

# Paper U

## Report

Mission Council Advisory Group





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## Mission Council Advisory Group

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Roberta Rominger roberta.rominger@urc.org.uk
<b>Action required</b>	Information to note; one item for decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Mission Council notes the concern expressed by Plymstock United Reformed Church regarding the appointment of the Revd Ruth Whitehead as Moderator of the South Western Synod and agrees that their dissent from this decision should be recorded.</b>
<b>Alternative options to consider, if any</b>	

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	
<b>Main points</b>	Procedural changes at Mission Council Request for a registration of dissent Resolution 38 Assembly Commission final report Comment on a blue plaque at URC Church House Correspondence with Children's & Youth Work Committee
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Human Sexuality Task Group convener (item 4)

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	

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1. Mission Council will notice two significant procedural differences in this meeting.
  - a. One is the use of a cover sheet for each paper summarising the main points and giving other general information. These are intended to give a clear introduction to each paper and MCAG would welcome comments as to their effectiveness.
  - b. The second is the implementation of the standing order agreed at the last meeting:
 

*For the good ordering of [Mission Council's] time, the Moderators, in consultation with the General Secretary and the Clerk, shall group the draft motions into three Groups which shall determine the manner in which [Mission Council] shall consider them: A – en bloc, B—majority voting, and C – consensus... Notice in writing to the effect that one or more of the motions included in Group A should be considered separately may be given to the General Secretary by the close of business on the first day of the meeting... If such notice, which must be signed by at least six members of [Mission Council] is duly received, then the motion(s) in question shall be removed from Group A.*

It was MCAG's view that the option of grouping items together for en bloc approval should be used to the full at this meeting as a demonstration of the time that could be released for other matters. Members are reminded that if they wish any item to be removed from the en bloc category, they must submit a written note to the general secretary by the first evening of Mission Council. [N.B. The Moderators have ruled that three signatures will be sufficient rather than the six signatures which will be required at General Assembly.]

2. The general secretary received a letter from Plymstock United Reformed Church wishing to register dissent from Mission Council's decision of October 2012 to appoint the Revd Ruth Whitehead as moderator of the South Western Synod. Although this is not technically allowable under the rules of procedure, MCAG felt that the pastorally responsible action would be to notify Mission Council of this request and suggest it be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

## Resolution

**Mission Council notes the concern expressed by Plymstock United Reformed Church regarding the appointment of the Revd Ruth Whitehead as Moderator of the South Western Synod and agrees that their dissent from this decision should be recorded.**

3. Resolution 38 Assembly Commission – final report  
The Commission investigated the one outstanding matter which was called to Mission Council's attention in May. The Commission submitted a final report to say that the allegation made had been proved and made recommendations about follow-up

actions. These actions have now been taken and the Commission's findings have been shared with the individuals concerned. With the completion of their work, the Commission has now stood down. Work continues in the Law & Polity Advisory Group and the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) on the full range of issues in the Commission's reports, including the one presented to Mission Council in May. Because of the pastoral sensitivity of PRWC's reconciliation work, MCAG felt it unhelpful to circulate the Commission's final report to Mission Council. However, it is available from the general secretary upon request.

#### 4. Blue plaque at Church House

Early in 2013 a request was received from the Marchmont Community Association to affix a blue plaque under their local scheme to the Wakefield Street wall of URC Church House to commemorate Ernest Boulton and Frederick Park, two comic actors of the Victorian era. Using the stage names Fanny and Stella, Boulton and Park were well-known female impersonators. They kept a flat at Wakefield Street and this was the site of their arrest in 1870 on charges of sodomy and conspiracy to draw other men into inappropriate behaviour. When brought to court the pair were acquitted but their treatment prior to their trial would be widely condemned as inappropriate today.

The request was forwarded to the Church House Management Group who gave approval, and on 10<sup>th</sup> July a dedication ceremony was held which included the mayor of Camden, other council staff, Marchmont Association officers, the author of the book *Fanny and Stella* and a crowd of neighbours. The general secretary welcomed them and took part in the dedication, citing other historical occurrences which had taken place on the site and highlighting the horror of the Boulton and Park story. She made it clear that the URC did not have a common mind on homosexuality.

The Assembly Moderators subsequently received complaints from the leadership of the URC's Group for Evangelism and Renewal (GEAR) who felt that the agreement to the plaque was in contravention of the 2007 Commitment on Human Sexuality and objected to what it had been reported the general secretary had said at the dedication ceremony. The GEAR leadership also sought clarity about who had authorised the plaque. This latter point was clarified and GEAR given an assurance that MCAG would consider whether this matter should be raised at Mission Council as some individual GEAR members had requested.

MCAG discussed this carefully but given that a proper process had been used to authorise the plaque did not see that there was any justification for a retrospective debate. However, given the concerns that had been raised, and some evidence of confusion about what actually happened, MCAG felt that a statement should be given to Mission Council. MCAG wishes to acknowledge the hurt caused and hopes that these paragraphs supply the necessary clarity.

This and other recent issues which relate to the use of the 2007 Commitment also prompted MCAG to reflect on how the Commitment is being remembered, heard and interpreted in various parts of the United Reformed Church. MCAG has therefore suggested that the Human Sexuality Task Group might consider how the Commitment can be more fully instilled into the Church's consciousness and whether there is scope for producing useful guidelines to ensure that all groups in the Church, not least committees that have a representative function, are alert to its implications as they undertake their responsibilities.

## 5. A resolution from the Children's & Youth Work Committee

The Children's & Youth Work Committee agreed at their June meeting that a resolution should go to Mission Council: **The Children's and Youth Work Committee asks that the choice of venue for General Assembly should be made so that all of the groups involved have appropriate space to participate and that children and youth work and FURY are represented on Assembly Arrangements Committee both in advance of and during General Assembly.** The general secretary sent the resolution directly to the Assembly Arrangements Committee and Karen Morrison, Head of Children's and Youth Work Development, took part in the discussion at their September meeting. Ideas were shared as to how the youth event "What do you think?" could be delivered effectively within the current budget and how input from children might be enabled in the absence of a Children's Assembly. Although regular attendance at Assembly Arrangements Committee meetings is restricted to those designated by Assembly as members of the Committee, there is a firm commitment to ongoing consultation with all the key stakeholders in the planning of the Assembly. MCAG offers assurance both to the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Mission Council that the inclusion of children and young people in the deliberations and decision making of the Church is receiving serious attention from those responsible for planning General Assembly. In the light of these discussions, the Convener and Secretary of the Children's and Youth Work Committee agreed that the Committee resolution did not need to be tabled at Mission Council.

