

Paper N1

**Task Group on the future of
General Assembly**

Report to Mission Council

Church 2017
United
Church **Reformed**
Church Church 2017

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Task Group on the future of General Assembly Report to Mission Council

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Val Morrison valmorrison7@btinternet.com
Action required	Section Nine: Decision. Remainder: The Task Group wish to hear the views of Mission Council on their current proposals.
Draft resolution(s)	Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council instructs the Assembly Arrangements Committee to plan a venue in the central part of the UK for the 2020 General Assembly.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The matter of location in section 9 requires a decision for 2020, to enable a venue to be booked for the 2020 General Assembly. The remainder of the report shares the current thinking of the Task Group, which may be refined in the light of feedback from Mission Council before presentation to General Assembly 2018.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	AAC supplementary report to GA 2016, Paper U12 of May 2017.
Consultation has taken place with...	Everyone, via a survey. There were 547 responses, from individuals, committees, and synods.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Possible modest increases in required funds whatever we do.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Improvements in the efficiency of our governance processes will reduce the risk of reputational damage.

Task Group on the future of General Assembly: report to Mission Council November 2017

Part One – how we reached our recommendations

1. The Task Group's Remit

- 1.1 In July 2016 General Assembly resolved to appoint a Task Group “to consider the documentation already available, to consult widely, particularly with synods and assembly committees, and to bring to the General Assembly of 2018 proposals for the form, size, duration, location and funding of the Assembly in subsequent years from 2020 to 2030.”
- 1.2 The report also stated that:
“The Task Group of five people, including a former Moderator of General Assembly, a current or recent Synod Clerk, and the Clerk of the General Assembly, nominated by the nominations committee, and appointed by the Assembly Officers, to begin work immediately, and report to each meeting of Mission Council. A report to the autumn 2017 meeting of Mission Council should enable that meeting to make decisions that enable a venue to be firmly booked for the 2020 meeting of General Assembly.”
- 1.3 In the event, the Nominations process proved slower than the drafters of the Assembly resolution hoped, and the Task Group was not able to meet until late December 2016. The members of the group are Val Morrison (convenor) (former Assembly Moderator and a former Synod Clerk), Adrian Bulley (Synod Clerk), Dick Gray (former Deputy Treasurer and a current Synod Treasurer), Margaret Marshall (Synod Clerk), along with Michael Hopkins (Assembly Clerk), supported by John Proctor (General Secretary).
- 1.4 The Task Group notes that the current pattern of governance is a two-year cycle, which consists of one meeting of General Assembly and four meetings of Mission Council. The Task Group also noted that these meetings are costed at £200,000 and £20,000 each respectively, making a total budget of £280,000 over the two years of a cycle.
- 1.5 Although Mission Council was not part of the remit, the Task Group are convinced that any serious changes considered to General Assembly cannot be considered in isolation from Mission Council.

2. Consideration of documentation already available

- 2.1 The Task Group considered a significant amount of documentation from discussions at Mission Councils over the last few years, including extensive notes from a session led by the General Secretary in March 2016, and the discussions at the 2016 General Assembly based upon the supplementary report of the Assembly Arrangements Committee.

3. Consultation

- 3.1 The Task Group members had good and wide connections across the synods, and we made extensive use of these contacts.
- 3.2 Early contact was made with Convenors of assembly committees, in advance of the more general consultation.
- 3.3 Reflections from recent Moderators and their chaplains on their visits to the Assemblies of other churches were sought.
- 3.4 An open survey was undertaken in which there were 547 responses, from individuals, committees, synods, and other groups. We believe that this is a very high response rate for United Reformed Church surveys.
- 3.5 The results of all these consultations underpin all our recommendations. At every stage, we have consciously tried to make recommendations based upon evidence and theology, while having due regard to financial considerations.

4. Background

- 4.1 The current discussions result from General Assembly in 2012 resolving to make a significant reduction to the budget for Assembly, but failing to agree any ways to implement that cut. Mission Council did agree ways to implement that decision, but there has been a general dissatisfaction with aspects of the Assembly, voiced by members of the Assembly and by synods, since 2012.
- 4.2 The Task Group also noted that a freezing of the budget since 2012 amounted to a gradual cut in real terms because of inflation. Conference centres, railways, hotels, caterers, and technical services suppliers have all increased their charges each year.

