

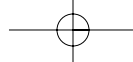
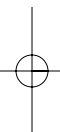
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Bread to spare

Planning for growth –
A Strategy for the URC in London 2007-2017

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4 Bread to spare

The United Reformed Church is currently undertaking a consultation as to whether or not a separate London Synod should be formed. This plan is written without knowing the outcome of that debate. This is a plan for London but much of it is as applicable out of London as in. It has been re-drafted in the light of feedback from the London Summit.



1.1 Aim

This plan aims to give a clear and positive direction for the United Reformed Church (URC) in London for the coming ten years. It is written with the conviction that our church has an important and distinctive contribution to make within the household of faith as a Christian community committed to the well being of London, its inhabitants and its inter-connected web of relationships across the globe.

1.2 The United Reformed Church in London

As a member of the Reformed family of churches, the United Reformed Church is part of the second largest global fellowship of Christianity. Its forebears played a major role in shaping the UK's democratic institutions and liberal conscience. It is a conciliar church, non-hierarchical placing a strong emphasis on the importance of the local congregation, the power and the freedom which the Holy Spirit gives and the regenerating grace or Jesus Christ.

The URC in London has 158 churches, local community projects, an experienced team of Ministers, both paid and unpaid, community and pastoral workers and 10,000 active church members. Its buildings are well used by local communities.

The URC in London seeks to awaken faith and proclaim the Kingdom of God with a distinctive approach. We have an "active spirituality" and proclaim the Kingdom through actions as well as by sharing the depth of our faith in words and prayer.

1.3 Communicating our faith

Every member is a missionary for the faith and every church community an advocate for and demonstration of reconciliation and justice in our city.

The URC will communicate the message of Jesus in exciting and challenging ways, above all through honest and open human encounters experienced in:

local congregational life, developing through creative, spiritually enriching and risk-taking worship and prayer life, study groups, community projects and the increased use of improved premises, and participation in civic life

valuing London's diversity recognising that we are a multi-cultural and multi lingual city, not shying away from the complexity of the issues but rather engaging with them and in the process making new friends, and enabling a new leadership to emerge

appreciating the web of relationships in which our members are engaged through caring relationships, work, leisure and civic responsibilities and supporting them in their particular ministries and employing them as vehicles of evangelism

modern methods of communications through broadcasting, internet, e and m communications

1.4 Our place in the household of faith

The United Reformed Church in the UK is a smaller historic church. The Church of England remains a dominant force and has the capacity to renew itself. The Roman Catholic Church continues to draw upon a large cultural base which is expanding as a consequence of migration and is dominant on the world stage. The Methodist Church is increasingly looking to the Church of England as its principal ally. The Baptists are closest to the URC in tradition and church polity but there are structural and theological reasons which make closer cooperation difficult. There is a new church presence of smaller independent churches and newer denominations which are part of the explosion of new and Pentecostal churches in the developing world.

All churches are challenged by the growth of other faiths, particularly Buddhism which is attracting more western European followers and Islam which identifies the spiritual price we have paid for western freedoms and offer a coherent and rooted alternative.

The distinctive contribution of the URC will be the openness of the spaces it creates in the city for multi-cultural welcome, for ecumenical initiative, for reconciliation and

peacemaking, for an active and vibrant spirituality touching deepest needs, for honesty and non-dogmatic approaches in human relationships, for commitments to social justice and for the full participation of all God's children globally, locally and personally. In this way, the URC will proclaim the universal faith in its distinctive way without apology or snub to our brothers and sisters in Christ or our partners among people of faith.

The church will therefore focus on matters of urgency and importance for the awakening of faith and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in London. We will:

- affirm our faith boldly through the creation of new opportunities for meeting with London's diverse population, baptising new Christians and nurturing a new generation of believers
- work for the reconciliation of communities, with a special concern for the elderly, migrants and refugees and socially excluded groups
- promote economic justice and fair trade through our own practice and prophetic witness and in joint campaigns with key partners
- show respect for God's creation through the management of our premises, awareness raising and the lifestyles of our members
- promote good governance within the church and in civic institutions through best practice and supporting members in their ministries at work and in civic duties

1.5 New ways of being the church

In order to renew the church and equip it for growth the 158 local churches will be encouraged to become "missionary congregations" and re-define their particular mission and form with reference to their capacity and context,

Local churches will be encouraged to think of new models of the church, including house churches, cell churches, work based fellowships, basic Christian communities, gathered congregations, inter-faith and community projects enabling this diversity of church expression to become the URC identity. This will be an evolving process over time as we adjust to the new realities of church and city and each church needs to be accompanied and supported in their particular journey over a sustained period of time. The new expressions of church will be interactive with their communities developing an ownership of the church by the community.

