

# News from Mission Council November 2013

## Faith and order conversations with the Methodist Church

Following the joint meeting of Mission Council with the Methodist Council last autumn, Mission Council agreed, as the Methodist Council already had, to set up theological conversations between the two churches. Many in LEPs will know that the differing theologies of ministry between the two churches is a source of tension, as is the commonality of practice across the church expected by the Methodism and the flexibility at local level beloved of the URC. There is no intention that these talks will lead to a union of the two denominations, but rather to developing greater mutual understanding.

## Developing Resource Sharing

Synods vary greatly in their resources, for a variety of reasons. For many years there has been a programme of sharing resources between synods, to help those with the least resources. However, a weakness in the current system is that the amounts of money involved can vary significantly from one year to another, which means the synods most heavily dependent upon gifts from other synods cannot easily budget effectively over a period of years if they have no idea what they might receive. Mission Council agreed to develop a smoothed system of guided giving.

## A united church in Wales?

The covenanted churches of Wales have been presented with a unity scheme for consideration, and the National Synod of Wales shared their proposed response to the first draft, and as a national synod they will continue to respond directly until the final proposals are ready. Our hopes and prayers are with them as this venture proceeds.

## Theological thinking still continuing...

Again Mission Council was able to spend time thinking about the future of the church generally, and specifically about Church Meeting, which is vital to our theology, but in practice needs revitalising in many places. The process had neither a particular agenda, nor a specific outcome in mind, the idea being that we listened for the Holy Spirit, and sought where God might be leading us. We await what the Faith and Order Committee makes of Mission Council's thoughts.

## And in other news...

- The Equal Opportunities Committee was re-named the Equalities Committee, to better reflect current thinking in a variety of contexts.
- Discussion on how the URC might respond to same-sex marriage will begin at General Assembly 2014, facilitated by the Human Sexuality Task Group, and decisions will follow depending upon the outcome of the conversations at the General Assembly.
- Flowing from the human sexuality discussion, an ambiguity in our structure became apparent over the extent to which the National Synods of Scotland and Wales were authorised to speak for the whole United Reformed Church in their nations, and a Task Group was set up to explore this thoroughly so that the correct places for decision-making can be definitively agreed.
- The nomination process for the next General Secretary is outlined in the December *Reform*, and the recruitment process for the three Deputy General Secretaries will begin such that the new General Secretary can be involved in that process.
- Mission Council approved the principle that Safer Sacred Space training will be compulsory for Ministers and CRCWs, and the Education and Learning Committee will return with more detailed proposals on how this will be organised and funded.
- The budget for 2014 is reasonably balanced, but by 2016 there is a potential deficit of £300,000, which will not be affordable. If every church could increase their giving to the Ministry and Mission fund by just 1% per annum, then by 2016 we would have £1 million more than we need to fund the current budget.
- The URC Trust had investigated an offer from the Baptist Union to share office space in Didcot, however this was impractical for a variety of reasons and will not be taken forward. The pressure to cut costs remains, meaning that the URC Trust will continue to explore options for the location of the General Assembly's offices.

This is neither an exhaustive nor an official report, but some headlines. The minutes and approved papers will be posted on the URC website in due course, which will provide a more comprehensive record.

*Your Wessex Synod reps were Clare Downing, Peter Pay, Michael Hopkins, and Colin MacBean. Also attending from Wessex were Margaret Carrick-Smith (Assembly Clerk), David Grosch-Miller (interim Assistant General Secretary, and Assembly Moderator-elect), Tim Meachin (Convenor of the Assembly's Children's & Youth Work Committee), Elizabeth Nash (Convenor of the Assembly's Equalities Committee), and, Carol Rogers (Secretary of the Assembly's Nominations Committee).*