

From the General Secretary,  
The Revd John Proctor

31 August 2018

To Church Secretaries

Dear Friends,

### **Matter referred from General Assembly for consideration by Church Meetings**

This letter comes on behalf of the Revd Michael Hopkins, Clerk to the General Assembly, as well as on my behalf. Any responses should be sent to me.

We write to you let you know about a matter that was discussed by the URC's General Assembly last month. This has been now referred to synods and to local Church Meetings for consideration, because it would involve changes to the Basis of Union of our Church.

The procedure for doing this is set out in Section 3(1) of the Structure. A change to our constitution of this kind is considered at a central council of the Church, then referred to synods [sometimes to local Church Meetings too], and finally brought back to a central council, where a firm decision may be taken. So this is now the middle stage of a three-part process. Responses from Church Meetings are requested by December 2019, to allow the matter to come back to General Assembly in 2020.

Assembly wanted to involve Church Meetings on this occasion because this resolution concerns the promises made by elders, and eldership is primarily an office in the local church. People in local churches have wisdom to share on this matter and a right to be heard.

If your Church Meeting wishes to resist this proposal, then you should pass a resolution that the matter "be not proceeded with" and notify me by the date indicated. If more than a third of Church Meetings reply in that vein, the matter will fall; otherwise it will proceed to Assembly in 2020, to be considered there. Further, whether you resist the proposal or support it, if you have comments to draw to Assembly's attention, you may send these to me and I shall pass them on.

If your local church is an LEP, please interpret 'Church Meeting' to refer to the nearest equivalent gathering that you have. Even if your congregation does not have elders as such, your people are still entitled to comment on this proposal.

Should you have any other questions about the procedure and its formalities, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



## RESOLUTION ABOUT THE PROMISES MADE BY ELDERS – response date 31 December 2019

General Assembly, meeting in Nottingham in July 2018, resolved to make the following addition to Schedule B of the Basis of Union, which sets out the promises made by elders of the Church:

### Question and Answer:

**Q. Do you promise as an elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always, so far as you are able, to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?**

**A. By the grace of God I do, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

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### Comment:

The thinking behind this resolution is set out on page 21 of the Assembly's *Book of Reports*, which is available on-line:

<https://www.urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Assembly2018/BookofReports2018w.pdf>

The main point is that the promises presently made by elders say little about what elders are expected to be and to do. This additional promise, although broad and general, is also quite weighty, and thus fills that gap.

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The Assembly would like this matter to be considered again by General Assembly 2020.

*The date for responses from Church Meetings to the General Secretary is therefore **31 December 2019**.*

Synods have been encouraged to discuss this matter at their autumn meetings in 2019, to give local congregations a chance to talk about it first. If that is the timetable your synod follows, then local church representatives at synod may well be able to contribute to the synod's discussion after hearing what their Church Meetings think. But local churches are also invited to send their own responses to the General Secretary, as outlined above.

*Michael Hopkins, Clerk to the General Assembly  
John Proctor, General Secretary  
August 2018*