council adjourned at 1300.

### **Session Six**

Mission Council reconvened at 1500. The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, was in the chair

### **19/11 (from 19/10) Paper R2 URC's safeguarding strategic plan 2019 to 2023**

The Revd Richard Church presented Paper R2 and the Resolutions.

The proposer accepted an amendment to Resolution 1 to add the word "draft".

- 1. Having already welcomed the recommendations of the Past Case Review Learning Group, Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, welcomes the URC's draft safeguarding strategic plan as the next step of the journey.**

Mission Council *agreed by consensus*.

After discussing several possible amendments, Resolution 2 was moved:

- 2. Mission Council directs the safeguarding advisory group:**
  - a) to bring to Mission Council, as soon as possible, a budget for the full implementation of a substantive plan and proposals for resourcing this work**
  - b) to oversee the development, implementation and monitoring of the plan over the next five years**

Mission Council *agreed by consensus*.

### **19/12 (from 19/07 and 19/09) Papers X1 and Z1**

The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, took the chair and explained the procedure for dealing with Papers X1 and Z1 which presently presented alternative resolutions.

Mr Ian Hardie addressed Paper Z1, and the Revd Dr David Pickering addressed Paper X1.

Mission Council voted in favour of paper X1, which, along with its Resolution, became the substantive Resolution.

Mr AJ Mills proposed the amendment 'In the light of the climate emergency, it is the wish...'  
There being no seconder, the amendment fell.

Mr Ian Hardie proposed to change 'as follows' to 'to reflect the following'. This was seconded by Mr David Greatorex, and the amendment was *carried*.

## **Resolution X1**

**Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, agrees that the ethical investment guidelines on climate change issues be updated to reflect the following:**

**It is the wish of the United Reformed Church that those responsible for investment decisions on behalf of the Church and its Trust bodies should:**

- a) not invest in fossil fuel companies whose total turnover is more than 10% derived from the extraction and/or supply of fossil fuels, including thermal coal, natural gas and oil**
- b) complete the divestment required to fulfil this decision by the time the URC General Assembly meets in 2020**
- c) widen their proactive role as investors, by engaging further with companies whose activities foster significant carbon emissions, for example the electricity and automotive industries, and producers of energy intensive products (e.g. cement)**
- d) refocus the Church's investment portfolio by scaling up investment in renewable energy and clean technologies.**

**Mission Council further resolves to:**

- e) encourage publicity of these actions and the rationale behind them, so that the URC can use its influence to advocate an end to the exploration for new oil and gas reserves, and the managed decline of fossil fuel production**
- f) advocate to the UK government and others for action to foster the transition to a net zero carbon economy.**
- g) encourage URC synods and local URC churches with investments to divest from fossil fuels, and reinvest in clean alternatives**
- h) support and encourage churches and church members to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels, and so participate in a just transition to a zero-carbon future**
- i) request the Resources Centres for Learning to ensure that those being prepared for service and leadership are cognisant of the global and spiritual context of the climate crisis.**

The amended Resolution was *carried*.

## **Session Seven**

The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, took the chair.

### **19/13 Paper M3 Acting With Strategic Intent**

Mr Alan Yates presented Paper M3 and moved the resolutions:

- 1. Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, expresses its desire to consult widely, in order to allow discussion about the possible advantages and disadvantages of any move towards amalgamating Trust bodies. Therefore, Mission Council directs the Law and Polity Advisory Group to initiate consultation with synods, with provincial and national trust companies, and with the URC Trust, with a view to promoting an appropriately careful discussion.*

Mission Council being unable to reach consensus, the resolution fell.

2. *Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly, expresses its desire to explore in more detail possible central provision of support services, and therefore directs [person or group to be determined] to initiate consultation with synods, and to bring forward any appropriate proposals that emerge.*

After discussion, Mission Council *agreed* by consensus that the Resolution be withdrawn for consultation with the General Secretariat, and returned to Mission Council later in the meeting if suitable wording could be drafted.

#### **19/14 Paper N2 Task Group on General Assembly**

The General Secretary moved the Resolution:

**Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, gives final approval to four matters referred from General Assembly to synods:**

1. **To make the number of synod representatives at General Assembly equal – to be, for the present, sixteen for each synod.**
2. **To introduce some flexibility to the 50 to 50 ministerial/lay divide – requiring at least a third of each synod’s representation to be ministerial (this term includes CRCWs) and at least a third to be elders or lay.**
3. **To include the synod moderators in the synod figures above, if their synods so wish, rather than giving them a place in Assembly in their own right.**
4. **To excuse the Convenor of pastoral reference and welfare from membership of General Assembly.**

The Resolution was *carried* by more than the required two-thirds majority.

#### **19/15 Paper N1 General Assembly Task Group**

Mrs Val Morrison, as convenor, presented paper N1 and its Resolutions:

1. **Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly affirms the vision, nature, scope, and responsibilities of the Moderator of General Assembly, as set out in sections 1.1 to 1.4.10 of this report.**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

2. **Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that there shall be one Moderator of General Assembly serving for one year, as set out in paragraphs 1.5.9 and 1.5.10, and instructs the Clerk to prepare amendments to the Rules of Procedure to effect this, to be presented to a future meeting of Mission Council or General Assembly.**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

3. **Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:**
  - a) **Mission Council shall normally meet for one 48-hour meeting, at a time and venue to be determined**
  - b) the membership of Mission Council shall be as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7
  - c) **the name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.**

Following discussion, Mission Council *agreed* parts a) and c) by consensus. Part b) was remaindered for future consideration, following which Mission Council adjourned at 1840.

