May 2021

**From:**

**The United Reformed Church Finance Committee**

**To:**

**All members and adherents of**

**United Reformed Churches and our Local Ecumenical Partnerships**

It would be fair to describe the year-and-a-bit since March 2020 as having been “different”, wouldn’t it? Lots of us have experienced loss of loved ones, loss of income and perhaps jobs. All have experienced periods of lockdown; periods without ‘non-essential’ shops; and continuous and extensive disruption to our ‘normal’ social interactions and relationships. The world we thought we understood and could take for granted has been utterly transformed. How many of us imagined at the start of 2020 that we could go months without a haircut or without people not in our ‘bubble’ entering our homes?

As members of United Reformed Church congregations ourselves, we understand much of what your church community has experienced since March 2020. The absence of what is now regularly labelled “in-person worship” for much (or all) of this time has compelled us to turn to other ways of being church. Buildings in which we used to praise God regularly have been shut, both to regular worshipers and others who might have sought solace within their walls during these desperate and troubling times. It has been hard to maintain close fellowship with people we only meet over Zoom (or the like) – if we are digitally enabled.

Financially, things have been extremely tough too. Plate offerings have collapsed; some regular givers have had to reduce or entirely stop giving to support God’s work; and those churches which hire out their premises have seen income from that source disappear.

At denominational level, we feared that these financial troubles would spell disaster for the URC’s Ministry and Mission (‘M&M’) fund through which the URC has always supported and developed our stipendiary ministers and Church Related Community Workers. It would have been all too easy for congregations to forget that for almost 49 years this fund (under various names) has provided stipends, pension contributions and training for all ministers throughout the three nations in which the URC operates: so that ministry reaches where synods judge it to be most needed and is paid for according to each congregation’s ability to contribute (though the ways of determining that vary from synod to synod). It was all very well to remind ourselves that the M&M fund is meant to be the first call on every congregation’s resources if the undertaking to financially support our ministers is to be honoured. We feared that drastically reduced income would make that impossible and that, because the need was less visible than the other calls on your diminished resources, payments to the M&M fund would have stopped first.

We are sorry if we ever doubted you.

It quickly became apparent that, although some congregations had to reduce their pledged giving to the M&M fund, many more of you were continuing to meet the 2020 commitments you had made during better times, despite the struggles that required. At the start of that year we had been expecting churches and synods to contribute around £18.5 million to the fund. By the year end, all but half-a-million pounds of that had been received. Since Church House staff and committees managed to reduce their budgeted expenditure by almost £1 million, your money enabled us to meet the full costs of our Ministries, Education & Learning, Children’s and Youth Work and Mission departments in 2020 as well as covering amounts spent on safeguarding, denominational governance and communications.

What is perhaps even more amazing is that, collectively, you have pledged to give £17.3 million during 2021 despite the financial problems caused by the pandemic being fully apparent well before your offers for this year were made.

We are always grateful for the financial support given each year to the M&M fund by all of you; but this past year has been phenomenal.

Thank you to those of you who have been able to maintain or increase financial support for your church congregation through this difficult time. That has enabled those responsible for your congregation’s finances to keep more money flowing to the M&M fund than we expected.

Thank you for all your previous financial support to those of you who, after prayerful consideration, have had to reduce or stop giving in response to your changed financial circumstances.

Thank you for the pledges your congregation has made about contributing to the M&M fund during 2021 even though you were by then aware of the impact the pandemic was having on your local congregation’s finances.

Thank you in anticipation for what you agree to offer to the M&M fund during 2022 to enable the denomination to deliver ministry, education and learning, children’s work and mission activity on God’s (and your) behalf.

We are aware that synods have played a significant part in encouraging and supporting many congregations with their contributions to the M&M fund. We have separately written to Synod Treasurers to express our thanks to them and their colleagues too.

Of course, our giving for God’s work is in response to the amazing generosity and love of God which we see in Jesus. Nonetheless, it is important for us to thank every one of you for what you do for God, your congregation and its and our denominational finances.

**Thank you!**

If you have any questions or comments arising from this letter, please speak to your church treasurer who has been provided with more detailed information. If they are not able to help directly then they can get in touch with the finance team at Church House.

Yours in Christ,

**Ian Hardie (Treasurer) and John Piper (Deputy Treasurer)**

* **On behalf of the whole United Reformed Church Finance Committee**