

Paper 11

Mission committee

Redrafting the terms of
the Jewish Fund

United
Church
Reformed
Church
2016
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Church 2016



Paper I1

Mission Committee Redrafting the terms of the Jewish Fund

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Bernie Collins bernie.collins@thecrocker.net The Revd David Tatem david.tatem@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Mission Council on behalf of General Assembly resolves:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to request and direct United Reformed Trust (URCT) as Trustee of the Jewish Fund (the fund) to amend the purposes of the fund to 'The promotion of contact, understanding and respect among Christians, Jews and members of other faith communities, in ways consonant with the beliefs and practices of the United Reformed Church' 2. that the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, in conjunction with the convener and members of the Interfaith Reference Group draw up parameters for the application of the fund and a procedure for processing applications to be submitted for approval to the Mission Committee. 3. to authorize the Moderator and Clerk of General Assembly to sign any deed or memorandum required for and on behalf of General Assembly as required and directed in (1) above.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	The redrafting and widening of the terms of reference of the Jewish Fund to become a more widely applicable interfaith fund.
Main points	The original terms of reference of the Jewish Fund require to be updated and the narrow application of the fund should also be expanded to provide a more appropriate interfaith remit.
Previous relevant documents	URC Trust paper, The Jewish Fund change of purpose, May 2016. Paper I submitted to Mission Committee in June 2016.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Trust, Mission Committee, Legal Advisor

Summary of Impact

Financial	Nil
External (e.g. ecumenical)	Improvement of the URC's ability to engage with and contribute effectively to interfaith initiatives.

Redrafting the terms of the Jewish Fund

1. There has been a lengthy period of discussion and consideration of the question of the terms of reference and application of what has for many years been known as 'The Jewish Fund' (the fund). This process, including conversations with the Charity Commissioners, has led to proposals both from the Mission Committee and the URC Trust the trustee of the fund which are being brought to Mission Council in order to complete the formal process of agreement required in order to bring the changes into effect.
2. The proposal to redraft the terms of reference for the Jewish Fund was first brought to the URC Trust in April 2015 by the Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and was argued as follows:
3. According to what is known of the origins of the Jewish Fund it was established in 1913 to assist efforts on behalf of the then Presbyterian Church to evangelise the Jewish Community of the East End of London. On the surface then this would appear to be the primary purpose of the fund. Most churches would argue that this is not so much an end in itself as a means to an end. It would be argued by many then and by some still that evangelism is the means to the end of achieving the ultimate wellbeing of individuals and communities but that it is the achievement of this wellbeing that is the primary purpose.
4. A contemporary analogy might be the work being done in Africa in the fight against Ebola. In order to eliminate the threat effort has been put into persuading people in certain cultures particularly to change their behaviour with regard to dead bodies. This involves a process of education and persuasion. A charity engaged in this could be seen as having its purpose focussed on behavioural change whilst in reality the primary objective is the elimination of Ebola and the consequent enhancement of the well being of the community and its members. A change in understanding of what leads to that would bring about a change in the visible objective of the charity so that the development of an effective cure and vaccine would soon change the visible objective from behavioural change to the mass vaccination of every member of the community.
5. Following this analogy the same might be said of the purposes of the Jewish Fund. A high view of evangelism would see it as having the purpose of enhancing the life of Jews individually and collectively and the wider community of which both they and Christians are a part. For many years now, albeit with exceptions, the churches have rejected the view that evangelism is the way to achieve this and have recognised the damage that has been done to the Jewish Community, to individuals and to local community cohesion by attempts to convert Jews. The year 2015 sees the 25th anniversary of the seminal Vatican statement on interfaith relations and in particular the relations with the Jewish Community, *Nostra Aetate*, which has set the Catholic Church firmly against attempts to convert the Jews and committed them instead to mutual understanding and dialogue. Most mainstream churches whilst not signing up in any formal process to *Nostra Aetate* would see the Catholic Church as speaking for them too.
6. It can be argued therefore that the core purpose of the Jewish Fund is fulfilled not by evangelism but by initiatives that increase mutual understanding and enable dialogue in order to enhance relationships within the community. It is also clear that the context in which that is practised has changed from the time of the establishment of the fund when the Jewish community was the most significant other faith community. This is no longer the case with

the Muslim community being the largest other faith group along with Hindu, Sikh, Jain and an increasingly diverse range of other groups interacting with one another. Any core objective, therefore, that seeks the enhancement of community relations as one of its aspects needs to recognise this and be able to respond fully to it. It could, therefore, be argued that parameters to the use of the fund that limit its application only to Jewish-Christian relations, in the contemporary context, disables the original core purpose and should ideally be expanded at least to encompass work with the Muslim Community which is recognised as the other faith that has significant relations with both Christians and Jews. It should be recognised, however, that both nationally and at local level a lot of these relations exist within the wider interfaith set of relationships under local Inter-Faith groups and nationally the Inter-Faith Network.