5. Comparison with other denominations

- 5.1 As well as the observations from former Moderators and their chaplains, the Task Group considered how churches with similar sizes organised their equivalents to the General Assembly. This is what we discovered:

Church	No. of members	Mem. of GA equiv. and frq. of meeting
Church in Wales	84,000	143, two days twice a year
Presbyterian Ch of Wales	24,000	150, three days once a year
Methodist Ch in Ireland	50,000	260, five days once a year
Scottish Episcopal Church	54,000	150, three days once a year
United Reformed Church	48,000	315, four days every two years

- 5.2 The Task Group also considered larger churches, including the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Methodist Church in Great Britain. However, we discovered that these churches spend money and staff time on their equivalents to General Assembly at levels which would rapidly bankrupt the United Reformed Church.

6. Theology and ecclesiology of General Assembly

- 6.1 The Structure of the United Reformed Church [paragraph 2(6)] states that the General Assembly:
- “shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life”.
- 6.2 The Task Group believes that there are theological ideas that shape the way that Reformed churches have historically made our decisions and ordered our structures, and wishes to highlight these:
- 6.2.1 A key principle for our tradition is conciliarity, that is, that we reach our decisions as representatives meeting together in council, guided by the Holy Spirit. Congregationalists and the Churches of Christ held the Church Meeting to be the central place of authority, while Presbyterians recognise the authority of the wider councils of Presbytery, synod, and General Assembly. Together these traditions, which are held in common with other Reformed churches, represent a view of the church that understands its authority under Christ to lie in a body of representatives acting in council, rather than in an appointed person or persons. We believe this is fundamental to the ecclesiology of the United Reformed Church.
- 6.2.2 Mission Council in March 2016 was asked to consider several ways that an Assembly’s effectiveness could be viewed. What matters most – the quality of its decisions, the sense of ownership and wide participation it engenders, or the inspiration it offers to those who attend? Clearly these aims need not be at odds with one another, but if one is more important to us than the others, this preference will tend to shape how we plan and deliver Assembly.
- 6.2.3 In this discussion members of Mission Council placed most stress on wide participation, ahead but not to the exclusion of the other two aims. The value of a broad membership, including many people whose primary church involvement is local, the opportunity to hear a balance of different voices, and the sense that the whole Church is overseeing the whole Church, were all attractive aspects of this way of viewing Assembly.
- 6.2.4 However, a problem with a broadly based way of decision-making is that sometimes urgent administrative decisions are needed while the appropriate council is not in session. In such situations a smaller group is sometimes given executive power to act on behalf of the council. Where this practice is infrequent, or when the issues are of no great consequence, the principle of conciliarity is still upheld. However, when the ‘executive’ group becomes a regular and significant feature of the decision-making process, our historical understanding of conciliarity is significantly altered, particularly when the Assembly itself does not make the major decisions.
- 6.2.5 At least since 2006, there is evidence that the United Reformed Church, both at the level of synods and the General Assembly, has given significant and ongoing responsibility to various executive bodies. In the case of the General Assembly this body is the Mission Council.
- 6.3 The remit of Mission Council is:
- “a co-ordinating committee...the purpose of the Mission Council is to enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of the activity and policy of the Church to decide more carefully about priorities and to encourage the outreach of the Church to the community. Its service is directly towards the Assembly, but its concern is with the whole Church and all

its members, so it will seek to be aware of the pains and joys, the adventures and hopes of the whole body.”¹

