



Section C: Rules of Procedure for the conduct of the United Reformed Church

1. General Assembly

- 1.1 The Assembly shall meet at least once in every alternate year. The scheduled meeting in each such year, the place and dates of which shall be determined by a preceding Assembly, shall be the ordinary meeting of the Assembly. At the completion of the business of the ordinary meeting of the Assembly, the Assembly is adjourned. The members of Assembly at any time between ordinary meetings of the Assembly remain those who were included on the Roll of Assembly at the constitution of the immediately preceding ordinary meeting of the Assembly. Any meeting of the Assembly other than the ordinary meeting shall be a special meeting.
- 1.2 A special meeting of the Assembly may be convened by the Mission Council or by either Moderator of the General Assembly.
- 1.3 All meetings of the Assembly shall be convened and held as provided by these rules. The Standing Orders which are printed in the Book of Reports to General Assembly shall apply to all meetings of the Assembly and the Mission Council and, in so far as they are applicable, to meetings of synods, district councils and their committees.
- 1.4 The Roll of Assembly shall be made up by the General Secretary. Synods shall send to the General Secretary, the names and addresses of their representatives to the forthcoming Assembly so as to reach the General Secretary not later than fourteen weeks before the meeting of the Assembly. Any necessary amendments to the list shall be notified to the General Secretary not later than two weeks before the meeting of the Assembly, at which time the roll shall be held to be complete.
- 1.5 When a synod cannot fill all its allotted places at Assembly, its vacant seats may be filled from other synods bearing in mind the need to balance lay and ministerial representation.

2. Business of the Assembly

- 2.1 Notice of any meeting of the Assembly shall be sent by post to each member as defined by Article 2 (5) (a) to (j) of the structure not less than 14 clear days before the date of meeting and shall contain a statement of the business to be transacted and the

reports to be received. No business other than that specified in the notice calling the meeting shall be transacted except business accepted by the Assembly on the advice of the Assembly arrangements committee.

- 2.2 The General Secretary shall dispatch to every member with the notice of the meeting a registration card. No member of the Assembly shall speak or vote at the Assembly unless possessing such a card and unless, when required to do so by the Moderator or the Moderator's deputy, displaying it.
- 2.3 The Assembly shall at its ordinary meeting appoint the members of the Assembly Committees all of which shall be constituted in accordance with the decision of the Assembly. Each committee shall discharge the functions assigned to it by the Assembly and report to the Assembly
- 2.4 When a resolution which directly concerns the life, status or witness of a named member or Minister of the United Reformed Church, a named local church or a church institution is brought to the Assembly by an Assembly committee or synod, and the individual or group feels aggrieved thereby,
 - 2.4.1 the individual or group may request the Clerk, not less than seven days before the opening of Assembly, for a hearing,
 - 2.4.2 the individual or two representatives of the group will be received, will be permitted to speak and will have their travel costs within the United Kingdom paid,
 - 2.4.3 and the time allowance for speaking will be equal in aggregate to that of the persons proposing the motion. Those speaking will follow the proposers at the start of the debate and precede the proposer at the end of the debate.
 - 2.4.4 An individual appellant may be accompanied by one other person whose name and status shall be made known to the Assembly and who may be permitted by the Moderator to speak if the appellant requests this.
- 2.5 When an amendment to the Basis of Union is proposed under paragraph 3(1) of the structure and the General Assembly gives first approval it shall at the same time decide whether or not following reference to the synods (and, where appropriate, to local churches) the change may be approved for a second time by the Mission Council. If not and providing that notice has not been received from synods (and/or local churches) as defined in clause 3(1)(f) a motion to agree the proposed amendment shall come before the General Assembly at its next meeting where it shall require a simple majority to be passed.

3. Moderators of the General Assembly

- 3.1 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be elected by ballot in accordance with these Rules. Each Moderator shall serve for two years commencing at the Assembly following the meeting at which the report of the election is received in accordance with Rule 3.10. The period of office shall be deemed to begin with the induction of

each Moderator and shall continue until that Moderator's successor is inducted into office. A Moderator will continue as immediate past Moderator until their successor ceases to be Moderator and therefore replaces them as immediate past Moderator.