7. In order to make it possible for the original purpose of the fund to be properly fulfilled in the 21st century the parameters of the fund ought therefore to be expanded to include relations with faiths other than Jewish.

8. The Trust agreed to explore ways of broadening the stated purposes of the fund to reflect two issues and concerns:

- a) the broader interfaith context in the UK. A century ago the Jewish community was the only large religious body apart from the churches. That is no longer the case;
- b) our concern that constructive engagement today requires the building of respectful and trusting community relations, rather than the narrow 'propagation' of one's own faith.

9. The Trust asked the General Secretary, Revd John Proctor, and Andrew Summers to take the matter forward. John Proctor spoke with Dr Ed Kessler MBE, Director of the Woolf Institute in Cambridge and an acknowledged leader in the study of relations among Jews, Christians and Muslims. Dr Kessler offered the following advice:

- a) It is normally better to expand an original trust responsibility, than to appear to change it entirely. Any new purpose should be set out, if possible, as an extension of what went before.
- b) In matters of interfaith work, the Charity Commission is much keener on words like understanding, community relations, contribution to society, than it would be on a term like mission.
- c) The Charity Commission's requirement to 'consult' about a change of purpose is, not best understood as a need to consult a lot of experts like himself. Dr Kessler thought it unnecessary for us to seek advice from Jewish bodies, or indeed from other interfaith institutions.
- d) We would be obliged to consult our own members. Perhaps we could do this representatively through consulting Mission Council.
- e) If we needed a letter to support an application to the Charity Commission, Dr Kessler would be willing to write to this effect.

10. John Proctor, Andrew Summers and David Tatem discussed this advice and proposed to the Trust in September 2015 that a change along the following lines be explored:

'the promotion of contact, understanding and respect between Christians and members of other faith communities, in ways consonant with the beliefs and practices of the United Reformed Church'

11. Such a change might be justified as follows:

- a) The United Reformed Church is the legal successor to the Presbyterian Church of England. Those who belong to it therefore represent in our day the 'doctrines ritual and disciplines' of that Church as these have been 'altered or added to' across the years.
- b) The multicultural picture in Britain is more varied than in 1913. Today Christians wish to relate responsibly to all our neighbours of faith, rather than particularly to the Jewish community. The original intention of the fund, to serve the well-being of Jewish people should now extend, as an extension of the original intention in a new context, to members of other faith communities.
- c) Today's context requires the building of respectful and trusting community relations, rather than the narrow 'propagation' of one's own faith. The United Reformed Church seeks to relate to communities of other faith with respect for their integrity, and with a concern to strengthen community relations through contact and understanding.

12. The Jewish Fund (the fund) came into existence by a deed dated 28th February 1913 (the deed). The purpose of the fund within the deed is "The propagation of the Christian religion among members of the Jewish race or religion in accordance with the doctrines ritual and discipline of the Presbyterian Church of England..."

Clause 9 of the deed provides a mechanism for amendments to be made to the deed by the trustee. URCT is the trustee of the fund.

Clause 9 provides that:

it is lawful for the trustee at the request and direction of General Assembly to alter revoke or add to the trusts powers and provisions so only that any such alteration revocation or addition shall not be inconsistent with the general trust contained in the first clause for "the propagation of the Christian religion among members of the Jewish race or religion."

In May 2016 URCT took the view that the proposed amendment to the purpose of the fund was not inconsistent with the general trust and believed that subject to the provisions of clause 9 of the deed it was free to amend the purposes of the fund as follows and resolved that it wished to do so:

'The promotion of contact, understanding and respect among Christians, Jews and members of other faith communities, in ways consonant with the beliefs and practices of the United Reformed Church'.

13. The Trust asked the Mission Committee to discuss this matter and bring an appropriate recommendation to the Mission Council.

14. The Mission Committee discussed the matter at its meeting in June 2016, and agreed to take the matter to Mission Council.

15. The Legal Advisor was then consulted, and his advice on the presentation of the matter is reflected in this paper.

