

Contact name and email address	The General Secretary <a href="mailto:john.bradbury@urc.org.uk">john.bradbury@urc.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	Consultation.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>N</b>

T

## Key issues for the longer term

churches, Synods and, to an extent the General Assembly, floundering under the weight of these issues. There is a need to liberate the roots of the vine from the clay of compliance, allowing the vine to absorb the nutrients of the gospel as a church, while ensuring these matters of safety and justice the law requires of us are tended to. How this can be done can only be fully explored when we have a clear idea of the resources available throughout the United Reformed Church, and have given thought to the structures that might provide it. We have a vision that every local church would receive personalised assistance from someone who was able to come to them, assist in assessing their compliance needs, furnish them with the advice and resources necessary to meet those needs, and work with them on ensuring everything was appropriate.

make choices about how we use them, and have governance structures that allow us to take decisions we then can follow through with.

## Ongoing work

### Theos research project

As agreed at Assembly Executive, work is now underway with Theos, who are researching, using primarily qualitative methods, the identity of United Reformed Churches, what flourishing looks like for United Reformed Churches, and what resources are necessary or desirable to enable congregations and members to flourish. This will consist of ten case studies (some of which will be groups of local churches to give a wider spread of data), each consisting of ten qualitative interviews. This will be supported by background data from existing sources, and hopefully some quantitative data too.

This work will be complete by Spring 2023, and emerging outcomes will be available to the Church Life Review Group as they emerge. There is a small steering group, with staff time being given by Steve Summers (the Development Worker for CRCW and SCM Ministries).

### Forensic accountancy project

At the time of writing, a template has been drafted of the headings it will be useful to analyse the income and expenditure of the General Assembly and Synods against. This has been refined in two workshops drawing together representatives of the Synods and Assembly finance teams, to ensure that the template will give the results needed, and that it is realistic to work with from the data that everyone holds.

Once the data are in, it will be possible for MKS to analyse it in ways that will tell us, for the first time ever, what we spend as a whole Church on each aspect of Church life. It should enable us as the family of the United Reformed Church to reflect on where our current priorities are in terms of our use of money, and give us the opportunity to reflect on where we would like them to be. It should provide insight into where useful economies of scale could be possible. It may also indicate areas where it would prove useful to do more detailed financial research to benchmark our use of resources against similar charitable organisations to help us gain a sense of where our expenditure may be out of kilter, or resources could be released for new work.

### The theology of money

A small group has been appointed to help produce some initial material to enable us, as the family of the United Reformed Church, to think about what scripture and our faith has to say to us about the way in which we used our financial resources. A brief examination of General Assembly reports suggest that while we have given careful thought to our investment policies, and have, at times, paid attention to economic matters in relation to justice issues within society as a whole, we have never reflected ourselves on how our faith commitments shape our own

# Paper N1

Material is being provided for local churches to use in the autumn. Reformation Sunday (30 October) is being suggested, but we are aware local churches may be marking our Jubilee in various ways locally, and they will want to work this into their activities in a way that makes sense for them. The Daily Devotions Sunday Service that week will focus on helping us think through questions around the future of the church, rooted in the theme of jubilee. We are planning a means by which online feedback will be possible as

that issues of compliance have often fallen between stools in ways that are unhelpful. The concern has also been flagged that the more assistance the wider councils of the church give to local churches around matters of compliance (see the aspiration stated above about what local churches might wish to experience from the wider Church), the greater the possibility is that the wider councils of the Church expose themselves to liabilities for things that happen in the local context. It would be possible to find ways to give such support to local churches that avoid this, and this needs active exploration. There is a general concern that in places within the life of the United Reformed Church, the authority to act, and the liability for such action, do not rest in the same place, leading to unsustainable risks. This needs careful attention.

### **Consultation on finance, property and governance issue**

The Law and Polity Advisory Group has expressed the intention of holding a consultation between all Synods and Synod Trust Companies to share the results of some of the work on Governance that has been done, and to engage with questions surrounding governance and compliance issues. There is a very high overlap between these issues and the financial issues that are being explored in the forensic accounting, as well as overlap among many of the individuals concerned with these areas of church life in Synods and nationally. At the time of writing this report, it is hoped that a joint consultation hosted by LPAG and the Church Life Review Group will bring together representatives of Synods, Synod Trust Companies, and