

Book of Reports 2023



The
United
Reformed
Church





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Online papers: www.bit.ly/generalassemblypapers

‘Spaces of Grace’ – a worship and Bible Study theme for General Assembly 2023

Dear friends,

In 2022, we celebrated our Jubilee. In many ways, 2023 is a year of ‘and now what?’ – not only for the URC, but also for the nations in which we live, as anxiety continues through the cost of living crisis and the ongoing war in Ukraine. What can we say of the Church in general, and the URC in particular, in this period of ‘and now what?’ One response we can give is to affirm that we are ‘spaces of grace’.

The church in all its diversity comprises spaces of grace, enabled and sustained by the Holy Spirit to be the ‘good news of God’s love incarnated in the witness of a community for the sake of the world’. (David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, Orbis Books, 1991).

As the General Assembly, we gather as a council of the Church, reliant on the Holy Spirit to shape us into a space of grace. We come from across the diversity of the URC, geographically, culturally and theologically, to form a space of grace where we seek the mind of Christ together. In that discernment we need to act gracefully towards and with one another. Our General Assembly agenda celebrates the work of the denomination, locally and nationally, as spaces of grace.

In our worship, we shall consider that a space of grace is a place of forming community; of gratitude; of transformation; of journeying and growth; of peace-making and reconciliation; of connectedness to each other and the Earth; of prayer and discernment; of belonging; of celebration.

We will explore the theme in word, song, prayer, art and symbolic action. We are delighted that Bible study will be led by Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, and that the Rt Revd Sally Foster-Fulton, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, will preach on Sunday morning.

We look forward to welcoming you at General Assembly 2023.

Yours in Christ,



The Revd Fiona Bennett, Moderator of the General Assembly 2023



The Revd Lindsey Sanderson, Chaplain to the Moderator of General Assembly 2023

**Minutes of The United Reformed Church Assembly Executive
meeting held at High Leigh, Hoddesdon,
28-30 November 2022**

Monday 28 November

Session one

The Moderator, the Revd Fiona Bennett, was in the Chair.

22/01

The meeting opened at 14:00 with worship led by the Chaplain, the Revd Lindsey Sanderson.

22/02

The minutes of the Assembly Executive of 22-24 November 2021 were approved. There were no matters arising.

The Assembly Clerk moved the appointment of a Facilitation Group comprising:

The Revd David Herbert
Ms Sarah Lane Cawte
The Revd Paul Robinson
The Revd Camilla Veitch

Assembly Executive *agreed*

On behalf of the Law and Polity Advisory Group, the Clerk moved that Paper P1 be withdrawn from the agenda for further work and consultation - *agreed*

The meeting adjourned at 15:00.

Session two

Assembly Executive resumed at 16:30.

22/03

Paper R1

MIND Advisory Group

The Revd Andy Braunston, on behalf of the Advisory Group on the Ministerial Incapacity and Disciplinary processes moved the Resolution:

Assembly resolves to add the following wording to Section O Appendix Y paragraph 16:

Within one month of the conclusion of any case, reports to assist the General Assembly's Advisory Group on Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline, or any group or committee succeeding to its functions in keeping this Process under review, are to

be prepared and transmitted to the Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline

- a) by the Investigation Team and
- b) by the Panel or Commission which last dealt with the case. ***In addition the minister, minister's representatives, complainants and the Synod will be invited to offer feedback.*** The Secretary of the Assembly Commission for Discipline is to pass these reports on to the Secretary of the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group.

This was *agreed*.

22/04

Greenbelt Festival

The Deputy General Secretary for Mission, the Revd Phillip Brooks, Dr Sam Richards and Mr Roo Stewart reported on the URCs 'Revolted Christians' presence at the Greenbelt Festival.

22/05

Paper H1

Ministries Committee

The Convener of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, presented paper H1, noting some minor changes to the original text, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the URC Roll of Ministers Policy.

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

22/06

Paper H3

Ministries Committee

The Convener of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, presented paper H3, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopt the Marks of Ministry of an Elder and Marks of Ministry of an Elders Meeting*¹.

¹*Or the Council fulfilling the functions of an Elders Meeting in an LEP or other expression or church.

The Moderator invited Assembly Executive to discuss the paper informally in small groups.

A number of reservations were expressed, and alterations and clarifications suggested. It was agreed that the paper should be addressed again at a later point in the meeting.

22/07**Paper G5****Pensions Review Group**

The Treasurer, Mr Ian Hardie, reported on the consultation about changes to the pension arrangements for ministers and staff in the URC. The review group will soon contact all ministers and staff with responses to the many general questions that have been asked.

The Moderator invited Assembly Executive to indicate informally its approval of the report, and while no formal decision was required, the support in principle of Assembly Executive was sought and given. Reservations were expressed about the consultation with regard to the arrangements for lay staff, many of whom are Synod employees, and it was noted that little or no consultation with Synods has yet taken place. It was questioned whether it would be possible to consult adequately within the planned timescale. It remains possible to postpone implementation of the new scheme should that prove necessary.

Assembly Executive adjourned at 18:10.

Session three

Assembly Executive resumed at 19:45.

22/08**Legacies of Slavery**

Convener of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, introduced a video film entitled *Telling It Like It Is (Uncovering white privilege in the Church)*, and asked members of Assembly Executive to reflect, upon viewing it, upon how we might appropriately listen and act in response.

Assembly Executive spent some time in informal reflection in small groups.

22/09**Papers J2 and J3****Nominations Committee**

The Convener of the Nominations Committee, Mrs Helen Lidgett presented paper J2 and the resolution:

- 1) **Assembly Executive agrees the term of service for the Secretary to the Appeals Commission will be five years in the first instance, with the option of further terms,**
- 2) **Assembly Executive notes the changes to Paper J1 to Assembly executive November 2022**
- 3) **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 3 of the report.**
- 4) **Assembly Executive appoints according to the nominations in Section 4 of the report.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Mrs Lidgett moved Resolution J3, with the addition, to paragraph 4.1.4 of the names:

The Revd Tim Lowe	November 2022	GA27
Mrs Kate Yates	November 2022	GA27
The Revd James Kissack	November 2022	GA27

And the additional appointment to serve as Convenor-Elect, Children's and Youth Work 2023-24, and Convenor 2024-2028:

The Revd Samantha Sheehan.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Assembly Executive noted a typographical error in paper J1, which would be corrected in the Nominations matrix grid, that 'Mr Tim Hockley' should read 'Mr Tim Hopley'.

22/10 **Emergency resolution**

The General Secretary moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive delegates to Assembly Officers the making of any Synod Moderator appointments that cannot wait until the General Assembly meets in 2023.

Seconded by the Clerk.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

22/11 **En bloc resolutions**

The General Secretary moved the resolutions *en bloc*:

A1	Former Moderators
D1	Education and Learning: Cost of Living
D2	Education and Learning: Continuing Studies
F1	Faith and Order
G1	Finance: Accounts
G4	Finance: Car Expenses
H2	Lay Pioneers
I1	Mission Report
J1	Nominations
M1	Loyal Address
M2	Risk Register
P2	Section Q Complaints Procedure
R2	Size of Investigation Team
S1	Safeguarding Annual report and Appendix

Assembly Executive *agreed*

The Chaplain led the meeting in worship, and Assembly Executive adjourned at 21:15.

Tuesday 29 November

Session four

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:15.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Lindsey Sanderson.

22/12

Paper G3

Finance Committee – M&M Budget

The Treasurer, Mr Ian Hardie, presented paper G3 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the M&M Fund budget for 2023, as set out in the Appendix to paper G3 for November 2022 Assembly Executive.

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper G2

Finance Committee – Energy Crisis Fund

Mr Hardie presented Paper G2 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive approves the recommendation of the Finance Committee and the decision of the United Reformed Church Trust to make £2m from the Trust's reserves available as seed money for a new Churches' Energy Crisis Fund.

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

22/13 (from 22/06)

Paper H3

Ministries Committee

The Convener of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, presented paper H3, slightly amended as suggested earlier in the meeting, including a new introduction:

“The following is a description of what The United Reformed Church can reasonably expect of people who are called collectively to be an Elders Meeting. It is expected that every elder will be committed to ensuring the following marks of ministry are in place although it is acknowledged that not all elders will embody all of these marks to the same extent.”

and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopt the Marks of Ministry of an Elder and Marks of Ministry of an Elders Meeting (or the Council fulfilling the functions of an

Elders Meeting in an LEP or other expression or church).

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Session five

22/14

Paper BDH1

Call and Vocation

The Revd Jenny Mills presented Paper BDH1 on behalf of the Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning, and Ministries Committees.

Assembly Executive broke into small groups to reflect upon the paper using discussion material provided.

22/15

Digital Church

The Revd Fran Kissack reflected on Digital Church, basing her reflection of the Pentecost story for the book of Acts: *'Each of them heard in their own language.'* She noted that *'with modern communication technology we need not be together to meet. Since Covid, for some, the church online is a place, a community where we can gather to hear the good news in our own language ... the church takes many forms; a digital form offers opportunities to connect with people where they are.'*

Session six

22/16

Assembly Executive met in closed session.

Session seven

22/17

The Moderator welcomed the Revd Dr Susan Durber, President of the World Council of Churches from the European region, who addressed the meeting, and led the meeting in discussion.

Session eight

The Chaplain led the meeting in worship, and Assembly Executive adjourned at 20:45.

Wednesday 30 November

Session nine

Opening worship was led by the Chaplain, the Revd Lindsey Sanderson.

22/18

Paper N1

Church Life Review Group

The General Secretary and Mrs Melanie Campbell presented Paper N1, Church Life Review update. Assembly Executive discussed the paper in a combination of plenary and group discussions.

22/19

The Moderator offered thanks to those who had enabled the meeting, and informed Assembly Executive that the postponed Jubilee celebrations will be held on 15 April 2023.

The session closed at 10:40, and the meeting was concluded with the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by the Chaplain.

Assembly Executive adjourned to meet again online in November 2023 to agree a budget for 2024 and any other very urgent business, and for a residential meeting in February 2024 at the Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire.

Standing orders for the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

1. The agenda of the Assembly

- 1.1 At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees which include the Assembly Executive or by Synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

2. In-person, virtual, and hybrid meetings

- 2.1 A meeting may be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. The boundaries between these descriptions are not always clear. A generally in-person meeting may have a minority of members joining the meeting by virtual means. A virtual meeting may have some participants gathered together in one place. In any event, what is always strictly essential is that all participants, both in-person and virtual, can fully see and hear each other in all directions, and that the Moderator is totally confident that participants are able to see and hear each other effectively. The Moderator must also be content and comfortable that they can manage full and proper participation from all participants in the meeting.

3. Records of meetings

- 3.1 Any streaming and/or recording of meetings, including subtitles or captions, does not replace the formal minutes of the meeting and is not a record of the decisions made. Formal minutes shall continue to be maintained and retained.
- 3.2 Meetings should not normally be recorded, in order to comply fully with both safeguarding and data privacy policies.

4. Operating procedure

- 4.1 Meetings will commence when the Moderator opens the meeting, within the requirements set out in the Rules of Procedure.
- 4.2 At the start of any meeting the Moderator shall make reasonable efforts to confirm that any members attending virtually can see and hear, and be seen and heard. The meeting shall not start until the Moderator is so satisfied.
- 4.3 Where available, participants joining a meeting virtually should normally use video as well as audio. Where video is not available, or it is not safe for the attendee to use video, then audio only may be used.
- 4.4 The Meeting will finish when the Moderator formally closes the meeting.
- 4.5 All microphones should be set to mute at the start of the meeting, apart from the Moderator and any necessary technical staff. Microphones should only be unmuted when a participant is speaking.

- 4.6 The Moderator has absolute discretion to pause or adjourn the meeting at any time, and to remove any attendees from the meeting if their conduct falls short of the standards expected in church.
- 4.7 In all but the smallest meetings, it is helpful if the Moderator is not also the online host. The host may be a staff member(s) or volunteer(s) who are not a member of the meeting in the same way that such people may assist with stewarding meetings.
- 4.8 In any event, no technical failure shall invalidate any decisions made.

5. Attendance

- 5.1 All meetings are required to meet any previously agreed quorum, where such a quorum has been specified.

6. Interpretation of Standing Orders

- 6.1 Where the Moderator is required to interpret any Standing Orders they shall take advice from the Clerk before making a ruling. The Moderator's decision in all cases shall be final.

7. Presentation of business

- 7.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.
- 7.2 A Synod may deliver to the General Secretary not less than twelve weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.
- 7.3 A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its Synod for consideration and, if the Synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the Synod to comply with Standing Order 7.2 above.
- 7.4 A member of the Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the General Secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a Synod through which the matter could properly have been raised, the General Secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Business Committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.
- 7.5 Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Assembly Executive or a committee of the General Assembly or a synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than twelve weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.

Standing Orders

- 7.6 It shall not be in order at any time to move a motion or amendment which:
- 7.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or
 - 7.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or
 - 7.6.3 pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or
 - 7.6.4 amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or
 - 7.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under Standing Order 7.4, or
 - 7.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 7.6.1, 7.6.2, 7.6.3, 7.6.5, and 7.6.6) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 7.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

- 7.7 In advance of the meeting, the General Secretary shall, in consultation with the Moderator and Clerk, prepare a proposal for a Facilitation Group for that meeting, for appointment at the beginning of the meeting. Some or all of the members of the Facilitation Group may be called upon by the Moderator at any time to help the Assembly reach a mind upon a question. The Assembly may add or remove members of the Facilitation Group at any time. The Facilitation Group may consult with whoever they deem it appropriate. Draft revised wording of motions should be checked by the Clerk, and by the Legal Advisor where appropriate, before being proposed to the Assembly.

8. En bloc business

- 8.1 The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide which items of business shall be taken en bloc. Placing business in the en bloc category does not imply anything about the importance of any item of business, merely that those planning the meeting think that it may be possible to agree the business without discussion. Any members wishing to have items removed from en bloc business should notify the Clerk by a stated time in advance of the meeting. If six or more members have so notified, then the business shall be added to the agenda of the meeting, otherwise en bloc business shall be voted upon without any discussion.

9. Business requiring discussion

- 9.1 It is not possible to use full Consensus Decision-Making during many meetings, since Consensus Decision-Making relies upon the Moderator being able to sense the mood of the meeting, and the members also being able to sense that and trust the Moderator, which requires senses not always available in online meetings or meetings with online participants. However, all meetings should still be conducted in the spirit and ethos of seeking consensus.
- 9.2 To ensure that all meetings always operate to the same procedure, noting the blurred boundaries referred to in Standing Order 2, all meetings will use the information session and the discussion session from Consensus Decision-Making, and then take a vote for the actual decision-making.

- 9.3 All decisions shall be made by vote, using the procedure set out in Standing Order 10. The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide in advance which items of business require a simple majority, and which require a two thirds majority, using the principle that routine formal decisions such as agreeing the minutes of the previous meeting might reasonably be taken on a simple majority, whereas matters of policy require a greater level of support than a simple majority. This Standing Order does not override any other provision for a specific majority set out elsewhere in the Standing Orders, particularly procedural motions.

10. Information and discussion sessions

- 10.1 The first stage is the information session. During the information session, members of Assembly may ask questions only to seek clarification or further information.
- 10.2 Once the Moderator decides that the information session has ended, the Assembly moves into the discussion session, in which the substance of the matter may be discussed.
- 10.2.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Assembly, time for thinking during a break, etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage or electronic equivalent, and shall ensure that the full ranges of voices are given opportunity to contribute.
- 10.2.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. If a proposed change is, in the opinion of the Moderator upon the advice of the Clerk, a major change, then a proposer and seconder are required and it is an amendment.
- 10.3 When the Moderator senses that the Assembly may be ready to reach a decision, the Moderator shall state that Assembly is moving into the decision session.

11. Decision session

- 11.1 All decisions shall preferably be made by vote. Those participating virtually should normally use any built in voting mechanism in the software. In a very small meeting, where the Moderator can see everyone at once, it may be possible to resolve this informally.
- 11.2 Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

12. Business and procedural motions

- 12.1 If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Clerk.
- 12.2 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or Synod, under Standing Order 7.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 7.4 of a motion to **refer back** to that committee or Synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference

back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.

- 12.3 During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. During the course of the debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.
- 12.4 No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder. The only exceptions to this are motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given, and the procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14. The procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14 may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote, and precedence as between the procedural motions is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.
- 12.5 A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserve the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.
- 12.6 An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion or as a further motion.
- 12.7 If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected, a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.
- 12.8 An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.
- 12.9 The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.
- 12.10 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.
- 12.11 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. It shall be for the Moderator, on

the advice of the Clerk, to rule when motions shall be considered as alternatives under the Terms of this Standing Order.

12.11.1 When such draft alternative motions have been received by the General Secretary, the Moderators may ask the General Secretary to convene a meeting (in-person or virtual) of the proposers, to ascertain if it may be possible to agree on a single draft motion to put before the Assembly, or to clarify the areas of disagreement.

12.11.2 If the Assembly has alternative motions before it, each proposer shall be given the opportunity to present their motion in an order decided by the Moderator.

12.11.3 After any amendments duly moved under Standing Order 12 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting.

12.11.4 Once a sole motion remains, further discussion is permissible and votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way.

12.12 In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration **be not put**. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Should the motion be carried, the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

12.13 In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question **be now put**. This is sometimes described as “the closure motion”. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

12.14 During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be **deferred to the next Assembly**. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that

an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the General Secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The General Secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be presented again at the next Meeting of the General Assembly.

13. Timing of speeches and of other business

- 13.1 Save by prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.
- 13.2 The Assembly may meet in parallel sessions or breakout rooms to consider the past work of Assembly committees for questions and comments. Any draft motions arising therefrom must be dealt with in a plenary session of the Assembly.
- 13.3 Save by the prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Assembly Executive, or from any Synod shall not in aggregate exceed 15 minutes, nor shall speeches in support of any particular committee or Synod motion exceed five minutes, (eg a committee with four motions may not exceed 15 minutes), unless a longer period be recommended by the Business Committee or determined by the Moderator.
- 13.4 Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than a different specified number of minutes.
- 13.5 When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.
- 13.6 Secretaries of committees and members of staff who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the Convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator. Staff should not normally seek permission from the Moderator to speak outside their area of responsibility.
- 13.7 In each debate, no one shall address the Assembly more than once without the permission of the Moderator, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.
- 13.8 The foregoing Standing Order (13.7) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.

- 13.9 An invited speaker, whether speaking to a draft motion or not, may address the Assembly for such period of time as may be agreed by the Business Committee.

14. Questions

- 14.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the Convenor of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.
- 14.2 A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.
- 14.3 Questions asked under Standing Order 14 shall be put and answered without discussion.

15. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

- 15.1 A member shall have the right to call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.
- 15.2 A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.
- 15.3 The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.
- 15.4 The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

16. Admission of the public and closed sessions

- 16.1 Only those who are members of the meeting, staff members in attendance, or invited guests may join a meeting. However, a meeting in open session may allow guests or be shown as a live stream.
- 16.2 A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Assembly, the Legal Adviser, and any technical staff required to enable Assembly to function may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held *in retentis* by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.

- 16.3 A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Assembly, requiring a simple majority. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded, and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately pause while non-members leave the meeting.
- 16.4 If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Assembly Officers, consulting the Legal Adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.
- 16.5 Members of Assembly who leave during a closed session may not be re- admitted.

17. Communications during the course of debate

- 17.1 The primary responsibility of members is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business in respect of business that the Assembly has completed. Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

18. Record of the Assembly

- 18.1 A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Business Committee may determine.
- 18.2 The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the Clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the Officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.
- 18.3 A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the General Secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.
- 18.4 As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a "Record of Assembly" and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each Synod and local church.

19. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

- 19.1 In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.

- 19.2 Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Assembly Executive). The Clerk of the Assembly may from time to time suggest amendments.



Shirley

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Artwork:
*A Transforming
Church*

Paper A1

Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group (known as MIND) – remit and name

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 1 General Assembly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) removes any reference to the now defunct Incapacity Process from the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group terms of reference; b) adds oversight of the Complaints Process (section Q) to the remit of the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group; c) renames the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group as the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group; d) notes that Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group may be abbreviated as CDAG.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Administrative tidying up following other decisions.
Main points	Remove defunct matters; providing oversight of a process currently 'homeless'; renaming to reflect these changes.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. The Resolutions in R5 have removed the Incapacity procedure from the church processes.
2. This resolution makes consequent updates to the relevant Advisory Group.
3. The Complaints Process (section Q) currently does not have a home for oversight. Given that the Complaints Process involves thorough and fair investigation, reporting, forming judgements, and is based upon a theology of justice, the skills and thought process would suggest that it fits with disciplinary matters.
4. A revised name is proposed, to reflect the changed remit.

Paper A2

Changes consequent upon moving to one Moderator of General Assembly

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 2</p> <p>1. General Assembly resolves to change paragraph 2(6)(i) of the Structure with effect from the close of General Assembly 2023, removing text struck through, and inserting new text in italics:</p> <p>The current text reads:</p> <p>i. Two in total <i>Such number as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine</i> from the following: former Moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, past chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, past presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, former Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, former chairmen or presidents of the Annual Conference of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, former presidents of the Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, provided that such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church and that they shall have been elected by a college consisting of all such past and former Moderators, presidents and chairmen as are members of the United Reformed Church;</p> <p>Resolution 3</p> <p>2. General Assembly determines the number of former Moderators to be members of General Assembly in that category shall be FOUR for the time being.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Consequential changes to one Moderator.
Main points	The reduction to one Moderator for one year reduces the number of former Moderators available for chairing both parallel sessions and those sessions that the Moderator is unable or unwilling to chair.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A1 of Assembly Executive, November 2022, and its subsequent referral to Synods.
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Former Moderators at the General Assembly

1. For various reasons, it was appropriate that all former Moderators were no longer members of General Assembly in that capacity.
2. The General Assembly has previously determined that the two immediate past Moderators (who at that time would have both served simultaneously) be members of General Assembly, and two other former Moderators elected from the total pool of former Moderators by said pool. This meant that there were generally two serving and four former Moderators present, making a total of six inducted Moderators.
3. Former Moderators are needed to chair sessions that the serving Moderator is either unable or unwilling to chair. This may include parallel sessions, as well as business sessions that the Moderator cannot chair.
4. The Assembly needs a suitably sized pool of people to undertake this work. While recent Moderators have tended to chair most business, this is not always the case and in some years the serving Moderator has chaired relatively little business for various good reasons.
5. Although the two immediate past Moderators category was agreed at the time this was two people, there is no proposal to change this because it is still helpful to have the most recent two Moderators present as members of General Assembly.
6. The Business Committee is proposing the removal of an absolute setting of the number of former Moderators in the Structure. This is because changing the Structure can take up to two years to come into effect, which seems unnecessarily cumbersome to make a minor adjustment such as this. Therefore, the Business Committee is proposing to use the form of words used elsewhere which allows the Assembly to determine a number upon one decision that can be effected immediately.

7. As a change to the Structure, this was agreed unanimously by the Assembly Executive in November 2022, and then referred to Synods. No Synods have resolved that it be not proceeded with, so it is now presented for final agreement at the 2023 General Assembly.
8. Following the notice given in November 2022, the Business Committee proposes at the 2024 General Assembly and following that the number of former Moderators elected from the pool be four. This number can be changed by a single vote of Assembly Executive or General Assembly.
9. The Business Committee notes that former Moderators may be present in other capacities, welcomes the input of former Moderators as Conveners and Synod representatives, and encourages Synods to consider former Moderators as representatives on the same basis as other possible representatives. However, the Business Committee is aware that some Conveners may be limited in what they can chair, because of potential conflicts of interests or their Conventer duties, over the Business Committee and the Business Committee is not comfortable relying on happenstance presence of former Moderators.
10. By way of information, the Business Committee is aware that there are no 'former Moderators' still living from some predecessor denominations, but there are from others. The Business Committee believes that gracious thing to do is to leave the list as it is until there are only former URC Moderators still living before tidying up that part of the list.

Paper A3

General Assembly and the URC Trust

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 4</p> <p>1. General Assembly authorises the Business Committee and the General Secretariat to begin conversations with the URC Trust on behalf of the General Assembly concerning the nature of the relationship between the United Reformed Church and the United Reformed Church Trust.</p> <p>Resolution 5</p> <p>2. General Assembly also authorises the Assembly Officers to appoint anyone else they deem necessary to represent the General Assembly in these conversations if urgency means that such an appointment cannot wait until Assembly Executive or the next General Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 6</p> <p>3. General Assembly requires any proposed changes to the relationship between the General Assembly and the URC Trust be brought to a future General Assembly, or Assembly Executive in the case of urgent matters, for agreement.</p> <p>Resolution 7</p> <p>4. General Assembly authorises the Chief Operating Officer to commence a consultation with all Church House employees under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 regarding transferring their employment from the Church to the United Reformed Church Trust.</p> <p>Resolution 8</p> <p>5. General Assembly authorises all future new contracts and contract renewals relating to its work to be taken</p>

	out by the United Reformed Church Trust rather than in the name of the Church.
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Taking steps to clarify the relationship between the URC Trust and Church, to enable both to function well in the context of increasingly complex regulatory and compliance requirements.
Main points	<p>The regulatory and compliance context in which the Church and the Trust function is becoming ever more complex. This, along with some recent scenarios, has highlighted that there are some anomalies in how the relationship between the Church and the Trust is explained, understood, and documented.</p> <p>There are steps which need to be taken now to address some of these anomalies where they relate to contracting and employment. Alongside this, there is a need for conversations with the URC Trust on behalf of General Assembly, to explore how best to structure and set out the relationship. Any proposed changes would be brought to a future General Assembly (or Assembly Executive for urgent matters) for agreement.</p>
Previous relevant documents	<p>Annual accounts 2021</p> <p>United Reformed Church Trust Memorandum and Articles of Association 2013</p> <p>Previous documentation relating to the relationship between the General Assembly and the URCT (October and November 1998, September 2000, 2010) following changes to Charities legislation.</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>URC Trust</p> <p>Church House Staff Secretaries in relation to employment matters</p> <p>The Human Resources Advisory Group</p> <p>The Pensions Review Group.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	<p>There is no immediate financial impact or changes to the costs of staffing.</p> <p>Making the proposed changed will enable robust management of financial risks in response to the increasingly stringent compliance requirements.</p>
External (eg ecumenical)	This will ensure clarity of understanding of responsibilities, and robust compliance with financial and audit requirements as well as the Charity Commission regulations.

Background

- 1.1 General Assembly has previously approved the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the United Reformed Church Trust ('the Trust'). In 2007, General Assembly set out that:

The object of the Trustees is to administer and manage the general property held in connection with the United Reformed Church for which General Assembly has responsibility and is accountable and conduct the temporal affairs, dealings and matters of the United Reformed Church which are administered centrally and ensure compliance with the temporal obligations of the United Reformed Church arising from its status and from its pursuance of its objects and work.

General Assembly therefore gave a remit to the Trust to hold matters such as finance, property, and employment. General Assembly subsequently approved the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust under which the Trust continues to act.

- 1.2 While the practical application of this has been true in many respects, there remain some significant anomalies in how the relationship between the Church and the Trust is explained, understood, and documented. Furthermore, the changing, and ever increasing, compliance agenda requires us to give closer scrutiny to these issues than previously necessary.
- 1.3 These anomalies and some of the resulting consequences have been highlighted in several scenarios:

a) Annual accounts

Some members of General Assembly may remember that the presentation of the approved 2021 accounts had to be delayed at the General Assembly in July 2022. This was not due to any problems with the figures, but related to concerns about the narrative text describing the relationship between the Church and the Trust. While it was possible to find a form of words that allowed the documents to be signed off on that occasion it highlighted that work needed to be done to bring greater clarity to the governance relationship between the Church and the Trust.

The auditors still require this to be addressed and have been satisfied for the 2022 accounts on the basis that work, albeit informal at this stage, has commenced to explore these issues and a way forward.

b) Dealing with contracts

Navigating existing contracts, many of which are in the name of the Church, has proved difficult on occasions when the financial information is in the name of the Trust. This is causing administrative difficulties for us and for those with whom we contract.

Furthermore, contracting as the Church, an unincorporated association, when the financial liability and therefore the associated risk under such contracts lies with the Trust, is an anomaly and governance risk which needs to be addressed by both the Church and the Trust. This lack of clarity in the relationship between the Church and the Trust could cause difficulties if the Church faces legal issues and litigation.

Steps to date and future action

- 2.1 Some initial informal conversations have taken place between some of the Officers of the General Assembly and the URC Trust.
- 2.2 Relationships are warm, cordial, and fulsome, and all are agreed that major work needs to be done to ensure that our arrangements avoid compliance liabilities.
- 2.3 The aim of this further exploration would be to develop a fully worked proposal for a future legal structure within which to hold the important relationship between the Church and the Trust, which:
 - Is easy to explain across the denomination and wider.
 - Is clear in terms of responsibility, authority, and risk management.
 - Enables agile decision making supported by sound governance and solid compliance.
 - Enables information to flow properly between the Church and the Trust thus bolstering transparency.

Employment and other contracting

- 3.1 Those initial informal conversations have shown that there are two areas however, which should not wait for a final decision on structure and approach to be taken, as there are already complications being faced because of the current approach.
- 3.2 The first relates to the **employment of lay staff**. Currently, all the lay staff working in and from Church House are employed by the Church, but the employing entity would more properly be the Trust. In the event of an issue and an employee seeking redress in the Employment Tribunal, it would be the Trust, as it holds the financial resources of the Church, which would fund any compensation and legal costs of such action. It follows therefore that it should be the Trust which needs the oversight of employment terms and conditions, policies and procedures, thereby mitigating its risk in relation to employment matters.
- 3.3 The appropriate course of action would be to begin a consultation with the lay staff regarding the transfer of their employment from the Church to the Trust under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). It is a requirement of these Regulations that when an employee is subject to a TUPE transfer, that all their existing terms and conditions transfer with them.
- 3.4 This would be a technical issue rather than having a significant impact upon members of the team and no employee would be adversely impacted by the transfer. Nevertheless, a full consultation in accordance with the Regulations would be required. It is also envisaged that the existing HR-related policies and procedures would be adopted by the Trust.
- 3.5 Ministers and CRCWs are holders of an office and are financially supported by the resources of the Trust. Therefore, their status will be unaffected by these changes.

- 3.6 The position in terms of wider **contracting** is more straightforward. Again, to ensure that risk and liability is properly managed and navigated, future contracts should be taken out in the name of the Trust rather than the Church.

Next steps

- 4.1 At each stage, there will be 'mirror' papers taken to the Trust Board meetings seeking equivalent approval for the different steps and stages.
- 4.2 If General Assembly passes Resolutions 1-3, then the Business Committee, the General Secretariat and representatives of the Trust will explore different legal structures in which to hold the relationship between the Church and the Trust moving forward. The timeframe for this work, which will require time capacity, is December 2024, coming to General Assembly in July 2025.
- 4.3 If General Assembly passes Resolution 4, then the Chief Operating Officer will commence work in accordance with a project plan agreed with the Trust, the Business Committee and the legal adviser addressing all matters of policy, procedure and compliance, prior to commencing the TUPE consultation.
- 4.4 If General Assembly passes Resolution 5, then the General Secretariat will work to ensure that future contracts are taken out in the name of the Trust rather than the Church.

Paper A4

Synod Moderator appointments

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 9 General Assembly authorises the Assembly Officers to make any appointments of Synod Moderators that cannot wait until Assembly Executive or the next meeting of the General Assembly until General Assembly 2024.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Enabling appointments to continue.
Main points	Extending permission given at Assembly Executive November 2022.
Previous relevant documents	Emergency resolution at Minute 22/10 of Assembly Executive, November 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	Failing to make appointments could bring reputational damage to the denomination and place an unnecessary additional burden on other officers and leaders within Synods.

1. The appointment of Synod Moderators is a complex process with a variety of stakeholders. First and foremost, the Assembly owes a great deal of thanks to those in Synods, the Panel for Assembly Appointments and the General Secretariat, who facilitate this process with great care and concern.
2. Changes to the pattern of Assembly Executives meant that in 2022/23 there was a very considerable gap between Assembly Executive in November 2022, and General Assembly in 2023. This would have meant an unreasonable delay in appointing the nominated candidate to serve as Moderator of Northern Synod. Assembly Executive therefore authorised the Officers of the Assembly to make the appointment.
3. Since that time, there have been an unprecedented number of simultaneous retirements and moves, several of which were not expected at the time they

occurred. As such, this has put considerable pressure on the General Secretariat and Synods to facilitate these. This means that not all the nominating groups will be in a position to bring names to General Assembly 2023.

4. With some reluctance, agreement is sought to extend permission for Assembly Officers to make any appointments that are needed in this unusual situation.
5. After General Assembly 2023, there will be a pattern of an online meeting of the Assembly Executive each November and an in-person meeting each February. It is hoped that this, coupled with a more usual number of changes within the Moderators meeting, will enable us to return to making appointments at General Assembly or Assembly Executive in the usual way.
6. For information, the Assembly Officers are: Moderator of the General Assembly, immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly, Clerk of the General Assembly, the General Secretary, the Treasurer, and the Convenor of the Business Committee.

Paper A5

Mediation and Reconciliation Resource

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 10 General Assembly Instructs the Business Committee to consult widely and bring costed proposals for a URC-wide Mediation and Reconciliation Service to Assembly Executive 2023.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To initiate a process exploring a possibility of a URC-wide mediation and reconciliation service.
Main points	<p>It has become obvious recently that across the Church there are an increasing number of conflicts that arise. In the context of a more litigious society, and in the light of the trauma of the pandemic, the Church is dealing with an ever-increasing number of complaints rooted in conflicts. These are affecting local churches, Synods and the General Assembly.</p> <p>The complaints process (Section Q) works on the basis that initially mediation is used, where at all possible, to try to resolve conflicts before moving to formal investigation. However, those operating the policy have to seek individuals willing to take on mediation. We have no standing panel that either Synods or the General Assembly can draw upon, to bring expertise in this area.</p> <p>The Business Committee believes this is something which could be of service to the whole church, and therefore invites General Assembly to initiate a process of consultation to test this, and if appropriate, to bring costed proposals to Assembly Executive in 2023.</p> <p>There will be good experience to draw upon from the Northern Synods who have worked with a 'Listening and Reconciliation' service. There will also be expertise and experience to draw upon from ecumenical partners (the Church of Scotland and Methodist Churches have developed similar services in places)</p>

	<p>and from expert organisations in the field, such as Place for Hope and Bridge Builders.</p> <p>We envisage a process of consultation with Synods, as well as partners with expertise in this area, to test the feasibility, and costs, of developing a mediation and reconciliation service to assist the flourishing of the whole United Reformed Church.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	No cost at present, consultation would be necessary about any cost and funding implications.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Paper B1

Recognition of children's, youth and family ministry

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 11</p> <p>1. General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.</p> <p>Resolution 12</p> <p>2. General Assembly acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.</p> <p>Resolution 13</p> <p>3. General Assembly believes there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Celebrating and recognising the ministry of many people across church who work with and alongside our children and young people.
Main points	Recognition of the importance of ministry among children, young people and families, and consideration of how to acknowledge, encourage and equip those who undertake this within the URC.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Jenny Mills, Secretary for Education and Learning Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries Steve Summers, Development Worker (Church Related Community Work and Special Category Ministry) Jamie Kissack, Moderator of Yorkshire Synod.

Summary of impact

Financial	The third resolution would result in future proposals coming to General Assembly or Assembly Executive that would require careful consideration of financial resources.
External (eg ecumenical)	Some reflection is detailed on the approaches and context of other denominations within the paper.

Introduction

- 1.1 What age were you when you were first introduced to church, to faith, to Jesus?
Some people, wonderfully, become part of a church family as adults, but research shows that the majority of people who will be considering these resolutions at General Assembly would have done so as children or young adults.
- 1.2 Research carried out by the Church of England in 2017 showed that 40% of practising Christians came to faith before the age of 5; 56% before the age of 11; 75% before the age of 19; and 83% before the age of 25. This shows what we all might perceive in church life – that childhood and youth are key periods in life for faith formation.¹
- 1.3 *Talking Jesus* research identifies that growing up in a Christian family is the most significant factor in encouraging children and young people to engage with church and beginning a journey of faith. Other significant factors include a church's children and youth work, attending a regular time of worship, or a special service (a wedding or christening, for example).²

¹ 2017 ComRes research for CofE interviewed 8,150 GB adults aged 18+ online – of whom 4,190 identified as Christians. <http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Church-of-England-Church-Mapping-Survey-Data-Tables.pdf>

² *Talking Jesus: perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism*, research conducted in 2015 on behalf of the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE.

Talking Jesus: perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism amongst 11-18 year olds, research commissioned in 2016 by the HOPE Revolution partnership: HOPE, Church of England, Soul Survivor, Urban Saints, Tearfund, Message Trust, Limitless, Youth for Christ and PAIS movement.

- 1.4 All of that tells us that work among children, young people and families is to be highly treasured as one of the key ways in which God's Spirit moves to draw people to faith in Christ.
- 1.5 The United Reformed Church has recognised the place of Children and Young People in the life of the church through its continued commitment to URC Youth (all those aged 11–25 inclusive), and, last year, through the launch of URC Children (for those aged 0–12 inclusive).
- 1.6 The 2022 Annual Church Returns reported that in the year ending December 2021 more than 1,000 children were baptised or dedicated in our churches; about 6,000 children and 3,000 young people are part of our worshipping community, making up over 8% of the average congregation. A further 17,200 children and 7,000 young people are associated with the life of the church.
- 1.7 These numbers show the importance, energy, and resources that local churches place upon ministry among children and young people. However, this also reflects a drop of just over two-thirds in children and young people associated with the church and almost half in the number attending worship since the end of 2007, the past 14 years. Over the same timeframe, both the average congregation and membership has roughly halved across our churches, and the number of URC churches has reduced by 345, almost 22%.
- 1.8 Other mainline denominations are facing similar decline – and responding by setting targets for growth in the number of young disciples (for example, the Church of England seeks to double the number of young disciples by 2030, identifying a chronic undervaluing and lack of investment in vocation and training for children's and youth work, and looking to spend £1.1 billion over the next ten years).
- 1.9 It is in this context that this paper and the attached resolutions invite the church to consider how we acknowledge, encourage and equip those who offer ministry among children, young people and families as treasured, valued and important servants in Christ's church.

The people involved

- 2.1 The annual returns from local churches suggest that there are around 6,200 individuals involved in delivering support and work through our local churches to children, young people and their families.
- 2.2 Most of those involved in that work will be volunteer leaders and helpers, some of whom will be young people themselves. There are others who stand alongside these dedicated people in this work locally – Elders of local churches (particularly one identified as a link to 'children and young people'), Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and employed children, youth and family workers. These people are all supported in their Synods by Children and Youth Development Officers (or equivalents) and by the denominational Children's and Youth Work staff team.
- 2.3 This represents a huge range of different roles, with people offering different gifts to support our ministry to children, young people and their families. Perhaps you can see the way in which this reflects some of the images Paul offers

(1 Corinthians and Romans) of many parts working within a single body for the mission and purpose of the church.

- 2.4 With so many different people involved in work that often overlaps, it is not easy to identify specific roles to celebrate, cherish and equip. However, this paper seeks to identify two broad groups, and invites the church to consider whether a third should be considered.

Celebrating and cherishing local church volunteer roles

- 3.1 In any local church engaging in ministry with children and young people, there will be volunteers leading, working, participating and giving to that ministry. That may include Sunday school leaders and helpers, mid-week group leaders, Pilots Captains and leaders, leaders of uniformed organisations, creche carers, squash makers, biscuit providers, inspired craft preparers, runners of games, musicians, action song leaders, risk assessors, safeguarding overseers, story-tellers, tidy-uppers, active pray-ers, money-givers, and many more besides.
- 3.2 If you are part of the 83% who came to be part of a church family before the age of 25, you will, no doubt, be able to identify some of the people who you knew and that worked with you and led you to faith and welcomed you into the church family. If your church has active children, youth and family ministry at the moment, there will be some volunteers in your local church doing this work - you might like to pause reading this paper now, and in prayer give thanks to God for them.
- 3.3 Every local church volunteer working with children, young people and their families should be encouraged, celebrated, honoured and cherished by the Church. The work, time and energy they give and offer is a vital and crucial ministry in the life of the church. The first resolution attached to this paper, invites the United Reformed Church to recognise the ministry offered by these people.
- 3.4 We warmly encourage local churches to acknowledge this ministry too. One way local churches can do that is by commissioning people at time of appointment to a particular role (following safer recruitment) and setting aside time to rededicate people in continuing roles. The Children and Youth Work team have prepared some example commissioning and re-dedication promises and an example service for local churches to adapt, which you can view here:
www.bit.ly/CYW_dedication_service

There is also a booklet available for churches to give to people working with children and young people (especially as they begin a new role). You can find that here: **www.urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/working-with-children-and-young-people/**

Resolution 11

The United Reformed Church recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

Children's, Youth and Family Leaders

- 4.1 Some churches in the United Reformed Church, as a result of strategic thinking and prayer, have recognised a need to employ individuals to help them fulfil their ministry to children, young people and their families. Often with professional children and youth work qualifications, a formal contracted role, and receiving support from a local church, these people partner with volunteers, and strategically lead and develop a local church's children's, youth and family work.
- 4.2 In other places, this strategic leadership role is fulfilled by an individual responding to a call to serve as a volunteer.
- 4.3 The CYDO+ team can offer support and help to local churches exploring, managing and supporting churches that employ people to lead in children's, youth and family work. However, it is local churches that are responsible for the employment, training and personal development of these workers.
- 4.4 Across Synods and the wider denomination, the church should be able to recognise the professionalism, gifts and structured strategic focus these specific ministries bring to the church. However with employment often focussed and managed by the local church, it is not easy for there to be confidence in the ability and professionalism that such workers may be able to use in a wider context.
- 4.5 Recently a couple of Synods have been exploring recognition schemes. Yorkshire Synod, working closely with the Ministries department, has developed a Synod scheme of local recognition of Children and Youth Leaders (employed or volunteers). This is seen as a children's and youth work equivalent to 'Locally Recognised Worship Leaders'.
- 4.6 The Children's and Youth Work Committee recognises the value of such a scheme, and thanks the Yorkshire Synod's Children and Youth Committee and Ministries Committee for their work in developing this with the denominational Ministries Committee. This scheme details some marks of ministry, levels of qualification, an assessment of an observed piece of work, other expected requirements and renewal periods (see www.urcyorkshire.org.uk/lrcyl/).
- 4.7 The Children's and Youth Work Committee encourages the church to acknowledge the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Workers, and encourages Synods to work with Ministries Committee to develop their own similar schemes of local recognition, ensuring a standardised approach across Synods that can be tailored for each context. This should include making a promise to exercise this ministry in accordance with the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC (to parallel other formally recognised ministries across the URC).

Resolution 12

The United Reformed Church acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.

A formal ministry of URC Children, Youth and/or Family Minister?

- 5.1 A number of reflections have been offered recently to the Children and Youth Work Committee that suggest the United Reformed Church may wish to consider adding a formal ministry of Children's, Youth or Family Minister; alongside that of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.
- 5.2 The CYWC have grappled a number of times with this question in different seasons. In many ways we recognise children's, youth and family work as ministry that churches feel led to seek, and individuals feel called to serve in.
- 5.3 The committee have weighed some of the benefits and difficulties of exploring a formal ministry and feel the time is right to seek the mind of Christ through the General Assembly. This is a genuine open question the committee wish to put to General Assembly – the committee need the Assembly's help to direct in this matter – rather than recommend one route forward. To help the Assembly, some of the benefits and difficulties of developing such a scheme, that the committee have identified are detailed below.
- 5.4 Some of the benefits of offering a formal ministry of Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister include:
- a. To enable the denomination and Synods to strategically plan and respond to places and contexts where there is need for such ministry.
 - b. A local church, region or context being able to consider receiving such ministry with less (but still some!) local financial and human resources responsibility.
 - c. A recognised training and professional development programme for ministers fulfilling this role, with a URC ethos, flavour and understanding.
 - d. The ability and a route within the URC for individuals to respond to a call to Children's, Youth and Family ministry.
 - e. A greater stability and a sense of long-term security for those called to such a ministry within the breadth of the denomination.
 - f. The symbolic elevation of ministry among children, young people and families to the equivalent of ministry to adults, and by implication the recognition of children and young people as equal members of the body of Christ.
- 5.5 Some of the difficulties of offering a formal ministry of Children, youth and/or Family Minister include:
- a. Identifying a single ministry role within Children's, Youth and Family ministry that enables the exploration of call.
 - b. Developing a means of considering and exploring call.
 - c. Offering and developing professional training alongside other EM1 structures.

- d. An additional group of ministers to manage, fund, and support through the central structures of the church (Ministries, Pensions, M&M, etc).
 - e. Potential conflict for existing workers and local churches currently employing individuals, and the danger of adding another layer of complication in the support we need to give to local churches, rather than simplifying and standardising approaches.
 - f. Potential to create an unhealthy hierarchy and division between formally accredited ministry and the ministry offered by volunteers and others not wishing or able to pursue this route.
- 5.6 The third resolution, therefore, invites General Assembly to consider where God might be leading us. If the General Assembly believes that there shouldn't be such a formal ministry, then our focus will be to continue to value, support and encourage the ministry currently being offered in local churches. If the General Assembly believes that there should be such a ministry in the church, then the Children and Youth Work Committee, alongside this ongoing support, will work with Education and Learning and Ministries Committees to bring proposals of how such a ministry might be developed to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 13

The United Reformed Church believes there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.

Paper C1

Communications strategy

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Peter Stevenson, Convenor, Communications Committee revdpete@btinternet.com Andy Jackson, Head of Communications, andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 14</p> <p>General Assembly adopts the Communications Strategy, and instructs the Communications Committee and Communications Team to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • undertake a research project to build a communications profile of each local church and Synod • to produce a series of easy-to-use, time saving toolkits to help churches to communicate more effectively • to create a network of Communications Advocates in each Synod who can be an informal link between the Communications Team, resources available, and local churches and the Synods • share the new Design and Digital Visual Identity Guide. <p>Resolution 15</p> <p>General Assembly requests that the URC website, www.urc.org.uk, be the website on which all Assembly-approved work is hosted, making searching for URC resources and information easier. General Assembly tasks the Communications Committee and the Communications Team to work with those hosting URC websites outside of the URC's domain to consolidate those websites into the URC's website by General Assembly 2025.</p> <p>Resolution 16</p> <p>General Assembly urges all churches without a website, or with a website that has been inactive for more than six months, to use iChurch to engage digitally with all those</p>

	<p>who are interested in attending worship or activities taking place in church buildings.</p> <p>Resolution 17</p> <p>General Assembly strongly encourages the United Reformed Church at all levels and in all teams to use the revised Design and Digital Visual Identity to ensure quality and consistency across the work of the denomination.</p> <p>Resolution 18</p> <p>General Assembly urges everyone connected to the Church to read <i>Reform</i>, the magazine of the URC, either in print or digitally.</p> <p>Resolution 19</p> <p>The United Reformed Church thanks all who helped with the Church’s 50th anniversary.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A communications strategy for The United Reformed Church.
Main points	A communications strategy for The United Reformed Church.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Communications Committee; the Revd Dr Romilly Micklem.

Summary of impact

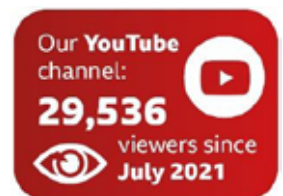
Financial	Cost of a research project to establish the communications needs of the URC, followed by the production of toolkits to help local churches (from existing budgets).
External (eg ecumenical)	Greater awareness of the United Reformed Church.

Communication team update

Follow up from General Assembly 2021: The URC’s Jubilee

The Jubilee resource pack was produced by a number of contributors in 2021 and was designed and distributed by Communications to all churches in early 2022. Further copies were sent out on request.

The Worship Resources Competition gave us two amazing hymns and a poem, judged from a wide range of entries. You can see the hymns and poem, which were shared at the 2022 General Assembly, on the URC’s YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/URCUK. They were also part of the URC’s Jubilee Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration. We thank all who entered and those that judged the competition.



The URC's Jubilee Service of Thanksgiving and Celebration finally took place on 15 April 2023, after being postponed due to a rail strike that was rescheduled after the death of Queen Elizabeth II, and the next preferred date of 6 May being taken by the coronation of King Charles III. The service can be watched on our YouTube channel. The service, the Open Church House event and the Walk to Westminster, which also took place on 15 April, were some of the many services and events that took place around the URC to celebrate the Church's first 50 years.



Highlights: press and public relations

On 14 October 2022, the URC got 5½ minutes on the Chris Moyles Show on Radio X which has over 1 million listeners:

www.globalplayer.com/podcasts/episodes/7DreXBy/

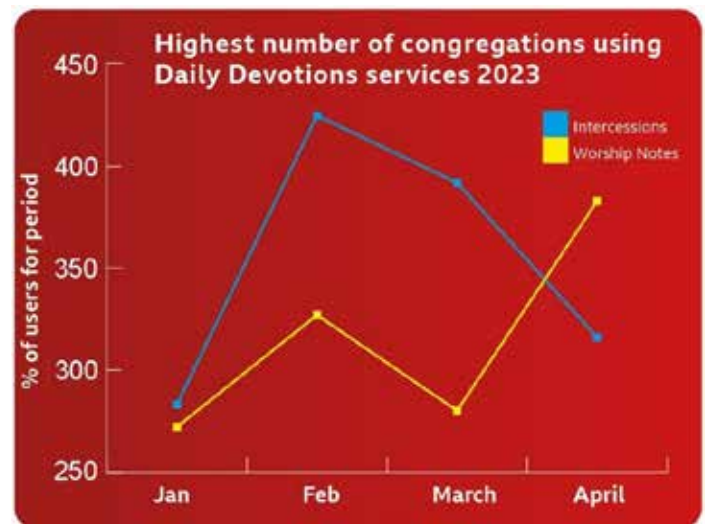


Starting at 25m 48s, host Chris Moyles reads a letter sent from the URC Bookshop and mentions a range of merchandise from the URC Bookshop that was sent to the presenter and his team.

Premier Christian Radio has also been back in touch, inviting URC people to submit prayers for Christmas, Lent, Easter and the Coronation, and has also shared Daily Devotions content.

The Daily Devotions services are being used by *The Methodist Recorder* now that the Methodists stopped providing the readings which were started during the pandemic.

John Bradbury, the General Secretary, has continued the partnership with UCB by featuring on Talking Point's Friday Round-up.



Getting the name right

Communications Officer, Ann-Marie Nye, corrects many a news report which misses the 'ed' from the Reformed part of our name, but it's good to see that sometimes journals such as *The Guardian* do it themselves: "This article was amended on 14 March 2023 because an earlier version misnamed the United Reformed Church as the 'United Reform' church." www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/mar/12/migration-bill-is-cruelty-without-purpose-says-archbishop-of-york

iChurch

2023 will be the first year that the iChurch scheme for affordable local church websites will have been in the black. Many thanks are owed to Dan Morrell, Reuben Watt and others for helping iChurch website managers during the long absence of the iChurch Coordinator, who has now left the staff team.



The long-term relationship between the URC, Dan and Reuben has seen iChurch websites grow in number and the committee is now deeply confident about the long-term future of the scheme. There are now 127 websites with iChurch, with another 11 in development, including some Synod website developments.

Email services are also now being offered for an extra fee, as well as a quarterly update service for churches who struggle to find people to regularly update their websites.

A new template for iChurch templates is under development, which will make all iChurch websites even easier to use and easier to be found by search engines.

The URC Bookshop

In 2022, the bookshop sent out 2,498 orders containing 40,566 items. This does not include items sold at synods, General Assembly and other events, such as the URC Minister's Gathering and regional events and gatherings. The turnover in 2022 was £82,635.54. This is more than previous years and the range of jubilee merchandise and books helped to increase the annual turnover.

www.urcshop.co.uk

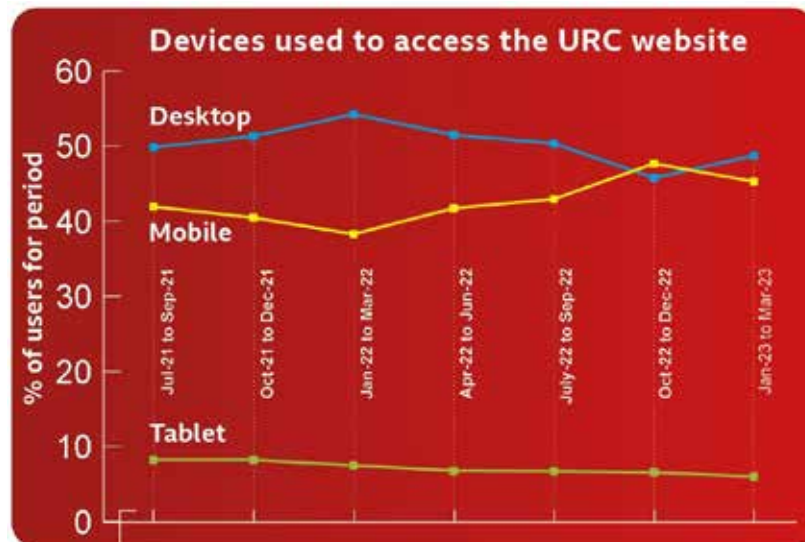
At the request of Jane Baird, the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources) until very recently, the Head of Communications developed the URC Bookshop Procurement Policy which was presented to the Communications Committee. General Assembly is requested to note this.

Publishing Board

The Publishing Board is a group of the Communications Committee which manages the books published by the URC. Proposals for books are invited – a proposal form can be found on the URC website – and the group meets three times a year to consider new proposals and to review those that have been selected for print.

A number of books were published for the URC's 50th anniversary:

- *Golden Threads – Reflections from 50 years of The Congregational Federation and The United Reformed Church*, published by the URC in partnership with The Congregational Federation, a collection of dozens of reflections from ministers and others about the denomination's first 50 years. The planning group included the late Revd Dr Walter Riggans who passed away in June 2022.
- *Traditions and Transitions, Studies in the history and theology of the URC*, edited by, and with contributions from, David Cornick and Robert Pope.
- *That They All May Be One*, a highly readable account, of the story of the URC from 1972 to 2022, by Stephen Tomkins, noted writer and Editor of *Reform*.



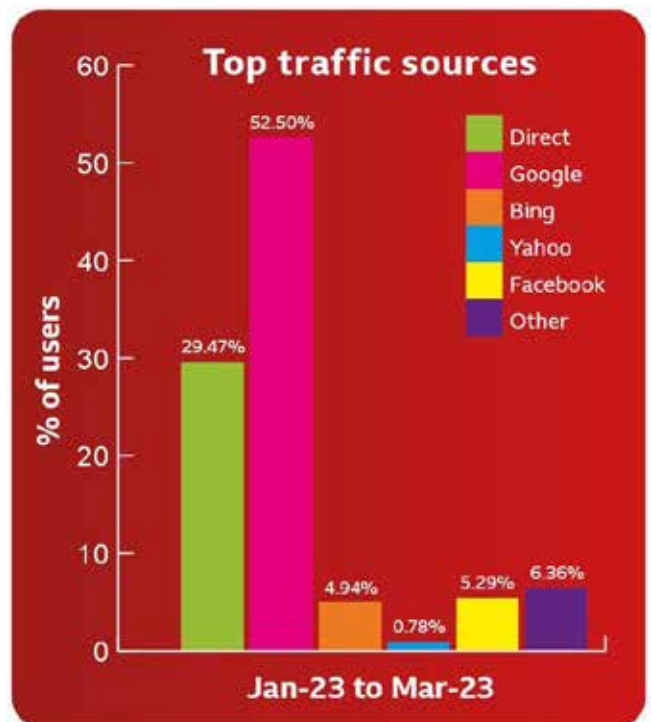
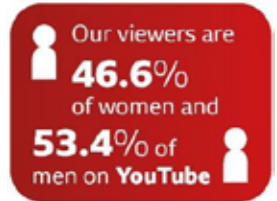
- *50 Hymns for 50 Years*, by Anne Sardeson, which looks at the hymns written since 1972 and how hymnody has reacted to the national and world events that have taken place.

This year, a new book by the Revd Neil Thorogood will be published, and in the planning stage is a large collection of new hymns by the Revd John Campbell, author of *Sunflower and Thistles*, published by the URC as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement.

Thanks and welcomes

Our thanks to the Revd Dr Peter Stevenson for convening the Communications Committee since 2019, and to the Revd Lucy Brierley who takes on the role after General Assembly has finished.

We are also deeply grateful to Jane Baird for her wisdom, warmth, humour and leadership, and wish her a very long, happy and well-deserved retirement. We welcome Victoria James to the role of Chief Operations Officer.



Paper C2

URC Communications strategy 2023-2025

Andy Jackson, Head of Communications

Introduction

This paper brings together my observations after four years in the role of Head of Communications along with proposals for the communication needs of the URC at local, Synod and national levels.

The United Reformed Church is wrestling with significant and continuing changes in society, which have to be factored into the thinking and planning for developing communications.

The UK population has grown; 30% of the population is under 25 and 18% are now 65 and above. A more open and liberal society is making it acceptable to abandon traditional social values relating to marriage, family, gender, sexual orientation and other related issues. Society is becoming increasingly secular, with greater emphasis on consumerism, sport, leisure, entertainment, lifestyle, well-being, and individuality.

The move away from religion is reflected in the declining membership of the different Christian denominations, including the United Reformed Church.

Politicians and the media are increasingly driving the debate around important moral, ethical and behavioural issues – this was once seen as mainly the preserve of the Church.

The impact of digital technology on everyday life and work has been dramatic and continuous. There has been a revolution in choice, availability and range of communication channels and media.

Operating professionally and responsibly, managing budgets effectively and delivering value and results have never been more scrutinised in the charity and not-for-profit sectors. This relentless pace of change experienced in the last 25 years is not slowing down and the Church needs to be more flexible, and fleet of foot in the way it delivers on its mission.

Organisationally it is the role of the Church House communications team to assist the United Reformed Church in meeting its vision and objectives as defined by the General Assembly and Assembly Executive year-on-year.

The team has goals and a work plan, but this is not comprehensively set out in one annual document. At present, communications and publications do not have a strategy or plan that is focused on achieving set goals in support of the Church House team and the wider Church. The work is reactive and in response to directives and the various needs of churches.

Before Covid-19, I had started to free the team from unnecessary processes and bureaucracy and had started to reshape the team to include a greater digital element.

The team delivered an outstanding and continuous set of resources during 2020 and 2021, which showed it was agile and quick to deliver much-needed online and physical resources.

Last year, the 50th anniversary of the URC dominated the workload, but again the team showed what it could deliver, despite the pandemic causing issues for the URC at all levels.

Now is the time to take stock and look forward to the next few years in the life and mission of the URC. There is a need for a new strategic focus and communications plan and the team needs a focus to help deliver the strategy.

Aims

This Communications Strategy aims to provide a strategic focus for the communications department, to enable them to deliver their mandate of promoting effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- giving voice to good news
- facilitating regional and national communications
- supporting the communications of Church House departments and General Assembly
- resourcing local churches.

The United Reformed Church has a living Christian faith which is open to all, for all stages and ages in life. We are locally based. It is our mission to proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus who calls us to be active in key social issues and an agent for positive change.

While the URC is smaller than it was, it is still a powerful body of people who can effect real change, in their churches, local communities, regions and nations.

Objectives

1. Knowledge

Know our churches – information is knowledge and knowledge gives us the ability to support our churches and in turn, empower them to communicate better. We cannot support local churches if we don't know them well. By undertaking research, we can produce a range of easy to use and quick to complete toolkits for churches depending on their situations.

By 2025 we will...

Ensure that the team has access to a communications profile of every URC church, including:

- membership, geography, worship style, lay leadership, services, attendance, local community, and demographics. It would work with ministers, local leaders and Synods to build a profile including strengths, weaknesses, goals, and ambitions.

This would pick up on work already going on in Synods rather than duplicating it.

- We will hold this information in our standard CRM database so that Church House and Synod colleagues have access to the data.
- We will work with ministers and Synods to ensure that, where relevant, local profiles and census information are also saved in the database or similar shared, central, system.

Use this information to continue to plan all our communication outputs to best support churches.

Have built a clear understanding in all URC departments of the way the Communications Team can support their development and execution of their objectives.

- We will create a clear induction / 'how we are & how we can help' process
- We will continue to build good relationships with all departments and structures
- We will work towards all Synods having an advocate to help with communications resources
- We will work to produce a series of toolkits that are easy to use and take little time to implement, bearing in mind the amount of volunteer capacity local churches now have.

2. Resources

Resource your local churches – our remit is to support the local church to show the URC's relevance in the lives of communities, church members, local people and their families and show how they can express their faith and participate in their local church.

By 2025 we will

Ensure local churches are resourced by providing:

- Instant-to-use posters/digital content as part of national campaigns
- Templates for creating publicity material
- Thought leadership literature on issues of the day giving a United Reformed perspective
- Video and audio content that supports their day-to-day work
- Communications and media-training, including crisis communications training.
- Support with digital channels via iChurch
- Communications strategy and planning
- Communications technology and software training
- Branding guidance and usage: noticeboards, websites, magazines and newsletters, social media, working with the media (print, radio, and broadcast), writing for the web, photography and video, effective design, presentation skills, issues and crisis management
- Reports of what other local churches are doing – sharing best practice
- Greater access and promotion of *Digest* in *Reform* to showing the relevance of the URC in the lives of communities
- A hub with content for newsletter and magazine editors to use.

3. Awareness

We exist to raise awareness, knowledge and understanding of the United Reformed Church. As a focus of its purpose, goals and values, the following unique selling point (USP) was created:

The United Reformed Church has a living Christian faith which is open to all, for all stages and ages in life. We are locally based. It is our mission to proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus who calls us to be active in key social issues and an agent for positive change.

This is not meant to be a new strapline for the URC, but something to use as a focus for our work. All are welcome to use it if and when needed.

By 2025 we will:

Ensure the URC’s key policy areas are known and understood

- We will build a network of trained, media-savvy spokespeople that represent the URC
- We will ensure that our Synods are included and represented in this network.

Ensure that the URC is a ‘go-to’ church for comment.

- We will build a network of key media contacts, and relationships with journalists and social media influencers in the Christian and secular media that shows the diversity of the church.

Create a systematic way of providing:

- Theologically balanced output
- Reactive media: responding to key stories that the URC has a view/opinion on
- Proactive media: creating relevant stories and content to push out
- Planned media: including the key moments of Lent, Easter etc.

The communications environment

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and accessible, mobile-optimised website. • URC wants to be an agent for positive social change, eg JPIT, actions by the Moderator of General Assembly, and Commitment for Life. • Very active social media. • Fast responses to media requests and national stories needing a response from the URC (eg the death of the Queen). • <i>Reform</i> magazine; long-standing attachment to this in many local churches, and shared nationally. • Radio Stations like UCB initiate contact with us due to solid relationships. • Local churches create good news stories for us through their mission. • Breadth of passions within the Church. • We can disagree well. • We’re unafraid to apply the Bible to modern context. 	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current team goals do not include digital elements. • All churches, regardless of denomination, can be slow to change. • Not a clear understanding of the profile of all local churches. • Tendency to be more reactive than proactive with communications. • Inability to articulate URC difference. • Not a clear, shared, visual identity. • Our language can be quite ‘churchy’ at times. • The gap between local churches and the national communications team. Sometimes the ‘them and us’ attitude is a barrier, which, if broken down, would allow many local churches to benefit from the huge array of resources the communications team delivers. • Diversity of opinion; difficult for the church to speak with one voice on
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusivity in our ministers. • All positions open to everyone. • Listen to the local churches, bottom-up decision making. 	<p>things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be tricky to make decisions. • Cleared shared voice not always clear. • Externally – quite a bit of uncertainty about who the URC is. • Difficult to get a new generation of people in.
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To use social moments eg warm spaces and Community Project Award winners as regular opportunities to show the church in action. • To use occasional and extraordinary events to also show the church in action, eg the church’s response to those who have fled Ukraine. • To promote the ways for churches to feedback to the team. • For every communication to have a clear purpose. • To use social media appropriately. • To create a bank of URC spokespeople to enable proactive media comment/coverage; regionally too. • The Church Life Review. • To use faith journey stories to show impact of URC church community. • To use Ministry Enquirers in same way. • More podcasts and video content. • The young nature of the church. • Use our amazing partnerships more. • Celebrating success (eg financial benefit of Commitment for Life partnership). • Collaborate with other departments at early stage of projects. • Build understanding of what good looks like with other departments. • Tailoring information to different audiences via different social channels. • Having a clear journey for all comms. • Share the resources we have. • Could we use ecumenical partners more? • Do we use our ecumenical heart? 	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ageing demographic in the URC. • Numbers in decline 192,000 members in 1972, 40,000 now. • A lack of a cohesive communications strategy. • Trying to do too much across too many channels with little or no return. • Analytics, such as the number of times a document has been downloaded from the website, not being used to make data-driven decisions. There’s little point repeating a resource if only seven people have downloaded it in 12 months. • Generational fear of failure. We used to get shouted at, at work or school if we did something wrong. With the advent of digital working, this no longer happens. • Those people who are unwilling to change. • Struggling to appeal to a younger demographic. • Being able to use our buildings and spaces and resources for community purpose. • Limitations in staff. • Less age diversity in committees. • Ministers and Elders in local churches are overstretched; no time to think about communications. • People taking on many more roles. • Inequality of funding across Synods. • Digital comms is not a priority for churches; other priorities like keeping church open. • Financial strictures we work under during costs of living crisis. • Too much dilution with all the different social media channels.