- 6.4 The Structure gives as one of the functions of the General Assembly that it: “shall also appoint a Mission Council with power to act in its name between meetings of the General Assembly and to discharge such other functions as the General Assembly may from time to time direct”²
On this basis, many decisions of Mission Council carry the words “Acting on behalf of the General Assembly...” to indicate that the Mission Council does not carry such authority in its own right but only by delegation from the General Assembly. In practice, however, Mission Council looks very much like a council of the church rather than a committee.
- 6.5 Moving further towards executive government may, of course, be a direction in which the United Reformed Church wishes to proceed, but this would be at the cost of our conciliar heritage, and a step away from how we have hitherto understood Reformed theology.
- 6.6 The question of the future of General Assembly is closely bound to the future of Mission Council: the decrease of the responsibilities of the one means an increase in those of the other. Perhaps, for some, the logical course is that Mission Council should simply replace the General Assembly. If that is the case the Task Group believes that we would need to rethink radically the membership of the Mission Council so that it better reflects the rotational and egalitarian system by which people are appointed to Assembly. Depending upon how one views the Synod Moderators, at present either 50% or 33% of the members of Mission Council owe their position to fulfilling a particular role in the wider church rather than their being appointed by a synod. Some have expressed the view that this proportion is too high.
- 6.7 By contrast, those who believe it is appropriate to reaffirm our conciliar commitment might want the church to consider:
- 6.7.1 An annual meeting of General Assembly.
 - 6.7.2 A corresponding reduction in the meetings and powers of the Mission Council.
 - 6.7.3 Revising the membership of the General Assembly in a manner that attempts to return to the original egalitarian intent of Reformed conciliar structures. Everyone in the synod who desires to attend Assembly gets their fair turn.
- 6.8 We are aware that executive government carries its own self-reinforcing momentum, and if the church wishes to reverse the recent trend towards that, it will take considerable effort.

7. Strategic and other questions

- 7.1 The questions raised by our explorations lead the Task Group to ask the church to make some strategic choices:
- 7.1.1 Should we return to an annual Assembly?
 - 7.1.2 Should the frequency and/or powers of Mission Council be reduced?
- 7.2 Less strategic questions raised are:
- 7.2.1 Should there be one or two Moderators of General Assembly? Does the answer to this question change if the frequency of Assembly changes?

¹ The Manual, section G

² Structure, paragraph 2(6)(o)

- 7.2.2 Should Moderators be inducted at the end of General Assembly, and then chair the General Assembly at the end of their period of office? [NB: while decision on this will lie with the 2020 General Assembly, the Moderators for 2018-2020 would value a strong indication of the view of Mission Council, to enable them and their chaplains to consider appropriate plans].

8. Criteria for making decisions

- 8.1 The Task Group believe that the United Reformed Church should make decisions on the basis of good theology, good governance, and good strategy.
- 8.2 However, we are aware that the funds are limited, and so decisions the church makes based upon the grounds in paragraph 8.1 have to be affordable and workable. Because of this we have sought to make recommendations broadly in line with the current budget.

Part two – Recommendations

9. Location

- 9.1 The Task Group recommend abandoning the current pattern of rotation of venue around the UK. This pattern was agreed some years ago between the Assembly and the synods, and involves meeting in the nations of the UK in the sequence Wales, England, England, Scotland, England, England, Wales...
- 9.2 The current pattern of rotation has been largely successful in ensuring that General Assembly visits all locations, however the Task Group question the extent to which the Assembly reflects the flavour of the place where it is meeting. The Task Group also received evidence that some synods view hosting the Assembly as a burden rather than a pleasure.
- 9.3 The evidence the Task Group saw showed that the pattern of rotating venues is expensive in both finance and staff time. More site visits are needed to a new venue than one to which we return regularly. Venue hire is also more expensive, because suitable venues in some locations are limited. Travel expenses for Assemblies further from the centre of the UK are higher than more central ones.
- 9.4 The Task Group, therefore, plan to propose to General Assembly that the current pattern of rotation be abandoned, and that instead the Church seeks a venue in the central part of the UK (which we define as being roughly Yorkshire and Lancashire, down to the southern edge of the English Midlands). The Task Group further propose that General Assembly should rotate within this central part of the UK only until a good enough venue is found to which we can return regularly. Even if we met consistently in one place, other synods could be involved in hosting and in shaping the ethos and flavour of the event, if they so wished.
- 9.5 Noting that the Task Group plan to propose to General Assembly that the current pattern of rotating venue be discontinued with immediate effect, we propose the following resolution:

Acting on behalf of General Assembly, Mission Council instructs the Assembly Arrangements Committee to plan a venue in the central part of the UK for the 2020 General Assembly.

- 9.6 We have consulted the Synod of Scotland, through their Moderator, over the immediate effect of this proposal – that the Assembly would not meet in Scotland in 2020.

