

Paper Q1

Joint property strategy group
Report

Church 2014
United
Church **Reformed**
Church Church 2014

Paper Q1



Joint property strategy group (JPSG): Report

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Cliff Patten cliffordpatten@btinternet.com
Action required	Questions and discussion
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mission Council accepts and supports the ongoing work of the JPSG and the proposed training events. 2. Mission Council asks the JPSG United Reformed Church members to consult further regarding a church buildings forum and developing our church building theology and report back to Mission Council.
Alternative options to consider, if any	None

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Reporting recent strategy group work and suggesting some United-Reformed-Church-specific work in response to this and the faith and order committee report to General Assembly 2014.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · JPSG roadshows · United Reformed Church building forum · Developing a United Reformed Church buildings theology
Previous relevant documents	Paper W3 Mission Council November 2013.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Revd John Proctor The Revd David Tatem

Summary of Impact

Financial	Budget required for roadshows. Limited costs associated with developing the forum.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Working with the Methodist Church. Opportunity – could be considered essential to engage with other denominations.

Joint property strategy group report

1. JPSG aims and objectives

The October 2010 joint meeting of the Methodist Council and the United Reformed Church Mission Council agreed that a new group should be established to undertake work identified by the earlier Methodist/URC buildings think tank. Terms of reference were agreed by both councils in spring 2011 and the joint property strategy group (JPSG) began meeting later that year. Money was budgeted to enable the employment of an executive officer and the Revd Carla Maurer held this post from September 2012 until May 2013. Kim Medford-Vassell was then appointed in March 2014 for a period of 18 months.

The JPSG originally identified four areas of work – possibilities, people, partnership and procedure. On the latter, separate work regarding LEPs and sharing agreements, governance and compliance with legislation and expectations is now being undertaken by another group and both the Methodist Church and the URC (via the property, legal and trust officers – PLATO) has established means of addressing these issues on behalf of the denominations. The JPSG has therefore focused its work on the following:

Possibilities: Creating communities of inspiration and learning, sharing good practices.

People: Empowering people and providing training in property management for church leaders, encouraging property stewardship and developing strategies for mission development.

Partnership: Reviewing the Reciprocal Sharing Agreement between the two Churches and presenting best practices for partnerships with church and non-church organisations.

2. What the JPSG has been doing

Since the last report to Mission Council, Clifford Patten, David Skipp and David Tatem, secretary for ecumenical relations, have joined Lucy Brierley as URC members of the JPSG.

The work of the JPSG has focused on the following areas:

2.1 Six roadshows (in 2015)

These will be aimed at all those within the URC and Methodist Church with an interest in mission and buildings within their communities and will take place in six locations across England and Scotland.

The roadshows will be designed to:

- Enable the target audience to think creatively about using property to further mission within their local churches;
- Motivate those already engaged or willing to engage in this work within the synods, circuits and local churches;
- Show models for change that has been proved to work;
- Enable a wider discussion in terms of mission within the community.

It is envisioned for these six roadshows to be held in church buildings that have been renovated and/or designed with mission in mind. It is hoped this will provide maximum impact not only in respect of presentation and discussion on all that can be achieved but provide a visual example also. The roadshows will most likely be whole day events divided into sections to include presentations, discussions and space for a question and answer

session. Synods will be asked to promote the roadshows at both their autumn and spring meetings. It is hoped that synods, training officers and moderators will encourage local church members, elders, crcws and ministers to attend a roadshow in order to begin (or assist to continue) creative and missional thinking about buildings.

Financing arrangements are being discussed and further information should be available by the time Mission Council meets.

2.2 Strategic training for those in leadership roles in local churches

It is hoped the training will be designed to be accessed across both denominations particularly to equip those interested in developing and releasing buildings for mission in:

- Discovering and believing in new **possibilities**;
- Setting up simple but effective **processes**;
- Finding and keeping motivated **people**;
- Making creative and ambitious **partnerships**;
- Enabling our mission to respond to the need, not to the **pennies**.

The JPSG are currently working on ways in which to implement this and the executive officer is liaising with Fiona Thomas about possible modules of training which could be incorporated into existing training structures.

2.3 New webpages within the Methodist Church and URC websites

It is intended that pages relating will be linked to both the URC and Methodist Church websites. These will include good news stories designed to highlight the missional work of churches and communities through creative use of its buildings, training, roadshow information, resources, links, updates and contact information. The pages will be designed to provide support to local churches.

If there are any good news stories you would like featured on the website, where properties have been transformed, in large or small ways, to further missional work in the Church and community, please contact Kim Medford-Vassell, executive support officer, via email to medford-vassellk@methodistchurch.org.uk, who will be happy to work with you on presenting this on the website.

