

Paper M5

New name for the Ministries of the Church Department

General Secretary





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General Secretary: New name for the Ministries of the Church Department

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council agrees that, with immediate effect, the Ministries of the Church Department should be known as the Discipleship Department, and the Deputy General Secretary responsible for that department should be called the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship.
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The proposal is for a change of name of the Ministries of the Church department.
Main points	The new name more accurately describes the work of the department. It would foster the self-understanding of church members that they are disciples of Jesus. It would enable certain work lost with the termination of the Life & Witness office to be recovered. It has helpful ecumenical resonance.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Church House staff, relevant committee conveners, HRAG

Summary of Impact

Financial	None
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Would open new possibilities for ecumenical collaboration

Ministries of the Church Department: new name

Mission Council agrees that, with immediate effect, the Ministries of the Church Department should be known as the Discipleship Department, and the Deputy General Secretary responsible for that department should be called the Deputy General Secretary Discipleship.

The Ministries of the Church Department comprises these areas of work:

- Children's & Youth Work
- Church Related Community Work
- Education & Learning
- Ministries
- Safeguarding

What is the unifying theme that holds these disparate areas of work together? "Ministries of the Church" isn't a very good name. It is intended to encompass the various ministries of the whole people of God and all their different forms of service, but in practice it is easily misunderstood as referring to one kind of minister.

Discipleship is an excellent word to encompass these areas of work. The department is concerned with cradle to grave discipleship – the formation of the people of God into their full potential for faithfulness and service. It is about equipping and supporting people of all ages in their Christian development and fulfilment of their vocation.

However, there is a more fundamental reason for the change. Until church members think of themselves as disciples, there isn't much hope for the renewal of the Church. This has not been typical language in the URC... why not? Renaming the department is a step towards putting the call to discipleship firmly at the heart of our self-understanding as a Church.

The new name will also enable Church House to address work which currently falls between the cracks. When the Life & Witness Department was dissolved under the Catch the Vision restructuring, a new Secretary for Mission was appointed to take up its work on evangelism and church growth. But who updates the leaflet on "They've asked me to be a church secretary"? Where does the Retreats Group sit? Or the Healing Advisers Group? Who coordinates the synods' work on local church vitality? Who monitors the superb documents emerging from the World Council of Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and other world church partners and ensures that Mission Council and Assembly are enabled to benefit from the dynamic thinking that is happening around us? At the moment, spirituality and prayer are an uneasy add-on to the busy Mission Committee agenda. While the Faith & Order Committee engages in a certain amount of theological reflection on behalf of the Church, they would no doubt welcome partnership with a department which fostered deeper spiritual and theological awareness across the Church, day in and day out. All of this work happens but it would benefit from the coherence of a unifying theme and perspective.

The current staff in the department do not have capacity for much additional work. The Deputy General Secretary would have some time for hands-on involvement. But the proposal is not for new initiatives as much as a coherent overview from which recommendations can flow.

It is also significant that some of our ecumenical partners, the Methodist Church and the Congregational Federation in particular, have done significant work on the theme of discipleship. Local churches already make extensive use of ecumenical resources but there is everything to be gained in combining our energy and creativity with that of our partners in exploring what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the 21st century.