

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH ~ SYNOD OF SCOTLAND

STRUCTURES GROUP REPORT FOR SYNOD IN MARCH 2006 THROUGH PPS

Section 1

An Overview

The five principles adopted by the March Synod 2005:

1. effective communication
2. covenant and commitment
3. pastoral effectiveness
4. understanding of ministry and deployment
5. ecumenical dimension

Aims behind this report:

- To make Synod more effective as servant and advocate of local mission and of the United Reformed Church voice in the national concerns of Scotland
- To note the principles agreed by Synod in March 2005 and the interim arrangements made by Synod in September 2005
- To be more alert to and responsive to the needs and concerns of the local church
- To facilitate good meetings that lead into God's future
- To reduce the number of committee meetings
- To trust people who are asked to undertake work

The story so far:

- In response to a resolution from Glasgow Area Council the former PPR Committee set up what was called the Glasgow Area Council Resolution Task Group.
- The Task Group reported to the March Synod 2005 and presented to that Synod the five principles which should under gird the future structure for the Synod. Synod agreed these and made comments to the full report.
- In September 2005 the Task Group presented a report outlining its consultation and thinking at this stage. Whilst the Task Group did not advocate any particular actions at that stage, Synod decided to progress certain parts of the Task Group's report.
- The Task Group, now called the Structures Task Group has continued its work. This report seeks to present Synod with its detailed proposals for a new Synod structure, building on the work already agreed by Synod. The suggestion of the Task Group is that the report be accepted by Synod for discussion. There are a number of resolutions offered in order to help the Task Group identify the initial response of Synod on a number of key matters.
- It is the hope of the Task Group that a full report will be presented to Synod in September 2006 so that the new structures can be prepared for implementation in 2007.

The new word:

Throughout this report a new word is used! This is the word **Link**. There is detail given in the paragraph entitled “significant changes”. The Links (and the group recommends four) are ‘fellowships, networks, partnerships of local congregations with one piece of formal structure, namely the Link Pastoral Group. Whilst the Links will be expected to meet annually any other activity that the Links undertake (as a whole or in smaller partnerships) will be the decision of the congregations depending on their needs and opportunities, recognising that some congregations are in ecumenical partnerships or covenants.

The picture:

- The paper on Synod Meeting hopes for a more inclusive, participative meeting of Synod which looks forward rather than merely receiving
- The paper seeks to engage more people in decision making (partly by the suggested Link meeting during the residential synod and by encouraging involvement in short-term task groups rather than long-term committees)
- The paper seeks to be more responsive to the needs of the local, therefore the presence of people from each Link is paramount throughout the structure being recommended
- The paper suggests a particular way of working pastorally, designed to have ‘local’ pastoral care closely linked to synod pastoral committee

More meetings:

- There will be more committees, but most of these should meet once or at the most twice a year.

Significant changes:

The Links:

The structures group recognise that even with a Synod with the small number of congregations that there are in Scotland there is need for a somewhat ‘localised’/ regional relationship between congregations for reasons of:

- pastoral oversight and care
- congregational neighbourliness
- a sense of regional belonging
- networking
- companionship

The structures group after much deliberation is of a mind that these should be called church Links. (Other names discussed are: local groups, clusters, clans, local/ regional partnerships etc). These Links are light in touch and are only asked to meet ‘formally’ once a year, during the residential meeting of Synod. Many of our churches and it is likely that this will be an increasing number are also forming a variety of ecumenical partnerships. The light touch of URC Scotland Links should not discourage this. Further the Structures Group recommends that there be four such Links, named: Eastern Link, Northern Link, Southern Link and Western Link.