- 3.2 The Moderators of the General Assembly shall be two in number, a minister or a church related community worker and an elder. The elder may be serving or non-serving but in all cases the names of those persons nominated to serve as Moderator must be included on the membership roll of a local church for that person to be eligible for nomination.
- 3.3 A nomination for election as Moderator of the General Assembly shall be made by a synod, the consent of the nominee not being required. The nomination shall be in writing under the hand of the Clerk of the synod and received by the General Secretary not later than the 31 March immediately preceding the Annual Meeting of the Assembly.
- 3.4 The General Secretary shall forthwith send to each person nominated a list of the nominations. Any nominee may, within ten days of the receipt of this list, withdraw from nomination by notice in writing to the General Secretary.
- 3.5 If after 31 March or after the period for withdrawal there shall be no nominations, in either or both categories, the General Secretary shall forthwith notify the Clerks of the synods and invite them to request nominations from the executive committees or equivalent of their synods. Such nominations, accompanied in each case by a note of the consent of the person nominated and a brief biography, must be in the hands of the General Secretary by 15 May.
- 3.6 In either category if after the period for withdrawal there is only one nomination, this nomination shall be placed before the Assembly and voted upon by secret ballot.
- 3.7 If the number of those who have been nominated in either category and have not withdrawn is or exceeds two, the election shall be by a secret ballot according to the principle of the single transferable vote. All members of the Assembly shall be entitled to vote. They shall vote by indicating their preference by figures 1, 2, 3 and so forth, but no voting paper shall be invalidated by the absence of alternative choices. If the tellers find that no name has an absolute majority of first choices, the second choices of those who gave as their first choice the name securing the smallest number of such choices shall be added to the first choices for other names. If necessary this process shall continue until one of the names has an absolute majority of votes cast. If the process continues until only two names remain, the person who then has the larger number of votes shall be elected.
- 3.8 Members of the Assembly shall vote by means of a voting paper containing the name, the usual designation and the church of membership, of each of those accepting nomination which shall be sent by the General Secretary by ordinary post to each such

member before the commencement of the ordinary meeting of the Assembly. Brief indication of the reasons for the nomination, as supplied by the synod, may be circulated with the ballot paper. The General Assembly may in any case authorise further means of informing the members about those accepting nomination.

- 3.9 Normally, the General Assembly shall vote to elect the Moderators of the Assembly by secret ballot as an item of business following prayer during the meeting of the Assembly. The ballot boxes shall be delivered to the tellers by whom alone they shall be opened. They shall report the result of the ballot to the Assembly at a later session.
- 3.10 As soon as the voting papers have been examined and the result of the poll ascertained, the voting papers shall be closed up under the seal of the tellers or any two of them, and shall be retained by the General Secretary for one month after the election, and shall then be destroyed.
- 3.11 At each ordinary meeting the Assembly shall appoint, upon the nomination of the nominations committee, three tellers to be responsible for the ballot for that year. The counting of the votes cast shall take place in secret under their supervision and control and they shall:
- 3.11.1 inform the General Secretary of the names of the persons elected and the General Secretary shall thereupon individually inform those nominated whether or not they have been elected.
- 3.11.2 report to the Assembly the names of the persons elected, the number of papers received and the number of papers which were invalid.
- 3.12 If any of the tellers appointed by the Assembly shall become incapable of acting the Moderator shall fill any such vacancy or vacancies and report that action to the Assembly.
- 3.13 Upon receipt of the report of the tellers by the Assembly the persons elected shall thereupon become the duly elected Moderators for the two years commencing at the next ordinary meeting of the Assembly.
- 3.14 Where the previous General Assembly at its ordinary meeting has failed to elect, or in the event of either or both of the persons elected to serve as Moderator becoming unable to serve more than 120 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5 for persons available to serve as Moderator for the coming Assembly. On receipt of those names, the General Secretary will inform all those whose names appeared on the roll of the previous Assembly of the nominations and send them a ballot paper. Those ballot papers shall be returned by post within five working days of receipt. Thereafter, the General Secretary shall deliver these ballot papers unopened to the tellers for the election of the Moderator who shall open and count the votes cast and report the

result of this election to the General Secretary in the same form as would have been reported to the General Assembly had this election been held during the Assembly.