Communications competitor analysis

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Church of England	More holistic campaigns for key moments of the year, eg Dust and Glory for Lent and Easter 2023, and Follow the Star for Christmas 2022, but The Great Invitation was too churchy for non-CofE and secular audiences.
Methodist Church	Huge exposure on BBC Radio; training for website and social media, the recent set of dedicated resources to help churches with their digital content.
Baptist Union	Better use of images on its website, books aimed at children and infants around key events/Bible stories. Forest church.
The Catholic Church – Bishops' Conference in England and Wales	Embedded podcasts on its website.
Moravian Church UK	Well-designed website let down by graphics from other areas below the eye line of the home page.
United Methodist Church	Internal adverts treated as external and too prominent (above main hero banner, repeated multiple times throughout home page).
Mothers' Union	Excellent use of thematic graphics across web and social media.
Life Church	Contemporary services – modern/live music, live service links, childcare during services with TVs for parents and carers to view the service, drinks and food at the start/during/end of service, community projects.
Church of Scotland	Excellent media resources area on its website.

Key moments

These are current and proposed priorities for communicating throughout each year:

- Mothering Sunday
- Synods Spring and Autumn meetings and special events
- Other events from the URC Prayer Handbook, Worship Book and Diary
- General Assembly
- New Year
- Father's Day
- Remembrance Day
- Greenbelt
- Black History Month
- September – new academic year
- Advent
- Christmas
- Lent and Easter
- Pentecost
- Earth Day (April)
- Disability Awareness Day (July)

Resources

Head of Communications

Andy Jackson

Senior managers

Sara Foyle, Lead Graphic Designer (full time)

Steve Tomkins, Editor of Reform (full time)

Ann-Marie Nye, Communications Officer, (full time)

Team members

Chris Andrews, Graphics Designer (full time, Reform 50% and URC 50%)

Louise Ault, Team Administrator and *Reform* Subscriptions (full time)

Hannah Clark, Digital Content Assistant – Daily Devotions and video content (part time, three days a week)

Simon Pickard, Bookshop Despatch Clerk (two days a week, Church House caretaker rest of the time)

Laura Taylor, Graphics Designer (full time)

Laurence Wareing, Content Editor, Reform (part time)

Neil Hunter, Digital Content Editor, three days a week.

All teams can be helped by temporary staff if needed.

The iChurch website platform for local churches is helped by two freelance contractors, Dan Morrell and Reuben Watt. There was a staff member, but they left in 2022 and will not be replaced.

Communications channels

Channel	Activity	New or established?
Website	Daily updates on several pages and specialist areas	Established, 102,000 pages views per month on average
Facebook	Daily updates, three times a day on various subjects	8,300 people reached each month on average
Twitter	Daily updates and Retweets, such as JPIT content	18,100 impressions in January, 20K average monthly reach
Instagram	Daily updates	3,900 average reach per month
LinkedIn	Daily updates	Not available at time of writing
TikTok	Films about Daily readings, unboxing content, magazine flick thoughts for Reform, other specialist content	New, began in November 2022, reach of 1840 since then. Similar to Instagram and other social media channels, this will take time

		to build up.
YouTube	Weekly videos on average	760 hours of videos watched in 2022, 12,000 views
NU	Monthly email	12,404 emails each month
<i>Reform</i> magazine	10 x year	4,000 magazines sent to 1,768 recipients including church distributors who take delivery of the magazine and pass them to others. Reach is estimated to be 8,000.
Podcasts	Two series to date, with plans to expand this ever-expanding audio programme channel	We will work with those with established podcast series to develop the URC's podcast output to reach a wider audience.

Culture and ambition

There can sometime be an assumption among our local churches that because we are a church, it is too hard to provide high-quality communications. There is no reason for this to be the case at all, and our team exists to help share the good news.

We want to encourage all in the URC to be ambitious, and user focused – for example, do the noticeboards inside and outside your church tell people about why the church exists, what it offers, and how to find out more?

Do the external and internal noticeboards join up, and are those who volunteer to welcome people into get training to deal with all who might come to a service – people who have never been to church, those who are returning after time away from church, those who are new to the area, those who have decided to try the URC because they liked what was on the noticeboard, local or national website or social media channel?



The research detailed in Section 1, above, will help the Communications Team deliver tailor-made toolkits for local churches.

The Committee also wants to establish a network of volunteer Communications Advocates in each Synod, where there isn't already a volunteer or member of staff who looks after Communications, who can be an informal link between the Communications Team, resources available, local churches and the Synod, with expertise in

communications, who can identify needs, offer resources, solutions, and other assistance, in conjunction with the Communications Team.

Our audiences

Existing audiences

- URC Members
- Local Church Meeting
- Local Elder Meeting
- Ministers
- Synods
- Assembly Executive
- General Assembly, its committees and advisory groups.

Audiences outside the URC, for example:

- Potential URC Members
- Online worship followers
- Individuals confined to the home
- Users of URC buildings
- Local population physically near a URC Church
 - Families
 - Young people
- Local Ecumenical Partnerships
- Secular decision makers (eg MPs drafting policy).

Key messages

The URC has some critical 'USPs' that we can build on to enable our distinctiveness to stand out in our communications, whether verbal, online or in print. Such as:

The United Reformed Church has a living Christian faith which is open to all, for all stages and ages in life. We are locally based. It is our mission to proclaim and live out the good news of Jesus who calls us to be active in key social issues and an agent for positive change.

Accessible language

There needs to be a clear expression of what the United Reformed Church is, its purpose and calling and what it offers people. And this should be communicated in accessible and inclusive language – more tabloid than broadsheet, more *Radio Times* than *The Tablet*.

The Church of England realised this when engaging with society at large rather than die-hard parishioners.

Language should avoid unnecessary jargon, If you are new to Christianity or the URC, it can be a barrier to understanding and off-putting. It assumes a level of knowledge and unhelpfully implies exclusivity rather than inclusivity.

The URC is open to all. Getting this right will help people understand what is special, different, and relevant about the URC and how it relates to them, and they to it.

Benefits

- Everyone will know the Church's core objective and its strategic goals and communications will help achieve the core objective and goals.
- The role and purpose of the communications team will be clearer.
- There will be a more efficient and effective use of resources.
- These will work to sustain and grow membership and church attendance. People like to be part of something that reflects their beliefs and values and is relevant in today's society.
- It is important for the United Reformed Church to be seen to have a relevant voice and role in creating good in the UK and worldwide.
- The local church is genuinely at the heart of this grassroots movement, and it is this which differentiates the URC, its engagement with the community, the involvement of lay leadership and its open welcome to all.

At the time of going to press, there were a number of resolutions relating to this area, and we will work, as always, to update our House Style, and to produce new resources when needed.

Brand continuity

The Design and Digital Visual Identity is attached as an appendix to this paper. We ask all who produce resources for the URC at all levels to follow these guidelines to ensure quality and consistency.

Examples of joined up branding and resources

- Cancer Research: <https://master.d1wflxy3hgj9gv.amplifyapp.com/>
- Macmillan: <http://portacreativeserver.com/vault/manualescorporativos/BRANDBOOK%20MACMILLAN.pdf>
- The Church of England: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-and-news/media-centre/logo-and-visual-identity>
- Coca Cola: <https://issuu.com/zakaz4ik/docs/styleguide-coca-cola>

We have helped dozens of churches and other URC groups with their branding, but if we are to make an impact in the same way that other brands do, tighter guidance and acceptance that media professionals should be producing materials, not someone using Canva, WordArt or Publisher.

Consistency and personality need to be evident in all that we do, especially in communicating to key audiences. Members should feel proud to be counted as URC or as a URC member in an LEP as their faith is presented as modern and relevant in today's world.

Tactics

Audience	Objective	Message	Channel
Secular decision makers	To raise awareness of the unique nature of the URC / its role in a particular social action debate.	URC/General Assembly believes X on issue Y.	Proactive media work via list of key spokespeople.
Individuals living near a URC Church	To let them know they are welcome in the church.	You're welcome in our church.	Poster Local media Local social media.
Staff in different URC departments	To remind them that the Communications team can support their delivery of objectives. To encourage them to create a consistent visual and verbal representation of the URC.	We can help your product / project be more successful if we work with you from the outset. Awareness of the URC, and understanding of what we are about, will be stronger when we show a consistent brand externally.	Regular internal communication and staff meetings between teams. Provision of, and support in using, the Design and Digital Visual Identity.

How are we going to achieve this?

1. Knowledge

Research by the Communications Team with an external researcher or company to build a profile of every URC.

- a) This could include creating a process for the Communications Team to input insights about local churches and their communications skills and needs into the URC database, and to review and update this on a regular basis.
- b) Use this information to plan communication toolkits and other resources to best support churches.

2. Resources

- a) Ensure local churches are offered resources.
- b) Review what resources exist already, produced by the URC or its ecumenical partners
- c) Ensure that all local churches are aware of these
- d) Evaluate the success of existing resources and update them as and when needed.

3. Awareness

- a) Ensure the URC's key policy areas are known and understood by decision-makers
- b) Continue to build the list of spokespeople and their specialist areas (e.g. Kevin Snyman, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) and work with General Assembly Committees to understand the URC's thinking on key areas. This thinking to be easily available on the website
- c) Develop the What We Believe area of the website with Faith and Order offering snapshots of what the Church believes as well as fuller resources (eg <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-believe/>)
- d) Set up contact lists with journalists who specialise in those areas (eg Damian Carrington is an environment editor at *The Guardian*).

Ensure that the URC is a 'go-to' church for comment.

- a) Develop the existing media contacts and journalists lists
- b) Create communication plans with relevant URC departments for the key moments
- c) Share the reach from planned media coverage.

Paper C3

Appendix: Further reflections and initiatives

Andy Jackson, Head of Communications

Marketing

Digital marketing is something that the URC could do more of, and there are consultants available who could help market the URC in general, *Reform* magazine and its products through the bookshop. The new URC Directory is also a superb tool in need of help, especially as most churches list their activities through it.

Video

The development of digital communications has made video incredibly popular – every minute of every day, 694,000 hours of films are watched on YouTube, and 10.4m minutes of films are watched on Instagram. Simply put, we could do so much more of it, and we could curate a lot more from other sources and share it on social media.

Talking Absolute Worship, Eco Congregation and others have been featured on our YouTube channels, which feed into the URC website, but with more curation, we could feature more, and generate more.

We've started a presence on TikTok and we have a valuable resource with Noah Brierley, son of the Revd Lucy Brierley, with 1.8m followers. With his father, renowned Christian presenter Justin, we could look at ways to increase videos and engagement.

We could also deliver sermons that are appropriate for the channel (less than a minute), share experiences, tell stories, enhance learning and support training.

Media relations

The United Reformed Church has a professional approach to media relations, and it is managed with safe and competent hands. However, its work is more reactive than planned.

The media does not actively seek out the opinions or comment from the United Reformed Church because it appears not to have anything relevant or newsworthy to say. Media don't understand the differences between the Church of England, the Catholic Church and the URC, and you always need to explain the difference. And even when you do, does anyone really care?

The last big story for the URC was enabling local churches to allow marriage for all if they chose to. (The URC's structure is that the local church makes the ultimate decisions for the life and mission of the church, and they invite ministers to serve, rather than top-down churches that place ministers and impose policy and polity.)

The Church needs to decide what subjects or issues fit with its mission build create media interest and enhance the public's perceptions, especially amongst potential members.

And when it does, then it needs to roll out a holistic plan – advertising/media, to items outside the church, inside the church, welcome teams and ministers/worship leaders. Campaigns will fail and people attracted to church involvement and membership will not be if one part of that fails.

Voice

There are many United Reformed voices but no media guide to help tell who can talk about what. Ann-Marie Nye is working on this and will deliver it later this year.

We train people in media relations, but it would be good to have a core team of senior, media savvy, on message, persuasive and engaging voices if the Church is to increase its public profile. And to explore what channels are possible. Look at the example of the Revd Kate Bottley – *Gogglebox*, *Songs of Praise*, *Steph's Packed Lunch*.

It is easier for the public at large to get to know a single personality, rather than a changing cast, but is this something the URC would feel comfortable with?

It would be great for a regular URC person speak on BBC Radio 4 Thought for the Day and BBC Radio 2's Zoe Ball Breakfast Show, as the Methodists have done recently.

The Movement for Reform Judaism is a small movement, but it has the confidence to punch above its own weight. It has spokespeople who are media savvy, takes every opportunity be heard, has points of view (and not just on Judaism, but importantly the issues of the day from a Jewish perspective) and is not afraid to express them.

Evidence suggests that if media is done well, then more opportunities will follow.

They also look at specific initiatives such as Eco Judaism and have the Rabbiting On podcast hosted by three female rabbis. A really clever title with decent content. How would we produce a long running series of podcasts and who for? We have dipped our toes in, but we need structure and help. A studio area in Church House would help produce these more quickly.

Printed resources

URC Publishing needs to continue to concentrate on producing core and essential publications that support the Church's strategic goals. This is supported by the URC Bookshop which will stock and sell other resources, such as books by URC ministers and others published by third party publishers, which are a 'nice to have' rather than a 'must have' resource for churches and members.

Procurement

Having brought a lot of experience from previous jobs, the Head of Communications reduced large print runs (in my first week when the yearbook order was going to be repeated despite sales going down year on year), avoiding wasteful print orders and unnecessary expense.

He also started to order fewer copies of publications and reviewed sales versus print orders, which hadn't been done strategically before.

Some books by others, such as *Praying the Way* by Terry Hinks, were ordered from third-party publishers, but not in great numbers, with a policy of buying small and reordering, rather than buying large amounts without knowing how well the sales might or might not be.

This has worked well: wastage has been reduced to a minimum, we break even on most items, make a small profit on the majority of them, and items that are remaindered are sold off or given away as incentives.

The publishing world has changed, so smaller print runs are now commonplace. Gone are the days of having to order thousands of books, That said, giving away books at the Christian Resources Exhibition and at Synods is not a bad thing. It helps promote the Church and informs and reminds warm contacts and members about who we are and what we do. And it drives people to find out what else the URC Bookshop publishes and offers.

- **See URC Bookshop Procurement Policy**

Free resources

The committee removed the costs associated with leaflets about the URC, *What is the URC*, a basic guide, and *Join the family*, a leaflet about membership. Both are free, apart from postage and packing, in packs of five. Talking to ministers and members revealed that they didn't want to pay £2.99 per pack!

We have distributed more than 50,000 leaflets, and feedback from ministers shows that people have become members because of these resources.

Resourcing local churches

Each local church is characterised by its people, locality, demographics, and socioeconomic factors. Essentially no one church is the same and its needs from the Synod and national Church will vary accordingly.

Communications and resources for these churches must reflect an understanding of the individual nature of the community. Bespoke communication solutions or resources for each church are not realistic given the cost and drain on resources but we could produce resources nationally to fit local situations.

For example, a prayer poster for those losing weight, so churches can put one up in the room where WeightWatchers meet. It is a connection between the local church and the group using the building, and a reminder about what the building does on Sundays!

Success is not just about knowing your churches and their members well, but also about the quality of the resources provided and how they are delivered by the communications team.

There are key areas where training and guidance on communications best practice can make a real difference, with programmes including topics such as:

- How to communicate effectively
- Working successfully with local media
- Becoming a local United Reformed voice.

The resources have to meet a real need, be fit for purpose, well written, well designed and well produced, otherwise churches will not use them. We also need to market them again and again, otherwise when someone searches for discipleship development, newer, non-URC resources, will appear above the ones that should be used by URCs.

Certificates

We also consulted about the dated and differently styled certificates, changing them to A4 individual certificates, with the same core design and brand, on parchment and foiled. The cost is higher but a pack of 20 certificates would last some churches, even before the pandemic, years.

We've sold thousands, but yet some still question the cost of a £2.99 certificate. We're welcoming someone into the URC with something that now could be placed on the wall. If this is a member, then if they give £5 per service they attend, then the ROI is £3.99 versus £200 of giving. Sadly, some don't see this as an investment.

We also dropped producing ecumenical resources because no other denomination produced them. We are the smallest of the mainstream Christian churches yet the only ones producing resources for LEPs. They didn't sell and were therefore dropped.

Resources for people with dyslexia, visual impairments and whose mother tongues are not English

We regularly print in-house General Assembly papers, Assembly Executive papers and other resources when requested for those with a variety of visual impairments. The Committee received a paper at its last meeting about resources for people with dyslexia, being printed on different coloured paper and in accessible, dyslexic-friendly fonts.

We have also been asked to produce resources in other languages for churches with communities from other countries. We are happy to do this but being mindful of the high cost of professional translation services, we will be asking for volunteer translators to help with this. The resources requested are aimed to introduce the URC to those communities, such as *What is the URC?* and *Join the family*.

Creative thinking and ambition – an example:

Advent kits: The 2020 Advent kits were an idea from Communications with the content produced by our close partners the Children's and Youth Work, producing a letterbox sized box packed with activities, resources and gifts for churches to buy at cost to give to those on the periphery of church life. The end result was superb, and they sold out. They were produced at a loss although the intention was to break even.

Lessons were learned for the 2021 kits, which were less ambitious, but still retained the box format.

In 2022, because church buildings had reopened, these were reduced to an A5 envelope again packed with activities and ordered in the thousands. More than 12,000 kits have been ordered over the three years. A Lent and Easter kit in 2021 was also well distributed.

Paper C4

URC Bookshop Procurement Policy

Communications Committee

Agreed by Communications Committee, February 2023

Procurement is the purchase of works, goods and services according to a process that is open and transparent.

Objectives of this procurement policy

The key elements of the Procurement Policy are:

- To maintain the highest ethical standards in procurement matters, for example, to minimise the risk of fraud.
- To ensure the correct goods or services are purchased, in terms of quality and specification.
- To achieve the best value for money.
- To keep paperwork to minimum.
- To act fairly towards suppliers.
- To promote equality, diversity and sustainability throughout procurement matters, in line with the URC's values and policies (eg eco policy).
- To return a profit for the URC from the operation.

The URC Bookshop

The bookshop exists to supply church resources, books, goods, gifts and services to the whole URC and beyond, of items published by the URC (eg the Prayer Handbook and the Diary, *That They All May Be One* by Steve Tomkins, *50 Hymns for 50 Years* by the Revd Anne Sardeson) and items by ministers, members and friends of the URC (eg *Praying the Way* by the Revd Terry Hinks, *Holy Habits: Following Jesus* by Andrew Roberts).

The bookshop ensures orders are despatched quickly through a despatch clerk who works two days a week, and more on an overtime basis during the busier months leading up to Christmas.

The orders are mostly received online via the bookshop website, www.urcshop.co.uk, and by phone, and are given to the clerk for despatch. The bookshop uses Royal Mail 48 and DPD to send packages, in accounts separate to that of the London URC office.

There was an additional temporary position costing the bookshop £30k pa, but when that person left in February 2020, the position was not replaced. Phone orders (average 2 a day) are dealt with by the Head of Communications.

The Head of Communications (HOC) leads the bookshop operation with purchases from suppliers offering the best deals, that do not exceed the budget of the team and that of customers (eg very high value items), and to ensure purchased goods and services conform with the quantity and quality specified in the order.

Values

The bookshop wants suppliers to embrace, share and support the values of the URC. The URC is committed to taking positive action on climate change and to work with suppliers who share our commitment to sustainability. For example, asking for plastic not to be used for individual items, and for the use of cardboard packaging instead.

For all purchase transactions, the following thresholds are applicable. When calculating the contract value, for a one-off purchase, the total cost of the goods or services will provide the contract value, which includes VAT:

- Up to £9,999: the HOC has discretion but rules regarding preferred suppliers, transparency and value for money must always be met.
- £10,000 - £24,999: the budget holder must obtain three written quotations.
- Above £25,000 there must be a formal tender process.

A standard URC agreement must be used and signed when engaging a new contractor for a service (usually done by the HOC with the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Human Resources (HR)).

A URC purchase order must be completed and sent to a supplier to confirm an order for goods or services.

Key principles

To maintain the highest ethical standards

The URC values its reputation for ethical behaviour, financial integrity and reliability and has a zero-tolerance policy towards bribery.

Staff must not accept any gift, reward or hospitality from any organisation or individual with whom you have contact in the course of your work as an inducement either for doing something or not doing something in your official capacity.

In the event of a conflict of interest, which occurs if an employee has an interest in an organisation or company providing goods or services to the URC, that interest must be declared in writing to the COO or CFO at the earliest possible opportunity.

To achieve value for money

There are two main aspects that impact on value for money in terms of purchasing goods and/or services:

- Quality and quantity – product specification.
- Right time, right place, right price – source of supply.

This usually includes:

- Purpose of goods or services (are they suitable for the URC audience?)
- Necessary characteristics (size, finish, minimum quantity etc)
- Life span (Bookshop items have long-term objectives, for example, to ensure a better item purchase rate, multiple units of URC clothing – polo shirts and hoodies – are purchased for sale over a three-year period)
- Reliability (is the supplier brand new or well established?)
- Maintenance arrangements (if needed).

To act fairly towards suppliers

The bookshop aims to pay suppliers for goods and/or services within 30 days of receiving an invoice. To achieve this aim, staff and suppliers are required to ensure related paperwork is processed promptly.

To promote equality, diversity and sustainability

The URC has a statutory duty to outlaw disability, race and gender discrimination in all of its functions. We will ensure that the purchase of goods, services and facilities is undertaken in line with our equality and diversity commitments.

We will not use suppliers who do not share our values on equality of opportunity and diversity. In all cases, the general equality duty requires staff and its contractors to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

To ensure good use of space

The bookshop has limited space in the Lower Ground Floor at 86 Tavistock Place, and in non-jubilee years, the only time that space in the meeting rooms is needed is when the Prayer Handbook is delivered. It's cheaper to take all copies at once rather than pay £50 for each partial delivery.

Printers now offer good prices for smaller runs, and so we can easily print 300 copies of *That They All May Be One* by Steve Tomkins and reorder another 300, while retaining a competitive and affordable price. Digital printing also helps with this when needed.

Governance, audit and finance structure

The bookshop is governed by the Communications Committee which is responsible for ensuring the proper conduct of its affairs, including conformance to standards of good governance and accountability with regard to procurement.

The bookshop accounts, along with all those of the URC, are audited each year and are available for scrutiny by Companies House and The Charity Commission.

Since 2021 the bookshop's finances use a cash sales basis, because of the changing timings of its annual publications. In previous years, money was transferred from one year to another (deferred payment) because some publications were purchased in one financial year but sold in the next. This is no longer the case and so the bookshop finances have been changed by the CFO and Finance Committee to a cash sales basis.

Frequently asked questions

Who has purchasing authority?

The Head of Communications (HOC), Chief Operating Officer (COO) and Chief Finance Officer (CFO) own the budget on purchases and services. This can be by work credit card purchases, supplier invoices or personal expenses.

What items can the HOC purchase?

No specific exceptions, but purchases should be in line with URC values and objectives.

Who can suggest items for the bookshop?

Anyone with a connection to the URC. The HOC may ask for a business case.

Who has the authority to award contracts?

HOC in conjunction with COO and HR.

What, if any, spending limitations are there?

The HOC along with the CFO review the budget and turnover annually.

What evaluation criteria should be used to choose potential suppliers?

That they are an established supplier, unlikely to go bust (however, Traidcraft recently went into administration), and are providing goods or services that meet a high ethical standard.

What is the company position on conflict of interest?

Any conflict must be notified to the COO and CFO.

What is the company position on accepting gifts to staff?

Must be declared to the register managed by the Compliance Officer.

What is the procedure for addressing legal questions?

Consult with COO and Legal Advisor if needed.



Paper C5

Design and digital visual identity for The United Reformed Church

Communications Committee

Contents

Why is visual identity important?	Typography
Our conversations	Imagery
Visual elements	Web and digital design
Logo	Where to start
Sub identities	Examples / templates
Colour palette	Contact details

Why is visual identity important?

Visual identity refers to all the graphics and pictures that express who we are and set us apart from other churches. To put it another way, it refers to everything that can be seen by the naked eye, from the logo to the layout of a room. It also refers to identifying materials such as business cards, letterheads, newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, social media, and posters, where the main goal is to distinguish the Church.



Each church has its own unique personality. How do people feel when they hear the name of your ministry, see the logo, go to the website, or interact with the church either in person or online? Your identity is in the impression you made on them. The church's members will be more likely to recognise and identify themselves as part of the United Reformed Church if they are exposed to the same consistent aesthetic features.

Our visual identity is largely established through logos and design. Fundamentally, a person's emotional and intuitive response to an organisation can be evoked through design. By expressing the cultural relevance, mission, and ideals of the Church and unifying the many various characteristics through unified graphics, it can educate audiences about the essence of the Church. For instance, by using plain English in place of jargon, you are demonstrating that our Church is inclusive, by speaking to as many people as you can in your conversations.



This guidance is to help you unify these identifying elements in your work.

Our conversations

Identify your audience before creating content that enhances their lives, fuels their aspirations, and addresses their needs.

Consider your tone of voice when writing. How does the Church wish to convey its principles, purpose, and vision?

Design should come first in your discussion of content, rather than being an afterthought. To achieve the best results, involve the communications team as early as possible in the conversations. This is especially true when creating material for websites, videos, social media, and other digital platforms.



Visual elements

Logo

Logos are at the heart of establishing visual identity.

We are keen for the logo to be used as widely as possible to promote the URC and the URC community. However, derivative versions of the URC logo are generally prohibited, as they dilute the URC's brand identity. For example, the URC logo should be used in its entirety and not broken into elements – the words and the fish symbol may not be used separately as a logo.

Where possible, the blue logo with web address should be used. It can appear on a white background, or reversed out white, as below. We also have a mono version for when colour printing is not available.



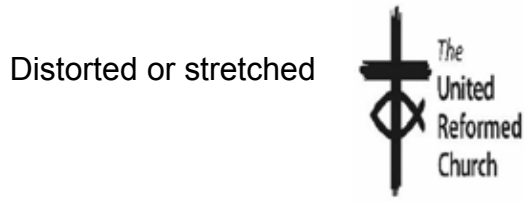
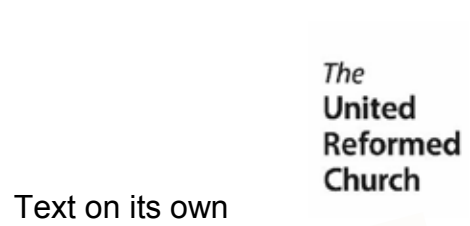
For samples of placement in design see section Examples / templates

Do not try to recreate the logo yourself. We are keen for the logo to be used as widely as possible to promote the URC and the URC community. If you have any questions, please contact us by email at graphics@urb.org.uk.

A variety of logos are available for download from the URC website: www.urb.org.uk/urb-logo. For more information on how and when the logo may be used, please refer to the leaflet *Guidelines for the use of the URC logo*.



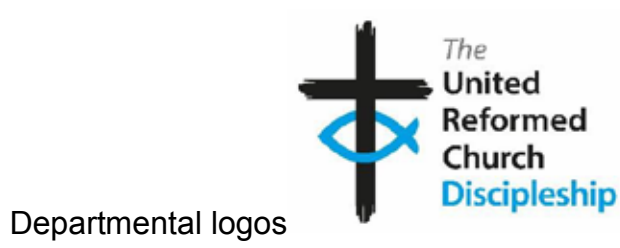
Here are a few examples of incorrect use. **Do not use like this...**



The URC logo is copyrighted to the United Reformed Church © 2016. The URC takes seriously its responsibility for defending our logo against any damaging or confusing uses. The logo is a registered trademark number, UK00003252243.

Sub-identities

Each sub-brand is distinctive, while also retaining assets of the main visual identity, such as in the samples below.





Stepwise logo



Retired Ministers Housing Society logo

Colour palette

These colours are used to identify the Church.

- CMYK: 100-0-0-0 (print)
- Pantone: Cyan Blue (print)
- RGB: 0-153-255 (web/digital)
- Hex: #0099FF (web/digital)

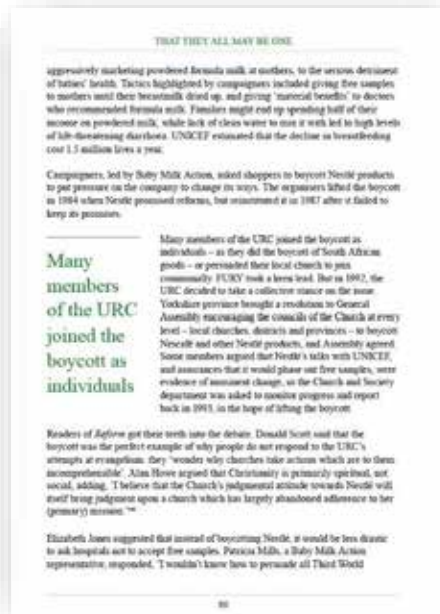


Typography

The way you style or shape your text is known as typography. To make the work of the URC appear professional, it's best to use a consistent typeface throughout everything produced. We advise utilising the **clear print standard** of Arial 12pt on 1.15 spacing in order to make the URCs work as accessible to people with different abilities as possible. Use of Times New Roman is also acceptable.

Calibri uses less ink, but the size of the font is smaller than Arial, which is recommended by charities such as **The Sensory Trust**. Pull quotes, illustrations, and other design elements can be used to break up pages of text-heavy publications and keep readers' interest. Here are a few URC book examples that make use of white space, visuals, and simple typography.





Pull quotes are a good way to break up long passages of text since they encourage reader participation. Also consider the contrast between backgrounds and type. As a general rule use dark type on a light background.

Tip: A colour contrast analyser (CCA) [free to download] may be beneficial when employing text on coloured backgrounds, to determine if colours pass accessibility criteria. Using CCAs, you can modify your content to make it more accessible to users with vision impairments such as poor vision and colour blindness.

For an example of a typical A4 Word document and to download templates visit: www.urb.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/urb-visual-identity-guide

Style guide

Using a style guide is essential to ensuring that various authors produce improved communications in a clear and unified manner since it ensures consistency both within and between publications. For anybody who reads or develops documentation for the Church, the URC style guide serves as both a reference resource and a training tool: www.urb.org.uk/house-style



Imagery

An image can influence how a user feels, thinks, or behaves while also improving the appeal of your content.

It may demonstrate how welcoming and inclusive your church is. Illustrations, iconography, photography, video content, and any spokespeople who serve as the "image" in action, are all examples of imagery.



For you to use in your church materials, the URC Communications staff has gathered a range of photographs and placed them onto the URC Flickr website. These are free to use within churches: [flic.kr/s/aHsmNAhoEM](https://www.flickr.com/photos/urc-communications/)

For guidance on taking good photographs see www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/taking-great-photos-in-church



Tip: Use only photos that appear to be authentic and not staged, with as much diversity as possible



Tip: When taking photos on a smartphone, first clean the lens, then focus the camera by tapping on the subject. When taking a photo in low light, turn on the flash and hold the camera steady.

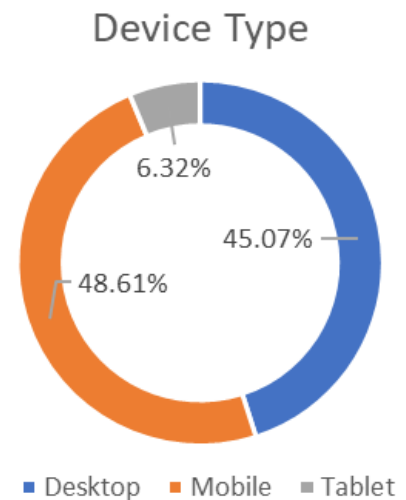
When taking photographs in churches, please remember Safeguarding, GDPR and Consent. You can read more about these on the [guide from the Church of England](#).

Web and digital design

Visual identity components are commonly communicated through hero or website photographs, interface colour schemes and layouts, social media content, animations, icons, buttons, and much more. In this setting, visual identity must gently support the user in achieving their objective.

Data from the URC website from 31 January 2023, reveals an increase in mobile users over the previous 13 months.* **Smartphone users are typically younger** and read less extensively than desktop users. When creating and delivering content, it is important to keep this in mind.

* Data by Neil Hunter, Communications Team, URC website performance report, 1 November to 31 January 2023.



Upload your copy as HTML wherever possible to allow your documents to use the users' individual browser settings. Other formats, eg PDF files, may make it more difficult for users to identify, access, and maintain your material, as they may not be as compatible with assistive technologies like screen readers (see www.gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/07/16/why-gov-uk-content-should-be-published-in-html-and-not-pdf/).

Keep a careful eye on your analytics and constantly examine your posts to see what has and has not worked to engage readers.

Tip: The sermon is the mechanism that creates content in your church. This occurs every day in the ministry of your church; people receive value, and inspirational tales are being told. Find a technique to record these events on camera so you can use them as social media material.

When taking videos in churches, please remember Safeguarding, GDPR and Consent. You can read more about these on the **guide from the Church of England**.

Useful guidelines

The United Reformed Church Social Media Guidelines and Digital Charter: www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/getting-your-church-online/social-media-guidelines-and-digital-charter/

Writing for the web: www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/getting-your-church-online/writing-for-the-web



A variety of other media information can also be found here: www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/getting-your-church-online/

Where to start

- Select your audience and target the individual rather than a group.
- Explore the concept of video, audio and social-only content, rather than print (with the communications team).
- Use Arial or Times New Roman 12pt on 1.15 leading.
- Simplify your document. This includes keeping fonts and Styles used basic, so that each document is transferable for web use if needed.
- Keep copy brief and to the point.
- Good headlines get people to stay longer on a page. Keep them short and punchy. The same goes for headings.
- Instead of using Word Art or Clip Art, utilise only high-quality photographs (where possible use images from URC churches). Most people will have read the captions to all the pictures first. Prior to becoming readers, your audience should be treated as viewers. Pick your pictures wisely. Be welcoming and represent diversity (see www.urc.org.uk/your-church/church-guides/portraying-diversity/).
- It's important to check that your imagery and text adheres to copyright regulations: www.urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/communications/copyright-licensing-urc-materials/
- Keep file naming conventions for photos and files concise and easy to understand when storing your work. Commas, brackets, slashes, and full stops should not be used (apart from before the end file type, ie .jpg). If necessary, hyphenate instead of using an underscore.
- Use a **Production Request (PR) form** to book work in – or your request may be lost within the email system!
 - ✓ Fill ALL sections of the PR form in – It saves lots of emails later!
 - ✓ Allow adequate proofing time for both design and copy (factor in your annual leave and the fact that we don't all work weekends too.)
 - ✓ Supply high quality images (do not supply them embedded in Word files)
 - ✓ Create realistic deadlines – and stick to them! (Avoid entering ASAP in the field, as you will always be at the back of the line!)
 - ✓ Check quotations fully before signing off – especially paper thickness and delivery date (and make sure you are there to receive delivery!)

Once you have a new product don't forget to promote it! Tell everyone about it: when it's being published, how it can be accessed and what's great about it.

Examples / templates

Here are some examples of recommended layout and logo placement.



Letterhead



Complements slip



Business card

URC customisable banners, postcards and bookmark templates, can be found here:
www.cpo.org.uk/urc.html

Other URC templates, including a cross stitch and knitting/crochet pattern of the URC cross, are available on a new downloads page on the URC website:
www.urc.org.uk/your-church/resource-downloads/

Tip: Make use of social media and include the icons in your marketing material.



Contact details

If you have any questions about the URCs design and digital visual identity, please contact our Communications Team.

020 7916 2020

graphics@urc.org.uk

Paper D1

Recruitment of a Principal, Westminster College, Cambridge

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates alan.yates@urc.org.uk The Revd Jenny Mills jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision on proposed resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 20 Assembly resolves to alter the guidance given in Resolution 17 of 2014 so that the post of Principal of Westminster College shall be open to members of the United Reformed Church and to members of those Churches which belong to one or more of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Recruitment of a Principal at Westminster College, Cambridge and amending the current restrictions.
Main points	The General Assembly sets the parameters within which the appointment of a Principal can be made, but the responsibility for recruiting and appointing a Principal has been delegated to the Governing Body. The Governing Body would like to broaden the pool from which a Principal can be appointed and propose changes to enable this.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 17 [2(d)] of General Assembly 2014 (see Assembly Record (2014), pp. 13-14) Resolution 43 of General Assembly 2018 (see Assembly Record (2018), p. 14).
Consultation has taken place with...	The Governors of Westminster College, Cambridge Education and Learning Committee The Secretary for Ministries The General Secretary Andy Middleton, Legal Adviser.

Summary of impact

Financial	Any financial impact would be on the budget of Westminster College.
External (eg ecumenical)	The breadth of potential applicants would be greater.

1. The Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, is one of a number of General Assembly appointments. General Assembly has set the parameters within which an appointment can be made, but the responsibility for recruiting and appointing a Principal has been delegated to the College's Governors.
2. General Assembly in 2014 resolved that the recruitment to the post of Principal should be restricted to a Minister of Word and Sacraments of the United Reformed Church or the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council (DECC), or the Council for World Mission (CWM). This currently forms the pool from which a Principal should be recruited.
3. In recent times, the role of Principal of a theological college has changed. Whereas in the past the Principal modelled the Christian ethos of the College, represented ordained Ministry of Word and Sacraments and led the College community academically, there is now more emphasis in sister institutions on the Principal acting as an advocate for the College (within and beyond the denomination), formulating strategy, taking a lead on innovation and diversifying College activity, and even fund-raising. The gifts and skills now required of a College Principal are such that they may no longer easily be found among the traditional recruitment pools as defined in the 2014 resolution.
4. Given that the pool of ministers in the URC from which the College can draw is shrinking, and that (at least) the previous two attempts to recruit drew limited interest from the other possible sources, the Governors agreed at their meeting on 2 December 2022 that the time has come to seek relief from some of these restrictions as has happened with other General Assembly appointments.
5. It is the Governors' view that, considering the challenges faced by the College, it would be prudent to broaden the pool from which a Principal can be recruited. The College would then be in a stronger position to recruit a Principal who is fully equipped to enable Westminster to flourish.
6. General Assembly in 2018 resolved that all Assembly appointments, apart from the General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, Synod Moderators and Principal of Westminster College, should be open to members of the United Reformed Church and to members of those Churches which belong to one or more of the WCRC, DECC, CWM, Action of Churches Together in Scotland, Churches Together in England, Cytûn (Churches Together in Wales), the Free Churches Group and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.
7. In the spirit of resolution 43 of General Assembly 2018, the Governors of Westminster College, with support of the Education and Learning Committee, ask General Assembly to extend the pool for recruitment to the role of Principal to include members of the URC and members of churches belonging to one or more of WCRC, DECC, CWM and the World Council of Churches. This should open

recruitment to a sufficiently wide pool of candidates from which an excellent appointment can be made.

8. Should General Assembly be willing to widen the pool from which a Principal might be recruited, then the Governors are mindful of the following points:
- Among the College's teaching staff, only the Principal's role is currently restricted to an ordained Minister of Word and Sacraments and removing that restriction, potentially, could lead to Westminster having a teaching staff team none of whom might be an ordained Minister. The Governors would therefore see it as their responsibility to ensure that, if the Principal were not an ordained Minister, then the Vice-Principal would be.
 - The Principal's job description and person specification will be written with the role of Bursar and General Manager in mind in order that the two roles, and those occupying them, complement each other.
 - In future, the role of Vice-Principal will be more clearly defined and more prescriptive, with the expectation that the Vice-Principal would complement the gifts and strengths of the Principal and ensuring that, between the posts, Westminster's Christian and specifically URC ethos is maintained and emphasised in the teaching staff and in the whole life of the College.

Paper E1

Report on ongoing work

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Salisbury, Committee Secretary david.salisbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information and discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To share with the General Assembly a summary of the committee's work since it last reported in 2021.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Equalities Committee report to General Assembly 2021 Paper E1, Report of the Affirmative Action Task Group, General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Purpose and remit

- 1.1 The Equalities Committee exists to remind the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the denomination. It does this by challenging the practice of the Church, supporting programmes and initiatives, and by listening to the voices of those who are sometimes on the margins of church or society.

Committee membership and pattern of meetings

- 2.1 The Equalities Committee currently has five members plus a convenor and secretary. In July 2022, we said thank you and goodbye to the Revd Anne Lewitt whose term as convenor came to an end, and we welcomed the Revd Naison Hove as the committee's new convenor.
- 2.2 In addition to these nominated members, we are fortunate at present to include two members of URC Youth who are the Equality and Diversity reps on the URC Youth Executive. Additionally, the Deputy General Secretary for Admin and

Resources (succeeded by the Chief Operating Officer in 2023) and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries also form part of the committee.

- 2.3 The committee normally meets on three occasions during the year. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, the committee was experimenting with virtual meetings, but since 2020 has met entirely online. This has allowed us to meet at times and on days which may not have been possible if meetings had been held in-person at Church House, thus enabling people with different needs and availability to be present and to contribute.
- 2.4 Some members of the committee represent Equalities as observers on other assembly committees with a monitoring and oversight role. This is true, particularly with Nominations, the Business Committee, Education and Learning, Ministries and Faith and Order. We have also collaborated with Church House HR when policies relating to equalities in the employment of staff have been updated.

Affirmative action towards an anti-racist church

- 3.1 The committee brought to General Assembly in 2021 a report and resolutions to encourage the church to act further on its commitment to becoming an actively anti-racist Church by addressing the racial imbalance in Assembly-appointed posts and other positions of influence in the URC. This led to the establishment of the Affirmative Action Task Group (since renamed the Positive Action Task Group) to do more work in this area and to bring further proposals to General Assembly in subsequent years.
- 3.2 An update of the task group's work was presented to General Assembly in 2022 together with a further resolution (Paper E1, Resolution 7, 2022). This paper highlighted some of the issues that the task group had identified, including the need for cross-denominational anti-racism training. Further work has been done on this and a proposal for Anti-racism training in the URC forms part of a paper being presented to Assembly this year by the Mission Committee on behalf of the Legacies of Slavery task group and in collaboration with the Positive Action Task Group.
- 3.3 The Positive Action Task Group has also collaborated with Mission, Ministries and Education and Learning Committees in drawing up plans for a conference in July 2023 called Making Spaces. The aim of this is to bring people currently occupying positions of influence and leadership together with black and ethnic minority members to explore how we might effect change.

Supporting people who are transgender, non-binary and intersex

- 4.1 The committee followed with interest the progress of St Columba's URC, Oxford, in the creation of a paid role to support the trans, non-binary and intersex community in the city and beyond. We were delighted to learn of the appointment of Chrissie Chevasutt to the post of Outreach and Development Worker with Transgender, Intersex and Non-Binary people at the beginning of 2022.
- 4.2 Chrissie was invited to speak at a meeting of the committee in February 2023 where we heard about the scope of her work, and learned first-hand of the many challenges being faced by the people with whom she is working.

- 4.3 Further to this, and troubled by the stories we heard, as well as those reported in the mainstream press, the committee is bringing a resolution to Assembly this year in support of trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people, which asserts their right to live without fear of violence and hatred, and encourages the Church to stand in solidarity with all those deeply affected by this.

Equalities and the Church Life Review

- 5.1 The interim report of the Church Life Review, which was presented at Assembly in 2022, suggested that work of the Equalities Committee might be carried out in a different way following a future restructuring and rationalisation of the church's committee structure.
- 5.2 The committee was encouraged by the voices heard at Assembly in 2022, which expressed the importance of advancing the work of equality, diversity and inclusion within the URC and encouraged the Church Life Review group to think again about some of its proposals. We also accept that more needs to be done to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into the life and fabric of the church, and that as a committee, we cannot go as far as we need to go to be truly effective.
- 5.3 Concerned that the responsibility for upholding the equalities agenda within the life of the Church might be overlooked, the committee has engaged with the Church Life Review group since Assembly 2022 and look forward to receiving its revised proposals at this meeting.

Paper E2

Affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Jo Clare-Young jo.clareyoung@gmail.com Jayne Taylor revjaynet@cantab.net David Salsbury david.salsbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 21 General Assembly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred. b) recognises the church’s failure to challenge the norms on which transphobia is built and acknowledges that sometimes it has perpetuated these norms. c) commits to furthering the church’s understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper calls upon Assembly to affirm the right of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people to live without threat of violence and hatred and commits the church to provide pastoral care and support to people within these communities.
Main points	In the light of increasing hostility toward trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people there is a need to affirm their right to dignity and respect in the life of the church and in wider society. To this end, there is a responsibility for the church to learn more about their lived realities, to offer care and to speak

	out against the threats of hatred and violence experienced by transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.
Previous relevant documents	Assembly Executive November 2021, Emergency Resolution Conversion therapy: www.tinyurl.com/j328k9tt
Consultation has taken place with...	Children's and Youth Work Committee URC Youth Executive.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Background

1. Transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming (GNC) people have always existed and are present in many societies throughout the world, from the Hijra people of India to the Waria people of Indonesia to the Two Spirit people of First Nation America.
2. Intersex people, i.e. people born with physical or chromosomal traits that do not fit typical binary characteristics of male or female bodies, are estimated to make up 1.7% of the global population (OHCHR, 2019).
3. Furthermore, there is an evolving scientific consensus of a biological basis for diverse gender identities. For example, evidence suggests that identical twins are more likely to both experience transgender identity as compared to non-identical twins, implying a genetic basis (Endocrine Society, 2020).

Hostility

4. There has been a growing hostility towards trans, non-binary and GNC people. One example of this is how access to gender appropriate spaces and healthcare has recently become a contentious issue. The Equality Act (2010) offers some protections to trans, non-binary and GNC people but these are being called into question with suggestions that the Act may be changed in ways that will have a negative impact on trans, non-binary and GNC people.
5. In response to the brutal killing of the trans teenager Brianna Ghey in February 2023, the Rt Hon Ben Bradshaw MP reported to parliament (March 2023) that there had been a 56% rise in hate crime against trans, non-binary and GNC people since last year.

The URC response

6. In April 2022, the Revd Clare Downing, as Moderator of General Assembly, endorsed a letter, produced by church leaders arguing that trans, non-binary and GNC people should be included in the government's planned ban on conversion therapy, reinforcing an emergency resolution of Assembly Executive in November 2021.
7. In 2022, St Columba's United Reformed Church in Oxford was the first church in the UK to appoint an outreach worker for the trans, intersex and GNC communities, funded by the local church, the Wessex Synod Trust, the Legacies Fund and Discipleship Development Fund of the United Reformed Church.

8. The URC has a clear imperative to oppose injustice wherever it is experienced, and trans, non-binary and GNC people have become under increasing attack in the media. The effect of this is that trans, non-binary and GNC people feel increasingly unsafe in their day-to-day lives. Churches should provide a safe haven for these communities and yet the perception, as well as the reality, for trans, non-binary and GNC people is, in some instances, far from certain.
9. This has been a live issue for URC Youth Executive and Youth Assembly for several years. Concerned about the discrimination that young people were experiencing because of their gender and sexual identity, Youth Assembly, in 2023, passed a resolution asking the Youth Executive to investigate the setting up of a centralised resource to provide support and care for anyone who identifies as part of the LGBT+ community in the URC, including trans, non-binary and GNC people who have experienced or are experiencing discrimination.
10. The Children's and Youth Work Committee would also welcome a joined-up conversation that enabled the whole church, across the breadth of theological views and experience, to move forward positively and embody Christ in our pastoral care for all.

References

- Transgender health: An Endocrine Society position statement. Endocrine Society, 2020.
www.tinyurl.com/38hk6c7h
- Intersex people: OHCHR and the human rights of LGBTI people. United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).
www.tinyurl.com/y6m4fvr6
- An introduction to the Equality Act 2010. Equality and Human Rights Commission.
www.tinyurl.com/yktuvp2d
- Mr Ben Bradshaw. Transphobia and Hate Crimes against Trans People. Hansard Vol 729. 8 March 2023.
www.tinyurl.com/36a5phef
- Trans exclusion from conversion therapy ban is unfair. The United Reformed Church, April 2022.
www.tinyurl.com/45etdrwp
- Emergency Resolution – Conversion therapy. URC Assembly Executive Nov 2021.
www.tinyurl.com/j328k9tt
- Oxford church appoints outreach worker for Transgender, Intersex and non-binary communities. The United Reformed Church, March 2022.
www.tinyurl.com/ywasedc3
- URC Youth Assembly 2023 Round Up, Resolution 9
www.tinyurl.com/yw7zwvvn

Paper G1

General Report 2022 to 2023

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the central budgets and other finance-related areas of work over the past year.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The M&M Fund 2022 results were considerably better than the 2022 budget. 2. The Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund had a healthy balance at the end of 2022. 3. Other matters considered by the Finance Committee this year are noted. 4. The Investment Committee and Pensions Committee are reported on. 5. The extensive work of the Pensions Review Group since General Assembly 2022 is reviewed.
Previous relevant documents	Finance Committee papers for General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Secretary for Church and Society; The Legacies of Slavery Task Group; The URC Trust; Synods/Synod Trusts; all active and prospective members of the two defined benefit pension schemes; Officers of General Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	Nothing new in the report itself.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Financial results

1. The appendix to this report sets out the 2022 income and expenditure statement for the URC M&M fund and the budget agreed at the November 2022 Assembly Executive for 2023.
2. 2022 income turned out to be fully £811k above budget at £18.664 million. The main reasons for this were that M&M contributions by local churches and Synods exceeded the Synods' original estimates by almost £540k and we

received significantly more than we had been advised was likely from the Congregational Memorial Hall Trust. We were grateful for both those outcomes. The 'Other income' category was also well above budget because the budget disregarded the income and costs of the 2022 Ministers' Gathering, which was expected to roughly break even. The income from the event under this heading is counter-balanced by the additional expenditure under the 'Committee and other meeting costs' category.

3. Despite this unbudgeted item of expenditure, total expenditure (before an extraordinary payment) was still slightly under budget at £20.638 million. The two major areas of overspend were 'Student Fees and Support' and 'Professional and Consultancy fees'. The former is always difficult to quantify since, when the budget is set, it is not known how many new students will be requiring support in the following academic year. The £100k overspend on the latter is largely attributable to legal and consultancy costs incurred in relation to considering changes to URC pension arrangements (of which more later).
4. The extraordinary payment was a one-off gesture of good will towards ministers and 'Church House' employees voted for by General Assembly 2022. After taking this payment into account, the final result for the year was a deficit of £2.26 million – £425k below the budgeted deficit which had been agreed because of the significant ministers' pension cost increase, which was unavoidable last year.
5. The 2023 budget income is almost the same as the 2022 budget figure, with expenditure almost £2 million lower than the previous year figure. The big anticipated changes were return of the pensions costs to 2021 levels but offset by a considerable increase in stipends and salaries to reflect then current inflation.
6. As reported last year, a new Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund came into being with extremely generous commitments from the Synods to tackling the deficit in the Ministers' Pension Fund ('MPF'). After making the agreed deficit recovery payments to the MPF, the restricted fund balance stood at almost £6.8 million at 31 December 2022. Thank you to all the Synods for their ongoing support in tackling this issue.

Church House damp issue

7. We reported last year that there was evidence of two areas of damp penetration in the lower ground floor. The committee has received updates about this at each of our meetings, but the matter has not yet been resolved.

Legacy fund

8. Bequests to the central United Reformed Church which are not earmarked for specific purposes are added to the legacy fund. Currently, the fund is in a position to award grants of approximately £150k a year, though only £54k was committed or paid to innovative mission projects in the year. We suspect this is an ongoing result of the pandemic.

Church building fund

9. Similarly, grants made from the church building fund via the inter-synod-resource-sharing process amounted to £13k in 2022, although the fund had about £150k available to support churches undertaking certain types of building development.

Other Finance Committee considerations in the past year

10. Separate papers are before this General Assembly reflecting our consideration of the need for a benevolent fund for retired ministers; an energy crisis fund for churches; and how to calculate target numbers for stipendiary ministers.
11. General Assembly 2022 asked us to reconsider car travel expenses and Assembly Executive agreed our proposal (taking account of environmental considerations) to leave the rate paid when only the driver is in the vehicle unchanged, but to offer an additional 5 pence per mile for each passenger in the car.
12. The committee also agreed who would represent us on the URC Environmental Task Group and outlined our initial thinking about our committee's contribution to meeting the URC's net-zero carbon target.
13. We considered a request to give further financial support to the Churches Mutual Credit Union and have kept abreast of work being undertaken by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group and the URC Church Life Review group.

URC Investment Committee

14. We remain grateful to the members of the URC Investment Committee who oversee the work of, and results achieved by, our investment managers in managing the investments held by the URC Trust (and the MPF). The Investment Committee with the Board of the URC Ministers' Pensions Trust ('URCMPT') completed a review of the consultancy arrangements in support for the MPF, which led to appointment of advisors who will help the URCMPT reconsider its investment strategy.

URC Pensions Committee

15. This sub-committee of Finance Committee has not had a convenor for most of the past year and in that time did not meet formally until April 2023. However, most of the Pensions Committee's members have also been members of the Pensions Review Group ('PRG') – a hybrid body set up by the Pensions Committee together with members of the Finance Committee and chaired by the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources) - with a remit to reconsider the URC's pension arrangements in view of the dramatically increasing costs which the two defined benefit schemes entailed. The subsequent paragraphs of this report set out what the PRG has been doing over the past 12 months and the results. The April 2023 meeting of the Pensions Committee received a more detailed report of this activity and has taken ownership of the outcomes going forward. It is hoped that General Assembly will fill the vacancy for a convenor of the Committee.
16. The July 2022 General Assembly heard the PRG's proposals for finalising the closure to future accrual of the two existing defined benefit pension schemes and for establishing a single new defined contribution pensions scheme for office holders and employees. General Assembly gave the go ahead for consultation with the active scheme members of both schemes on the basis of the proposals as outlined in GA 2022 Paper G5, but with the addition of some ill health benefits for employees.
17. It took some time to establish what such an additional benefit might look like and how it might be paid for and then to complete all the documentation required to inform the consultation exercise to the satisfaction of the legal requirements.

Eventually the consultation ran from 22 September to 22 November 2022. In addition to the written documentation sent out to all active members, the consultation involved material on the website of the provider of services to the new scheme (Aon), a number of online or face-to-face seminars and question and answer sessions, and people were also encouraged to ask questions in writing.

18. Assembly Executive received an oral report that, although lots of questions had been asked during the consultation process, very few people submitted any responses to the consultation itself and most of those were not expressing any concern about the actual proposals. The PRG met with the other employers in the lay staff scheme and, after consideration of one issue, it was decided to recommend to the Officers of Assembly that the new scheme should be implemented as outlined in the consultation documents, but with a slight delay to the start date. As authorised by General Assembly, the Assembly Officers agreed to closure to future accrual of the two existing schemes and the finalisation of the new scheme arrangements. When people were advised of this decision in writing, further opportunities were offered to ask questions about the new arrangements at online sessions.
19. The original target date for the changes had been closure of the existing schemes to accrual at the end of December 2022 and commencement of the new scheme from 1 January 2023. For a number of reasons – particularly the need for more consultation with Synods about their wishes re their staff and the need to work round a legal complication in relation to life insurance cover for the death in service benefits to be offered alongside the new scheme – the two existing schemes did not close until 28 February 2023 and the new scheme, to be known as the United Reformed Church Pension Plan, started on 1 March 2023. This means the higher costs of the MPF scheme continued into early 2023.
20. The Finance Committee wants to take this opportunity on behalf of the URC as a whole to recognise the considerable effort put in by, and strain placed upon, many people involved over the past few years in considering and planning the change and wishes to express thanks for this to the following people involved in some way in the work undertaken by the PRG or Church House staff: Jane Baird, Chris Evans, Vaughan Griffiths, Ian Hardie, Gordon Justham, David Martin, Richard Nunn, John Piper, Joao Rodrigues, Rob Seaman, Mary Steele and Lyndon Thomas. Thanks too to all the Synod and/or Synod Trust office holders and employees who have also been heavily involved.

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
URC M&M FUND
For the year ended 31 December 2022

Appendix

TOTAL	Actual 2022	Budget 2022	Budget 2023
	£	£	£
Income			
Income from Churches & Synods	16,685,499	16,148,127	16,259,240
Donations, Legacies & Grants	221,718	109,950	152,000
Income from training & academic activities	1,708	1,000	1,000
Other income	104,851	12,000	12,000
Income from Investments	1,231,510	1,199,000	1,189,000
Income from Trading Activities	201,539	219,500	216,900
Property income	217,032	163,770	162,550
Total Income	18,663,857	17,853,347	17,992,690
Expenditure			
Stipends & associated costs	13,825,528	13,876,801	12,467,786
Other Minister costs	125,089	116,800	143,600
Salaries & associated costs	2,687,688	2,792,737	2,612,190
RCL Support	676,779	683,665	694,580
Student Fees & Support	724,218	566,910	506,000
Discipleship development	4,479	10,500	0
Mission Costs	21,139	58,500	48,500
Programme expenditure	289,222	257,450	277,350
Committee & other meeting costs	298,520	227,150	144,850
Grants	412,271	521,520	390,760
Travel, accomodation & subsistence	152,731	170,400	137,700
Office & other staff costs	283,279	269,350	268,150
Professional & Consultancy fees	354,963	254,200	213,850
Telecoms	30,320	33,430	33,000
Facilities & buildings costs	82,263	144,700	140,500
IT Costs	198,570	206,340	205,100
Cost of sales	183,491	137,500	150,000
Sundries	16,837	12,250	11,500
Depreciation	70,119	74,200	91,598
Irrecoverable VAT	200,448	120,000	120,000
Total expenditure	20,637,955	20,534,402	18,657,014
Net (surplus)/expenditure (before cost of living pmt)	1,974,098	2,681,056	664,324
Extraordinary cost of living payment	281,870	0	0
Net (surplus)/expenditure (after cost of living pmt)	2,255,969	2,681,056	0

Paper G2

URC Trust Accounts 2022

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Consider the resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 22 General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2022.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To draw General Assembly's attention to the (hoped for) availability of the audited accounts for 2022 and accompanying Trustees' report.
Main points	It is likely, but not certain, that the accounts will be available to members before the paper is due to be discussed at General Assembly. The paper indicates what it is hoped will happen if that proves unachievable.
Previous relevant documents	Audited accounts for 2021 which are available on the website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust; the General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	Simply noting the availability of the accounts has no financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report provides a publicly available summary of the Church's activities and financial state.

1. Normally both the Finance Committee and the URC Trust would have considered the findings of the audit and agreed to sign off the Trustees report etc before this paper for General Assembly is written. However, timings this year are such that the audit is not yet complete.
2. It is anticipated that the audit results will enable the URC Trust to finalise its 2022 report and financial statements in time for the accounts to be available online (at www.urc.org.uk/trustees-report-and-financial-statements/) during June, giving sufficient time for members of General Assembly to consider them. If that proves to be the case, the Draft resolution will be considered at General Assembly.

3. If for any reason the accounts are not available online before General Assembly meets, the Treasurer will seek to withdraw the paper from consideration by members of General Assembly.

Paper G3

Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Discussion and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 23 General Assembly encourages the Finance Committee, working with others, to continue developing and resourcing a URC Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund, taking account of views expressed about the report to General Assembly 2023 during the discussion of that report.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the work done to date re the need for and potential scope of a benevolent fund for retired ministers.
Main points	Meetings called by the Finance Committee have concluded that there is a need for a retired ministers' benevolent fund. Suggested criteria for eligibility to apply to the fund have been developed. Final conclusions have not been reached on the required size of the fund and how it might be resourced. General Assembly is invited to express its view on the work to date and to encourage further work to be undertaken in the light of the Assembly discussion.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G3 for General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee convenor; Ministries Committee Secretary; General Secretary; Synod Moderators and representatives of Synods/Synod Trusts and the URC Trust.

Summary of impact

Financial	No immediate cost; but resourcing the fund will require an as yet undecided level of financial commitment from Synods/URC Trust in due course.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. General Assembly 2022 instructed the Finance Committee to bring together a wide-ranging group to consider:
 - whether a benevolent fund might be the right way to provide support to retired ministers in particular financial difficulties; and if so
 - in what circumstances might ministers be eligible for support from such a fund; and
 - what should be its nature and size and how might it be resourced;with a report of the group's work and/or conclusions to be presented to the 2023 General Assembly.
2. Before bringing the group together, the Finance Committee undertook some basic research into other potential sources of support both within the URC and from external funds which give financial support to ministers in certain circumstances. This research suggested that there was the potential for only patchy support at best from within the URC and significant gaps in the likelihood of external support from the specialist funds considered.
3. The group met twice. At the first meeting it was agreed that Paper G3 presented to General Assembly in 2022 had identified one particular subset of retired ministers who indeed might be in need of financial assistance because of their personal financial circumstances. It was considered possible that other sub-sets might exist, but it was less easy to describe in generic terms what their circumstances might be. It was agreed that a benevolent fund was needed and that a second meeting should be held to pursue the topic.
4. The second meeting concluded that it was not possible to determine what size of fund might be needed until the potential population requiring support had been clarified, but a number of Synods expressed willingness to contribute to the fund in due course. It was also agreed that the fund needed to be administered centrally using agreed denomination-wide criteria for support but with input from Synods in determining the candidates for support. Finally, it was agreed that the best way of delineating who might be supported from such a fund was to develop principles and criteria for determining eligibility, rather than to try to identify specific sub-groups of retired ministers to be supported. A working group – consisting of Romilly Micklem, Nicola Furley-Smith and David Grosch-Miller – was tasked with developing such criteria.
5. Their conclusions are set out as an appendix to this report. The working group's conclusions had not been seen or discussed by the wider group at the time of writing this report.
6. The working group added that, although not strictly within its remit: “we feel that since the current level of need is completely unknown, the URC Trust should in the first instance cover the costs of the Fund. Synods should be asked to resolve to support the Fund in principle and to commit to offer contributions in the future, as the funding requirement becomes clearer.”
7. This too has not yet been discussed by the wider group, the Finance Committee or the URC Trust.

8. Finally, the working group wrote: “We also feel it is important to ensure clear ongoing communication, both at Assembly and at Synod level, with current and future retirees about where they can properly seek advice and help with accessing statutory funding and benefits, eg, Age UK; Citizens’ Advice.”
9. We regret that it has not been possible to bring final recommendations to General Assembly, particularly re the fund’s “nature and size and how it might be resourced”.
10. We would welcome discussion of the report on the floor of General Assembly and invite members of Assembly to support the resolution encouraging the Finance Committee and others to take forward this work in the light of that discussion.

Appendix

The principles and criteria developed by the working group:

- The Fund must be equally applicable and accessible across the whole URC family (no postcode lottery).
- The Fund must be a last resort: all statutory sources of benefits etc must have been explored and claimed where possible.
- The Fund must be for truly exceptional cases only, where there is genuine hardship because of a shortfall in pension provision (not because of liberality or foolishness in spending). It is not there to provide a guarantee of a universal minimum pension for all ministers.
- Overall household income should be taken into account in assessing hardship (not just the minister's income).
- The Fund is for making up a shortfall in income over a period of at least a year. It is not for covering one-off needs such as car repair bills or replacement of white goods, for which Synod welfare funds are generally available.
- Awards from the Fund should be reviewed annually: they will not be 'lifetime' payments.
- Awards from the Fund must be discretionary and decided on a case-by-case basis: eligibility to apply for an award does not equate to entitlement to receive one.
- There needs to be an income threshold for eligibility (ie, income above the threshold disqualifies an application to the Fund). We suggest that this should be the sum of 50% of the current in-service stipend and the full standard state pension.
- There should be an annual cap on the maximum payable under the scheme in each case. We suggest that this should be 50% of the current in-service stipend.
- The retired minister's Synod of residence must be responsible for assessing eligibility in the first instance and for supporting and forwarding applications to the Fund.

Paper G4

Churches' Energy Crisis Fund

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	URC response to the rising energy costs facing churches.
Main points	<p>It is intended to establish a fund in response to the energy crisis facing churches.</p> <p>While some of the fund will be used to help churches with general energy bills in Synods which are unable to provide that type of support on their own, most of the fund will be used to support energy saving projects being undertaken by mission-oriented churches.</p> <p>The URC Trust has contributed £2 million to the fund, but contribution levels from most Synods are not yet known.</p> <p>A working group is looking at qualifying criteria for accessing the fund and the process required.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Paper G2 for 2022 Assembly Executive.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust; Synod Moderators and treasurers; Synod representatives.

