

Paper B2

URC infant feeding policy for local churches

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Robinson paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Dr Sam Richards sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council approves the URC infant feeding policy and encourages local churches to adopt it.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To offer local churches a denomination approved policy to support infant feeding.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Record of Assembly 1992 Record of Assembly 2010 Mission Council November 2018 Paper B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	Equalities Committee CYDO+ team Head of Communications.

Summary of impact

Financial	Local churches may incur minor cost in implementing the policy.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	If approved we will share this with our ecumenical partners through Children's Ministry Network (part of CTBI).

1. Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her,
all you who love her;
rejoice with her in joy,
all you who mourn over her—
¹¹ that you may nurse and be satisfied
from her consoling breast;

that you may drink deeply with delight
from her glorious bosom.

¹² For thus says the LORD:

I will extend prosperity to her like a river,
and the wealth of the nations like an overflowing stream;
and you shall nurse and be carried on her arm,
and dandled on her knees.

¹³ As a mother comforts her child,
so I will comfort you;
you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
Isaiah 66:10-13 NRSV

The Christian tradition directly associates God with infant feeding. The Lord is described as a nursing mother and caring father. In Jesus, God is incarnate as a newborn infant dependent parents and carers for nourishment to thrive. As the people of God, we rightly celebrate each new life, and seek to welcome infants into our community.

2. A key element of welcoming infants with their parents and carers is offering an environment where their needs can be comfortably met whilst enabling them to participate in the full life of the church and its wider activities.
3. This is the second year of Children's and Youth Work Committee's (CYWC) five year strategy which has a focus on supporting local churches in their engagement with 0-5 year olds.
4. Equalities Committee had previously begun work on a breast feeding policy for local churches, and earlier this year passed that over to Judy Harris, Children's and Development Officer (CYDO) for Wales for comment.
5. This was brought to the CYDO+ team who agreed to work with Children's and Youth to develop this into a more inclusive policy to support all parents and carers bringing infants to activities in local churches. This policy is now presented by CYWC to Mission Council for approval (see Appendix 1).
6. The proposed policy aims to promote and enable breast feeding, widely recognized to be the best start in life. The World Health Organisation states:
'Breastmilk is the ideal food for infants. It is safe, clean and contains antibodies which help protect against many common childhood illnesses. Breastmilk provides all the energy and nutrients that the infant needs for the first months of life, and it continues to provide up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs during the second half of the first year, and up to one third during the second year of life. Breastfed children perform better on intelligence tests, are less likely to be overweight or obese and less prone to diabetes later in life. Women who breastfeed also have a reduced risk of breast and ovarian cancers'.¹
7. The policy aims to balance this with supporting all parents and carers in feeding their infants according to their circumstances and choices.
8. URC Communications are prepared to work with CYWC to design appropriate signage for local churches which can be downloaded from the URC website.

¹ https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_1

9. The URC has a history of supporting campaigns to promote and protect breastfeeding worldwide. FURY Assembly resolution IJ9 in 1992 on Nestle and Baby Milk supported the boycott campaign. URC General Assembly subsequently passed a resolution in 1992 encouraging churches to boycott Nescafe and other Nestle products because of the way Nestle markets breast milk substitutes in the developing world. The Church and Society committee and the Commitment for Life sub-committee of the URC, both continued to monitor the situation and support the work of Baby Milk Action for a number of years. The URC was thanked by Baby Milk Action for its support². In 2010, following a resolution concerning ethical investment, General Assembly invited the Children's Assembly to write to Nestle to make their views known.³
10. A new report by WHO, UNICEF, and the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) reveals that despite efforts to stop the harmful promotion of breast-milk substitutes, countries are still falling short in protecting parents from misleading information. 'The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need for stronger legislation to protect families from false claims about the safety of breast-milk substitutes or aggressive marketing practices. Breastmilk saves children's lives as it provides antibodies that give babies a healthy boost and protect them against many childhood illnesses.'⁴
11. The policy invites local churches to engage with these continuing issues at local, national and international levels as a matter of Christian witness of God's particular concern for the most vulnerable.
12. The policy sets out the level of support it is possible for local churches to offer in relation to infant feeding. Churches would be encouraged to adopt this whilst still working towards some elements as a statement of intent, and the policy may be adapted by local churches as appropriate to their context.
13. The provision of a welcoming environment for the feeding of infants in our local churches is an invitation and opportunity for all to deepen our experience of being a child of God:
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.
Psalm 131:2 NRSV

² <http://archive.babymilkaction.org/pdfs/babymilkactionurc0710.pdf>

³ https://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Archives/assembly_record_10.pdf

⁴ <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-05-2020-countries-failing-to-stop-harmful-marketing-of-breast-milk-substitutes-warn-who-and-unicef>

Appendix 1

Anytown United Reformed Church Safe feeding environments for babies

Anytown United Reformed Church ('the church') wants this to be a safe place for infants to be fed by their carers/parents.

We will give all parents and carers active and practical support for their needs in feeding their infant here whether by breast or bottle.

Guidelines

1. The Equality Act 2010 says that it is discrimination to treat a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding. It applies to anyone providing services, benefits, facilities and premises to the public, public bodies, further and higher education bodies and associations.
2. We will acknowledge and support the rights of women to breastfeed their children in all public areas of these premises. If a mother is happy to feed in a public area, then she should be made to feel comfortable to continue. An appropriately placed chair can be offered for her comfort and convenience.
3. If a mother wishes to feed her baby in private, we will advise her of the facilities available [quiet room, vestry, church office *as applicable*]. If a mother chooses not to use the private facilities offered to her, her right to do so must be respected.
4. Toilets are not acceptable as a private space to breastfeed and should not be offered as they do not offer a hygienic environment.
5. If a mother wishes to express milk to feed her baby, we will advise her of the facilities available [quiet room, vestry, church office *as applicable*]. If a mother chooses not to use the private facilities offered to her, her right to do so must be respected. Toilets are not acceptable as a private space to express and should not be offered as they do not offer a hygienic environment.
6. If there are older siblings with the parent or carer, and there is no creche provision, then we will try to provide an appropriate space alongside the feeding parent/carer with age appropriate materials for those children to play with safely.
7. We will provide information to everyone about the options for feeding infants, giving support to those who cannot breastfeed their own children and are grieving about this.
8. We will signal our support for breastfeeding with appropriate public signs (these are available from URC website).
9. We will support local, national and international campaigns that promote safe feeding environments for infant and breastfeeding.

10. We will support International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) campaigns. Whilst acknowledging that not every mother can breastfeed, the targeting of the world's poorest nations by large multinational companies is not acceptable.

Handling objections

1. It is the policy of this church to try and meet the needs of all its members and visitors and make their attendance as positive and safe as possible.
2. If a visitor or member of the church objects to a mother breastfeeding, then a conversation about the church's policy will be held and an alternative place for the person with objections to sit will be offered.
3. The policy was discussed by elders and church members prior to its adoption and will be reviewed annually. Anyone wishing to comment on this policy should contact the Church Secretary.

Equipment which may be helpful:

- A comfortable chair without arms which is suitable to use for feeding a child (nursing type chair);
- A quiet space using a small play tent, a wigwam or a simple rug for older siblings, with a box of books, and some age appropriate quiet toys;
- Facility to warm a bottle;
- Facility to keep milk cold.

**This policy was adopted at the Anytown URC Church Meeting held on [date].
Reviewed [date]**