

Assembly Business Digest



A round of the decisions made at the 2022 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, which took place at The Hayes Conference Centre from July 8-11.



The Assembly inducted two people to new posts: Andy Braunston was inducted as Minister for Digital Worship, and Philip Brooks as Deputy General Secretary (Mission).

Session one

At the start of the first session, matters presented on the first [Order Paper](#) (additional business deemed to be not contentious) were voted on and passed. These were Resolutions 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 and 51. These related to the running of the meeting as well as wishing the Minutes Secretary Ken Forbes a speedy recovery. Andy Braunston was appointed Minutes Secretary for this Assembly.

[Synod Moderators' report](#)

Presenting the report, the Revd Steve Faber (Moderator of the West Midlands Synod) said that the URC can't carry on as it is; adding that statistics of decline can be rather depressing, but are they inevitable? Can we, and should we, do something new? If so, what? He invited Assembly members to suggest how we may shape the future differently. What are you most excited about in the report? What concerns you most?

If you could make one change to your local church, what would it be?

Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub - [Paper B/D/M 1](#)

The resolutions (5 and 6) and aim of the paper is to recognise a new ministry of Assembly accredited Lay Pioneers and to train them through the new Newbigin Pioneering Hub – a joint venture between the URC, Congregational Federation, Church Mission Society, and the Seedbeds organisation – to train and support lay pioneer ministers – and for General Assembly to adopt marks of ministry for Lay Pioneers.

Affirmative Action Towards an Anti-Racist Church - [Paper E1](#)

A report to Assembly on the work so far of the Affirmative Action Task Group was presented.

The report outlines actions the Church can take to improve appointment processes. Its recommendations include promoting 'positive action' as best practice, making anti-racism training mandatory and introducing mentoring.



Introducing the report, Karen Campbell, pictured, said it was not about positive discrimination but about levelling the playing field.

The resolution before Assembly endorsed the work of the group and asked them to continue with it, bringing firm proposals to the 2023 Assembly. It was passed unanimously.

Ministries Committee, [Paper H1](#)

In introducing the report, committee convenor the Revd Paul Whittle focused on deployment: “Difficult decisions have to be made. Priorities have to be established, and we are in this together. We do far better if we stop talking of decline but look for the opportunities that God is calling us. Do we believe that the spirit is still moving?”

Steph Atkins from Westminster College said that training wouldn't be possible without the support of the URC. “We focus on lay ministry but how many times have we challenged people about the ministry of Word and Sacrament? I was told that training would be difficult because of my kids. We should be as excited about ministry of Word and Sacrament as well as lay ministry. It's fantastic calling.”

North Western Synod Resolution – [see Order Paper for details](#)

The Revd Adam Woodhouse, Minister in the Lancashire East Missional Partnership within the North Western Synod, addressed Assembly about the government's controversial Rwanda deportation policy.

Sarah Lane Cawte, convenor of the Mission Committee, thanked colleagues in the North Western Synod for raising the issue and raised the fact the URC hasn't been silent on the issue but has been advocating for the past couple of months. The Joint Public Issues Team

has also been [working on the matter](#). The resolution passed unanimously.

Children and Youth Work – [Paper B1](#)

The acting convenor the Revd Samantha Sheehan said that due to the pandemic, 2022 had become a year of consolidation of the CYWC strategy approved by Mission Council in November 2018. “This was not a time of stagnation,” the convenor said, “and we offer our thanks to the church house and CYDO+ team who worked hard in producing a variety of resources for the changing face of children and youth work and ministry.”

Introducing Resolution 3, Ms Sheehan said that, following on a decision made at General Assembly 2021, the formal work of the Pilots Sub-committee has come to an end. Resolution 3 was agreed.

Jo Harris, URC Youth Assembly Moderator, then brought three resolutions from the Youth Assembly. Two resolutions were a response to the Youth Assembly's reflections on a lack of diversity among key office holders in the general, and the Moderator of General Assembly in particular. The resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority.

Ms Harris then asked the Assembly to reaffirm the Youth Assembly's commitment to tackling stigma surrounding mental ill health (Resolution 2).

Launch of URC Children

Members of the Children's and Youth Work team and committee with children ran into Assembly with placards to launch URC Children, a new umbrella for children aged 0 to 12 connected with the URC. The initiative seeks to provide the same support, resourcing, participation, and voice for children within the URC, and those who work with them, that URC Youth provides for young people aged 11-25.