Summary of impact

Financial	In November 2022, Assembly Executive agreed that £2 million be taken from the URC Trust reserves to “pump prime” the new fund. Contributions from the Synods are expected, but most have not yet indicated their intended level of support.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. During 2022, it became clear that many churches faced dramatic increases in the costs of the energy they use, in many cases of the order of 200% or more. When Finance Committee considered this challenge facing churches, we recognised that such cost increases had the potential to push some otherwise viable congregations towards closure. The committee called for a round-table discussion involving Synod Moderators and Synod finance people to explore the scope for establishing a fund to help with energy costs and/or energy saving projects of otherwise viable and mission-oriented churches. It was recognised that although many Synods were in a position to react to this crisis on their own, that was not true of them all.
2. The committee suggested to the URC Trust that an appeal for help in setting up such a fund would be best received by the Synods if there was a clear signal that the Church centrally was fully behind the idea of the fund. Accordingly, the URC Trust agreed that the sum of £2 million be made available from its reserves as 'seed' money for the new fund. When Assembly Executive met in November 2022 it approved that decision by the Trust.
3. The round-table meeting took place in December 2022 at which there was enthusiastic endorsement for the establishment of such a fund, with each Synod agreeing to identify a representative to take consideration of the nature and scope of the fund forward.
4. It took some time for all the representatives to be chosen but, following the appointment of the final Synod representatives, the group met online on 3 March 2023.
5. The group felt that the denomination needs to take a strategic view on how it uses its buildings for mission: but that this was beyond our remit.
6. On balance, the group concluded that the bulk of the fund should be used for support of those Synods which were not able to offer energy project funding to their own churches or which were not able to do so at the level they would wish. Although there might be a case for extending the scope of the fund to cover manse, this was seen as being too difficult – especially given the potential tax implications for ministers.
7. However, some money (15% was mentioned, but that is still to be finally determined) should be earmarked in the first instance for more general energy bill crisis support of churches in Synods where that might be required. (In fact, one Synod has already received some money for this purpose from the URC Trust 'seed' money.)
8. Although the idea of using the Inter-Synod-Resource-Sharing ('ISRS') mechanism and structure to administer the fund had its attractions, the majority of the group felt that, in practice, the ISRS system was unlikely to be able to take on that role. Consequently, it was thought likely that the fund will end up being held at the centre of the denomination, but will be overseen by a small group of people drawn from Synods, in the main.
9. At the meeting one person expressed the hope that the fund might reach £4 million or £5 million; but no decision was taken on that: with many wanting to

understand the scope of the what the fund would do more clearly. A working group to be coordinated by John Dennison of Southern Synod was identified and tasked with exploring what mechanisms or procedures might be required for accessing the fund and any qualifying criteria.

10. That working group gathered factual information about existing Synod efforts in this area and then met for the first time on 30 March. The working group's interim report is attached as an appendix to this paper.
11. Although it was recognised that final decision about the level of individual Synod contributions (if any) to the fund could not be made at that stage, group members were asked to attempt to get some early indication of the potential level of support for the fund from their Synod. At the time of writing only three Synods – Eastern, West Midlands and South Western – have suggested a ballpark figure. The group recognised that it was impossible to ensure 'fairness' in absolute terms, there was a hope that Synods might be willing to give (roughly) in line with their relative wealth. A second sub-group was formed to consider the initial offers from Synods in the first instance in terms of 'feel fair' contribution levels. In view of the low response rate from Synods to date, that group has not yet been called into action.

Appendix

Report to the URC Finance Committee regarding procedure to access Energy Crisis Funding

At the 3 March Synod representatives meeting, two sub-groups were established, the Procedure Group being one of them. On 13 March, a questionnaire was sent to all 13 Synods seeking information on their current provisions for immediate emergency energy crisis funding and for longer term energy project funding. Nine of the Synods responded with very helpful information. While several Synods provided a set amount of emergency funding to every church in its' Synod, most provided funds upon application. For the latter group, most had, at the time of the response, experienced a fairly low number of requests for assistance.

The first meeting of the Group was held on 30 March. The Group stated that:

- It was important that the Group worked closely with the Net Zero Task Group to ensure that the two groups' work did not overlap.
- The Fund should, initially, have a defined period of existence: two to three years for the crisis funding and three to five years for the energy project funding.
- The application process should be as simple as possible.
- Synod supporting information, which may reduce some of the committee's workload and recognises the Synods' primary responsibility.

Questions were raised as to linking funding to:

- a church's mission
- the church's potential longevity
- membership of the Eco-Church program to be encouraged.

The biggest questions related to:

- Equitable distribution of grants to those Synods seeking funding.
- Timing of the meetings of the grant-making body.
- Start date of the funding process. (Depends on response of every Synod to funding/use of Fund).

We will be scheduling a further meeting shortly.

John Denison
24 April 2023

Paper G5

Stipendiary Ministry target numbers

Finance and Ministries Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 24 General Assembly resolves that going forward the target number of stipendiary ministers should be set so that the direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget moves in line with the most recent changes in M&M giving, which are known before the start of each relevant year.</p> <p>Resolution 25 Recognising that further work is required to ensure this policy is introduced at an appropriate time and in a way which is workable for Ministries Committee’s planning purposes, General Assembly directs that the disregard of the 2012 policy by the Finance Committee and URC Trust in preparing the 2023 budget should be extended to apply also to the 2024 budget with firm proposals for the date of introduction of the new policy and details of its implementation being brought for consideration by the 2024 General Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To consider replacement of the existing (suspended) policy for calculating the target number of stipendiary ministers and the timing of making such a change.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 19 of the 2012 General Assembly and related note (2012 Book of Reports, page 252); Paragraph 8 of the Finance Committee report to that General Assembly (2012 Book of Reports, page 103); Ministries Committee report on ‘Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment’ (2016 Book of Reports, pages 154 to 161); Paper G-H 1 for 2021 General Assembly.

Consultation has taken place with...	
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Summary of impact

Financial	The target number is intended to ensure that Ministries is not deploying more ministers than can be afforded. In practice, historically the Church has been able to afford more ministers than have been available.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. The 2021 General Assembly directed that, in view of the impacts of coronavirus on the finances of the Church and of unprecedented additional pension contributions on the direct cost of stipendiary ministry, “in preparing the 2022 and 2023 budgets for the Church the Finance Committee and the URC Trust [should] disregard resolution 19 of the 2012 General Assembly; and the Finance and Ministries Committees [should] bring their suggested replacement for the 2012 resolution to the 2023 General Assembly”. This paper is in response to the second part of that resolution.

Background

2. Resolution 19 of the 2012 Assembly reads “General Assembly directs that for 2013 and until further notice, the target number of stipendiary ministers should be set so that the direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget moves in line with the trend in overall membership numbers across the Church.”
3. The 2012 policy replaced one dating from 2003. That policy spoke about the target number of ministers changing by the same percentage as Church membership changed. The problem with the 2003 approach, which was identified in 2012, was that the cost of each minister had been rising due to stipend increases and higher pension contributions; so, the same number of ministers could not be afforded as before. The 2012 policy addressed this by focusing on the direct costs of stipendiary ministry, rather than directly on the number of ministers.
4. It is clear from the Finance Committee report to the 2012 Assembly that they believed the 2012 resolution revised the policy on stipendiary ministry numbers “to bring the costs in line with what the local churches feel able to give to M&M”. However, paper G-H 1 for the 2021 Assembly observed that that is not what the 2012 resolution does. It would only have that effect if the movement in M&M contributions and the changes in membership numbers were on an identical trajectory. By 2021 it had become clear that membership number movements were a very imperfect proxy for changes in the level of M&M giving. Between 2012 and 2020 membership numbers had dropped by an average of roughly 4.7% each year: but M&M giving had dropped at a much slower rate, averaging 1.4%.
5. In 2016, General Assembly learned of the results of some work undertaken jointly by Ministries and Finance Committee to project both the target number of

stipendiary ministers which the 2012 policy indicated could be afforded and the actual number of stipendiary ministers predicted to be available for service for the years down to 2025.

6. One of the assumptions used in arriving at the 2016 projections was that URC membership would continue to fall at the same 3.2% rate as it had over the previous five years. In fact, the 2021 Assembly paper pointed out, the fall in membership was greater than 3.2% in every subsequent year down to 2020.
7. Consequently, in terms of the wording of the 2012 policy, the 2016 projections have overstated the target number of ministers which were 'affordable'. On the other hand, looking at the apparent intention of the 2012 policy to reflect movements in the levels of M&M contributions, the projections understated the target number, since the 3.2% used was greater than the reduction in M&M contributions in all but one of the subsequent years to 2020.
8. The 2021 Assembly paper noted that, because the 2016 projections had anticipated that in every year down to 2025 the available number of stipendiary ministers would be fewer than the 'affordable' number provide for by the 2012 formula, the Ministries' budget for each subsequent year had been drawn up with a focus on the predicted number of ministers and what they would cost.
9. However, the 2021 paper was triggered mainly by the realisation that the impact of the gigantic increase in the costs of ministers' pensions forecast for 2022 could have led to a drastic cut in the number of ministers if the 2012 policy had been followed.
10. In summary, paper G-H 1 for the 2021 General Assembly argued that the 2012 policy "never did what it was apparently intended to do; is out of line with current practice in calculating the Ministries' budget; and would lead to imminent cuts to the target number of stipendiary ministers in an endeavour to stay within its parameters". General Assembly was persuaded to allow the 2012 policy to be disregarded when setting the budgets for 2022 and 2023 with a suggested revised policy being brought to the 2023 General Assembly.

The suggested new policy

11. Steps taken during the past two years have considerably reduced the potential for ministers' pension cost changes to impact on the costs of stipendiary ministry in future.
 - Closure of the defined benefit ministers' pension scheme to future accrual and its replacement by a defined contribution scheme has removed much of the unpredictability about movements in future pension costs.
 - The closure of the previous scheme combined with the steps taken to address the existing and anticipated deficit related to that scheme through a separate restricted fund limits the potential exposure of the M&M fund to future pension deficit issues.
12. Consequently, implementation of a revised policy now, does not carry the same risks as observing the existing (suspended) policy would have done during the past two years.

13. It is the view of both Ministries and Finance Committees that what the 2012 policy was intended to do – ie, maintain a co-relation between M&M giving and the cost of stipendiary ministry – was entirely sensible and prudent but, rather than use a proxy for movements in M&M giving, that giving itself needs to be at the heart of the formula. The first resolution above seeks your assent to that approach.
14. That resolution is not precise about when and how this revised policy might take effect.
15. Because the Finance Committee has devoted so much of its resources to tackling pension matters during the past two years, little time has been devoted to ensuring that the direct costs of stipendiary ministry at present are being captured comprehensively for the purpose of applying this suggested policy and for bottoming out the implications of the proposed new policy for the needs of the Ministries Committee in trying to look forward, when the policy essentially looks back to known past trends. That is why the second resolution above gives some time and scope for further discussion between the two committees in considering precisely when this policy will apply in relation to the actual current cost of the actual number of ministers available at present and whether there is scope for devising new projections to assist Ministries to plan going forward.
16. Accordingly, the two committees invite General Assembly to pass both the resolutions set out at the start of this paper.

Paper G6

The URC Legacy Fund

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Ian Hardie, Treasurer ianzhardie@googlemail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly resolves that half of the current balance in the URC Legacy Fund be transferred to the Annenberg Fund with a view to that latter fund being available to meet expenditure of Church Life Review projects on external expertise and/or capacity building, such as temporary additional staffing.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To establish how certain future possible Church Life Review ('CLR') project expenditure might be funded.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Finance Committee and URC Trust have agreed to redesignate the Annenberg Fund to enable its money to be used for specific CLR purposes. 2. Because the money in that fund may be insufficient for all the expenditure which might be required, they also suggest that half of the current balance in the Legacy Fund be transferred to the Annenberg Fund to be available for this purpose also. 3. Although the committee believes the basis on which the Legacy Fund was established allows them to do that without the need for approval, in view of the limited way in which the fund has been used in recent years, they seek explicit approval from General Assembly for their proposal.
Previous relevant documents	Minutes of January 2008 Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretariat and The URC Trust.

Summary of impact

Financial	The resolution will enable the Church to use some of the money currently in a designated fund to progress the Church Life Review project. If the money did not come from this
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	source, it would need to come from the already hard-pressed M&M fund budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. The paper before this General Assembly from the Church Life Review ('CLR') Group outlines its work to date and recommends further work being done re certain aspects of Church life and structures. A number of these suggested explorations or evaluations would benefit from input from external experts and/or capacity building measures, such as temporary additional staff input to enable the work to be undertaken most effectively.
2. Finance Committee has not attempted to prejudge the decisions of General Assembly about any of these proposals: but has considered how they might be afforded were General Assembly minded to agree to take some, or all of them, forward. In view of the stresses on the M&M budget, the committee has considered whether there are other funds which might be utilised instead.
3. The United Reformed Church Trust ('URC Trust') holds on behalf of the Church a designated fund named the Annenberg Fund. This fund resulted from a significant gift from an American Ambassador to the UK. Until now, this fund has been earmarked for supporting relationships with the church in America; but that was not a stipulation at the time of the gift.
4. In practice, it has been many years since any use has been made of the fund, which currently stands at £179k. It is the view of the Finance Committee that the designation of the fund should be changed to enable this money to be utilised to the extent necessary in engaging consultants or capacity building to support such of the various projects outlined in the CLR paper as commend themselves to General Assembly. The URC Trust has considered this recommendation from Finance Committee and has agreed to the change in designation.
5. However, Finance Committee is concerned that the amount currently available in that fund may be inadequate for all the work that General Assembly might consider to be required. We have looked at other funds which are not restricted in their use as a result of conditions attached by their giver.
6. One of those which we have considered is the Legacy Fund. This designated fund was set up by Mission Council in January 2008 to receive all the unrestricted legacies which were bequeathed to the denomination centrally. The paper proposing the establishment of the fund spoke about "the opportunity ... to fund projects that cannot be supported from normal budget resources", and the minutes of the Mission Council decision speak of encouraging assembly committees to "share visions for future special projects".
7. In practice the Finance Committee and its Legacy Group have tended to consider requests (primarily from local churches or Synods, though occasionally from Assembly committees) for financial support for innovative, mission-oriented, projects.
8. It is important that such projects are not inhibited in any way and the Finance Committee does not, therefore, suggest any change in the practice of directing

unrestricted legacies to the Legacy Fund going forward. Nonetheless, particularly since the pandemic, the Legacy Fund has not received the same volume of applications for support as previously and a large amount of money – £1.14 million – is being under-utilised.

9. Although the terms on which Mission Council established the fund would, we believe, already enable us to utilise some of this money to further CLR projects, in view of the way in which the fund has been operated in practice, we judged it advisable to seek the express approval of General Assembly to use up to half of the current balance of the fund for such works by transferring the money into the redesignated Annenberg Fund.
10. Of course, any money not required for CLR projects would be made available in due course for other purposes – including, if necessary, for implementing any other General Assembly decisions for which no budget has been allocated.
11. We believe the other half of the Legacy Fund balance to be adequate to fund the level of applications from local, churches or Synods during the next few years, by which time further legacies are likely to have reached the fund.
12. Accordingly, we invite General Assembly to support the resolution at the head of this paper.

Paper H1

General report

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Nicola Furley-Smith ministries@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update on the work of two sub-committees: Accreditations Sub-Committee (CRCW&SCM) and the Assessment Board.
Main points	To update General Assembly on the ministry statistics of both sub-committees.
Previous relevant documents	Ministries Report to General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

General report

The committee is responsible for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, lay preaching and eldership. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education, prisons and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, Church Related Community Workers and lay preachers, including supervision, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the Assessment Board and is assisted by four sub-committees.

Membership:

Convenor: Mary Thomas
Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Nominated members:

Gill Bates, Lesley Moseley, Stuart Scott, Sally Willett

Convenor of the Accreditations sub-committee:

Paul Dean

Convenor of the Assessment Board:

Bill Gould

Convenor of the MOM sub-committee:

David Coote

Convenor of RMHS sub-committee:

Paul Whittle

Leadership in worship advocate:

Vacant

Synod Moderator:

Jamie Kissack

1. We continue to be blessed to have Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Elders, Lay preachers and Lay pioneers who serve faithfully.
2. Ministries Committee wishes to update the denomination with the following sub-committee reports which indicate the health of the breadth of ministries across the denomination.

Accreditations (CRCW&SCM) sub-committee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training, and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries. It supports the work of CRCW ministry.

Convenor:

Paul Dean

Secretaries:

Nicola Furley-Smith and Steve Summers

Members:

Jacob Bali (SCM post holder), Bill Gould (convenor of the assessment board), Alison Micklem, Joanne Patterson (CRCW post holder), Dave Herbert (synod moderator), Mary Thomas (convenor of Ministries Committee)

1. The Accreditations sub-committee has been asked to update the denomination on ministry statistics. This report does not deal with the wider work of the committee on CRCW & SCM, as this will be reported to General Assembly in 2024.

2. Certificates of Limited Service

- 2.1. Certificates of Limited Service allow a minister of another denomination to serve in, and be paid by, the URC, in a specified post only and for a limited period of time. They provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities.
- 2.2. No new certificates have been issued in the last year, and one has been renewed or extended (Jonathan Soyars), and no certificates have been closed due to retirement.
- 2.3. For a period of three years, part-time certificates of limited service will not be counted against a Synod's deployment target.

3. Certificates of Eligibility

- 3.1. Seven Certificates of Eligibility have been issued in the last 12 months to ministers from the Methodist Church (1), Église Réformée (1), United Church of Christ (1), Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa (1), Uniting Presbyterian Church of Cameroon (1), Presbyterian Church of Nigeria (1), and Presbyterian Church of Zambia (1); and one certificate has been withdrawn.

4. The Roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments

4.1 Admission to the roll of Ministers of Word and Sacraments (from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023)

By ordination and induction:

Solomon Aryee-Brown, Adam James Earle, Mark Hayes, Katherine Rachel Hunt, Nicola Anne Robinson, Lisa Wilson.

By transfer from other Churches:

Ruth Lucy Armstrong (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa), Brian Charles Buschkill (United Church of Christ, USA), Robert Paul Hoch (Presbyterian Church, USA), Noel Irwin (Methodist Church) and Kurauone Mutimwii (Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe Presbytery).

By changes within the Roll of Ministers:

There have been no changes within the Roll of Ministers.

4.2 Deletions from the Roll of Ministers

By resignation:

Andrew Herbert McLuskey, Donald L Pines.

By transfer to another denomination:

James Edward Church, Timothy Peter Samuel Mullings.

By deletion under the disciplinary process:

Brian Stephen Jolly.

4.3 Re-admission to the Roll

There have been no re-admissions to the Roll.

4.4 Jubilee Ministers

Celebrating 70 years of ordained ministry in 2023:

Bernard Swain Holt, Howard John, Mark Wilson.

Celebrating 60 years of ordained ministry in 2023:

Brian Alfred Bowyer, J Charles Brock, Valerie Jean Dinning, Geoffrey Christopher Dunstan, Richard Henry Hambly, Daphne Hull, Donald Norman Macarthur, James Martin, Ian Norman McPherson, Arnold Christopher Mellor, Peter Cedric Moth, Peter Roland Page, Charles Edward Lammond Price, Eric Rippingham, Peter David Scotland, Robert Gerald Scribbins, Paul Robert Smith, Robert John Way, Alan Luther Willcocks.

Celebrating 50 years of ordained ministry in 2023:

William Raymond Pryde Adams, Angus Wilkieson Allan, Elizabeth June Caswell, Kenneth Chippindale, Kah Geh Chong, Malcolm Bernard Clarke, Geoffrey N Collins, Kenneth Brian Charles Fear, Geoffrey Arthur Harmer, John Brian Jenkinson, John Richard Landon, Allen Ross Morton, Gerald Roy Muttram, John Henry Oldershaw, David Holt Roberts, Reginald William Rooke, John Raymond Smith, Bruce Douglas Drew Stuart.

4.5 Ministers who have retired from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

Robert James Bushby, Susan Joy Chapman, Tod Gobledale, Ana Karen Gobledale, Martin Thomas Hazell, Michele Susan Jarmany, Robert John Maloney, Mhari McLintock, Andrew Christopher Mills, Kristin Ofstad, John Frederick Potter, Duncan Leroy Tuck, Alan James Wickens, Anthea Josey Wickens.

4.6 Ministers who have died from 4 July 2021 to 14 April 2022

Listed elsewhere.

5. The Roll of Church Related Community Workers

Admissions to the Roll of Church Related Community Workers (from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023)

By commissioning:

Felicity Mary Barker.

Deletions from the Roll by resignation and/or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process:

There have been no deletions to the Roll.

CRCWs who have retired from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

Rosemary Buxton.

6. The Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers

The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination:

Yorkshire Synod – Caroline Pathak

The following have received Assembly re-accreditation between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023:

Claire Louise Nutt

Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by resignation, removal and/or transfer to other Churches from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

Sheila Rosemary Ashmore, Paul Andrew Duncan, Brian Edmund Heeley, Derek Roger Marsh, Margery Dawn Jane Powell.

Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

Gerald Leslie Gibbs, Kevin Hogan, Andrew Robert Jeens, David Colin Meatcher, Brynmoor Iven Newman, George Bernard Thomas, Mary Catherine Whittle.

Assessment Board

Membership:

Convenor: Bill Gould

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members: Liz Mullen (2), Keith Reading (3), Jamie Kissak (4), Dan Morrell (4), Samuel Silungwe (5), Mark Tubby (7), Faith Paulding (7), Gerald England (8), Bridget Akinyombo (10), John Danso (10), Sue McCoan (10), Jan Adamson (13).

Flow of candidates

Date of Conference		No. of candidates	Number accepted
Nov-22	CRCW	0	0
	Stipendiary Ministry	3	3
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	2	2
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
TOTAL		7	7
Mar-23	CRCW	2	1
	Stipendiary Ministry	1	1
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	2	2
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
TOTAL		7	6
GRAND TOTAL		14	13

Students in Training, by Synod as of 31 March 2023

Synod	Name	
01 Northern		
Non-Stipendiary Ministry		
	Roberta	Ritson
Stipendiary Ministry		
	Louise	Sanders
02 North Western		
CRCW		
	Katy	Ollerenshaw
Non-Stipendiary Ministry		
	Walt	Johnson
03 Mersey		
Stipendiary Ministry		
	Karen	Jones
05 East Midlands		
Stipendiary Ministry		
	Simon	Cross
06 West Midlands		
Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4		
	Julie	Jefferies
Stipendiary Ministry		
	Steph	Atkins
	Edward	Lyne
	Clare	Nutbrown-Hughes
	Johnny	O'Hanlon
07 Eastern		
Stipendiary Ministry		
	David	Cumbers
	Maria	Lee
	Tina	Wilson
08 South Western		
Non-Stipendiary Ministry		
	Rachel	Leach
09 Wessex		
CRCW		
	Alice	Gilbert
Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4		
	Gill	Bailey
Stipendiary Ministry		
	Siobhan	Antoniou

Ruth Dewis
 Abigail Perrow
 Simon Peters

10 Thames North

CRCW

Rachel Harvey

Stipendiary Ministry

Joseph Amoah
 Azeem Bakhsh
 Carolina Davey

11 Southern

CRCW

Carol Clack

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Josephine Osei

Stipendiary Ministry

Maurice Omorojie

12 Wales

Stipendiary Ministry

Mark Rodgers
 Kate Wolsey

13 Scotland

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

Margaret Higton
 Derek McDonald
 David Townsend
 Eilidh Young

Stipendiary Ministry

Lesley Thomson

Students in Training statistics as of 31 March 2023

	Students in training	Anticipated entry into URC service			
	Mar-23	2023	2024	2025	2026
STIPENDIARY					
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	3	1	1	1	
Northern College (RCL) MWS	9	2	3	1	3
Scottish College (RCL)	2	2			

Ministries Committee

Westminster College (RCL)	10	3	3	2	2
Subtotal	24	8	7	4	5
NON-STIPENDIARY					
Northern College (RCL)	2	1			1
Scottish College (RCL)	1	1			
Westminster College (RCL)	1				1
Subtotal	4	2			2
NON-STIPENDIARY 4					
Northern College (RCL)					
Scottish College (RCL)	4	2	1		
Westminster College (RCL)	3	1	1		
Subtotal	5	3	2		
GRAND TOTAL	33	13	9	4	7

MWS: Ministry of Word and Sacraments

CRCW: Church Related Community Worker

RCL: Resource Centre for Learning

Ordinations and Commissions

		Type of Ministry	Date of ordination	Date into URC	History for Yearbook
Ruth	Armstrong	Stipendiary Minister		14/07/2022	Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (UPCSA) -2002; The Vale, Hardres Street and Southern Synod directed 2022-
Solomon	Aryee-Brown	Stipendiary Minister	04/09/2022		North Nottinghamshire Area: Hucknall; & Sutton in Ashfield; & Sherwood; & Arnold; & Bulwell 2022-
Felicity	Barker	CRCW	23/07/2022		Wooler URC CRCW Project 2022-
Brian	Buschkill	Stipendiary Minister	22/11/2009	18/09/2022	United Church of Christ, USA -2009; Chadwell Heath, Hornchurch Nelmes & Trinity Uppminster 2022-
Adam	Earle	Stipendiary Minister	24/07/2022		Castle Hill Ipswich, St John's Ipswich, Felixstowe, Leiston, Saxmundham 2022-
Mark	Hayes	Non-Stipendiary Minister	23/07/2022		Thaxted 2022-
Robert	Hoch	Stipendiary Minister	01/09/1995	14/11/2022	02 North Western Synod, Training and Learning Mentor 2022-
Katherine	Hunt	Stipendiary Minister	20/08/2022		Cumbria Missional Partnership 2022-
Noel	Irwin	Stipendiary Minister		24/01/2023	Northern College Tutor 2023-
Kurauone	Mutimwii	Stipendiary Minister	13/06/2013	13/10/2022	Presbyterian Church of Zimbabwe -2013; Greater Manchester South and Cheshire Missional Partnership 2022-
Nicola	Robinson	Stipendiary Minister	03/09/2022		Leeds Partnership 2022-
Lisa	Wilson	Stipendiary Minister	30/07/2022		Cumbria Missional Partnership 2022-

Paper H2

Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 27 General Assembly adopts the updated URC Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The policy updates the previous Core Competencies 2007.
Main points	The policy brings states which standard is met.
Previous relevant documents	Core Competencies 2007.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Northern College works as part of an ecumenical community based at Luther King Centre, Manchester.

1. We rejoice that the Panel of The Endorsement and Quality Standards Board for Community Development Learning (ESB) has approved Northern College's application to become a 'Recognition Centre'. Therefore, from September 2024, Northern College can offer full recognition and baseline recognition in community development outside the degree programme.
2. In order to gain such recognition with the ESB, it has been necessary to update the URC Core Competencies for Church Related Community Work so that the standards are met (See Appendix 1).
3. The Core Competencies are the Marks of Ministry for Church Related Community Workers.

A Church Related Community Work minister in the United Reformed Church is a person:

who is	who is identifiable lives	who knows about and understands	who has skills in
A faithful disciple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> committed to Christ a life of prayer, worship and community engagement with integrity, discipline, joy and commitment in good, flourishing and wholesome relationships with others practicing inclusivity (S6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> his/her own experience of life and faith their own, and the church's, reasons for community engagement biblically, and from a Community Development Perspective, the importance of enabling inclusion in church and community (S6). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relating the Gospel to contemporary society Relating to those not engaged in faith communities.
A contextual theologian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a life shaped and being transformed by the Gospel inhabiting a particular tradition, but also within the ecumenical, world and inter-cultural community of the Church in a healthy tension between received tradition and present experience and expression with mind and heart ready to question and to trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Bible the Tradition (including its expression within the United Reformed Church) the importance of being a theologian for particular times and places the importance of relating text and context. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting theologically on their local and broader context making the tradition (biblical and theological) relevant for the communities in which they work Using the Gospel to build community and challenge injustices interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith from within particular contexts.
An encourager (Key Area Six)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> with an evident depth of self-awareness with openness to, and a desire to live for others attentive to the safety of all with sensitivity and responsiveness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how to accompany and strengthen groups to use Community Development approaches (S22) patterns of human relationship particularly to lead and assist in setting up new projects and partnerships (S21) patterns of human community and society the human psyche how to support, develop and manage Local Support Groups (S20). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> listening and being able to advise on organizational structures using Community Development Perspectives (S20) Plan and gain resources and funding (S21) Use a Community Development Approach for monitoring and Evaluation (S23) understanding and interpreting people and situations.
An educator (Key Area Five)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as one committed to being a learner throughout life with awareness of own learning style and needs taking regular opportunities to learn, develop and grow. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how people learn and grow how to develop community learning opportunities using Community Development Practices (S18) the ethos and practices of community education (S18). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching all ages and all kinds of people facilitating community learning for social and political development (S19).
A missionary and evangelist (Key Area Two)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> as one who understands and engages with the local community as one on fire with the Gospel with a message to proclaim with a love for God's world with a primary commitment to community and to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> how to analyse and to understand the contemporary world and particular contexts the demands of evangelism today how to assess, develop links with and engage with a community (S7) how to analyse and to understand the use of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> effective communication social and political action facilitating community research (S8) analysing and dissemination their community research with others (S9).

Paper H3

Pastoral Supervision Policy

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 28 General Assembly adopts the URC Pastoral Supervision Policy.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The policy updates the previous Guidelines for Pastoral Supervision into current and expected practice in light of the 2023 deadline.
Main points	The policy outlines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the form, purpose and function of pastoral supervision in the United Reformed Church; b) the ethos and process of the supervisory relationship; c) who is able to supervise; d) who needs to have pastoral supervision e) practical arrangements for supervision.
Previous relevant documents	Pastoral Supervision Guidelines 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Introduction

1.1 Scope

- 1.1.1. This Pastoral Supervision Policy provides a framework for, and an outline of, the requirements for all Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (thereafter known as ministers) in categories 1-3 of the Active Ministers Policy within the United Reformed Church.

- 1.1.2. It draws on the work of the Ministries Pastoral Supervision Task Group and the Guidelines for Pastoral Supervision adopted at General Assembly 2020.
- 1.1.3. It is intended that this policy be reviewed every five years in light of further experience of the practise of pastoral supervision. It is important to review its implementation as part of the responsible exercise of oversight in the life of the church.

2. What is Pastoral Supervision?

- 2.1 Pastoral Supervision is defined by this policy as the exploratory and reflective practice by a minister in covenant with a trained, resourced and approved supervisor. It is designed to assist ministers in reflecting on their vocation and practice.
- 2.2 Pastoral Supervision is intended to be
- a *fruitful process*, for the sake of the other;
 - a *body of Christ process* that is practises and experienced in community;
 - a *holistic approach* involving heart, mind, soul and body;
 - a *relational process* of collaboration between supervisee and supervisor that takes skill and practice;
 - a *covenanted process* of relationship that is structured intentional and boundaried;
 - and a *means of grace*.
- 2.3 The intention of focused reflection on practice is to encourage ‘a conversation between soul, role and context¹’ thus enabling ministers to grow through their experience, or to come to terms with it resourcing the minister to better carry out their role and to further God’s mission.
- 2.4 In order to be effective, supervision needs to be frequent, open and supportive in three areas through:
- providing reliable relational accompaniment which supports well-being and flourishing of ministry practice including the developing of skills and self-awareness;
 - underpinning risk assessment, boundary management and clarification of role to assist safeguarding of everyone in church life;
 - providing skilled and intentional space to reconnect with ministry vision and discerning what God is speaking in your particular context.

3. The purpose and function of pastoral supervision

- 3.1 Pastoral supervision within the URC has three main functions:
- To support and affirm the well-being and development of those who minister;
 - To safeguard the interests of those amongst whom ministry is exercised;

¹ Patterson

- To ensure that ministry offered in the name of the URC is accountable and represents the purposes of the church in furthering God's mission.
- 3.2 Pastoral Supervision within the United Reformed Church has three main pillars²:
- Normative – attentive to accountability by having aims that accord with the Basis of Union, an appropriate code of ethics for one's working environment; physical, mental and ministerial fitness to work; an ability to set boundaries and to challenge inappropriate behaviours or expectations;
 - Formative - learning and developing one's ministry through reflecting on their practice and that of others, exploring creative approaches to the demanding issues of ministry and relationships as they arise;
 - Restorative – ensuring that the vocation and work of the minister is shared, valued and nurtured; exploring healthy habits and ensuring wellbeing issues for the minister are monitored and addressed.

This policy reinforces that supervision is 'affirmative', giving ministers support and affirmation, and encouraging realistic self-appraisal without becoming overly self-critical or self-judgmental.

4. The ethos of a supervisory relationship

- 4.1 Ministry in today's world can seem to be a lonely experience. Not only are ministers likely to have fewer colleagues in ministry than they did five or ten years ago, but the changing nature of ministry means there is less clarity regarding the expectations and realities of a minister's role.
- 4.2 Newly ordained ministers are provided with a pastoral advisor during their period of Education for Ministry Phase 2 (EM2) and this may continue informally when a minister enters Education for Ministry Phase 3 (EM3). The value of an ongoing personal supportive relationship in which issues to do with their ministry, usually on a one-to-one basis, in complete confidence, has been recognised by many ministers.
- 4.3 Ministers of the United Reformed Church have always been party to an oversight structure of the denomination as referenced in the Basis of Union. However, this has largely been about functions. The Marks of Ministry (2019), the Core Competencies (2007), the Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Ministers/CRCWs, Safeguarding Training, Safer Sacred Space Boundary training and peer support may have assisted the safety and flourishing of the whole church and those the church is called to serve. Pastoral Supervision provides an external safe space for the minister to reflect on issues of performance.
- 4.4 As pastoral supervision is introduced to ministers normally for those in Education for Ministry Phase 3 (EM3), they will be supported and trained to make the most of supervision. This will be done through How to get the

² Inskipp and Proctor 1988

most out of pastoral supervision workshops led by Ministries and, for new ministers, through the EM2 programme.

4.5 It is important therefore, that care is taken to ensure that supervisor and supervisee feel able to work together to achieve the purposes outlined in 3.1 and 3.2 and are willing to collaborate in order to create an ethos that is:

- prayerful and non-anxious,
- playful and reflection
- collegial and non-coercive
- embodied and dialogical
- excentric and missional
- compassionate and courageous
- intentional and boundaried
- and accountable³.

This list is not exhaustive.

5. The supervisory relationship

5.1 Each supervision should provide opportunity for

- reconnecting with God, self and the supervisor
- an update on any agreed actions from previous supervisions
- substantial attention to at least one issue
- attention to risk in relation to potential harm to self or others or the mission of the church
- a written record of explicit actions in relation to safeguarding, fitness to practice and any other matters for referral.

5.2 Boundaries and expectation of the supervisory relationship

5.2.1 Safe practice in supervision relies on the clear boundaries and expectations. These are established between the supervisor and supervisee as they come together but rests on the boundaries and expectations set by the Marks of Ministry or Core Competencies.

5.2.2 In this policy the United Reformed Church sets boundaries for the supervisory relationship and expectation concerning the scope and purpose of supervisions and practical matters like the frequency and duration of the meeting.

5.2.3 The main burden of the supervision agenda rests on the supervisee who should identify significant practice issues to bring to supervision that, over time, reflect the breadth and depth of their vocation and work.

5.3 Who may supervise?

5.3.1 The approved list includes those affiliated to

- APSE (Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education)
- BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy)
- the Association of Christian Counsellors;

³ Jane Leach

- those trained by the United Reformed Church on the URC Pastoral Supervision course.

5.3.2 The request to use a pastoral supervisor from any other body than those listed above will need prior approval from the Synod Moderator who may consult with the Secretary for Ministries.

5.4 Who may supervise whom?

5.4.1 Those trained by the United Reformed Church on the URC Pastoral Supervision course will be expected to supervise fellow URC ministers under the training agreement.

5.4.2 Best practice dictates that a URC trained pastoral supervisor should not normally pastorally supervise anyone in their own Synod or whom they know as a friend rather than a colleague.

5.4.3 However, the policy recognises the need for some flexibility in 5.4.2. For those supervisors who have dual roles, care needs to be taken to establish clear boundaries. Advice on conflict of interests should be sought from the Synod Moderator in consultation with the Secretary for Ministries.

5.5 Whom must be supervised?

5.5.1 All ministers in EM3 in categories 1-3 of the URC's Active Minister Policy (Paper H5 Assembly Executive 2021).

5.5.2 For those avoidance of doubt these categories are:

- Category 1: in a pastorate or post for which they are receiving a stipend (either full or part) from the United Reformed Church (e.g. deployed post, SCM post, Assembly appointment) under the Plan for Partnership;
- Category 2: in non-stipendiary service in a recognised ministry post (e.g. model 1, 2, 3 or 4 or Local NS CRCW);
- Category 3: exercising a ministry with another organisation within the gift of the church to the wider church to which they have been inducted by the URC where possible (e.g. chaplaincy, educational establishment, ecumenical body) and for which they receive a stipend, salary or serve in a voluntary capacity;

5.5.3 It is recognised that ministers in category 3 may have professional pastoral supervision as part of their work. In these cases, they should inform their Synod Moderator and the Synod should inform the Ministries Office.

5.5.4 Synod Moderators, at their discretion or with the approval of the Secretary for Ministries, may require those ministers in categories 4-7 to receive pastoral supervision. This may include ministers in Education for Ministry 2 (EM2).

6. Practical arrangements for supervision

6.1 Frequency and duration for full-time ministers

6.1.1 Every full-time minister who is subject to this policy should receive not less than six hours of supervision spread evenly throughout the year.

6.1.2 Additional supervision, up to 3 further hours, may be negotiated in appropriate circumstances e.g. when a supervisee is also a supervisor and needs supervision of supervision; when the supervisee is under particular pressure; if there is need for an emergency supervision for any negotiated reason. The cost of this will be borne by the pastorate.

6.1.3 Those engaged to supervise by the United Reformed Church as external supervisors or who are offering supervision as the main ministry they offer to the United Reformed Church should receive supervision on supervision equivalent to 10% of the time they offer as supervisors but not less than an hour per quarter.

6.2 Frequency and duration for part-time ministers

6.2.1. For those in part time ministry, engagement in supervision should be proportionate and appropriate to the role being exercised as determined by the Synod Moderator in consultation with the Secretary for Ministries. However, in order to achieve the objective of frequency and maintain a realistic supervisory relationship, no one subject to this policy should be supervised for less than one hour each quarter.

6.3 Mode of supervision

Whilst the United Reformed Church expects all ministers to have no less than 6 sessions throughout the year, Ministries had originally required that half those sessions would be in person. The pandemic meant that this was not possible. Whilst the ideal would be all six sessions in person, Ministries accepts that effective pastoral supervision can be done online. This will also help with the capacity issue in some areas. There is therefore now no requirement for in person supervision, though some such sessions are encouraged.

6.4 Sabbaticals

6.4.1 Any minister on sabbatical is entitled to receive her full quota of supervision but may, by negotiation with a supervisor, miss a quarter of the annual quota during that three-month period.

6.4.2 Any minister on sabbatical should not undertake all the supervisions for the supervisees during the sabbatical but should make appropriate and proportionate arrangements for the supervision of their colleagues.

6.5 Parental Leave

6.5.1 Any minister on parental leave should normally continue to be supervised on the keeping in touch days.

6.5.2 Any minister who supervises who takes parental leave for more than two months should make alternative arrangements can be made for their supervisees.

6.6 Sick leave

6.6.1 Ministers who are signed off sick may not engage in pastoral supervision.

6.6.2 Any supervisor who is signed off sick may not supervise. Where this persists for more than two months, alternative arrangements should be made for the affected supervisees by the Ministries Office.

6.7 Suspension

- 6.6.7 Ministers who are suspended may not engage in pastoral supervision unless the Assembly Commission deem it appropriate.
- 6.6.8 Where the minister who supervises is suspended alternative arrangements should be made by the Ministries Office for the supervision of the supervisees.

6.8 Confidentiality

- 6.8.1 Pastoral supervision in the URC is not intended to replicate a professional management relationship. Whilst issues of accountability in relation to the minister's local pastorate and Synod will arise, these are not the main focus.
- 6.8.2 Supervision will be confidential between supervisor and supervisee, unless the supervision raises concerns relating to safeguarding, or serious legal or wellbeing issues. Supervisors are trained to respond appropriately to such matters, and the serious concerns should be reported to the Synod Moderator.
- 6.8.3 Supervisees are also encouraged to regularly identify any needs or concerns that might be addressed or supported by the Synod or local pastorate, and to report them to the appropriate forum, eg the Synod Training and Development Officer or equivalent.

6.9 Recordkeeping

- 6.9.1 To ensure good recordkeeping, the minister and pastoral supervisor will jointly confirm in writing to the Synod Moderator or the appropriate Synod committee, normally in the January of each year, that regular supervision is taking place.
- 6.9.2 Upon receipt of the information the Synod will be responsible for updating both the minister's file and the entry on the minister's record on the database accordingly.
- 6.9.3 The Synod will, in turn, report this to the Secretary for Ministries, who will keep a denomination-wide record.

6.10 Claiming for supervision

- 6.10.1 It is still hoped that the local pastorate sees the value of pastoral supervision for their minister and will pay the full cost, or, failing that, at least 50% of costs.
- 6.10.2 Those pastorates which cannot afford the full cost may apply for their reimbursement from Ministries.
- 6.10.3 A claim for reimbursement can be made via the Ministries Office in the December of each year.

Paper H4

URC Procedure for the Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 29 General Assembly adopts the updates to the URC Policy for the Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age (formerly Duty to Consider).

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The policy updates the previous document.
Main points	The policy changes a) the name to reflect the purpose of the policy and b) in the interests of clarity and consistency gives the authority for the Accreditations (CRCW&SCM) Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee to make all decisions about extensions including requests for up to a 6 month extension for full-time service and all part-time extension rather than the Synod as is at present.
Previous relevant documents	Duty to Consider 2006 amended to take account of the revised retirement age agreed by General Assembly 2012.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Ministries Committee believes that, following the repeal of the Employment Equality(Age) Regulations 2006, along with the Duty to Consider administrative provisions, the URC Procedure for the Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial

Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age would be a more apt policy title than Duty to Consider.

2. The current Duty to Consider document allows the extension for both:
 - a) part-time extensions beyond the normal age of retirement and
 - b) full-time extensions up to six months beyond the normal age of retirementto be considered by the Synod in which the minister resides.
3. In the interests of consistency, the Ministries Committee believes all extensions should be considered by the Accreditations (CRCW&SCM) Sub-Committee of the Ministries Committee as is presently the case with all other full-time extensions.
4. For the purposes of this policy and procedure, ministers refers to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers of the United Reformed Church.

Appendix 1

Procedure

General Assembly approves the adoption of the following procedure for the extension (formerly duty to consider) for both full-time and part-time stipendiary service by a Minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker beyond the retirement age set by the United Reformed Church.

1. The criteria for seeking an extension are set out below and will be considered against the legitimate strategic and social policy objectives and denominational reasons within the denominational retirement policy:
 - a Minister drawing near to the end of a particular project or piece of service who might need to spend a year or two to bring it to a conclusion;
 - plans for a new grouping of churches in a particular area where it is felt desirable for the Minister to remain for a short while to see plans through to fruition;
 - a Minister, coming into ministry later in life, who might have just a short time to go before qualifying for retired ministers' housing;
 - a Minister whose spouse has a short period of time before retirement;
 - a Minister wishing to continue part-time in a pastorate in which they currently serve full-time;
 - a Minister who, on retiring from full-time stipendiary service at age 68 wishes to take up a new part-time post;
 - a Minister already serving part-time who wishes to continue part-time in the same pastorate beyond the age of 68.

These criteria apply to both full-time and part-time extensions.

Part-time is considered up to 75%.

2. In reaching a decision over whether to grant an extension, the Accreditation (CRCW&SCM) Sub-Committee (thereafter known as the Accreditation Sub Committee) shall also consider the individual circumstances against the denominational retirement policy together with the overall responsibility of the United Reformed Church to monitor Minister numbers so that:
 - a) the financial responsibility to support the ministerial work force is not threatened; and
 - b) the introduction of newly ordained and commissioned ministers is not curtailed.
3. The process for extensions is as follows:
 - 3.1. In the month of a Minister's 67th birthday the payroll office shall confirm the expected date of retirement as the end of the month in which they are 68.
 - 3.2. If a Minister does not wish to retire on that date, they must apply to the Accreditations Sub-Committee for an extension of service for a maximum of three years.
 - 3.3. The Minister shall speak to the Synod Moderator and thereafter submit an application for an extension to the Synod Moderator stating whether the extension is a continuation of full-time or part-time service.

- 3.4. On receipt of the application, the appropriate Synod Committee shall consult with the Minister, Moderator, Elders of the Church/es/post and the Church Meeting(s), where the Minister is in a pastorate, to see whether or not the individual circumstances warrant an extension of stipendiary service.
- 3.5. The Minister should not be present when the Church Meeting discusses the extension.
- 3.6. The Synod (through its appropriate committee) should send:
 - a) the Minister's application;
 - b) an account of the particular circumstances under 1 above which necessitates an extension;
 - c) a written record of whether the pastorate or post supports an extension;
 - d) a written record of whether Synod supports an extensionto the Secretary for Ministries for a decision by the Accreditation Sub-Committee.
- 3.7. If an extension is granted the Secretary for Ministries shall inform the Synod and the Minister of the decision of the Accreditation Sub-Committee. If the decision is to accept the extension, then a new date of retirement shall be agreed.
- 3.8. The extension shall be for up to three years until the age of 71 with a review one year before the extension finishes.
- 3.9. A year before the revised date of retirement, the payroll office shall once again write to the Minister and, if a further extension of stipendiary service is requested, the United Reformed Church must consider the request. The procedure set out above will therefore be repeated. However, extensions will be considered on an annual basis only to take into consideration the individual circumstances against the denominational retirement policy together with the overall responsibility of the United Reformed Church to monitor Minister numbers.
- 3.10. Ministers wishing to appeal against the decision of the Accreditation Sub-Committee should do so in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure.

Paper H5

URC Withdrawal of Call Policy and Procedure

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 General Assembly adopts the URC Withdrawal of Call Policy and Procedure.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The policy outlines the process for when a call is withdrawn.
Main points	At present, a call of a Minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker can be withdrawn as a result of a disciplinary, incapacity or capability process. However, there are times when a breakdown of a pastoral relationship may lead to a withdrawal of call. The policy outlines the role of the Councils of the Church in the withdrawal of call process including those in LEP settings. It also provides information on manse provision, expenses, and stipend.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	Law and Polity URC Legal Adviser Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Call and vocation

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God - believers or not.

- 1.2 However, within the whole people of God “the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church” (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).
- 1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments “...may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office” (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers “... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period.” (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22).
- 1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union*, is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed and ensure good order.
- 1.5 It is recognised that, whilst a call process may be used for non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs) with concurrence given by the Synod, NSMs (categories 1-4) are appointed by the Synod to their particular ministry. However, Synods always appoint to, and sustain in, such roles considering the views of the church with whom the NSM will be ministering.
- 1.6 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which, through its Councils, offers concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.
- 1.7 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.
- 1.8 For the sake of clarity in this document the term minister shall apply to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. **Withdrawal of a Call Through Discipline or Capability Processes**

2.1 There are two scenarios where a Call might be withdrawn which are covered by existing URC policies and processes:

2.1.1 As a result of the Discipline Process:

An Assembly Commission for Discipline may, following a finding of ministerial misconduct curtail a Call or Appointment.

2.1.2 As a result of the Capability Process:

Where a minister's competency is questioned by the Elders' or Church Meeting, the Local Steering Group of a Church in Community Project, or the Synod Moderator and Pastoral Committee, or by the ministry supervisor in a Special Category post, Synod or General Assembly role, the Capability Process can be used which may result in the Call to serve in that particular context being withdrawn.

3. **Ministers move on**

3.1 Active ministers, of course may end a Call by seeking a new Call at any time for a number of reasons:

- a) a minister accepts a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded;
- b) a minister retires normally upon reaching the normal retirement age unless the processes for an extension of service have been followed;
- c) a minister resigns seeking some other form of work or ministry outwith the United Reformed Church;
- d) a post might be time limited;
- e) a minister wishes to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post.

4. **Breakdown of a pastoral relationship**

4.1 On occasions pastorates, or projects, and ministers find themselves in a position where there is a breakdown in relationship with talk of withdrawing Call. This breakdown might be because of intractable difficulties which aren't related to capability or discipline such as a complaint under Section Q of the Manual or might simply be as a result of a sense that this ministry has gone on for too long.

4.2 In these cases, the Elders Meeting¹ should invite the Synod Moderator (or their deputy) to speak with the minister and indicate their feeling that circumstances are such whereby the view is that the minister should consider seeking a new call through the Moderators' List. The Moderator will explore with the Elders' Meeting and the minister whether mediation would be fruitful.² The local pastorate must engage with the Moderator, the Minister and the relevant Synod Committee or equivalent if mediation is to take place.

¹ For Elders' Meeting read any equivalent body eg the Steering Group of a Project or Church-in-Community, in Synod or General Assembly role, Pastorate Steering Group or Council in the case of a joint pastorate.

² See 1 above

- 4.3 In a multi-church pastorate, the Synod Moderator (or their deputy) shall speak with the Elders' Meeting of each church to ascertain whether the issues have been replicated across the pastorate.
- 4.4 In these cases, the Moderator should also consider whether using the Competency Process is appropriate.
- 4.5 In a local pastorate or Church-in-Community project it is always open to the Elders' Meeting / Steering Group to ask the Church Meeting to withdraw the Call. In such circumstances the Synod Moderator will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an external chair of the Elders' Meeting / Church-in-Community Project Steering Group and the Church Meeting/s for this matter. The external chair will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting / Church-in-Community Steering Group explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting/s which shall vote on the resolution "the Minister shall continue in office". If the Minister attends in person, the external chair will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.6 In an LEP where a URC minister is in post, it is always open to the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) to ask the Church Meeting to withdraw the Call. In such circumstances the Synod Moderator will discern if mediation would be fruitful as well as consulting with the appropriate leadership personnel in the denominations which are partners of the LEP, to ensure they are fully informed at all stages of the process. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to chair the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) and the Church Meeting/s for this matter. The Interim Moderator (or deputy such as representatives from the Synod Pastoral Committee) will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting/s which shall vote on the resolution "the Minister shall continue in office". If the Minister attends in person, the Interim Moderator will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.7 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a Synod role whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, or in a Special Category Ministry, and the Synod occurs it is always open to the Synod to appoint a Commission to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call. In such circumstances the Synod Pastoral Committee will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Synod shall appoint a Commission of three people unconnected to the post holder, or others who have experienced difficulty, to decide the issue. These may be members of another

Synod. The Moderator will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt the relationship has broken down. The Commission will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite a representative from the Synod to speak. The Minister will also be invited to speak. The Commission shall then decide, by majority, on the question of “the Minister shall continue in office.”. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.

- 4.8 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a General Assembly role and the General Assembly occurs, it is always open to the General Assembly to appoint a Special Group of three to consider the matter. This would normally be done by the Business Committee acting on behalf of the General Assembly. The Special Group would be formed of members of the General Assembly Appointments Panel. In such circumstances the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt that the relationship has broken down. The Special Group will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite the Minister’s ministry supervisor and the Minister to speak. The Special Group shall then decide, by majority, on the question of “the minister shall continue in office.” It is possible for an appeal to be lodged, whose decision is final.
- 4.9 If the Call to a minister is withdrawn from only part of the pastorate or role – eg the Synod withdraws the call for a 25% role or if one church in a group withdraws the Call, the Synod Pastoral Committee will explore if it is possible to reconfigure the pastorate. If the Synod Pastoral Committee is not able, or willing, to reconfigure the pastorate then the effect of the withdrawal of Call from one part of the pastorate or role is to withdraw the Call from the entire pastorate or role, or for the minister to accept as a result of reduced scoping a reduction in stipend. This is not an exhaustive list. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision of the Pastoral Committee using the normal appeals process.
- 4.10 If the Call to a minister is affected where more than one church closes with the outcome that scoping is reduced when a church closes, the Synod Pastoral Committee will explore if it is possible to reconfigure the pastorate. If the Synod Pastoral Committee is not able, or willing, to reconfigure the pastorate then the effect of the withdrawal of Call from one part of the pastorate or role is to withdraw the Call from the entire pastorate or role or for the minister to accept a reduction in stipend. This is not an exhaustive list. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision of the Pastoral Committee using the normal appeals process.
- 4.11 Given that it is the local church/pastorate that calls, and the Synod which gives concurrence, the appropriate councils of the Church need to be involved in the process for a Call to be withdrawn. Therefore, the local church/pastorate/church in community, the Synod and its appropriate committee will all be involved.

5. Manse provision and Expenses when a Call is withdrawn

- 5.1 Manses are provided rent free for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.
- 5.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.
- 5.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.
- 5.4 If the whole call is withdrawn the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the Minister (and/or family) and the Synod or Pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal eg. car and other allowances.
- 5.5 A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months. Any extension to this would be a matter of the Synod or Pastorate depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
- 5.6 Whilst the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the Synod or Pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.
- 5.7 When the scoping has been reduced the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 5.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.
- 5.9 Where scoping is reduced a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.

6. Stipend when a Call is withdrawn

- 6.1 The stipend should continue whilst the minister is seeking a new Call for three months.
- 6.2 After three months the Synod Moderator may wish to make application to the GA Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for stipend support.

7. Appeal

- 7.1 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure as set out in the Rules of Procedure and should be notified to the Clerk of the appropriate Council of the Church. Appellants should ask for a copy of the minute of the decision within 14 days of being notified of the decision, and lodge their appeal with the Clerk of the appropriate Synod within a further 14 days.

Paper I1

Report to General Assembly 2023

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor, Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report provides an update on the work of the Mission Committee and Mission Team. It includes the response to previous General Assembly resolutions.
Main points	The report covers the areas for which Mission Committee is responsible, namely: Church and Society, Ecumenical Relations, Interfaith Relations, Greenbelt, Commitment for Life, Global and Intercultural Ministries, Fresh Expressions, Mission and Evangelism, Rural Mission, URC Buildings Forum and Net Zero Task Group.
Previous relevant documents	Paper I2 and Resolutions 26-35, Israel Palestine Report, General Assembly 2021 Paper I2 and Resolution 17, Environmental Policy, General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	Widely within the context of the ongoing work of Mission Team and Mission Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	All the work described below is within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	The report outlines considerable areas of outreach including UK, European and Global ecumenical relationships.

Introduction

The task of the Mission Committee is to seek to encourage growth in discipleship, evangelism and witness by:

- reflecting on the Church's mission practice and theology
- formulating policy, strategies and programme (action) priorities
- reading the signs of the times and speaking prophetically
- working with partners
- continuously evaluating the place of mission and evangelism within the work of General Assembly.

This report offered by Mission Committee provides an overview of each area for which the committee is responsible, enabled by the staff members indicated at the beginning of each section of the report. Members of the Committee, representing each of the URC's 13 Synods are listed in the Nominations Committee report.

2. Church and Society

Secretary for Church and Society, and Team Leader of the Joint Public Issues Team:

Simeon Mitchell

Programme Support Officer:

Roo Stewart

The church and society programme helps the Church to speak prophetically about justice and peace issues in the public square. It supports local churches by providing resources and campaigns that help individuals make the links between faith, politics and social action. Most of this work is carried out through membership of the Joint Public Issues

Team (JPIT), a partnership between the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, with the Church of Scotland as associate partners. Over the period since we last reported to General Assembly in

2021, JPIT has focused on helping the Church to work, witness and pray for Six Hopes for society.



2.1 **A society where the poorest and most marginalised are at the centre**

Rising living costs have had huge impacts across our society over the last 18 months, but the sharpest effects have been felt by the least well-off. In August 2022, JPIT coordinated the launch of a research report highlighting the huge financial shortfall people would be experiencing and some of the personal impact of that. It called for urgent government action. This was endorsed by multiple faith and charity leaders, alongside former Prime Minister Gordon Brown, generating significant media and political interest.

Advocacy on these issues has continued. The URC added its support to the 'Guarantee Our Essentials' campaign for benefit rates to be calculated to at least cover the cost of essentials like food, household bills and travel costs. JPIT is currently coordinating the development of a broader campaign which aims to generate the political will to end structural poverty in the UK.

We have supported local churches in responding to the increasing challenges faced by communities, in particular through being part of the 'Warm Welcome' initiative to offer safe, warm, free and heated community spaces in the winter of 2022-23, while pointing people towards the policy changes and justice work that would ensure such provision is not required in the future.

As part the wider movement to address poverty, JPIT has been a partner in Challenge Poverty Week and a conference hosted with Church Action on Poverty and the APLE Collective on 'Dignity for All' in June 2023.

2.2 A society that welcomes the stranger

The asylum system has been a hot political topic over this period, and the Church has been a significant voice in advocating for fairer and more compassionate policies. JPIT played a leading role in coordinating the response of faith groups to the government's 'New Plan for Immigration' and subsequent Nationality and Borders Bill, which sought to reduce the rights of asylum seekers arriving by 'irregular' routes. Over 1000 faith leaders signed a letter released in February 2022 urging a rethink of the plans, and it was quoted extensively in parliament.



More than 1,000 leaders representing the six major faith groups in the UK expressed their concern about the government's asylum plans.

The Church was also vocal in opposing the plan to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, and the 2023 Illegal Migration Bill, which effectively seeks to close Britain's borders to almost anyone seeking sanctuary here. A statement from JPIT church leaders questioning the morality of the Bill attracted the signatures of more than 1,500 other church leaders. It was presented to 10 Downing Street in April 2023.

2.3 A world which actively works for peace

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, we offered prayer material alongside practical guidance for local churches and members around supporting refugees. The URC also joined a statement calling for an immediate end to the war as part of Churches Together in England. Further reflection materials were released around the anniversary of the invasion, urging ongoing generosity in offering hospitality and humanitarian support.

A JPIT project has continued to look at the financing of nuclear weapons, as well as wider issues about militarisation and the ethics of arms technology.

2.4 A planet where the environment is renewed

The UK's hosting of the COP26 climate talks in November 2021 offered a focal point for action on the climate crisis, although the summit itself secured limited progress. More than 2,200 churches held a Climate Sunday service, thousands engaged with the Young Christian Climate Network's relay around the UK and other campaigns, and many new commitments were made to environmental action. The COP27 summit a year later was significant in acknowledging the need for compensation for climate loss and damage, a justice issue on which faith communities have been actively campaigning for many years.

Recognising the need for local as well as global responses to the climate emergency, in 2022 JPIT launched the 'Net Zero in my Neighbourhood' initiative to encourage and support churches to engage with local authorities on their environmental plans.

2.5 A just economy that enables the flourishing of all life

Linking concerns about poverty and the environment are questions about our economic system. In 2023 JPIT released Just Economics, www.jpit.uk/justeconomics, a six-session Bible study course for small groups designed to open up conversations about how the economy might be re-shaped to enable the wellbeing of all people and the planet.

2.6 A politics characterised by listening, kindness and truthfulness

JPIT has sought to resource churches and members in their political engagement, encouraging the development of good relationships through the 'Meet your MP' scheme, and informed dialogue through election briefings. A campaign has also raised awareness of new requirements for people to have a form of photo ID to vote.

An event organised in parliament in November 2022 brought together leaders from five denominations with parliamentarians for discussion and debate.

The Church has expressed its concerns about the erosion of democratic space through restrictions on protest and proposals to reform the Human Rights Act.

A variety of events and resources have been offered to enable church members to engage with, reflect on and respond to current issues in society. In June 2022, more than 150 participants took part in the JPIT Conference, on the theme 'From the Ground Up: unearthing hope and seeking justice'. Webinars and speaking engagements have been provided on a range of topics. Worship resources were produced for Advent and the Season of Creation, along with daily prompts to 'Stay and Pray'. 'Politics in the Pulpit?', JPIT's weekly lectionary-based video podcast, has continued to be appreciated, with seasons hosted by URC ministers the Revd Jenny Mills and the Revd Lee Liddell. Informed commentary on current events is provided by JPIT through regular blogs, briefings, news stories, social media posts, a monthly email newsletter, and a relaunched podcast offering '10 minutes on...' a range of topical issues. All can be accessed from the JPIT website: www.jpit.uk



Secretary for Church and Society, Simeon Mitchell, welcomes MPs and church leaders to an event in parliament in November 2022

3. Ecumenical relations

Mission Support Officer with responsibility for ecumenical relations:
Lindsey Brown

Administrator to ecumenical relations:
Carole Sired

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Synod of Scotland:

John Bremner

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer, Synod of Wales:

Martin Spain

3.1 UK ecumenical instruments

The URC continues its active engagement with Churches Together in England (CTE), Cytûn in Wales and with Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI).

3.1.1 Wales

On 1 April 2023, Cytûn's new Chief Executive, Siôn Brynach took up his post. He was formerly the Head of Communication and Public Affairs for Arts Council of Wales and is ordained as a priest in the Church in Wales. The URC Synod of Wales continues to play its part in Cytûn. Martin Spain will be the URC appointed Director on the board of Cytûn. The current Moderator, Revd Simon Walkling, serves as the President of the Free Church of Council of Wales.

Ecumenically, the Covenanted Churches meet together twice a year with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Officers' Network (EION). This is a Church in Wales led initiative and has achieved much since its formation. In recent meetings, initiatives brought forward by the URC have gathered momentum, including the following recommendations for radical co-working:

- Wales to become an ecumenical nation, drawing inspiration from Cumbria as an ecumenical county
- The Commission of the Covenanted Churches' statement on shared ministry to be put into practice
- Initiatives to train and deploy pioneer ministers ecumenically
- Increase ecumenical and interfaith aspects of ministerial training
- A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission (Churches Together in England toolkit) to be adapted and developed for the Welsh context.

In addition to EION, there are several dialogue groups with church partners, including one with the Presbyterian Church in Wales.

3.1.2 Scotland

Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) consists now solely of funds, administered by a board of Trustees, and, other than dealing with administrative matters, is effectively inactive. To fill this vacuum, the Scottish Church Leaders' Forum, in which the URC Synod of Scotland plays an active part, has widened ecumenical involvement. It was originally shaped as a response to the pandemic, but subsequently has developed into an effective forum for engagement between participating churches, senior church leaders and with Scottish Government agencies.

3.1.3 England

Lindsey Brown represents the URC at CTE's Enabling Group, which has been engaging with issues including responses to the conflict in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis. She has made two presentations to the Group, focusing on the URC's ecumenical hopes in its Jubilee year, and sharing the film 'An Ecumenical Love Story': www.youtube.com/watch?v=KMBF1gmEUJM&t=1s. This short film about a newly formed URC/Methodist Local Ecumenical Partnership (LEP)

demonstrates how the sharing of ecumenical resources in Salford has brought much needed help to this impoverished community.

Lindsey Brown contributed to CTE's training course for new Ecumenical Officers and will be part of the group revising this well-established course. She was also part of a panel presenting on Climate Justice as Missional Action at a CTE conference with the theme of 'Learning to be Missionary Disciples'.

Philip Brooks is a member of CTE's diversity group which was set up to respond to the issue of the 'empty chair' of the fourth presidency, where Quaker Hannah Brock-Womack was requested not to take her appointed role as president because of her same-sex marriage.

Victoria Turner from URC Youth continues as a CTE Trustee.

The URC welcomed the opportunity to host CTE's National Ecumenical Officers' Away Day at Lumen in January for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.



L-R, Ecumenical representatives from the Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, Congregational Federation, Baptist Union, Salvation Army, the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church attended the event in-person and were joined online from the Society of Friends (Quakers), Church of Scotland and the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

3.2 Bilateral ecumenical relations

3.2.1 Methodist

The Methodist/URC Liaison Group is co-convened for the URC by East Midlands Moderator, Geoffrey Clarke and for the Methodist Church by the Chair of the Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire District, David Chapman. It meets twice per year and deals with many of the practical details of the relationship between our two denominations.

The Strategic Oversight Group which brings together the URC General Secretariat and their Methodist equivalent takes a more strategic overview of our activities. Philip Brooks is the ecumenical observer to Methodist Council and the Methodist-Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission. Geoffrey Clarke currently represents the URC at Methodist Conference.

As the Methodists relocate their Church House operations from Marylebone Road to Tavistock Place, just a few doors down from URC Church House, partnerships between the two denominations move closer geographically as well as relationally.

3.2.2 Roman Catholic

The Roman Catholic/URC Dialogue Group continues to meet and is planning the document that will mark the end of its third phase. This is intended to be an accessible paper designed to highlight practical ways that URC and Catholic local churches can work together. The co-convenors are Philip Brooks and Bishop Paul Hendricks. Visits to local contexts have included Milton Keynes, Carlisle and Cardiff, with a residential set in Edinburgh in November 2023. A fourth phase is anticipated at the end of this period of dialogue in 2024.

In June 2023, the Centre for Catholic Studies in Durham hosted a symposium entitled, 'Learning on the Way: Receptive Ecumenism and the Catholic Synodal Pathway'. Contingents from six denominations, including the URC, took part.

3.2.3 The Church of England

Our bilateral Contact Group is still awaiting the appointment of a Bishop and therefore, sadly has not met during this phase of dialogue. Philip Brooks is the ecumenical observer on the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity, which resumed meeting after a 13-months pause in April 2023. Tim Meadows represents the URC at the Church of England Synod.

3.3 Golden Jubilee Celebrations

At the postponed service for the URC's 50th anniversary, we were joined by more than 50 British, European and global ecumenical guests, including the Moderator of the Free Churches Group, the Revd Helen Cameron; the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Bishop Mark Strange and the General Secretary of the Council for World Mission, the Revd Jooseop Keum, who delivered one of the sermons.

3.4 European ecumenical relations

3.4.1 In November 2022, Philip Brooks spoke at the **Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz** Synod in Speyer, Germany, in recognition of the URC's 50th anniversary. A party of 12, including the region's first female Church President, Dorothee Wüst, then attended the rearranged celebrations on the weekend of 15-16 April 2023. The Pfalz churches gifted the communion wine used in the Jubilee service. After the service at Methodist Central Hall Westminster, the visiting group presented a framed painting from the Pfalz to the URC (see below).



L-R: Tessa Henry-Robinson, URC GA Moderator-Elect, Dorothee Wüst, Pfalz Church President, John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, Marcus Jäckle, Pfalz Ecumenical Secretary and Fiona Bennett, URC GA Moderator

- 3.4.2 The URC Waldensian Fellowship** visited the Waldensian Valleys and the Ligurian coast of Italy in May 2023.
- 3.4.3** Helen Everard represents the URC at the National Synod of the **Église Protestante Unie de France**.
- 3.4.4** A delegation from the **Uniting Church in Sweden** met with members of the Mission Team and the General Secretariat at Church House in April 2023. The initiative for the visit came from the Swedish Church's interest in the URC's environmental policy from the 2022 URC General Assembly.
- 3.4.4 The World Council of Churches (WCC)** held its General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany in September 2022. Karen Campbell and Sarah Moore attended as delegates and Philip Brooks as an ecumenical advisor. They travelled by train as a group of ecumenical partners from the UK. We are delighted to note that Sarah Moore was elected to a second term on WCC Central Council, and the Revd Dr Susan Durber was elected as WCC President (Europe).

