

Paper M1

Continuing on the Way of Jesus

Walking the Way steering group

Basic information

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Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper provides a summary of the Walking the Way steering group's work since Mission Council met in July 2020.
Main points	The steering group's work in communications, resources and accompaniment/mentoring continues. Plans for the URC's 50th anniversary continue. The group has agreed the shape of its own work on online church, which will focus on developing disciples online. The group continues to consider the long-term future of discipleship as a focus across the URC.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council 11/15 papers M1 and M2 Mission Council 3/16 paper M1 General Assembly reports 2016, p.11 Mission Council 11/18 paper I2 Mission Council 11/19 paper I3 Mission Council 03/20 paper I3 General Assembly reports 2020, p.195.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Education and Learning Communications Children's and Youth Work Finance.

Summary of impact

Financial	The budget proposed by Finance, if passed, will enable the steering group's work to continue until the end of the calendar year 2021.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The ecumenical and interfaith implications of our work, including planning for the URC's 50th anniversary, are being considered.

1. General update

1.1 Since Mission Council last met in July 2020, the work of the Walking the Way steering group has continued under the following general headings:

- 1.1.1 Communications – over the past few months, the Project Manager has enjoyed Zoom conversations with the steering group's main contacts in synods and various networks, catching up on what's been happening and asking if there is anything the Walking the Way steering group can do to help. The latest edition of the Walking the Way newsletter was e-mailed to all churches. We can see at a glance that of the approximately 3,000 newsletters sent, almost 2,000 were opened, and were looked at nearly 7,000 times, with only five asking to be unsubscribed. The Walking the Way social media accounts ([Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)) have also been kept up to date with regular content on discipleship for a range of audiences.
- 1.1.2 Resources – the latest versions of the Walking the Way [resource map](#), [steering group resources](#) and [synod/local church](#) recommended resources are now available. Walking the Way resources for use around [Armistice Day and Remembrance Sunday](#), as well as resources for use in [Harvest celebrations](#), have also been published. A URC information booklet entitled '[Doing online differently](#)' has been released to help open up fresh thinking about online technology in relation to discipleship development, along with [suggested additional materials](#) which might be useful in this. As individuals and local churches consider and engage with the emerging new reality, the steering group continues to highlight '[New reality, same mission](#)' and '[Continuing to support each other](#)' as potentially useful resources.
- 1.1.3 Accompaniment/Mentoring – the current crisis has been challenging in terms of progressing the pilot accompaniment programme being explored with the [London Institute for Contemporary Christianity \(LICC\)](#) in Southern and Mersey synods, but work has been ongoing to keep participants and their churches connected and supporting each other in these difficult times, as well as gathering information on how their participation in the pilot has helped to develop their perspectives on discipleship. All of this data continues to influence the steering group in considering accompaniment and mentoring in discipleship within the URC. Stepwise, which continues to be developed as a programmatic element of Walking the Way: living the life of Jesus today, also has much wisdom to offer, especially in accompanying people on their journey of discipleship.
- 1.1.4 URC's 50th anniversary planning – the planning group continues to meet as it explores various possibilities for denominational and regional celebrations of this important occasion. This will be explored further in group discussions at this meeting of Mission Council.

1.2 In all of this, and in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis, the bold and innovative responses of many individuals and local churches, in sharing the love of Jesus, holding communities together and responding to God's presence in every aspect of life, has been truly inspiring.

2. Online Church

- 2.1 At its meeting in September, the steering group was able to digest the content of discussions on online church so far, including with Synod Moderators, Synod Clerks, URC Youth and Church House Connective, in more detail.
- 2.2 As a result of this, the steering group has agreed three main points with regards to its own work on online church:
 - 2.2.1 The focus of the steering group must be firmly on discipleship. It is excellent that much is being done in exploring online worship and fellowship, but the steering group must focus, above all other concerns and priorities, on equipping whole-of-life disciples online.
 - 2.2.2 Existing and emerging approaches must be celebrated and supported. There are already so many platforms, approaches and materials available and emerging as we speak. We need to celebrate and build on these, rather than add more to the already growing list of choices people have.
 - 2.2.3 A network is needed to help share wisdom, experience and practice. When so much is going on, we need a network, rather than a task group, where people who are engaged directly in developing online churches can share insight and wisdom with a focus on discipleship.
- 2.3 A couple of steering group members have agreed to consider how these principles might be developed further.
- 2.4 In addition, the Walking the Way project manager will remain in contact with networks across the United Reformed Church which are engaged in online church development to share good practice and explore the discipleship implications of this work.

3. The future

- 3.1 The Walking the Way steering group is very grateful to Mission Council for its decision in July to encourage those responsible for the finances of the Church to find funding for Walking the Way until the end of the calendar year 2021.
- 3.2 The budget proposed to Mission Council at this meeting, if approved, will enable this to happen.
- 3.3 The steering group will use this time to continue its work and consider long-term ways of encouraging whole-of-life discipleship as a top priority across the United Reformed Church.