



## Thames North Synod District Councils Proposal

**Paper H  
20 March  
2021**

Motion from Hounslow URC:

**In the light of the top heavy (Synod based) style of governance currently obtaining in the URC Thames North Synod urges General Assembly to restore the former District Councils as the main day-to-day form of church government.**

Presented by: The Rev Andrew McLuskey

### **Preliminary Presentation**

'Small is beautiful' is a cry that will resonate with many of us. It is, however, a description that can hardly be applied to the way we run the URC. Palpably the governance of our denomination is top heavy, confusing and – I am afraid – sometimes ineffective. In the higher echelons of the Church we have a myriad of organisations: General Assembly, Church House, Mission Council and Synods. Broadly speaking these are difficult to access unless you have money or time.

Then there is a huge gap as we descend to local churches. (Local Area Groups interestingly do not figure in the official church description of its polity.)

In a denomination which prides itself on its free church, non-conformist roots this is curious to say the least. It almost looks as though there has been a conspiracy to hack away the democratic substructure which for many of us is the main reason for being in a conciliar rather than an episcopal organisation. Perhaps all this has just happened by chance. However (despite claims in our Synod's own organisation 'blog') it goes diametrically against the basic, widely accepted principle of Subsidiarity, a principle originally enunciated by the Calvinist writer Johannes Althus in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The principle holds that *Issues should be dealt with at the most immediate or local level that is consistent with their resolution*. If the current system was producing full churches and vibrant, effective mission then we might be inclined to let sleeping dogs lie. However, with some exceptions, I don't think we can claim that. Numbers are plummeting and our national profile is weak to say the least.

In my own recent experience, the remote control by synods of complex pastoral difficulties can lead to hurt and be ineffective. This compares (again from personal experience) with the work done in Methodist Circuits or Scottish Presbyteries where there is much more local knowledge and face to face communication. None of this is to disparage the sincere efforts of people (including Moderators) who have worked for the Synods and other 'higher' organisations. However, effective outreach and good pastoral care demand face-to-face (not virtual or long distance) contact. Change is necessary and the best way it can be achieved is by the reconstitution of the District Councils and agreement that - under the General Assembly - they are the main organs of governance in the URC.

The Rev Andrew McLuskey  
2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021