Lindsey Brown attended the World Council of Churches online Ecumenical Officers gathering in March 2023, which focused on its new post-Assembly strategic and programmatic direction.

3.4.5 Communion of Protestant Churches Europe (CPCE)

John Bradbury continues his term as President of CPCE. In July 2023, Philip will attend the 50th Celebration of Leuenberg for CPCE Church Leaders, and at the end of September Tessa Henry-Robinson will join a gathering of CPCE Synod members in Bad Herrenalb, near Karlsruhe in Germany.

In October 2022, the Revd Martin Spain was the United Reformed Church delegate/presenter at a CPCE conference in Romania, on the subject of multilingualism and inter-culturality. He spoke about the real experience of bi-lingual worship in Wales. In February 2023, Alex Clare-Young attended a CPCE Sexuality and Gender conference in Berlin.

- 3.4.6** In June this year, the Revd John Bradbury attended the **Council of European Churches (CEC)** General Assembly in Tallinn, Estonia. The theme of the Assembly was 'Under God's Blessing, Shaping the Future'.

- 3.4.7** Karen Campbell, Lorraine Downer and Philip Brooks represented the URC at the **Council for World Mission (CWM)** European Members' Mission Forum in Amsterdam in April 2023. Lindsey Brown attended in her capacity as CWM trustee. Four of the member churches have a strong presence in Wales, which enabled useful conversations about future ecumenical cooperation in Wales. One of the key themes of the Forum was the response to Legacies of Slavery, CWM's 'Onesimus Project'.



L-R: Ebin Thankachan, PA, CWM London Office, Philip Brooks, URC DGS (Mission), Karen Campbell, URC Secretary for GIM, Graham McGeoch, CWM Mission Secretary (London), Lindsey Brown, URC Project Support Officer & CWM Trustee, Lorraine Downer, URC Thames North CYDO, Amelia Koh-Butler, CWM Mission Secretary (Singapore), Sudipta Singh, CWM DGS, visiting the Lutheran Museum, Amsterdam.

4. **Interfaith relations** **Programme Officer:** Kevin Snyman

Administrator to interfaith relations:
Carole Sired

4.1 **The Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG)**

The IEG is overseen by Mission Committee. It meets three times per year, and two of these meetings combine with the Baptist Interfaith Working Group (BIWG). Facilitated by members of the IEG, there has been URC representation at various interfaith events. These include the one-year anniversary of the Ukraine war; an Iftar event organised with Carrs Lane in Birmingham; a Churches Forum for Interreligious Relations residential meeting at the Woodbrooke Centre; representation at the Faith Communities Forum, organised by the Inter Faith Network (IFN); an IFN regional gathering in Yorkshire and many other excellent programmes that facilitate a meaningful encounter between faiths in the UK.

There has been continued support of the Church/Mosque twinning initiative and CTBI is developing a resource for churches to help combat Islamophobia. At the time of writing this report, an urgent review of IFN activities is taking place in the light of government funding being withdrawn from IFN. We continue to highlight a recent resource drawn up by members of the IEG and BIWG which gives guidance to local churches about the use of church buildings by people of other faith communities: 'The use of church buildings by people of other faith communities – United Reformed Church'.

4.2 **Interfaith Fund**

This facilitates local URC congregations looking for a small grant to support an event. Full details can be found on the URC's funding page:
www.urc.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities/.

4.3 **Israel Palestine**

In 2021, the United Reformed Church's General Assembly passed ten resolutions relating to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT). Mission Committee has worked to address each of those resolutions in a variety of creative and

substantive ways. This is itemised in relation to each of the ten resolutions passed at the 2021 General Assembly, as follows:

- 4.3.1 Resolution 26** instructed Mission Committee to raise awareness about Holy Land pilgrimage to underline the importance of engaging with Palestinian communities. Mission Committee has developed an ecumenically shaped pamphlet that helps organisers of pilgrimages to build into their trip at least some exposure to the reality of Palestinian life under occupation. A copy of the pamphlet can be obtained by contacting urcinterfaith@urc.org.uk.
- 4.3.2 Resolution 27** recognised and affirmed Israel as a country within the international community of States with rights and responsibilities. Mission Team continues to affirm and support of The Council for Christians and Jews and continues to strengthen relations with the Board of Deputies of British Jews in response to this resolution.
- 4.3.3 Resolution 28** affirmed the United Nations commitment to a State for Palestine. Mission Team met with ecumenical representatives in a meeting called by William Bell, Christian Aid's Head of the Middle East Region, to determine whether there was support for a call to Rishi Sunak not to attend the 75th anniversary celebrations of the founding of Israel given the increasingly desperate actions of the Israeli State in suppressing all hope of a viable Palestinian State. It was agreed that a call would be made for the Prime Minister to give equal weight in his visit to representatives of Palestine, who would be marking the 75th anniversary of their Nakba, translated as the Day of Catastrophe for Palestinians.
- 4.3.4 Resolution 29** condemned all acts of violence in the region. Understanding the root causes of that violence is critical. To that end, Mission Team has sponsored a Council for Christian and Jews (CCJ) visit to IOPT that included Bishops, ministers, Rabbis, Holocaust Memorial workers, and Muslims. Mission Team has also arranged for the Assembly Moderator to attend a CCJ trip to Poland. Commitment for Life sponsored two young URC members on a Christian Aid trip to IOPT in April 2023. Mission Team is intrinsic to the planning and leading of an ecumenical trip to IOPT in November 2023.
- 4.3.5 Resolution 30** expressed deep concern over the worsening situation for Palestinian people since 2016, particularly with regard to forced house demolitions and the acquisition of land by coercion that are breaches of international law. Our GA call for Israel to reverse its de facto annexation of the occupied territory has gone unheeded, and even accelerated. The authorisation from this resolution has enabled the URC to join with ecumenical partners in lobbying the UK government.
- 4.3.6 Resolution 31** requested local churches and members to write to their MPs expressing concern over these expansions. Mission Committee has worked in partnership with The Balfour Trust to encourage this action.
www.balfourproject.org/balfour-project-writing-to-your-mp/
- 4.3.7 Resolutions 32 and 33** addressed the problem of church trusts, often unknowingly, maintaining investments in companies that benefit from the occupation. Mission Committee continues to negotiate with CCLA on an investment portfolio that screens for such companies, as reported to the November Assembly Executive.

4.3.8 Resolution 34 and 35 addressed the question of support for the Palestinian economy rather than that of Israeli settlements. We commend the work of Christian Aid, EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel), the Sabeel-Kairos URC Action Group, the online congregation YoURChurch, Commitment for Life congregations who support IOPT, and many individuals associated with the URC for their tireless work in support of our partners in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

5. Greenbelt Programme Officer Roo Stewart

5.1 Introduction

The URC has had an active presence at the Greenbelt annual Christian arts and music festival since 2016 (except 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

5.2 The URC's visible presence at the festival has provided:

- A meeting point where festivalgoers who attend a local URC can feel connected with the rest of the URC.
- A showcase for the URC for those unfamiliar with the denomination.
- An opportunity for URC members around Great Britain to participate remotely.
- An inspiring, welcoming oasis amid the hubbub of the event, providing a space for conversation and making friends, with activities available for all ages.
- A space where URC people can represent the denomination through volunteering.
- A place for asking questions and growing in faith. The organising team responsible for the URC's presence at Greenbelt is keen that a growing number of URC people have an opportunity to experience it.

5.3 The URC's active presence at Greenbelt is overseen by the Mission Committee. The detailed organisation, in terms of delivering this presence over the August Bank Holiday weekend each year, is undertaken by a team of volunteers and staff members from the Mission, Discipleship and Communications teams, many of whom offer their services above and beyond their daily tasks at Church House. Without their dedication and enthusiasm, it would not be possible to mount such a major witness to the life, work and ethos of the URC.



5.4 Innovations

In 2022, the URC developed its presence at Greenbelt considerably.

- We expanded our team to 65 volunteers and ran a café in a large marquee at a prime position at the festival.
- We teamed up with REfUSE, Durham and Grace Kitchen, Bradford to provide low-cost, quality food made on site from ingredients saved from going to landfill.
- Income from the café offset the additional costs involved.
- A programme team developed the theme of 'Revolting Christians', encouraging tent visitors to stand up against injustice.
- The team secured funding that enabled a group of Black people to attend the festival, to act as ambassadors after the event.
- A special service on site, also available on Zoom in partnership with the URC's online worshipping community yoURChurch, celebrated the URC's 50th year.
- A CYDO+ team, supported by the Church House Children and Youth team, took over the running of Greenbelt's youth provision, with creative ways to encourage a diverse range of young people exploring their own faith. This was funded directly by Greenbelt.



5.5 Future plans

- The URC will have a similar presence at the 2023 Greenbelt festival as in 2022.
- The theme of 'Revolting Christians' is retained.
- There will be a Sunday afternoon service in the café tent, designed for strong Zoom video conferencing participation, once again in partnership with yoURChurch.



- Funding has been secured to facilitate a further group of Black and Asian URC young people coming to the event.
- Lessons learned from our experience in 2022 have brought enhancements.
- The café will be serving hot food throughout the day, to cope with the high demand we experienced last year.
- The craft area will be open all day and more visible.

- A large timetable of events will be visible to passers-by.
- 5.6** The CYDO+ and Children and Youth teams will again run the youth provision at the festival. This will be sustained for the next three years, funded by Greenbelt directly.
- 5.7** The 2022 refreshed and expanded format for the URC at Greenbelt made a real impact as can be seen by the **Appendix** below. From the comments, it is possible to see how this is a vehicle to celebrate all that the URC offers, engaging with a wide audience of festival goers, several of whom are actively seeking connections to church. We look forward to building on this work of outreach in 2023 and beyond.

Appendix

Some social media feedback

Kudos to the URC team running the *YoURCafe* for a job well done providing affordable food, reducing food waste and providing entertainment all at the same time!



A fab venue, thank you URC ❤️
Lovely people, lovely food.
And the cakes were terrific



Great craft activities for kids and a lovely friendly team
I loved the Revolting Christians theme: the posters were fabulous and brought about conversations



Our fave snacking venu[e] which showed the way – just got to love non-conformists!

Some volunteer feedback

- I loved Greenbelt! I had the most incredible experience, both in terms of fun and spiritually. It was beautiful and I loved what we did with the waste food.



It was fantastic!
By the Saturday, the only place I would eat.



I stopped off to pick up a drink and stayed on for a chat because of the lovely background music.
Super duper place, really well done to the team!
And decaf tea and coffee ❤️❤️



A wonderful place!
The paella was superb 😊
Absolutely! A big thumbs up from us!



- It was great to see an explicit effort made to increase racial diversity by inviting a group of people from minority ethnic backgrounds to attend without the burdens of cost or camping. It was also good to see diversity in the Greenbelt programme and artistry side of things.
- Probably the best thing I've done all this year. If not volunteering I'd gladly pay to return – but volunteering was rewarding in itself.
- I felt really positive on the whole about my experience as a URC volunteer, but also enjoying the festival atmosphere and activities of Greenbelt. I appreciated the opportunity to both serve and welcome as well as be part of the festival in a more in-depth way.

Some feedback from UK marginalised groups

- This is what the URC does so well: create safe space and sanctuary for vulnerable and marginalised communities. Stepping into the URC Café felt like a home coming.
- The atmosphere was great. A delightful pleasure to be at Greenbelt. Both the people and the atmosphere get a 10/10. ... it was great to be part of an environmentally friendly festival, working to support the climate and minimise excess waste [that is] harmful to the environment. I am truly inspired!
- All in all, I think Greenbelt has a long way to go in terms of ethnic diversity. I was very impressed by the accommodation towards people of different gender identities and sexualities ...] I was also taken aback by the concessions made for the differently abled.
- The evening Taizé worship was a very calming way to connect with God. I have never experienced that style of worship before but enjoyed being outside in the dim light with a sea of people connected in worship.

6. Commitment for Life

Programme Officer, URC Global Justice and Partnerships:

Kevin Snyman

Administrative Assistant Commitment for Life:

Suzanne Pearson

6.1 Introduction

- 6.1.1 One immediately identifiable characteristic of the United Reformed Church is our unwavering support for and commitment to global justice. This can be seen in the fact that while the effects of Covid, lockdown, and the cost of living crisis have impacted on aspects of church life, including the closure of some Commitment for Life (CFL) congregations, there remains a robust support for the advocacy and generosity to CFL. There is a lively interest in and support for our Christian Aid partners in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.
- 6.1.2 The strapline for CFL is *Life-giving faith; Defiant Hope; and Generous Love*. The Mission team is keen for this strapline to be used more widely in its work, and conversations around how this might be rolled out are in progress.

6.2 People

We say thank you and a fond farewell to Christine Eddowes (Northern Synod) and John Collings (National Synod of Scotland) who step down as CFL

Advocates. Jonathan Clark has provided maternity cover for our Christian Aid contact, Charlotte Scott. Ruby Pickering from Global Justice Now has shared news to the CFL Reference Group of their ongoing campaigns, particularly around climate justice and trade injustice. We continue our support for the work of the Fairtrade Foundation.

6.3 Activity

CFL has sponsored three young people on Christian Aid-organised trips, including one to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We are also sponsoring a facts-and-story-gathering trip to Zimbabwe planned for July 2023 to generate content for our bi-monthly *Moving Stories* publication and the *Go-with-Greta* resource for children.

There are ongoing discussions and long-term planning internally and with Christian Aid to map out the route towards reducing the carbon impact of our work.

6.4 Thank you

The team is particularly grateful for all supporters and congregations who have supported *Commitment for Life* through prayer, advocacy, and generosity, and practical means by which to demonstrate faith, hope and love.

If you would like to access a video resource for use in your local congregation that focuses on the work of CFL, you can find Richard Lewney's excellent presentation here: <https://youtu.be/WBowpCGoAL4>

7. Global and Intercultural Ministries

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries:

Karen Campbell

Administrator:

Veronica Daniel

Programme Officer, URC Global Justice and Partnerships:

Kevin Snyman

7.1 Introduction

Much has happened in Global and Intercultural Ministries (GIM) since our 2021 report. The racial justice aspects of our intercultural remit have progressed significantly, with considerable attention both from within and beyond the URC. Although less visible, the global work has also demanded focussed attention. This report provides just a snapshot of recent and ongoing work.

7.2 Racial Justice – the URC journey

7.2.1 Racial justice continues to be a priority as GIM works to encourage and equip the URC to live out its commitment to journey from 'not racist' to 'actively anti-racist' (November 2020). Collaboration has taken place with the Equalities Committee to form the Affirmative Action Task Group (General Assembly 2021), now renamed the Positive Action Task Group, seeking to address the underrepresentation of Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues in Assembly-appointed positions of leadership and influence in the URC. Convened by the GIM Secretary, the task group has sought to highlight the barriers faced by Black and Ethnic Minority colleagues, and to propose strategies to overcome these barriers.

- 7.2.2 Senior Leadership' conversations are ongoing between the task group, the Mission Team, and the Secretaries for Ministries and Education and Learning. This collaboration has given rise to the 'Making Spaces' gathering planned for July 2023, bringing together individuals in Assembly-appointed leadership roles, and Black and Ethnic Minority URC members, to explore together how to effect change.
- 7.2.3 With thanks to film-maker, Kevin Snyman, GIM produced the well-received 2022 docufilm, 'Telling it like it is', sharing the testimonies of Black URC members concerning racism within and beyond the denomination:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=1MrzfxX5gGs
- 7.2.4 The poem 'Do They Know?', shared during the URC History Society's 50th Anniversary Conference and at General Assembly 2022, was directly inspired by conversations with Black and Ethnic Minority URC ministers. GIM offers the docufilm and poem as resources for reflection and conversation.

Do They Know?

Do they know, Karen,
Does the URC know
All that we face, day out and day in –
What we see, what we hear,
What we take in our stride;
What it means,
How it feels
To walk in our skin?

Can they imagine the sting,
Standing fresh in the church,
Offering gifts of talents and time,
And much more,
To be told, "You're not needed
For this, nor for that;
We've called a white colleague
We knew from before!"?

Do they know how it burns
When the message is shared,
"She says she's not coming on any such day
That you lead, that you preach,
Because she insists,
She can't understand a word that you say"?

Do they have any idea
Just how much it smarts
When a colleague, in collar,
Seeks to keep me in check -
Says, "I welcome 'your folks' in the pews, but cannot
Accept a white collar
Around a Black neck"?

When we look around
And see so many ways

We uphold this Church – our Church –
‘Cross this land
Then look beyond local,
See our spaces dissolve
And hear the view that, perhaps,
This is all as God planned?

Do they know, Karen,
Does the URC know
Just what we encounter
While they say we ‘belong’;
What it means to be Black in this Church –
Our Church?
Please, hear what we see -
See that something is wrong.

Karen Campbell, June 2022

- 7.2.5 GIM is delighted to report that some progress is being made. We rejoice that when inducted in July 2023, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson will become the first Black woman to serve as Moderator of the General Assembly, and that two black ministers will serve as her Chaplains. It was also pleasing to see the whole diversity of the URC reflected in the URC’s 50th Anniversary celebration service.

7.3 Legacies of (Transatlantic) Slavery

The Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group welcomed its new Convenor, Prof David Reynolds in 2021 – just in time to steer the group through the URC-wide consultation process. While some responses were unnecessarily hurtful to engage with, it was gratifying that General Assembly 2022 adopted the statement of Confession and Apology drafted by the task group, committing to concrete actions of ‘repairing justice’. The year since then has seen close collaboration between the LoS and Positive Action task groups to bring proposals to General Assembly 2023, starting with mandatory anti-racism training for the occupants of specific roles within the Church, as detailed in the Mission Committee Paper ‘Legacies of Slavery – Proposals for Repairing Justice’.

7.4 Racial Justice – the Ecumenical Journey

- 7.4.1 The URC is represented in various ecumenical conversations. We are among the founding members of the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) and sponsored its formal launch in February 2023. The RJAF works both proactively and reactively to promote racial justice in civic society, engaging with victims of injustice, the police and with politicians in seeking to bring about change.

- 7.4.2 There is great ecumenical interest in the URC’s racial justice journey, with the GIM Secretary being invited to contribute to the Baptist Union General Assembly on the topic of LoS (May 2022), and to serve on the Reparations Group for the Methodist Church (current). She has contributed to ecumenical resources collated by CTBI for Racial Justice Sunday 2022, marking the 30th anniversary of the murder of Stephen Lawrence (<https://ctbi.org.uk/racial-justice-sunday-2023-stephen-lawrence/>), and was invited to participate in ‘Stephen Lawrence Legacy Conversations’ alongside colleagues from a variety of Christian backgrounds:

- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9RYHi01mHNfWnh-s0VyiV9ABURGxIKnw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9RYHi01mHNegnzOYRQeC-PAeYLEwJh0B>

Through the Secretary, we are currently part of the planning for a service to commemorate the Windrush 75th Anniversary, to be held at Southwark Cathedral on 22 June 2023.

7.5 **Global and Intercultural – the Council for World Mission**

Sometimes, there is no clear distinction between global and intercultural. There has been mutual encouragement between the Council for World Mission (CWM) and the URC regarding engagement with the Legacies of Slavery. In August 2022, the GIM Secretary was invited to co-host the launch of CWM's Onesimus project in South Africa, including an apology for its predecessors' involvement in transatlantic slavery: www.cwmission.org/council-for-world-mission-launches-the-onesimus-project. She has also worked with the CWM joint Caribbean and Europe regions' Gender Justice Working Group, including moderating two live-streamed global conversations in March and October 2022. Nearer to home, the Secretary is participating in Europe Region Roundtable Conversations addressing LoS/Reparations – opportunities for mutual sharing and support between the member Churches.

7.6 **Partners in Mission – the Council for World Mission**

GIM oversees the relationship between the URC and CWM, including the URC's sending and receiving of Partners in Mission. We are blessed to have two Partners currently serving with us – the Revd Yufen Chen, from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (Thames North), and Ms So Young Jung, from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Southern Synod). Both Partners completed their first terms of service during the past year, with GIM organising reviews and recommending that each serves a second three-year term. GIM oversaw the retirement of Alison Gibbs, CWM's longest serving Partner in Mission, who returned from service in Zambia in December 2021. April 2022 saw the departure of URC ministers the Revd Melanie Smith and the Revd Mark Meatcher to serve with the Pacific Theological College in Fiji. All of these were intensive processes, and thanks are due to the International Exchange Reference Group, and to Veronica Daniel (GIM Administrator), who contributed greatly to ensure that all ran smoothly.

7.7 **Global Partners**

GIM continues to have a presence in the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF) and in the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development on the Korean Peninsula (EFK). Thanks are expressed to former Moderator of URC General Assembly, the Revd David Grosch-Miller, who has continued to represent the URC in both networks and to share his wisdom with the GIM Secretary and the Mission Committee. General Assembly 2022 adopted a resolution in support of the Korea Peace Appeal, calling for a formal end to the Korean War, and in September 2022, the GIM Secretary attended an EFK gathering in Karlsruhe, Germany. More recently, conversations have resumed with the London Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. In April 2023, GIM was pleased to support the visit to the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) by the Secretary for Ministries, Nicola Furley-Smith. She spoke at the Yeongdeungpo Synod meeting with 300+ ministers and elders present. After the URC Secretary for Ministries had spoken, a debate ensued at the Synod as to why no women

delegates had been elected, given partner churches had women in leadership roles. This resulted in the passing of an emergency resolution to suspend their rules and to commit the PCK to sending at least one female minister and one female lay person each year to their General Assembly.

7.8 The coming year will see a review of our ongoing and potential global relationships.

8. Fresh Expressions

Fresh Expressions Coordinator:

Linda Rayner

Fresh Expressions are new forms of church that emerge within contemporary culture and engage primarily with those who don't 'go to church.'

(www.freshexpressions.org.uk)

8.1 Since our last report in 2021, the remit of the Fresh Expressions Enabling Group has expanded to include the enabling of *Pioneering* in the denomination. Therefore, the group is now known as **Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Enabling Group (FXPEG)** and includes representatives from the Mission and Discipleship departments, as well as the URC Pioneer network and Synod Moderators. The group meets four times each year to consider how to cultivate a deep understanding and acceptance of fresh expressions of church and pioneering within the URC. This will be achieved by ongoing development of the 'embedding strategy' and ensuring the necessary action takes place between the meetings. Much emphasis is laid on collaboration between the Mission and the Discipleship departments and recognition and acceptance of the wide variety of accepted ministries within the URC (Word and Sacraments, CRCW Ministers, Special Category Ministers, Chaplaincy etc).

Introducing new ways of being church, and changing mindsets is a slow process, however, there have been considerable strides forward since the last report.

8.2 Pioneer Training

2022 saw the launch of a major new initiative called the Newbigin Pioneering Hub. In collaboration with the Congregational Federation and Church Mission Society (CMS), URC lay pioneers can now train for the CMS Certificate in Pioneering Mission. The part-time course consists of six modules delivered via a mix of teaching styles, including two residential weekends and a series of hybrid (online and in-person) sessions. The first cohort consisted of 21 people and will end in July 2023. The second is due to commence in September 2023. The development of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub is intended to offer ongoing support for students. Full details of the Hub can be found at:

www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/more-about-ministry/newbigin-pioneering-hub/

Creating New Christian Communities is a short (three day) course at Westminster College, which is optional for ordinands for credit, or can be audited by lay or ordained church leaders.

8.3 The Fresh Expressions Partners' Learning Community, which is for the partner denominations of the Fresh Expressions movement, was attended by representatives from the FXPEG in January 2023. This year, the focus was on studies of liminal spaces, the creativity that can arise from being in a position of

uncertainty, and how this applies to post-Covid church and fresh expressions of church.

- 8.4 The FXPEG worked in collaboration with Faith and Order Committee to develop a paper: 'Ecclesiological considerations for the United Reformed Church in conversation with Fresh Expressions', which establishes how the URC can recognise new forms of church and welcome them into the denomination. The paper represents a number of years of work and concludes that the URC is able to accept new forms of church, saying: "The Faith and Order Committee confirms that there are means, through dialogue and mutual respect, of agreeing that a Fresh Expression of church constitutes a congregation which could be recognised as a church within the United Reformed Church."

9. Mission and Evangelism

- 9.1 The Mission Committee has devoted time in recent meetings to look at the relationship between mission and evangelism. At its September 2022 residential, a presentation was given by the Mersey Synod representative, which was followed by a full discussion. In February 2023, the theme was picked up again with a session led by Northern College Tutor, Graham Adams on the subject of evangelism and social action. This was followed by Niall Cooper from Church Action on Poverty, looking at the relationship between social action, church growth, and discipleship. He shared how hospitality and generosity are significant for church growth and how participation in social action can also offer a practical route into faith for people who have previously not been part of the church community and therefore might not have considered exploring faith before. Church Action on Poverty is calling for the traditional churches to invest in low-income areas and halt its disproportionate withdrawal from the poorest communities.

9.2 Mission Enablers Network

From the Mission Team, Lindsey Brown and Linda Rayner support the work of the Mission Enablers Network, comprising all those Synod appointees who enable mission in various ways. These include regular meetings for networking, sharing and support. As well as meeting for an annual residential and an annual day meeting, there will be regional meetings to support the work more locally.

The Network is made up of a range of roles, including evangelists and special category ministers, as well as representatives from the team of Missional Discipleship Mentors in North-West Synod. As it has emerged from the challenging pandemic period, the Network is becoming increasingly energised by success stories and new initiatives.

9.3 Leading Your Church Into Growth (LYCIG)

Mission Team will be represented at the LYCIG residential in November 2023 in Preston, led by Mersey Synod Mission Enabler, Stuart Radcliffe and Yorkshire Synod Evangelist Ashley Evans. Mission Team is actively looking at how LYCIG can be offered more widely in the denomination, as a way of helping local URCs to focus on church growth.

10. Rural Mission

- 10.1 The Arthur Rank Centre hosts a regular online gathering of Rural Regional Network officers and anyone with an interest in Rural Mission is welcome to join. The conversations tend to focus on activity in the regions and are particularly

useful for mutual support and generating ideas. The one-hour meetings cover a diverse range of topics, including recently 'Campaigning and Engaging your local MP', and 'Cost of Living Crisis in Rural Areas'. Contact linda.rayner@urc.org.uk for information about joining the hub.

- 10.2 It is becoming increasingly clear that rural communities, in particular, are suffering in the financial crisis:
- 10.3 Trussell Trust reports a 75% increase in need for food parcels in rural areas in the six months to January, and there is recognition that rural areas incur additional living costs of at least 10%, in terms of such items as heating, fuel, and housing. The nature and threshold of rural poverty is markedly different from that in urban contexts.
- 10.4 Isolation and loneliness also continue to be key issues facing rural churches, and the Arthur Rank Centre offers a toolkit for churches which can be found at: www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/mission/rural-isolation-and-loneliness-toolkit/
- 10.5 The Arthur Rank Centre offers a course for lay and ordained leaders who may be new to a rural context, entering a rural appointment for the first time, or in need of a 'rural refresher'. This is a space to explore mission, evangelism and leadership through an ecumenical rural lens.
www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/ruralministrycourse/
17–18 Octobr at King's Park, Northampton.

11. URC Buildings Forum

Administrator:

Carole Sired

Mission Support Officer:

Lindsey Brown

- 11.1 The URC's Buildings Forum was established to provide a single voice for the URC when consulting with other denominations and other bodies to further develop an understanding of the ways in which buildings both enhance and hinder the life of the Church.
- 11.2 The forum now largely comprises URC Synod Property Officers and some additional members and meets twice a year to exchange information and ideas and receive updates from the Listed Buildings Advisory Group and others, loosely organised by a small team with a range of property experience.
- 11.3 Online conferences were started during the pandemic in 2021, covering a range of topics including inspirational examples of missional focused buildings. In 2023 there will be two conferences, one on using church buildings for community presence, and the second in the autumn on ways to adapt our buildings to be more environmentally friendly.
- 11.4 We are grateful to David Skipp for chairing the planning group until spring 2023, and to the rest of the group for their enthusiasm and drive in founding and steering this very popular initiative. Mission Team actively supports the work of

the URC's Building Forum, recognising the important role that church buildings can play for mission.

12. Net Zero Task Group

Convenor:

Chris Baillie

Administrator:

Carole Sired

- 12.1 Within the URC, a new Environmental Policy was agreed by General Assembly in 2022, establishing a target and plans for the Church to reach net zero emissions by 2030. The 2022 resolution outlined the membership for the Net Zero Task Group. Once the required members were recruited, it held its first meeting in March 2023 and has committed to meet monthly thereafter.
- 12.2 There is a growing network of 'Green Apostles', who advocate in their respective Synods. 30% of local URCs have registered as eco churches. 121 churches have received their bronze awards, with 52 having achieved silver.
- 12.3 With just over six years to achieve the task set by last year's General Assembly of reaching net zero 'across the whole of church life', the task ahead is very steep. As the Net Zero Task Group gets to grips with its work, it is also likely to be costly, with major changes to the way we operate as a church.

Paper 12

Poverty and inequality in the UK

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor, Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society simeon.mitchell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 31 In response to the gospel call to challenge poverty and structures that cause marginalisation, General Assembly: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. expresses its deep concern at the rising levels of poverty in the UK over the last 15 years, recognising that in a wealthy economy such as the UK, poverty is not inevitable but a result of political choices and systemic injustices b. calls upon political leaders to make a commitment to work towards the eradication of structural poverty in the UK, and encourages churches and church members to raise these issues with candidates in the lead-up to the next General Election c. asks the Mission and Ministries Committees and the Synods to reflect on how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission, and bring proposals, if appropriate, to a future General Assembly.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This report offers a summary of the current context of poverty and inequality in the UK to enable the Church to give a considered response.
Main points	In 2012, General Assembly received a substantial report entitled 'The social impact of poverty and inequality in the UK – a challenge to the Church' ¹ , and adopted a resolution ² setting

¹ This can be read on pages 204-213 of the Book of Reports for 2012: https://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Archives/assembly_reports_12.pdf

² Resolution 28, found on page 22 of the Record of Assembly for 2012: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/assembly-record-2012.pdf>

	<p>out various ways in which the Church would respond to that challenge and work to end inequality in our society.</p> <p>Over the decade since, there have been many significant changes in the nature and extent of inequality in Britain. Poverty has become deeper and more entrenched. The impact of austerity policies on public services and changes to the benefits system have reduced the support available to people on low incomes. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated financial inequalities and resulted in many poorer households building up debts. The cost of living crisis of the last 18 months means that many more people are affected by and aware of these issues.</p> <p>Levels of destitution, child poverty and poverty experienced by those in work, are all on the rise. We have witnessed the rapid growth in provision of food banks and now “warm spaces”, by churches and others, as the welfare system does not provide a sufficient social safety net.</p> <p>This report therefore seeks to provide an update to the 2012 report and offer an opportunity for General Assembly to reflect on these central gospel concerns in our current context and discuss the ways that the Church should respond.</p>
Previous relevant documents	‘The social impact of poverty and inequality in the UK – a challenge to the Church’, report to General Assembly, 2012.
Consultation has taken place with...	Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT), Development Worker (Church Related Community Work and Special Category Ministry), Secretary for Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	None directly.
External (eg ecumenical)	These are concerns shared by ecumenical partners particularly our JPIT partners, the Methodist Church and Baptist Union. Agreeing the resolutions would enable closer joint working on these issues.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Rising living costs have had huge impacts across our society over the last 18 months, but the sharpest effects have been felt by the least well-off. The charity Action for Children recently reported that: “Frontline staff have told us that child poverty levels are at the worst they can remember.”³ In communities that have gone through a decade of austerity followed by a pandemic, who understand and are sadly acclimatised to deprivation, the sentiment that “this is the worst we have seen” is being repeated time and time again.
- 1.2 In a recent focus group held with people who experience poverty, the observation was made that they had been seen drops in their standards of living over many

³ Action for Children: <https://take.actionforchildren.org.uk/page/98558/petition>

years, having to make harder and harder decisions about what to cut out of budgets, but it only became labelled a cost of living crisis when “average” middle-income families began to feel the impact of price rises.

- 1.3 This report draws on analysis of public data, recent reports from charities, and evidence provided by a series of interviews, focus groups and conversations that the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) have held with church and community leaders to set the current crisis in context, and enable considered reflection on how the Church should respond.⁴

2. The changing nature of poverty since 2010

- 2.1 From 2010 to 2022, average household incomes rose slowly (from £28.1k to £32.3k for the median household)⁵. Average wealth per household rose markedly, largely due to rises in the values of property, stocks and shares (from £250k to over £300k for the median household, in real terms). However, while the average and higher income family saw increases in income and wealth, the story for those with lower incomes was very different. The poorest fifth of households saw a drop in their incomes by over 4% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2021/22. By the spring of 2020, around 14.6 million people (22% of the population) were experiencing poverty, up from 13.1 million (21% of the population) in 2010.⁶
- 2.2 In 2019, around 9% of this number were pensioners, the majority were adults of working age, and a third of those in poverty were children (meaning 3 in 10 children in the UK were growing up in poverty). If we break down the figures by other characteristics, we build up an even clearer picture of the face of poverty. You are much more likely to be on a low income if you are from an ethnic minority, if you have a disability, or if you are a single parent.
- 2.3 Poverty has also become deeper, with the numbers in destitution – the deepest form of poverty which had been believed to be virtually eliminated in the UK – rising past 1.5 million in 2015, to 2.5 million in 2020.⁷ Deeper poverty became harder to escape, with 13% of the population experiencing persistent poverty.
- 2.4 It is important to recognise that this is not about unemployment, which has fallen significantly. More hours are being worked. Families are having to work harder, yet are remaining in poverty.
- 2.5 This is partly as a result of changes to the benefits system. During the 2010s there were large cuts to welfare benefits, largely through changes in who was able to claim, and freezing of benefit levels in cash terms, thus allowing inflation to erode their value. The remaining money in the benefit system was rebalanced to favour those in work. This, alongside a steadily increasing minimum wage, meant that poverty for single people in work reduced, while for those unable to work full time, or families with children, poverty increased markedly.

⁴ The first part of this report draws extensively on JPIT briefings on the cost of living crisis: <https://jpit.uk/economy/the-cost-of-living-crisis>

⁵ Office for National Statistics:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/personalandhouseholdfinances/incomeandwealth/bulletins/householddisposableincomeandinequality/financialyearending2022>

⁶ This report uses the international standard definition of poverty which is “a household income that is 60% or less of the average (median) societal [in this case British] household income”.

⁷ Joseph Rowntree Foundation: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk>

2.6 Local authorities also faced huge cuts over this period, with overall spending falling by 23% per person. Changes to the funding formula increased the importance of an area's demographics, especially old age, and reduced the importance of economic factors. This meant that the cuts were focused on the least well-off parts of the country. In England the most deprived areas averaged 31% in funding cuts, whereas the wealthiest areas saw cuts of "only" 16%.⁸

3. Effects of the pandemic

3.1 The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were felt across the population, but it had a particular effect on those in poverty. Outside of residential care settings, people on low incomes experienced the worst health outcomes as a result of Covid-19. They also experienced the most severe financial pressures.

3.2 Those on low incomes were most likely to lose their job altogether, most likely to be furloughed, and least likely to have their furlough pay topped-up. Low-income families also faced increasing costs – as strategies that they had previously used to make their budgets work were not easily available during lockdowns.⁹

3.3 For the families who entered the pandemic just about managing, increased costs and lower incomes gave people no choice but to borrow, often by delaying paying bills. Between April 2020 and September 2021, the number of people reporting difficulty paying bills doubled to 15 million, with 4 million needing to borrow to cover basic bills.¹⁰

4. Cost of living crisis

4.1 Since early 2022, the cost of living has been rising for everyone, but has risen fastest for the least well-off. The effective inflation rate for the poorest families is conservatively estimated at 12.5% for the year to April 2023. The major driver of inflation is increasing household energy costs, accompanied by large rises in food prices. The poorest families by necessity spend a much greater proportion of their income on food and fuel than the average family, which is why the inflation rate for the poorest is higher.

4.2 Analysis undertaken by Prof Donald Hirsch, published by the Joint Public Issues Team last autumn,¹¹ highlighted that an average family of four receiving benefits, even taking into account additional payments and energy price caps, will be around £1,400 worse off this year than last. As around half of adults receiving Universal Credit regularly skip meals because they cannot afford them,¹² this is having an extremely serious impact.

4.3 As a result, many people have faced awful choices. The cliché is the choice between heating or eating. It is a cliché because it so common that it now often

⁸ Institute for Fiscal Studies, 'The outlook for councils' funding: is austerity over?', 2019

⁹ Joint Public Issues Team, *Reset the Debt*, 2021: <https://jpit.uk/reset-the-debt>

¹⁰ StepChange, *Credit Safety Net*, 2022: <https://www.stepchange.org/policy-and-research/credit-safety-net.aspx>

¹¹ Professor Donald Hirsch, 'Enough to get through the winter', analysis published by the Joint Public Issues Team, 21 September 2022. Source: <https://jpit.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/September-2022-DH-Report.pdf>

¹² Food Foundation, 2022-23: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking#tabs/Round-12>

goes unremarked upon. One woman who joined a focus group had difficulty talking, and it transpired her choice was between food for the family and dental treatment. Prioritising her children meant weeks of toothache. Stories of families moving lightbulbs from room to room – not just to save on buying more bulbs but to ensure that electricity was not wasted – are no longer rare. The seeming abstract percentages of inflation rates very quickly translate into stories of real struggles in families where budgets are tight.

5. Charities are providing a safety net

5.1 The increasing financial challenges faced by many people have translated directly into a greater demand for charitable help. This is starkly illustrated by the growth in foodbanks since the early 2010s. In 2022-23, the Trussell Trust distributed almost 3 million food parcels, more than ever before.

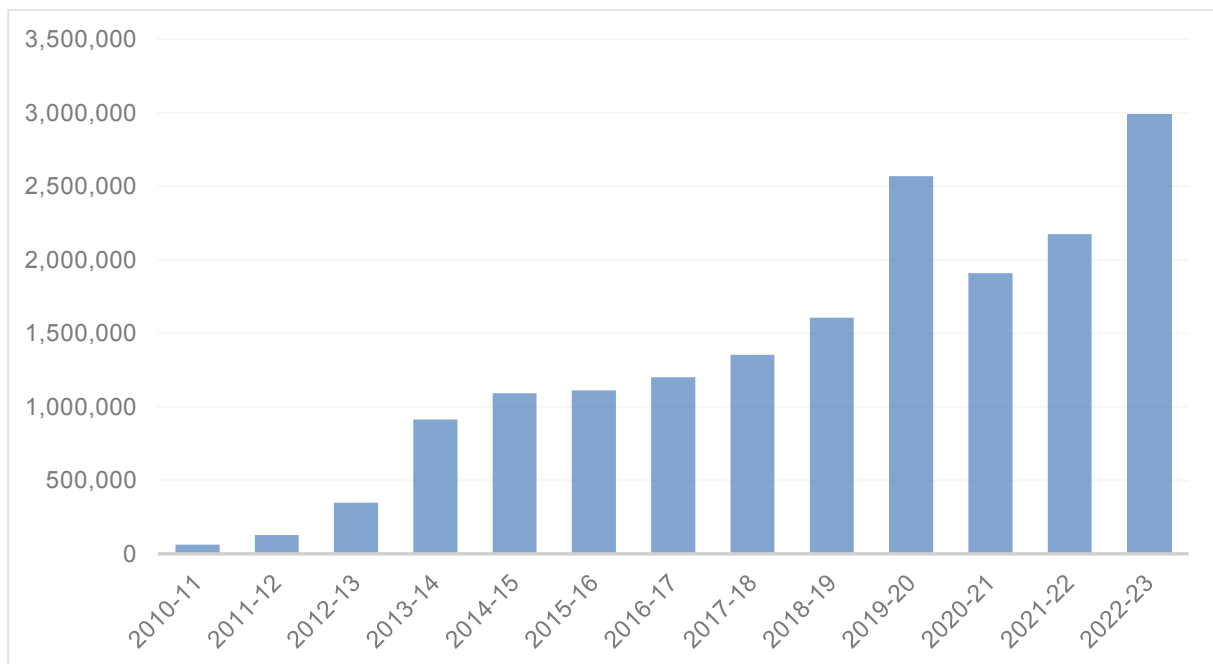


Chart: Trussell Trust food parcels delivered each year, 2010-2023. Trussell represents around half of foodbanks in the UK, and there are thousands of other emergency food aid providers, including soup kitchens and social supermarkets. Source: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/>

5.2 Community and charity provision has increasingly become an essential part of the social safety net. Thousands of warm spaces were opened in the winter of 2022-23. Debt charities, such as Christians Against Poverty and StepChange, are responding to a surge in people needing advice.

5.3 While the perseverance and energy that has been shown is extraordinary, it cannot be relied upon indefinitely. A recent report from Theos concluded that: “The collective impact of household insecurity is beginning to show in whole communities. It is no longer a crisis only of individual circumstances, but a systemic problem, reflected in the fraying fabric of civil society and faith groups. These institutions form a vital part of the safety net offering security and material support to millions of people, but are themselves becoming less secure.”¹³

¹³ Theos, *A Torn Safety Net: How the cost of living crisis threatens its own last line of defence* (November 2022): <https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/cmsfiles/Insecurity-report-v4-combined.pdf>

6. Outlook

- 6.1 Looking ahead, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast in March 2023 that real household disposable income per person, a measure of living standards, will fall by a cumulative 5.7% over 2022/23 and 2023/24. This would be the largest two-year fall since records began in the 1950s.¹⁴ A recovery to pre-pandemic living standards is not expected for a number of years. However, in a highly unequal economy such as the UK's, averages often disguise important information. In this case, this includes the fact that those with the lowest incomes are expected to see a longer and deeper impact on their standard of living than the average family, while the wealthiest 10% are expected to see their overall disposable income increase, driven by higher interest rates generating greater investment income.
- 6.2 Without a significant shift in political will to tackle these issues, poverty looks set to be increasingly entrenched in British society in a structural way, and a generation will grow up experiencing sustained and chronic economic insecurity.
- 6.3 It is important that this begins with listening to the experiences of those living in poverty. The experts in poverty are those who live that life. Making ends meet with very little money requires knowledge, skills and ingenuity most do not possess. Any solution to poverty must start with knowledge and expertise only these experts have.

7. Our theology calls us to action

- 7.1 The 2012 report to General Assembly on poverty in the UK offered a review of theological considerations about injustice, poverty and inequality. It concluded that: "biblical economic values demand nothing less than the economic well-being for all, and especially for the vulnerable and marginalised in our society."
- 7.2 It also affirmed that: "The URC continues to view justice to the poor as a core part of Christian mission... while poverty is often hidden and misunderstood, it continues to prevent many from fulfilling the potential that God has given them. As Christians we are called to stand beside those in poverty as well as challenge the structures which allow poverty to persist."
- 7.3 We believe the Church now needs to respond to this call with greater urgency and visibility.

8. How should the Church respond?

- 8.1 Nationally and locally, the United Reformed Church is already actively involved in responding to poverty in multiple ways, from pastoral care to advocacy to provision of social and community services.

Mission and ministry among people experiencing poverty and marginalisation

Many local, flourishing churches are involved in partnerships and campaigns to alleviate poverty and are involved in organising practical examples and signs of hope and inclusivity. Three-quarters of URCs host or support a food bank, and a significant number host warm spaces, debt counselling centres, and other community projects. The Theos report commissioned as part of the Church Life

¹⁴ House of Commons Library, 'Poverty in the UK: Statistics', 6 April 2023, p. 14
<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN07096/SN07096.pdf>

Review highlighted that the URC's Church-Related Community Workers offer a distinctive form of ministry and service among people experiencing marginalisation in different ways, although this is currently a very small programme.

There is potential for the Church to do much more to demonstrate its commitment to this gospel priority. The Life on the Breadline project, a recent major study of the nature, reach and impact of Christian responses to contemporary poverty, recommended that churches engage more deeply with the call to “transform structural injustice” and “translate verbal commitments to God’s Preferential Option for the Poor into an ecumenical programme of action for systemic change.”¹⁵ A recent Church Action on Poverty report¹⁶ highlighted the high rate of church closures in low-income areas over the last decade, and while it noted that the URC was alone among mainstream denominations in closing more churches in more affluent areas, the story is nonetheless one of withdrawal. It challenges the Churches to more intentionally listen and collaborate with those “on the margins”, and commit resources to ministry and mission in areas of deprivation.

For instance, for over 15 years the Church of Scotland has had a Priority Areas programme,¹⁷ which dedicates additional support to churches serving the most deprived communities; and over the last three years the Methodist Church has invested in a ‘Church at the Margins’ initiative,¹⁸ which aims to nurture and build new Christian communities amongst economically marginalised people.

As the Church Life Review process seeks to encourage flourishing, and release and redirect resources around the Church, it seems timely to begin a joined-up conversation about how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission.

Advocacy, campaigning and public witness

Through the Joint Public Issues Team, the URC nationally has been involved in producing various reports, briefings and campaigns around poverty in the UK over the last few years. Most recently, the Church has added its support to the joint call spearheaded by former prime minister, Gordon Brown, for the government to provide people on low incomes with ‘Enough to Live’¹⁹ during the cost of living crisis, and to the ‘Guarantee Our Essentials’ campaign,²⁰ which is asking the government to ensure the basic rate of Universal Credit should be calculated to at least cover the cost of essentials like food, household bills and travel costs.

¹⁵ *Life on the Breadline: Christianity, Poverty and Politics in the 21st Century City – a report for Church Leaders in the UK*, 2022: <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Life-on-the-Breadline-Church-Leaders-Report-2022.pdf>

¹⁶ Church Action on Poverty, *Church on the Margins: Is the Church losing faith in low-income communities in Greater Manchester?*, February 2023: <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/news-release-poor-communities-hit-hardest-by-church-closures-study-finds%ef%bf%bc/>

¹⁷ See <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/connect/priority-areas>

¹⁸ See <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/discover-church-at-the-margins/>

¹⁹ Joint Public Issues Team: <https://jpit.uk/enoughtolive>

²⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/guarantee-our-essentials>

Work is now underway, led by the Churches but drawing in organisations from across civil society, to develop a major campaign which aims to use the lead-up to the next general election to move poverty up the political agenda, and build the political will to end structural poverty in the UK. Structural poverty is poverty that exists because of decisions made by employers, institutions and government about how wealth should be distributed in society. This campaign will be rooted in and informed by lived experience, and seek to strengthen the long term movement for the ending of poverty in the UK.

We believe it is once again a moment for the Church to raise its prophetic voice – on this issue, call for action, and stand, like Jesus, in solidarity with members of our communities who experience poverty and marginalisation.

Paper I3

Legacies of Slavery – proposals for repairing justice

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of URC Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 32</p> <p>1. General Assembly resolves that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Officers of the General Assembly • The General Secretariat • Staff Secretaries • Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries • Synod Moderators • Synod Clerks • Members of the Panel for General Assembly appointments • Members of the Assessment board • The Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline • The Disciplinary Investigation Panel • The Commission Panel • The Disciplinary Appeals Commission List • The CYDO+ Team • Synod Racial Justice Coordinators and Advocates (RJAs) • Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (Categories 1, 2, 5 and 8 as defined in the Active Ministers Policy, Paper H5 Assembly Executive 2021)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members of Assembly Committees and Advisory Groups • Training and Development Officers (TD+ Network) • Synod Mission Enablers. <p>Resolution 33</p> <p>2. General Assembly asks the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Ministries and Education and Learning Departments to explore how and when anti-racism training can be rolled out more widely in the URC, particularly to include those roles defined as URC Office holders.</p> <p>Resolution 34</p> <p>3. General Assembly endorses the schedule and timetable of mandatory anti-racism training outlined in the Legacies of Slavery Task Group report and agrees an initial budget of up to £20,000 to meet the cost of training sessions and related expenses up to General Assembly 2024.</p> <p>Resolution 35</p> <p>4. General Assembly recognises that further funds will be required as the anti-racism training is rolled out more widely, and asks the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to bring updated costings to General Assembly 2024 informed by the actual costs incurred in delivering the early stages of the training.</p> <p>Resolution 36</p> <p>5. General Assembly endorses the work of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, the direction of travel outlined in the task group’s report, and asks the task group to continue its exploration of regional and global proposals, aiming to bring costed proposals to General Assembly 2024.</p> <p>Resolution 37</p> <p>6. General Assembly asks Mission Committee to maintain the existence of a Legacies of Slavery Task Group to steer the future work as outlined in the task group report.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group. Adoption of resolutions arising from this work.
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Main points	General Assembly is asked to make anti-racism training mandatory for specific groups within the Church; to endorse a proposed schedule of anti-racism training to be delivered from early 2024; and to endorse the task group’s proposals for repairing justice at local, regional and global levels.
Previous relevant documents	<p>Healing: Hope in Action – Mission Committee Paper, Sept 2019</p> <p>LoS Consultation Documents 2021/2022</p> <p>Paper E1, Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church (Equalities Committee) - General Assembly 2022.</p> <p>Various past resolutions, including: From ‘Not Racist’ to Anti-Racist – Mission Council November 2020</p> <p>URC statement of Confession and Apology regarding the legacies of transatlantic slavery (2022)</p> <p>General Assembly commitment to concrete acts of repairing justice in response to the continuing legacies of transatlantic slavery (2022).</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>The Positive Action Task Group</p> <p>Members of the CYDO+ Team</p> <p>The Finance Committee</p> <p>The General Secretary</p> <p>The Deputy General Secretary, Mission</p> <p>The Mission Committee</p> <p>The Equalities Committee</p> <p>The Secretary for Education and Learning</p> <p>The Secretary for Ministries</p> <p>The Synod Moderators</p> <p>Cascades of Grace</p> <p>The Training Officer for the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Process</p> <p>The Head of Children’s and Youth Work.</p> <p>Prof Anthony Reddie – renowned theologian, and expert in the field of anti-racism training.</p> <p>Various ecumenical partners, including colleagues in The Methodist Church, The Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	£20,000 to be budgeted for expenditure in the period up to General Assembly 2024, with further funds to be committed from General Assembly 2024. The Finance Committee has been specifically consulted.
External (eg ecumenical)	Our main ecumenical partners are all engaged in similar or related work concerning racial justice in general, and addressing the legacies of transatlantic slavery in particular –

	including the need for reparative justice. Close ecumenical partners, including The Methodist Church and The Baptist Union of Great Britain, are seeking to learn from the URC's legacies of slavery (LoS) journey. In response to the task group's work, the URC Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries was invited to join a panel exploring possibilities for reparations by The Methodist Church. Through the Secretary, the URC is also contributing to LoS and reparations round table conversations hosted by CWM Europe.
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Report of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group for General Assembly 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In 2022, General Assembly adopted a statement of Confession and Apology regarding transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies. In addition, Assembly affirmed its “commitment to practical actions to address the continuing negative impacts of the legacies of transatlantic slavery on Black communities in the UK, the Caribbean and Africa”, and instructed the Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group “to bring concrete and costed proposals to General Assembly 2023 for a considered programme of repairing justice”.
- 1.2 The task group has continued to meet to consider the actions which might be undertaken by the URC. It has been supplemented by two members of the CYDO+ team, demonstrating the commitment to ensure an intergenerational perspective on the URC's LoS journey. The group has also included two members of the Positive Action Task Group, helping to ensure a joined-up approach to areas of work previously endorsed by General Assembly. It has reviewed the LoS Consultation responses to identify emerging themes, and has consulted with individuals and groups both within and beyond the URC.
- 1.3 There is no question that the continuing racist legacies of transatlantic slavery have immeasurable negative social and financial impacts on Black communities both in the UK and around the globe. The task group has been equally clear that the URC's repairing justice response must be “costly” – in terms of money and impact – to demonstrate that our statement of Confession and Apology is truly meaningful. We cannot commit only to what we think we can easily afford – but must be bold in our commitment to justice and ‘putting right’ that which we know to be wrong. That said, the imperative for costly action has been held in tension with the need for any proposals to be realistic and possible for a church of our size.

2. What has emerged?

- 2.1 Three main proposals have emerged from the task group's work, seeking to address the legacies of transatlantic slavery at three ‘different levels’:
- Local – within the body of the URC

- Regional – in different geographic locations within the UK which have a specific historic connection with transatlantic slavery, and
- Global - working with our partners in/through the Council for World Mission (CWM) to support initiatives identified by churches in the Caribbean and Africa, or to develop joint initiatives with them.

While the task group is proposing that all of these are actioned, it has not been possible to properly research and cost all the proposals in time for General Assembly 2023. The group believes it is better to walk slowly, and thereby successfully reach the desired destination, than to race ahead without properly preparing for the journey. It is with this in mind that the task group outlines all three proposals in the paragraphs below, but with only one being recommended for immediate action. It is suggested that all proposals form part of a five-year plan, starting from Assembly 2023.

3. Local proposal: Mandatory anti-racism training – to be actioned from General Assembly 2023

- 3.1 Matthew 7:3-5 advises that we remove the log from our own eye to see clearly to remove the speck from our neighbour's eye.
- 3.2 Racism is a persistent, daunting and unacceptable reality in our world. That said, it is too easy for the Church to look out and critique the world beyond itself without addressing the issues within its own body. The LoS Task Group was very clear that the URC's starting point for actions of repairing justice must be to put our own house in order – even before and while seeking to comment on the world around us. The Legacies of Slavery Consultation and the subsequent Synod conversations highlighted that many people in our Church are painfully aware of the racial inequalities within the URC; some are on a journey of discomfiting realisation; too many others are in complete and even hostile denial that any issues exist. Repeatedly, the task group has heard the view that we need to elicit a culture change within our Church if we are to build a more equitable future for all. The recommendation for anti-racism training to be implemented across our Church, and for such training to be mandatory for specific post holders and employees within the Church, is a first step in seeking to kick-start that culture change, and brings concrete action to our 2021 commitment to journey from “not racist” to “actively anti-racist”.
- 3.3 Working in partnership, the LoS Task Group (Mission Committee) and the Positive Action Task Group (Equalities Committee) are recommending the introduction of mandatory anti-racism training for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC. The training will seek to open eyes, to make us more aware of the racist structures around us, and the racist norms and assumptions which inadvertently influence the ways we think and operate. Effective training will move us to question “the way things are done round here” in every sphere of URC life, and to implement changes as necessary

to elicit more equitable ways of doing and being: This *is* the movement from not racist to anti-racist.

- 3.4 Representatives from both task groups met with Prof Anthony Reddie, a renowned theologian, author, and expert in the field of anti-racism training from a specifically Christian theological perspective, to discuss what is needed. All parties recommend that the training should be in depth and in-person, with the first round of training being delivered by Prof Reddie and starting in early 2024. This will accommodate Prof Reddie's autumn sabbatical and give time to organise and advertise the sessions. The sessions will be held at regional centres around the UK, seeking to secure venues relatively near to where attendees live.
- 3.5 The task groups further recommend that the training should begin with the following groups (recognising many people will fall in more than one category, but will be required to be trained only once):
- The Officers of General Assembly
 - The General Secretariat
 - Staff Secretaries
 - Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries
 - Synod Moderators
 - Synod Clerks
 - Members of the Panel for General Assembly appointments
 - Members of the Assessment board
 - The Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline
 - The Disciplinary Investigation Panel
 - The Commission Panel
 - The Disciplinary Appeals Commission List
 - Synod Training & Development Officers (TD+ Network)
 - Synod Racial Justice Coordinators and Advocates (RJAs).
- 3.6 There will be an ongoing process of honing and adapting in light of feedback from these groups to shape a finalised training programme to be delivered more widely across the Church over the next few years. The Synod TD+ Network and RJAs will be specifically trained to join in delivering the anti-racism training, although there is no presumption that all of these individuals will feel comfortable or equipped to take on this very specific task.
- 3.7 The LoS and Positive Action Task Groups propose that further rounds of in-person training should be rolled out as soon as practical, and include:
- The CYDO+ Team
 - Members of Assembly Committees and Advisory Groups
 - Synod Mission Enablers
 - Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (Categories 1,2,5,8 as defined in the Active Ministers Policy 2021).

They further propose to work with the Ministries and Education and Learning Departments to explore how anti-racism training can be extended more widely across the URC, and specifically include individuals in roles defined as URC Office holders.

- 3.8 The task groups have considered the challenges of achieving in-person training for so many people, and are also conscious of the weight of mandated training which may be faced by ministers serving in ecumenical partnerships. Even so, the task groups recommend that, as a benchmark, the URC's anti-racism training should be mandatory and in-person for the cohorts named above, with alternative options explored on an as needed basis.
- 3.9 The task groups are also mindful of the work of the Church Life Review Group, and the prospect of significant structural changes being implemented in the Church before the work outlined above reaches completion. The groups are confident that the proposals are flexible enough to be adapted as necessary.

4. Regional proposal: Mentoring and pioneer ministry – to be further developed

- 4.1 The LoS Consultation responses highlighted a need for work with young Black men in particular, who are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Mentoring was cited as a specific, positive means of intervention.
- 4.2 The LoS task group has researched existing mentoring projects in a number of UK cities which have specific links with transatlantic slavery, in locations spanning Scotland, England, and Wales. Members of the group are having conversations with a number of these projects to explore how the URC might offer meaningful support beyond simply 'making a donation'. Ideas include pairing the project with a local URC to establish an ongoing point of contact, prayer and support, and possibly using the URC building to host aspects of the project's work.
- 4.3 The task group is proposing the development of a small network of regional pioneers – one person to be located in each of the four identified local churches – who will work in partnership with the church, the mentoring project, and with each other, to develop wider and joined-up work across the UK.

5. Global proposal: Work with global partners with and through the Council for World Mission (CWM) – to be further developed

- 5.1 This work is still at a fledgling stage. The task group has made contact with the new CWM Mission Secretary for Europe, who is keen to work with the URC to explore possible repairing justice initiatives. The task group was delighted to be contacted by the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans, former Moderator of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI), and current Chair of the UCJCI Reparations Task Force. The Revd Cowans warmly commended the URC's Statement of Confession and Apology, and is keen for us to work together

in developing appropriate initiatives. The LoS Task Group will be engaging more closely with CWM and the UCJCI during the coming year.

6. Looking to the future

- 6.1 Members of the present group propose that General Assembly asks Mission Committee to maintain the existence of a Legacies of Slavery Task Group to steer the future work outlined in this report, albeit recognising that some changes of personnel may be necessary in the light of members' other commitments.
- 6.2 The current task group commends this report to General Assembly, and would welcome General Assembly's endorsement of the work to date, and the proposals detailed here.

Paper 14

Reinvigorating the Ecumenical Vision of the United Reformed Church Part 2

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of URC Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 38</p> <p>1. General Assembly endorses the measures for ecumenical working and resource sharing outlined in Reinforcing the Ecumenical Vision of the URC Part 2 and encourages Synods to consider how they might make use of them to assist in addressing the areas of under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments and in developing new ecumenical relationships.</p> <p>Resolution 39</p> <p>2. General Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee to allocate six ministry of Word and Sacraments posts, available to Synods by application and open to all Ministers of Word and Sacraments with a specific call to ecumenical working, and which will not reduce Synod stipendiary ministry deployment targets, to provide ordained ministry of word and sacrament in identified local ecumenical contexts, whether existing or new.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To offer practical steps to reinvigorate the ecumenical vision of the United Reformed Church.
Main points	An update of the action taken by Mission Committee in response to Resolution 16d passed at the 2022 General Assembly. Conclusions drawn from that action.
Previous relevant documents	Paper 11 of the GA2022 Book of Reports – Reinforcing the ecumenical vision of the United Reformed Church.
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Committee; Ministries Committee; Faith and Order Committee; Synod Moderators; Synod Ecumenical Officers;

	Methodist/URC Liaison Group, National Ecumenical Officers, URC Youth Executive.
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Summary of impact

Financial	All anticipated within current budgets.
External (eg ecumenical)	The measures proposed, if adopted, will increase the level of support offered to local ecumenical working, addressing some areas where there has been an under resourcing of our ecumenical commitments. The proposals have been received enthusiastically by ecumenical partners and so there would be a positive impact in maintaining and developing ecumenical relationships.

1. Introduction

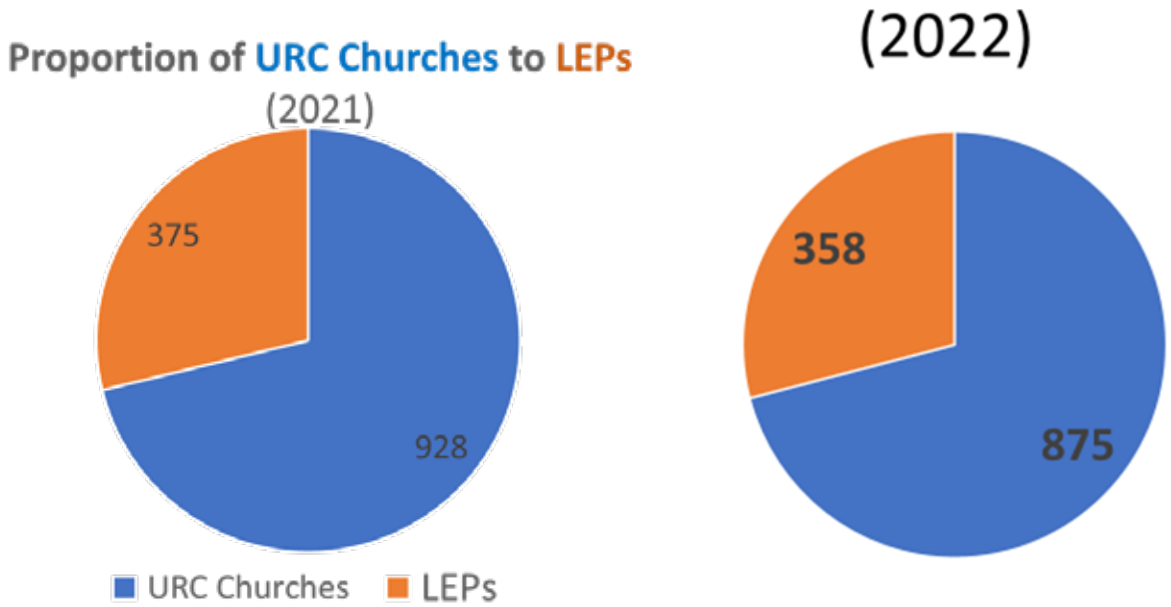
- 1.1 At General Assembly 2022, in our Jubilee year, the report from Mission Committee reminded the Church of the ecumenical hopes at its foundation in 1972.
- 1.2 A set of resolutions were passed acknowledging areas of under resourcing, affirming our commitment to our ecumenical vision and instructing Mission Committee to look for practical ways to resource our ecumenical commitments, particularly at a local level.
- 1.3 Since then, Mission Committee has comprehensively consulted with those on the ground, particularly our Synod Ecumenical Officers and Moderators, to get a clearer picture of the challenges that the URC faces in supporting its LEPs and to propose some of the practical resources that have emerged. This engagement has taken place in full cooperation with Ministries Committee and the Secretary for Ministries.
- 1.4 We are grateful to URC Youth for their enthusiastic support of these resolutions. In January at Youth Assembly 2023, some members of URC Youth wanted to highlight that relationships and partnerships between local churches, especially between churches with more financial and other resources and those with less, were a vital part of ensuring that mission takes place to its fullest potential in local communities. As a result, Youth Assembly passed a resolution encouraging local churches to develop concrete relationships with other churches in order to share resources, not limited to the URC denomination.
- 1.5 Aware that Mission Committee was already working on similar resolutions, responding to an instruction from the 2022 General Assembly, the URC Youth Executive has worked with Mission Committee to embody and put into action the intent of the Youth Assembly resolution within this paper and resolutions.

2. Local Ecumenical Partnerships Update

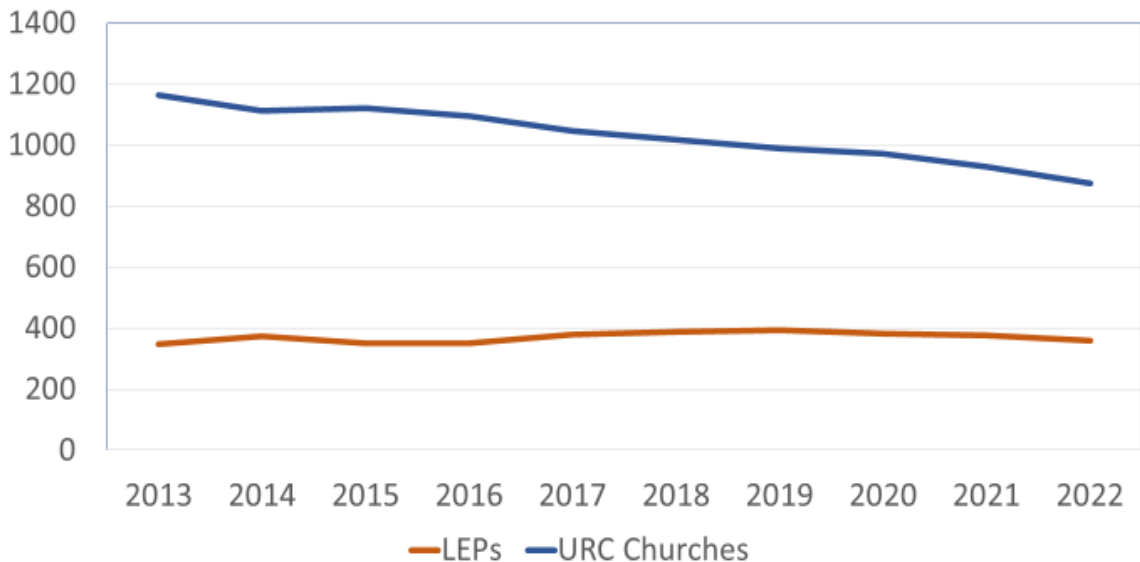
- 2.1 Resolution 16a) at GA2022 affirmed “that LEPs continue to be central to the ecumenical mission and vision of the URC”.
- 2.2 The general picture is that churches are working very well together ecumenically on social action projects, in such areas as foodbanks, warm hubs and refugee support. Formal ecumenical arrangements, however, are faltering in some places,

with deployment and finances most likely to be leading to difficulties in relationships.