- 3.15 If a Moderator is unable to take office fewer than 120 days and more than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly at which they were to have been inducted, then the Moderator currently in office shall continue in office until a successor is inducted. The General Secretary shall seek nominations from synods in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.3 to 3.5, and an election shall be held at the General Assembly in the manner prescribed in clauses 3.7 and 3.8, and the Moderator so elected shall be inducted during that meeting of Assembly.
- 3.16 If a Moderator is unable to take office fewer than 60 days before the first day of the meeting of the General Assembly, or resigns from office after induction, or is removed from office after induction, then the General Secretary shall forthwith initiate a postal ballot as described in clause 3.14, and the person so elected shall be inducted at the next meeting of the Mission Council, save that if this clause comes into effect less than nine months before the planned meeting of General Assembly, then the remaining Moderator shall serve alone until the next meeting of General Assembly.
- 3.17 During the temporary absence of a Moderator, the other Moderator may serve alone. In the event of a conflict of interest with the business under discussion, the most recent former Moderator without such conflict of interest, who is present and willing to serve, shall serve. If neither Moderator is present, the most recent former Moderator present and willing to serve shall serve.
4. Suspension and removal of volunteers serving at denominational level
- 4.1. For the avoidance of doubt, the following rules apply only to those who are serving in a voluntary capacity, and only to employees or Ministers of Word and Sacrament or church related community workers in so far as they undertake any additional voluntary work which is not part of any employment or scoping. For work which is employed or scoped, the relevant disciplinary processes apply in place of these rules.
- 4.2 Anyone with a concern about someone serving at denominational level should report that to the Clerk of the Assembly, or to the General Secretary. The officer receiving the concern shall conduct a preliminary enquiry as necessary to establish sufficient facts as to whether or not there is a prima facie case to answer. S/he shall report all of this to the two former Moderators of General Assembly who are members of General Assembly in that capacity, and the three together shall decide whether or not it is necessary to take the matter further.
- 4.3 In the case of those other than current officers of Assembly, or Moderator elect, or immediate past-Moderator, there shall be a standing panel of three persons, consisting of the two former Moderators of General Assembly who are members of General Assembly in that capacity, and either the Clerk of the Assembly or the General

Secretary. The Legal Adviser may be in attendance at any meetings of the panel. The former Moderator who served most recently shall convene the panel. A Moderator may be unable to serve for any number of reasons, including, but not limited to ill health, bereavement, or family circumstances. Such a situation should not be assumed to be disciplinary.

- 4.4 The panel shall investigate any complaint, and following consideration of evidence, are empowered:
- (a) to suspend a volunteer where the nature of the concerns raised require this, and
 - (b) to consider whether the individual concerned should be permitted to remain in office in cases where no other disciplinary procedure is appropriate or, where other procedures, if pursued to a conclusion, would leave this question unresolved.
 - (c) to recommend removal to a closed session of Mission Council or General Assembly, whichever meets first.
- 4.5 The normal order of proceedings before initiating the standing panel shall be first, any criminal investigation; second, any employee disciplinary proceedings; third, any procedure that could lead to deposition from ordained or commissioned office.
- 4.6 The standing panel shall be empowered to accept any resignation offered, which therefore terminates their work.
- 4.7 In the case of Assembly Officers, Moderators-elect, and immediate past Moderators, there shall be a standing panel of five persons, consisting of the two former Moderators of General Assembly who are members of General Assembly in that capacity, and the Convenors of the equalities committee, the faith and order committee, and the ministries committee. Where one individual holds more than one of these offices, or is unable to serve, the panel may co-opt any member(s) of General Assembly to fill the space(s), always providing that there shall be five members. The General Secretary, Clerk, and Legal Adviser, may be in attendance at any meetings of the panel, unless they are the subject of the process, but shall not be members of the panel. The former Moderator who served most recently shall convene the panel.
- 4.8 The panel shall investigate any complaint, and following consideration of evidence, are empowered:
- (a) to suspend a Moderator-elect or serving Moderator (or an immediate past Moderator in respect only of his/her automatic membership of Assembly and Mission Council) or other Officer where the nature of the concerns raised require this, and
 - (b) to consider whether the individual concerned should be permitted to take (or, if already serving, remain in) the Chair of the General Assembly or continue in their office in cases where no other disciplinary procedure is appropriate or, where other procedures, if pursued to a conclusion, would