The JPSG/URC group would welcome comments and guidance from Mission Council, and if appropriate proposes the following Resolution 1:

RESOLUTION 1: Mission Council accepts and supports the ongoing work of the JPSG and the proposed training events.

1. The United Reformed Church response to this work

In addition the JPSG/URC group suggest the following URC response to the work to date set against the familiar background outlined below.

3.1 People-focussed mission strategies

Almost without exception, and understandably Mission programmes produced over the years focus upon people, but to the extent that they ignore the significant part that buildings can play in facilitating, enhancing and most significantly shaping and hindering such work. Failing buildings often dictate church closure and the maintenance burden of too many buildings

will increasingly restrict effective investment in people. Programmes such as local mission and ministry review (LMMR) and vision20/20 will become more effective if formal recognition is given to the physical and financial part that buildings play in their delivery.

3.2 Our inherited building stock

- The dependency of church families upon the buildings they occupy is a relationship founded upon family emotional ties, the perceived duties of stewardship and the way that buildings shape what we feel able to do and what we are. In many ways our buildings reflect and shape the nature of the Church family and will often speak louder to the community than the posters on the noticeboard.
- Our inherited buildings largely determine the distribution and location of church families and the building investment and natural change inertia can maintain this distribution and building supply beyond the natural life of the cause.
- Much has been said about too many buildings maintained in many places by a reducing membership. The Church family, rather than building condition, needs to be shaping the strategic planning for future provision; this planning is enhanced if carried out on a community basis and together with our ecumenical partners.
- We have a rich resource of buildings which tell our nonconformist story and it is important that we should identify how and where this story is told and seek to interpret and preserve some of it as a denomination.

There has been a recognised need for some time to create a vehicle enabling the URC to speak with one voice when required regarding Church buildings, recognising that this may embrace a variety of views. This is particularly relevant when working with government agencies and in particular the heritage bodies. Working with the Methodist Church has again emphasised this gap and will restrict the effectiveness and extent to which we can work together on property matters.

Within the URC, advice to local churches and communities at synod or area level varies considerably in relation to the resources and personnel available. This can lead to an inconsistent approach to specialist advice, funding and reinvesting monies released by property sales, strategic planning and facilitating thorough and challenging investigations of building performance and requirements.

The faith and order committee's report to General Assembly suggested the development of a shared Church buildings theology and this coincides with the URC JPSG members' concern that such a piece of work, called for in the original task group report will not be undertaken jointly. The group are keen that this should be developed across the URC drawing upon local experience and creating a body of work that can be used by all Church families and ecumenical groups to both challenge existing established ways of working and help shape effective longer-term strategies through greater and consistent understanding.

The URC representatives to the JPSG have held separate meetings and consulted the general secretary to discuss how the URC can best facilitate and respond to these issues.

4. Work ahead

The members of the JPSG are prepared, for the remainder of their appointed term (until the end of 2015) to take advice from Mission Council and develop strategies for a Church building forum and a means of developing the Church building theology. If the principle is acceptable, Mission Council may choose to enhance the existing group or create another group to carry out this work.

We set out below an outline of the two pieces of work.

4.1 Building forum

- Create a Church building forum linking synods and other parties such as the law and polity advisory group (LPAG) to develop and promote a building theology and promote a wider discussion of building provision and funding.
 - The forum may meet occasionally and link into the JPSG.
 - It can also work alongside the PLATO group if and when required.
 - It will provide a point of contact with other denominations, building agencies and heritage bodies.
 - To be fully effective this forum needs to be recognised alongside other General Assembly committees.
 - It will be the body which relates to Mission Council and General Assembly to raise the profile of Church buildings.
- A forum convenor is probably required to promote the work; it will be for Mission Council to determine how this may be approached. This would signal the importance attached to this work.
- Develop the patchy building theology advisory and support work at synod level and develop a more coordinated approach.
- A major piece of mindset-changing work needs to be undertaken to encourage a focussed rationalisation of buildings; this needs to be big picture mission focussed and cross denomination. We need to learn to be the catalyst in bringing the local churches together to make a difference.
- A major piece of work is required to address the use of funds released from building sales for revenue funding. Much of this money was originally given for building work and perhaps we owe a duty to see it recycled into new building projects. Only by having funds available for projects will church families dare to dream and consider mission-responsive building schemes.

2. Towards developing a Church building theology

The JPSG/URC members are happy to facilitate discussions with Mission Council as a method of gathering information and comment. It may be that the forum, if acceptable, will become the vehicle for assembling the responses and developing the work over time.

Again the JPSG/URC group would welcome comments and guidance from Mission Council regarding these two pieces of work, and, if appropriate, proposes Resolution 2:

RESOLUTION 2: Mission Council asks the JPSG/URC members to consult further regarding a church buildings forum and developing our church buildings theology and report back to Mission Council.