



*They've asked me to be*  
**a member of**  
**General Assembly**



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## **Introduction**

This booklet has been written for those who've been asked if they will consider being a member of General Assembly – or indeed for those who are considering nominating someone. It seeks to give an overview of the role and obligations of being a member, as well as the work of the General Assembly itself.

## **What is the General Assembly?**

The General Assembly is a meeting held every July, and lasting for four days (Friday lunchtime to Monday lunchtime) in which Ministers, staff and other members of the United Reformed Church (URC), together with ecumenical representatives, deliberate upon and make serious and far-reaching decisions on the life, work and priorities of the denomination at home and abroad.

The Basis of Union states that Assembly 'shall embody the unity of the United Reformed Church and act as the central organ of its life and the final authority, under the Word of God and the promised guidance of the Holy Spirit, in all matters of doctrine and order and in all other concerns of its common life.'

## Who attends General Assembly?

The Assembly has several categories of members – each Synod has 16 representatives (this is the category of membership to which this booklet refers) and, in addition, the convenors of the Assembly committees attend as do a staff and student representative from each of the Resource Centres for Learning; some ecumenical representatives and one serving United Reformed Church military chaplain.

More information on the membership of the Assembly can be found on page 12 of section B of *The Manual* available on the URC website here: [www.bit.ly/URCmanual-B](http://www.bit.ly/URCmanual-B)

## How are the Synod representatives chosen?

In most Synods people are invited to nominate potential members – with the hope and intention that the synod Assembly reps will be fully representative of the synod which they represent, in terms of race, gender and age etc. One third of Synod reps are to be ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers, one third are to be lay members (many are elders, but this is not a requirement) and the remainder made up of individuals from either category.

In some cases, a person may be nominated because they have expertise in an area that will be the subject of major debate/ decision at General Assembly and such nominations are encouraged.

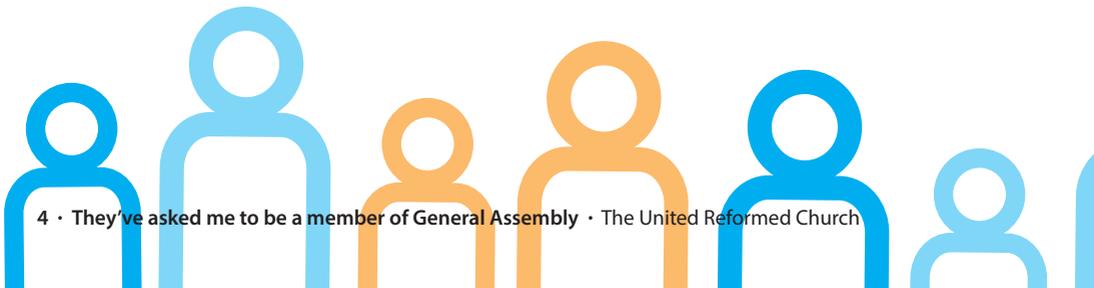
Membership is for a single Assembly so it's a one-year appointment, although the same person can go to consecutive Assemblies. There's no formal limit on the number of times a person can be a Synod rep, but it is good practice to avoid sending the same person continually.

## What happens at General Assembly?

General Assembly is important. As stated above, every meeting of the Assembly makes serious decisions on the life of the whole Church.

A wide array of subjects is considered; each report is first presented by those bringing the business (often a committee), and then debated on the floor of the Assembly before a vote is taken on the resolution(s) attached to the report. All members of Assembly have full speaking and voting rights and are encouraged to get involved in the business.

It's not all reports and resolutions – although the majority of time at Assembly will be spent on business, there is daily worship and a morning Bible Study as well as fringe meetings, the *Reform* Community Project Awards presentation and the opportunity to socialise with other members and guests during meals.



## What makes an effective member?

Effective Assembly members love God and seek to serve the Church. They also:

- understand the realities of local church life and the challenges they are facing; most of the decisions Assembly takes will affect local United Reformed churches; members who grasp the demands and pressures of modern church life will be in a position to make informed decisions
- are confident enough to speak publicly when they have something relevant to say ... but not so consumed with their own ego that they feel that they need to contribute to every debate! If you have something to say, have the courage to say it. Don't be frightened – you didn't sign up just to be a listener. Don't hide away at the back, sit forward, be engaged – you've been invited to attend in the hope you'll be active; so be prepared to participate
- take their role seriously – have read the *Book of Reports* and familiarised themselves with the issues to be debated at General Assembly. Being a member of Assembly is like, briefly, being a member of Parliament. Assembly, like Parliament, makes important decisions – the contribution you make, and the vote to have, is significant. If you are new to it, it's bound to be intimidating; there are formal procedures/points of order to understand, but there are people to help you and excellent information available.



Make sure you read *A brief guide to Frequently Asked Questions* by the Clerk of the Assembly. This is updated by the Clerk before every meeting of General Assembly and will be included in the information sent to all members.

## Obligations of members

The expectation is that members are there to attend and contribute to the debates and vote on the resolutions. Obviously, you can leave the hall for comfort breaks, but the clear expectation is you will be present for the vast majority of, if not every part of, the agenda.

But, as mentioned already, it's not all work, work, work.

## Beyond the business

Apart from the business, there are lots of other good things to enjoy. Explore the smaller/fringe meetings, attending those that tally with your own interests. Enjoy being in a hall full of people who know the words to all the worship songs and enjoy singing them!

And don't forget to socialise with other members. You could arrive at Assembly only knowing the people from your own Synod, indeed, it's possible you may not know anyone ... so take the opportunity to meet others; there are lots of interesting people at General Assembly – talk to those you sit beside at mealtimes and meetings. Everyone will be interested to learn about you

and your experiences of the United Reformed Church – it's great to realise you are part of something bigger than your local church and synod.

## After General Assembly

Members of the Assembly are expected to report back to their Synods and local churches with news from the Assembly. To help members report back quickly and accurately, the outcomes of many, if not all, of the debates, will be on the URC website [www.urch.org.uk/assembly](http://www.urch.org.uk/assembly), and in addition to the online coverage the communications team produce a printed round-up which is available to all, as are the daily minutes.

## The final word

Being a member of General Assembly is a privilege – you'll be at the very heart of the denomination's decision making.

Enjoy it. Participate with confidence and passion. You are there for a reason so make a difference.



This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at [www.urc.org.uk/ask](http://www.urc.org.uk/ask)



*The*  
**United  
Reformed  
Church**

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