

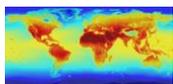
Highlights of Mission Council, 13th-15th May 2019, High Leigh

Our Bible Studies were led by Revd Neil Thorogood, Principal of Westminster College, who spoke on the Last Supper in Mark 14, Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 and the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mark 7, and the parable of the lost son(s) in Luke 15. He gave us copies of inspirational pictures by the late Catholic priest Sieger Köder.



Neil began by saying: 'We hear a cacophony of sound: deep faith and faithlessness; laughter and weeping; high hopes and sometime stifling cynicism... We hear from the messy mass of ordinary sinners that we are. Listening to God speaking through the church and ourselves... God says: I give you open hands and reach out to you...' In reflecting on the parable of the prodigal son, Neil said God is 'more merciful than seems possible and more welcoming than seems prudent'. He ended by inviting us to consider the sort of churches we need to be to embody God's abundant gifts.

Climate Change



- We agreed a far-reaching Resolution in line with other churches in the Joint Public Issues Team, on Carbon emissions – urging the UK government to set a target and establish policies to achieve net zero emissions by well before 2050; and to act urgently to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of Church life.

“Mission Council calls on URC members, local churches and synods to support these commitments in word and deed.”

And there was much discussion of two alternative resolutions dealing with the URC's investment in fossil fuel companies.

- **In the end we unanimously agreed the Resolution from the Synod of Scotland, expressing our wish to divest from fossil fuel companies immediately.**

The resolution and accompanying paper 'Creating a climate of change' can be found on the URC website: <http://bit.ly/2VCYARK>

Acting with strategic intent

We expressed our desire to explore in more details possible central provision of support services, and directed the General Secretariat to initiate consultation with synods, and to report back on any themes or concerns that emerge.

Other things:

- Our General Secretary and our Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) will be retiring in the summer of 2020. The human resources advisory group brought updated job descriptions and person specifications, which were agreed.
- We received two papers from the Education and learning committee – one on marks of ministry; a revised version will come to a future meeting of Mission Council. And Paper D1 put flesh on the bones of the discipleship development fund. Payments from the fund would normally be restricted to £200 a year for each applicant, managed by the Synods. We also voted to reword the policy to allow Assembly-accredited lay preachers to have access to the fund.
- Dr Sam Richards, Head of Children's and Youth Work, gave a presentation about 'Friends on Faith Adventures', a new initiative created by CYW and Pilots. This is for children aged 5 to 11. Each session involves a game, a Bible story told through a dramatised reading which ends with an 'I wonder' question (using props and costumes suggested), and a craft activity. Parents and carers will be invited in to see what children have been up to, everyone is given a Walking the Way challenge, and the session ends in prayer. It will be trialled in 8 settings in September, for a launch in January 2020.



Report from MIND

The Ministerial Discipline and Advisory Group (MIND) presented an outline of the suggested new process in dealing with disciplinary cases involving Ministers and Church Related Community Workers. We approved the setting up of scrutiny groups to work more on the new process, for report back to Mission Council in 2020.



Assembly 2020-30

The Assembly task group reported on several pieces of work including: The number, tenure and duties of the Moderator of General Assembly; the frequency of Mission Council; and the succession of the Clerk to General Assembly. We agreed that:

- Beginning from 2022, the Moderator of General Assembly will serve for one year. Although only one Moderator will be elected at each Assembly, nominations of both elders and ministers will continue to be invited each year.
- Mission Council shall meet for one 48-hour meeting each year with a new name, Assembly Executive.
- Each Synod will send four reps to the Assembly Executive – hoping that a youth rep will be included
- We want to appoint an Assistant Clerk to General Assembly.



The URC's Safeguarding Advisory Group

reported that the past case review led to a range of developments to standardise good practice. They brought proposals for an agreed safeguarding strategic plan. Further work was agreed about the development, resourcing, budget, implementation and monitoring of the plan between now and 2023. The six objectives of the plan aim to effect culture change within the URC, and are to:

- Instil a safeguarding ethos of care and service within all local congregations, synods and bodies of the URC.
- Ensure initial and ongoing pastoral care and support to those who were impacted by safeguarding incidents and concerns.
- Set up secure and appropriate systems and processes of data and information handling and reporting safeguarding.
- Ensure the safeguarding policies and procedures are updated, reviewed and implemented in practice throughout the URC.
- Provide appropriate and accessible safeguarding training for all those who are accountable for and working with children, young people and adults.
- Encourage and build constructive partnerships with statutory, non-statutory bodies, other denomination and faith-based communities.

For much more, please see the Mission Council pages on the URC website, or contact your reps:

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