

June 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**General Assembly  
Friday 9 to Monday 12 July 2021**

It is three years since the General Assembly last met in a form in which it could discuss, debate and discern together. Last year, Assembly met virtually for worship, and to induct officers of the Assembly, but not to make decisions; a brief meeting of Mission Council acting in its stead.

Then, it seemed an impossibility that General Assembly might function in a digital conferencing format. How little did we realise that by the time this year came around we would still be facing decisions about how to meet, but also that handling a meeting the size of the Assembly in a digital format would begin to feel quite normal.

It has been a time of immense change in all our lives, and in the life of the church. It is not only a time of great change, but a liminal moment: a moment when different futures become possible. It is a moment of the now and the not yet, when as I write, I do not know the precise context the pandemic will shape for us by the time we meet. Our faith speaks powerfully into liminal moments and moments of change and transition. They are moments that the Holy Spirit can be experienced as at work in profound ways.

Scripture is full of liminal moments, from the call of Abraham and Sarah to set out to where they did not know on the back of a promise that sounded most unlikely, to the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years, to a manger bed in a politically unstable part of the world leading the Christ child to become a refugee, to the call of disciples to fish for people, to the transfiguration of Christ on a mountain top leaving those with him transformed, to the ultimate transformations of death and the new life, of cross and resurrection – our faith is full of God at work in the midst of liminal moments.

As we gather for the Assembly, peering into our cameras and waving at one another through the ether, we know in our bones that nothing will ever be quite the same again, just as we also know the power of the allure of the familiar. We cannot guess at the shape we will be as a Church in five years time, never mind ten, never mind the church we will hand to the care of the generations who come after us.

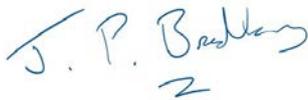
And yet, in the midst of that uncertainty, we know that Christ calls us to be his disciples, to follow the promptings of the Spirit, and to live and proclaim good news for the whole of creation. We know that God does not abandon God's people, but reshapes and restores them in ways the human mind can barely fathom.

This General Assembly is, in its way, a vital one in our life together. A moment in which we gather, in this liminal moment, and wait upon the movement of the Spirit. We have significant matters to discern. We will set off on a review of the life of the United Reformed Church, we will consider matters that might seem mundane, like pensions, but that will vitally shape the context for our work in the decades to come. We will have the opportunity to consider the initiating of new pieces of ministry for this digital age. In all this we will debate, discuss, discern and determine as we wait upon the movement of the Holy Spirit and as we are reshaped and restored to become a renewed church for a renewed moment in history.

My prayer is that, scattered in community, we will unite together the many and various gifts of the Spirit that we bring; we will be attentive to one another in love; that in one another's words we will discern the Word Christ is speaking to us. As you read this book of reports, I invite you to pray – that through the words on these pages, you will hear something of the call of God, that when we gather, our discernment may be rich and fertile.

The 'top table' of Assembly, along with the tech team will be gathered at Westminster College in Cambridge (where we hope the internet connection remains stable!) to enable us to better facilitate the smooth running of the Assembly. We will all be together, however, through the work of the Spirit. I pray that you will find in our scattered gathering, your faith nurtured, and your discipleship fed, as we are re-formed as the body of Christ, hearing and proclaiming good news for the world.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. P. Bradbury" with a small number "2" written below it.

John Bradbury  
General Secretary