10. General recommendations

- 10.1 Having consulted extensively, the Task Group propose a number of general recommendations, which we wish to make regardless of decisions to be made about the size and frequency:
- 10.1.1 Time of year: the General Assembly should continue to meet in late June or early July, preferably not clashing with the Methodist Conference, the Church of England General Synod, or the Presbyterian Church of Wales General Assembly. No evidence has been found to suggest that a different time of year would bring any practical, financial, theological, or governance advantages.
- 10.1.2 Meeting at tables can be helpful, but an absolute requirement for tables should not rule out an otherwise suitable and affordable venue.
- 10.1.3 Whatever the number of synod representatives is, that number should be divided equally among the synods, and unfilled places (apart from youth reps) may not be transferred. Smaller synods have found it difficult to ensure fair representation from the breadth (theological, ecclesiological, demographic and geographical) of their synods on the current formula, while some larger synods have difficulty filling the places allocated to them. The Task Group observed that no-one thought an equal division of places among the synods at Mission Council, despite widely differing sizes of synods, was unfair. Therefore the Task Group propose that it would be simpler and fairer to divide the places at General Assembly equally among the synods.
- 10.1.4 Rather than a strict 50:50 division between Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs on the one hand, and “lay” members on the other, we recommend that a measure of flexibility be introduced, while retaining enough provision to prevent either group dominating. Therefore we propose that at least one third of each synod’s reps should be “lay”, and at least one third “ministers”, with the remaining third open to either category. Equality of representation between ministerial and “lay” has always been an important ecclesiological belief in the United Reformed Church. The Task Group, however, notes that the exact division does not take into account the fact that some Synods now have very few ministers. Nor does it take into account that a number of churches are led by various forms of “lay” leaders. The Task Group propose that the most helpful way to address this situation is to introduce a measure of flexibility, while retaining safeguards for both ministerial and “lay” representation.
- 10.1.5 The Task Group propose that Synod Moderators should be included within the number of each synod’s reps, rather than as a separate category. While the Task Group expect that most synods will wish their Moderator to represent them, this also adds a measure of flexibility because a synod whose Moderator was on sabbatical or close to retirement or on long term sick leave, for instance, might decide that place was better used by another representative.
- 10.1.6 The survey made it clear that the only way of paying for Assembly that will be acceptable to the Church is from the Ministry and Mission Fund. Expecting payment from individuals or from synods would not find support. However, the

Task Group recommend that those attending Assembly should be given a fuller explanation of its costs and a clearer invitation to donate than we presently offer. This possibility should be mentioned on the expenses form, with the option of donating by Gift Aid.

- 10.1.7 The results of the 2017 survey showed clear enthusiasm for wide participation, within the context of a strongly held view that General Assembly is first and foremost a business meeting. In our tradition a business meeting is always held within the context of worship. The Task Group also note that General Assembly being primarily a business meeting does not preclude there being other events and activities, but business is the primary purpose.
- 10.1.8 The Task Group noted from past accounts that some General Assembly Moderators had not been given guidance on discretionary spending, and recommend that the current practice that Moderators should be guided that discretionary spending is limited, and budget figures must be adhered to, is maintained.
- 10.1.9 The Task Group noted that many people now use electronic devices as their primary means of receiving documents, and prefer this to paper copies. Therefore, the Task Group recommend that, as a default, papers will be supplied electronically. The requirements form will allow people to opt into receiving paper copies, as well or instead, at the expense of the Assembly, if they wish.
- 10.1.10 Evidence from several Moderators of General Assembly, serving and former, showed a widespread desire among Moderators that they chair the General Assembly at the end of their term of office, when they had built up practice in chairing Mission Council and gained a greater familiarity with the business of the Assembly. The Task Group also noted that the Presbyterian Church of Wales successfully followed this practice. The Task Group therefore recommend that Moderators should be inducted at the end of the General Assembly at which they take up office, rather than the beginning, and then chair the meeting at the end of their term of office. Were this proposal adopted, then on a one-off basis the Moderators of the 2018 Assembly, Derek Estill and Nigel Uden, would also chair the 2020 Assembly, and their successors would chair the Assembly at the end of their term of office.
- 10.1.11 Experience at Assembly is that some members speak more than others, and by the end of a three-day meeting some faces and voices have become very familiar indeed at the microphone. A response made very strongly in the survey was that a significant majority of the 547 respondents respectfully suggested that this does not always help Assembly to do its business as well as it might. The Task Group considered how to respond to this, and decided to recommend that members of General Assembly receive **three** non-transferable tokens, allowing them to speak on three separate occasions without further permission. After a member's three tokens are used up, they may still speak, but only with the express permission of the Moderator on each subsequent occasion.