- leave this question unresolved.
- (c) to recommend removal to a closed session of Mission Council or General Assembly, whichever meets first.
- 4.9 The normal order of proceedings before initiating the standing panel shall be: first, any criminal investigation; second, any employee disciplinary proceedings; third, any procedure that could lead to deposition from ordained or commissioned office.
- 4.10 The standing panel shall be empowered to accept any resignation offered, which therefore terminates their work.
5. General Secretary
- 5.1 The General Secretary, who shall be a minister of the United Reformed Church shall be appointed for a period of seven years renewable for the same term or such shorter period as the Assembly may determine. The appointment shall be made according to the following procedure.
- 5.2 The group to appoint or review the General Secretary shall consist of the Moderators of the General Assembly (one of whom shall act as Convener), the Clerk of the General Assembly (who shall act as Secretary), three Conveners of the Assembly standing committees, and six members of the appointment and review panel selected by the nominations committee. This group shall have the authority to make a nomination for the appointment or reappointment of a General Secretary. That nomination shall be brought to the next General Assembly or Mission Council for agreement.
6. Clerk of Assembly
- 6.1 The General Assembly shall appoint a Clerk of Assembly who shall be a member of the United Reformed Church. The nominations committee shall submit a name to the General Assembly for appointment as Clerk, for six years in the first instance, renewable for a maximum additional period of four years, but ensuring an overlap with a period of service of the General Secretary.
7. Structure
- 7.1 In Wales and Scotland there shall in each case be a single synod. The area of the church in England shall be divided into such number of synods as the Assembly on the recommendation of the Mission Council may from time to time determine.
- 7.2 A synod may constitute such committees and subcommittees as are required for the conduct of its business and may delegate to those committees or subcommittees such of its powers as it considers appropriate.
8. Moderators of synod

- 8.1 A Moderator for each synod who shall be a minister of the United Reformed Church shall be appointed by the General Assembly and be responsible to it.
- 8.2.1 Each Moderator shall be appointed for such term not exceeding seven years as the General Assembly shall in each case think fit, beginning on a date to be determined by the General Assembly, subject always to the provisions of Rule 8.2.3.
- 8.2.2 The General Assembly shall have power to determine any such appointment during its term or to renew any such appointment for successive terms of not more than five years each, subject always to the provisions of Rule 8.2.3.
- 8.2.3 Moderators shall not be eligible to hold office following the elapse of one month from their sixty eighth birthday unless the General Assembly in special circumstances determines otherwise.
- 8.3 The Moderators shall submit a report to each Assembly.
9. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review (structure, paragraph 5)
- 9.0 Limit of applicability. In single congregational Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, these rules shall only apply to business that clearly comes under the jurisdiction of the United Reformed Church, or when it has been agreed by the participating denominations that these rules be used. In such a case, ecumenical representatives may serve on a Commission, as agreed by all parties.