At the hub will be an interactive Pastoral Resource Centre which will be a meeting place in Central London for URC members, where innovation at local level can be shared with

others. It will have a well publicised enquiry line for newcomers to London and practical and professional resources which assist churches and fellowships in their development. This is a response to the expressed desire of local churches for help *where they are*.

There will also be a number of resource centres based in existing URC premises including a Spirituality Centre, most likely a virtual centre although creating some opportunity for Synod-wide celebrations, Youth and Children's Centre and a number of churches will be designated "Learning Centres" for the development of pastoral (diaconal) ministries, such as pastoral visiting, leading new fellowships, youth and children's workers.

1.6 Ministry

The strategy will be resourced through the collective efforts of our Ministers, pastoral and community workers, Elders and members. The strategy is only achievable with a dedicated and focused commitment by all.

In the first years of the plan there will be a recruitment drive and embedded training for at least 158 new church leaders for diaconal ministries, one for each church. Time will be devoted to motivating new leaders and to team building. As the plan develops these will be further expanded to ensure there is both a flow and expanding numbers of people to take on new roles.

The plan values the distinctive role of the ordained Minister strategically located within local congregations. By the end of the ten years it is envisaged that there will have been a net increase in the number of stipendiary ministers as growth brings about expanded need, increased finances and an increasing number of candidates.

There will also be a restructuring of staff employed centrally. The new roles are to be determined by the needs of this plan and will be located within the Resource Centres, making them closer and more accessible to local churches.

In addition a **Synod(s) Enterprise** will be established to provide additional, optional services to local churches including: accounts, premises management and income maximisation, communications, interior design, arts management and other support requirements. Churches may purchase these additional services.

1.7 Premises

Church premises are important expressions of our openness to the wider community and the vitality of our spirituality and service. They are a tool for mission and all development of premises will have an explicit mission purpose. The URC in London will re-develop a key site in central London. It will ensure, as far as possible, that no church site is made redundant but used for the renewal of the church or community life.

All local churches will be encouraged to make their premises inviting and exciting both externally and internally and environmentally responsible. Worship spaces will be aesthetically stimulating. Local churches will be supported by professional staff at Synod level and encouraged to maintain property to a high standard. There will be additional support for major regeneration projects.

In the event of a restructuring of the Synods, the new Trust will be established recognising the particular need for property development and income generation.

1.8 Finances

There will be a number of calls upon finances for this plan to be successful. They are:

- the establishment of Resource Centres such as the proposed Pastoral Resource Centre
- the establishment of a Communications Strategy
- the establishment of an intensive training course for local church leaders
- the establishment of an effective Regeneration Section

The rapid expansion of the URC can be resourced through:

- the development of a strategically located site, in partnership with the local church to share its asset with the wider church
- the establishment of a bond, through the pooling of reserves and investments from local churches and synod(s) resources
- large donations from philanthropists
- government regeneration grants
- a voluntary amount added to M&M specifically for the development of the mission strategy, arising from a renewed vision and commitment

1.9 Management

The URC in London will be managed through a minimal and effective structure.

The overall responsibility for the development and implementation of the plan will lie with the Strategy Development Group (Synod Executive and Mission and Strategy Group)

Reporting to this group and with well-defined delegated powers will be five working groups:

- Discipleship
- Pastoral Development
- Spirituality and Communications
- Regeneration and Community Ministry
- Forward Funding and Logistical Support

1.10 Time frame

This plan is written to stimulate growth over a period of time. It is not envisaged that change will be easy or instant. However, it is possible that over a ten year period we can, at a minimum, slow the rate of decline to zero but there is no reason why we should not aim for a growth rate of up to 5%.

The first priority is to increase skilled people working at local level as local church leaders. Then we must improve the quality of our buildings to stimulate more activity which will extend the reach of our churches and increase income. Once this has happened we will be in a stronger position to make an evangelical push led by our stronger churches deepening our fellowship and accentuating our witness. From this position we will increase the number of ordained ministers and the number of Christian fellowships which have the potential to grow into new or re-stimulated local churches.

