

M: Assembly committees and their tasks

The task of Assembly committees is to carry out the policy of the Assembly and to advise the Assembly on matters which may need its decision. Many committees also relate to local churches and other Councils of the Church: the remit of each committee is shown below to help readers know which committee to contact if they have suggestions or questions. Further information on the work of the committees can be found on the URC website.

The Business committee

This committee plans and budgets for meetings of the URC's General Assembly and of its executive body, the Mission Council. It is responsible both for practical arrangements and for the planning and ordering of business.

The children's and youth work committee

This committee supports, encourages and promotes work among children and young people. It gives oversight to Pilots, to URC Youth, and to the Assembly elements of the Children's and Youth Development Officer (CYDO) programme. It works to facilitate the involvement of children and young people at every level throughout the church.

The communications committee

The communications committee oversees the internal and external communications of the denomination – including *Reform*, News Update and media releases. It also handles reputation management issues, and looks after the content and maintenance of the URC website and database, produces quality design and print, publishes URC books and reports and is the initial contact point for copyright enquiries.

The education and learning committee

The committee encourages and enables relevant training and learning throughout the whole Church. To this end it seeks to influence the ways we think about learning and the ways we do it, the content of courses, and the deployment of resources. It supports and helps other Assembly committees and the synods in training and development matters and it also maintains oversight of the initial and continuing development of ministers of word and sacraments, CRCWs and lay preachers.

The equalities committee

The role and remit of the equalities committee is to remind the denomination that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work – and to challenge the practice of the URC Church where appropriate. The committee does this by developing detailed equalities policies and monitoring their implementation and effectiveness, reporting regularly to General Assembly. It also has oversight of training programmes in inclusion and equalities.

The faith and order committee

This committee addresses issues of faith and order on behalf of the URC, advising the Church's officers and committees and responding to concerns raised throughout the Church. It participates in ecumenical discussions, and publishes occasional materials related to faith and order questions.

The finance committee

This committee is responsible for general oversight of the URC's central funds, ensuring that proper procedures are in place for the maintenance of accounting records, the safe custody of assets and the preparation of financial statements. It gives financial advice to other committees, Mission Council and Assembly, and manages the Church's finances and budgets within the policies set by General Assembly.

The ministries committee

The committee is responsible for the ministry of word and sacraments, church related community work, eldership and lay preaching. It oversees admissions, numbers and accreditation of new personnel, central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, colleges and universities and the armed forces, and the Special Category Ministry scheme. It has concern for the pastoral support of people who serve in all these spheres, and for their supervision, appraisal and accountability.

The mission committee

This committee works with the whole Church to encourage growth in discipleship, evangelism and witness, and to focus our task of 'being Christ's people, transformed by the Gospel, making a difference to the world' (General Assembly 2007). The committee therefore seeks to support local churches in their mission and evangelism, and to sustain and develop the Church's external relationships. It brings together the work of ecumenical, international and interfaith relations, racial justice and intercultural ministries, and public affairs (church and society). It oversees Commitment for Life, through which the URC contributes to international development, attends to the sending and receiving of mission personnel, particularly through the Council for World Mission, and seeks to support our people in their interfaith contact and conversation.

The nominations committee

This committee nominates to Assembly people to convene and to serve on all Assembly committees, suggests names of URC representatives on external and ecumenical bodies and proposes names for appointment groups for synod moderators and certain central staff.

The pastoral reference and welfare committee

This committee 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. Its work is necessarily confidential and is reported in general terms only, directly to the General Assembly.

This concludes the list of the Assembly's committees.

Of course, the committees do not work in isolation and the four related bodies listed below do important work: Mission Council acts as a coordinating body; the URC Trust acts as fiscal and legal guardian of the Church's assets and activities; the other two have an important measure of independence, so that they can steward substantial assets on behalf of some of the Church's people.

Mission Council

This acts as a co-coordinating body. One of the Moderators of General Assembly is in the chair. Each synod has three representatives and the Synod Moderators are also members. In addition, the convenors of all the Assembly committees are members, as are the officers of Assembly and members of the General Secretariat. The purpose of Mission Council is to support the work of General Assembly: it briefs Assembly on important business, manages some necessary detail, deals on Assembly's behalf with urgent matters, and seeks to keep the Church focused on the mission of God in the world. It will only do this well if it remains aware – through the representation of all the synods in its membership – of the pains and joys, concerns and hopes of the whole body that is the URC.

The United Reformed Church Trust

This charitable limited company is responsible for the properties and assets of the central Church, and also seeks to ensure denominational compliance with all legal requirements. It further offers strategic oversight in regard to the Church's use of its resources.

The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust

This limited company administers the Ministers' Pension Fund.

The United Reformed Church Retired Ministers' Housing Society

This registered Community Benefit Society helps many of our ministers and their widow(er)s to afford suitable housing in their retirement years.

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M: Assembly pastoral reference and welfare committee

1. Terms of reference

(a) The Assembly pastoral reference and welfare committee will consider the cases of United Reformed Church ministers and congregations which are referred to it because of some perceived pastoral need by Mission Council, synods, committees, synod moderators or Officers of Assembly.

(b) The committee will seek to enable the minister's service within the URC to be continued if that is seen to be appropriate, and to this end may consider financial support for a course of retraining, or therapy, or counselling.

(c) The committee may initiate discussion about alternative forms of service for a minister, within or outside the URC, and may seek help (practical, financial, professional) in consultation with the minister to make this happen.

(d) The committee may authorise the maintenance of ministry (MoM) sub-committee to provide stipend or part-stipend and may authorise the Chief Finance Officer to pay other necessary expenses (including accommodation costs) to a minister not in pastoral charge for a specific period. Such period will not exceed six months in the first instance but may be extended by the pastoral reference committee. The MoM sub-committee (or such other body as shall in future carry out the functions of the MoM sub-committee) or the Chief Finance Officer will accept this authority for payment.

(e) In each case the committee will make clear to the minister concerned the period for which payments will be made and if it may be extended. (f) The committee, in consultation with the finance committee, will determine the level of welfare grants to be paid from Assembly funds.

2. Limitations on Powers

(a) The committee does not have the authority to delete the name of a minister from the Roll of Ministers nor to take any other disciplinary steps against him/her. The committee does not have to be consulted about and does not have the authority over the process of ending the appointment of a minister in pastoral charge, which process is a matter for minister, church meeting and synod pastoral committee or equivalent.

(b) The committee may not be involved with, and must withdraw from, any ongoing discussions, counselling or direct pastoral involvement with any case in which the disciplinary procedures of the Church are being applied against a minister. Nevertheless, the committee may authorise any financial payments allowed under its terms of reference (see 1d).

3. Confidentiality

It is evident that the work of the pastoral reference and welfare committee will be confidential and pastoral. Nevertheless, it will need to keep a record of its meetings. The committee's conclusions should be recorded, given to the person concerned and shared with others directly

involved in the matter who need to know the outcome. It would be inappropriate for the committee as a body or individual members of it to divulge any additional information about ministers or churches concerned.

4. Composition

- A former Moderator of General Assembly who shall be the convenor.
- The General Secretary
- Two lay people
- One minister in pastoral charge
- One Synod Moderator
- The Treasurer
- The Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) who will act as secretary

5. Attendance

- (a) The committee may invite the minister to meet some or all its members. The minister may be accompanied by a friend if he or she so wishes.
- (b) The committee has the discretion to invite other persons involved in a case to meet it.

6. Relationship to Structure

The committee will report to the General Assembly at its annual meeting. However, the report will only deal with general matters and the committee will not report on, nor may it be questioned on, individual cases.

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