
News from Mission Council

Mission Council is the executive body of the United Reformed Church, meets twice a year and acts in the name of General Assembly. It is made up, mainly of four representatives from each Synod (including each Synod Moderator), the General Assembly Officers and Committee Convenors. The last meeting of Mission Council took place in early March.

Worship



We mix worship in with our business highlighting our role as disciples seeking the mind of Christ for His Church. Mission Council opened with a celebration of Holy Communion led by Mr John Ellis and the Rev'd David Grosch Miller, Assembly moderators, and the Rev'd Nigel Uden, chaplain. Mr Ellis preached about the different ways we encounter Jesus and the wider Church which give us the gift of diversity which is one of our hallmarks. He felt this gift of diversity had helped us cope, with good grace, in difficult discussions over recent years. Rev'd David Grosch Miller inducted our new Secretary for Church and Society, Grace Pengelly. Thursday morning started with an extended Bible study led by the Rev'd Carla Grosch Miller on the meeting with Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus did not hesitate to engage her in her in deep and revealing conversation despite the barriers of race, faith and gender that were between them.

Our closing worship concluded these thoughts with a reflection on listening to the people on the edge, as was the woman at the well.

URC now an Associate Sponsor of Greenbelt

Steve Summers reported that the URC is now an associate sponsor of the very popular annual Christian arts festival, Greenbelt. A range of URC themed activities will be planned for this year's festival which takes place over the August Bank holiday weekend at Boughton House near Kettering. It is hoped that this will both raise the profile of the URC at Greenbelt and give a place for URC people attending the festival to meet and socialise.



Mission Council at Work

Missional Discipleship

The Rev'd Richard Church, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) and the Rev'd Fiona Thomas, Secretary of the Education and Learning Committee presented a paper which will affect every agenda of the church. Various resources to foster discipleship are being developed including those which will celebrate the 100th anniversary of Constance Coltman's ordination as the first female minister in our tradition and of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reform. The Training for Learning & Serving programme will be remodelled for two years and incorporate various new elements. A range of new resources for the church will be developed and a funding application to the Council for World Mission will be made to help finance this project.

Migration Issues

The Rev'd Dr Michael Jagessar, Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry told Mission Council of a series of resources which are being developed to help local churches discuss issues of migration in the context of the refugee crisis currently effecting the Middle East. It is anticipated that these resources will be available in due course.

Celebrant Elders

The Rev'd Elizabeth Welch, convenor of the Faith and Order Committee, and the Rev'd Professor David Thompson, convenor of the small task group looking at authorised eldership, presented a paper reviewing the discussions we have been having about authorising elders and lay preachers to preside at the Sacraments. The main difference to our current practice would be to authorise such people to a period of service of between 3 and 5 years. A code of conduct would be developed for such authorised people and a record of those who had been removed from the list of authorised people would be held at Church House. Mission Council members felt that specific training for celebrating the Sacraments with vulnerable people – for example in care homes – should be provided following the model of the Synod of Scotland which already does this. The comments made would be considered by the Faith and Order Committee and an updated paper will be presented to General Assembly.

Question Time with the Moderators



An interesting session was held with the two retiring Assembly Moderators about their time in office and perceptions of the church.

The Future of General Assembly

Mission Council broke into small groups to discuss an excellent paper from the Rev'd John Proctor, General Secretary, outlining the various things we seem to want from General Assembly: to make wise decisions; to make widely shared decisions; and to inspire and equip those who attend. We were also to reflect on the value of our consensus decision making process. Mr Proctor suggested that our consensus process is reflective of our polity of wanting to journey together, is prophetic as it allows minority voices at a Council of the Church, is a good process for working through the various stages of a debate and allows us to perceive the depth of feeling on various sides of an issue. Feedback from each discussion group was given and every member of Mission Council was invited to complete a short questionnaire exploring their feelings in detail. During the closing session Mr Proctor reported back views of Mission Council including suggestions to consider which are the best decisions to be made at Assembly, how synods and churches could become more involved in decision making before the Assembly meeting, perhaps creating more space for 'inspiration, vision and equipping'. It was proposed that Assembly could be shortened to two nights, particularly if we were more discerning about Assembly agendas and this might help with costs. The Assembly Arrangements Committee were invited to consider the feedback as they commence plans for 2018 Assembly.

Past Case Review

Mission Council heard of the progress of the first stage of the Past Case Review as well as the next stages which are being planned which will be announced in due course.

Redevelopment of Church House



Mission Council was informed of plans by the United Reformed Church Trust to redevelop Church House from funds held by the Trust. Better use of the basement, ground and first floors is planned and the second floor will be developed so that it can be rented out separately. It is hoped that the rent achieved from this rental will pay for the running costs of the building. The cost, of £2.5m, will be met from the sale of a house owned by the trust near Church House and from funds already held. Mission Council was concerned about the money being spent, the environmental impact of any development and about finding a way to support a project in the developing world as well. The matter was referred to a facilitation group who suggested that the General Secretariat develop a clear strategy that communicates the vision behind the project which: highlights the aspiration that Church House becomes cost neutral; becomes more accessible both physically and virtually; is more environmentally responsible; is future proof and that the day to day management and use of the building communicates our mission; and that information about the funds that are available to local churches for building work. These suggestions were approved by Mission Council.

Technical Issues

Final approval to some tidying up the Structure on who is to be a member of General Assembly, the Appeals Process and various other items were discussed. Further details of these can be found on the URC website

Notes

Notes were made by Andy Braunston: Synod Clerk
North Western Synod.