11. Options the Task Group is not recommending

- 11.1 Before we present options for the size and frequency of General Assembly, we need to lay out some options which we are not offering:
 - 11.1.1 Despite requests from some sections of the Church, the Task Group do not find any evidence that it is realistically possible for the Assembly to meet more often than it currently does yet with the same or a greater number of people attending. The long term trend of both income to the M&M fund and total church membership numbers are falling. We simply cannot afford the

current or a larger Assembly more often, and neither were we convinced that this was appropriate in a church of our size.

- 11.1.2 Despite possible cost savings, the Task Group do not recommend that the Assembly meets less frequently than now. The evidence that we gathered showed us that both the sense of detachment from decision-making that currently exists, and the departure from the ecclesiology of conciliarity, would both be exacerbated by this.

12. Number of Moderators

- 12.1 The Task Group's consultations have revealed that in general terms an Assembly Moderatorship which requires a six year commitment places a very significant limitation upon the number of people who can offer themselves for this service.
- 12.2 The Task Group has also observed that the pool of such people available to for this role is not great, and is shrinking, so it is reasonable to suppose that, while there have been no difficulties hitherto, there might be difficulties in finding the right person in the future.
- 12.3 How many Moderators should there then be? One Moderator provides greater clarity for governance, and avoids the issue of what the church would do if two Moderators disagreed upon a question that required a Moderatorial decision.
- 12.4 Two Moderators offer the advantages of sharing the work, covering more things than one Moderator could do, being able to consult one another about difficult decisions, and increasing the profile of our Church through greater exposure.
- 12.5 While there might be some small financial savings in only having one Moderator at a time, these are not significant enough to be a driving factor.
- 12.6 The Task Group's recommends that if the Assembly returns to being annual, it should revert to one Moderator who could be a Minister of Word and Sacrament, a CRCW, or an Elder. If the Assembly remains biennial, then the case for two Moderators remains.

13. First option for the frequency and size of General Assembly

- 13.1 Option A – *a shorter annual Assembly, and a reduced frequency of Mission Council*
- 13.2 Assembly returns to meeting annually, with one Moderator, with a slightly reduced size compared to now, and meets for 3 days. Mission Council meets once per year, mid-way between Assemblies.
- 13.3 This option is costed at £128,000 for the General Assembly, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. a total cost of £296,000 over a two-year cycle (the current budget over a two-year cycle is £280,000).
- 13.4 The detailed and underlying assumptions:
- 13.4.1 Duration 48 hours (2 nights)
 - 13.4.2 Representatives reduced to 16 per synod including Moderators (reducing the total from 269 to 208)
 - 13.4.3 Others total 39 (currently 46)
 - 13.4.4 Cost average is £80 per person per night

- 13.4.5 Catering
 - Packed lunches on 2 days @ £9
 - No Dinners
 - Snacks @ £2/person/day
 - Other catering £250
- 13.4.6 Travel costs average £80
- 13.4.7 Venue costs £12,500
- 13.4.8 Audio visual £15,000
- 13.4.9 Transportation £3,000
- 13.4.10 Additional program costs: £2,500 for Moderators' specials
- 13.4.11 £2,000 for What do you think
- 13.4.12 Set-up costs:
 - Printing £3,000 (based on papers where requested only) remainder by internet
 - Staff costs £12,000 (could be organiser or local staff)
 - Committee costs £1,250 to include site visit costs
- 13.4.13 Contingency £5,000

- 13.5 While the Task Group has confidence that these figures are as realistic and achievable as it is possible for any figures relating to any General Assembly to be this far in advance, these figures are offered to demonstrate that the Task Group has undertaken proper research, not to provide a definitive budget against which account can be held with suppliers that have not yet been identified, let alone negotiations begun.

- 14. Second option for the frequency and size of General Assembly**

- 14.1 Option B – *a still smaller annual Assembly meeting for the same length as now and a reduced Mission Council*

- 14.2 Assembly returns to meeting annually, with one Moderator, with a more reduced size compared to Option A, but meets for 4 days. Mission Council meets once, mid-way between Assemblies.

- 14.3 This option is costed at £125,000, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. a total of £290,000 over a two-year cycle (the current budget over a two-year cycle is £280,000).