- 2.3 From a URC perspective, the most recent Annual Church Returns show a continuing trend of LEPs closing at a slower rate than single congregation URCs, as indicated in last year’s ecumenical report to General Assembly. Below are the updated comparisons in graph format:



Decline in **URC Churches** versus **LEPs**



3. Counting LEP membership in the URC

- 3.1 Resolution 16b) at GA2022 reminded: “Synods and local churches that joint or ecumenical members of LEPs have always been and remain members of the URC, not just those who were members of the URC at the formation of the LEP.”

- 3.2 As stated in the 2022 Report (3.5 and 3.6): “In many cases, churches only count the residual URC membership, meaning those URC members registered at the inception of the LEP, and who identify solely as URC... In an established LEP, joint members will usually represent the largest proportion (if not all) of its membership roll. It is an ecumenical principle that joint members are regarded as full members of **all** the participating denominations. Our Methodist and Baptist colleagues include all joint members in their annual statistics, as opposed to the URC situation where, at best, only a proportion are included and, at worst, none.” The 2022 General Assembly resolution confirmed that “joint members have always been and remain members of the URC”.
- 3.3 We are now in a position to provide a much clearer indication of the importance of our LEPs to the denomination. For the first time last year, we collected additional data on the number of joint LEP members. The analysis is drawn on the latest annual survey, where an impressive 89% of LEPs (319 churches) submitted data. This information shows that the numerical size of LEP congregations on average is larger than a single congregation local URC. They recorded 8,091 joint members with an additional 3,666 people who identified their membership as purely URC (out of an overall LEP membership for this return of 18,357 members). Combining the joint and URC only members (all of whom are full members of the URC) from the 89% of LEPs which provided information, brings a total of just under 12,000 members. This is a substantial number, given the URC’s overall number of members. Significantly, they represent a cohort which currently is not fully included in the URC’s membership statistics, nor in scoping for ministry.
- 4. Addressing the areas of under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments**
- 4.1 The impact of undercounting URC membership in LEPs has an impact on the calculations for the deployment of ministers in Synods. It means that Synods are restricted in their ability to provide ministry for these LEPs. As a result, there is a tendency to provide less resourcing for our LEPs and to view them as being detached from the URC. With less allocation of resource, the LEPs often struggle to maintain their URC identity and sense of connectedness.
- 4.2 Anecdotally, our Synod Ecumenical Officers have also indicated that the URC, as a consequence, is seen by some local and regional ecumenical partners to be neglecting or withdrawing from their ecumenical responsibilities, which has led to a breakdown in relationships and trust. There is clearly a need to redress the balance, which leads to the substance behind the second resolution in this report, drawn up by the Secretary for Ministries below.
- 4.3 The Ministries Office is responsible for producing the deployment statistics for each Synod on an annual basis according to the formula set by General Assembly. As the number of full-time stipendiary equivalents (FTE) decreases, Synods have to make hard decisions about where stipendiary ministry needs to be placed. This is sometimes to the detriment of ecumenical vacancies and in the belief that the other denominations will find ministry for these posts. This has led to an erosion of the URC’s ecumenical credibility. Therefore, Ministries Committee supports the proposal from the Mission Committee to allocate the six posts outside of the normal deployment quota.
- 4.4 Six posts may seem an odd number given the number of Synods, but Ministries Committee feels this is a fair number in light of current ministry statistics. It is the

intention for these posts to be outside a Synod's allocation of FTE for our ministry statistics thus enabling Synods to declare vacancies and not be wildly over their target number of FTE. Each post will be for a period of seven years. These posts are not designed to be synod-wide, but for specific and identified local ecumenical contexts. Applications from Synods for such ecumenical posts should be made in writing to the Ministries Office using the attached proforma. The Accreditations (SCM&CRCW) Sub-Committee will be the final arbiter for the accrediting of such posts with advice from the Secretary for Ministries and the Deputy General Secretary (Mission).

5. Existing and new ways to resource and support ecumenical working

5.1 Existing routes for deployment to LEPs

5.1.1 There are several existing options that Synods can adopt to support the deployment of Ministers of Word and Sacraments to LEPs.

5.1.2 These include:

- a) Using Certificates of Limited Service, where 50% and under of a minister from another denomination falls outside of deployment.
- b) When a retired minister takes up a 30% role, deployment figures are not affected, **subject to Ministries Committee approval at their May meeting.**
- c) By placing an LEP on the Moderators' list up to one year before it is in vacancy, Synods can avoid the sense that another denomination needs to provide ministry before the URC has had an opportunity to issue a call.

5.2 Shared Ministry

5.2.1 By local arrangement, with the support of ecumenical officers, Synods and their ecumenical equivalent bodies, churches of different denominations, often including one or more LEP, can be grouped together using shared ministry in an ecumenical area or pastorate arrangements. Such groups will share ministers between the churches, provided that there is a common understanding of who will do what. Any agreement will, among other things, need to provide for what will happen when a minister from one of the churches leaves to ensure that new ministers continue to support and develop the Partnership.

5.2.2 Many existing LEP constitutions are drawn up on the basis of alternating ministry. It was expected that, if an LEP had been served by a minister of one denomination for a period, when that minister moved on, their replacement would be from one of the other denomination(s) in the LEP. As already noted, many Synods have instead asked the other denomination(s) to continue to provide ministry. This fails to recognise that all the traditional LEP denominations are struggling to offer ministry, with reducing numbers of ministers available amongst our ecumenical partners.

5.2.3 One option therefore is to move to a model of shared ministry where an LEP could be served by ministers of all the participating denominations in the LEP, but on a reduced scoping. This would provide consistent links to the parent denominations of the LEP and acknowledges that there is a reduction in the number of ministers in the URC and its ecumenical partners alike.

5.3 Synod-employed ecumenical officers and/or ecumenical enablers

5.3.1 The URC has a network of highly experienced and committed Synod Ecumenical Officers. Some of these are fully or part-scoped in paid posts, while others volunteer to perform this role.

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- 5.3.2 Many of the ecumenical officers, particularly who are serving in a voluntary capacity, feel stretched and unable to perform more than a fire-fighting role. Most see lost opportunities and potential for supporting ecumenical initiatives and developing stronger relationships with ecumenical partners. It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit volunteer ecumenical officers within the Synods.
- 5.3.3 Mission Committee is developing job descriptions for two distinct, employed Synod roles: ecumenical officer and ecumenical enabler. The former would be the familiar existing Synod role of advisor and representative. The latter would seek to initiate and encourage new ways of ecumenical working across the Synod.
- 5.3.4 Neither role need to be limited to Ministers of Word and Sacraments. They would equally suit an experienced lay person. Whilst it is a substantial commitment of resource to recruit for these roles using paid posts, the impact on mission is considerable. It also reduces the volume of queries which often end up on Moderators' desks.
- 5.3.5 Clearly, this depends on Synod resources although, if adopted as a successful model, there may be opportunity for support from the Synod sharing scheme.

6. Use of A flexible framework for local unity

- 6.1 GA2022 passed Resolution 16c) that affirmed the use of the Churches Together in England document, A Flexible Framework for Local Unity. We have already seen examples of this document being used to great effect, and a training opportunity is scheduled for autumn 2023 to further encourage EOs and Moderators in its use.
- 6.2 As highlighted in the 2022 Report, although the document was developed by Churches Together in England and its member churches, it provides a model that can be applied beyond the English borders. It has even been shared as a model with a partner church in Jamaica.

7. Pilot schemes

- 7.1 Currently, Northern Synod is undertaking a trial with the South-East Northumberland Ecumenical Area (SENEA). Instead of a constitutional arrangement with its incumbent administrative complexity, they are moving to one of the flexible framework arrangements, namely a partnership agreement. This will give greater freedom to concentrate on mission.
- 7.2 North Western Synod has had recent consultation with Methodist Districts within its boundaries to see how their Missional Partnerships can map more closely with Methodist Circuits and the shared ministry model suggested earlier in this report. One important aspect which came from these conversations was the importance of regular communication about ministry and mission. In addition, there was a recognition on behalf of our Methodist friends that several of our URC ministers were already scoped for LEPs and should therefore be recognised as Authorised Presbyters in the Methodist Church.

8. Summary

- 8.1 In addition to the steps highlighted here that we, as the URC, can take, we continue to work with our ecumenical partners to better understand one another's polity and process. There have been some very open and frank conversations, for example about mutual recognition and the distinctiveness of our call process and

of eldership. In continuing to raise these issues and appreciate one another's perspectives, we hope to grow ever closer in our walk together as missional churches.

- 8.2 There is much joy to be seen in ecumenical partnerships that are working well. While still in our 50th anniversary year, it is the aim of these resolutions to General Assembly to offer some practical steps to resource and reinvigorate our ecumenical vision, honouring the commitment to ecumenism which brought us into being in 1972.

Appendix

APPLICATION FORM FOR AN ECUMENICAL POST

Please fill out the details below

1.	THE PASTORATE/LOCAL ECUMENICAL CONTEXT
Full name of the pastorate or local ecumenical context	
Scoping percentage	
Do you understand this is a 7 year post?	
Name and contact details of the main applicant	
2.	CONTEXT
3.	CENTRAL CONVICTION
Describe the mission and/or ministry context	
Are there exceptional circumstances why this post should receive ecumenical accreditation?	
Does this post have the support of ecumenical partners?	
Please attach a letter of support from the ecumenical lead(s) of partner denominations	
How will the ministry develop?	
How will you monitor and evaluate the post in order to develop it?	
4.	RELATIONSHIP WITH THE URC
What time, if any, is allocated to the Synod/URC?	

5.	STAFFING
Role Description	
Person Specification	
6.	FINANCE
Please describe the financial arrangements for the post	
7.	REVIEW AND REPORT
Please describe the process for the annual review and report which should be sent to the Ministries Office.	
8.	ANY ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
Is there any additional information to support your application?	

Once all the questions have been answered and this form has been completed in full, please return it to Nicola Furley-Smith, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT or to nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk

Thank you.

Paper J1

Report to General Assembly 2023

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Helen Lidgett hnlidgett@gmail.com Margaret Marshall nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 40</p> <p>1. General Assembly offers profound thanks to Mr Ian Hardie for his work as URC Treasurer over the past six years.</p> <p>Resolution 41</p> <p>2. General Assembly appoints Mr Alan Yates to serve as URC Treasurer from General Assembly 2023 to General Assembly 2029.</p> <p>Resolution 42</p> <p>3. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 9 of this report, subject to the additions and corrections contained in supplementary reports to Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint members of various committees and groups.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with Synods, local churches and the committees and groups where appointments are required.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Report to General Assembly 2023

Introduction

- 1.1 The committee brings to General Assembly for authorisation the names of people to serve as Assembly Officers, as convenors and secretaries of Assembly committees, or as members of those committees, for set periods. It also recommends names of people to serve on various Panels and to represent the United Reformed Church on other bodies.

Nominations Committee

- 2.1 Every Synod is represented on the Nominations Committee, whose members serve for as long as their Synod determines. They bring knowledge of the skills, experience and interests of ministers and members in their Synods to inform recommendations. There have been several changes of personnel during the year and we thank all those who have relinquished the role as well as the current membership. The Committee is also greatly helped by the presence and experience of a former moderator of General Assembly, the General Secretary or a Deputy General Secretary and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries. It is well served by a volunteer Secretary.
- 2.2 The number and range of church committees and groups is decided by General Assembly and Assembly Executive and the Committee's role is to serve the requirements of the Church. We note the recommendations of the Church Life Review and remind Assembly that rationalisation of the committee structure of the United Reformed Church will improve the effectiveness of the nominations process, reduce the number of people we need to populate committees and greatly reduce the heavy workload of the Committee Secretary.

Current work

- 3.1 So that Assembly committees can support the work and mission of the United Reformed Church, the Nominations Committee relies on the willingness and commitment of members and ministers of the United Reformed Church who generously give their time to serve. It is a challenge to identify new people with relevant skills and experience, but this is done in several ways:
 - a) The committee members, through consulting their own synod networks, bring names of people who are then considered, approached, and if they agree, are nominated for appointment by Assembly (or Assembly Executive).
 - b) Assembly committees and staff secretaries are encouraged to make suggestions, recognising that often they have the clearest understanding of their own needs and knowledge of suitable people. They are reminded of the importance of preparing role descriptions for their committee's work and keeping them up to date.
 - c) A process of consultation with committee secretaries and, where appropriate, the General Secretary or a Deputy General Secretary has been introduced for potential candidates to serve as committee convenors and deputy convenors.
- 3.2 In the course of the year we have selected 20 people from the Panel for General Assembly Appointments to serve on six Synod Moderator Nominating Groups and the recruitment panel for the Chief Operating Officer. Each Synod Moderator

Nominating Group consists of a Convenor and three members drawn from the Assembly Panel and four members from the Synod.

- 3.3 Further work has been done over the past year in nominating members to serve on the various panels of the Disciplinary Process and the appointment of a secretary to the Assembly Commission on Discipline. Once again, we thank the Revd Andy Braunston and the Revd Dr Janet Tollington for continuing to identify, interview, nominate and train members of the panel.

4. **URC Treasurer**

The United Reformed Church is served by an Honorary Treasurer, in a voluntary capacity. Mr Ian Hardie completes six years in this role at General Assembly 2023.

Mr Hardie has indicated that he does not wish to serve a further term. In the words of the General Secretary: “We need to express profound thanks to Ian. He has gone above and beyond in almost every way, and on his watch we’ve had to navigate the pandemic, the need to close the old pension schemes and initiate new schemes, and over this last year the escalating cost of living. He has steered the finances through these troubled waters with a cool head, a heart for the church and its ministers and steady support for the URC finance staff and committees.” Assembly is asked to express its sincere gratitude to Ian.

The General Secretary undertook a search to find a successor to serve as Treasurer. After careful consideration, Mr Alan Yates has agreed to offer himself to General Assembly to serve in this capacity.

Mr Yates served as Moderator of General Assembly from 2018-20 and, therefore, has good in-depth knowledge of the URC. Prior to the abolishment of District Councils, Alan was treasurer for Chiltern District Council, a role that required good communication skills rather than accounting knowledge. Throughout his career he has been an operations director, a consulting programme director and a client director. In all of these roles he had responsibility for profit and loss (P&L) and budgets. In the final years of his remunerated working life, he ran his own company. Although being small it still required the full gamut of accounting practice, from payroll to VAT and from P&L to statutory accounts. Since 2020 Alan has been a director of Churches Mutual Credit Union, and he has been their president since 2022.

We bring his name to General Assembly which is invited to appoint him for an initial term of six years from General Assembly 2023 to General Assembly 2029.

5. **Clerk of General Assembly**

The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins completes two terms of service as Clerk of General Assembly in 2024. A search is underway to find a successor to serve as Clerk-elect from General Assembly 2023 and as Clerk for six years from General Assembly 2024. The post has been advertised in *Reform*. At the time of writing, the process is not complete, but we hope to bring a name to General Assembly for approval in a supplementary paper.

6. **Equalities**

- 6.1 The Committee seeks to ensure that the membership of all committees and Panels is compliant with the equalities guidelines of the United Reformed Church.

Care is taken to ensure the Assembly membership of Nominating Groups for Synod Moderator and Staff appointments reflect as far as possible the diversity of the Church.

- 6.2 The Committee held a discussion on the recommendations of the Positive Action Task Group and noted several implications for its work. It hopes that the racism awareness training recommended in the report can be implemented as soon as possible.
- 6.3 The Committee collects and records monitoring data. All those invited to serve on the Church’s committees, working groups and Panels are asked to complete a monitoring form. This information is requested to track the URC's journey to becoming an anti-racist church. Following a suggestion made by the Assembly Moderator-elect we are using a revised terminology in the summary monitoring report for 2022-23 included below.

95 acceptances were received between September 2022 and April 2023.

Ordained	54	56%
Lay	41	44%

Male	33	35%
Female	53	56%
Not stated	9	9%

An analysis of 80 responses providing monitoring data shows this age spread:

Under 26	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
3	14	9	9	28	17
4%	18%	11%	11%	35%	21%

80 responses gave ethnic origin:

Global majority	Global minority (“white”)
16	64
20%	80%

7. Thanks to all who serve on Assembly Committees

The Church continues to be blessed by many willing members who give their time

represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows is offered with a real sense of gratitude for all who serve in this way.

8. Resignations

8.1 General Assembly is asked to note the following resignation:

Ref	Committee/Group	Name
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline	Mr Stephen Thornton

9. Those to be appointed or re-appointed

Those agreeing to be appointed for the first time, for a further term, and those returning following a break in service are listed in the table below.

Key: ** = new appointment, † = extension of term of service, †† = further term of service after a break.

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	Years
2.1	Faith and Order Committee	The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad	Member**	GA23-GA27
2.1.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Ms Megan Price	Member**	GA23-GA28
2.1.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Mr Donald Swift	Member**	GA23-GA28
2.3	Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline	The Revd Ian Kirby	Member†	GA23-GA25
2.7	Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure	The Revd Roy Lowes	Member†	
2.7	Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure	Dr Ewen Harley	Member†	
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Wilbert Sayimani	Deputy Convenor**	GA24-GA28
3.1.3	Interfaith Enabling Group	Mr Andy Lie	Member**	GA23-GA27
4.1.1	Accreditations Sub-Committee	The Revd Carole Marsden	Member**	MAR23-GA26
4.1.1	Accreditations Sub-Committee	The Revd Jacob Bali	Member**	MAR23-GA26
4.1.3	Retired Ministers' Housing Sub-Committee	The Revd Don Nichols	Member**	MAR23-GA26
4.1.4	Assessment Board	Mr Keith Reading	Member**	GA23-GA28
4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	Mr Mathew Barkley	Member†	GA23-GA27

4.3	Children's and Youth Work Committee	Mr Reuben Watt	Member†	GA23-GA27
4.4	Worship Reference Group	The Revd Sam Silungwe	Convenor†	GA24-GA28
5.2	Communications Committee	The Revd Tim Lowe	Member†	GA23-24
5.2	Communications Committee	Mr Dan Morrell	Member†	GA23-24
5.2	Communications Committee	The Revd. Heather Whyte	Member†	GA23-24
5.3	Equalities Committee	Mrs Janet Raven	Member**	MAR23-GA26
5.4	Finance Committee	Mrs Jane Humphreys	Member†	GA23-GA27
5.4	Finance Committee	Ms Joana Marfoh	Member†	GA23-GA27
5.4	Finance Committee	Mr Chris Atherton	Member**	GA23-GA27
5.4.1	Pensions Committee	The Revd Dr Janet Tollington	Convenor**	MAR23-GA26
5.7	Investment Committee	Dame Katharine Barker	Member†	GA23-GA27
9.1	Northern College Governors	The Revd Raymond Singh	Governor†	GA23-GA25
9.2	Westminster College of Governors	The Revd Ryan Sirmons	Member**	MAR23-GA28
9.2	Westminster College of Governors	Mr John Ellis	Member†	GA23-GA29
11.3	Congregational Fund Board	Mrs Mary Steele	Member†	GA23-GA27
11.4	Congregational Memorial Hall Trust	Mr John Ellis	Member0†	GA23-GA27
11.12	World Day of Prayer	The Revd Jane Weedon	Member**	GA23-GA27
11.13	Westhill Endowment Trust	The Revd Clare Callanan	Member**	GA23-GA27
11.13	Westhill Endowment Trust	The Revd Dr Kathryn Price	Member**	GA23-GA27

10. Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. The General Assembly Moderator, the Assembly Moderator-elect, the Immediate-past Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee. Deputy General Secretaries are members *ex officio* of every standing committee within their department. Any *ex officio* member may arrange for an appropriate deputy, such as any Deputy General Secretary or an officer of Assembly, to attend on their behalf. Any committee may invite other

Assembly officers (or their deputies) or staff members to attend in a non-voting capacity where the business so requires.

2. Symbols have been used as follows: ** denotes those whom General Assembly is invited to appoint for the first time; † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service; †† denotes those returning after a break.
3. Numbers in round brackets following names indicate the member's synod: (1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.
4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category, this is indicated in round brackets following the name.
5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes exceptionally be renewable. Committee convenors serve an additional preliminary year as convenor-elect. In sections one to five of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. Dates in square brackets following names indicate the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000, some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. New committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of General Assembly.
9. Nominations to Assembly committees and their subcommittees, and to advisory and task groups serving Assembly and Assembly Executive, should be of members of the United Reformed Church, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly. A term of service may normally be completed if someone ceases to be a member of the URC during their term.
10. Nominations of URC representatives to external bodies should either be URC members, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly, or URC staff who have relevant expertise. The nomination of a staff member would automatically lapse if the person concerned ceased to hold a URC post.
11. The names in the following list are submitted for approval by General Assembly and it will be updated after the close of Assembly. The latest list approved by General Assembly, by Assembly Executive or by Assembly Officer Action on its behalf is available at: www.bit.ly/URCNom.

Officers of Assembly

Clerk to General Assembly:	The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins [2024]
Assistant Clerk to Assembly:	The Revd Sarah Moore [2023]
Clerk-elect to General Assembly [2023]:	Pending appointment
Honorary Treasurer:	Mr Alan Yates [2029]

1. Assembly Executive

Assembly Executive acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the immediate past and elect Assembly Moderators, the deputies to the General Secretary and Treasurer, the Assistant Clerk, four representatives from each synod, normally, but not necessarily, including the moderator and the Synod Clerk, together with the convenors of Assembly committees, the chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three members for URC Youth, including the URC Youth Moderator. In attendance are staff secretaries, Assembly Moderators' chaplain and others as appropriate.

1.1 Human resources advisory group

Convenor: Mrs Bridget Fosten [2027]

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Nominated members:

Mrs Barbara Ellis [2024]

Two vacancies

1.2 Law and Polity advisory group

Convenor: Ms Morag McLintock [2028]

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2026][†]

General Secretary

Clerk of General Assembly

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

Synod Clerk representative: Mr Tim Hopley [2027]**

Property, legal and trust officers' representative: Ms Muna Levan-Harris

Nominated members:

The Revd Steven Manders [2025] Mr Dean Taylor (2026)

In attendance: Legal Adviser

1.3 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Dr James Mather [2025] (nominated by the group)

Secretary: Mr Geoff Milnes [2025] (nominated by the group)

General Secretary

Synod Representatives:

Vacancy (1)

Ms Alison Lee (3)

Mrs Judith Booth (5)

Mr Peter West (7)

Mr Gerry Prosser (9)

Mr Guy Morfett (11)

Mr Michael Williams (2)

Mr David Figures (4)

Mr Matthew McDade (6)

Mr Roger James (8)

Mr Christopher Buckwell (10)

1.4 Resource sharing task group

Convenor: The Revd Steve Faber [2024] (Synod Moderator)

Secretary: Mr Chris Atherton

Treasurer: The Revd Dick Gray

Miss Margaret Atkinson

Mr Mike Gould

URC Treasurer

1.5 Net Zero task group

Convenor: The Revd Chris Baillie

Representative members:

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)
 The Revd George Watt
 Mr Bill Potter
 Mr Clifford Patten
 Mr Simeon Mitchell
 Ms Victoria James
 Ms Maya Withall
 Ms Judy Harris
 Mr Matthew McDade
 Ms Eileen Newington

Synod Moderator
 Finance Committee
 URC Trust
 Secretary for Church and Society
 Chief Operating Officer
 URC Youth
 URC Children
 Synod Property Officer
 Synod Green Apostle

1.6 Review of Church Life Group

The Revd Dr John Bradbury
 The Revd Steve Faber
 The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson
 Mrs Muna Levan-Harris

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson
 Ms Victoria Turner
 The Revd Dr Phil Wall
 Dr Gordon Woods

2. General Secretariat

2.1 Faith and Order Committee

The convenor and nominated members normally serve for six years.

Convenor: The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2026]

Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

General Secretary

Nominated members:

The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad [2027]

The Revd Sue McCoan [2026]

Ms Diana Paulding [2026]

The Revd Kristin Ofstad [2026]

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson [2027]

2.2 Nominations Committee

Synods appoint and decide terms for their representation.

Convenor: Mrs Helen Lidgett [2025]

Secretary: Mrs Margaret Marshall [2026]

A past Moderator of General Assembly

General Secretary

Synod Representatives:

The Revd Dr Trevor Jamison(1)

Mr Tim Hopley (2)

Mrs Rita Griffiths (3)

Mr Tim Crossley (4)

Vacancy (5)

Mrs Rachel Wakeman (6)

The Revd David Coaker (7)

Ms Rachel Leach (8)

Ms Karen Bell (9)

Ms Nneoma Chima (10)

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith (11)

Ms Megan Price (12)

Mr John Collings (13)

In attendance:

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Equalities Committee representative

2.2.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson (9)

Dr Paul Ashitey (10)

Ms Victoria Paulding (5)

Mr Matthew Barkley (9)
The Revd Lucy Brierley (9)
Mr David Gartside (3)
Ms Pippa Hodgson (5)
The Revd Paul Robinson (12)
Mr Alex Walker (4)

Mr Reuben Watt (11)
The Revd Sal Bateman (10)
The Revd Peter Henderson (8)
The Revd George Mwaura (5)
Mr Patrick Sheard (1)

Retiring 2026

The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)
Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid (10)

The Revd Mark Robinson (9)
Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

Retiring in 2028

Ms Megan Price (12)

Mr Donald Swift (3)

2.3 Ministerial incapacity and discipline (Mind) advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Steven Manders [2026]

Secretary: Staff Secretary

Synod Moderator: The Revd Clare Downing [2023]

Convenor of the Assembly commission

Secretary to the Assembly Commission for Discipline: Mr Philip Laws [2026]

Convenor of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Secretary of the review commission of the incapacity procedure

Consultant for ministers and CRCWs: Mrs Fiona Smith [2026]

Consultant for mandated groups: The Revd Ian Kirby [2027]

Training coordinator: The Revd Andy Braunston [2024]

General Secretary; Clerk of General Assembly; Secretary for Ministries; legal adviser

2.3.1 Secretary to the Assembly Appeals Commission:

The Revd Andy Braunston

2.4 Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Adkinson [2028]

Deputy Convenor: Dr David Jones [2028]

Members (not time-limited):

The Revd Nigel Adkinson

The Revd Andy Braunston

Mr Ian Corless

Mrs Barbara Ellis

Mr Alastair Forsyth

Mrs Cathy Glazier

Ms Barbara Groom**

ProfGraham Handscomb**

Dr David Jones

The Revd Sue McCoan

The Revd Martha McInnes**

Dr James Mawdesley**

The Revd Wilbert Sayimani

Mr Dean Taylor**

Mrs Janet Virr

Ms Darnette Whitby-Reid**

The Revd Bill Bowman

Ms Mary Coole**

Ms Janine Cowie**

The Revd Peter Flint**

Mr Remi Ferguson**

The Revd Dominic Grant**

The Revd John Grundy**

The Revd Marcus Hargis

Mrs Mary Kelly

The Revd Alan McGougan

Ms Morag McLintock

The Revd Sarah Moore

The Revd Alistair Smeaton**

The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe

Mr Gordon Wanless

2.5 Disciplinary Investigation Panel

Senior Member: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington [2028]

Deputy Senior Member: Vacancy

Members (not time-limited):

The Revd Dr James Coleman**	Mr Stuart Dew**
The Revd Martin Ferris	The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King**
Mrs Chris Harris**	The Revd Derek Hopkins
Mr Keir Hounsome**	Ms Alison Jiggins**
Prof Jean McClellan*	The Revd Lesley Moseley
The Revd Craig Muir	The Revd George Mwuara
The Revd Zadie Orr**	Mr Andy Russell
Mr Mark Rigby	Ms Cathy Simpson
Mrs Margaret Smith**	Mrs Liz Swanwick**
The Revd Martin Spain	The Revd Geoff Wright

2.6 Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

Minister members:

The Revd Tessa Henry-Robinson [2027]**

The Revd Nick Mark [2027]**

The Revd Raymond Singh [2027]**

Elder members:

Mr Tim Crossley [2027]**

Mr Dodie Khurshid [2027]**

Vacancy

2.7 Standing panel for the incapacity procedure

This panel is normally convened by the member with legal experience.

Members serve one or two five-year terms.

Secretary: Vacancy

Synod Moderator: The Revd Simon Walkling [2023]

Past Moderator of General Assembly: The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2026]

Commission officer for the incapacity procedure: The Revd Roy Lowes [2027]

Mr David Nash (legal experience) []

Dr Ewen Harley (GP) [2027]

2.8 Pastoral reference and welfare Committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch (2027)

Convenor-Elect: Vacancy

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

General Secretary

Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator: Vacancy

Nominated Members:

The Revd Dr Irene John [2024]

One Vacancy

Mrs Hilary Miles [2026]**

3. Mission Department**3.1 Mission Committee**

Convenor: Sarah Lane Cawte [2028]†

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

Ms Katrina Hackett (1) [2027]**

Mr Aftab Mughal (2) [2025]

The Revd Stuart Nixon (3) [2026]

The Revd Barry Welch (4) [2027] **

The Revd Stuart Nixon (3) [2026]
Vacancy (5)
The Revd Alex Clare-Young (7) [2027]**
The Revd Ray Stanyon (9) [2025]
The Revd Martin Knight (11) [2026]**
The Revd John Bremner (13) [2027]**

The Revd Barry Welch (4) [2027] **
The Revd Debbie Brown (6) [2027]**
The Revd Henriette Wemtink (8) [2027]**
Vacancy (10)
The Revd Branwen Rees (12) [2026]†

3.1.1 International exchange reference group

Convenor: The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2028]†
Synod Moderator: Vacancy
Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries
Nominated member: Vacancy

3.1.2 Commitment for Life (CfL) reference group

Convenor: Mr Richard Lewney [2028]†
At least two CfL advocates
Representative of mission committee
Representative of Global Justice Now
Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships
Representative of mission team
Representative from Christian Aid

3.1.3 Interfaith enabling group

The convenor is nominated by the Mission Committee.
Convenor: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2028]†
Secretary: The Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland
Ecumenical & Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales
Nominated members:
Ms Victoria Turner [2025] Mr Andy Lie [2027]†
Co-opted members:
The Revd Dr Graham Adams [2024] The Revd Dr Mark Godin [2024]
The Revd Dr John Parry

3.1.4 Joint Public Issues Team strategy and policy group

Deputy General Secretary (Mission) The Revd Steve Faber

3.1.5 Rural strategy group (United Reformed Church/Methodist)

Future being reviewed by the Mission Committee.

4. Discipleship department

4.1 Ministries Committee

Convenor: The Revd Mary Thomas [2026]**
Secretary: Secretary for Ministries
Leadership in worship advocate: Vacancy
Synod Moderator: The Revd Jamie Kissack [2024]
Convenors of the Accreditations (CRCW and SCM), Maintenance of Ministry and Retired Ministers' Housing subcommittees
Convenor of the Assessment Board
Nominated members:
Mrs Gill Bates [2024] Chris Kellett [2025]
The Revd Lesley Moseley [2025]

4.1.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Paul Dean [2025]

Secretary: to be confirmed

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Representatives:

Synod Moderators: The Revd Jamie Kissack [2024]

SCMs: The Revd Tim Clarke [2024]

CRCWs: Vacancy

Nominated Members:

The Revd Alison Micklem [2025]

The Revd Carole Marsden [2026]**

The Revd Jacob Bali [2026]**

4.1.2 Ministries – Maintenance of ministry sub-committee

Under review

4.1.3 Ministries – Retired Ministers' Housing Society sub-committee

Terms of service shall be for four years with the possibility of a further term of four years. The convenor shall be a member of the Ministries Committee nominated by that Committee.

Convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle [2023]**

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Nominated Members:

The Revd Don Nichols [2026]** One vacancy

Representative Members:

Tenants: Vacancy

Retired Ministers' Housing Society: Vacancy

4.1.4 Assessment board

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Convenor: Professor Bill Gould [2026]

Retiring 2023

The Revd John Danso (10)

Mr Dan Morrell (4)

Retiring 2024

The Revd Jan Adamson (13)

The Revd Gerald England (8)

Mr Mark Tubby (7)

Retiring 2025

Ms Mercy Nimako

Ms Liz Sharples

The Revd Samuel Silungwe

Retiring in 2026

The Revd Lis Mullen (2)

The Revd Sue McCoan (10)

Retiring 2027

The Revd Jamie Kissack (4)

The Revd Tim Lowe (4)

Mrs Kate Yates (10)

The Revd Jacob Bali (11)

Mrs Simon Loveitt (4)

Retiring in 2028

Mr Keith Reading

4.2 Education and Learning Committee

Convenor: Mrs Pippa Hodgson [2027]**

Convenor-Elect: Vacant

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Nominated Members: (nominated by the Nominations Committee)

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2024]

The Revd Tim Meachin [2024]

The Revd Andrew Mudharara [2026]**

Ex-officio members:

a General Assembly moderator (current, past or elect)

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Representative Members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

RCL Principals:

The Revd Dr John McNeil Scott [2026]**

Synod Training and Development Officers:

The Revd Dr Rob Hoch [2026]**

CYDOs and other Children's and Youth Work officers: Mr Richard Knott [2026]**

EM1 students

Non-voting members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

Synod Moderator:

RCL Principals:

The Revd Dr Robert Pope (Acting)

The Revd Dr Adam Scott

Secretary for Ministries

Methodist Church Representative

4.2.1 Education and Learning finance sub-committee

Chair: Mrs Pippa Hodgson

Minutes Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Co-opted Member: The Revd Edward Sanniez

Ex-officio: URC Treasurer, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship),

Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee

Staff in attendance: Chief Finance Officer

The chair and member are appointed by the Education and Learning Committee.

4.2.2 Stepwise development Group

Convenor: The Revd Alison Davis

Administrator: Stepwise Programme Assistant

Secretary for Education and Learning

Stepwise Programme Manager

Education and Learning Instructional Designer

Education and Learning Programme Officer (by invitation)

Convenor of the Stepwise Learning Standards Board

Representatives – serving appropriate terms of service:

Children's and Youth Work Committee: Mr Leo Roberts

Synod mission enablers network:

The Revd Stuart Radcliffe

Synod training and development officers: Vacancy

Resource Centres for Learning:

A tutor

Together Ethnic and Minority URC:

The Revd Zaidie Orr

Co-opted Members:

The Revd Simon Goddard (Fresh Expressions)

The Revd Peter Henderson

Mr Iain Johnston (Faith in Community Scotland)

The convenor and the co-opted members are appointed by the Education and Learning Committee.

4.3 Children's and Youth Work Committee

Convenor: The Revd Paul Robinson [2024]

Convenor Elect: The Revd Samantha Sheehan [Convenor from General Assembly 2024]

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

Pilots representative

Nominated members:

Mr Matthew Barkley [2027][†]

Mr Reuben Watt [2027][†]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2024]

The Reverend Julian Sanders [2025]

Ms Caroline Akinyele [2025]

4.4 Worship Reference Group

Convenor: The Revd Sam Silungwe [2028][†]

Secretary: The Minister for Digital Worship

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Nominated Members:

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale [2024]

Co-opted Member:

The Revd Anne Sardeson

4.5 Safeguarding Committee

Convenor: The Revd Roger Jones [2026]**

Secretary: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary for Ministries

Training and Development Coordinator

Policy Development Co-ordinator

Nominated Members:

Mr Alex Walker [2026]**

Mrs Kate Yates [2026]**

Synod Safeguarding Practice Group Representative: Ms Julie Rafferty [2026]**

Synod Moderator:

National Synod of Scotland Representative: Ms Ruth Goold [2026]**

URC Advocated Survivors Group Representatives (up to 2): Group not yet operative

Independent members:

Mr Tim Carter (Methodist Church) [2026]**

Ms Fi Cisneros [2026]**

In attendance:

Head of Children's and Youth Work

Secretary for Education and Learning

5. Administration and resources Department

5.1 Business Committee

Convenor: The Revd Mark Robinson [2025]

Secretary: General Secretary

Moderator of General Assembly

Moderator-elect and Immediate-past Moderator of General Assembly

Clerk of General Assembly

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

URC Treasurer

Nominated members:

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

Mr Reuben Watt [2026]**

5.2 Communications

Convenor: The Revd Dr Peter Stevenson [2023]

Convenor-Elect: The Revd Lucy Brierley [2027]
Secretary: Head of Communications
The Revd Tim Lowe [2024] Mr Dan Morell [2024]
The Revd Heather Whyte [2024] Ms Joy Aldred [2024]
Two vacancies

5.3 Equalities Committee

Convenor: The Revd Naison Hove [2026]
Secretary: The Revd David Salisbury [2023]
URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative
Nominated members:
The Revd Jayne Taylor [2027][†] The Revd Jo Clare-Young [2024]
Mrs Rosie Martin [2024] Ms Judy Rogers [2024]
Dr Ruth Shepherd [2024] Mrs Janet Raven [2026]**
One vacancy

5.4 Finance Committee

Convenor: URC Treasurer
Deputy Treasurer: Mr Vaughan Griffiths [2025]
Chief Finance Officer Chair of the URC Trust
Nominated members:
Mrs Jane Humphreys [2027][†] Ms Joana Marfoh [2027][†]
Ms Denise Harman [2024] Mr Chris Atherton [2027]**
The Revd Simon Copley [2025] Mr Gordon Wanless [2025]
Mr Bill Potter [2026]^{††}

5.4.1 Pensions Committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington (2026)**
Secretary: Pensions Manager
Nominated Members:
Ms Joana Marfoh [2024]
Co-opted members, maximum of three:
Mr David Martin
Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer Convenor of the Investment Committee
Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee
Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)
In attendance:
Chief Finance Officer
Secretary for Ministries (for Ministers' Pension Fund matters)

5.5 United Reformed Church Trust

Members normally serve for four years and may only serve a maximum of two terms (eight years). The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number and appoint a secretary and deputy secretary.

Chair: Ms Catriona Wheeler

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr John Samson

Members:

Group one (Synods 1, 2, 3, 4, 13):

The Revd Nick Mark (13) [2024]

Group two (Synods 5, 6, 7, 8, 12):

Mr Clifford Patten (7) [2024]	Mr David Greatorex (5) [2024]
The Revd James Breslin (5) [2024]	Mr David Lathbury (6) [2026] [†]
Ms Catriona Wheeler (5) [2026] [†]	
Group three (Synods 9,10,11):	
The Revd Julian Macro (9) [2025]	The Revd John Macaulay (10) [2026]**
There is one vacancy for a group member.	
URC Youth appointee: vacancy	
Moderator of General Assembly	Clerk of General Assembly
General Secretary	Treasurer
In attendance:	
Convenor of the investment committee	Minute secretary
Chief Finance Officer	

5.5.1 Church House management Group

Convenor: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)
 General Secretary
 Chief Finance Officer

Nominated members:

Dr Ian Harrison [2024]	Mr Adam Lester [2024]
Two vacancies	

5.5.2 Remuneration Committee

Convenor: Mr William McVey
 Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)
 Ms Sushila Jetha (Methodist HR) URC Treasurer

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

5.6 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company secretary.

Chair: Mrs Bridget Micklem

Deputy chair: Mr Lyndon Thomas

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Church Nominated Trustees/Directors:

Mrs Bridget Micklem [December 2023]	Mr Colin MacBean [2024]
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Mrs Faith Paulding [2025]	
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Convenor of the Pensions Committee: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington

URC Deputy Treasurer: Mr Vaughan Griffiths

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee: The Revd David Coote
 (Pending a review of MoM Sub-Committee)

Convenor of the Investment Committee: Mr Richard Nunn

Member Nominated Trustees/Direct

The Revd Caroline Vodden [2026]	The Revd Daniel Cheyne [2026]
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Two Vacancies	
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5.7 Investment Committee

Convenor: Mr Richard Nunn [2026]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Members:

Dame Katharine Barker [2027] [†]	
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Mr Lyndon Thomas [2024]	Vacancy
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URC Treasurer	Convenor, Pensions Committee
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7.6.3 CTBI environmental issues network
The Revd Mike Shrubsole

7.6.4 CTBI consultative group on ministry amongst children (CGMC)
Head of Children's and Youth Work and one other

7.6.5 CTBI interreligious network
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.6 CTBI China forum
The Revd John Scott

7.6.7 CTBI Korea group
The Revd David Grosch-Miller

7.6.8 CTBI Middle East contact group
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.6.9 CTBI Churches' refugee network
The Revd Fleur Houston

7.7 Churches Together in England (CTE)

7.7.1 CTE enabling group
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

7.7.2 CTE group for evangelisation
Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

7.8 Action of Churches Together in Scotland (Acts) members meeting
Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

7.9 National Sponsoring Body for Scotland
Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

7.10 Churches Together in Wales (CYTUN)
Appointed by the National Synod of Wales

7.11 Commission of Covenanted Churches in Wales
Appointed by the National Synod of Wales

7.12 Free Church education committee
Prof Graham Handscomb Mrs Gillian Kingston

7.13 European Churches' environmental network
The Revd David Coleman

7.14 Churches' Committee on funerals and crematoria
The Revd Sally Thomas

7.15 Churches' forum for safeguarding
Designated Safeguarding Lead

7.16 Churches' network for nonviolence
Head of Children's and Youth Work

7.17 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association
Mrs Valerie Jenkins

7.18 Joint liturgical group
The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale

8. Representatives on formal bilateral and multilateral Committees

8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group
Co-convenor: The Revd Geoffrey Clarke (Synod Moderator) (five-year term) [2026]
Co-secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland
Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales
Nominated Members – serving one or two four-year terms:
The Revd Tim Richards [2024] Mr Tim Hopley [2025]

8.1.1 Methodist/ United Reformed Church strategic oversight group
General Secretary A General Assembly Moderator
Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

8.2 Church of England - United Reformed Church Contact Group
Co-Chair: The Revd Ruth Whitehead [2024]
Co-Secretary: Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
The Revd Dr Susan Durber [2024] Mr John Ellis [2024]
The Revd Tim Meadows [2024]

8.3 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland) [see note 7]
Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

8.4 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion
The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

8.5 Roman Catholic/United Reformed Church Dialogue Group
Co-chair: The Revd Dr John Bradbury
Co-secretary: The Revd Philip Brooks
Members:
Mr John Cornell The Revd Dr Sarah Hall
The Revd Jason McCullagh The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

9.1 Northern College
The Revd Raymond Singh [2025][†] Mrs Margaret Marshall [2024]
Mr Willie Duncan [2025] The Revd John Grundy [2025]
The Revd Mark Bates [2026][†] Dr Lesley Coote [2026]**
In attendance: Secretary for Education and Learning

9.2 Westminster College: board of governors

Governors serve six-year terms, which may be renewed.

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Uden [2026]

Clerk to the governors: The Revd Naomi Young-Rodas [2028]**

Honorary treasurer (Westminster College): Mr Andrew Grimwade [2023]†

Acting Principal: The Revd Dr Robert Pope

Mr John Ellis [2029] †

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

The Revd Stuart Scott [2023]

The Revd David Miller (2028)**

The Revd Ryan Sirmons (2028)

Note 1: A further six governors are appointed by the Cambridge Theological Federation, the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, the college's teaching staff, its students and the Cheshunt Foundation.

Note 2: The Secretary for Education and Learning and the URC Treasurer are normally in attendance.

9.2.1 The Cheshunt Foundation

Mr Guy Morfett

9.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation

Convenor, Westminster College governors

10. Governors of colleges and schools with which the United Reformed Church is associated

10.1 Caterham School Southern Synod Moderator

10.2 Eltham College Mr Martin Fosten

10.3 Walthamstow Hall Mrs Isabel Heald

10.4 Milton Mount Foundation

Mrs Daphne Bembridge [2023]

Mr Ray Dunnett [2024]

The Revd Kevin Swaine [2024]

The Revd Derek Lindfield [2026]†

Vacancy

5 URC governors serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

10.5 Silcoates School

The Revd Jason McCullagh [2024]

Vacancy

Governors serve three-year terms.

10.6 Taunton School

Baptist governor at present

10.7 Bishops Stortford College

Mr Richard Harrison

11. Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

11.1 Arthur Rank Centre

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell

11.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service
Ms Muna Levan Harris [2023]

General Secretary

11.3 Congregational Fund Board
The Revd Janine Atkinson [2023]
Mr Mike Hart [2024]

Mrs Mary Steele [2027]†
Two Vacancies

11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust
Mr John Ellis [2027†]
Mr Philip Bonnier [2025]
The Revd Derek Wales [2025]
Representatives serve four-year terms which may be renewed.

Mrs Margaret Thompson [2024]
Two Vacancies

11.5 Historic England Places of Worship Forum
Convenor of the listed buildings advisory group

11.6 Lord Wharton's Charity
Vacancy

11.7 Retired ministers' and widows' fund
The Revd Julian Macro
Ms Liz Sharples

Mr Anthony Bayley

11.8 Roots for Churches Ltd
The Revd Jenny Mills**
Nominated by the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

11.9 Samuel Robinson's Charities
Mr Tony Alderman

11.10 Scout Association – URC General Assembly Chaplain
The Revd Keith Morrison
This appointment is made by the Children's and Youth Work Committee.

11.11 United Reformed Church History Society
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar [2024]
The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe [2023]
Council Members serve five-year terms which may be renewed.

Mrs Jean Wyber [2027]†

11.12 World Day of Prayer
England, Wales and Northern Ireland: The Revd Jane Weedon [2027]**
Scotland: Synod appointment.

11.13 Westhill Endowment Trust
The Revd Clare Callanan [2027]**

The Revd Dr Kathryn Price [2027]**

Paper J2

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mrs Helen Lidgett hnlidgett@gmail.com Mrs Margaret Marshall Nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This is the Supplementary Report referred to in the Nominations Committee Report to General Assembly 2023. It provides additions and amendments.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Nominations Committee Report to General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with Synods, local churches and the committees and groups where appointments are needed.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Amendments to published list of nominations to be noted
General Assembly is asked to note the following additions to the Nominations list in the Book of Reports for General Assembly 2023.

2.7 Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure
Mr George Faris is Secretary of the Standing Panel for the Incapacity Procedure {2026}

5.2 Communications Committee
The Revd Lucy Brierley is Convenor of the Communications Committee [2027]
Ms Joy Aldred resigned from the Communications Committee in 2021

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	Years
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Mr John Collings	Member	

2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Mr Andrew Howes	Member	
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Dr Gordon Woods	Member	

2. Resignations

General Assembly is asked to note the following resignations:

Ref	Committee/Group	Name
2.4	Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel	The Revd Alistair Smeaton
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	The Revd Derek Hopkins

3. New appointments and re-appointments

General Assembly is asked to make the following additional appointments and re-appointments to those listed in the Book of Reports for General Assembly 2023:

Key: **= new appointment, † =extension of service, †† = further term after a break

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	Years
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Ms Linda Austin	Member**	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Mrs Sheila Davies	Member †	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Mrs Barbara Ellis	Member †	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Ms Rita Griffiths	Member**	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	The Revd Alison Hall	Member †	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Mrs Helen Lidgett	Member †	GA23- GA28
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	Mr Bill Robson	Member ††	GA23- GA28
2.6	Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline	Ms Sandra Wood	Member	
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Debbie Brown	Member**	GA23- GA27
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Barry Welch	Member**	GA23- GA27
3.1	Mission Committee	Ms Katrina Hackett	Member**	GA23- GA27
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd John Bremner	Member**	GA23- GA27
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Henriette Wentink	Member**	GA23- GA27

3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Jane Wade	Member**	GA23- GA27
3.1	Mission Committee	The Revd Eddie Boon	Member**	GA23- GA27
4.1	Ministries Committee	The Revd Terry Jin	Member**	GA23- GA27
4.1.3	Retired Ministers' Housing Society Sub-Committee	The Revd Paul Whittle	Convenor	GA23- GA25
5.2	Communications Committee	The Revd Tim Lowe	Member †	GA23- GA27
5.2	Communications Committee	The Revd Heather Whyte	Member †	GA23- GA27
5.2	Communications Committee	Mr Dan Morrell	Member †	GA23- GA27
5.3	Equalities Committee	The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo	Member**	GA23- GA27
5.3	Equalities Committee	The Revd David Salisbury	Secretary†	
5.4.1	Pensions Committee	The Revd John Piper	Member †	GA23- GA25
5.5.1	Church House Management Group	Mr Joel Sainsbury	Member**	GA23- GA27
5.6	The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd	Mrs Bridget Micklem	Member †	GA23- December 2027
5.6	The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd	The Revd Caroline Vodden	Member †	GA22- GA26
5.6	The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd	The Revd Daniel Cheyne	Member†	GA22- GA26
11.3	Congregational Fund Board	The Revd Janine Atkinson	Member †	GA23- GA27
11.3	Congregational Fund Board	The Revd Howard Sharp	Member**	GA23- GA27

Paper K1

General report

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Grosch-Miller david.grosch-miller@urc.org.uk The Revd Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report the work of the committee and its oversight of welfare funds.
Main points	The work of the committee is necessarily confidential, but the report draws attention to matters of general concern.
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Finance Committee, Secretary to Ministries and Synod Moderators as appropriate.

Summary of impact

Financial	No proposed changes to existing provision.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Introduction

This pastoral reference and welfare committee (PRWC) considers the cases of ministers who are referred to it, usually by Synods, often at times of difficulty. It also deals with welfare and emergency matters including the use of welfare funds. Because of the confidential nature of its work the report is in general terms only.

Committee members:

Convenor: The Revd David Grosch-Miller (from July 2018)
The Revd Bridget Powell (from July 2019)
Professor Malcolm Johnson (from July 2018 - July 2022)
The Revd Bridget Banks (from November 2021)
The Revd Dr Irene John (from July 2020)
Mrs Hilary Miles (from July 2022)

Ex-officio: Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), URC Treasurer (or Deputy Treasurer) and the General Secretary.

In attendance: Secretary for Ministries

The committee has continued to meet via Zoom and this has enabled the committee to make decisions in a timely fashion. Urgent requests are occasionally dealt with via email.

1. Pastoral reference work

- 1.1 The committee responds to requests to support ministers and their families that are received from Synod Moderators and Assembly Officers. In the last year requests have included the need to support ministers when appointments end and there is a delay in identifying the appropriate next step.
- 1.2 There has been an increase in the number of requests for help with housing costs not covered by the Plan for Partnership.
- 1.3 The committee continues to express concern that the need for careful financial planning by ministers for retirement should be recognised early in ministry. The committee has contributed to the continuing discussion about financial concerns for ministers arising from the changes to the URC pension scheme.
- 1.4 The churches' ministerial counselling service offers confidential support to all ministers and their immediate family. The service has been appreciated by several ministers and was supported by grants of £15,895.50 in 2022.

2. Welfare grants

- 2.1 PRWC has oversight of historic funds that are held for designated purposes and available to stipendiary ministers of the United Reformed Church. The level of grants available is set from time to time by the committee, and these are paid on application for the following purposes: education fees for children in URC affiliated independent schools, musical instruments for children, school uniform and equipment, public transport travel costs for school attendance. Further grants are paid at bereavement, as a Christmas gift to widows and widowers, and as a contribution to the housing costs of a minister's spouse following divorce or separation. The committee also receives requests for financial assistance to ministers for purposes not covered by the historic funds.
- 2.2 Welfare grants totaling £56,302.29 were paid in 2022. The income from historic funds was supplemented by grants from General Funds of £22,000.

3. With thanks

- 3.1 We have welcomed Bridget Banks, Adrian Bulley (DGS Discipleship), Vaughan Griffiths (Deputy Treasurer), Hilary Miles and Elizabeth Welch (Convenor-elect). We have appreciated the attendance of the Secretary for Ministries, Nicola Furley-Smith. Malcolm Johnson and Bridget Powell have completed their terms of service and we have valued their insights and wisdom as we have wrestled with some difficult issues. Izumi Nishizono is the administrative cog that helps us to operate efficiently. Mary Steele continues to be the sympathetic voice, whose knowledge and experience are invaluable. And, finally, our thanks go to David Grosch-Miller whose wisdom, insight and care has more than ably guided the committee.

Paper N1

Church Life Review GA 2023 report

General Secretary/Church Life Review

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury, General Secretary John.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 43 General Assembly commends the five reflections on the theology of money to the whole United Reformed Church and its associated Charities and Trust Companies for prayer, reflection, and study.</p> <p>Resolution 44 General Assembly Commends the Theos report: <i>The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads</i> to local churches and Synods for prayer, study, and reflection.</p> <p>Resolution 45 General Assembly commends to Synods and local churches the resource <i>Flourishing Churches</i> for prayer, study, reflection and action.</p> <p>Resolution 46 General Assembly affirms the vital role of Synods in connecting, affirming, and resourcing local churches.</p> <p>Resolution 47 General Assembly adopts the following Values and Principles as the basis for future decision making concerning the use and sharing of financial resources across Synods and the General Assembly:</p> <p>Values:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) As the United Reformed Church, we value conciliar decision making where we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen to each other, and the urgings of the Holy Spirit • act with humility • act with grace and generosity • seek to consider the good of all God's people, fostering obedience to the Gospel and furthering justice and climate care, rather than narrow self-interest.

b) We believe that transparency about our decision making helps us be accountable to each other, and to God, whose mission we seek to serve.

c) We will use the charitable funds at our disposal lawfully and ensure the activity carried out with them is compliant.

Principles:

a) We seek to use our resources *effectively*, and not just where some of us might shout loudly or on sustaining existing ways of being.

b) We look to be *efficient*, as part of our commitment to good stewardship.

c) We will take *considered risks* for the Kingdom.

d) We prioritise *partnership* within and beyond the United Reformed Church.

e) We value local *diversity* within the family of the United Reformed Church, rather than constraining uniformity.

Resolution 48

General Assembly believes God is calling us to financial resource sharing across the United Reformed Church in accordance with the values and principles it has adopted. It empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to appoint a task group to:

a) Develop a range of different models of resource sharing.

b) To carry out detailed feasibility work for each model.

c) To determine what structural or legal changes might be necessary to enable each model to function.

d) To evaluate each model against the Values and Principles General Assembly has adopted.

e) To report back to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 49

General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a task group to explore ways in which, in accordance with the values and principles adopted, the wider Councils of the United Reformed Church might offer consistent,

	<p>locally accessible, support functions for local churches in areas including (but not exclusively):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • finance • property • health and safety • human resources • safeguarding. <p>It asks the task group to bring a model, or models, to General Assembly 2024 with feasibility studies and costings.</p> <p>Resolution 50 General Assembly invites the General Secretariat and PLATO to re-establish the PLATO handbook (or equivalent), providing a central online resource of advice and pro-formas for trust, property, financial and related matters for local congregations, to be available on-line at the latest by General Assembly 2025.</p> <p>Resolution 51 General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a working group to examine:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) What models of employed lay work can be effective within local churches. b) What infrastructure is necessary to be provided by the wider church to support employed lay ministry in local churches. c) How mission and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.
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Summary of content

<p>Subject and aim(s)</p>	<p>The Church Life Review Group was asked by General Assembly 2021 to examine the structures, resources, and work of the United Reformed Church to enable us to respond faithfully to the challenges the church faces. Over the last two years, we have consulted widely across the Church, and commissioned work on the theology of money, the lived experiences of the United Reformed Church, the resources available to the United Reformed Church, and how we are using those resources.</p> <p>Our work has given each member of the group greater insight into the challenges and opportunities facing the United Reformed Church. In particular, we have been struck that we have more significant financial resources available to deploy</p>
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	<p>on the church’s mission than many members of the church may realise. However, it is also true that those resources are not available uniformly across the church, but concentrated in particular areas, in part as a result of wider economic trends.</p> <p>The Church Life Review Group is clear that those resources should neither be deployed against some centrally directed strategy, nor simply used to subsidise existing activities. Rather, we see the church as facing a <i>Kairos</i> moment where it has an opportunity to try different ways of being the church and bring new energy to its mission.</p>
Main points	<p>To that end, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commend the resources developed and commissioned by the Church Life Review Group to the church (Theological reflections, Theos, flourishing churches etc). • Invite General Assembly to affirm some of the key messages we have discerned from the wider church (purpose of wider church structures, values, principles etc). • Recommend that General Assembly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ commissions work on effective resource-sharing across the church; ○ establishes work to create centres of expertise within the church, avoiding duplication, and making expertise more widely available to Synods and local churches; ○ creates a working group on new models of lay work in local churches and groups of churches; and ○ authorises effective, proportionate project management of this work for the benefit of the wider Church.
Previous relevant documents	<p>N2 – AE Paper 2021 N1 – AE paper 2022 N1 – GA paper 2022.</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>Synod Moderators, Synod Clerks, Synod Treasurers, Synod Trust Convenors, Synod Trust Officers, Synod Property Officers, Convenor of URC Trust, Finance Committee and General Secretariat.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	<p>The Finance Committee has identified sources of funding to support further work agreed. See finance resolution G5.</p>
External (eg ecumenical)	<p>N/A.</p>

1. Planting gardens

- 1.1. “Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:5-7).
- 1.2. The letter the prophet Jeremiah writes to the exiles from Jerusalem who find themselves transplanted into Babylon is remarkable. The People of God have been uprooted from everything they know and from so much that formed their very identity, and find themselves in a context where nothing seems recognisable. There are limits to any analogy, but the Church in Western Europe finds itself transplanted into a world that many of us barely recognise. We can plot the graphs of our numerical decline, and lament the loss of our place within society. We can decry secularisation and live in secret fear of becoming irrelevant. However, if we hear the words of the prophet to one set of exiles as words to us, we find ourselves reorientated.
- 1.3. The exiles are told to do some remarkably simple things. Things which in the context must have felt difficult. They are told to plant gardens, build houses, form relationships, and seek the good of the place that is now their home – a place one might have expected them to think of as “the enemy”. They are not to look back and lament the wondrous gardens they once had, but to plant a seed, that in time, once more, there will be a garden. Garden planting starts with that simple act of hope which is to plant a seed. It may sprout, it may not. It will need watering and tending and caring. We don’t know what will happen when we plant a seed. Nothing may happen. But without planting that seed there is no hope.
- 1.4. This letter to the exiles, rather unexpectedly, has become the key biblical text for the Church Life Review. The General Secretary chose it early in the process as the basis for reflections to a couple of Synod meetings. Entirely coincidentally, Fiona Bennett, the current Moderator of General Assembly, chose it to focus our Bible study and worship as we met in consultation with Synod Moderators and representatives of Synods. We also find resonances in the report from *Theos*. Just as planting a seed can be the first step on the way to a garden, we find that small churches can make a significant difference to the communities around them. The innate charism of the United Reformed Church locally to serve the local communities in which we find ourselves is us responding to the call to seek the welfare of the places in which God has set us. We may no longer recognise those places in many ways, given the rapid pace of societal change, but our vocation remains to seek the welfare of the places God has set us.
- 1.5. The Church Life Review Group has learnt much on the journey that brought it from an initial resolution to bring such a group into being at General Assembly 2021. By the time the group had been formed and was able to meet in person for the first time, to the point at which this report has had to be submitted has been less than 18 months. We realise that as this phase of our work concludes, and this group stands down, we have done little more than set us off on a journey. That will frustrate some who want immediate answers to pressing problems.

Others have struggled with the pace that we have set. Our prayer is that we have planted seeds, and provided resources to the wider church that might nourish the work that will follow as the garden is tended.

- 1.6.** We were convinced from the outset that providing a grand plan for the United Reformed Church – some kind of church-wide mission strategy – was to misunderstand both our real need and to misunderstand what can really make a difference to our life in local churches. We remain convinced that the primary place for the discerning of God’s vocation to the life of the Church remains the local Church and Elders meetings. There are some who are frustrated with that, and who struggle to see how, without a clear denominational vision, we can set priorities and use resources effectively.

We believe, as a result of much prayer, worship, discernment, consultation and information gathering, that key to the flourishing of the United Reformed Church is to resource as effectively as we can our local churches, and other frontlines of mission. It is for local churches to utilise those resources in service of the vision they have caught for their life together in their context. We will invite General Assembly to affirm that the primary strategic purpose of the wider Councils of the United Reformed Church is to serve the flourishing of local churches and only to undertake such work that furthers the gospel and flourishing of the whole body that cannot be undertaken by the local church.

- 1.7.** The conciliar nature of the United Reformed Church leads us to understand that strategy cannot emerge top-down, rather it emerges as we engage together. We have learned the vital importance of first-class facilitation for that to happen. We experienced this as Fiona Bennett facilitated our consultation with Synod Moderators, and as Andrea Russell and Gordon Woods facilitated the Yarnfield consultation which brought together those from across the Synods and General Assembly with responsibility for finance, trust matters, property and the like. Expert facilitation allows all voices to be heard, and principles, aims, aspirations and potential actions to be discerned and refined. That facilitation enables the Church to listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit in the voices of one another. We believe that bringing people together for extensive consultation has been invaluable, and will continue to be invaluable, even though it has a cost to it. Engaging difficult issues requires the trust that emerges out of real human interaction. This is when imaginations begin to fire collectively in the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe these ways of working have proved invaluable, and will need to be part of the ongoing next phase of work.
- 1.8.** We have learned of the vital contribution that those with expertise beyond the life of the United Reformed Church can bring us. The attentive listening that *Theos* has done for us has given us the opportunity to see ourselves as others see us. An outside listening ear, without an axe to grind, provides valuable space for people to reflect. Similarly, the expertise that MKS have brought us as we’ve attempted to examine our financial situation has been invaluable. It has enabled us to tell the story of the United Reformed Church in numbers. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21).
- 1.9.** We have learned that the kind of work we have been doing needs to be well resourced. This Church Life Review process was set off without any additional staffing capacity being added to resource its work. In the period of our work, there have been a number of unexpected Church House staff absences or changes of

personnel. The General Secretary ended up being signed off work for a few weeks – which is maybe not entirely unrelated to these issues of capacity. We offer huge thanks to Lindsey Sanderson and Gordon Woods who stepped up to the plate to convene and act as secretary of our work. The lack of capacity to enable our work has had implications. Consultation has not always been what we would have hoped with regard to the review of structures. Balls have been dropped. Pieces of work have been later than anticipated. Where we have failed, we offer our apologies. We also would recommend to the Church that for future work as we move forward, it is vital that it is properly resourced in terms of staffing. Processes that are not well handled and administered run the risk of losing trust, not building trust, and making errors, simple or profound, that might not be made otherwise.

- 1.10.** We have learned that there is a very serious lack of trust within the United Reformed Church. Some of us knew this coming into the work, but it has also been demonstrated in some of what *Theos* have found in their report. There is too often suspicion of Synods by local churches, and suspicion of the General Assembly by local churches and Synods, and suspicion of Church House by absolutely everybody! Our experience has been that there is a tendency amongst us to think the worst first, to presume that there is a hidden agenda, to assume that “they” are out to “do us down” somehow. We simply do not believe that this is true.

We have engaged with a huge variety of people from across the whole United Reformed Church and find faithful people working tirelessly for the good of the life of the Church and the world. We believe that building trust must be one of the key objectives we have as a church. There is, at times, no replacement for meeting together in person. Bringing people from differing perspectives and different vantage points in the life of the church around one table is always a transformative experience.

- 1.11.** We have learned that there is a sense that very few people within the life of the United Reformed Church believe that they have the necessary agency to effect change. Change should either be initiated from “them”, and “they” are not doing it, or change that is desired is being blocked by “them” over there. Having brought together in one room Synod Moderators, Synod Treasurers, Synod Trust Company Convenors and Trust officers, Synod Clerks, members of the Church Life Review Group, and members of Church House staff it was remarkable to hear our ecumenical facilitator reflect back to us that she was hearing a significant sense that ‘we’ have not got the ability to effect change, and a sense that there is some kind of ‘they’ that might stop it.

Discovering a healthy sense of having the agency and authority to begin to effect change is vital to our health as the body of Christ. We, together, the United Reformed Church, as those who make up its Councils, from the Church Meeting to the General Assembly, do have the ability to effect change and make things happen. We are, perhaps, too wary of taking hold of what conciliar church government says really is ours to grasp.

- 1.12.** We have prayed, studied scripture together, worshipped together – and done all those things with many others. We have heard of remarkable things that the United Reformed Church is doing, and it has been a privilege. As this configuration of Church Life Review Group stands down having brought us to

General Assembly 2023, we want to thank you for the remarkable opportunity that you have given us to see so much that is good in the life of the United Reformed Church.