I – Appeals

- 9.1 The right to appeal from a decision of a Church Meeting belongs to (a) the elders' meeting of the local church concerned and (b) any dissident.
- 9.2 The right to appeal from a decision of an ecumenical area meeting belongs:
- 9.2.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to (a) the appellant in those proceedings, (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and (c) any dissident;
- 9.2.2 In the case of any other decision, to (a) the Church Meeting of any local church of the URC subject to the oversight of the area meeting and (b) any dissident.
- 9.3 The right to appeal from a decision of a synod belongs:
- 9.3.1 In the case of a decision in appeal proceedings, to (a) the appellant in those proceedings, (b) the respondent council in those proceedings and (c) any dissident;
- 9.3.2 In the case of any other decision, to (a) the Church Meeting of any local church subject to the oversight of the synod, (b) any ecumenical area meeting subject to the oversight of the synod and (c) any dissident.

- 9.4 The following time limits apply to appeals governed by rules 9.1 to 9.3: 9.4.1 The potential appellant must, within fourteen days of the decision, request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision.
- 9.4.2 This copy minute must be supplied within fourteen days of the request.
- 9.4.3 Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute, the appellant must notify his or her desire to appeal, in writing, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction. 9.4.4 For the purpose of rule 9.4.1, the date of a decision shall be
- (i) in the case of decisions taken at a plenary meeting of the synod, the date of that meeting;
 - (ii) in the case of decisions taken by officers or committees under powers delegated by the synod, the earliest of the following:
 - (a) the date on which the decision is communicated in writing to the appellant (or to Church Secretaries, if the appellant is a local church);
 - (b) the date of the next plenary meeting of the synod after the decision.
- 9.4.5 An appellant may appeal out of time, giving reasons for the delay, but such an appeal shall only be entertained if the Moderator and Clerk of the council with jurisdiction, after considering the reasons given for the delay and (if they think fit) inviting comments on behalf of the respondent council, so directs in the interests of the Church or of fairness.

- 9.5 On receiving due notice of a desire to appeal, the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council. The effect of this shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision in the appeal proceedings, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the respondent council, lifts the stay.

II – References

- 9.6 A council of the church wishing to refer a dispute or difference for resolution by a wider council under paragraph 5.2 of the structure may do so either without taking any decision of its own on the subject matter, or by submitting a decision it has already taken to the wider council's judgment.
- 9.7 The effect of a resolution to refer shall be to stay any action or further decision of the referring council on the subject matter of the reference pending a decision on that reference, unless the council with jurisdiction, on the application of the referring council, lifts the stay.
- 9.8 In either case the Clerk of the referring council must, within fourteen days of the resolution to refer, transmit to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction a copy minute of the resolution and the names of any members of the referring council who appear willing and able to present the issues to the council with jurisdiction.

III – Constitutional review

- 9.9 A decision of a synod or any more local council of the church which seems to be in contravention of the Basis of Union or the structure of the URC, the Rules of

Procedure, or a binding resolution of the General Assembly, and which is not already the subject of an appeal or reference may be considered for constitutional review on the application of

9.9.1 in the case of a synod decision,

- (a) any three members of the General Assembly or
- (b) a majority decision of the Assembly Officers
- (c) the resolution of any two Church Meetings within the synod taking the decision

9.9.2 in the case of any other decision,

- (a) any three members of the synod having oversight of the council taking the decision who are not also members of the council taking the decision or

9.9.3 in any case, of a council or person who would be entitled to appeal from the decision.

9.10 A council or person wishing to apply for constitutional review of a decision must request the Clerk of the respondent council, in writing, to supply a copy of the minute of the decision. This must be done within fourteen days after the applicant has become aware of the decision. The copy minute must be supplied within fourteen days of the request. Within fourteen days of receiving such copy minute, the applicant must notify his or her request for a review, in writing setting out their reasons, to the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction. In case of urgency the request may be notified in advance of receiving the copy minute.

9.11 The Clerk of the council with jurisdiction must forthwith notify the Clerk of the respondent council of the application, and the effect of this shall be to stay the action of the respondent council pending the decision on the review.