- 14.4 The detailed and underlying assumptions are:
 - 14.4.1 Duration 72 hours (3 nights)
 - 14.4.2 Representatives reduced to 10 per synod including Moderators (reducing the total from 269 to 130)
 - 14.4.3 Others total 36 (currently 46)
 - 14.4.5 Cost average is £80 per person per night
 - 14.4.6 Catering
 - Packed lunches on 3 days @ £9
 - No Dinners
 - Snacks @ £2/person/day
 - Other catering £250
 - 14.4.7 Travel costs average £80
 - 14.4.8 Venue costs £15,000
 - 14.4.9 Audio visual £15,000
 - 14.4.10 Transportation £3,000
 - 14.4.11 Additional program costs: £2,500 for Moderators specials
 - 14.4.12 £2,000 for What do you think
 - 14.4.13 Set-up costs:

- Printing £2,000 (based on papers where requested only) remainder by internet
- Staff costs £12,000 (could be organiser or local staff)
- Committee costs £1,250 to include site visit costs
- 14.4.14 Contingency £5,000

14.5 As para 13.5.

15. Further comments on Options A and B:

- 15.1 It might be said that returning to an annual Assembly is a step backwards. The Task Group believes that no church need be afraid to admit that something hasn't worked as well as was hoped, and if that is the case, we should look to make changes.
- 15.2 The Task Group has seen some evidence that an increase in the number of decisions made by Mission Council has created difficulties in their acceptance, because the authority of Mission Council is challenged. (The termination of the ZI campaign, and the closure of the Windermere Centre would be two examples.) The group believes that reversing the current trend, and making more decisions at General Assembly, would increase confidence in and support of such decisions, and reduce challenge, thereby improving the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church. We cite as additional evidence that the 2014 Assembly came close to calling for the special meeting of Assembly that was eventually held in 2015 because it believed that the registration of buildings (in Scotland of celebrants) for the marriage of same sex couples needed to be based on decisions of the General Assembly itself.

16. A third option for the frequency and size of General Assembly

- 16.1 Option C – *adjusting the current model*:
- 16.2 Retaining an Assembly which meets every two years with two Moderators, for a similar length to now, and two Mission Councils per year.
- 16.3 The Task Group is not convinced that the evidence from the survey and consultations, nor our theology, make this our preferred option. Neither does the Task Group believe that this solution solves the underlying concerns that led to our work. Nonetheless, we have provided a means to enable the current model to be adjusted to be affordable.
- 16.4 We would then recommend reducing the size slightly to:
- 16.4.1 16 reps per synod, including 2 youth, making a maximum of 10 “ministers”, and a maximum 10 “lay”;
 - 16.4.2 Ecumenical reps reduced to 5 British and Irish, 5 International and 1 CWM;
 - 16.4.3 URC Youth (those separate from synod youth reps) reduced from 3 to 2;
 - 16.4.4 Conveners reduced by 2, by removing the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee Convener from attending, and by making one of the Immediate Past Moderators Convener of the Nominations Committee, *ex officio*;
 - 16.4.5 RCLs are reduced by one rep since Windermere closed;
 - 16.4.6 Synod Moderators have also been removed from this category, and will be part of synod representatives.
- 16.5 This option is costed at £205,000, with £20,000 for each Mission Council, i.e. a total of £285,000 over a two-year cycle (the current budget over a two-year cycle is £280,000).

- 16.6 The detailed and underlying assumptions:
 - 16.6.1 Duration 72 hours (3 nights)
 - 16.6.2 Representatives reduced to 16 per synod *including Moderators*: total 208.
 - 16.6.3 Others total 43
 - 16.6.4 Cost average is £80 per person per night
 - 16.6.5 Catering
 - Packed lunches on 3 days @ £9
 - Dinners on 3 evenings @ £15
 - Snacks @ £2/person/day
 - Other catering £600
 - 16.6.6 Travel costs average £80
 - 16.6.7 Venue costs £22,000
 - 16.6.8 Audio visual £25,000
 - 16.6.9 Transportation £4,000
 - 16.6.10 Additional program costs: £2,500 for Moderators specials
 - 16.6.11 £3,300 for What do you think
 - 16.6.12 Set-up costs:
 - Printing £5,000 (based on papers where requested only) remainder by internet
 - Staff costs £20,000 (could be organiser or local staff)
 - Committee costs £2,500 to include site visit costs
 - 16.6.13 Contingency £10,000

- 16.7 As para 13.5..

