

Paper M1

Mission & Discipleship

Missional Discipleship

A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church

United Reformed Church
Church 2015
Church 2015
Church 2015



Paper M1

Mission & Discipleship

Missional Discipleship – A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Francis Brienen francis.brienen@urc.org.uk Richard Church richard.church@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council receives the report, endorses the direction of travel, and asks for further information in March 2016.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper gives an update on the work of the Mission committee on the next phase of the CWM Mission Support Programme (MSP) and of the Education & Learning committee and the Discipleship department on the TLS review and its follow up. This is for information. A further paper will be tabled at the Mission Council meeting.
Main points	There is synergy between the work of the Mission and Discipleship departments following the MSP work and the TLS review. Both are inspired by an encompassing vision for missional discipleship. A task group has been set up and is preparing an outline plan for a fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council November 2013 paper Mission Council March 2014 group discussion
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission committee; Education & Learning committee; invited attendees of a consultation day on Discipleship (27 April 2015); TLS tutors; synod moderators.

Summary of Impact

Financial	Cost of task group meetings (these can be absorbed by current budgets.)
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None

Missional Discipleship

A fresh emphasis on making and releasing disciples within the United Reformed Church

CWM Mission Support Programme

1. The Council for World Mission (CWM) of which the United Reformed Church is a member, makes grants to all its 31 member churches according to an agreed budget through its Mission Support Programme. Each new funding round is designated as a new 'phase' and the United Reformed Church is now in the process of discernment as to the best use of the grant, which is designated for strategic mission work and encourages the member churches to undertake new ventures addressing the challenges of their mission contexts.
2. The Mission committee started discussions on Phase 3 of the Mission Support Programme in October 2012 and initially identified the need for evangelism and how to equip people in the URC for this task (within the broader context of discipleship) as a focus to be explored for a new mission programme. A small group developed a proposal for wide consultation with potential stakeholders in the URC, which included a three-stage process with the overall aim of creating a culture of evangelism in the URC, starting with the leadership. This was widely discussed in the URC between March and September 2013, including in Mission Council, and as a result it was agreed that the proposal be re-focused on **pre-evangelism and discipleship**. An expanded group was asked to do further work on the proposal and it suggested holding a Day on Discipleship to explore how we can (further) develop discipleship in the URC (a discipleship of which evangelism/faith sharing is a natural and integral part).
3. The Day on Discipleship was held at High Leigh on Monday 27 April 2015 and was attended by 22 people, including synod moderators, Church House staff, training and development officers, mission enablers, members of the FURY advisory board and members of Team URC (Together Ethnic and Minority). The main focus of the day was discernment of where God is leading us.
4. The gathering affirmed that developing discipleship with a view to building confidence in evangelism is something the URC must urgently pursue. The gathering also made practical suggestions to enable people locally to grow in discipleship and to show how this could be supported centrally.
5. A subsequent small group meeting reflected on the outcomes of the day and emerged with the conviction that any work on discipleship should be formational, missional, focused on people rather than programme, and concerned with the Jesus way of full life rather than church. The emphasis should be on the formation of habit and a change of culture in congregations (as well as the provision of a comprehensive approach to discipleship from which people associated with the United Reformed Church can benefit at any point in their journey of faith.) It was thought that there might be convergence between this group's ideas for deepening discipleship and the recommendations of the TLS review. Both were inspired by an

encompassing vision of missional discipleship. The group recommended that an approach should be made to Education & Learning to explore synergy between the TLS aspirations and the MSP process. This was agreed by the Mission committee at its meeting in June. It also recommended that the thinking on whole church learning for lay and ordained people in a discussion paper on Pioneer Ministry (by Peter Ball and Linda Rayner) be considered in the further development of the work.

Training for Learning and Serving

6. At its meeting in January 2015 the Education & Learning committee received a report from the TLS Review Group. The review had shown that whilst the ingredients of TLS are valuable, the way it is perceived and structured is in need of renovation. The crucial point, however, was the desire expressed in the review of working towards an integrated system of whole-life discipleship with all learning opportunities being open to all, anchored in the Christian revelation and building up the Church. As expressed in recommendation 2 of the TLS Review:

*“Since integration of the many ways people learn and develop as Christian disciples has been a priority in recent thinking, we suggest that Education & Learning consider ways in which a common identity can be given to the many disparate strands of learning within the denomination. **Exploring Discipleship and Service** might as a title encapsulate some of our desire to see all learning opportunities being open to all, anchored in the Christian revelation, and building up the Church.”*

7. In the course of the discussion of the report, it was recognised that TLS was brought into the denomination as part of a vision concerning the learning of the whole people of God. If anything was to succeed it as a vehicle for learning throughout the denomination it would need to be launched as a fresh vision for the development of individuals and communities within the Church. It should offer flexible pathways to enable the recognised ministries in the URC to respond to the vocation of discipleship. It was hoped that something new would come on stream in 2017.
8. It had been proposed to engage two external consultants from September 2015 to start work on what a re-branded TLS would include and look like. They would draft principles and start drawing the architecture, after extensive dialogue and wide ranging conversations.

Joint work on missional discipleship

9. During the summer this was taken further by the Mission and Discipleship departments and the idea of engaging consultants was pursued. These consultants would be asked to do the skilled work of exploring how the TLS aspirations could be combined with the work of the MSP process without losing their original remit. The desired outcome of the work would be an outline/sketch of how the two processes would fit together and what could be developed jointly. It was envisaged that the main part of this work be done between September and November 2015.
10. Following difficulty in finding available consultants a Missional Discipleship Task Group has been established with terms of reference prepared by the Secretary for Education & Learning (appended to this paper). This group comprises the Revd Richard Church & Francis Brienen (co-conveners), the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar and the Revd Fiona Thomas (consultants), the Revd Peter Ball, the Revd Dr Phil Wall, the Revd Kathryn Price, the Revd Tracey Lewis and the Revd Dr Graham Adams.