2. Where we have come from

- 2.1. In November 2022 we reported to Mission Council on our progress to date. At that point, we were to some extent in something of a limbo position. We were waiting on major consultations with Synod Moderators and about finance and trust matters, and on the Theos report. We were in the process of consulting further on changes to committee structures, and reported on the consultation feedback at that point. This General Assembly report is the first time we have the substantive material for detailed discussion to follow.
- 2.2. We have come to realise that it is vital to understand that there have been various significant attempts to grapple with serious issues that have faced the United Reformed Church for many years. We can think back to the 'Growing Up Report', the 'Patterns of Ministry Report', the 'Catch the Vision', the 'Medium Term Strategy Report', and the review of Synods and Synod Moderators. Fruit has been harvested from many of these initiatives, perhaps most radically in the changes which flowed from 'Catch the Vision'. However, we have also often heard of the regret that many of the key recommendations of the 'Patterns of Ministry' report were not adopted. Many of the issues that we have been identifying were identified and constructive suggestions made to engage them in the 'Medium Term Strategy' report. We have a history of setting groups of people up, asking them to address significant and difficult issues, bringing radical proposals to General Assembly only for them to be rejected, and to find ourselves a few years later staring at the same problems and at times regretting not having tackled them more boldly earlier.
- 2.3. In the light of the above, we are not bringing a set of resolutions to effect radical change. That is not realistic in the timescale to which we have been working, and neither do we believe it is the most helpful way to effect change. Rather, the recommendations we bring seek to define some basic principles we may discern as guiding future work and decision making, seeking to identify some key aspirations that we believe if followed through with would make a significant difference to the ability of United Reformed Churches to flourish, and to set off further detailed work exploring the feasibility of possible options.
- 2.4. What is radically new in the work we have done is the attempt to engage the question of money. How are we called to use the financial resources we have is a theological question, and one that the United Reformed Church has not examined previously. It is perhaps telling that when we looked at past General Assembly Resolutions about money, we notice that we have frequently taken positions on how other people ought to use money, but rarely considered how we are called to use the money we have as a Church. There are exceptions to this in terms of ethical investment policies, but we have never thought seriously about the theological groundwork for the way in which we take budgetary decisions.
- 2.5. If we were to simplify to the absolute core the key question that we have been seeking to address it would be: **What enables local United Reformed Churches to flourish, and how might the United Reformed Church most effectively use the financial resources it has to enable that flourishing?** Our work has obviously involved reflection on other matters, such as structures.

But we believe that this is the key question that the Church needs to continue to try to answer if we are to respond faithfully to the call to plant gardens and seek the welfare of the place God has put us.

3. What have we done

3.1 Theos research: At the outset, we recognised the vital importance of hearing the voices of local United Reformed Churches as carefully as possible. We have engaged in a variety of exercises seeking feedback, including the ‘Jubilee Questions’ around a Jubilee Daily Devotions service, feedback from various discussion sessions at General Assembly and Assembly Executive, as well as examining all individual contributions that were made. At the heart of our attempt to do careful listening to the reality of United Reformed Church life was the work we engaged in with the think-tank Theos. We partnered with them (meaning that the work is of use in furthering their charitable objectives in terms of the understanding of the impact of faith communities in the public square as well as our objectives as the United Reformed Church) in a piece of research work whose primary aim was to examine what flourishing looks like within the United Reformed Church, and what supports that flourishing.

A set of ten case studies were developed, seven reflecting a range of different local pastorate contexts, attempting to gain a spread of demographic contexts. One case study was of URC Youth as a representation of an activity of the whole United Reformed Church across all the different councils of the Church. Two case studies were of Synods so it was possible to gain an insight into the similarities and differences between how local churches and Synod understand the issues at stake. The full report is available at on the main webpage for General Assembly papers: www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly

3.2 Theology of Money: We commissioned a series of theological reflections from people with differing perspectives on the theology of money. This was to provide material for the whole church to think about and spark conversation around questions to do with how, theologically, we are called to use the financial resources we have available to us. The reflections are available here: www.urc.org.uk/your-faith/prayer-and-worship/small-group-studies/

3.3 MKS Forensic Accounting: We commissioned a piece of forensic accounting from MKS, who have a specialist charities accounting unit. The aim was to map the financial resources of the United Reformed Church across the 14 legal entities that hold them on behalf of the General Assembly and the 13 Synods. From an initial model spreadsheet, representatives of all Synods were invited to workshops to refine the model and ensure it would capture the information required and in ways manageable. The 14 Trusts were then invited to respond to this. The hope had been to gain three years' worth of data to map historical changes. In reality, it was only possible to gain high enough quality data to map one year: 2021. This gives us the first overall view of the income and expenditure of those 14 interrelating entities. The full report is available in report N3.

3.4 Flourishing churches: Aware that many churches are struggling to manage particularly with the lack of people able to take on positions of responsibility, and aware of the sheer numbers of churches who feel they may be close to closure, we engaged with a piece of work designed to enable churches to discern the ways in which they might be able to meet the basic requirements of being a church, and beyond that to flourish. As the Theos report indicates, there are a

range of possibilities for supporting partnerships of congregations which have not been significantly engaged with. This paper seeks to help local churches recognise what key elements of church life are vital for flourishing and offers a range of ways forward that might offer new life. The full version of this resources is in the Book of Reports at N4.

- 3.5 **General Assembly Committee structure:** We have engaged in a process of reconsidering the structures of the General Assembly. There is universal agreement that we need smaller, more compact structures, that require far fewer people to fill them. This part of our work, more than most, suffered from a lack of capacity to move forward consultation in the ways hoped. An interim report was issued at Assembly Executive 2022, but the further hoped for consultation has been lacking. We bring therefore reduced proposals regarding structures but wish to test the mind of Assembly on moving forward with aspects that seem to have met with widespread agreement and to set off a process to continue this work and bring it to completion. These proposals are contained in an appendix to this main report.
- 3.6 **Consultations:** We sought to consult with the wider Church through 'Jubilee Questions' that were linked with the Jubilee Daily Devotions service in October 2022. More specifically, aware of the unparalleled oversight that the Moderators meeting has of the whole United Reformed Church we met with the Moderators meeting for a 48-hour consultation facilitated by the Moderator of General Assembly, the Revd Fiona Bennett. We were also very aware that the process of thinking through questions surrounding the resourcing of local churches at the level of finances, and dealing with the compliance challenges that face us, was something that requires joined-up thinking from across the 14 legal entities that make up the wider URC.

For the first time in the history of the United Reformed Church, we brought together the Convenors of all the Trust Companies which hold our assets (it is telling that Church House did not even know who all these people were at the start of this project), Synod Treasurers, Synod Trust Officers, Synod Clerks, Synod Moderators along with people responsible for buildings, and General Assembly and Church House staff with relevant responsibilities. This was facilitated jointly by Revd Dr Andrea Russell, Warden of Gladstone's Library, and Gordon Woods from the Church Life Review Group. This consultation felt seminal in our work, and from it emerged the proposals for future work concerning resource sharing and supporting local churches with compliance matters that are below. The Councils of the Church remain the key place in which we discern together, and the place the authority for determining policy and taking action resides. We believe that bringing people together to consult as we have done has been of tremendous benefit in assisting the discernment process of the Assembly.

4. What we have found

- 4.1 **Reaffirming our values:** The United Reformed Church is a Church which believes that the mission and ministry of the church is best discerned by local congregations for their immediate contexts. The Theos research demonstrates the foundational importance of local decision-making for us, and the way we do that is valued by many. Our concern for the immediate local communities that we serve is also central to our identity. There is a strong feeling of being part of a family of the United Reformed Church, which is one of the metaphors with which

one can unpack what it means to be the Body of Christ and the People of God. Where one part of the family suffers, we all suffer. The gifts of the whole body are required for the flourishing of the whole body.

We believe that these values lead us to an understanding of what the strategic priorities of the wider Councils of the Church (Synods and General Assembly) must be, which is: **to serve the flourishing of local churches and only to undertake such work that furthers the gospel and flourishing of the whole body that cannot be undertaken by the local church.** We believe that the wider councils of the Church should only undertake such activity that is not directly about serving the local church when it is activity that local churches themselves cannot undertake alone. The Theos report illustrates this well: URC Youth provides discipleship and an experience of 'being church' for young people that most local churches cannot.

Another example might be the work of the Joint Public Issues Team which helps local churches have a voice in the public realm (together with ecumenical colleagues) that no local church alone could have. Equally, the wider councils of the church have duties to enable new local congregations to be initiated through missionary activity. When determining the priority for resources, however, serving the flourishing of local churches should be the number one priority.

- 4.2 **Naming our lived experience:** We believe that naming the joys and challenges of being Church today is vital. The Theos report gives many examples of flourishing, and there are many more besides. It also points to hard realities about being church in today's world. We do lament the loss of what we have been, and that sense of loss leads at times to bitterness and resentment, particularly if not named and owned. We need to develop a culture where we can be honest about our lived joys and sorrows, and name reality for what it is, even when that is difficult. This is what it is to speak the truth in love – sometimes the truths we face as a family are hard.
- 4.3 The Theos report finds many **signs of flourishing**, particularly in our work within local communities, around how we hold differences together, and the way we hold the voices of children and young people within the life of the church. We are a church of action and activity. We are also a tired church, perhaps. We struggle to place discipleship at the centre of our lives. Of all the voices Theos heard, there was very little they heard about worship, spirituality or discipleship, despite discipleship being a key focus of our work over the last few years.
- 4.4 There is a very strong sense around the life of the United Reformed Church that **our existing structures are failing us.** They are too top-heavy, too extensive, and need to be sleeker, and slimmer. We bring initial proposals for beginning changes to our structures in an appendix to this report.
- 4.5 There is also a strong sense that **people are tired and ground down by what feels like a scarcity of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Elders.** Whilst the number of ministers per member may remain static, the number of congregations per minister is becoming frightening as we contemplate a statistical future with over seven congregations per stipendiary minister within a decade. We have not ever been in the position where we limit the number of candidates for ministerial training we can accept on financial grounds. We are once again accepting several ministers on certificates of eligibility each year.

- 4.6 **What is experienced as the shortage of stipendiary ministers cannot be addressed by simply ordaining more stipendiary ministers.** There are not large numbers of people coming forward to candidate for ministry (and we need to be realistic about the pool of suitable people who might receive a vocation given the demographic of the overwhelming proportion of the URC), and there is a limit to the number of certificates of eligibility the M&M fund can sustain. This does not mean the issue cannot be addressed, there are various things we can do, but many of them have resource implications. We can do the following.
- 4.1.1. Begin to **think in the round about ministry beyond stipendiary target figures.** How can we proactively address deployment as being about stipendiary, non-stipendiary (models 1-3 and 4) ministers and CRCWs, Lay Preachers, Lay Pioneers and Elders? One precious resource within the Church is our Lay Preachers. Often, however, at the end of training and commissioning they function entirely 'freelance', in an essentially open-market bidding system where pulpit supply secretaries try to get in early enough to book a lay preacher whilst they are still free. We believe that moving towards an understanding of Lay Preaching as a resource that can be part of the deployed ministry within a pastorate or grouping of local congregations would be a helpful direction of travel.
- 4.1.2. Alongside recognised ministries of the Church **employed lay staff need to become a greater part of the ministry mixture.** Youth and Children's Workers, Pastoral Assistants, Community workers and the like are all employed positions that can add massive value to the ministry and mission of a local congregation. However, staff require infrastructure: payrolls, line-management, disciplinary and other appropriate policies in place, support, or reference groups etc. These are currently beyond the ability of some local congregations to provide and within our current structures can be a significant challenge for Synods to deliver. Such support for employing staff to assist in our work locally could be provided, however, if the resources to do that were available. This would also help us become a better and more consistent employer ensuring best employment practice is followed.
- 4.1.3. It is vital that we release all the ministry resource we have, from all the variety of vocations we find within the URC, to engage with the heart of ministry. All too often, Ministers, CRCWs, Elders and Lay Preachers are ground down by an array of administrative tasks to ensure that the myriad compliance requirements on several local churches are met. One significant way to **free up ministerial resource** of all varieties would be to ensure that congregations have administrative support for the management of finances, buildings, compliance and the like. Again, this requires infrastructure that currently is largely beyond the ability of our structures to deliver.
- 4.7 **The Theos report** makes clear the value that Church Related Community Workers bring to the life of the United Reformed Church. We were surprised at the extent to which this emerges within the report, given there are only 13 CRCWs. There is a resource here, and learning, from which the whole United Reformed Church might better benefit, given how central community ministry is to our identity. The report also highlights that there are at times issues in the functioning of CRCW projects and their integration within the life of the church.

We believe that the Church would benefit from the Ministries Committee initiating a review into CRCW ministry and the support of community work across the

Church, to explore what learning there is for the wider Church, how presenting issues might be addressed, and to explore how a greater part of the URC might benefit from this form of ministry.

- 4.8 The results of **the forensic accounting** show a mixed picture across the financial life of the United Reformed Church. These are available in paper N2. In short, across the 14 legal entities that hold the financial resources of the wider church, we spend more each year than we get in general income. We subsidise our day-to-day living by selling redundant church buildings and through the gains on investments (which go down as well as up). However, the overall trajectory is that our financial wealth is increasing relatively rapidly because of the sale of redundant buildings. This is in stark contrast to the decline in membership and the closure of congregations. The cruel irony is that decline of church life results in an increase in financial resources. How are we called to use those financial resources in a theologically appropriate way in response to the call of God?
- 4.9 What is also clear, though hardly new knowledge, is that **the financial resources of the church are deeply unequally spread across the 14 legal entities which hold them**. Inter-Synod resource sharing is very limited in what it achieves, which is in effect to ensure that the Synods of Scotland and Wales are able to function at a realistic level on a year-to-year basis.
- 4.10 It is also clear that the **support services that can be offered to local churches vary considerably from Synod to Synod**. No Synod can offer comprehensive support in terms of finance, buildings, human resources, safeguarding and the like. For many churches, much more focused support of this nature would make the difference between them being able to engage meaningfully in their mission and ministry within their local communities, and simply keeping going.

Even the Church-wide resources that once we had, such as the PLATO handbook, have become unsustainable. The PLATO handbook sought to bring together up to date and reliable advice and proformas on a range of different practical matters for local churches. The Trust Officers found they were lacking the capacity to keep its content up to date, and out of date content can be even more unhelpful than no content, so the resource was withdrawn. This leaves us in a situation where often advice on items such as legal matters end up being taken multiple times over by the 14 different legal entities, at considerable cost, and with the danger that the advice given is inconsistent and leads to potential problems defending legal cases as they arise.

- 4.11 The United Reformed Church was for a long time rich in extraordinary volunteers who gifted time, and often considerable expertise to Church life. However, it was not a Church that ever thought of itself as rich. We now find ourselves in an era where we are people-poor, but increasingly cash-rich. This entails a change of mindset. All members of the URC are aware of the drastic changes that we are living through, and the challenges that entails.

We believe that this is something of a **Kairos moment: a moment the Spirit offers us**, which can be grasped, but equally could slip through our fingers. We believe we have sufficient human resource to engage in a process of quite radical change that would release the resources of the church for local mission and ministry. The *Kairos* moment will not last forever – there is a strong sense that unless we grasp this moment, we may be too late. The fear of many is that

we die an extremely rich church when there is the possibility of stewarding our resources such that new life can flourish, ministry freed for its true purpose, and seeds planted to ensure future generations have gardens from which to eat.

5. Planting seeds

5.1. Even before a garden is planted, seeds need to be planted. Planting seeds is an act of faith. One is never quite sure what will happen, and some will not flourish. Others may grow wildly at first but have little longevity, some may turn into weeds that later need weeding, but some will form the basis of the gardens of the future. We offer the following suggestions for the next stages of the work.

5.2. Resolution 43: General Assembly commends the five reflections on the theology of money to the whole United Reformed Church and its associated Charities and Trust Companies for prayer, reflection, and study.

5.2.1. These reflections have been helpfully turned into resources as part of the 'Daily Devotions' resources. All councils of the Church and their associated charities and Trust Companies take decisions on how we use money, and we believe that careful consideration of the theological principles which underlie our use of money will enrich our life together.

5.3. Resolution 44: General Assembly Commends the Theos Report: *The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads* to local churches and Synods for prayer, study and reflection.

5.3.1. We believe that this report will provide rich resources to local congregations and Synods to enable reflection on our ministry and mission.

5.4. Resolution 45: General Assembly commends to Synods and local churches the resource *Flourishing Churches*.

5.4.1. This resource explores what some of the key aspects of church life are that are vital to the existence of the life of the church and its flourishing. Recognising how many local churches struggle to find the human resource necessary to undertake that work, this resource sets out different forms of church life that might reduce and share the burdens. It also recognises that there are elements that must be present for church life to be safe and recognises that the moment does come when a church cannot continue because those elements are not present. There are many possible avenues to explore before that place is reached, and this resource will help local congregations and Synods explore the possibilities in different contexts.

5.5. General Assembly believes that the primary strategic aim of the work of the General Assembly and Synods is to serve the flourishing of local churches and only to undertake such work that furthers the gospel that cannot be undertaken by the local church.

5.5.1. We believe that it will be helpful to state this aim, so that it is kept in view. It does not preclude other valuable work where the church can only exercise part of its ministry and mission within the wider Councils of the Church. It also does not preclude the initiating of new forms of mission and ministry. It should act as a guide for the use of resources, however, to ensure that the primacy of the local as

the place where mission and ministry is exercised is shaping all our decision-making processes.

5.6. Resolution 46: General Assembly affirms the vital role of Synods in connecting, affirming and resourcing local churches.

- 5.6.1. Synods often find themselves uncomfortably caught between local churches and the General Assembly. We believe they are a vital way in which the interconnectedness of the body of Christ is maintained. It is easy to hear calls to share resources more widely as undermining the work of individual Synods. Synods, as the primary Council of oversight play a significant part in the flourishing of the United Reformed Church and that should be celebrated. At the same time, it is helpful to recall that Synods, as a Council of the Church, are not identical to the charitable trust companies which hold the resources of Synods. This resolution makes clear that future discussion which theoretically may result in suggesting changes to Trust structures (and equally may not), in no way undermines the vital role that Synods themselves play fulfilling the functions ascribed to them in the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church.

We also noted that with the abolition of District Councils, work that might have been done at that level has now reverted largely to Synods, with a particular increase in demands on Synod Moderators. We do not believe that merging Synods would be a helpful approach, because they can already feel distant from the local church.

5.7. Resolution 47: General Assembly adopts the following *Values and Principles* as the basis for future decision making concerning the use and sharing of financial resources across Synods and the General Assembly:

Values:

- a) **As the United Reformed Church, we value conciliar decision making where we:**
- listen to each other, and the urgings of the Holy Spirit;
 - act with humility;
 - act with grace and generosity; and
 - seek to consider the good of all God's people, fostering obedience to the Gospel and furthering justice and climate care, rather than narrow self-interest.
- b) **We believe that transparency about our decision making helps us be accountable to each other, and to God, whose mission we seek to serve.**
- c) **We will use the charitable funds at our disposal lawfully and ensure the activity carried out with them is compliant.**

Principles:

- a) **We seek to use our resources *effectively*, and not just where some of us might shout loudly or on sustaining existing ways of being.**
- b) **We look to be *efficient*, as part of our commitment to good stewardship.**
- c) **We will take *considered risks* for the Kingdom.**
- d) **We prioritise *partnership* within and beyond the United Reformed Church.**

- e) **We value local *diversity* within the family of the United Reformed Church, rather than constraining uniformity.**

5.7.1 These values and principles emerged from the consultation at Yarnfield. Initially we worked simply with the principles, but it was clear from reaction in the meeting that there was a strong desire to set specific principles in the wider context of our values. These values and principles were found helpful as a tool to evaluate different options for future ways of working. We believe that in setting these as the values and principles by which we will evaluate potential option for new ways of sharing resources and administering them, future Assemblies will be greatly assisted in their discernment.

5.8 Resolution 48: General Assembly believes God is calling us to financial resource sharing across the United Reformed Church in accordance with the values and principles it has adopted. It empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to appoint a task group to:

- a) **develop a range of different models of resource sharing**
- b) **carry out detailed feasibility work for each model**
- c) **determine what structural or legal changes might be necessary to enable each model to function**
- d) **evaluate each model against the Values and Principles General Assembly has adopted**
- e) **report back to General Assembly 2024.**

5.8.1 The consultation at Yarnfield explored briefly a range of different ways in which resource sharing might operate in the future. These ranged from an enhanced version of inter-synod resources sharing, through to the merger of all the legal entities which hold the financial resources of the United Reformed Church. Whilst there was a strong consensus that significant change was needed, positives and negatives were immediately spotted for each possible model. For General Assembly to discern wisely, it needs detailed feasibility studies on a range of different approaches.

5.9 Resolution 49: General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a task group to explore ways in which, in accordance with the values and principles adopted, the wider Councils of the United Reformed Church might offer consistent, locally accessible, support functions for local churches in areas including (but not exclusively):

- **finance**
- **property**
- **health and safety**
- **human resources**
- **safeguarding.**

It asks the task group to bring a model, or models, to General Assembly 2024 with feasibility studies and costings.

5.9.1 We believe that central to releasing the maximum potential from ministerial resources (lay and ordained ministries) is to ensure that the gifts and graces people bring to the life of the church can be released for mission and ministry, not

tied up in attending to necessary and important, but time consuming, compliance matters. We believe that, working together, and sharing our resources in new ways, it would be possible to offer resources, locally accessible, to congregations. This resolution invites feasibility work into this.

This emerges out of reflection at Yarnfield, where it was clear there was appetite to achieve common standards in compliance areas to maximise support to congregations and minimise risk. There was also a desire to explore how this might best be achieved, including through the possible development of 'centres of expertise' rooted in Synods but serving the wider church. The resolution recognises there are a range of models that potentially could be explored, so does not limit the task group to just this model.

5.10 Resolution 50: General Assembly invites the General Secretariat and PLATO to re-establish the PLATO handbook (or equivalent), providing a central on-line resource of advice and pro-formas for trust, property, financial and related matters for local congregations, to be available on-line at the latest by General Assembly 2025.

5.10.1 One clear and relatively achievable outcome of the Yarnfield consultation was a desire to reinstate something equivalent to the former PLATO handbook. This will need resourcing, but the presence of a Compliance Officer at Church House goes some way to enabling this. This could potentially significantly reduce developing the same pieces of work multiple times over, and provide an easy one-stop shop for local churches furnishing them with written advice and pro-formas that can be adopted for local usage.

5.11 Resolution 51: General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a working group to examine:

- a) **What models of employed lay work can be effective within local churches.**
- b) **What infrastructure is necessary to be provided by the wider church to support employed lay ministry in local churches.**
- c) **How mission and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.**

5.12 Financing future work

5.12.1 It is not possible at this point in the development of further work to bring detailed cost proposals for the capacity that will be necessary to develop the next stage of work of the Church Life Review. It is only as task groups begin their work that it will become clear what capacity, either in terms of staff time or consultancy, will be necessary to complete work well. We do not wish to bind the hands of those who will undertake the work, but we are convinced that there is not the resource within existing capacity to complete it well.

The Finance Committee has considered this report and the work the Assembly would be initiating if these resolutions are passed. It has agreed to redesignate the Annenberg Fund to enable it to be spent on necessary professional advice, consultancy or temporary employees to enable this work to be forwarded in a

timely fashion. The Finance Committee are also bringing paper G5, which sets out to repurpose a proportion of the funds that have accumulated in the Legacy fund to assist with the funding of the work. The Finance Committee and the Trust will ensure appropriate oversight and governance of expenditure.

6. We conclude with a prayer.

God who gardens,
who enjoys the land and declares it to be good,
who revels in its diversity and delights in its abundance,
who invites us to share in the task of nurturing and cherishing the gardens of our lives and our churches,
we ask for energy and wisdom as we tend the land.

Where the garden is overgrown,
give us insight into what should be cleared away and what should be nurtured;
Where the garden is tired,
fill us with courage to prune back branches to allow new growth to emerge;
Where the garden is barren,
encourage us to plant seeds with hope and trust, even if we may not see the tree fully mature;
Where the garden is desolate,
may we provide nesting boxes and bug hotels to encourage and foster new life;
Where the garden needs feeding,
help us to get the right balance of food and water, sunshine and shade
Where the garden is flourishing
may we cherish its life and invite others to sit in its shade.

God who gardens,
as we co-create with you,
may we also enjoy the land and declare it to be good,
revel in its diversity and delight in its abundance.
Amen.

Paper N2

Church Life Review Structures

General Secretary

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 52</p> <p>1. Principles</p> <p>a) General Assembly adopts the following principles in making decisions about its Committee structures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The General Assembly will provide the infrastructure and resources necessary to efficiently support the work of local churches and Synods. ii. The General Assembly will only exercise the functions of the life of the Church that are not more appropriately carried out at local or Synod level. iii. The General Assembly will reduce the number of committees and people required to populate the committee structure to make it proportionate to the current size of the United Reformed Church. iv. The General Assembly will ensure coherence between the Committee Structure and the General Assembly staffing structure to facilitate joined-up strategic thinking and operations. <p>b) The committees of the General Assembly will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. provide integrated decision making and delivery between different areas of General Assembly work as much as is possible to avoid duplication or lack of coherence. ii. work only at the level of strategy, policy and governance.

- iii. be scalable, allowing work to contract or expand as the needs and overall size and level of activity of the Church changes.
- iv. trust General Assembly staff and Office holders to make operational adopted strategies and policies, ensuring accountability through appropriate governance structures.

Resolution 53

2. General Assembly amends the composition of the Business Committee to be made up of:
 - a) An Independent Convenor (who shall be an officer of the General Assembly).
 - b) The General Secretary who shall serve as Executive Secretary.
 - c) The Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - d) The immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - e) The incoming Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - f) The Clerk to the General Assembly.
 - g) The Treasurer to the General Assembly.
 - h) The other members of the General Secretariat.
 - i) Two members appointed by the General Assembly to reflect the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church, one of whom will normally be under the age of 26.
 - j) The Business Committee may invite others to be in attendance when it will assist the making of Assembly Arrangements or the strategic oversight of the business of the Church.
- b. General Assembly adopts the following Terms of Reference for the Business Committee:
 - a) To oversee the practical arrangements of meetings of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.
 - b) To oversee and order the business of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.

- c) To keep a strategic overview of the work of the General Assembly, facilitating the coherence of business across the various committees of the church.
- d) To ensure the coherence of the strategies of the General Assembly, good governance, and the operational work of the Assembly.
- e) When necessary, instigate new business to ensure the wellbeing of the work of the General Assembly.
- f) In urgent circumstances to take any necessary decisions on behalf of the General Assembly in between meetings of the Assembly or Assembly Executive and to report them to the next meeting of the Assembly or Assembly Executive.

Resolution 54

3. General Assembly:

- a) Determines that all Nominations to serve the ongoing work of the General Assembly will be made in accordance with Safer Recruitment policies.
- b) Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the officers of the current Nominations Committee, to appoint a Nominations Committee of six members, reflecting the diversity of the Church. Its Terms of Reference will be:
 - i. To adopt and keep up to date processes for Nominations, including proformas for application forms, guidance for interviews, and other resources necessary to facilitate the nominations process.
 - ii. To receive from Committees (on behalf of themselves, or subcommittees, groups, panels, boards or representatives to outside bodies that are accountable to them), and external bodies Role Descriptions and Person Specifications, and to disseminate these widely through a variety of communications approaches and through Nominations Champions, seeking nominations and applications.
 - iii. To receive from Committees, Groups, Boards and external bodies names of people who have applied, been interviewed, and received appropriate references. To check that appropriate process has been followed, that appointments would recognise appropriate diversity, and when approved, forward

names to General Assembly or Assembly Executive to confirm appointment. Committees are responsible for interviewing for any subcommittees or boards/panels that are accountable to them, or representatives to bodies that report to them.

- iv. To maintain a list of those available to serve on recruitment processes for General Assembly ministerial or staff appointments and to forward to the General Assembly or the Assembly Executive the names of those appointed or nominated for appointment.
 - v. External bodies requesting representation from the United Reformed Church as set out in their governing documents will be responsible for role descriptions, and (where appropriate and possible) interviewing, the Nominations Committee will collect references.
 - vi. To support and enable Nominations Advocates to effectively disseminate opportunities for service within their networks.
- c) Instructs each Synod, URC Youth and the Racial Justice Advocates Network (working with the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries) to each appoint a 'Nominations Champion' to be responsible for assisting with the dissemination of opportunities for service within their respective networks.
 - d) Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the Officers of the current Nominations Committee, to bring this new process into being as soon as possible.
 - e) Recognises the need for staff administrative support for the good functioning of this process and instructs the General Secretariat to enable this.

Resolution 55

- 4. General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to appoint an independent external consultant to advise on the range of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, and a small reference group of three to support their work. The remit should include:
 - a) Mapping the current work of the General Assembly in the field of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and assessing its effectiveness.

- b) Engaging with the work of ecumenical partners and others in the charity sector to ascertain best practice which might inform our work.**
- c) Advising on a draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.**
- d) Advising on appropriate structures and mechanisms to enable the delivery of an EDI policy and effective accountability mechanisms.**
- e) The Business Committee should report to General Assembly 2024 on the progress of this work bringing any appropriate resolutions.**

Resolution 56

- 5. General Assembly renames the Faith and Order Committee the 'Worship, Faith and Order Committee' with the following membership:**
- a) A Convenor**
 - b) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations**
 - c) The Minister for Digital Worship**
 - d) Five members appointed by the General Assembly**
 - e) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations or the Minister for Digital worship will normally function as the Secretary for the Committee.**
 - f) General Assembly adopts the following remit for the Worship, Faith and Order Committee**
 - g) to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC**
 - h) to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues**
 - i) to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order**
 - j) to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate**
 - k) to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order**

- l) to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship.**
- m) to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group**

Resolution 57

- 6. General Assembly thanks the members of the Worship Reference Group for their service and dissolves the group from the close of General Assembly 2023.**

Resolution 58

- 7. General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to oversee a consultation process, to be led by the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship, involving representatives of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Education and Learning Committee and the Ministries Committee, leading to proposals for the further integration of their work, including proposals for further structural integration. These should be in line with the principles adopted in Resolution X.**
 - a) If external facilitation is required to achieve a constructive outcome, the Business Committee is empowered, after consultation with those concerned, to appoint an external facilitator to assist the process.**
 - b) Invites the Business Committee to bring back further proposals, emerging from this consultation exercise, to either Assembly Executive or General Assembly 2024.**

Resolution 59

- 8. General Assembly agrees in principle to the creation of one Resources Committee to bring together responsibility for the areas currently covered by the Church House Management Group, the Communications Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Human Resource Advisory Group.**

It agrees the membership of the Committee to be:

- a) A Convenor (who may be the Treasurer).**
- b) The Treasurer (if not the Convenor).**
- c) The Chief Operating Officer (who will be the Executive Secretary).**

	<p>d) The Chief Finance Officer.</p> <p>e) Five further members, reflecting the diversity of the Church, with collective expertise in the areas of: finance, property, human resources and communications.</p> <p>Resolution 60</p> <p>9. General Assembly invites the Nominations Committee to begin to populate a committee to serve from the close of General Assembly 2024.</p> <p>Resolution 61</p> <p>10. General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to bring full terms of reference for the committee to Assembly Executive 2024 for adoption.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To reform aspects of the Committee Structure of the General Assembly.
Main points	To adopt principles for the reform of the Committee Structure; to amend the makeup and remit of the Business Committee; to amend the remit and functioning of the Nominations Committee; to set up independent consultancy work on the URC’s EDI structures; to adopt a new name a remit for the Faith and Order Committee, and dissolve the Worship Reference Group; to initiate a consultation process leading to further integration of the work of the Discipleship Department, and to agree in principle the creation of a Resources Committee.
Previous relevant documents	N2 - AE Paper 2021 N1 - AE paper 2022 N1 - GA paper 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	General Assembly 2022, Assembly Executive 2022, existing committees and various officers of committees.

Summary of impact

Financial	Nothing specific, but should lower the costs of committees by reducing their numbers.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

Church Life Review Appendix 1

General Assembly Structures

Background

1. As part of the Church Life Review, we were asked to examine the structures of the General Assembly. This was in part because of the significant pressures on the nominations committee and difficulties filling all the relevant positions. It is also about a widespread sense that our structures are simply too large for the size of Church we now are.
2. We outlined initial thinking and consulted General Assembly 2022. At the same time, we engaged in a round of consultation with all Committees, who were invited to comment. We fed back the results of this, indicating where we believed changes to the proposals were necessary, to Assembly Executive in November 2022.
3. At that point, there was an unfortunate failure in communications. We believed that a written invitation had been sent to follow up the verbal invitation given at Assembly Executive to all committees to invite a member of the Church Life Review Group to attend a meeting of any committee that wished. That written invitation did not get sent, and the Church Life Review Group was surprised that only one committee invited us.
4. This means that we are not able to bring a complete set of proposals across all the areas of Church Life. Such is the pressure on the Nominations Committee that we have chosen to bring proposals in those areas where we believe we appropriately can, and very significantly, to the work of the Nominations Committee itself.
5. Broadly, the proposal was that there should be three committees that map onto three Church House departments: Mission, Church Life (covering the current Discipleship department) and Administration and Resources (or possibly called 'Finance and General Purposes').
6. There was considerable agreement among the committees of the Administration and Resources department.
7. The Discipleship department have already been enjoying much closer collaboration between the Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Ministries Committees over recent years, and staff and convenors are keen to find ways to embed that structurally. There is concern about the scope of any new committee, and the practicalities of how this would function. It is in this area that consultation most noticeably failed.
8. The Mission Committee already functions as one Committee with one Deputy General Secretary and one staff team. There are no proposals to change this.
9. Proposals floated at General Assembly 2022 to have one Deputy General Secretary and two Department Leads in Mission and Church Life have been dropped over concerns about the capacity of staff to hold a full specialist brief and exercise the function of Deputy General Secretary.

10. There has been a general concern, expressed within the Nominations Committee itself, and at Assembly Executive, about its ways of working. They have served us well over many years, but no longer feel fit for purpose. We bring proposal for the formation of a new Nominations Committee and Nominations process to ensure we are working to the Safer Recruitment policies of the General Assembly.

Principles

1. It has been helpful to determine some principles by which structural reform should happen, and we invite General Assembly to adopt the following principles by which ongoing work in this area can be determined. We therefore propose the following resolution:

- a. **General Assembly adopts the following principles in making decisions about its Committee structures:**

- i. **The General Assembly will provide the infrastructure and resources necessary to efficiently support the work of local churches and Synods.**
- ii. **The General Assembly will only exercise the functions of the life of the church that are not more appropriately carried out at local or Synod level.**
- iii. **The General Assembly will reduce the number of committees and people required to populate the committee structure to make it proportionate to the current size of the United Reformed Church.**
- iv. **The General Assembly will ensure coherence between the Committee Structure and the General Assembly staffing structure to facilitate joined-up strategic thinking and operations.**

- b. **The committees of the General Assembly will:**

- i. **provide integrated decision making and delivery between different areas of General Assembly work as much as is possible to avoid duplication or lack of coherence.**
- ii. **work only at the level of strategy, policy and governance.**
- iii. **be scalable, allowing work to contract or expand as the needs and overall size and level of activity of the Church changes.**
- iv. **trust General Assembly staff and Office holders to operationalise adopted strategies and policies, ensuring accountability through appropriate governance structures.**

Business Committee

1. The Business Committee was formed from the previous Assembly Arrangements Committee and the Mission Council Advisory Group. The functions of the former have dominated over the last three years as we have planned and executed meetings of General Assembly and Assembly Executive both through the pandemic and settled into the new permanent venue for Assembly of The Hayes.

The strategic oversight of the whole business of the General Assembly has suffered as a result.

2. The current Business Committee is made up of the Officers of the General Assembly (The Moderator of the General Assembly, the immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly, The General Secretary, the Clerk, the Treasurer and the Convenor of the Business Committee), the Moderator Elect, and two General Assembly appointed representative to ensure balance within the committee. A range of others involved in aspects of the running of General Assembly are invited to attend when discussing preparations for Assembly or Assembly Executive. Its meetings are currently held exclusively on Zoom.
3. The reflection on consultation to date reported at Assembly Executive suggested that it become a body made up of the Officers of the General Assembly and the Convenors of what would have become the three main committees of the General Assembly. This is now problematic in that the number of committees is not yet reducing significantly enough to make this a viable number of people for a strategic body. Furthermore, consultation and reflection has also shown that a significant current weakness is that the only person who maintains the link between the Officers of the General Assembly, the overall business of the General Assembly and the work of the staff of the General Assembly is the General Secretary. When the General Secretariat was formed, part of the rationale was to ensure that there is a strong conciliar element to the exercise of responsibilities at General Secretariat level. The current arrangement does not fully recognise that desired culture. The General Secretariat as a whole has the responsibility to put into operation the priorities of the General Assembly. The current arrangement does not reflect the conciliar working that our tradition would expect, and places too much responsibility on the General Secretary acting alone to be the 'hinge' keeping the Councils of the Church and the work of Church House tied together. We therefore believe that the Business Committee should seek to bring together the Officers of the General Assembly and the General Secretariat, along with two other Assembly appointed members to reflect the diversity of the Church, one of whom would normally be under the age of 26. This would give an overview of all the committee work of the Assembly, as the Deputy General Secretaries are ex-officio members of all the committees in their departments, and in the case of Mission (and the proposed future Finance and General Purposes Committee) the Executive Secretaries of them. The Officers of the Assembly have the wide view of the Business and Governance of the Church.
4. An additional issue is that custom and practice have dictated that from time to time the Officers of the General Assembly make decisions on its behalf when urgent business, or business which it is legally necessary to be restricted to a small circle of confidentiality is required. General Assembly has not (as far as we are aware) ever formally delegated that responsibility to its Officers. Good governance requires that such authority be delegated, and also that any decision taken on behalf of the General Assembly be reported to it, or to Assembly Executive. We believe that the most appropriate body to take such decisions would be the Business Committee, rather than the Officers alone. This is for two primary reasons. Firstly, the composition of the Business Committee makes it more likely to be better representative of the Church as a whole. Secondly, (if these proposals are adopted) it will be a body that has a full overview of the governance of the General Assembly, its strategy, and the operationalisation of

its work, and will be better placed to take such decision than the Officers acting alone.

5. We therefore bring the following resolutions:

General Assembly amends the composition of the Business Committee to be made up of:

- a) **An Independent Convenor (who shall be an officer of the General Assembly).**
- b) **The General Secretary who shall serve as Executive Secretary.**
- c) **The Moderator of the General Assembly.**
- d) **The immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly.**
- e) **The incoming Moderator of the General Assembly.**
- f) **The Clerk to the General Assembly.**
- g) **The Treasurer to the General Assembly.**
- h) **The other members of the General Secretariat.**
- i) **Two members appointed by the General Assembly to reflect the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church, one of whom will normally be under the age of 26.**
- j) **The Business Committee may invite others to be in attendance when it will assist the making of Assembly Arrangements or the strategic oversight of the business of the Church.**

General Assembly adopts the following Terms of Reference for the Business Committee:

- a) **To oversee the practical arrangements of meetings of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.**
- b) **To oversee and order the business of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.**
- c) **To keep a strategic overview of the work of the General Assembly, facilitating the coherence of business across the various committees of the church.**
- d) **To ensure the coherence of the strategies of the General Assembly, good governance, and the operational work of the Assembly.**
- e) **When necessary, instigate new business to ensure the wellbeing of the work of the General Assembly.**
- f) **In urgent circumstances to take any necessary decisions on behalf of the General Assembly in between meetings of the Assembly or Assembly Executive and to report them to the next meeting of the Assembly or Assembly Executive.**

Nominations

1. The current Nominations Committee is formed of one representative from each Synod, often the Synod Clerk (but not exclusively). There are a vast number of roles to fill (across our committees and representative to external bodies, some 500). It is often difficult for members of the committee to know exactly what each role entails. Names are often brought of people who are known only to one or a small number of the committee, or who may not directly be known by any of them but are a third-hand recommendation. Invitations are then extended by the Secretary to the Committee. The burden of the work falls on the Officers of the Committee, particularly the volunteer Secretary, who give an extraordinary amount of time to the role, and often feel swamped by it. The General Assembly has placed an unreasonable burden of expectation upon the officers of the committee.
2. It is important that all our appointments are made in accordance with our safer recruitment policies. Good Practice 5 defines Safer Recruitment as involving:
 - **providing a job description and a person specification**
 - **completing an application form**
 - **completing a self-declaration of criminal history**
 - **a face-to-face interview**
 - **checking references**
 - **completing a DBS/PVG check (where necessary)**
 - **a trial period.**
3. To achieve this, it will be necessary for the Committees, Groups, Trustee boards and external bodies that we work with to play a much more central role within the Nominations process. They must proactively be preparing role descriptions and person specifications, be willing to engage in meeting with perspective volunteers for conversations and provide training when required.
4. We also believe it will be much more necessary to advertise opportunities to volunteer more widely. Where this has been done in trying to fill roles within the new Disciplinary process, it has thrown up a wide range of people well beyond the “usual suspects”, of greater diversity, and highly qualified and experienced individuals willing to give of their time and expertise.
5. We therefore bring proposals to significantly reduce the size of the Nominations Committee. It will become the responsibility of Committees, Groups, Trustee boards and external bodies to produce role descriptions and person specifications, to meet with perspective volunteers, and to make recommendations to the Nominations Committee for appointments. The Committee itself will be responsible for widely disseminating opportunities to serve (with the assistance of the Communications Team), determining the process, providing pro-forma application forms, receiving recommendations from Committees, Groups, and outside bodies, ensuring appropriate diversity within committees, and bringing slates of names for appointment to General Assembly or Assembly Executive.
6. Alongside advertising, we recognise that there is a vital role for disseminating opportunities through networks. We therefore will ask each Synod, URC Youth and the Racial Justice Advocates each to appoint a Nominations Champion. They will be informed of all opportunities for service and be invited to seek out appropriate nominations from within their networks.

7. In the light of the above we bring the following resolution:

General Assembly:

- a) **Determines that all Nominations to serve the ongoing work of the General Assembly will be made in accordance with Safer Recruitment policies.**
- b) **Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the officers of the current Nominations Committee, to appoint a Nominations Committee of six members, reflecting the diversity of the Church. Its Terms of Reference will be:**
 - i. **To adopt and keep up to date processes for Nominations, including proformas for application forms, guidance for interviews, and other resources necessary to facilitate the nominations process.**
 - ii. **To receive from Committees (on behalf of themselves, or subcommittees, groups, panels, boards or representatives to outside bodies that are accountable to them), and external bodies Role Descriptions and Person Specifications, and to disseminate these widely through a variety of communications approaches and through Nominations Champions, seeking nominations and applications.**
 - iii. **To receive from Committees, Groups, Boards and external bodies names of people who have applied, been interviewed, and received appropriate references. To check that appropriate process has been followed, that appointment would recognise appropriate diversity, and when approved, forward names to General Assembly or Assembly Executive to confirm appointment. Committees are responsible for interviewing for any subcommittees or boards/panels that are accountable to them, or representatives to bodies that report to them.**
 - iv. **To maintain a list of those available to serve on recruitment processes for General Assembly ministerial or staff appointments and to forward to the General Assembly or the Assembly Executive the names of those appointed or nominated for appointment.**
 - v. **External bodies requesting representation from the United Reformed Church as set out in their governing documents will be responsible for role descriptions, and (where appropriate and possible) interviewing, the Nominations Committee will collect references.**
 - vi. **To support and enable Nominations Advocates to effectively disseminate opportunities for service within their networks.**
- c) **Instructs each Synod, URC Youth and the Racial Justice Advocates Network (working with the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries) to each appoint a 'Nominations Champion' to be responsible for assisting with the dissemination of opportunities for service within their respective networks.**

- d) **Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the Officers of the current Nominations Committee, to bring this new process into being as soon as possible.**
- e) **Recognises the need for staff administrative support for the good functioning of this process and instructs the General Secretariat to enable this.**

Equalities Committee

1. There was considerable concern raised about the proposal to abolish the Equalities Committee and make Equalities part of the remit of every Committee. The point is well made that what is everyone's responsibility quickly becomes no one's responsibility – and that was not the aim of the suggestion at all.
2. Consultation has revealed that there is a general sense that the Equalities Committee has struggled to achieve its purposes. This is perceived as being partly about the lack of authority, and partly about the lack of resources.
3. Consultation has also revealed the fragmentary nature of where the General Assembly addresses Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) issues. They are currently split between a number of key places (recognising others exercise an interest in EDI beyond this core list):
 - a) The Equalities Committee (for overall monitoring)
 - b) The Mission Committee (where the work of the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries is located – meaning work on the Legacies of Slavery, anti-racist church and affirmative action have originated).
 - c) The Human Resources Advisory Group and Human Resources Department at Church House (for EDI in employment matters)
 - d) The Compliance Officers (where EDI issues touch compliance issues)
4. Consultation also revealed a sense that what might be lacking was a central staff post to co-ordinate all EDI work. This we are unconvinced by for two reasons: firstly, there is already extensive staff time dedicated to EDI work, it remains un-coordinated, however. Introducing one further role might well increase the confusion, rather than bring order. Secondly, the experience is that frequently it is thought a staff post is the solution to an issue, but rarely does that prove to be the case. Effective cultural and structural change is nearly always the long-term solution, and that is rarely achieved by one individual working alone with a remit, or even a single committee. What we do believe we would benefit from, however, is advice from an EDI expert, with experience of enabling organisations to be effective in this area. We therefore believe that expenditure on some external consultancy would be more effective than simply creating a staff-post without addressing the structural issues that have been identified.
5. An Equal Opportunities policy was last adopted on behalf of the General Assembly in 2006, and now feels dated in relationship to contemporary thinking in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.
6. There seems to be a need to think about our strategy towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the round. We commit significant time and staff resource to this

area of work, but there is a lack of co-ordination, and the current Equalities Committee is not currently acting as the organ for co-ordination.

7. We bring the following resolution:

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to appoint an independent external consultant to advise on the range of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, and a small reference group of three to support their work. The remit should include:

- a) **Mapping the current work of the General Assembly in the field of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and assessing its effectiveness.**
- b) **Engaging with the work of ecumenical partners and others in the charity sector to ascertain best practice which might inform our work.**
- c) **Advising on a draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.**
- d) **Advising on appropriate structures and mechanisms to enable the delivery of an EDI policy and effective accountability mechanisms.**
- e) **The Business Committee should report to General Assembly 2024 on the progress of this work bringing any appropriate resolutions.**

The Faith and Order Committee

1. Proposals to bring worship under the remit of the current Faith and Order committee have been generally welcomed and we bring resolutions to achieve this.
2. There was some concern expressed about the proposal that the new Worship, Faith and Order Committee would no longer be a full committee of the General Assembly, but a reference group. Upon reflection, it becomes clear that now we no longer have Mission Council, and reference groups that only report to Mission Council, the distinction is almost meaningless. Therefore, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee will be a full Committee of the General Assembly.
3. The Worship Reference Group was set up with a hope it would encourage the creation and distribution of worship resources but with a rather limited remit from Mission Council. Assembly then created the post of Minister for Digital Worship with a specific remit to create, curate, and commission worship resources. The range of worship material that is now being produced and shared through Worship Notes and on the Prayers for Church Seasons page of the website is diverse and useful. Some years ago the Faith and Order Committee was established but without any remit to include worship (previously there had been a Doctrine, Prayer and Worship Committee). Our faith is grounded in our worship and reflects good order. Our worship is informed by and stimulated by our faith. It is proposed, therefore, to thank the members of the Worship Resource Group and disband this group and to redefine the Faith and Order Committee as the Worship, Faith and Order Committee which will respond to the Church's requests to reflect on and commission worship resources as necessary.
4. We bring the following resolutions:

General Assembly renames the Faith and Order Committee the ‘Worship, Faith and Order Committee’ with the following membership:

- a) A Convenor
- b) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
- c) The Minister for Digital Worship
- d) Five members appointed by the General Assembly
- e) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations or the Minister for Digital worship will normally function as the Secretary for the Committee.

General Assembly adopts the following remit for the Worship, Faith and Order Committee:

- a) to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
- b) to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
- c) to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order
- d) to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- e) to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order
- f) to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship
- g) to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

General Assembly thanks the members of the Worship Reference Group for their service and dissolves the group from the close of General Assembly 2023.

The Future of the Discipleship Committees

1. The draft proposals indicated that we were in favour of the development of one Committee which would incorporate the work of the Children’s and Youth Work Committee, the Education and Learning Committee and the Ministries Committee. This remained the case in our update to Assembly Executive in 2022, recognising that some unease had been encountered during initial consultation. That is the direction of travel that the Church Life Review Group favours in principle.
2. It is in the Discipleship area that the failures of the consultation process were most keenly felt, for which we apologise. This proposal was the most radical and complex. These committees have busy agendas, and whilst their work does overlap and interrelate, integrating this work into one committee would be a complex task. There is genuine concern at the extent of the possible agendas, and how this might effectively work.

3. There has been significantly more integration of the work of this department in recent years, partly because of excellent working relationships between staff members. For integration to be secure in the long term, it does need embedding structurally, and not be reliant on personalities. The staff members and convenors have been at pains to stress they support further integration and working together but were very concerned that rushing to create one committee would lead to important details being overlooked, and potentially damage the good work of the department.
4. We need to heed these concerns. Integration of work structurally will only be effective if those with detailed knowledge of the areas concerned have brought that knowledge and expertise to the process of determining new structural arrangements. Thus far we've failed to enable that process properly.
5. It should be noted that whilst the Church Life Review Group does continue to favour the creation of one committee, in bringing the resolution below it recognises other solutions may emerge which would more helpfully embed the Principles Assembly has been invited to adopt, and the needs of our Discipleship work. Such consultation that has taken place does suggest that simply remaining exactly as things are now is widely anticipated to be undesirable.
6. It should be noted that there is no proposal to integrate the work of the Safeguarding Committee with any other committee, its work being highly specialist, and the General Assembly being required to have such a committee to oversee its safeguarding responsibilities.
7. In the light of this, we bring the following resolution:

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to oversee a consultation process, to be led by the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship, involving representatives of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Education and Learning Committee and the Ministries Committee, leading to proposals for the further integration of their work, including proposals for structural integration. These should be in line with the principles adopted in Resolution X.

- a) **If external facilitation is required to achieve a constructive outcome, the Business Committee is empowered, after consultation with those concerned, to appoint an external facilitator to assist the process.**
- b) **Invites the Business Committee to bring back further proposals, emerging from this consultation exercise, to either Assembly Executive or General Assembly 2024.**

The future of the Administration and Resources Committees and the creation of a Resources Committee

1. There is seemingly general agreement that bringing together the Church House Management Group, the Communications Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Human Resource Advisory Group, would be a helpful development. However, this intersects with a separate piece of work which has arisen out of a lack of clarity around the relationship between the Church and the United Reformed Trust (See Report A3). This means that some functions carried out currently by the Church would become the responsibility primarily of the Trust.

2. Currently, the Human Resources Advisory Group oversees employment policies and staffing structures. If the Trust becomes the Employer of lay staff, it will need to be the Trust that takes responsibility for Human Resources policies.
3. Currently the Church House Management Group has responsibility for the purchase and maintenance of central properties (Church House and General Assembly Ministers' manses). These are purchased with Trust resources and the freehold is owned by the Trust, and again it should be the responsibility of the Trust to oversee and authorise their purchase and upkeep. The CHMG has also provided expertise in the area of IT in recent years.
4. It is going to be necessary for there to be a primary point of contact regarding finance, staffing and property between the General Assembly and the URC Trust. We would envisage a new Finance and General Purposes Committee being responsible for budget setting, financial management and the working relationship with the URC Trust company on matters pertaining to finance, property, staffing and contracting.
5. We are asking Assembly to agree in principle to there being one committee that will take on this range of functions and be in a key relationship with the URC Trust. We believe this direction of travel to be sufficiently secure to invite the Nominations Committee to begin forming a committee, but that the precise details of its terms of reference be determined following further detailed work on governance matters pertaining to the relationship between the Church and the URC Trust.
6. Feedback from those involved with the Communications Committee have indicated that its purpose has at times not been clear. As one of the services provided within Church House to support the work of the whole Church, it is appropriate that it come under the oversight of a Finance and General Purposes Committee. However, it is recognised that such a Committee is not going to bring either a wide range of specialisms in Communications, or necessarily a representative spread of opinion from around the Church regarding the work of the communications department. To a significant extent the purpose of the Communications staff team is to give us the specialism that we require. It has been suggested that bringing together a representative sample of people from across the church on a standing or occasional basis to act as a sounding board or focus group for the work of the communications team might be helpful. This is something it would entirely be in order for the new committee to make happen and we do not believe requires General Assembly Resolution.
7. We bring the following resolution:

General Assembly agrees in principle to the creation of one Resources Committee to bring together responsibility for the areas currently covered by the Church House Management Group, the Communications Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Human Resource Advisory Group.

It agrees the membership of the Committee to be:

- a) **A Convenor (who may be the Treasurer)**
- b) **The Treasurer (if not the Convenor)**

- c) **The Chief Operating Officer (who will be the Executive Secretary)**
- d) **The Chief Finance Officer**
- e) **Five further members, reflecting the diversity of the Church, with collective expertise in the areas of: finance, property, human resources and communications.**

General Assembly invites the Nominations Committee to begin to populate a committee to serve from the close of General Assembly 2024.

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to bring full terms of reference for the committee to Assembly Executive 2024 for adoption.

Paper N4

Local churches flourishing through good governance

General Secretary

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Mission Council in March 2021 asked the officers of Assembly to commission a review group to: “Oversee a review of the structures, resources and work of the United Reformed Church to enable us to respond faithfully to the challenges present in paper A1.”
- 1.2 This paper identifies some key challenges facing a number of our local churches – ministerial deployment, ageing demography, declining membership, and an increasing legislative burden, all leading to an increasing difficulty in maintaining legal and governance compliance.
- 1.3 In light of this, the Church Life Review Group proposes that some churches need to consider a different way of continuing their life together, or face having to make a decision to close. We present as alternatives to closure some options to enable local churches to flourish and grow, within the need to operate good governance at the local context. These include uniting with another local church (an ecumenical partner or another URC congregation, or becoming a Mission Project of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.4 The local church remains the locus of mission. Mission cannot be delivered effectively from a regional or wider base; therefore, in any re-ordering of structure or redeployment of resources, the aim will be to enable the local church to flourish.
- 1.5 Local churches will flourish in the broadest sense when they operate in line with best practice, which includes meeting the standards expected by the denomination, complying with charity law and maintaining high standards of governance. In this way, the United Reformed Church demonstrates we are a reputable organisation that can be trusted with both spiritual matters and with our assets which are held on charitable trusts. Details of these expectation and requirements are given in the Appendices.

2. Introduction

When Mission Council (March 2021) commissioned a review of the life of the United Reformed Church, among the challenges identified were the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, very significant pressures of the deployment of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments (with links to maintaining Ministry and Mission Fund income), the ministerial and lay pension fund

deficits, and the risk from maintaining an Assembly structure requiring the service of more than 500 volunteers.

The appointed Church Life Review Group (CLRG) will not be able to solve through their work every problem in the United Reformed Church.

We believe that it is the local church that is the locus of mission, bringing the Good News of Jesus to our neighbours, through word and deed. Therefore, it is incumbent on the wider structures of the denomination to enable the local congregation to engage in worship, mission and fellowship. In other words, the structures of the denomination must empower the flourishing of local churches; the structures are not here (at least primarily) to serve the institution.

However, we recognise that charity law and the Structures of the United Reformed Church place an onus on each local church to be properly constituted and compliant with a number of requirements. For some of these areas, we are proposing some ways to meet those compliance requirements through reducing the administrative and managerial burden on churches which may otherwise be struggling. For others, particularly when it comes to meeting legal obligations, things may need to be done significantly differently at a local level in order to maintain good governance and even to avoid breaches of charity law.

We believe that the greatest flourishing of local congregations, and thus of the United Reformed Church, will come when local churches do not merely meet the minimum requirements to fulfil charitable law and meet URC governance standards.

Compliance with legislative and denominational requirements must be seen as the absolute minimum standard for any local church. Beyond this minimum, there are issues of good and best practice in a range of fields. A number of Assembly policies deal with good (that is, appropriate and normal) practice, such as lifelong learning, engaging with public issues, and developing missional discipleship. Because they are Assembly policies (even if worded with verbs such as encourage or urge), they are setting up good practice for the local church and should, unless contextual issues can take precedence, also be regarded as what is expected of the local church.

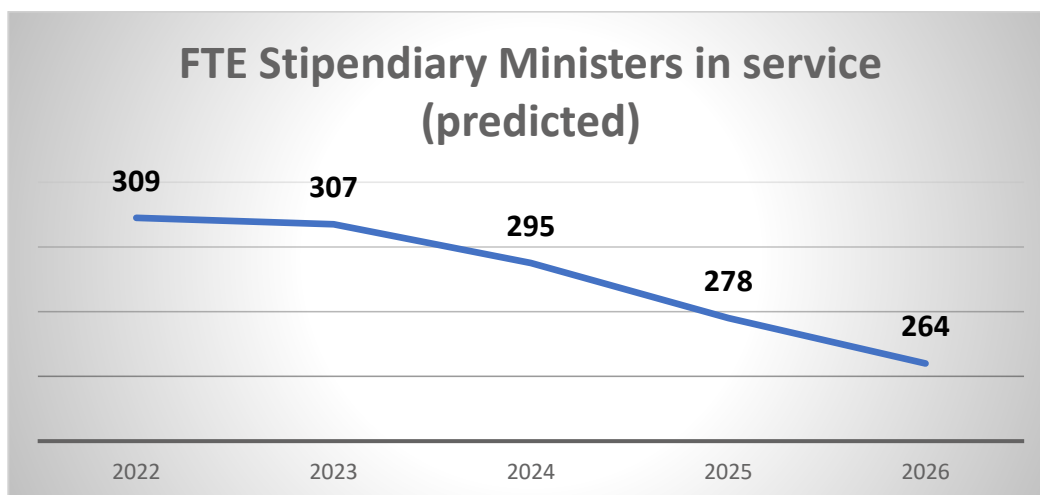
We believe it is through living faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ and in operating according to good and best practice that the greatest flourishing of local churches will be found. This paper identifies several basic requirements for a local church to operate legally, safely and well, and points to a few other areas for consideration. In all this, our aim is not to add to the weight of responsibility that many in our churches already feel gravely, but to provide a pathway to return to the joy of knowing the Living God and loving our neighbours as we love ourselves. The experience of being associated with a Christian Church should be one of joy, not of anxiety, fatigue and encumbrance.

While many of the issues addressed in this paper affect our smaller congregations most acutely, we do not believe that big equals good and small equals bad. Some congregations have sustained their vocation to be small churches and have been small (numerically) for many decades. The churches that have seen the greatest decline numerically are those that are still among the larger churches in the denomination. Proportionally, they have seen the greatest downturn in membership and attendance compared with the smaller churches.

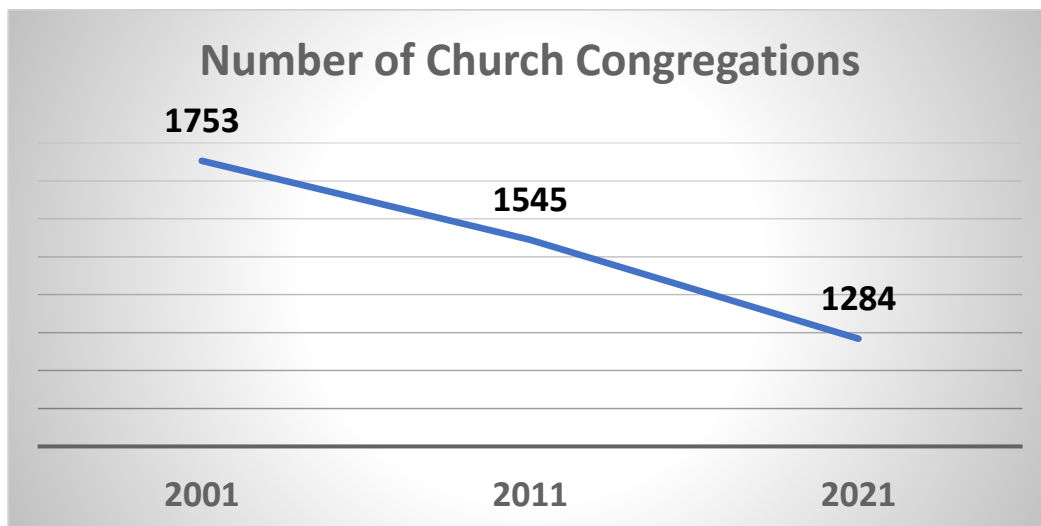
3. Some challenges – now and in the near future

Deployment of ordained ministry

- 3.1 Until General Assembly 2021, the number of deployable Stipendiary Ministers (ie both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) was determined by income to the Ministry and Mission Fund – we would only deploy those Stipendiary Ministers that we could afford to pay. This link was suspended in 2021 and was replaced in 2022 by agreement that we will consider the predicted number of Stipendiary Ministers available to serve for each of the next four years, adding 20% to that predicted number to determine how many posts are available to be shared for deployment between the 13 Synods.
- 3.2 The most recent forecast from the Ministries Office (October 2022) expects that the deployable number of Stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments will continue to decline from 330 at the start of 2022 to 264 by the end of 2026.



- 3.3 We do not expect any net increase in the number of congregations across which the decreasing number of stipendiary MWS will serve. We expect that the long-established trend of church closures will continue, if not increase. To quantify this, the 2001 yearbook listed 1,753 local churches; the 2022 yearbook lists 1,284: around a quarter of our churches have closed in two decades. We should be clear that not all of these are true losses – the difference includes many local churches that have merged in that time, so two or more congregations in the same locality have united to form one church covering the area previously served by more than one.



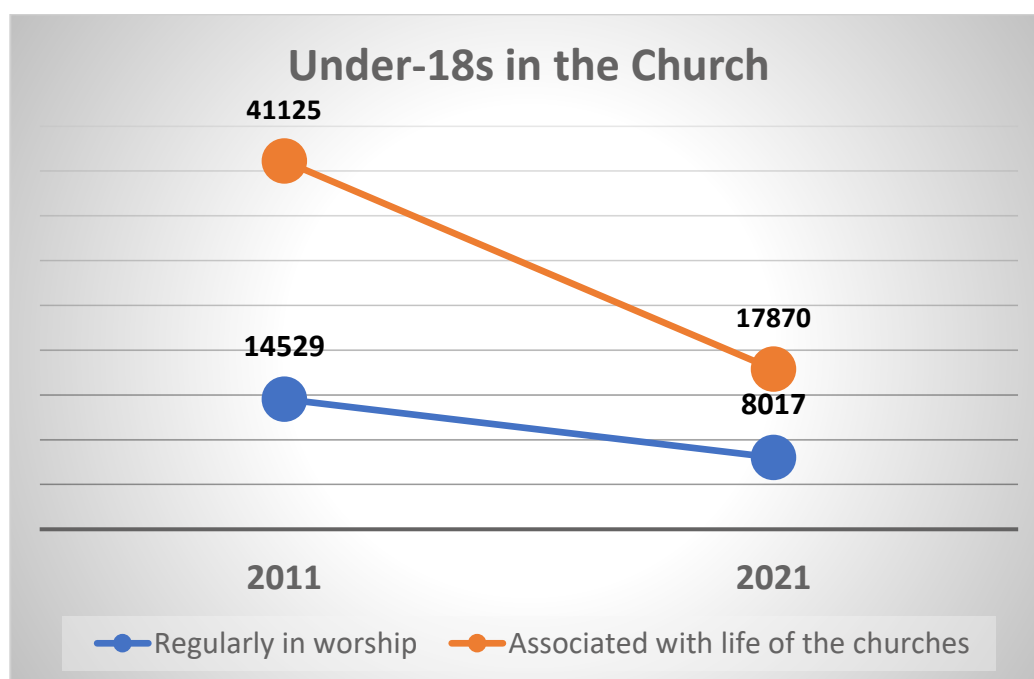
- 3.4 Although the number of congregations to be served by ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments is decreasing, the number of ministers decreases at a faster rate, and thus each minister is being asked to serve more congregations.
- 3.5 The Church of England’s Church Growth Research Programme produced in a report *From Anecdote to Evidence* in 2014 that looked at questions for church growth and decline. In the report, Prof David Voas noted that: “There is no single recipe for growth; there are no simple solutions to decline. The road to growth depends on the context, and what works in one place may not work in another.”¹
- 3.6 One of the report’s conclusions was that a significant factor in achieving numerical church growth is assigning roles to lay people as well as the ordained clergy. The hope that providing a larger ministry scoping to any particular church will (necessarily) lead to a growth in membership is fallacious. It is the size and nature of the team of local leaders that makes a difference. Perhaps more significantly, the research reported that in congregations where the same people tend to serve in the same roles year after year, 8% of churches reported growth, compared with 47% that reported growth where there was a lot of rotation among people in volunteer leadership roles.
- 3.7 While the report was clear that one minister serving one church is more likely to result in church growth, where there is more than one person serving a group of churches (lay and ordained) that correlation weakens or is reversed. Multiple church pastorates served by a good local leadership team can equally expect to grow. The report’s authors also made it clear that the size of the pastorate and its ministry team is only one factor amongst several that are more likely to lead to growth or decline. While there is correlation between

¹ The summary report is available at https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-06/from_anecdote_to_evidence_-_the_report.pdf

growth and pastorate size (the number of churches in the pastorate), this does not equate to causation.