IV – Commissions, their procedure and their reports

9.12 As soon as the Clerk of the council with jurisdiction has received due notice of an appeal or reference the Officers of Assembly (in the case of the General Assembly), the executive committee or other body charged with the synod's business between sessions (in the case of a synod), or the corresponding organ of an ecumenical area meeting (in the case of such meeting) shall appoint a commission to hear the case and report to the full council. The commission shall consist of five members of the council with jurisdiction representing at least three different churches within that council, except that one person who is not such a member may be appointed in respect of some particular relevant expertise. That person must be a member of the United Reformed Church or, in the case of an ecumenical area meeting only, of one of the other denominations represented on the meeting. No individual personally concerned with the case may serve on the commission. The commission shall proceed as it sees fit subject to the following principles.

9.13 An appellant, or the applicants for constitutional review, shall have the right and may be required to appear at a meeting of the commission. A council referring a dispute or difference for resolution must also appear, unless the individuals named under rule 9.8

appear and the commission considers itself adequately informed regarding the issues in dispute. A respondent council must also appear in support of its decision.

- 9.14 Individual parties appear in person; a council of the church appears by two or more members authorised by the council to represent it.
- 9.15 Appeals, references and applications for constitutional review shall be accompanied by all relevant records and papers. Appellants and applicants shall be entitled to see such papers as they deem necessary in order to bring their case before the commission.
- 9.16 Commissions proceed in the matter in the following order:
- (a) call for and read minutes and papers relevant to the case
 - (b) hear and question the parties
 - (c) consider and decide upon their report in the absence of the parties
 - (d) the parties being recalled, intimate the decision to them
 - (e) report in writing to the council with jurisdiction through its Clerk, who supplies copies of the report to the parties.
- 9.17 The decision of the commission shall have effect as a decision of the full council that commissioned it. The commission's report shall be presented to the council with jurisdiction for information only, at the council's next meeting.
- 9.18 Decisions of the council in 9.17 may be appealed to the next wider council according to 9.1 above.
- 9.19 If a decision of any council of the church is reversed or declared a nullity on appeal or constitutional review, or the decision of a wider council substituted for it, the Clerk of the respondent council must annotate accordingly the record of the decision in that council's minute book, and enter in the minute book a copy of the wider council's decision.

V – Definitions

- 9.20 Throughout rule 9:
- 'appellant' means the person or council appealing to a wider council of the church
- 'Clerk', in relation to a Church Meeting, means the Church Secretary, and in relation to an ecumenical area meeting, means its secretary.

'constitutional review' has the meaning ascribed in paragraph 5.3 of the structure of the URC.

'council with jurisdiction' means the council competent to hear a particular appeal, reference or constitutional review.

'days' means days absolutely.

‘decision’ of a council of the church includes an express decision not to take any action, or the refusal by any council (or by the person presiding at its meeting) to consider a proposal for such action.

‘decision in appeal proceedings’ means the decision of a wider council of the church on appeal from a more local council.

‘dissentient’, in relation to any decision of a council of the church, means a member of that council, or a person directly affected by a decision of that council, who dissents from the decision.

‘ecumenical area meeting’ means an area of ecumenical cooperation as defined under paragraph 2(5) of the structure.

‘general decision’ means any decision of a council of the church except a decision in appeal proceedings. ‘minute’ of a decision includes, where no formal minute was made, a record of the decision made by the Clerk of the respondent council at the request of an appellant or a person applying for constitutional review ‘Moderator’, in relation to a council with jurisdiction, includes the presiding member, by whatever title, of an ecumenical area meeting. In relation to the General Assembly, the Moderators shall agree between themselves which one is to act in relation to a particular appeal as soon as it is notified, and the term ‘Moderator’ in this rule shall thereafter apply only to the Moderator so acting. A Moderator in the sense of this rule may however appoint a deputy to act under the rule throughout a particular appeal.

‘respondent council’ means the council of the church whose decision is currently under appeal to a wider council or has been referred for constitutional review.

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