➤ **Purpose of the Links:**

- 1) Mutual care and oversight, expressed through a pastoral group in each Link of people from the Link congregations acting with the Moderator. Each Link’s Pastoral Group would have two of its members on the Synod Pastoral Committee (except the Northern Link)

- 2) Networking, gathering to do things together from time to time, e.g.: worshipping, learning, training, exploring, identifying mission opportunities. (This does not imply that all churches in each Link will be involved in everything, it is likely that there will be localised activity/ partnership within the Link.)
- 3) Whilst each local church will belong to one of the four Links, it is recognised that many local congregations are also committed to an ecumenical partnership (whether formally constituted or not). Such partnerships will often give a significant sense of belonging and will be an expression of mission in unity for the local congregations involved in them. The nature of Links is such that they should not inhibit such a local ecumenical commitment. Links should however be alert to the ways in which the resources of the Synod might well serve to complement these ecumenical partnerships as an integral part of their supportive and pastoral role towards local churches.
- 4) Linked churches Links will meet at the residential synod for up to 2 hours and may meet on other occasions as and when desired.
- 5) Links are not councils of the church, they are informal, caring, supporting, mutually challenging and encouraging networks of sister URC congregations.

Committees

Pastoral Committee

The Synod Pastoral Committee is being challenged with a whole new way of working. Some of its current responsibilities are passed to a new committee (Church Life) in order to give it more space to concentrate on its core responsibilities.

Education Committee

The Structures Group recommends the Education Committee be discontinued. This is being recommended with no negative connotations, nor should negative connotations be read into it. The Structures Group affirms and delights in the work carried out and the innovative programme of activities formulated under the auspices of the Education Committee. However the Group is also mindful of the special relationship between the Synod and the College which is so essential. It does not believe there is a need for two structures to deliver the integrated education and nurture for the whole people of God which lies at the heart of the vision, purpose and activity of the Scottish College. To distinguish between College and Education Committee is often difficult.

The Task Group therefore recommends that the College be fully recognised and affirmed as providing for the educational need so for the people of the Synod of Scotland and be entrusted with the continued deliverance of a full and integrated programme whilst remaining a separate institution.

The Task Group believes that to achieve this, the Synod should embark on a period of consultation with the College with the intention of establishing a clear concord with it, including any financial or staffing implications in order that the College is fully resourced to continue and develop the work it currently undertakes for a developing church.

Church Life Committee

The Task Group encourages the creation of a Church Life Committee; details of its proposed remit are to be found in the body of this paper

Children and Youth Ministry sub-Committee

Similarly, and reporting to the Church Life Committee, the Task Group proposes the creation of a Children and Youth Ministry Committee: again details of the proposed remit will be found in the body of this paper.

Proposed resolutions for March 2006:

1. Synod welcomes the report of the Structures Task Group
2. Synod urges all Area Councils and Church Meetings to comment on the report in order that detailed proposals may be prepared for the September 2006 Synod and requests that comments be sent to the Synod Clerk by 14th May 2006
3. Synod broadly welcomes the concept of four church Links across Scotland
4. Synod broadly welcomes the pattern for pastoral care and oversight suggested by the Structures Group
5. Synod broadly welcomes the committee structure and way of working for committees described in the report.
6. Synod asks the Synod Clerk to establish a process of consultation with the Scottish Congregational and United Reformed Church College with an agenda in line with the Structures Group report to the March Synod 2006.

The continuing work:

1. The intentional church exploration is continuing within the life of the synod and church meetings. It is hoped that the outlined structure will be flexible enough to respond to the intentional church process.
2. As the life of congregations turns toward creating a church for today and entering tomorrow it will be necessary to ask how the movements and developments demand alterations to the ways in which the synod is structured and the ways in which we relate with one another. This paper is not the final word! We do not know what the final picture will be in the Synod, we will never know – which of course, makes becoming church very exciting!
3. The Structures Group have had the opportunity to examine and learn from similar work being undertaken in some of the other Synods. We recognise that there will be great variation from one synod to another. This means that as people (ministers and ‘lay’ people) move around the church they will discover significantly different ways of working. It will therefore be necessary for the Synod to prepare a welcome pack for folk moving into the United Reformed Church Synod of Scotland so that they will understand how the synod is seeking to operate, which will be different from the synod from which they might have moved. Indeed a Synod Handbook will be necessary as we learn to make the new system live.
4. We must look to flexibility. There may be other links between churches other than merely the rough geographical area suggested in this paper. For example

our 'smaller' churches or our town centre churches might work together to explore the particulars of their challenges and opportunities. The Links would not hinder this in anyway and nor should the Synod.