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Years 3-5	Years 6-10
Recruit and train local church leaders				
Establish and develop a communications strategy				
Establish Learning Centres				
Establish a Regeneration Department				
Systematically renovate church premises				
Provide better support to churches to maximise income				
Establish Spirituality Centre				
Open Synod(s) Resource Centre				
Gradual Increase deployment of ordained ministry				

1.11 Our commitment

As a full member of the apostolic and catholic church we will:

- **preach** the distinctive message of God’s Kingdom without apology
- **baptise and nurture** new Christians and new communities
- **open ourselves** to the creative Spirit within prayer, biblical reflection, worship and spiritual direction, receiving from the whole ecumenical tradition of the Christian faith and enjoying the liturgical freedom which our forebears so jealously guarded
- **live** on the margins rather than the centre of human society as a matter of conviction and witness
- **reflect** the diversity of our city in our membership and leadership,
- **value and own** our inheritance and be prepared to allow the Spirit to prune the church for growth,
- **take risks** in challenging injustice and inequality
- **allow** the story of local Christian engagement to shape the structures
- **release** the talents and enthusiasm of people of faith to engage with the people of this city in the name of Jesus Christ
- **read** the signs of our times and the Gospel story with diligence and enable them to inform our actions
- **engage** with the rapid changes taking place around us, providing space for new communities to form to counter the alienation and isolation of urban life
- **accept** the inevitability of change with intelligence, prayer and renewed vision
- **expend** our resources flexibly and strategically where they will produce growth

Executive Summary

The Strategy has been written following extensive consultation, research and reflection. A substantial report is currently in draft format, a summary of which is produced here.



Background

1. The London Strategy is written against a background of real concern for the future of the denomination as numbers decline, buildings are harder to manage, ministers and congregations age.
2. The strategy which is proposed takes a positive view of the future of the URC, which it sees as having a distinctive contribution to make as an independent, socially engaged denomination without compromising its deep rooted commitment to ecumenism.

Methodology

3. The strategy is an outcome of an action-research project commissioned by the Southern and Thames North Synods of the United Reformed Church (URC). A combination of desk research, surveys, focus groups and consultations have been undertaken by a working team. The strategy was finalised by an Advisory Group appointed by the Synods.

Mission challenges

4. The mission context is London, its global interface, neighbourhoods, diverse communities, and differential disadvantage. It is a challenging place in which to seek to live out the Gospel.
5. London is a major world city as a centre of financial institutions, higher education, transport and tourism and the site of the upcoming Olympic Games. Its economy is very strong and growing but poverty is a persistent feature with some areas experiencing the highest levels of poverty in the country. There is a structural interaction between global poverty and the contrasting wealth and poverty of London through trade and migration.
6. London has the character of a City State, with its own regional government with devolved powers and distinctive cultural make up. London's demography is constantly changing. A new phenomenon of "hyperdiversity" is seen in the changing character of migration and the complexity of inter-relationships emerging in the capital.
7. London's environment is stressful and damaging to the health of its citizens even though cities are less damaging to the environment overall.
8. There are important areas of engagement for the church – care for an aging church population, nurturing children and re-engaging with young people, health matters and caring for the bereaved which require constant attention and an upgrading of skill and heightened interventions.
9. There are other challenges shared with the rest of the UK and the developed world, including changing patterns of family life, work and leisure which make traditional patterns of church life difficult to sustain.
10. The world church is present in our London churches and has a strong influence on our church life. Migration is a factor in church growth as much as in the economy of London.

Mission at the centre

11. There is a central question for all Londoners, but with added resonance for Christians. How are we to live together? Inequality is a reality and is experienced in poverty, racism, ageism, discrimination. It is felt within churches and the neighbourhoods in which they are placed.
12. Government strategies are shifting, with terms like equalities, diversity, community cohesion, integration and multiculturalism being hotly contested. The church must both be a part of the diversity of London but also go the extra mile by working for reconciliation within and between communities.