## **Session Eight**

Mission Council reconvened at 2000. The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, was in the chair.

### **19/16 Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group (MIND)**

The Revd John Durell and Dr Augur Pearce presented Paper T1 and the resolutions, which were discussed, and decision-making was deferred until the next session.

### **19/17 Pilots – Friends in Faith Adventures**

Dr Sam Richards presented the Pilots 'Friends on Faith Adventures' programme.

The Chaplain, the Revd David Coaker, led evening prayers.

Mission Council adjourned at 2112

## **WEDNESDAY 15 MAY**

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## **Session Nine**

Mission Council was reconvened at 0915 with morning prayers led by the Chaplain, the Revd David Coaker, and Bible Study led by the Revd Neil Thorogood. The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, was in the chair.

The General Secretary outlined the process for election to MCAG, noting that there was one nominee, the Revd Adrian Bulley, who had been nominated by Mrs Helen Lidgett and seconded by Mrs Rosie Martin.

The General Secretary sought approval for any necessary changes to the Structure that arose from Paper N1 to be referred to synods with a deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> December. Mission Council *agreed*.

### **19/18 (From 19/16) Ministerial Incapacity Advisory Group (MIND)**

Dr Augur Pearce responded to questions raised previously.

Mission Council addressed the resolutions:

- 1. Mission Council approves the preparation of a new process for dealing with cases of discipline involving ministers and church related community workers, incorporating the changes from the current process enumerated in paper T1 of November 2018. It directs MIND (the ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group) to proceed with redrafting and to report further to Mission Council in March 2020.**

The Resolution was *agreed* by consensus.

- 2. Mission Council approves the proposal that scrutiny groups set up by MIND for specific responsibilities in the drafting task should contain members of Mission Council as well as members of MIND and others, as set out in MIND's report. The Officers of Assembly are directed to invite interest from members of Mission Council, make appointments from those volunteering and communicate their names to the Secretary of MIND.**

The Resolution was *agreed* by consensus.



The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, took the chair.

### **19/19 (from 19/13) Paper M3 Acting With Strategic Intent**

Mr Alan Yates proposed an amended form of the resolution:

**Mission Council, acting on behalf of General Assembly, expresses its desire to explore in more detail possible central provision of support services and therefore directs the General Secretariat to initiate consultation with synods and report back on any themes or concerns that emerge.**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

### **19/20 Paper J3 Nominations Committee**

The Revd Ray Adams, on behalf of the Nominations Committee, proposed the Resolution:

**Mission Council mandates the officers of Assembly to consider any nominations that come via the Convenor and Secretary of the nominations committee and to act on behalf of the Assembly in making the necessary appointments, and to report to the November meeting of Mission Council.**

In response to a question, Mr Adams re-assured Mission Council that the intention was only to use this power in relation to committee roles, and not to senior staff appointments.

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

Mission Council adjourned at 1047.

## **Session Ten**

Mission Council reconvened at 1120. The Moderator, Mr Derek Estill, was in the chair.

### **19/21 (from 19/15) Paper N1 General Assembly Task Group**

b) *the membership of Mission Council shall be as set out in paragraphs 2.1 to 2.7*

Mission Council by indicative vote *agreed* that four representatives per synod to General Assembly was most appropriate. This required alteration of '2.1' to '2.2'. The amended resolution reads:

3. **Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:**
  - a) **Mission Council shall normally meet for one 48-hour meeting, at a time and venue to be determined**
  - b) **the membership of Mission Council shall be as set out in paragraphs 2.2 to 2.7**
  - c) **the name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.**

Mrs Morrison moved resolution 4:

4. **Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of General Assembly 2020:**
  - a) **the Assembly arrangements committee and the Mission Council advisory group shall be discharged and abolished**
  - b) **General Assembly offers its thanks to all who have served on these two bodies**

- c) **A new standing committee of General Assembly, to be known as the business committee, shall be established, with a membership and remit as set out in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6.**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

Mrs Morrison moved Resolution 5:

**Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly agrees that, from the close of this meeting an additional sentence be added to the Standing Orders:  
'5.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work'**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

Mrs Morrison moved resolution 6

*Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly asks the nominations committee to seek an Assistant Clerk, who would serve in the first instance for two years from January 2020.*

The Revd Jenny Mills proposed an amendment, that the period of service be three years; seconded by Mrs Helen Lidgett. Mission Council accepted the amendment recognising disagreement.

The amended resolution was put:

**Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly asks the nominations committee to seek an Assistant Clerk, who would serve in the first instance for three years from January 2020.**

Mission Council *agreed* by consensus.

Mrs Morrison moved resolution 7:

*Mission Council acting on behalf of General Assembly resolves that the Clerk may serve for an initial term of up to six years, renewable for further terms of up to four years each.*

There being no indication of any consensus, Mrs Morrison proposed withdrawal of the resolution. Mission Council permitted its withdrawal, *recognising disagreement*.

The General Secretary announced that the Revd Adrian Bulley was duly elected to serve on the Mission Council Advisory Group.

The Moderator thanked those who had arranged this meeting of Mission Council, Church House and Communications staff, conveners and committee members, the Chaplains, musicians, the Bible study leader, the Minute Secretary, and the staff of High Leigh.

The Chaplain, the Revd Elaine Colechin, led closing prayers.

Mission Council adjourned at 1214, expecting to meet next at The Hayes on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2019.