11. The group is currently conducting a survey exploring what helps people in the church to grow in faith. The survey asks the following questions:
1. *What are the elements that have been influential in your Christian discipleship and continue to help you in your journey?*
 2. *In what ways does your being a follower of Christ express itself in your daily life?*
 3. *In your local church/Christian community what sustains and nurtures your corporate life?*
 4. *Identify three ways in which you would like your local church/Christian community to make a difference to your neighbourhood?*
 5. *What if any formal patterns of learning are currently running at the church(es) you are involved with?*
 6. *What would you like the wider Church to consider as we reflect on ways to enable and encourage growth in missional discipleship in our churches?*
12. Most of the survey will be conducted in face to face conversations (e.g. synod moderators, TLS tutors, FURY advisory board and two synod meetings). The information generated by the survey will contribute towards sketching the outline and content of a new discipleship process.
13. The group has been asked to report to the November Mission Council in 2015 to ensure that the outline of the new emphasis can be endorsed by the Council.

Timescale

14. In the event of Mission Council endorsing the process that has begun under the two Assembly committees, it is proposed to plan the materials and resourcing that the fresh emphasis will require, reporting to General Assembly 2016 the principles behind the new scheme so that those plans can be implemented. It is hoped that people wishing to access the material online may do so by early in 2017 and that people wishing to follow a validated route will begin in August/September of 2017.
15. It is proposed that TLS will not enrol any new students for the Foundation Course in 2016, permitting the Revd Stanley Jackson and the Revd Dr John Burgess to manage the remaining cohort of students through to the completion of the Foundation Course. Gateways into Worship and Developing Community Experiences will continue.
16. In the event of Mission Council affirming the direction of travel, the task group will set about commissioning new material in the spring of 2016. Senior staff at Church House are prepared to be available to address groups of ministers and synods in the Spring of 2017 in order that the fresh emphasis can be communicated effectively.

Appendix

Missional Discipleship Task Group

Terms of Reference

Vision

For the United Reformed Church to further encourage and develop the way in which people discover and follow Jesus through whom God calls them to participate in God's reign. Indicators of what this would look like are given in the Vision2020 statements reframed as provocative proposals.

Aim

To offer an integrated system of whole-life missional discipleship with all learning opportunities being open to all, anchored in the Christian revelation, and building up the Church.

Objectives of the Task Group

In conjunction with the Mission and Discipleship Departments of the United Reformed Church, to devise a discipleship scheme for the United Reformed Church which:

- reflects the Church's commitment to participation in the *Missio Dei*
- provides the church with the means of equipping every congregation with servant leadership which is imaginative, flexible and courageous.
- provides diverse individuals with accountable routes of discipleship
- Incorporates the fruits of dialogue with a range of partners including Children & Youth and Racial Justice and Intercultural Ministry perspectives.
- draws on the findings of the TLS Review which reported to the Education & Learning committee in January 2015;
- takes forward the valued characteristics of TLS.

Expectations of the Process

1. That it be established in recognised principles of adult education and missiology
2. That the initial stages of the Task Group's work will be largely based on desk study of existing documents and close discussion with key individuals and institutions.
3. That it draws on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry so as to be consistent with a significant approach being advocated within the United Reformed Church, especially in the light of the need to achieve culture change within the Church.
4. That it takes into account the importance of the emphasis on evangelism which has been a significant driver in discussions about discipleship in the United Reformed Church in recent times
5. That it recognises the depth of well-founded content which already exists through material that has been road-tested in TLS-LITE, TLS Classic, and Vision4Life and which is available for redirection, together with ecumenically produced discipleship courses.

Time Frame for the Task Group

Phase 1

1. Six months, from 1 September 2015 to 29 February 2016
2. The first two months to focus on producing an outline of the main elements of the scheme, for discussion and possible adoption by the United Reformed Church's Mission Council in November 2015
3. The remaining four months, assuming Mission Council acceptance, to be spent on putting flesh on the bones of the scheme. This will include
 - a. Working with the Extended MSP Planning Group to produce a funding proposal to CWM as a means of resourcing the scheme
 - b. Devising a realistic implementation plan with a target date for recruitment of participants ready to start URC-validated elements in Autumn 2017.
 - c. Preparation of a proposal for agreement by General Assembly in July 2016.

Phase 2

(assuming General Assembly assent in July 2016) 15 month: July 2016 – September 2017

1. Scaffolding the implementation plan such that:
 - a. All synods are on board with the plans and ready to start on schedule
 - b. The four RCLS have agreed their role in the implementation
 - c. The technologies required to offer the programme are in place and robust
 - d. Students are enrolled where relevant in particular pathways by June 2017

Vision2020 Statements

Reframed as “provocative propositions”

Statement 1: Spirituality and prayer

We are active in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Statement 2: Identity

The United Reformed Church is a Church where every local congregation is able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

Statement 3: Christian Ecumenical Partnerships

We are confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the Church.

Statement 4: Community partnerships

We are a Church that is active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

Statement 5: Hospitality and diversity

We are a Church committed to being welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

Statement 6: Evangelism

We are confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

Statement 7: Church growth

We are a growing Church with an increasing membership.

Statement 8: Global partnerships

We are a Church that is an active partner in God’s global mission with other Churches around the world.

Statement 9: Justice and peace

We are a Church committed to peacemaking and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

Statement 10: The integrity of creation

We are a Church that takes significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.