Demographically aging congregations

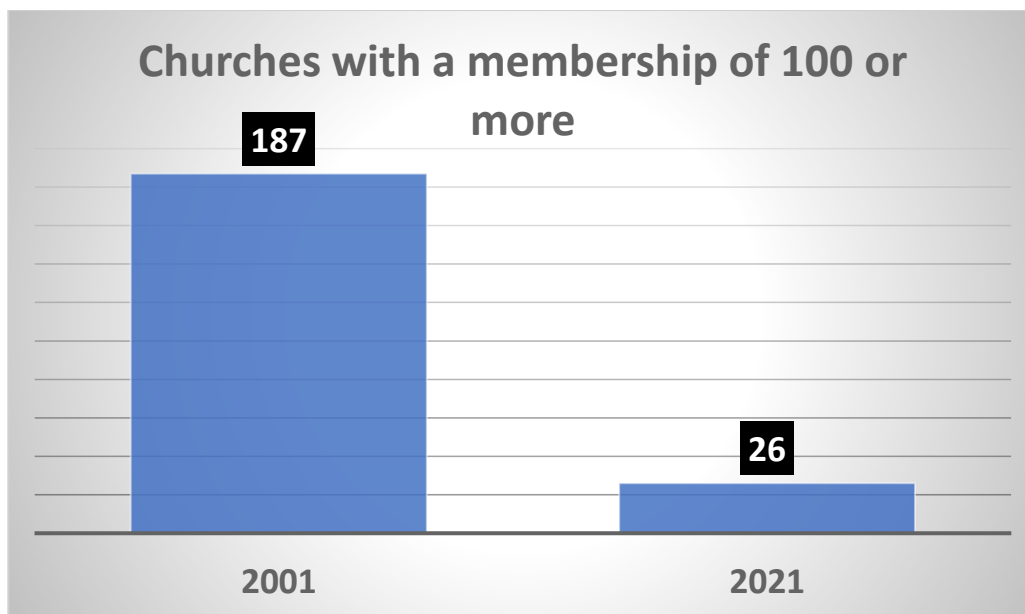
- 3.8 Our denomination does not collect data about the age of our congregations' members, other than for under-25s in various age bands, and we do not know how accurate even that data are.
- 3.9 Nevertheless, the anecdotal evidence is overwhelming. We are primarily a denomination of older people, and the average age is increasing. The majority in our congregations are visibly well into their retirement years. In many congregations that is exclusively the case. We also know, on the basis of the statistical evidence, that this is not the picture everywhere. Even when children and younger adults are not in church on Sunday, many of our churches do have meaningful connection midweek. From the limited dataset we have, we know that in the 2021 Annual Church Returns, a total of 8017 under-18s were regularly in worship (down from 14,529 ten years earlier), but there were 17,870 under-18s associated with the life of our churches (2011: 41,125 – a drop of 56% in ten years, which should be sounding loud alarm bells).



- 3.10 The impact of having older congregations is that fewer people will feel able to contribute physically to the life of the church in ways that they might have ten or 20 years ago. In many cases, disposable income becomes more restricted as members get older, thus creating some pressure on future income to the M&M Fund.
- 3.11 We must also face the fact that as congregations get older, we can expect more members to reach the end of their life and further decrease membership.

Declining membership

3.12 Not all small churches, as has often been observed, are failed big churches – many have a different charism to be small rather than large. It is clear, though, that many churches which used to be much larger have decreased in size dramatically over the life of the denomination. In 2001, there were 187 churches reporting a membership over 100. The statistics held in the URC database show that by the 2021 annual return, that is using data to the end of December 2020, there were only 26. (NB. This is counting those designated as URC Members in the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships. We have more than 26 congregations with a total membership over 100 when all members in an LEP are included.) We have other data that supports this picture that our largest congregations have declined more in proportion to the change in smaller church sizes.



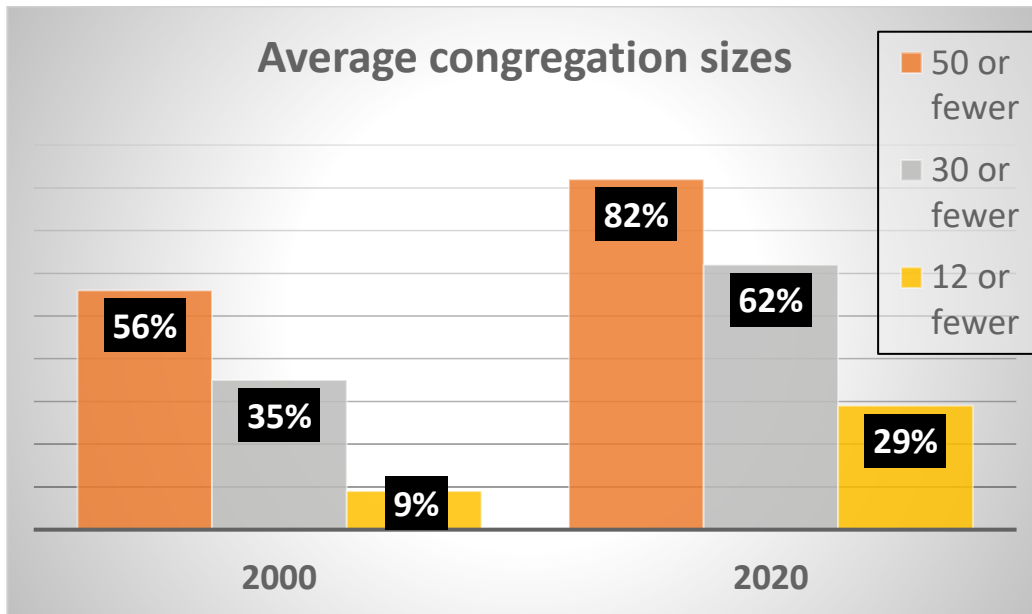
3.13 At some point, churches can fall to a size where legal compliance and good governance becomes increasingly difficult and then impossible. However, we are not called to be administrative bodies, but disciples of Christ. Even when meeting the minimum numerical standards explained below, there needs to be capacity to offer good-quality worship (and we believe it should not just be good but high-quality) worship that is glorifying of God and edifying to the people.

There needs to be capacity to develop discipleship, because we are not offering a membership club, but the call to follow Christ, which means learning more about Christ and seeking to serve him through serving others. There needs to be a capacity to deliver missional activities, both as a tangible expression of God’s love for the world and with the intention of increasing the size of the worshipping community. Even if some respond to that call by joining a congregation of another denomination – this is not a numbers game to increase the URC so much as being faithful to make disciples among all people, teaching and baptising them and engaging them in the same mission to make new disciples.

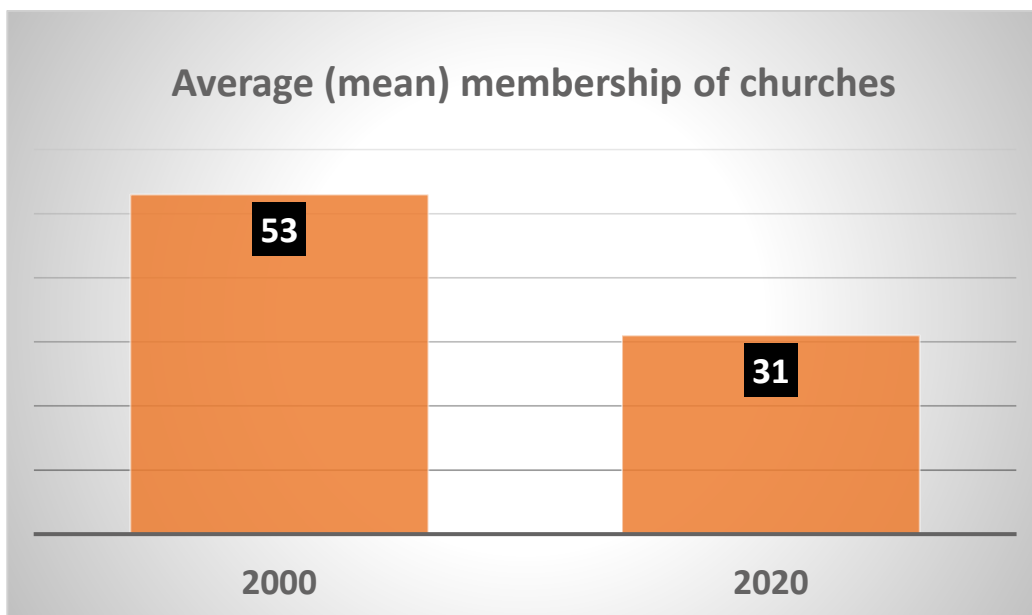
- 3.14 Clearly, if all of this activity is left to the same two, three or a small handful of people, there is no capacity to do everything.
- 3.15 We know some churches that have “forever” been made up of half a dozen members, even if not the same half a dozen – some will have died or moved away and been replaced by others joining the church, so there is no net movement in membership size. Such small churches can play a disproportionately positive part in their local community, especially in rural areas when, pro rata to the local population, more of the community are in church than in more urban areas. Small is not the same as bad or useless.
- 3.16 We have made anecdotal observations that in the most part, smaller churches tend to be less engaged in outreach and intentionally seeking to grow their fellowship, although this is demonstrably not exclusively the case. Smaller churches may offer an extremely welcoming space, but this relies on people discovering them and walking in – the yet-to-be congregant has to take the initiative to walk into church or make first contact. Often there are only limited attempts intentionally to reach out and draw new people into the community of faith even if there are well-publicised social events. We would also note that if this is a failing of smaller churches they are not alone – we can easily identify larger churches that tend to wait for people to find them.

One thing we learn from the Fresh Expressions movement, and that empirical data shows, is that if this presence alone were a good enough approach, we would have growing churches in more communities. The practice of saying, or thinking, or assuming unthinkingly, ‘if we build it, they will come,’ is not working, and has worked ever. The myth of the full church is just that – there have always been more spaces in our pews than there have been people to fill them. Prof Robin Gill is just one amongst many whose academic research has established this beyond doubt (see, for example, Gill in *The Myth of the Empty Church* SPCK, London, 1993).

- 3.17 There is no single or formal definition of a small church. One boundary point is that a church has 50 regular worshippers or fewer. The Small Churches Task Group, commissioned by General Assembly 1998 Resolution 6, reported that in 2000, 56% of United Reformed Churches were, by that definition, small churches. They also noted that 35% of our congregations had 30 or fewer regular worshippers, and 9% had 12 or fewer in their usual congregation.
- 3.18 By contrast, and by way of update, figures from the 2021 Annual Returns (data as at 31 December 2020), show average congregations of 50 or fewer in 82% of our churches. 62% had 30 or fewer in the congregation and 29% had 12 or fewer. This is a very significant move towards smaller congregations in two decades. The average size of congregations was 58 in 2000, and just 34 in 2021.



3.19 We more typically measure a church’s size by the membership roll. This decreased in the same period from 53 members per church on average to just 31, down over 40%! The number of churches with six or fewer members has gone from 5% in 2000 to 10% (125) in 2021. Almost a quarter of local churches (23%, 289 churches) recorded 12 or fewer members in the same year. Although these very small churches with six or fewer who have committed to the privileges and responsibilities of Church Membership may be able to fulfil the legal and URC governance requirements, serious questions about their ability to be congregations offering quality worship and growing disciples must be asked. Undoubtedly, some will be doing this at least as well as much larger churches, and most, if not all, would say that they are doing their best. We believe the time has come to start to ask these questions and be ready to put in place strategies and mechanisms that will enable all our congregations to give demonstrably positive answers to them.



- 3.20 We also want to be clear that when we talk about numerical growth in any church, there is no strategy that will guarantee growth, and that we share the conviction that God through the Holy Spirit gives growth – it is not the result of human effort. However, we also believe that where a church is oriented towards seeking growth, making efforts to share faith and loving service and put into place plans to welcome and include newcomers and then to develop them as disciples, they are more likely to grow. Why would God direct potential new disciples to places where they will be rejected, ignored, or exploited?

Increasing legislative requirement around buildings and operations

- 3.21 We know that that the legislative responsibilities and complexities of managing buildings and charities only increases. The UK government has recently announced additional responsibilities that churches will need to address regarding preparedness for potential terrorist attacks on their buildings, while many of our churches are still struggling to get on top of GDPR, safeguarding and formal health and safety risk assessments, to name just a few of the more recent requirements.
- 3.22 We also know that this extra workload falls to fewer and fewer people to address. Very rarely will churches be exempt from these increasing requirements on the grounds of numerical or financial size.
- 3.23 For some, the weight becomes such that the Elders and members feel utterly overwhelmed and discouraged, and decide the only way to escape is to close the congregation. If the burden cannot be borne by those available, the only way to be released from the burden is to be released of the responsibility of managing a church in the 21st century.
- 3.24 For others, they may feel that a significant portion of the legislative burden could be eased by surrendering the church building. They might choose to ask their trustees (most often the Synod Trust company) to sell the building, while they rent space in a community building – or they might be small enough to meet in a member's house for worship and fellowship. Matters such as data protection, safeguarding and proper accounting will continue to need attention, but the continuing church will not have to worry about the expense and regulations around maintaining safe buildings.
- 3.25 Others still might decide that the time has come to retain an online presence, but meet together in person rarely, if at all. Again, this will not remove all responsibility, but a simplified operation can result in simpler compliance issues.

Upholding legal and governance requirements

- 3.26 Any church that is unable to fulfil its legal obligations as a charitable body must be deemed unsustainable. We cannot damage the reputation and, therefore, the witness of the denomination by allowing unsafe and illegal practice. If, in consultation with the Synod and with the Synod's support as appropriate, they cannot take action to meet those legal obligations within a short and agreed timescale, the Synod will need to initiate a conversation with the church to encourage it to consider the question of the church resolving to

close or to merge with another local church. If the church cannot make that decision by itself, the Synod will need to exercise its responsibilities under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure to move to close that congregation or merge it with another local church (calling a meeting of the District Council to authorise disposal of assets if necessary).

- 3.27 It is possible for a local church to work in partnership with other URC congregations to fulfil some of its obligations – for example, sharing a Treasurer or Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator – provided that the Elders’ Meeting are fully and regularly briefed on those matters. A local church cannot abdicate and will always retain its responsibilities for legal, financial and governance compliance. The Elders’ Meeting (or equivalent council in an LEP) are the charity trustees for the local funds and so will always carry that legal responsibility.
- 3.28 Some simplification and relief from these requirements might also be found in a local church, with the Synod’s support, ceasing as a full local congregation and being re-formed as a Mission Project. The next section explores further some of these possibilities.

For reflection

- Which of these are the greatest issues facing your church?
- What is the story of your church over the last two decades?
- What have been the positive achievements?
- What have been the greatest challenges?

4. Renewing and re-forming – some options

Exceeding the baseline standards

- 4.1 It is the belief of the Church Life Review Group that we should not be aiming for (barely) hitting minimum standards. Rather, the United Reformed Church as a whole, and so its local congregations also, should aim for more than this. We should be aiming to be well-functioning parts of Christ’s Church, giving glory to God through our very existence as well as our work and worship. Being part of Christ’s Church should not be characterised by “scraping by” or the experience of constant burden and worry over who will do what. We wish to speak of churches thriving, not simply surviving. Jesus, after all, came to give life in abundance.
- 4.2 Similarly, we are convinced that the experience of being part of a church should be a joy as we meet with other members of Christ’s Body. When the primary concern is one of meeting rules and regulations, church quickly becomes a grind, something that sucks life and energy rather than giving joy. It is harder to meet with the Living God in worship when the focus is on rotas.
- 4.3 We believe that the fundamental purpose of the Church is to be those gathered together and sent out. We gather together to worship God and learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are sent back into the world to live out our developing discipleship. Ministry and mission are an inseparable pair, and the church cannot exist as such if it only

meets for worship and does not serve in mission, nor is it the Church of Jesus Christ if there is no worshipping community to engage in mission – that is, acting in the service of others and in witness to the Living God.

- 4.4 Further, while in some places individuals are engaged in serving their community, undeniably doing good works, if the community of faith of which they are part does not have a shared sense of ownership in that mission, it cannot be said that it is that local church in service. Acts of service, and even evangelism, that are purely the response of the individual are just that – the work of an individual. However, churches might choose to use an act of worship to commission the individuals to undertake the work with their blessing, and with prayerful and hopefully practical support. Then it becomes the work of the church, even if the service is actually done by a single individual responding to a sense of call. Equally, the church would then have the right to withdraw that support, as the individual would be accountable to the church for what they are now doing in the church's name. If the church does not own the work, it cannot be said to be the work undertaken by the church, and if a congregation is not engaging in witness and service, it is failing in its calling and responsibility.

For reflection

- How do you experience joy as you gather for worship and in service of your community?
- To what extent is the mission engagement carried out by individuals from your congregation actually the work of the church (that is, carried out in the church's name)?
- Are the workers commissioned in worship for this work?
- Can those outside your church recognise the work of the church offered among them?

'Marks of Viability' and 'Sparks of Vitality'

- 4.5 The report of the Small Churches Task Group (SCTG) was received by Mission Council in the spring of 2001. With a few minor changes, it was agreed that the report should be published.
- 4.6 The SCTG proposed that "viability" was a more helpful measure of church life than the size of a local church. They identified nine "Marks of viability" to indicate a level of congregational life that should help to discern if a congregation was still viable. These were churches that are open to the following:

Small Churches Task Group: Marks of Viability



- 4.7 The Task Group report said that these marks of viability “need to be discerned in a variety of contexts” – evidence of a mark might be different in a very isolated village and in a thriving suburban church; they might be different in a multicultural community and congregation against one set in a mostly monocultural area.
- 4.8 In response to the SCTG report, Thames North Synod developed a resource pack to help churches (of whatever size) called, “Open All Hours?!” The Synod took the nine marks of viability, but called them “Sparks of Vitality,” adding a tenth dimension, that of being open to the workplace. The thinking behind the alternative naming is to be expansive – looking at how to develop churches rather than judge that a church has reached the end of its life.
- 4.9 We understand the Marks/Sparks of being open to one another includes active participation in the wider church through giving at an appropriate level, agreed with the Synod and in line with the Synod’s policies, to the Ministry and Mission Fund. This is a core value of the United Reformed Church and is a part of our covenanting together and stewardship of finances. Another element of this Mark/Spark is that the church should be committed to participating in Synod meetings and events. There is no Synod without the local church – no “them” and “us”, only “we”. Similarly, the members of General Assembly are drawn from local churches, and we need members

from churches to serve the denomination on our committees. Any church that lives in isolation from the wider church is not fulfilling this Mark/Spark.

- 4.10 The Church Life Review Group offers an eleventh Mark of Viability/Spark of Vitality. **Churches must be open to responding to the Gospel** – and we would argue that this is so central that it ought to be at the top of the list. In this, we respect the theological diversity of the United Reformed Church. Yet a church can only be made up of those already committed to living as disciples or followers of Christ, and those seeking to understand Christ's call on their life who may not yet be committed to following Him. We expect people to be changed in the light of meeting with Jesus. This does not presume a theological uniformity by any means – far from it. Christ meets us all where we are and as we are, but loves us too much to let us remain the same. Ever so, there is no mould into which an imperfect Christian is poured from which a perfected one emerges. We will retain a great diversity, even as we are being made more like Christ.
- 4.11 A church that is not actively seeking to help people develop and deepen their knowledge of God, and is not encouraging and challenging its members to live out that discipleship in the world is not answering the Great Commission. Each church will do this according to their theological understanding, conviction and context, just as each individual will, but we believe this is so elemental to the life of the church that it needs to be stated explicitly. Without it, we remain a well-meaning if somewhat exclusive club, or we are so engaged in community service without a faith perspective being evident that we could more easily be secular social entrepreneurs, and not Christians living out our baptismal vocation to follow Christ all our days. We return again to our core belief that ministry and mission are inseparable partners in the life of a church.
- 4.12 Whether we consider this from the point of view of viability or vitality, we offer these Marks/Sparks as the basis for self-reflection. We do not intend this to be formal test, where a church must provide evidence of (say) at least eight sparks of vitality. It requires a subjective, discerning look to see whether the sparks can still be fanned into flame with God's help and support from the wider church.

For reflection

- Which of these Marks/Sparks are most evident in your church?
- Which are least evident or not present?
- How open is your church to change, so that the least evident Marks/Sparks can be developed?
- What support from outside do you need to bring about this change?

When a local church cannot sustain its life

- 4.13 When a church is no longer able to meet the minimum size for good governance, or might be deemed unviable (or lacking sufficient of the 'sparks of vitality'), *regardless of size*, they and the Synod are faced with a number of choices. We believe that it is not responsible to allow a church to continue in this state.

- 4.14 The first question to face is whether there is something that can be done to supplement and strengthen the struggling congregation. Are there people in a neighbouring church who would be willing to transfer their membership and service, to give the struggling one a new lease of life?

We observe a number of places where members travel past one or more other URC congregations to attend the church that holds their membership. This might be because they have established roots in a local church but have moved home, or it might be that they are attracted by the style or programme at a church further away. Might they be encouraged to support the more local congregation and local community? Are there resources that could be shared from another church? Would employing a local worker or releasing financial resources through grants or loans from the Synod, the denomination, or outside the church help to turn that church around? In this latter scenario, we must face honestly as responsible stewards the question as to whether this will actually be transformative, or whether this is simply a way of delaying an unpalatable inevitability.

- 4.15 Having considered this first-order question, and where it is felt that there is nothing that can be added to the current church to bring it back to a point of sustainability, there remain a number of options for the congregation.
- 4.16 Firstly, the church might be encouraged (usually by the Synod) to consider if the time has come to end its life and witness, and pass the necessary resolutions to close as a congregation of the United Reformed Church.

The question can, of course, arise from within the local church – we do not want to set up Synods as those that must always be the ones to ask this question, which gives rise to a risk of Synods being seen as asset strippers. Our work remains to further the work of the United Reformed Church and the Church generally, not to retract our work. It must also be remembered that simply asking the question, and considering it honestly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit does not pre-suppose that the church should or must close. Asking the question might provoke a new determination and lease of life, which would be a very positive outcome.

- 4.17 Secondly, the church may decide to explore uniting with another church to form an LEP, if a suitable church (or churches) can be found who are willing to explore this form of partnership. Equally, the church may decide to explore union with another URC congregation so that their work and common life will continue in a new form. In either case, we expect that this should be seen as a new church being formed from the parts of two or more coming together, rather than a takeover by one of the other. Each will have something unique to contribute to the new, united church. Such union, whether ecumenically or with other URC congregations, cannot be seen as a last bid for survival. The partnership will only succeed and thrive where it is born out of a desire to be faithful to God in worship and witness. Just having a local body to “see us out” is not sufficient ground for uniting two or more churches.
- 4.18 Thirdly, using its power under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure, a Synod may determine that Church X must unite (amalgamate) with another URC

congregation, Church Y. This has the same effect as ending the separate identity and existence of Church X, but it transfers its assets to the enlarged Church Y. Again, it may pastorally be better to regard this as a completely new Church Z, the sum of the parts of Church X and Church Y with their differing charisms and attributes. This does rely on the members of Church Y who must be willing to let go of their current identity so that it is a merger, not a takeover.

- 4.19 Fourthly, the Synod may decide to close the church, under the same function in the Structure. This can be done without the consent of the local church meeting (although potentially might be subject to a Constitutional Review process if there is a question over whether the Synod reached their decision and acted properly in achieving this end). The Synod would then assume control of the assets of the closed church.
- 4.20 Fifthly, the Synod may decide that the local church should become a Mission Project of the Synod. This terminates the status of the congregation as a local church and re-creates it as a Mission Project. Such changes must be presented to General Assembly and accepted by them. The 1992 General Assembly approved the creation of Mission Projects for causes that were not suitable (at that stage) to become “full” local churches of the denomination. Under the paragraph 2.(4)A(ii) of the Structure, the Synod may decide upon the establishment of new causes and the recognition of mission projects. The 1992 approval of this type of cause gives the Synod the responsibility to see that Mission Projects have suitable oversight and support.
- 4.21 Guidance from the Law and Polity Advisory Group in September 2020 clarified that: “A Mission Project might be: (a) a wholly new piece of work; (b) a new way of operating from the premises of a now closed local church, perhaps where the ecclesial body had ceased, but community work was still going on; (c) a transitional arrangement for an emerging piece of work that might become a local church in due course.” Further, that advice states explicitly that: “A Mission Project is NOT a way of simply propping up a local church that would otherwise normally close.”
- 4.22 In light of this, the fifth option above in paragraph 4.17 will not be available as an avenue open in every case. It must meet one of the three tests in the LPAG guidance and not be a way to avoid what would otherwise mean closure of the local church. A litmus test must be applied to a mission project: there must be, or there must be a realistic prospect and intention to develop, both ministry *and* mission.

Non-negotiably, a Mission Project is centred around mission, and cannot simply be a vehicle for providing pastoral care to a remnant congregation fading away. In such cases the options are narrowed to (i) closure, giving thanks to God for the life and witness of that congregation, (ii) uniting with another church to form an LEP, provided that this will make a viable local church, and (iii) uniting with another United Reformed Church congregation if there is the ability to make a viable and vital local church.

For reflection

- Are you in a place where your congregational life cannot be sustained? (Refer to the requirement laid out in the appendices as well as the reflections you have covered earlier in this paper.)
- If so, do you warm to one of the options above to avoid closure, and if so, why?
- Is there a viable route to uniting with another church, ecumenically or with another UC congregation?
- Who in the Synod structures should help you with exploring this possibility?
- Is the way forward for your church to become a Mission Project of the Synod? (See the next section for suggestions on how this might look.)

Developing Mission Projects – seeking to plant/re-plant viable congregations

- 4.23 When General Assembly 1992 accepted the World Church and Mission Report which proposed the creation of Mission Projects, the detail on what they were and how they would operate was lacking. This may have been deliberate, to keep options and patterns of work as open as possible. Yet the same report spelt out a number of criteria to enable a Mission Project to be accepted as such by General Assembly.
- 4.24 The report requires the Synod to make provision to enable the Mission Project to have “suitable oversight and support [and] appropriate opportunity to share in the decision-making process of the URC”. Mission Projects were to be “within the responsibility and oversight of Synods”. Further, “each Mission Project would need to formulate suitable constitutional and management structures”.
- 4.25 The report also noted that if Mission Projects were accepted as a new category of work, the denomination would “need to develop a policy strategy towards them”. There is only limited evidence of such a policy strategy having been developed, save for a number of Mission Projects having been created by Synods and accepted by General Assembly, and the limited guidance from the Law and Polity Advisory Group referenced in paragraph 4.18.
- 4.26 One reading of the URC Acts would suggest that a Mission Project cannot hold (or have held in Trust for its purposes) property. The Mission Project is an unincorporated body, and is not a congregation (again, by one reading) of the URC, and so would appear not to be covered by the URC’s exception from registration as a charity. This has a knock-on effect over the basis on which a Mission Project may open and operate a bank account and show financial transparency.
- 4.27 The September 2020 guidance from LPAG supports this view. A Mission Project is run by a committee appointed by the Synod, and it might choose to appoint “most of the committee from the local area of the Mission Project, or from areas further away, depending what was the most sensible approach to take in the particular circumstances”.

- 4.28 Monies involved in operating the Mission Project are the responsibility of the Synod. The Synod should operate designated funds for that Mission Project, and as the Synod ultimately controls the Mission Project, even if its operations are delegated to a local committee, the Mission Project, and thus its funds, are part of the Synod's work.

Note that within Scotland, every local church must be registered as a separate charity. As a Mission Project is governed by the Synod, a Mission Project within Scotland is covered by the charity registration of the National Synod. It should not be registered as a charity in its own right. An existing church that is registered separately that then becomes a Mission Project should have its charity wound up and the assets transferred to the Synod.

- 4.29 As the Synod is ultimately responsible for the Mission Project, this has implications for safeguarding – should a Mission Project also be compelled to have a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator (CSC) when it is not, strictly, a church? The inability to find a CSC and, therefore, its inability to comply with denominational requirements, may have been one of the factors that led to the church being re-formed as a Mission Project. However, the need for the Synod to approve constitutional and management structures for the Mission Project means that compliance with appropriate safeguarding policy is required without exception, although that does not build capacity to implement policies at the local level.
- 4.30 The question of adequate “oversight and support” by the Synod must be the lynch pin to hold a Mission Project accountable for all aspects of its work and to build capacity for the Mission Project to develop.
- 4.31 Local safeguarding compliance might, in practice, be provided for by the managing committee or by a neighbouring United Reformed Church congregation, to which the Synod may delegate some of its powers to act as the “managing committee”. In this scenario, the neighbouring church to which the Synod's powers are delegated becomes responsible for the good governance and spiritual walk of the people in the Mission Project. Financial management could be provided by the church, again with powers delegated from the Synod, and so it could hold and operate a bank account for the Mission Project or simply operate their finances as a dedicated (designated or restricted) fund of the church's main account. Those in the Mission Project, if they wished and if they undertook appropriate preparation, would become members of that neighbouring church.
- 4.32 Delegation of powers does not remove responsibility or accountability. Even if a local church manages and hold the finances for a Mission Project under the Synod's delegation, the monies remain with the Synod and the church holding the funds for the Mission Project must make regular financial reports to the Synod. The terms of delegation should also specify the circumstances where financial decisions, such as major expenditure, must be referred to the Synod. Careful drafting of the delegation will be needed such that it is clearly evident that the Synod controls the work of the Mission Project.

Partnering with stronger churches

4.33 Any arrangement or ordering of churches no longer meeting criteria that would allow them to continue as a separate church, but instead continuing their life as part of another church (even while under the direction and control of the Synod), looks, ecclesologically, like the Methodist Class system, Base Ecclesial Communities in South America, or Cells within the Cell Church Movement as explained below. These models are offered to help with understanding. They do not differ in terms of responsibilities for good governance or the re-invigoration of a local gathering of God's people to do God's work. They do not require changes to United Reformed Church structures or policy. Rather they are models to be agreed between the Synod and the people at the heart of a Mission Project – they are patterns that might give shape to the Mission Project that will allow it to meet the existing policies of General Assembly.

Giving new life as a cell of a larger church

4.34 In Cell Church understanding, the Cell has two key purposes – to grow and to divide. Worship would normally be a function of the church where many Cells exist, and in larger gatherings of churches for a Celebration. Using the biological metaphor, a cell cannot exist in isolation, it must be part of a body (a local church), but each cell has its own life within the body. It has its own DNA and the potential to grow.

4.35 The Cell also provides a suitable environment to nurture and develop future leaders for that Cell and for other Cells that it goes on to produce.

4.36 At an operational level, the Mission Project operating as a Cell of a larger church might meet in the church building in their community, or in an individual's house. They could well operate using the "Four W" model of cell church, where the weekly meeting begins with a Welcome (some sort of ice-breaker activity), then members engage in Worship, they hear the Word expounded and applied to their lives, and they consider how they will Witness to others in light of what they have heard.

4.37 Cell Churches usually operate by five core values – every member growing, Jesus at the centre, every member in ministry (service), building a community marked by opened and sacrificial love, and doing evangelism, not just talking about it.

4.38 In most cases, a church will be in this position because it was discerned that they no longer had the capacity for self-governance or growth and division, that is, to produce two cells within the existing church, rather than growing to the point where they can be established/re-established as a local church in their own right. The expectation is that a cell will grow and sub-divide whilst remaining part of the same church.

4.39 In most cases, following this model seems less likely to be appropriate – those in the Mission Project would, presumably, want to move to such a point that they can be their "own" church again, rather than produce further cells. However, for some this may be a helpful vision of their future life together.

Giving new life as a Class of a stronger church

- 4.40 Under Methodist Standing Orders (CPD Vol 2, SO605A), where a local church falls below 12 members and remains below 12 for four successive quarters, the Circuit shall close that church and transfer any remaining members to another local church. Both buildings could continue to be operated by the church, with the Circuit deciding how often to offer worship in each of the chapels operated by the enlarged church. Each former church may, “retain its pastoral identity for so long as it is deemed appropriate”.
- 4.41 In Methodism, a Class Leader is appointed by the Church Council. In a possible equivalent model for the operation of Mission Projects of the Synod where another local church provides the operational management and oversight, the Church Meeting would make the appointment of the Class Leader. The leader of the Mission Project would be tasked to report regularly to the Elders’ Meeting at the church on the state of the project and those associated with it, and the “managing” church would be accountable to the Synod. (One of the leader’s responsibilities in a Methodist Class is to ask the people weekly: “How is it with your soul?” This would be a good practice for Elders in churches to do also.)
- 4.42 One of the benefits of a Class system is that it joins/holds people together in a small group, where relationships with each other and with God can be fostered. Meeting weekly and being asked the question about soul-state shows that the Christian life is not static, and does not end with making a commitment to Christ (or simply growing up within the Church – many members and adherents would struggle to point to a moment when they made a choice to follow Jesus.) Rather, it shows that discipleship is ongoing and progress varies from week to week. Struggles can be acknowledged and support offered in a safe space.
- 4.43 The Class has a form of membership, and the Class Leader is thus responsible (as the first point of contact, and in partnership with the church leaders and Ministers of the church carrying delegated authority to act for the Synod) for the pastoral care of those who are members of the Class.
- 4.44 The Class can be the locus for weekly worship, study, and service, but is closely linked with another, larger, grouping with which it can meet for worship and teaching, as well as providing a bigger resource pool for administration, governance and missional activities.
- 4.45 The Class is fully part of the local church, but takes primary responsibility for its own pastoral care. Governance is the sole responsibility of the larger church of which the Class forms a part.
- 4.46 This presents itself as a very helpful model for the organisation of smaller churches that should become Mission Projects. What the Mission project will retain is a sense of local fellowship and (usually) a local place to meet, either in a church building in their own community or in private homes or rented public space. But they will only do so under the auspices of the larger church until such time as the Synod discerns the Mission Project has the capacity to

have a full life as a local church in their own right, and the General Assembly receives them as such.

- 4.47 This retains at the heart of things, the notion that Mission Projects should, with appropriate support, have the potential to regain their status as a local church, but provide a practical and perhaps medium-term way of maintaining a presence in a local community until those concerned (in the Mission Project, the appointed Management Committee and the Synod) discern that the Project has run its course and should be brought to a close.
- 4.48 However, if the “class” of the larger church exists only for worship and pastoral care, it does not seem to meet the key criteria of being based around mission. Retaining the local fellowship as a “class” or another church seems an easy and attractive option, but careful thought must be given as to how local mission will be fostered and developed, the first of the functions of the Elders’ Meeting of the larger church (Structure 2.(2)(i)).

Giving new life as a Base Ecclesial Community (BEC)

- 4.49 BECs are found in many different contexts, but originated in South America, as a way of forming a very local congregation set in a particular community. They typically follow a liberation theology (but not in all social contexts).
- 4.50 BECs operate from week-to-week as essentially autonomous groups, self reliant for providing worship, but under the tutelage or oversight of a priest who may live a great many miles away and have an itinerant ministry over a large area. They might not visit a BEC for many weeks or months as they complete a circuit around the many BECs under their charge.
- 4.51 The priest identifies a “lay catechist” who would be the local leader of the BEC, and who is trained to lead a “priest-less Mass”, with pre-consecrated bread and wine.
- 4.52 BECs are always a “church within a church” and are never intended to be a totally independent structure, but are attached to a larger parish church. Nevertheless, local organisation and identity are key features of a BEC.
- 4.53 There is an emphasis on empowerment of the laity – members of a BEC are expected to be active in their faith and in serving their local community.
- 4.54 Where a Mission Project can still organise its local life and mission, but is deficient in some areas of governance (legislatively or ecclesiologically), this model may be a helpful picture for that Project. The governance can be managed by the larger church of which the Project is a part (under suitable oversight from and delegation of powers by the Synod), and ministry would come under the larger church’s remit. In other regards and to the outside world, it would look as though the Mission Project is a congregation of the United Reformed Church. This does place the onus on the larger church/Synod-appointed management structure to ensure that the governance is properly in place for this largely autonomous grouping, and the Mission Project must be ready to accept that governance.

- 4.55 This option is effectively making the congregation a “Local Arrangements” Mission Project, where the leadership is lay with only minimal input and oversight from an ordained minister (and if Authorised Elders are given permission to preside at the sacraments the ordained presence may be nil). Pulpit supply, the councils of the church, day-to-day management of property and finance all come from within the membership.
- 4.56 However, General Assembly resolved that Mission Projects are the responsibility of the Synod, with operational oversight from an appointed committee. No local gathering, however constituted, can be part of the United Reformed Church without connexion to the wider Church; no local congregation of any size can operate independently of the Synod and General Assembly. The denomination, through the Synod and the management committee given oversight for the Mission Project, continues to care about and care for a Mission Project.

Just as a BEC is part of another, geographically distant, church, so a Mission Project is not autonomous in making its own policy and strategy. That authority remains within the wider church and thus the Mission Project and its local leadership are answerable to others and must still act in compliance with the policies of the United Reformed Church and within the law. A Mission Project that functions as a BEC is still a Mission Project of the Synod and the path between the local operation and the oversight of the Synod must be clear at all times.

For reflection and action

- If, as a result of working through this paper, the congregation feels its future lies as a Mission Project, which, if any, of the models above looks most suited for your future? Be realistic about your capacity to contribute to the local management of the Mission Project and your capacity to develop or continue your mission.
- Speak with the appropriate Synod Pastoral Committee (or equivalent) or the appropriate officer within your Synod to discuss your thinking so far and see if these plans can be developed into reality.
- Do you need to go back to an earlier phase of the reflection and discern afresh whether there is a different future for your church?

Appendix A

United Reformed Church expectations of a flourishing church

A1. A general guide

- a) The United Reformed Church as a denomination has a number of expectations and places a number of obligations on local churches regarding their operation. Primarily, these are contained within the Structure of the United Reformed Church and Basis of Union (available at www.urc.org.uk/the-urc-manual) and the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000, but also by policies agreed at the General Assembly.
- b) If a church cannot, with appropriate support from the Synod, fulfil these expectations, it is no longer able to operate as a local church of the United Reformed Church. The remaining members and the Synod are obliged to consider options for the local church's future as explained in this paper.

A2. An Elders' Meeting

- a) All local churches must have an "Elders' Meeting" (The Structure of the United Reformed Church 2.(2)) or an equivalent council in Local Ecumenical Partnerships. The meeting is made up of the minister(s) serving the congregation and the elders elected by the Church Meeting. The minimum and maximum number of serving Elders is not specified, but the plural is used consistently – there must be at least two serving Elders (i.e. not including any ministers called to serve that church).
- b) From amongst the Elders' Meeting, a Church Secretary (or secretaries) must be nominated, and Church Meeting must elect the person or persons for them to take office (Structure 2.(2)(iv)). The Church Secretary must be one of the serving Elders.
- c) Other functions of the Elders' Meeting are given in the same section of The Structure.
- d) At Assembly Executive November 2021, the resolution attached to paper H4 was passed, whereby, 'Assembly Executive strongly recommends local churches to use the process for the Safer Election of Elders.' That process is laid out in paper H4, which can be found at www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/27/Assembly_Executive_full_papers.pdf.

A3. A Church meeting

- a) The Church Meeting consists of all those "who have been admitted to the full privileges and responsibilities of membership of the United Reformed Church". The Church Meeting may invite others who regularly worship at the church but who are not on the membership roll to attend and speak at the meeting, but they may not vote on any matter.
- b) Minister(s) serving the congregation are *ex-officio* members of the Church Meeting by virtue of their induction to serve in that congregation.

- c) The Church Meeting must be held at least once a quarter and it is our expectation that this is honoured in LEPs where partner denominations may not have the same emphasis on members' meetings.
- d) The Church Meeting is responsible for the functions laid out in paragraph 2.(1) of The Structure, including the election of Elders and officers of that local church.

A4. Financial governance

- a) The role of Treasurer is not defined within the Structure. The Elders' Meeting (acting together in council) are the body responsible for, "the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the Local Church" (Structure 2.(2)(x)) and the Church Meeting has the responsibility to "adopt financial reports" and shares in the same general oversight for the financial responsibilities, acting on the recommendation from the Elders' Meeting.
- b) Subject to proper reporting, especially to the Elders' Meeting so that they can fulfil their responsibilities as charity trustees, it is not necessary the Treasurer to be a serving Elder of the local church, or even (strictly) a member of the United Reformed Church. If a local church is not able to identify and appoint a competent person to manage their local accounts (which may be a person serving as Treasurer at another URC congregation, especially in a Joint Pastorate or Group of Churches), serious concern about the viability/sustainability of that congregation must be an issue to be addressed.
- c) Banks will normally require at least two signatories for an account, and these must be members of the Elders' Meeting or other local Trustee body for the church who have the authority to permit payment against the charitable funds. So that the Elders may exercise proper control of the church's finances, the URC expectation is that at least two signatories will be appointed and appropriate mandates given at the bank that payments can only be authorised by at least two signatories. This arrangement should also be followed for online banking – one person to raise the transaction and a second to authorise it. (Best practice is that there should be more than two signatories. Blank cheques must never be pre-signed by one party for the second to fill in payment details later.)

A5. Safeguarding

- a) The United Reformed Church has stated on numerous occasions that safeguarding is of paramount importance (for example, see Good Practice 5, p20) and the responsibility of the whole Church.
- b) Since General Assembly 2022, each local church has responsibilities under the Structure to appoint a Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator who must report regularly to the Church Meeting. Church Meeting are responsible for adopting and promoting implementation of safeguarding policy in line with Assembly requirements, and the Elders' Meeting has a duty to "satisfy themselves that all necessary [safeguarding] procedures are in place".

- c) The Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator must be sufficiently competent to do exactly that – co-ordinate safeguarding matters for the local church. This does not negate the responsibility of Church and Elders’ Meetings to ensure that proper standards are maintained, but the CSC must have the confidence of the local church to lead them well in matters regarding safeguarding of children and adults at risk.
- d) Under Resolution 48 (Paper T5) of General Assembly 2021, many categories of office holder, worker and employee will be required to undertake safeguarding training at either the Foundation, Intermediate or Advanced levels. Anyone who is unwilling to undertake training at the appropriate level will thus be in breach of General Assembly policy and will not be a suitable person to hold the role/position to which they may have been appointed.
- e) Similarly, Resolution 49 (Paper T6) of Assembly 2021 updated the matrix showing the appropriate level of DBS disclosure required for a variety of office holders and employees. Other than where specified in that matrix, disclosures in Scotland are dealt with under the PVG scheme in line with the safeguarding procedures for the National Synod of Scotland. Anyone not complying with the policy on disclosures is liable to be removed from their position, and may become subject to criminal investigation.

A6. Upholding legal and governance requirements

- a) Any church that is unable to fulfil its legal obligations as a charitable body must be deemed unsustainable. If, in consultation with the Synod responsible and with the Synod’s support as appropriate, they cannot take action to meet those legal obligations within a short and agreed timescale, the Synod will need to initiate a conversation with the church to encourage it to consider the question of the church resolving to close or to merge with another local church. If the church cannot make that decision by itself, the Synod will need to exercise its responsibilities under paragraph 2.(4)A(iii) of the Structure to move to close that congregation or merge it with another local church (calling a meeting of the District Council to authorise disposal of assets if necessary.)
- b) It is possible for a local church to work in partnership with other URC congregations to fulfil some of its obligations – for example, sharing a Treasurer or Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator – **provided that** the Elders’ Meeting is fully and regularly briefed on those matters. A local church cannot abdicate and will always retain its responsibilities for legal and governance compliance.
- c) This compliance must be seen as the absolute minimum requirement for any local church. Beyond this minimum, there are issues of good and best practice in a range of fields. A number of Assembly policies deal with good (appropriate) practice, such as lifelong learning, public issues, and missional discipleship. Because they are Assembly policies (even if worded with verbs such as “encourage” or “urge”) they are setting up good practice for the local church and should, unless contextual issues can take precedence, also be regarded as what is expected of the local church.

Appendix B

Charity law requirements

B1. A general guide

The following is a general guide to legal requirements and is not intended to be definitive or exhaustive nor constitute formal legal advice. This document does not cover the legal frameworks for the Crown Dependencies of the Islands of Guernsey and Jersey or the Isle of Man, although the applicable laws are the same in principle at least as those in England, Scotland and Wales where the overwhelming majority of our churches are established (that is, currently every one of our churches except for four between these three islands).

The default position is that those serving on the Elders' Meeting or equivalent council in LEPs will normally be the Trustees of the charity holding the funds for the church, unless they are not qualified to act as Trustees because of their age or because they are disqualified by the relevant regulator. In Scotland, all churches must be registered as separate charities and have a registered charity number. In England and Wales, churches with an income over £100,000 per year are required to register as a separate charity, but most others are deemed to be excepted from registration. The threshold for registration will eventually reduce.

Whether or not a church is registered as a separate charity, the same principles and best practice, and in many cases the same legal requirements (other than submitting annual reports to the regulator) apply. The United Reformed Church requires all local churches to comply with relevant charitable legislation and best practice.

B2. Charity Commission for England and Wales

("CC" www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission)

a) How many Trustees are required?

- i) The Charity's Governing Document (also known as the Constitution), where one exists as should be the case for all separately registered charities, may set a minimum and/or maximum number, and a quorum for decision-making. Trustees must be over the age of 18 (but for Charitable Incorporated Organisations and company charities they may be over the age of 16.) There is no upper age limit.
- ii) There is a legal requirement to follow any rules in the Governing Document regarding Trustee recruitment, and the document may say how many are needed and how they are appointed. CC guidance recommends that charities should 'aim for a minimum of three unconnected trustees with a good range of skills'. You need enough trustees to govern the charity effectively.' (Note: most churches in England and Wales are not registered as separate charities and therefore most will not have a Governing Document, although there are some denominational expectations and requirements for all

churches regarding meetings in the Structure and Rules of Procedure. We suggest that some further work is done on what a Model Governing Document for all of our churches might look like).

- iii) CC suggests asking prospective Trustees to sign a declaration that they are eligible (not disqualified) prior to appointment; it is an offence to act as a trustee when disqualified unless the CC has given a waiver for the individual.
- iv) Charities must fulfil legal duties regarding DBS checks for Trustees where the charity works with children or adults at risk.

b) Requirements for Charity Trustee meetings

- i) When and how meetings will be held normally set out in the Governing Document, and those stipulations must be followed.

c) How to manage charity finances

- i) Trustees have a legal responsibility to maintain financial records (which must be kept for six years), and to prepare annual accounts and have them independently examined or audited (according to the nature and size of charity). Churches governed by charities registered separately rather than excepted from registration must submit the Trustees Annual Report to the CC.
- ii) Trustees “must act responsibly, reasonably and honestly” with the charity’s resources. They should have “effective processes for handing money to help avoid poor decisions and accidental errors, as well as theft and fraud. Failure to do so is likely to result in a breach of [their] duty.”
- iii) All Trustees must manage properly any conflicts of interests of loyalty and financial involvement, to ensure that they can properly act in the charity’s best interests at all times.

B3. Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR: www.oscr.org.uk)

a) How many Trustees are required?

- i) The Charity’s Governing Document may set a minimum and/or maximum number, and a quorum for decision-making. OSCR “expect” Trustees to be at least 16 years old and they must not be disqualified from trusteeship.
- ii) Other than for Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIO), the law does not specify a minimum number of trustees for charitable bodies “but it is good practice to have at least three”. Advice from the Law and Polity Advisory Group is that it is not possible for United Reformed Church congregations for operate as a SCIO.
- iii) OSCR recommend asking prospective Trustees to sign a declaration that they are eligible to act as Trustees prior to appointment.

- iv) Charities must consider whether a Disclosure Scotland (PVG) check is necessary, for example when the charity works with vulnerable beneficiaries.

b) Requirements for Charity Trustee meetings

- i) When and how meetings will be held normally set out in the Governing Document, and those stipulations must be followed.

c) How to manage charity finances

- i) The 2005 Act gives Trustees specific duties to maintain financial records (which must be kept for six years), prepare annual accounts and submit them to OSCR.
- ii) Trustees are required to act with “care and diligence” in managing the financial affairs of the charity, which means having appropriate controls over financial procedures to protect the assets of the charity.
- iii) All Trustees must put the interests of the charity before their own interests or those of any other person or organisation. Conflicts of interest do arise, and the charity must disclose the conflict and not take part in any discussion or decision-making on the matter.

Paper P1

Simplifying Processes

Law and Polity Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 62</p> <p>1. General Assembly resolves that, for the avoidance of doubt, any volunteer serving the General Assembly may in principle be treated under the Disciplinary Process for Office-holders.</p> <p>Resolution 63</p> <p>2. General Assembly removes the entirety of section 4 of the Rules of Procedure, ‘suspension and removal of volunteers serving at denominational level’, as this is no longer needed.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Removing an unnecessary process.
Main points	The Disciplinary Process for Office-holders duplicates section 4 of the Rules of Procedure, and it is recommended that section 4 be removed as it is no longer needed.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Following a Commission chaired by former Moderator of General Assembly, the Revd Dr David Peel, it was agreed that the Assembly would introduce a process should the suspension or removal of volunteers serving the General Assembly be needed.
2. This was duly done and is found in section 4 of the Rules of Procedure.

3. Subsequent to that, it was felt helpful for the Church to the possibility of a general Disciplinary Process of Office-holders.
4. The Disciplinary Process for Office-holders has now been agreed and is live.
5. The Disciplinary Process for Office-holders covers everything that might be envisaged under section 4 of the Rules of Procedure, and it is both dangerous and unwise to have competing processes to cover the eventuality. The enabling resolution presented confirms this coverage.
6. Section 4 of the Rules of Procedure has never been used, and it remains our hope that the Disciplinary Process for Office-holders will likewise not need to be used.

Paper R1

Redrafting Section O 5.2

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston, Training Officer andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Accept resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 64 Change of working in Section O 5.2</p> <p>Current wording:</p> <p>5.2 If the Investigation Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a prima facie case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline. On receiving such a report the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline must take safeguarding advice, and must then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, save that it may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration.</p> <p>Proposed wording:</p> <p>5.2 If the Investigation Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a prima facie case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline. On receiving such a report, the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline must take safeguarding advice and may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration. It must then send the report to the minister for comment. The ASPD will then consider the report, any response from the minister, and then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Corrects drafting error whereby ministers are not shown a report which exonerates them and the possibility of asking for the Investigation team to reconsider is almost an afterthought. The changed wording sets the order of events better and ensures ministers see the report.
Main points	Reorders text, adds requirement to show Investigation Team report to ministers.
Previous relevant documents	Section O of the Manual.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Paper R2

Amendment to Section O Appendix J

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston, MIND Training Officer andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 65 Assembly amends Section O Appendix J by inserting:</p> <p>A new paragraph 3:</p> <p>In deciding whether to impose a suspension or not, the Synod Moderator (in cases of urgency), the Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline, or the Assembly Commission for Discipline (as the case may be) must consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the nature of the allegations made against the minister and/or any admissions made which, if proven, would indicate that serious misconduct had occurred, ii. any ongoing risks to individuals or to the credibility of the Church’s witness, iii. any risk of interference with evidence or witnesses, iv. the length of time which has elapsed since the occurrence of the alleged/admitted misconduct and the conduct of the minister during the intervening period, v. advice from the Safeguarding Officer, and vi. more generally whether it would be reasonable in the particular circumstances of the case to impose a suspension. <p>Amendment of existing paragraph 3:</p> <p>Any decision to suspend a minister must be communicated immediately by the Moderator making the decision, any member of the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline making the decision, or the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline if the decision is made by a Commission. It must be accompanied by a brief statement of reasons. Suspension takes effect immediately upon notification by any method. If the</p>

	<p>decision is initially communicated orally, a note is to be made of the time of the communication, and a written confirmation notice of suspension signed by the person notifying the suspension must be delivered to the minister as soon as practical thereafter. The written notice of suspension must contain the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the reasons for the minister’s suspension, ii. that suspension does not imply any view about the correctness of any allegations made concerning the minister iii. that suspension does not affect any stipend or pension arrangements iv. that any conduct on the minister’s part during the suspension which breaches or contravenes either Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union or the Paragraph 4 Part II of Schedule F to the Basis of Union (whichever is relevant) may be taken into account by the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, by the Appeals Commission. <p>Add a new paragraph 4</p> <p>If, in the opinion of the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline or the Assembly Commission for Discipline, and considering safeguarding advice, it seems wise, a minister may be suspended for only part of their role. (For example, when a minister is in a multi-church pastorate and the alleged misconduct does not impact the other churches or the credibility of the Church’s witness.) A clear notice of suspension will be drawn up with the statements outlined in paragraph 3, above, making clear which areas of ministry the minister is suspended from and which areas may continue, and served upon the minister.</p> <p>And renumbering the remaining paragraphs.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To set out the criteria to be used when a minister is suspended.
Main points	<p>To write into the new process the Suspension criteria from the old as this was not carried over.</p> <p>To introduce a new partial suspension status where a minister is suspended from one aspect of their role but not all aspects.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Paper R3

Monitoring cautions and warnings

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston, MIND Training Officer andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 66 Assembly Amends Section O Appendix M as follows:</p> <p>Insert new paragraph 10:</p> <p>When a caution contains steps to be taken to remedy any harm and ensure the admitted misconduct is not repeated, the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those steps and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to undertake those steps.</p> <p>Resolution 67 Assembly Amends Section O Appendix S as follows:</p> <p>Insert new paragraph 3 and renumber:</p> <p>When a warning contains directions the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those directions and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to abide by them.</p> <p>Insert a new paragraph 8 and renumber:</p> <p>When directions are issued along with a curtailment, the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those directions and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to abide by them.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Establishes a process to monitor conditions when a Caution is issued and when directions are imposed with a warning or curtailment.
Main points	The Moderator, or Assembly Representative for Discipline, as the case may be, will work with two people appointed by the Ministries Committee to monitor any conditions or directions imposed as part of the discipline process.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Paper R4

Increase number of members of Disciplinary Investigation Panel

MIND Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston, MIND Training Officer andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 68 Assembly Amends Section O Appendix K to read: 1: The Disciplinary Investigation Panel comprises up to twenty-four thirty members of the United Reformed Church appointed by the General Assembly or, in its name, by Mission Council Assembly Executive...

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To expand the number of members in the Disciplinary Investigation Panel.
Main points	The higher than anticipated number of cases entering the Discipline Process has caused considerable difficulties in allocating Panel members to investigate a case or assist a minister. Increasing the number of people in the panel will help immensely.
Previous relevant documents	Section O.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	None.

Paper R5

Removal of Section P from The Manual of The United Reformed Church

Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline (MIND) Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Sarah Moore asst.clerk@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 69 General Assembly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) abolishes the procedure outlined in Section P of the Manual “Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers” b) rescinds Resolutions 14 and 15 from the 2007 meeting of the General Assembly and any and all resolutions passed since by Mission Council, Assembly Executive or the General Assembly concerning the content and operation of the Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers. c) removes the text of Section P Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers from the Manual of the United Reformed Church d) notes that all references in the Structure to the “Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers” are now obsolete and shall be removed.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Removal of Section P Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers.
Main points	

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Previous relevant documents	Mission Council Report General Assembly 2007 Other documentation presented to Mission Council, Assembly Executive and the General Assembly since 2007 that have amended the process.
Consultation has taken place with...	Secretary for Ministries Legal Advisor.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None .

1. The Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church Related Community Workers was accepted by the General Assembly in 2007. This was inserted into The Manual at section P.
2. Various additions and amendments have been made to section P over the intervening years with its oversight coming from the Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group. The process itself has never been used at all stages.
3. Concern has been raised about the legality, helpfulness, and general fitness for purpose of section P as the recent changes to the Ministerial Disciplinary Process have been brought into use. Particular concern has been raised that should an office-holder who had been subject to section P bring litigation against the denomination as a result of that process, use of an incapacity process or anything like it in its current form may be found by a Court of Law to be unlawful. As well as a substantial legal bill in such circumstances the URC could be compelled to accept changes to our procedures imposed by a court that raise other difficulties for the councils of the church and those who facilitate our life and polity.
4. It is therefore proposed that the current Procedure for dealing with dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church Related Community Workers be abolished and the current Section P of the Manual deleted.
5. Discussion has taken place between the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and General Secretariat concerning the references to the Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers contained within the Structure of the United Reformed Church. Regular attendees of meetings of the General Assembly and of synods will be aware that the Rules of Procedure normally require changes to the Structure to be referred to the synods for agreement and return to the next meeting of the General Assembly for final ratification. This group are of the view that the General Assembly may abolish the Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers with a single vote and that the relevant parts of the Structure are rendered obsolete instead of being changed or added to in and of themselves so can simply be removed.

Paper T1

Annual Report

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roger Jones – Convenor rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr – Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Overview of safeguarding in the URC.
Main points	Highlights Risk areas Areas of development Summary of Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2021.
Previous relevant documents	Annual Safeguarding Report from the Safeguarding Advisory Group to General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A.

Background

The Safeguarding Committee began to meet following General Assembly 2022. At the time of writing, the committee has met three times and is made up of 15 people with various roles both within the URC and external representatives. The Revd Roger Jones is the Chair and Sharon Barr is the Staff Secretary.

Historically, this report has come from the Safeguarding Advisory Group and has been a deep dive into the data from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns. However, following feedback from the last year's report that went to Assembly Executive 2022, a more concise report is welcomed at General Assembly and the in-depth analysis and actions should be considered at the Safeguarding Committee meetings.

Highlights

Church House staff team

For over a year, the safeguarding team at Church House has not been running at full capacity due to vacancies.

From February 2023, there is now a full team in place with the following people in role. Please feel free to contact them as needed:

- Sharon Barr – Designated Safeguarding Lead
- Carrie Kaunda – Training and Development Coordinator
- Kerry Baker – Policy Development Coordinator
- Emma Pearce – Administrative Assistant.

Safeguarding team away days

Last year, the Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Church House Safeguarding Team met for a two-day event. It was the first of its kind with the team learning more about how to support local churches to safeguard those in their congregations. The team completed sessions on domestic abuse in the church, supporting refugees and asylum seekers, and safeguarding in a church context. The days were a great success, and they will be coming together this year for a similar event.

Case management system

The URC's Past Case Review and subsequently the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the importance of effective recorded systems for safeguarding. As a result, all Synod Safeguarding Officers are starting to use a case management system for managing safeguarding concerns. The system will ensure consistency of recording across the denomination and allow for better auditing and compliance management of cases. The system is bespoke to the URC, with thanks to Gillian Jones, Matt Knowles and Belinda Herbert, who have worked on the development of the system to suit the needs of the denomination.

Training

During the past year, Carrie Kaunda has created a suite of training courses for use by Synod Safeguarding Officers. These go through rigorous scrutiny by all Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Training Reference Group before they are rolled out across the URC. As part of her role, Carrie has been able to offer some of these courses online and accessible to all Synods, which have proved popular, and she delivered to 500 individuals over the last year. For more detail on available courses, please see the URC Safeguarding page of the website (www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/) or the safeguarding page of your Synod's website.

Safeguarding strategic plan

The Safeguarding Committee has reviewed the strategic plan during the last year. The wider safeguarding team, including Synod and local church staff and volunteers, continue to achieve and work towards achieving the objectives of the plan. Synods engage with it differently, from some who have used it as a basis for their Synod Strategic Safeguarding Plan to others who, although working towards the key tasks, are not using the plan as a framework for their safeguarding work as it is not the easiest to use document.

The key tasks that still need significant work to achieve are those linked to the engagement and collaboration with survivors and victims of abuse. The feeling from the

Synod Safeguarding Officers and members of the Safeguarding Committee is that this work should grow organically with real focus and benefit to those who engage, rather than be a tick box exercise to achieve the objective of the strategic plan; therefore, discussion has started about how this would be best achieved. If you are aware of anyone who would be suited to either supporting the formation of survivors work for the URC or who might be a survivor wanting to engage in this work, then please contact Sharon Barr.

Guidance on work in private dwellings

During last year the Safeguarding team and Children and Youth team worked on guidance for work in private dwellings, which can be found here:

www.urc.org.uk/safeguarding/guidance-for-urc-local-church-activities-in-private-dwellings/

This will be updated as needed.

Risk areas

Synod Safeguarding Officer workload

All Synods (bar one that is in vacancy), now have safeguarding professionals in roles as Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs). The hours allocated to each person vary across Synods, as does the level of administration support offered to SSOs. This can cause some issue with capacity to undertake safeguarding tasks in the Synods and engagements denominationally. Half-time for each Synod with administration support is, therefore, the norm and we can see that less than that would create significant capacity issues.

As the workload and expectations of the safeguarding role in Synods increases with tasks, such as historical concerns being shared, more training courses being delivered, SSOs increasingly seeking advice due to confidence in churches about SSOs' ability to support, Synods should be aware of the need to review the workload and hours given to safeguarding staff within Synods.

Areas of development

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse working group

Following the conclusion of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and its final report being published, a working group has been set up with key safeguarding personnel from the URC to review the reports related to faith organisations, looking particularly at the recommendations from these reports and drawing upon any learning and action points that should be implemented by the URC. The group's findings will be presented to the Safeguarding Committee in early 2024, with any significant actions being presented in its report to General Assembly 2024.

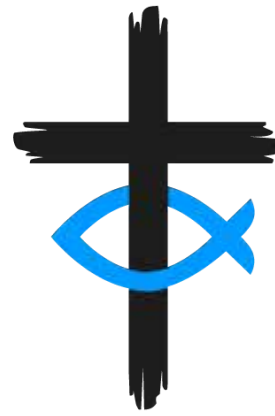
Good Practice 5 review

Kerry Baker is leading on the review of Good Practice 5, the denomination's safeguarding guidance documentation. The aim is to have it ready to launch at an online safeguarding symposium on 12 October 2023, further details of which will be circulated in due course.

As part of the review of the document, Synod Moderators, Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers were all given the opportunity to give

feedback, and this has guided the focus of the review. The hope for Good Practice 6 is that it will make clearer who takes on what role when managing safeguarding within the Church, will explain the theology of safeguarding and the document will be more succinct with better use of appendices.

ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING RETURNS REPORT



The
United
Reformed
Church

www.urc.org.uk

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2022, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers through their reporting due to timeframe for submission. Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2023 Safeguarding Committee.

INTRODUCTION

76.6% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns
7% of churches have no safeguarding coordinator
76% of churches reviewed their policy in the last year

Comments:

Synod Safeguarding Officers will continue to work with local churches who do not have a safeguarding coordinator to support them to achieve this necessary function of the church.

Both appointing a safeguarding coordinator and reviewing the church policy were added to the URC Manual as functions of Church and Elders meeting and this will be shared again through the Safeguarding Newsletter.



SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

Number of concerns related to children: 73 of which 20% related to self harm and mental health and 15% to exploitation.

Number of concerns related to adults: 148 of which 25% related to emotional abuse and 15% to self harm and mental health.

Total number of concerns raised to outside agencies: 56, these are cases that met the threshold for needing external support for managing the case due to the nature of the concern

Comments: The Church House Training Development Coordinator continues to design training that is relevant to the types of concerns that Local Churches are dealing with. Also Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Church House team keep up to date with their own professional development in these areas through their annual away days and peer support sessions.



PASTORAL CARE & SUPPORT

Comments: Synod Safeguarding Officers continue to work with their Synod colleagues to support local churches pastorally when there has been a safeguarding concern raised. If this cannot be provided within the URC then Synods would seek to source this from an appropriate outside agency.



MANAGING RISK



59 known offenders who pose a risk to children or adults at risk attending URC Churches

Comments: This group of people are supported through a Safeguarding Agreement which is managed by the Synod Safeguarding Officer along with those in the local church and any other professionals involved with the individual.

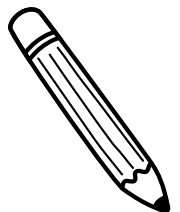
SAFER RECRUITMENT

Comments: The safeguarding team at Church House and Synod Safeguarding Officers have continued to raise awareness of the importance of safer recruitment. This has been through training and highlighting this issue through the safeguarding newsletters. The team have also launched safeguarding training for elders which includes their responsibilities to adhere to safer recruitment. Safer recruitment is far wider than just DBS checks and should include applications, interviews and references. However as a point of interest the URC carried out 1800 DBS checks in 2022



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Through this year's annual returns we have experienced push back from LEP's to complete the return if they are following another denomination's safeguarding policy. The URC's Designated Safeguarding Lead is picking this up with the other main denomination to see how we can better support churches in submitting this data as it is invaluable to have this from all churches.



Paper T2

URC Whistleblowing Policy

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roger Jones, Convenor, rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr, Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk
Action required	Adoption.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 70 General Assembly adopts the Whistleblowing Policy outlined in paper T2 of General Assembly 2023 and commends it to church meetings, Elders' meetings and Synods for consideration, implementation and dissemination.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>The URC Whistleblowing Policy aims to give all areas of the Church a basis for supporting whistleblowers and guidance on managing complaints that are raised through this route.</p> <p>The review of Good Practice 4 identified a need for a Whistleblowing Policy that covered all areas of the Church, which was endorsed by the General Secretariat at the time. Mary Fallah, the URC's Compliance Officer, has now produced the Whistleblowing Policy.</p>
Main points	<p>This policy aims to encourage whistleblowers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated as appropriate and their confidentiality respected.</p> <p>It aims to provide whistleblowers with guidance as to how to raise their concerns.</p> <p>This policy aims to reassure whistleblowers that they can raise concerns without fears of reprisals, even if their concern turns out to be mistaken.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The General Secretariat Church House Connective Team Synod Moderators Synod Clerks

	The Law and Polity Advisory Group Synod Safeguarding Practice Group (consisting of Synod Safeguarding Officers).
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Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A.

United Reformed Church Whistleblowing Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 The United Reformed Church and its associated bodies ('the URC', 'we' 'us', 'our') are committed to openness, accountability, and integrity. In line with this commitment, we expect employees, office holders, church members, volunteers, third parties or those contracted to provide services to the URC who have serious concerns about any aspect of our work, to come forward and voice those concerns with the knowledge that, if made in good faith, their action will be viewed positively. This will assist us in addressing the concerns and thereby avoid more serious regulatory breaches or reputational damage.