17. Mission Council

- 17.1 If the Assembly were to opt for Option A or Option B, the Task Group's response to the evidence and theology is to suggest that there would be less need for Mission Council to act as it does now, which would mean that Mission Council had a smaller and more focused task, which would then merit a smaller and more focused membership.

- 17.2 Therefore, the Task Group propose that if Assembly were annual, Mission Council would only need to meet either for one residential meeting, or for two one-day meetings. The group's view is that more is achieved in one residential meeting at smaller travel costs, although two one-day meetings may be better for disposing of minor business more expeditiously.

- 17.3 At the moment it is possible for members of Mission Council not to be members of the General Assembly. It is unusual, if not unique, for people to be members of an executive body without being members of the body of which they are an executive. This could be resolved if synods were asked to nominate which of their reps to General Assembly were to be members of Mission Council in the forthcoming year.

- 17.4 Unintended consequences of shrinking the work of Mission Council might be a weakening of the relationships within that body that help it to handle controversial and complex matters, and a weakening of the support given to the small number of Advisory Groups (for example, Law and Polity, or Safeguarding) that report to Mission Council. Whether we think that Mission Council undermines our conciliar theology, or expresses it in a manner complementary to the work of Assembly, there do seem to be a few things that a body of under 100 people does better than an Assembly of

300. These points do not mean that changes cannot be considered, but do suggest that the implications of changes ought to be thought through with care.

18. Staffing

- 18.1 The bulk of the organisation of Assembly is currently handled by staff at Church House, with assistance from volunteers. In the future this could be handled either by URC staff, or by using an events management company. There would be an inevitable trade-off between in-house management of Assembly and a professional company. It is likely that professionals would manage the task more efficiently, and perhaps more cheaply. Whereas if we took some of the task away from Church House staff, the event would lose something of its family feel; members would place their bookings with strangers rather than with URC people, and some may feel that they are not as well understood as they would like to be. We have gathered some data on the potential costs of using an events management company, to assist those in Church House who are charged with making operational decisions.

19. Where do we go from here?

- 19.1 The Task Group require a decision from Mission Council on the location in section 9, and would then value the opinions of Mission Council on the rest of the report, to enable them to bring a final report to General Assembly in 2018.
- 19.2 Much of what is proposed may require changes to the Structure and to the Rules of Procedure. Once Mission Council has given its advice, the Clerk will prepare drafts of any possible changes to the Structure, the Rules of Procedure, and any other resolutions required, that the Task Group requests, so that these will be available to General Assembly should it wish to make decisions that require these.

Appendix One

Comparison of the numbers of members of General Assembly in different categories under the various options

Category	The current position	Option A	Option B	Option C
Synods representatives and Moderators	269	208	130	208
Serving Assembly Moderator(s)	2	1	1	2
Clerk	1	1	1	1
General Secretary	1	1	1	1
Deputy General Secretaries	3	3	3	3
Committee Conveners	11	9	9	9
URC Trust Convenor	1	1	1	1
Immediate Past Moderators	2	1	1	2
Former Moderators (elected from all former Moderators)	2	2	2	2
RCL Reps	6	6	6	6
URC Youth	3	2	2	2
Forces Chaplain	1	1	1	1
Ecumenical and CWM reps	13	11	8	11
TOTAL	315	247	166	249

Appendix Two

Questions for discussion

1. Do you support the principle of returning to an annual Assembly?
2. Do you agree that there would need to be consequent changes to the Mission Council, if Assembly returned to an annual meeting? If so, do you support the proposed changes, or have you an alternative to offer?
3. Do you support the idea that an annual Assembly would be better served by one Moderator?
4. Do you support the proposal that the total number of synod representatives be divided equally among the synods?
5. Do you support the proposal that the division of synod representatives between “ministerial” and “lay” be made more flexible by no longer insisting on an exact balance, but stipulating that there be at least one third of each?
6. Do you support the proposal that Assembly Moderators be inducted at the end of Assembly and then chair the Assembly at the end of their term of office?
7. Do you support the proposal that three speaking tokens be introduced?
8. In what order do you prefer options A, B, and C?
9. What are the reasons for your preferences among A, B and C?
10. Please indicate one way in which your preferred option could be improved.
11. Can you offer any alternative funding plans? In particular can you suggest any ways in which URC work that you are involved in could be handled more cheaply, to make more funds available for Assembly or Mission Council?