Community Project Awards



The Moderator, the Revd Clare Downing, introduced the 2022 Community Project Awards, thanking Congregational Insurance for financing the awards since 1997. Margaret Slater of Congregational Insurance presented the awards to three winners: Skipton Wellbeing Café at St Andrews URC/Methodist. Community Uniform Swap Shop, at St Columba's URC, Wolverhampton and Roker Life, at Roker United Reformed Church, Sunderland.

Two other projects were highly commended and invited to apply for the award again in the future. They were the WestCan Show Choir, at Westfield and Cannington URCs, Bridgwater, and the Dulwich Grove Community Lunch, at Dulwich Grove URC.

Moderator of the General Assembly, 2023-2024



The United Reformed Church General Assembly has made history by electing its first woman BAME Moderator-Elect.

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Minister of Wanstead URC, Trinity Walthamstow URC, Grange Park URC,

and Gants Hill URC in the Thames North Synod, was elected URC General Assembly Moderator-Elect.

Future pension arrangements – Paper G5

General Assembly endorsed the new defined contribution pension scheme to replace both the URC Final Salary Scheme and the URC Ministers' Pension Fund, and authorised the formal consultation with members of the existing schemes about the proposals. It also approved the signing of the contract with Aon Master Trust.

General Assembly also authorised Assembly officers to consider the outcome of the consultation to finalise the new scheme and close the existing schemes if approved, to begin the new scheme from 1 January 2023, or soon after, and if not possible to start it to ensure that revised proposals are brought back to General Assembly or Assembly Executive.

Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline - Papers R4, R5, and Paper R6

Resolutions from MIND (Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group) were brought to Assembly by the Revd Dr Janet Tollington.

2021 Assembly approved a new process for disciplinary process – to come into effect from the close of this current Assembly. As a result of testing out the new process, MIND brought several resolutions in order to fine-tune the new process, allowing it to be operated in a smooth and transparent way.

Tackling stigma surrounding mental health

The Assembly reaffirmed the URC Youth Assembly's commitment to tackling stigma surrounding mental ill health (Resolution 2). URC Youth Moderator Jo

Harris said that one in four individuals will experience some poor mental health in a year and that much mental health starts before the age of 18.

Greetings from ecumenical and international guests

Greetings were received from the Revd Ramthanga, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar. In February 2021, the country's military seized power, an event which sparked widescale protests, armed resistance and mass killings. "I hope righteousness will be restored in Myanmar in the near future, and at that time we will be worshipping with you all. I request that you pray for the peace of Myanmar and for the Christian community, in particular.

Yvonne Campbell, General Secretary of The Congregational Federation, congratulated the URC on its 50th anniversary ([and its creative range of merchandise!](#)). The Federation is also celebrating its 50th anniversary and has published [Golden Threads](#) with the URC.

Pfarrer Martin Henninger from the Evangelical Church of the Pfalz, Palatinate, Germany, congratulated the URC and gave thanks to God for the church's 50 years of service in a truly ecumenical understanding. "I'm often asked 'what is the purpose of the covenant between our churches'," which predates the formation of the URC. "It is an opportunity to share our stories," Martin said.

Environment Policy

Simeon Mitchell, Secretary for Church and Society, said the climate crisis is an ever-present reality. The policy, adopted by the Assembly, sets out an ambition to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030.

The Revd Rob Weston said one in five congregations have signed up to the Eco-

Church or Eco-Congregation Scotland schemes.

Turning to the "how" of implementing the policy, Simeon pointed Assembly to: Green apostles in every synod: Eco-Church and Eco-Congregation Scotland websites; [The Greening your Church section of the URC](#) website and Synod Property Officers.

Mission, Reinvigorating the ecumenical vision, [Paper I1](#)

In presenting Paper I1, Philip, said: "We only truly live out our Christian calling when we are in unity. And whilst our 50-year journey seems to have proved that structural union is not where God is leading us, at a local level, we still have a strong story to tell."

He then presented the resolutions to Assembly along with a film that showcased the ecumenical work of Wharton & Cleggs Lane Church & Community Centre (URC/Methodist LEP), in Salford; an LEP which opened earlier this year in April.

A toolkit for ecumenical work, mentioned in the report, can be found [here](#).

Church Life Review Group, [Paper N1](#)

The Revd Steve Faber, Moderator of West Midlands Synod, said that the group had embarked on considerable research. Most of the work undertaken is not yet ready for report but the group expect to bring substantive resolutions to General Assembly 2023.

He said: 'This is not change for the sake of change time or inclination to rearrange deckchairs on the Titanic. We do not accept that ship is sinking, we do not accept inevitability of decline. There are stories of decline around the church but it is not too late to change.'

