

1. Why do we need to be missional?

- 1.1 Most of the UK Church has seen a clear focus on ‘worship’ and ‘discipleship’ in our activity and resource commitment. ‘Mission’ has tended to be understood as the church’s activity abroad or involvement in ‘social action’ in this country (where it has often been distanced from ‘evangelism’). The end of the 20th century saw a growing realisation (beginning with returning missionaries such as Leslie Newbiggin and others) that the ‘mission field’ was in fact in this country. However the following decades of effort and good intentions have failed to significantly shift our attention and resources from our focus on worship and discipleship.
- 1.2 If we want to recover the missional life of our churches (and we must if we want to be a living body of Christ), we cannot just hope it will happen. Nor can we assume that if we get our worship or discipleship programmes right then mission will naturally follow. To become more missional churches we will need an intentional decision and commitment to shift our focus. This does not mean stopping (or necessarily changing) our worship and discipleship, but it does mean choosing to prioritise mission and seeing worship and discipleship as resourcing it.

2. What does it mean to be ‘missional’?

- 2.1 ‘Being missional’ is not a new programme for the synod to follow, and there is not a set of particular actions we can take to make it happen. ‘Being missional’ involves a shift in focus and developing a different mind-set to the one we currently share. ‘Being missional’ might be best expressed in terms of certain attitudes and approaches to our faith.
- 2.2 **Kingdom focussed:** The church’s mission is to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God by talking and being the kingdom for the people we meet - to bring God’s forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, justice, peace, and love in the world. Unfortunately we can easily fall into the habit of being inwardly focussed - on ourselves and on our churches. We are not here to keep our denomination going, our buildings open or our groups meeting. We exist to make God’s kingdom real for our neighbours. We need to make a conscious effort to look beyond ourselves.
- 2.3 **Following God ‘outside’:** God is bigger than the Church, and is at work in the world. God is not sitting in church waiting to meet people who might come in. We are called to join in with this ‘missio dei’ (mission of God) to help build God’s kingdom. This will mean stepping into the unknown through a process of listening to God and listening to our neighbours as we discern where God is moving in order to join in. This may lead us to be doing new things that we might not have done before and that might not look like ‘church’ to us.
- 2.5 **New forms of church:** There is a ‘culture gap’ between what we do in church and the world around us. We should not assume this equates to a spiritual gap. The church of Jesus Christ has looked very different at different times and in different places as Jesus is made ‘incarnate’ in the culture of a particular time and place. New parts of the body of Christ today may look very different to what we have known before – we can see a glimpse of this in things like ‘Messy

Church'. We might continue with church as we know it, but we must also encourage and be open to church in forms that make sense to the lives of other people around us.

- 2.6 **All of our responsibility** : This is the mission of the whole church, not just the ministers and elders. And it is our everyday mission, it is not just for Sunday mornings. As we look further we will need to encourage and develop all members of our churches, especially those who may have been gifted by the Holy Spirit as evangelists, prophets and apostles and who we may not have recognised as well as we do the teachers and pastors (Ephesians 4).
- 2.7 Being missional does not necessarily mean throwing out everything that we do and have been doing. BUT it does mean a shift in our perspective, a re-focussing of our attention and intention which might then lead to a deeper re-evaluation of our resources and structures.

3. How can we become a Missional Synod?

- 3.1 'Being Missional' does not mean starting a new programme or courses. We have good ones already in place that will serve the different needs of churches (Lycig, Inviting Forward, Faith-filled Life...). The shift to becoming 'missional' is more like changing the lenses in our glasses, rather than changing what we are doing. If different lenses help us to focus more on worship, discipleship or mission, now is the time to try our missional lenses out! Becoming more missional-minded is initially a process of prayer and reflection. We listen to God and then go out and listen to our neighbours before we can start to discern what God might be doing around us that we might join in with.
- 3.2 We could imagine there are three threads to the process in the synod. There is the personal thread of the lives of the individuals in our congregations; the life and activity of each different congregation; and the organisation of the wider body of churches that make up the synod (and the support and resourcing that the 'organisation' offers). Each of these threads might follow a similar process of prayer, conversation, reflection and discernment to identify where God may be leading us to be more missional. This process takes time, the URC's jubilee year seems like a good time to engage in this as we seek to discern a future after Covid.
- 3.3 The process for all three threads might follow a similar pattern:

Step 1 - awareness and understanding – engaging in conversations about where we are and where we could be or want to be if we were shaped around God's mission – a process of prayer, conversation and discernment – 'waiting dangerously'.

Step 2 - evaluating how we might engage more with our communities and embody the kingdom; what is God prompting us to look at or try out, or stop?

Step 3 - start missional experiments – identifying things to try out as a way of exploring what God is asking of us; putting them into practice and then reviewing them before taking next steps.