1.2 About this policy:

- This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and it may be amended at any time, subject to agreement with the General Assembly or the Assembly Executive, acting on behalf of the General Assembly.
- It sits alongside other policies within the URC. It is not a part of a hierarchy of policies to be used to raise any type of complaint. This policy applies only to issues pertaining to whistleblowing.
- This policy aims to encourage whistleblowers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated as appropriate and their confidentiality respected.
- It aims to provide whistleblowers with guidance as to how to raise their concerns.
- This policy aims to reassure whistleblowers that they can raise concerns without fears of reprisals, even if their concern turns out to be mistaken.

2. What is whistleblowing?

2.1 Whistleblowing is the term used regarding the internal or external disclosure of suspected wrongdoing or dangers in relation to our activities, in the interest of the public. This includes bribery, fraud or other criminal activity; facilitation of tax evasion; miscarriages of justice; health and safety risks; damage to the environment; any breach of legal or professional obligations; negligence; and the deliberate concealment of any of the above-mentioned matters. Safeguarding matters concerning vulnerable people in the URC are also included in the definition of whistleblowing.

2.2 Untrue or malicious disclosures

If a whistleblower raises a concern in good faith or in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, or it is proven to be untrue, then no action will be taken against the whistleblower. However, if it is found that the whistleblower has maliciously raised a matter which they know to be untrue, or they are involved in any way in the malpractice, wrongdoing, or illegal act or omission, their behaviour may be addressed through other appropriate policies/procedures, including disciplinary depending on their status within the URC.

2.3 When should this policy be used?

This policy should be used where the whistleblower witnesses wrongdoing, malpractice, or a risk towards others. The whistleblower's concerns must be in the public interest and, unlike grievances, they may not affect the whistleblower at all, but will have wider implications on the public.

2.4 Grievance complaints

Complaints about how the whistleblower has been treated are commonly identified as grievances. These are typically issues about how the whistleblower exclusively is being treated and not the treatment of others. Grievances can be about things they have been asked to do in their role, any breaches of their employment rights or their contract of employment, or the way they are personally being treated at work, to name a few. Such complaints do not fall under this Whistleblowing Policy. If the whistleblower is an employee, grievances should be raised through the Grievance Policy pertaining to their employment. If they are not an employee, please see The Complaints Procedure (Section Q), within The Manual on the United Reformed Church's website for guidance on how to raise a complaint.

3. How to raise a whistleblowing concern

Concern about	Inform (designated person)
Matter in a local church	Church Secretary or Elder or Minister
Safeguarding matter in a Church or Synod	Synod Safeguarding Officer
Matter relating to activities in a Synod	Synod Clerk or Moderator
Matter relating to activities of Synod Trust	Convenor/Chair of Board of Trustees
Matter relating to activities of the 'central' URC, i.e., General Assembly, Assembly Executive, Assembly Committees, and advisory groups.	Clerk to General Assembly or General Secretary
Safeguarding matter relating to 'central' URC	Designated Safeguarding Lead
Matters relating to United Reformed Church Trust	Chair of Trustees or Secretary to Trustees
Retired Ministers Housing Society (RMHS)	Secretary to RMHS or Chair of RMHS board
Ministers Pension Trust	Chair of Board of Trustees
Any actions to be taken beyond the above, would require you to consider external disclosures.	

If it is not possible to disclose to the designated person, as the concern may involve them, please speak to the next appropriate designated person.

- 3.1 Whistleblowers can provide oral disclosures, but written disclosures are preferable, as these will make the process more efficient and effective. In the whistleblower's disclosure, they should provide a description of the concerns, including where possible, precise information such as dates, names of those involved, meetings or correspondence which have taken place and reference to relevant documents or policies. They should also mention that they are raising their concerns using the United Reformed Church Whistleblowing Policy.
- 3.2 All concerns will be acknowledged, recorded, and reviewed by the person to whom the disclosure is made and where appropriate investigated.

4. Confidentiality

- 4.1 Where possible, the identity of the whistleblower will be protected. There may be circumstances, however, where it may not be possible to proceed without revealing the whistleblower's identity, for example if the whistleblower's evidence is needed in the investigatory process, at a disciplinary or court hearing. Should this be the case, the matter will be discussed with the whistleblower at the earliest opportunity, and they may have the opportunity to withdraw the disclosure if, by continuing with the investigation, their identity would be revealed to the subject of the disclosure. The whistleblower must understand, however, that where a potentially serious disclosure is made, a designated person, on behalf of the URC must investigate to ensure that the URC is taking due care of its people, property, funds, moral and legal obligations. Where necessary, this may continue without the cooperation of the whistleblower.
- 4.2 The need for confidentiality may prevent the designated person from providing the specific details of the investigation or actions taken, to the whistleblower.
- 4.3 The whistleblower should treat any information about the investigation as confidential.
- 4.4 Concerns raised anonymously will be dealt with at the discretion of a designated person, on behalf of the URC.

5. Investigation and outcome

- 5.1 Once the whistleblower has raised a concern, a meeting will be arranged to discuss their concern. They may bring someone with them to this meeting, if that person is willing to maintain the confidentiality of their disclosure and any subsequent investigation.
- 5.2 Feedback will then be given as to whether the concern falls within the scope of this policy and how the designated person, on behalf of the URC plans to deal with the matter.
- 5.3 If there is a cause for concern, the designated person will arrange for an investigation. The designated person may appoint another person to undertake the investigation on their behalf.
- 5.4 Where there are existing procedures or policies in place for the investigation of certain allegations, for example those covered by The Manual concerning complaints and discipline, the matter will be dealt with in line with that policy.

5.5 The process

Once a disclosure has been made, the designated person will:

5.5.1 Make a record of its receipt.

5.5.2 Conduct a preliminary review as to whether the disclosure falls under the scope of this policy and whether there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it should be investigated and if so, appoint a person to investigate.

5.5.3 Following the preliminary review, the investigating officer will make a preliminary decision and notify the whistleblower, where it is possible and appropriate to do so that:

- The disclosure will be investigated formally.
- The disclosure has been investigated and relevant action taken.
- The disclosure has been drawn to the attention of the person who has the authority to act on the matter.
- The disclosure has been dismissed as there are no ground for investigation.

5.5.4 Where the initial investigation identifies that a formal investigation is required then:

- An investigation will be carried out by someone with relevant experience appointed by the designated person and as speedily as possible, depending on the complexity of the investigation.
- The person(s) subject of the disclosure will be informed and advised of any supporting evidence and will have the right to respond during interview.
- After the interview, the investigator will report their findings with recommendations of further steps to be taken. All reports will be retained for a period of two years.
- Consideration will be given as to whether the incident should be reported to the Charity Commission or other appropriate bodies.
- The whistleblower will be informed of the progress and timescales of the investigation, where it is appropriate. All information must be kept confidential by the whistleblower.
- If the disclosure is deemed to be malicious or made for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against the individual concerned if they are a minister or employed staff. Where the individual concerned is a volunteer, such behaviour may result to a dismissal/termination of volunteer agreement (if applicable).

5.6 Time frame

Under UK law, there is no legal timeframe for a response to a whistleblowing concern. There is also no legal requirement to feedback an outcome regarding action envisaged or taken. However, whistleblowing charity Protect, encourages following the EU Whistleblowing Directive guidelines as best practice:

- Acknowledgment receipt of the disclosure should be sent to the whistleblower within seven days.
- Investigation and feedback of outcome should be within a reasonable period, not exceeding three months from acknowledgment of receipt of the disclosure.
- Where more time is required to investigate a concern raised, the whistleblower should be informed.

6. External disclosures

6.1 While we hope that the whistleblower will be able to resolve any concerns by using the internal mechanisms detailed above, we understand that this will not always be possible or appropriate. If they need independent advice, Protect operates a confidential helpline for employees, workers, and volunteers. It is an independent charity staffed by lawyers, who offer confidential free legal and practical advice on how people can raise concerns about malpractice at work. Its details are at the end of this policy, along with a list of some of our external regulators.

Disclosure made to the press will not be considered reasonable and may constitute misconduct.

7. Protection and support for whistleblowers

7.1 Protection for employees of the URC

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) only provides legal protection for employed staff, who raise legitimate concerns in certain situations, outlined in section 2.1 of this policy. These are known as protected disclosures, and they enable employees to share information which would otherwise be considered confidential or private.

PIDA will only consider a whistleblowing disclosure “protected” if it relates to matters that “qualify” for protection under the Act. Qualifying disclosures are disclosures which the employee reasonably believes to be true and tend to show that one or more of the listed matters in section 2.1 is either happening now, took place in the past, or is likely to happen in the future.

A qualifying disclosure will be a ‘protected’ disclosure provided the employee:

- makes the disclosure in good faith
- reasonably believes that the relevant failure relates to ‘proper administration of charities and funds given, or held, for charitable purposes;’ and
- reasonably believes that the information disclosed and any allegation contained in it are true.

If a whistleblower believes they have been unfairly treated because they have blown the whistle, they may decide to raise a grievance or take their case to an employment tribunal. The process for this would involve attempted resolution through the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) early conciliation service. Information can be found at the end of this document.

7.2 Protection for volunteers of the URC

Currently, there is no UK legislation that provides protection for volunteers who blow the whistle. It is the policy of the URC that anyone who reports wrongdoing should be protected as a recognition of the importance of reporting poor or dangerous practice.

7.21 Volunteers are encouraged to follow this procedure. They should be able to report their concerns in the same way as employees; however, as there is no legal protection afforded, volunteers may feel anxious about raising concerns and could fear being treated unfavourably or harassed. Volunteers are therefore advised that they can use the advice of the **Charity Commission** or **Protect**, to ensure they are adequately protected.

7.22 An atmosphere of openness is encouraged, and support provided to whistleblowers who raise genuine concerns under this policy, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment because of raising a genuine concern.

Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.

If a whistleblower believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the relevant designated person.

A whistleblower should not face any threats or retaliation, for raising a concern from anyone working in the URC. Any such behaviour towards a whistleblower could result in disciplinary action. In some cases, the whistleblower could have a right to sue personally for compensation.

8. Important contacts

Key internal and external contacts are in the tables below.

Internal Contacts [to be completed by the local Church if the policy is displayed or made available to local Churches]

Your Church Secretary	[NAME] [TELEPHONE] [E-MAIL]
Church Safeguarding Officer	[NAME] [TELEPHONE] [EMAIL]
Synod Clerk	[NAME] [TELEPHONE] [E-MAIL]
Synod Moderator	[NAME] [TELEPHONE] [E-MAIL]
Secretary to the Synod Trust	[NAME] [E-MAIL]
Synod Safeguarding Officer	[NAME] [TELEPHONE] [EMAIL]

General Secretary	The Revd Dr John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Secretary to the URC Trust	Sandi Hallam-Jones s.hallam-jones@urc.org.uk

External Contacts: not an exhaustive list. Please contact **Protect** for more.

Charity Commission	Email: whistleblowing@charitycommission.gov.uk Website: www.gov.uk/guidance/report-serious-wrongdoing-at-a-charity-as-a-worker-or-volunteer
Protect	Helpline: 0203 117 2520 E-mail: info@protect-advice.org.uk Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk
HM Revenue and Customs	Helpline: 0800 788 887 Website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/contact/reporting-tax-evasion
Health and Safety Executive	Helpline: 0300 003 1647 Website: www.hse.gov.uk/contact/concerns.htm
The Environment Agency	Helpline: 03708 506 506
NSPCC	Helpline: 0800 028 0285 Email: help@nspcc.org.uk
ACAS	Helpline: 0300 123 1100
Information Commissioner's Office	Helpline: 0303 123 113 Email: icocasework@ico.org.uk
Fundraising Regulator	Helpline: 0300 999 3407 Email: admin@fundraisingregulator.org.uk

Paper X1

2023 Resolutions for Ukraine

East Midlands Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Derek Graham, Elder, St Andrew's with Castle Gate URC Derekgraham049@gmail.com Luke Framji, Church Member, St Andrew's with Castle Gate URC luke.framji@gmail.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 71 From East Midlands Synod a) Out of its concern for its brothers and sisters in the Churches in Ukraine which are members with us in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (the United Methodist Church in Ukraine, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine and in particular the Transcarpathian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of Ukraine), the United Reformed Church sends greetings to the respective Conference and Synods of the three Churches. b) General Assembly instructs the Mission and Finance Committees to determine what help can be given to our brothers and sisters in the Transcarpathian Reformed Church to assist in the eventual process of reconstruction as a result of the Russian invasion.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To support the Protestant Churches of Ukraine.
Main points	To show solidarity with Christian partners in Ukraine by sending greetings. To offer financial support when the war eventually comes to an end towards the reconstruction of the work of the Reformed Church in Ukraine.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	General Secretary, Clerk to Assembly, The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

Summary of impact

Financial	If the second resolution is passed in Assembly, this may result in a financial contribution to the Transcarpathian Reformed Church if the Mission and Finance Committees make such a determination.
External (eg ecumenical)	Strengthening ecumenical ties with the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.

These resolutions were put to East Midlands Synod by St Andrew's with Castle Gate United Reformed Church, Nottingham at the March 2023 Synod meeting, which by co-incidence met at St Andrew's with Castle Gate. The Synod agreed unanimously to bring these resolutions to General Assembly.

Background

Many of our churches and church members have given generously in support of the Ukrainian War effort. However, most, if not all, of this giving has been directed towards the government or to charities working to provide medical assistance for all Ukrainians. What we have not done is target help to our coreligionists in the Reformed family.

All three churches identified are small. The largest and oldest, the Reformed Church, has about 100 congregations, the Lutherans have 18 and the Methodists 7. In common with many of the smaller Protestant Churches in Eastern Europe, particularly those in countries where Orthodox Christianity is the majority religion, even before the outbreak of war they frequently felt themselves to be isolated and ignored by their coreligionists elsewhere in Europe. This remains true, although all three are members of their respective confessional bodies, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council and the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The URC is also a member of the latter.

In the aftermath of World War Two, our Church, particularly the Presbyterian part, was greatly helped and encouraged by financial and other assistance offered by other Churches in our Reformed family towards the process of reconstruction. The eventual end of the war with Russia will leave the Church in Ukraine needing to recover from the damage caused by the invasion. The offer of both moral and financial support from other members of the Reformed family would help greatly with this and additionally show that we remember and value the help we received in the 1940s.

It is not the intention of this resolution to dictate what help the United Reformed Church should offer to our Ukrainian coreligionists. That would be for the two committees charged with this matter to determine. Rather, it is to enable us to show formally and officially the concern for them that has already been shown unofficially and to enable us to do for our Ukrainian brothers and sisters what was once done for us.

Paper X2

YoURChurch

North Western Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Tim Hopley clerk@nwsynod.org.uk Ruth Watson revruth@btconnect.com
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 72 General Assembly receives the online congregation YoURChurch as a local church of the URC, and commits to continuing further work on the issues of Church Membership.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To enable YoURChurch to become a recognised church in its own right, with the relevant governance, commitments and potential of any other United Reformed Church.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The Faith and Order Committee, The Synod Clerk.

Summary of impact

Financial	There will be a positive impact, as the new church will contribute to the Maintenance of the Ministry fund.
External (eg ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners are aware of yoURChurch and have shown interest because they are looking at similar initiatives.

Preface

yourchurch began in August 2020 when the group that had been meeting weekly on Zoom as a way of continuing to worship through the first lockdown elected to keep doing so and form an intentional online congregation. They had discovered that meeting in this way had become more than a means of survival until “normal service could be resumed”: it was a different way of being church and one which fed them in a unique way.

Two factors were at play here: one was the opportunities afforded by the digital space; the second was the very deliberate focus on discipleship and mission – the connection between **yourchurch** and the URC’s Walking the Way with its focus on whole life discipleship. Baked into **yourchurch** from the very outset, therefore, was the hope that we could become an online church within the URC, rather than simply a congregation that met online.

We recognised, from the outset, that this was not a straightforward matter. Although we very deliberately organised ourselves along URC principles, URC ecclesiology did not recognise the possibility of online churches. Some of the biggest issues were obvious: membership, M&M/finances, safeguarding, mutual accountability, and relationship with the wider URC.

There were also issues that arose from within the congregation of **yourchurch** around membership. From the outset, there were some who wished to express their membership of the URC through **yourchurch** and others whose membership was with other churches (URC or otherwise), but who nevertheless regarded **yourchurch** as also “their” church because it offered them something different and vital. They want to be able to participate fully within the life and decision-making of **yourchurch**, which is hardly straightforward.

We are very grateful to the United Reformed Church for this opportunity to explore together how to make it possible for an online congregation to become a member church of the denomination. Particularly, we are grateful to the North Western (NW) Synod for being prepared to exercise Synod oversight, and to the Faith and Order Committee for its committed work on URC ecclesiology in order to allow for online churches like **yourchurch** to be recognised as URC churches.

The papers we have submitted are what we are hoping to achieve in terms of membership, finance and governance, and church community. They represent the results of a careful consultation process that has included the **yourchurch** congregation, the NW Synod and the wider URC, and outline an initial recognisably URC framework within which we might achieve our aims. We recognise that we are in new territory with an opportunity to create something unique; we are therefore asking for your help to see how far we can get collectively in realising those ambitions, as well as for any insight, wisdom and creativity that you can offer us. We want to thank you in advance for your participation in this exploration.

yourchurch Patterns of Community

yourchurch is an online worshipping community which began on 16 August 2020 and recently marked its 130th online service. We have an established, regular congregation of people on 30-40 cameras, including worshippers from Germany and Taiwan, as well from the three nations that make up Great Britain.

Our preachers, ordained and lay, are drawn from across the United Reformed Church and more widely. We celebrate communion monthly, at which an ordained minister presides. We have an established relationship with both the Protestant churches of the Pfalz in Germany and the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem.

Services are publicised via email and Facebook.

Worship styles and practices are diverse, with various media and interactions being utilised, for example mentimeter, whiteboard and the Zoom chat facility being used for

prayer time. Music ranges from traditional hymns to secular music. Members of the congregation regularly read and lead the prayers. The congregation greatly appreciates the use of break-out rooms to reflect on and engage with the theme of the service.

Future opportunities

- To reach out to others who don't yet worship with **yourchurch**.
- To make connections to other online presences within the URC.
- To encourage the congregation to share information about **yourchurch** with others.
- To invite young people's groups to lead worship.
- To encourage more placing of weblinks in the wider URC.

Community

Background

Over the years since **yourchurch** started, an online faith community has been established. Strangers have become friends.

Contact is made with worshippers who may be missing from services for a number of weeks.

Some of those who worship with **yourchurch** are members of other churches – URC, or other denominations. Others with no church membership want to express their membership through **yourchurch**. Another group from within the **yourchurch** Leadership Team is exploring with the Faith and Order Committee how this may be achieved.

A website has been produced and is ready to go live, pending the requisite approvals.

Future opportunities

- To reflect on and establish robust pastoral support in an online setting. "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. (Hebrews 10:24-25.)"
- To link into study groups from the wider church as well as continuing to offer our own, based on **yourchurch** worshippers' experiences.

Discipleship

Background

yourchurch offers a breadth of theology and covers relevant issues and topics. From the beginning, discipleship has been our primary focus.

yourchurch is the first online church to have gained the Bronze Eco-Church award from A Rocha.

There are plans to see how we can engage with Commitment for Life, perhaps in a new and radical way.

Future opportunities

- We are working towards our Silver Eco-Church award.
- To consider asking the congregation to invite friends to join them for a meal before a **yourchurch** service based on a topic which people can discuss around their tables.
- To continue and strengthen our links with Greenbelt. A live service was held with **yourchurch** from the Festival site last year.
- To consider a '10 am tomorrow slot', where worshippers reflect on how they live out their faith in their daily lives.

Proposed **yourchurch** Covenant.

We are a *fellowship* of disciples of Jesus who understand ourselves to be a part of the body of Christ, the Church.

We commit ourselves, through regular virtual gatherings, to centre our life around missional discipleship, and to support each other in walking the way of Jesus.

We commit ourselves to live out our life and mission in ways that are both in accordance with the Basis of Union and Structure of the United Reformed Church, and in accordance with the deepest ecumenical principles, holding both to be equally important.

As a *fellowship*, we commit to being open and transparent with each other about our membership of other churches. We remain accountable for our personal conduct to the denomination in which we each hold our membership. We are committed to honouring the ecumenical diversity of our community, working together to be an expression of the unity Christ wills for his church.

We seek to be an inclusive community, celebrating our diversity.

We commit ourselves to discern the mind of Christ through the **yourchurch** Church Meeting. We will be accountable to one another in honouring the decisions we make together as the body of Christ.

Structure of **yourchurch** comprises a *fellowship of Christian disciples*.

yourchurch *disciples* hold membership in a number of ways:

- Some are received into membership of **yourchurch** as members of the United Reformed Church, this being where their URC membership is recorded.
- Some hold membership in other United Reformed Churches from across the United Kingdom.
- Some hold membership in churches of other denominations that are part of ecumenical bodies in which the URC participates (such as CTE, Cytŷn, CTBI, CWM, CPCE and WCC).

yourchurch governs its life through a Church Meeting. The Church Meeting has all the functions, privileges and responsibilities of every Church Meeting in the United Reformed Church, as set out in the Structure.

yourchurch welcomes all attendees to take part in its Church Meeting and will use consensus decision making (CDM) where possible. In matters that require a majority

decision, only those holding their United Reformed Church membership in **yourchurch** will have a vote.

The **yourchurch** leadership team can include any member of the United Reformed Church elected by the Church Meeting, and they will be ordained and inducted as Elders and have all the functions, privileges and responsibilities normally attributed to a United Reformed Church Elders' Meeting, as set out in the Structure. It may include observers who are not members of the URC, and it will keep a roll of **yourchurch** *disciples*, and of their membership details including the church, denomination and region to which they belong.

When by decision of the **yourchurch** Church Meeting, individuals are to be ordained or baptised, appropriate physical arrangements will be made while ensuring that the online congregation can also participate.

yourchurch will be held under the pastoral oversight of the North Western URC Synod, which gives its concurrence to the structure adopted by **yourchurch**. **yourchurch** will have all the usual opportunities to participate in the wider life of the United Reformed Church afforded to congregations through the Synod. It will make itself open to the guidance, oversight and scrutiny of the Synod.

While it is through North Western Synod that accountability to the United Reformed Church is expressed, individuals from **yourchurch** may choose to engage with other URC Synods and denominations to exercise aspects of their discipleship.

Any changes to the Covenant and Structure of **yourchurch** require a two-thirds majority vote of the Church Meeting, and concurrence by the North Western Synod.

yourchurch – finance and governance Ministry and Mission (M&M) Fund

Contributions to this fund are made by each church through the Synod to which it belongs and are calculated by that Synod (each Synod does this in its own way in order to raise the money asked of it by the denomination). Contributions to the M&M Fund (like contributions to one's local church) are voluntary, but that doesn't make them optional. Each Synod makes a pledge to the denomination and then works out how that pledge is going to be shared out into requests from each of its local churches.

The North Western Synod M&M assessment is made up of the following elements:

- An assessment of the church based on its membership and number of regular worshippers (as given in the January Annual Church Return) with a weighting based on the size of the church
- A levy of 2% of the capital held by the church
- A synod element, for the work of the synod itself which includes an element to cover ministers' expenses as these are incurred across a whole Missional Partnership and so paid by the Synod in the North West. The ministers' expenses part is not charged to churches which have no stipendiary ministry. The North West includes regular worshippers in its assessment in order to deal with the perception of the M&M as a membership tax and remove or reduce the apparent financial disincentive to becoming (or inviting people to become) church members. This is significant as many **yourchurch** worshippers will be regular worshippers elsewhere. An assessment for **yourchurch** might be best based on only those that **yourchurch** counts as members, so only those whose URC membership is held by **yourchurch**.

- **yourchurch** would need a conversation with the North Western Synod treasurer and finance committee about the way our M&M assessment will be calculated, looking at what constitutes membership in **yourchurch** and remembering that many who have a commitment to **yourchurch** may well have their membership in another URC, or a different Christian congregation.

Governance issues

Officers

A group of Elders, the Leadership team, would need to act as trustees for the church. Additionally, we would need to have a specific person to act as Treasurer and a named Church Secretary.

Bank account

The level of proof of an organisation's status required by banks nowadays to open a bank account would make it difficult for **yourchurch** to open an account. However, the Synod is likely to be willing to hold our church funds for us in its bank account.

Effectively the Synod would act as the bank for **yourchurch**: receiving monies, paying bills and holding the balance. It would be for **yourchurch** to maintain accounts and authorise payments made by the Synod on our behalf. The Treasurer of **yourchurch** would keep accounts and authorise transactions according to the decisions of **yourchurch**, and Synod staff would manage the actual payments. This money would not appear in the accounts of the Synod.

Clearly, **yourchurch** finances are not going to involve banking of cash from Sunday offertory or events, or any of the complexities of building use, so the holding of our bank account by the Synod would in principle be relatively simple. It would also be possible for a local church to perform this function for **yourchurch** if one were willing.

Gift Aid

The level of proof of our charitable status to register to claim gift aid is much lower than that needed to open a bank account. **yourchurch** would be able to register with HMRC and claim back gift aid on donations in the same way as every other church.

Insurance

yourchurch would need Public Liability Insurance.

Safeguarding

yourchurch already has a safeguarding policy in place.

Data protection and copyright

yourchurch would comply with GDPR and all data protection requirements. It also has all the necessary copyright licences etc in place .

Paper X3

Illegal Migration Bill

North Western Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd John Gordon revdjohngordon@btinternet.com The Revd Daleen ten Cate daleen.tencate@nwsynod.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 73 General Assembly expresses deep concern that the Illegal Migration Bill (2023) will change the law so that those who arrive in the UK illegally will not be able to apply for asylum here and will instead be detained and then promptly removed, either to their home country or a safe third country.</p> <p>Resolution 74 General Assembly strongly objects to the Illegal Migration Bill since it potentially breaches the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953), of which the UK is a signatory.</p> <p>Resolution 75 General Assembly recognises the aim of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in maintaining a legal standard of human dignity that reflects the nature of God revealed in the Bible, and urges the UK government to uphold it.</p> <p>Resolution 76 General Assembly invites churches and members of the URC to write to their MPs expressing their opposition to the Illegal Migration Bill.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Challenge to government policy on migration.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

In critiquing the Illegal Migration Bill (2023), the political commentator Paul Mason described the government's legislation with the following words: "What we are being subjected to in the Tory refugee policy is a deliberate theatre of cruelty." (*The New European*, 13–19 April, 2023).

If Mason is correct in his analysis, what should be a measured Christian response to such cruelty?

The Creation story in Genesis 1 speaks of how God "created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them". All humanity reflects the divine image. There is an essential connectedness between God and humanity.

This mystery is further expressed in the Incarnation, whereby Jesus became enfleshed in our human history.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes about the unity and diversity within the body of Christ. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit, we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body."

Building on the Creation story and the Incarnation, is it possible to extrapolate from Paul's teaching that one sovereign country cannot cut itself off from the rest of the world and treat others with disdain?

Human history is full of the brokenness of relationships resulting in the violence of war. Following the devastation of World War Two, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in December 1948.

In 1949, the Council of Europe was formed to protect human rights and the rule of law and to promote democracy. Proposed by Sir Winston Churchill and drafted mainly by British lawyers, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was created. It was signed in Rome in 1950 and came into force in 1953, with all members of the Council of Europe, including the UK, being party to it. The primary aim of this legislation, which became known as the European Convention on Human Rights, was to secure basic rights for anyone within the borders of the Council of Europe, including their own citizens and people of other nationalities. The UK enshrined the rights in this document into UK law through the Human Rights Act 1998.

When introducing the Illegal Migration Bill to parliament, the Home Secretary had to make an unprecedented declaration that she could not state that the legislation was compatible with the human rights set out in the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act.

Paper X4

Synod changes

North Western and Mersey Synods

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Tim Hopley clerk@nwsynod.org.uk Rita Griffiths synodclerk@urcmerseysynod.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 77 General Assembly transfers Macclesfield & Bollington United Reformed Church from the North Western Synod into Mersey Synod, and instructs the two Synods to effect this transfer at a date convenient to all parties, and to notify that date to the General Secretary.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Agreement to movement of a Church between Synods.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Over a period of time, Macclesfield and Bollington URC sensed an increasing impetus to explore a move of Synods, and engaged in conversations jointly with representatives from North Western and Mersey Synods as they explored that possibility.

Macclesfield and Bollington URC expressed their thinking thus:

“We believe that the church is an agent of God’s purposes and that our proclamation of the Gospel in worship goes hand in hand with pastoral care, service of the wider community and the search for a society in which God’s love, justice, peace, will prevail. Although we know ourselves to be blessed as a fellowship in many respects, we are aware of our insufficiency and have come to realise increasingly the degree to which we have learnt to rely on the sufficiency of God.

“We believe that there are respects in which God has used developments within the North Western Synod to guide our life as a church.

“Firstly, there was the creation of Missional Partnerships in 2017 and our designation as a congregation within the Greater Manchester South and Cheshire Missional Partnership. Apart from ourselves and Wilmslow, other churches in the partnership are closely grouped together in Greater Manchester; we are isolated geographically. Had the United Reformed Church come into being after 1974 when the county boundaries were revised, we would have been grouped with other congregations in Cheshire, which are currently in the Mersey Synod. We are aware that if Macclesfield were to move to Mersey Synod, we would still be on the edge of the Synod, but geographical distances between the churches in the South Cheshire Group would be similar to one another, giving rise to a sense of solidarity and inclusion.

“In practice, the geographical distance from other churches in the Partnership has made it impossible for us to engage meaningfully in joint activities or to collaborate in mission and pastoral care. In the knowledge that these are best exercised in as local an area as possible, we realise that in our case this might be better achieved through strengthening our existing ecumenical collaboration with HOPE churches in Macclesfield.

“We believe that our growing sense of disconnection from the Missional Partnership may be a sign of God’s calling to move.

“Secondly, we were given further momentum in our journey when, at a meeting of the North Western Synod, the Synod Executive encouraged local congregations and Missional Partnerships to discuss whether their mission was best served by current structural boundaries and to respond with any proposed changes by 1 August 2022. We duly discussed the matter with a range of church members at meetings of Pastoral Group Leaders, Elders, and Church Meeting. While it was generally agreed that our mission was not best served by current arrangements, our geographical position on the southern-most tip of the North Western Synod meant that a change of Missional Partnership was not a viable option. So we decided instead to explore the possibility of moving to another Synod and had informal discussions about this with representatives of the North Western Synod Executive. The most obvious Synod was Mersey, where we might eventually be grouped with other Cheshire congregations. The formal meeting with representatives of North Western and Mersey Synods on 14 December 2022 brought further understanding and focus.

“We believe that in discerning God’s call, approval by the church is of utmost importance. The Macclesfield & Bollington Church Meeting on 8 January, with the unanimous support of the Elders, gave a ringing endorsement of the proposal to move to Mersey Synod. There were no contrary voices and the two abstentions reflected a proper measure of sadness in contemplating the dissolution of the existing bond with North Western Synod.”

A Synod Meeting was held in North Western Synod on the 20 February 2023 where, following prayerful consideration of Macclesfield and Bollington’s request, North Western Synod supported and endorsed their thinking. In love, a resolution was then sent to Mersey Synod who met on the 11 March 2023. Further prayerful discussion and conversation about Macclesfield and Bollington’s request led to Mersey expressing a wish to welcome the church into the Mersey Synod.

Paper X5

Bristol Korean Church becoming a local United Reformed Church

South Western Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Rachel Leach synodclerk@urcsouthwest.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 78 General Assembly receives The Bristol Korean Church as a local church of the United Reformed Church.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The South Western Synod receives with delight the request from The Bristol Korean Church to become a local United Reformed Church. We request General Assembly to authorise this.
Main points	The Bristol Korean Church wishes to become a local United Reformed Church, having been until now a Mission Project of the URC. The South Western Synod voted to bring the above resolution to General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	South Western Synod Secretary for Ministries.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	This is built on and will continue to foster relations with the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

Paper Z1

Life after 50?

Synod Moderators

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Herbert dave.herbert@urc-northernsynod.org
Action required	Discussion. Potential to be a conversation starter at local church level.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The report is offered to General Assembly and local churches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to reassess priorities to create space to envision and birth creative initiatives to embrace future uncertainty as a necessary part of kingdom-living to appreciate how God can use us, even as we are to find renewed confidence and hope.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider how it feels to be part of the United Reformed Church in its sixth decade To help us think about looking ahead as well as looking back To be more comfortable with who and what we are, and think less about what we are not Providing the necessary space time and resources for pioneer work To enable people to see we already have all we need to be the people of God, recognising God's provision.
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' Reports to General Assembly.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	No direct impact from the report.
External (eg ecumenical)	Potential for local churches to reflect on mission, examine priorities in a constantly changing mission context.

Life after 50?

1. So, the United Reformed Church has marked her jubilee year, and the last of the celebrations have taken place. The extra events and activities have run their course – worship both local and national, trees planted, meals shared, and many words written. Life after 50. How is it feeling? What is age? Only a number. It's how you feel, isn't it? So the adage goes.
2. The United Reformed Church is now into her sixth decade. Relatively speaking being in our 50's pales into insignificance when we think of much older Christian traditions! But on a more human individual scale, by the time we reach our 50's some pennies hopefully have begun to drop; some of life's most sweet and bitter experiences have left their mark; our earlier years, all those triumphs and disasters, begin to feel like a life lived by another, not ourselves.

Looking back, looking ahead

3. Looking back over the decades it is true we see much continuity, along with much significant change too. Looking ahead we are trying to be more fleet of foot and as ever we are called along with all God's people to proactively respond to a rapidly changing mission context, fresh vision with pentecostal power as relevant and effective as it ever has been or will be. Although we are much smaller in the eyes of the world, can we really convince ourselves that God could truly have finished with us? Not at all!

*Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts.
Zecchariah 4:6b NRSV*

4. As we consider how much smaller we are than when we began in 1972, let's avoid sinking into the rabbit holes of frustration or disappointment in the way we see our particular expression of the body of Christ as the United Reformed Church, and instead become more comfortable in our own skin, as can sometimes happen in our later decades. For example, most of us might well know of a local congregation with an aging profile yet reaches out to a local nursing home/sheltered housing to great effect. We are navigating uncharted waters and sailing into a changing mission context which will necessitate changes across the whole Church on a scale not seen in these islands since the Reformation. The Church is not dying, but we are in transition. When Good Friday seemed to mark an existential calamity, Easter dawn was around the corner, and Jesus' followers soon came to understand this was a new beginning, and it had not turned out to be an end as they had feared. No denomination comes out of nowhere, nor does any part of the body of Christ ever wholly disappear into oblivion in the relay marathon of God's salvific history. Today the Gospel addresses the human condition and humanity's place in creation as effectively as it ever did. Our God is not a cruel God who invites us into divine mission and in the process sets us up to fail. God's promises are true.

Becoming older, becoming more comfortable in our own skin

5. To be more comfortable in our own skin is not to be resigned to complacency, resignation, or consumed with wistful self-awareness that we cannot somehow turn the clock back. Quite the opposite! It is to be aware of who and what we are, to remember how God repeatedly works through the most unlikely of lives and in the most surprising ways. For example, the young shepherd David was asked to be something he was not, but understood he needed to be himself to fulfil his task of

defeating the taunting, intimidating Goliath, and so it must be for the United Reformed Church as we grow into our own skin and be comfortable in it.

Saul clothed David with his armour; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. David strapped Saul's sword over the armour, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them." So David removed them. Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd's bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

1 Samuel 17:38-40 NRSV

Saul and no doubt David's older brothers and everyone else present wanted to arm him to the teeth in a way which weighed him down – he did not have the size or strength sufficient for their conventional wisdom. Happily for the Israelite camp David possessed sufficient insight and confidence not to humour Saul, but instead cast off the armour pinning him down to the point of not being able to walk, and instead drew on his personal faith, shepherding experience, and reason as he stepped out into combat in apparent, but ultimately for Goliath lethal, vulnerability.

6. Maybe the world or our own inner inclinations nudge us to a conventional wisdom that what we need is a bigger church to fulfil God's purposes through us; or maybe a richer church; or newer buildings, or the list goes on. We can become absorbed, consumed by what we are not, but instead let's draw wisdom from young David's example, and depend on who we are, rather than pine for who and what we are not. David stepped out in faith, cloaked not in the world's power and wisdom, but in God's hands with discernment and trust. That is the spirit in which the United Reformed Church is to step out into our uncertain future, reassured that an uncertain future actually is the norm, that many of our forebears in the faith, and successors, will have or will face the same test of confidence and faith.

More lean, lithe, and fleet of foot

7. Can we usefully draw closer to a self-awareness that enables us not to try and be what we are not? For example compared with the church of fifty years ago – we are much smaller, so let's not see that as a weakness, rather let's adapt and capitalise on how we are leaner and possess a lighter footprint, to explore new ways of being and doing church, and explore a more mixed ecclesial economy and recognise how one manifestation of congregational life, backbone of the United Reformed Church though it is, is not necessarily appropriate in every context. All this is made more possible precisely because we are now far more fleet of foot and agile, necessarily focusing on fewer core tasks, looking to wider resources and networks beyond our own immediate in-house resources, and using them well. There are already multiple good examples across our synods of small congregations in rural, urban and suburban neighbourhoods, who decided to find alternative premises when their older church buildings became burdensome, so finding a new lease of life. Such moves are often experienced as liberating, and in themselves open up the possibilities of hitherto unexplored partnerships and opportunities.
8. Let's nurture a culture whereby we focus on resourcing local congregations to have every opportunity to engage in God's mission in their own communities while making a habit of making space, giving time, and resourcing innovative pioneer initiatives some of which will be conduits into sustainable ways of discipling, service, and proclamation.

9. Let's rediscover afresh through receptive ecumenism what it is that we can bring to the ecumenical table while equally importantly discovering what it is we can learn from sisters and brothers in other denominations and traditions that will enhance our presence, purpose, and proclamation in the mission context of Great Britain and wider global village in the 21st Century. For example, those congregations who have found new capacity for mission through sharing with ecumenical neighbours and thereby making a difference in their local communities beyond their own capacity had they remained on their own.

We already have all we need to be the people of God

10. To be more comfortable in our own skin means to recognise that through our trust in God's promises we can rest assured that, whatever our circumstances and expression of the gospel we live and embody, we already have all we need to be the people of God wherever God has placed us and at any particular moment in time. Here is an illuminating illustration recorded in The Acts of the Apostles –

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them. But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.
The book of Acts 3: 1-8 NRSV

11. Expectations lie at the core of this encounter's dynamic: the expectations of not only the beggar but also the expectations on behalf of Peter and John and what they perceive they can bring to the situation. How can they restore this marginalised, impoverished and no doubt stigmatised individual back into his community? They are the first to openly concede they cannot provide the charity he is asking for, but they know they can offer something far more lasting and transformational in the name of Jesus. The beggar discovers a new beginning, new life, offering thanks and praise to God as he danced into the temple.

We already have all we need to be the people of God, right where we are.

12. Peter and John knew very well what they did not have. But more importantly they knew what they did have! We share the same love, compassion, prayer life, openness to the Holy Spirit, teachings of Jesus, and the same commission from the risen Christ. So may it be for the United Reformed Church as we eagerly discover what life in Christ after 50 will mean, and look ahead eager to remain activists and agents in God's economy.

Personalia

13. Since our last report to General Assembly we have said farewell to Brian Jolly. Ruth Whitehead and Simon Walking have accepted calls to local pastorates, and Dave Herbert retires at the end of July 2023 after which Northern Synod welcomes their new Moderator, Kim Plumpton. Paul Whittle will also have retired by the time next year's Moderators' Report is presented. Clare Downing has moved from Wessex to

be Moderator at North Western. Ron Reed, our minute secretary stepped down this year, and we are grateful to Shirley Miller for taking up the role. We are thankful for their significant contribution to the meeting. As a meeting we look forward to welcoming new colleagues who will serve in the Wessex, South Western, and Northern Synods along with the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.

Questions for discussion in local churches

1. What does being comfortable in our own skin mean in our local context?
2. What can we let go of to keep us lean, lithe, and fleet of foot as activists and agents in God's economy?
3. What does it take for us to realise we already have all we need to be the people of God?
4. How can we carve out the space and time to consider new initiatives?

Resolutions

Resolution 1

page 24

General Assembly:

- a) removes any reference to the now defunct Incapacity Process from the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group terms of reference;
- b) adds oversight of the Complaints Process (section Q) to the remit of the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group;
- c) renames the Ministerial Disciplinary and Incapacity Processes Advisory Group as the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group;
- d) notes that Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group may be abbreviated as CDAG.

Resolution 2

page 26

1. General Assembly resolves to change paragraph 2(6)(i) of the Structure with effect from the close of General Assembly 2023, removing text struck through, and inserting new text in italics:

The current text reads:

- i. ~~Two in total~~ *Such number as the General Assembly shall from time to time determine* from the following: former Moderators of the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, past chairmen of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, past presidents of the Congregational Church in England and Wales, former Moderators of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, former chairmen or presidents of the Annual Conference of the Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, former presidents of the Annual Conference of the Re-formed Association of Churches of Christ in Great Britain and Ireland, provided that such former officers are members of the United Reformed Church and that they shall have been elected by a college consisting of all such past and former Moderators, presidents and chairmen as are members of the United Reformed Church;

Resolution 3

page 26

General Assembly determines the number of former Moderators to be members of General Assembly in that category shall be FOUR for the time being.

Resolution 4

page 29

1. General Assembly authorises the Business Committee and the General Secretariat to begin conversations with the URC Trust on behalf of the General Assembly concerning the nature of the relationship between the United Reformed Church and the United Reformed Church Trust.

Resolution 5

page 29

2. General Assembly also authorises the Assembly Officers to appoint anyone else they deem necessary to represent the General Assembly in these conversations if urgency means that such an appointment cannot wait until Assembly Executive or the next General Assembly.

Resolution 6 **page 29**

3. General Assembly requires any proposed changes to the relationship between the General Assembly and the URC Trust be brought to a future General Assembly, or Assembly Executive in the case of urgent matters, for agreement.

Resolution 7 **page 29**

4. General Assembly authorises the Chief Operating Officer to commence a consultation with all Church House employees under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 regarding transferring their employment from the Church to the United Reformed Church Trust.

Resolution 8 **page 29**

General Assembly authorises all future new contracts and contract renewals relating to its work to be taken out by the United Reformed Church Trust rather than in the name of the Church.

Resolution 9 **page 34**

General Assembly authorises the Assembly Officers to make any appointments of Synod Moderators that cannot wait until Assembly Executive or the next meeting of the General Assembly until General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 10 **page 36**

General Assembly Instructs the Business Committee to consult widely and bring costed proposals for a URC-wide Mediation and Reconciliation Service to Assembly Executive 2023.

Resolution 11 **page 38**

1. General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

Resolution 12 **page 38**

2. General Assembly acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.

Resolution 13 **page 38**

3. General Assembly believes there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 14 **page 45**

General Assembly adopts the Communications Strategy, and instructs the Communications Committee and Communications Team to:

- undertake a research project to build a communications profile of each local church and Synod
- to produce a series of easy-to-use, time saving toolkits to help churches to communicate more effectively
- to create a network of Communications Advocates in each Synod who can be an informal link between the Communications Team, resources available, and local churches and the Synods
- share the new Design and Digital Visual Identity Guide.

Resolution 15

page 45

General Assembly requests that the URC website, www.urch.org.uk, be the website on which all Assembly-approved work is hosted, making searching for URC resources and information easier. General Assembly tasks the Communications Committee and the Communications Team to work with those hosting URC websites outside of the URC's domain to consolidate those websites into the URC's website by General Assembly 2025.

Resolution 16

page 45

General Assembly urges all churches without a website, or with a website that has been inactive for more than six months, to use iChurch to engage digitally with all those who are interested in attending worship or activities taking place in church buildings.

Resolution 17

page 46

General Assembly strongly encourages the United Reformed Church at all levels and in all teams to use the revised Design and Digital Visual Identity to ensure quality and consistency across the work of the denomination.

Resolution 18

page 46

General Assembly urges everyone connected to the Church to read *Reform*, the magazine of the URC, either in print or digitally.

Resolution 19

page 46

The United Reformed Church thanks all who helped with the Church's 50th anniversary.

Resolution 20

page 76

Assembly resolves to alter the guidance given in Resolution 17 of 2014 so that the post of Principal of Westminster College shall be open to members of the United Reformed Church and to members of those Churches which belong to one or more of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council, Council for World Mission, World Council of Churches.

Resolution 21

page 82

General Assembly:

- a) affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred.

- b) recognises the church's failure to challenge the norms on which transphobia is built and acknowledges that sometimes it has perpetuated these norms.
- c) commits to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination.

Resolution 22**page 90**

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31 December 2022.

Resolution 23**page 92**

General Assembly encourages the Finance Committee, working with others, to continue developing and resourcing a URC Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund, taking account of views expressed about the report to General Assembly 2023 during the discussion of that report.

Resolution 24**page 100**

General Assembly resolves that going forward the target number of stipendiary ministers should be set so that the direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget moves in line with the most recent changes in M&M giving, which are known before the start of each relevant year.

Resolution 25**page 100**

Recognising that further work is required to ensure this policy is introduced at an appropriate time and in a way which is workable for Ministries Committee's planning purposes, General Assembly directs that the disregard of the 2012 policy by the Finance Committee and URC Trust in preparing the 2023 budget should be extended to apply also to the 2024 budget with firm proposals for the date of introduction of the new policy and details of its implementation being brought for consideration by the 2024 General Assembly.

Resolution 26**page 104**

General Assembly resolves that half of the current balance in the URC Legacy Fund be transferred to the Annenberg Fund with a view to that latter fund being available to meet expenditure of Church Life Review projects on external expertise and/or capacity building, such as temporary additional staffing.

Resolution 27**page 116**

General Assembly adopts the updated URC Core Competencies for Church Related Community Workers.

Resolution 28**page 118**

General Assembly adopts the URC Pastoral Supervision Policy.

Resolution 29**page 125**

General Assembly adopts the updates to the URC Policy for the Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age (formerly Duty to Consider).

Resolution 30

page 129

General Assembly adopts the URC Withdrawal of Call Policy and Procedure.

Resolution 31

page 158

In response to the gospel call to challenge poverty and structures that cause marginalisation, General Assembly:

- a) expresses its deep concern at the rising levels of poverty in the UK over the last 15 years, recognising that in a wealthy economy such as the UK, poverty is not inevitable but a result of political choices and systemic injustices
- b) calls upon political leaders to make a commitment to work towards the eradication of structural poverty in the UK, and encourages churches and church members to raise these issues with candidates in the lead-up to the next General Election
- c) asks the Mission and Ministries Committees and the Synods to reflect on how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission, and bring proposals, if appropriate, to a future General Assembly.

Resolution 32

page 166

1. General Assembly resolves that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Officers of the General Assembly
- The General Secretariat
- Staff Secretaries
- Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries
- Synod Moderators
- Synod Clerks
- Members of the Panel for General Assembly appointments
- Members of the Assessment board
- The Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline
- The Disciplinary Investigation Panel
- The Commission Panel
- The Disciplinary Appeals Commission List
- The CYDO+ Team
- Synod Racial Justice Coordinators and Advocates (RJAs)
- Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (Categories 1, 2, 5 and 8 as defined in the Active Ministers Policy, Paper H5 Assembly Executive 2021)
- Members of Assembly Committees and Advisory Groups
- Training and Development Officers (TD+ Network)
- Synod Mission Enablers.

Resolution 33

page 167

2. General Assembly asks the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Ministries and Education and Learning Departments to explore how and when

anti-racism training can be rolled out more widely in the URC, particularly to include those roles defined as URC Office holders.

Resolution 34

page 167

3. General Assembly endorses the schedule and timetable of mandatory anti-racism training outlined in the Legacies of Slavery Task Group report and agrees an initial budget of up to £20,000 to meet the cost of training sessions and related expenses up to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 35

page 167

4. General Assembly recognises that further funds will be required as the anti-racism training is rolled out more widely, and asks the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to bring updated costings to General Assembly 2024 informed by the actual costs incurred in delivering the early stages of the training.

Resolution 36

page 167

5. General Assembly endorses the work of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, the direction of travel outlined in the task group's report, and asks the task group to continue its exploration of regional and global proposals, aiming to bring costed proposals to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 37

page 167

6. General Assembly asks Mission Committee to maintain the existence of a Legacies of Slavery Task Group to steer the future work as outlined in the task group report.

Resolution 38

page 174

1. General Assembly endorses the measures for ecumenical working and resource sharing outlined in Reinvigorating the Ecumenical Vision of the URC Part 2 and encourages Synods to consider how they might make use of them to assist in addressing the areas of under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments and in developing new ecumenical relationships.

Resolution 39

page 174

General Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee to allocate six ministry of Word and Sacraments posts, available to Synods by application and open to all Ministers of Word and Sacraments with a specific call to ecumenical working, and which will not reduce Synod stipendiary ministry deployment targets, to provide ordained ministry of word and sacrament in identified local ecumenical contexts, whether existing or new.

Resolution 40

page 183

1. General Assembly offers profound thanks to Mr Ian Hardie for his work as URC Treasurer over the past six years.

Resolution 41

page 183

2. General Assembly appoints Mr Alan Yates to serve as URC Treasurer from General Assembly 2023 to General Assembly 2029.

Resolution 42

page 183

General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 9 of this report, subject to the additions and corrections contained in supplementary reports to Assembly.

Resolution 43

page 210

General Assembly commends the five reflections on the theology of money to the whole United Reformed Church and its associated Charities and Trust Companies for prayer, reflection, and study.

Resolution 44

page 210

General Assembly Commends the Theos report: *The United Reformed Church: A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads* to local churches and Synods for prayer, study, and reflection.

Resolution 45

page 210

General Assembly commends to Synods and local churches the resource *Flourishing Churches* for prayer, study, reflection and action.

Resolution 46

page 210

General Assembly affirms the vital role of Synods in connecting, affirming, and resourcing local churches.

Resolution 47

page 210

General Assembly adopts the following Values and Principles as the basis for future decision making concerning the use and sharing of financial resources across Synods and the General Assembly:

Values:

- a) As the United Reformed Church, we value conciliar decision making where we:
 - listen to each other, and the urgings of the Holy Spirit
 - act with humility
 - act with grace and generosity
 - seek to consider the good of all God's people, fostering obedience to the Gospel and furthering justice and climate care, rather than narrow self-interest.
- b) We believe that transparency about our decision making helps us be accountable to each other, and to God, whose mission we seek to serve.
- c) We will use the charitable funds at our disposal lawfully and ensure the activity carried out with them is compliant.

Principles:

- a) We seek to use our resources *effectively*, and not just where some of us might shout loudly or on sustaining existing ways of being.
- b) We look to be *efficient*, as part of our commitment to good stewardship.

- c) We will take *considered risks* for the Kingdom.
- d) We prioritise *partnership* within and beyond the United Reformed Church.
- e) We value local *diversity* within the family of the United Reformed Church, rather than constraining uniformity.

Resolution 48

page 211

General Assembly believes God is calling us to financial resource sharing across the United Reformed Church in accordance with the values and principles it has adopted. It empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to appoint a task group to:

- a) Develop a range of different models of resource sharing.
- b) To carry out detailed feasibility work for each model.
- c) To determine what structural or legal changes might be necessary to enable each model to function.
- d) To evaluate each model against the Values and Principles General Assembly has adopted.
- e) To report back to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 49

page 211

General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a task group to explore ways in which, in accordance with the values and principles adopted, the wider Councils of the United Reformed Church might offer consistent, locally accessible, support functions for local churches in areas including (but not exclusively):

- finance
- property
- health and safety
- human resources
- safeguarding.

It asks the task group to bring a model, or models, to General Assembly 2024 with feasibility studies and costings.

Resolution 50

page 212

General Assembly invites the General Secretariat and PLATO to re-establish the PLATO handbook (or equivalent), providing a central online resource of advice and pro-formas for trust, property, financial and related matters for local congregations, to be available on-line at the latest by General Assembly 2025.

Resolution 51

page 212

General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a working group to examine:

- a) What models of employed lay work can be effective within local churches.

- b) What infrastructure is necessary to be provided by the wider church to support employed lay ministry in local churches.
- c) How mission and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.

Resolution 52

page 228

1. Principles

- a) General Assembly adopts the following principles in making decisions about its Committee structures:
 - i. The General Assembly will provide the infrastructure and resources necessary to efficiently support the work of local churches and Synods.
 - ii. The General Assembly will only exercise the functions of the life of the Church that are not more appropriately carried out at local or Synod level.
 - iii. The General Assembly will reduce the number of committees and people required to populate the committee structure to make it proportionate to the current size of the United Reformed Church.
 - iv. The General Assembly will ensure coherence between the Committee Structure and the General Assembly staffing structure to facilitate joined-up strategic thinking and operations.
- b) The committees of the General Assembly will:
 - i. provide integrated decision making and delivery between different areas of General Assembly work as much as is possible to avoid duplication or lack of coherence.
 - ii. work only at the level of strategy, policy and governance.
 - iii. be scalable, allowing work to contract or expand as the needs and overall size and level of activity of the Church changes.
 - iv. trust General Assembly staff and Office holders to make operational adopted strategies and policies, ensuring accountability through appropriate governance structures.

Resolution 53

page 229

- 2. General Assembly amends the composition of the Business Committee to be made up of:
 - a) An Independent Convenor (who shall be an officer of the General Assembly).
 - b) The General Secretary who shall serve as Executive Secretary.
 - c) The Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - d) The immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - e) The incoming Moderator of the General Assembly.
 - f) The Clerk to the General Assembly.
 - g) The Treasurer to the General Assembly.
 - h) The other members of the General Secretariat.
 - i) Two members appointed by the General Assembly to reflect the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church, one of whom will normally be under the age of 26.
 - j) The Business Committee may invite others to be in attendance when it will assist the making of Assembly Arrangements or the strategic oversight of the business of the Church.

- b. General Assembly adopts the following Terms of Reference for the Business Committee:
- a) To oversee the practical arrangements of meetings of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.
 - b) To oversee and order the business of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive.
 - c) To keep a strategic overview of the work of the General Assembly, facilitating the coherence of business across the various committees of the church.
 - d) To ensure the coherence of the strategies of the General Assembly, good governance, and the operational work of the Assembly.
 - e) When necessary, instigate new business to ensure the wellbeing of the work of the General Assembly.
 - f) In urgent circumstances to take any necessary decisions on behalf of the General Assembly in between meetings of the Assembly or Assembly Executive and to report them to the next meeting of the Assembly or Assembly Executive.

Resolution 54

page 230

3. General Assembly:
- a) Determines that all Nominations to serve the ongoing work of the General Assembly will be made in accordance with Safer Recruitment policies.
 - b) Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the officers of the current Nominations Committee, to appoint a Nominations Committee of six members, reflecting the diversity of the Church. Its Terms of Reference will be:
 - i. To adopt and keep up to date processes for Nominations, including proformas for application forms, guidance for interviews, and other resources necessary to facilitate the nominations process.
 - ii. To receive from Committees (on behalf of themselves, or subcommittees, groups, panels, boards or representatives to outside bodies that are accountable to them), and external bodies Role Descriptions and Person Specifications, and to disseminate these widely through a variety of communications approaches and through Nominations Champions, seeking nominations and applications.
 - iii. To receive from Committees, Groups, Boards and external bodies names of people who have applied, been interviewed, and received appropriate references. To check that appropriate process has been followed, that appointments would recognise appropriate diversity, and when approved, forward names to General Assembly or Assembly Executive to confirm appointment. Committees are responsible for interviewing for any subcommittees or boards/panels that are accountable to them, or representatives to bodies that report to them.
 - iv. To maintain a list of those available to serve on recruitment processes for General Assembly ministerial or staff appointments and to forward to the General Assembly or the Assembly Executive the names of those appointed or nominated for appointment.
 - v. External bodies requesting representation from the United Reformed Church as set out in their governing documents will be responsible for role descriptions, and (where appropriate and possible) interviewing, the Nominations Committee will collect references.

- vi. To support and enable Nominations Advocates to effectively disseminate opportunities for service within their networks.
- c) Instructs each Synod, URC Youth and the Racial Justice Advocates Network (working with the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries) to each appoint a 'Nominations Champion' to be responsible for assisting with the dissemination of opportunities for service within their respective networks.
- d) Instructs the Business Committee, in consultation with the Officers of the current Nominations Committee, to bring this new process into being as soon as possible.
- e) Recognises the need for staff administrative support for the good functioning of this process and instructs the General Secretariat to enable this.

Resolution 55

page 231

- 4. General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to appoint an independent external consultant to advise on the range of our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work, and a small reference group of three to support their work. The remit should include:
 - a) Mapping the current work of the General Assembly in the field of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and assessing its effectiveness.
 - b) Engaging with the work of ecumenical partners and others in the charity sector to ascertain best practice which might inform our work.
 - c) Advising on a draft Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.
 - d) Advising on appropriate structures and mechanisms to enable the delivery of an EDI policy and effective accountability mechanisms.
 - e) The Business Committee should report to General Assembly 2024 on the progress of this work bringing any appropriate resolutions.

Resolution 56

page 232

- 5. General Assembly renames the Faith and Order Committee the 'Worship, Faith and Order Committee' with the following membership:
 - a) A Convenor
 - b) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations
 - c) The Minister for Digital Worship
 - d) Five members appointed by the General Assembly
 - e) The Secretary for Ecumenical Relations or the Minister for Digital worship will normally function as the Secretary for the Committee.
 - f) General Assembly adopts the following remit for the Worship, Faith and Order Committee
 - g) to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
 - h) to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
 - i) to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order

- j) to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- k) to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order
- l) to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship.
- m) to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

Resolution 57

page 233

6. General Assembly thanks the members of the Worship Reference Group for their service and dissolves the group from the close of General Assembly 2023.

Resolution 58

page 233

7. General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to oversee a consultation process, to be led by the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship, involving representatives of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Education and Learning Committee and the Ministries Committee, leading to proposals for the further integration of their work, including proposals for further structural integration. These should be in line with the principles adopted in Resolution X.
- a) If external facilitation is required to achieve a constructive outcome, the Business Committee is empowered, after consultation with those concerned, to appoint an external facilitator to assist the process.
 - b) Invites the Business Committee to bring back further proposals, emerging from this consultation exercise, to either Assembly Executive or General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 59

page 233

8. General Assembly agrees in principle to the creation of one Resources Committee to bring together responsibility for the areas currently covered by the Church House Management Group, the Communications Committee, the Finance Committee, and the Human Resource Advisory Group.

It agrees the membership of the Committee to be:

- a) A Convenor (who may be the Treasurer).
- b) The Treasurer (if not the Convenor).
- c) The Chief Operating Officer (who will be the Executive Secretary).
- d) The Chief Finance Officer.
- e) Five further members, reflecting the diversity of the Church, with collective expertise in the areas of: finance, property, human resources and communications.

Resolution 60

page 234

9. General Assembly invites the Nominations Committee to begin to populate a committee to serve from the close of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 61

page 234

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to bring full terms of reference for the committee to Assembly Executive 2024 for adoption.

Resolution 62

page 288

1. General Assembly resolves that, for the avoidance of doubt, any volunteer serving the General Assembly may in principle be treated under the Disciplinary Process for Office-holders.

Resolution 63

page 288

General Assembly removes the entirety of section 4 of the Rules of Procedure, 'suspension and removal of volunteers serving at denominational level', as this is no longer needed.

Resolution 64

page 290

Change of working in Section O 5.2

Current wording:

5.2 If the Investigation Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a prima facie case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline. On receiving such a report the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline must take safeguarding advice, and must then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point, save that it may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration.

Proposed wording:

5.2 If the **Investigation** Team concludes that the allegations against a minister do not amount to a prima facie case, or that even if proven they would not merit formal disciplinary sanctions, the Team will report accordingly to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline. On receiving such a report, the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline must take safeguarding advice and may refer the report back to the Team on one occasion for reconsideration. It must then send the report to the minister for comment. The ASPD will then consider the report, any response from the minister, and then declare the Process and any suspension terminated from that point.

Resolution 65

page 292

Assembly amends Section O Appendix J by inserting:

A new paragraph 3:

In deciding whether to impose a suspension or not, the Synod Moderator (in cases of urgency), the Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline, or the Assembly Commission for Discipline (as the case may be) must consider:

- i. the nature of the allegations made against the minister and/or any admissions made which, if proven, would indicate that serious misconduct had occurred,
- ii. any ongoing risks to individuals or to the credibility of the Church's witness,
- iii. any risk of interference with evidence or witnesses,
- iv. the length of time which has elapsed since the occurrence of the alleged/admitted misconduct and the conduct of the minister during the intervening period,
- v. advice from the Safeguarding Officer, and

- vi. more generally whether it would be reasonable in the particular circumstances of the case to impose a suspension.

Amendment of existing paragraph 3:

Any decision to suspend a minister must be communicated immediately by the Moderator making the decision, any member of the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline making the decision, or the Secretary of Assembly Commissions for Discipline if the decision is made by a Commission. It must be accompanied by a brief statement of reasons. Suspension takes effect immediately upon notification by any method. If the decision is initially communicated orally, a note is to be made of the time of the communication, and a written confirmation notice of suspension signed by the person notifying the suspension must be delivered to the minister as soon as practical thereafter. **The written notice of suspension must contain the following:**

- i. the reasons for the minister's suspension,
- ii. that suspension does not imply any view about the correctness of any allegations made concerning the minister
- iii. that suspension does not affect any stipend or pension arrangements
- iv. that any conduct on the minister's part during the suspension which breaches or contravenes either Paragraph 4 of Schedule E to the Basis of Union or the Paragraph 4 Part II of Schedule F to the Basis of Union (whichever is relevant) may be taken into account by the Assembly Commission or, in the event of an appeal, by the Appeals Commission.

Add a new paragraph 4

If, in the opinion of the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline or the Assembly Commission for Discipline, and considering safeguarding advice, it seems wise, a minister may be suspended for only part of their role. (For example, when a minister is in a multi-church pastorate and the alleged misconduct does not impact the other churches or the credibility of the Church's witness.) A clear notice of suspension will be drawn up with the statements outlined in paragraph 3, above, making clear which areas of ministry the minister is suspended from and which areas may continue, and served upon the minister.

And renumbering the remaining paragraphs.

Resolution 66

page 295

Assembly Amends Section O Appendix M as follows:

Insert new paragraph 10:

When a caution contains steps to be taken to remedy any harm and ensure the admitted misconduct is not repeated, the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those steps and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to undertake those steps.

Resolution 67

page 295

Assembly Amends Section O Appendix S as follows:

Insert new paragraph 3 and renumber:

When a warning contains directions the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those directions and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to abide by them.

Insert a new paragraph 8 and renumber:

When directions are issued along with a curtailment, the Ministries Committee will appoint two people to work with the Moderator of the Synod concerned or, in the case of General Assembly posts, the Assembly Representative for Discipline, to monitor compliance with those directions and to refer back to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline any failure to abide by them.

Resolution 68

page 297

Assembly Amends Section O Appendix K to read:

1: The Disciplinary Investigation Panel comprises up to ~~twenty-four~~ thirty members of the United Reformed Church appointed by the General Assembly or, in its name, by ~~Mission Council~~ Assembly Executive...

Resolution 69

page 298

General Assembly:

- a) abolishes the procedure outlined in Section P of the Manual “Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers”
- b) rescinds Resolutions 14 and 15 from the 2007 meeting of the General Assembly and any and all resolutions passed since by Mission Council, Assembly Executive or the General Assembly concerning the content and operation of the Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers.
- c) removes the text of Section P Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers from the Manual of the United Reformed Church
- d) notes that all references in the Structure to the “Procedure for dealing with cases of incapacity involving ministers or Church-Related Community Workers” are now obsolete and shall be removed.

Resolution 70

page 306

General Assembly adopts the Whistleblowing Policy outlined in paper T2 of General Assembly 2023 and commends it to church meetings, Elders’ meetings and Synods for consideration, implementation and dissemination.

Resolution 71

page 314

From East Midlands Synod

- a) Out of its concern for its brothers and sisters in the Churches in Ukraine which are members with us in the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (the United Methodist Church in Ukraine, the German Evangelical Lutheran Church in Ukraine and in particular the Transcarpathian Reformed Church, the Reformed Church of Ukraine), the United Reformed Church sends greetings to the respective Conference and Synods of the three Churches.

General Assembly instructs the Mission and Finance Committees to determine what help can be given to our brothers and sisters in the Transcarpathian Reformed Church to assist in the eventual process of reconstruction as a result of the Russian invasion.

Resolution 72

page 316

General Assembly receives the online congregation YoURChurch as a local church of the URC, and commits to continuing further work on the issues of Church Membership.

Resolution 73

page 322

General Assembly expresses deep concern that the Illegal Migration Bill (2023) will change the law so that those who arrive in the UK illegally will not be able to apply for asylum here and will instead be detained and then promptly removed, either to their home country or a safe third country.

Resolution 74

page 322

General Assembly strongly objects to the Illegal Migration Bill since it potentially breaches the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953), of which the UK is a signatory.

Resolution 75

page 322

General Assembly recognises the aim of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in maintaining a legal standard of human dignity that reflects the nature of God revealed in the Bible, and urges the UK government to uphold it.

Resolution 76

page 322

General Assembly invites churches and members of the URC to write to their MPs expressing their opposition to the Illegal Migration Bill.

Resolution 77

page 324

General Assembly transfers Macclesfield & Bollington United Reformed Church from the North Western Synod into Mersey Synod, and instructs the two Synods to effect this transfer at a date convenient to all parties, and to notify that date to the General Secretary.

Resolution 78

page 326

General Assembly receives The Bristol Korean Church as a local church of the United Reformed Church.

Notes

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