

# South Western Synod meeting Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022

## REPORT from the Discipleship and Service Committee

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1. You will be aware that the URC engaged in consultations on the Legacies of Slavery ahead of papers being considered at General Assembly in July 2022. Assembly passed the two resolutions brought by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group and the following public apology and declaration was offered by the Assembly Moderator and Deputy General Secretary:

“We, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, mindful of our own history and that of our antecedent bodies, wish to confess and apologise for our role in transatlantic slavery, and the scars which continue to blight our society, our Church, and the lives of black people in our midst and around the globe today. This action is firmly rooted in the gospel call to repentance and gives life to the commitment in our Basis of Union to be ‘formed in obedience to the call to repent of what has been amiss in the past and to be reconciled.’ As a conciliar Church, we have listened to one another as we received the report of Mission Committee on the ongoing legacies of the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We have heard the pain of sisters and brothers who have been hurt, and are still being hurt, by these legacies, including the continuing scourge of racism. We have heard God in Christ speaking to us at what we believe to be a Kairos moment. In a spirit of humility and vulnerability, we are urged on by a movement of God’s Spirit, calling us for a journey of words and actions towards a future built on equity, justice, and love.

To this end, the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, gathered here in Swanwick, in the year 2022:

- humbly acknowledges our share in and benefit from our nation’s participation, and that of some of our own antecedent bodies, in transatlantic slavery
- recognises our failure to honour the efforts of our abolitionist forebears by permitting the legacies of transatlantic slavery to continue shaping our world
- offers our apology to God and to our sisters and brothers in Africa, the Caribbean, and their descendants, for all that has created and still perpetuates such deep hurt, which originated from the horror of slavery
- repents of the hurt we have caused, our reluctance to face up to the sins of the past and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today
- admits that these sins are part of our continuing failure to see and hear God in all our neighbours, whoever they may be
- commits, in a true spirit of repentance: to find constructive ways by which we can move from saying ‘I’m sorry’ into concrete actions of ‘repairing justice’ and so contribute to the prophetic work of God’s coming kingdom
- to continue working to promote racial justice as part of our Christian commitment to justice for all
- to encourage the whole United Reformed Church to be engaged in this journey.”

The Discipleship and Service Committee was deeply saddened and alarmed to hear about the distressing nature of some of the consultation responses which caused deep pain for those having to read them. In response, we sent a letter of good wishes, encouragement and support to those involved.

With Revd Henrietta Wentink, our Synod's Racial Justice Advocate, we will continue to work through these vital matters of history and faithfulness. The relevant material can be found on the URC website here: <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/legacies-of-slavery/>

2. A number of members of Synod, including members of the committee, recently completed training as Stepwise facilitators provided by Revd Roy Lowes. This has given us access to the Stepwise resources online and the chance to better understand what the potential for the material is and ways in which it can be delivered to benefit congregations. Stepwise will be one of the potential resources on offer as congregations consider their opportunities to try new things (see below).
3. A few people have been supported in completing worship leader and lay preaching training under the Training for Learning and Serving (TLS) Lite programme which has come to an end across the URC. Stepwise is the suggested new pathway.
4. A small number of people shared in training to preside at Holy Communion at Trinity-Henleaze URC in September. The committee, in response to comments about the locations for such training given the synod's geography, is going to explore the potential for this to become a regular online offer rather than requiring travel.
5. Since Synod last met in March 2022, there have been two significant opportunities for ministers to gather. The URC brought together many ministers at a second denominational gathering at Yarnfield in May. This was widely appreciated as both a chance to be refreshed and a time of evocative and challenging input including Bible study, reflections upon the URC's journey thus far, mission in contemporary context amidst war and global crises and ways in which local churches can be equipped and encouraged. September saw a good number attend the much-delayed Synod Ministers' 'Spring' School at Westminster College, Cambridge. We explored caring for creation with excellent input from a variety of speakers and also reflected upon caring for ourselves in ministry, including the opportunity to look further at pastoral supervision. The next Spring School, actually in the right season, takes place at Saunton Sands in Devon, 17-20 April, 2023.
6. A major area for the committee in the coming months is likely to be the encouragement for and support of local churches in response to the invitation from the Moderator and others to help us explore our work and outreach as we continue to see things return or begin after the pandemic and lockdowns. Making Christ Visible will be an ongoing opportunity to consider ways in which existing work might be encouraged and renewed and new work explored and launched. Finance will be available from the Synod! We will be looking to offer creative, engaging, realistic and exciting ways to discover resources and identify what might work well in every context across our synod. Please watch this space!