One resolution, brought to the General Assembly because of a retirement in July

2023, allowed the Assembly Executive to look at appointing a 'Chief Operations Officer' instead of a Deputy General Secretary (Admin & Resources).

Korean Peace Appeal, [Paper I3](#)

General Assembly was invited to "affirm its support for a lasting peace settlement to end the Korean War" and to instruct the General Secretary and Moderator to sign the Korea Peace Appeal on Assembly's behalf.

The Appeal is a worldwide effort to secure 100 million signatures by June 2023, supporting a formal Peace Treaty between North and South Korea.



Pictured are Maria Lee, a Church Related Community Worker based in Chelmsford, and her husband URC Minister the Revd Barnabas Shin.

Greetings from Bishop Mike Royal

Bishop Mike Royal, the new General Secretary of Churches Together in England (CTE), greeted General Assembly. He explained that his focus for CTE is "raising up a new generation of ecumenical leaders".

Newly ordained Ministers

The Moderator introduced two newly ordained ministers: the Revd Jonnie Hill and the Revd Adam Woodhouse. The Moderator led the Assembly in prayer for those who have had long journeys in

ministry and for those just starting out on that journey.

En bloc resolutions

The full reports and resolutions in each case can be read [here](#): G1 Finance: General report 2021 to 2022; H2 Ministries: Maintenance of ministry (Resolution 14); Confidentiality policy (resolution 15); I4 Mission: Vision 2020 (resolution 19); J1 Nominations: (resolution 22; 23); M1 Ministerial Discipline and Incapacity (MIND) (resolution 24); M2 Safeguarding (resolution 25); M3 Church changes (resolution 26); P1 Law and Polity Advisory Group; R1 MIND (resolution 29; 30); R2 MIND (resolution 31); R3 MIND (resolution 32); R5 MIND (resolution 40; 41); R7 MIND (resolution 43; 44); R8 MIND (resolution 45); and T1 Safeguarding Advisory Group: Annual report.

Pastoral supervision, [Paper H3](#)

Steps are being taken to increase the number of accredited pastoral supervisors, including training URC ministers and lay people through the established scheme at Wesley House, Cambridge. The Revd Paul Whittle confirmed that the new requirement would mean that some supervisors would carry a caseload of six individuals, meeting their ministers once every two months.

Travel expense rates, Resolution 53

Owing to the rise in fuel costs, the Revd Anne Sardeson brought an emergency "private member's" resolution for consideration requesting the Finance Committee to reconsider the current policy of paying only the lower rate for travel expenses and encouraged synods and other bodies to also consider this.

One off payment to ministers and lay staff - [Paper G2](#)

General Assembly resolved that, bearing in mind the recent energy cost increases, and with probable further energy price rises coming, a payment be made in October of £800 to those on the URC Plan for Partnership and £500 for each Church House employee. Some Non-Stipendiary Ministers expressed disappointment about not being included, and the finance committee explained that not receiving a stipend was the reason why they weren't included.

Loyal address

An address to the throne was presented by Mr Derek Estill, one of the former Moderators of the General Assembly. In sending loyal greetings to Her Majesty, the Assembly noted that in this year both Her Majesty and the URC are marking a significant jubilee.

Moderator's reflection

The Revd Claire Downing, outgoing Moderator of General Assembly, offered her closing reflections on her term of office.

The pandemic meant not having quite the induction expected, learning how to hold large meetings over Zoom, and, in the first year, "having to do virtually everything virtually. Keep thinking about who you're including and who you're excluding."

Ms Downing paid an emotional tribute to Peter Pay, who died during his term as Moderator. "He was an amazing colleague to work with," Clare said.

Apology for transatlantic slavery

The United Reformed Church has made a confession and apology for the role of its antecedents in transatlantic slavery and

its continuing complicity in the legacies of the trade today.

The General Assembly passed [two resolutions](#) pertaining to the topic. In addition to the apology, the Church made a commitment to undertake practical actions to address "the continuing negative impacts of the legacies of transatlantic slavery on black communities in the UK, the Caribbean and Africa".

Induction of the Revd Fiona Bennett, Moderator of the URC General Assembly 2022-2023



After an introduction by the Revd Clare Downing, an affirmation of faith, prayers, promises and the signing of the Assembly Bible, the Revd Fiona Bennett was inducted as the Moderator of the General Assembly.

Fiona was welcomed by the Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary for Mission, who said: "Know that you are held in our love, support and prayers. We are blessed to walk alongside you in this coming year."

Reporting by: Andy Jackson, Ann-Marie Nye, Steve Tomkins, Laurence Waring. Pictures: Chris Andrews.