13. There are concrete ways in which the church can engage in seeking Kingdom values for our city, through personal lifestyle, projects, and campaigns. The URC will make its choices at local level based on an understanding of what is going on, analysis, prayer, reflection and re-engagement.
14. Government regeneration strategies are important for churches. They enable us to engage with genuine attempts to counter inequalities. They also give us the opportunity to make our own distinctive contribution to the sustainability of the city in which we are placed.
15. There is a positive experience of regenerating church buildings and an encouragement to enter into the process of renewing our buildings with the assistance of experienced professionals.
16. Church premises will need to be made inviting, aesthetically exciting, and open to community use and, if we are to be genuinely mission focused, become important centres for community engagement.

Faith reflections

17. There is a shift of thinking as the church in Western Europe adapts to its changing position. We are in a post-Christendom and post-modern generation and the evangelical task must be undertaken with full awareness of this.
18. Evangelism is dependent upon engaging in new ways through the contemporary interest in spirituality and faith but recognising the lack of involvement with and mistrust of organised Christianity. The church must find new ways of expressing itself and meeting people where they are. This will mean the need for a variety of ways of being the church under the banner of the URC
19. We need to communicate who we are, through a distinguishable and recognisable "brand" being prepared to use up-to-date technologies and other means of communicating our faith and contribution to London's life.
20. The URC through its preceding denominations has a proud heritage and must be faithful to the core and enduring values of dissent and non-conformity, which never shied away from temporal power but sought to transform it for a greater good.

Ecumenism

21. The URC in London has a relationship with an ever widening ecumenical circle. Our strategy coheres with our conciliar relationship within the URC through the Catch the Vision process and the URC's commitment to ecumenism. We also receive from CWM's challenge to "Take the good news home." The strategy is informed by the thinking of the World Alliance of Reformed Church and the World Council of Churches thus ensuring our ecumenism is axiomatic and renewed.
22. The experience of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and of sharing arrangements with the new Independent churches has offered important opportunities. However, both experiences bring challenges and are relationships which need constant attention. Our ecumenical partners in London are not encouraging further organic unions. We must plan realistically as the denomination we are but with the unity of Christ's people as an ultimate value.
23. The vision of the strategy is for the URC in London and its constituent churches and fellowships to be places of ecumenical invitation and commitment holding onto a vision of the ecumenism of the whole inhabited earth, seeking the reconciliation of the peoples. Ecumenism guides our spirit more than our structures.

Equipping the church for the task

24. Our church is not in a healthy situation. It has been in constant decline since its inception and it is increasingly difficult to maintain its life. Our congregations and leadership are aging. We are utilising capital resources, through the sale of premises, as revenue. If we continue as we are then we will reach a point where we have died either literally or because we have no relevance to the world around us. Our treatment of people who contribute time and skill to the church is well below the standard of care required by the Gospel. A radical renewal is needed and this is widely recognised.
25. Renewal can only come through the local church. However, most churches are unable to function effectively as traditional gathered churches because they lack capacity. They need to be given permission and encouragement to redefine themselves as missionary congregations. There are "new ways of being the church" which have developed in recent years and we can lock into that experience and grow as a result.

26. Local churches need support and the strategy provides for a number of Resource Centres where specialist services will be available. These centres will be located in existing churches which are growing or have developed a particular area of expertise. One of these will be in Central London and be an accessible resource for all our churches. Others will be Learning Centres, Youth and Children's Centres and a Spirituality Centre.
27. The Synod(s) will ensure that there are particular professional skills available in the provision of technical resources for the upgrading of church plant. The establishment of a mechanism for the regeneration of church buildings and the increase in self-generated income is seen as essential.
28. The Synod(s) will also undertake a programme of leadership development with the intention of building up the resource of pastoral (diaconal) ministries. An embedded recruitment and training programme will train 158 new leaders in the first three years of the plan. There will also be improvements to the care of all paid and voluntary disciples working within our mission strategy.
29. There will be a new approach to funding and it is suggested that imaginative approaches such as the raising of bonds could be employed. There is also the strong possibility of increased grant aid from external sources and an increase in income as churches are able to increase income from their premises and as numbers of congregations grow.
30. The URC in London is embarking on a pilgrimage. It can do so with joy as much as trepidation. Our overall aim is to awaken faith and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. We will do so through affirming faith, reconciling communities, working for justice in the economy, respecting God's creation and contributing to integrity in governance.
31. The first task is to empower this Christian community to engage with God's mission for London by growing disciples, re-forming churches, renewing and building partnerships and creating new, flexible and functioning structures. This is not a plan to manage decline, or to halt it but it is a plan for growth.
32. Through God's grace, it is possible.