

Session Seven

The Chaplain led worship and Dr Meg Warner led a Bible study.

The Revd John Marsh, took the chair and called Assembly to order.

25: URC Environmental Policy

Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, the Revd Robert Weston, and Mr Simeon Mitchell presented Paper I2 and introduced the following resolution. During discussion Ms Judy Harris proposed an amendment to add “URC Children” to section d, and the Revd Samantha Sheehan seconded. The Convener agreed to accept the amendment, and the Assembly agreed to the amendment.

Resolution 17

General Assembly:

- a) Resolves that urgent action should be taken to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030.
- b) Adopts the Environmental Policy in Part 2 of this paper with effect from January 2023, and instructs the committees and bodies under its control, and encourages associated bodies (including Trusts, the Retired Ministers Housing Society, and Resource Centres for Learning), Synods and local churches to adopt as a minimum the practices it sets out.
- c) Instructs each Assembly committee to develop a Net Zero Action Plan for its area of responsibility, and set and monitor targets for implementing this policy, reporting by March 2023, and annually thereafter.
- d) Establishes a Net Zero Task Group with membership of one Synod Moderator, one member of the Finance Committee, one representative of the URC Trust, the Secretary for Church and Society, the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources), a representative of URC Youth, URC Children, a Synod Property Officer, and a Synod Green Apostle .

The group’s remit shall be to:

1. oversee progress in implementing this policy and report regularly to the Assembly Executive and General Assembly
2. identify, advocate for, and where possible put in place any additional resources, support and expertise that are needed to implement this policy across the Church
3. engage with Assembly committees around their Net Zero Action Plans and support them to develop them further
4. encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.

Agreed

26: Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Process Report

The Revd Adrian Bulley, Deputy General Secretary, reported that since General Assembly last met in July 2021, two Section O cases have been concluded. The first incurred costs of £18, 592. The second, of £18,014. Neither case resulted in the removal of a minister from the roll.

The Moderator adjourned Assembly for coffee.

27: Worship

The chaplain led Assembly in worship, during which the Moderator preached.

The Moderator adjourned Assembly for lunch

Session Eight

The Moderator resumed.

28: Church Life Review Group

The Rev'd Steve Faber presented the reports N1 and N2 on the work of the Church Life Review Group and moved the following resolutions.

In response to a question from the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, who noted that the paragraph about the future of the Business Committee was inadequate to cover the work of the Business Committee and further work was needed, Mr Faber gave an assurance that the Church Life Review Group would give further consideration to this and all other matters raised.

Mr Dan Morrell proposed the amendments indicated below, and the Revd Dr Hopkins seconded. Assembly agreed with the amendment.

Resolution 27

General Assembly ~~receives welcomes~~ the initial thinking about a General Assembly Committee structure and an associated Church House staffing structure. In the light of comments at Assembly, and the results of further consultation with Committees, Synod Moderators and Clerks, it invites the Church Life Review Group to bring a *further report* ~~finalised proposals~~ to Assembly Executive in November 2022 ~~authorising Assembly Executive to adopt these if it sees fit so to do.~~

Agreed

The Revd Dr Romily Micklem proposed, and the Revd Dr Catherine Ball seconded, an amendment to resolution 28 to change the job title to Operations Officer. Assembly did not warm to this idea so the amendment was withdrawn.

The Revd Jonnie Hill proposed the Chief Operating Officer role be a fixed term contract to be determined by the Church Life Review Group. The Revd Ruth Whitehead seconded the proposal. The Church Life Review Group wished to have more time to think and the Moderator referred the matter to a facilitation group.

29: Korea Peace Appeal

The Moderator invited the Revd David Grosch Miller to address assembly. Recorded greetings from the Rev'd Dr Hong Jung Lee, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea were received. Dr Lee urged Assembly to support Resolution 18. Mr Grosch Miller noted that worship material for the peace appeal is available on the URC website. Ms Lane Cawte introduced the following resolution.

Resolution 18

a) General Assembly affirms its support for a lasting peace settlement to end the Korean War and instructs the General Secretary and Moderator to sign the Korea Peace Appeal on its behalf.

b) General Assembly commends the Korea Peace Appeal and urges Synods, local churches, and individuals to sign the Korea Peace Appeal in solidarity with ecumenical partners in Korea.

30: Minutes of Saturday's Sessions

The Clerk moved the acceptance of the minutes of Saturday's sessions subject to minor corrections.

Agreed

31: Greetings from Churches Together in England

The Rev'd Philip Brooks introduced Bishop Mike Royal, General Secretary of Churches Together in England who addressed Assembly. The Moderator greeted Bishop Royal as well as the Church of England's representative the Revd Canon Sarah Gower.

32: Jubilee Ministers, newly commissioned Church Related Community Workers, & newly ordained Ministers

Assembly watched a visual presentation celebrating Jubilee Ministers, newly commissioned Church Related Community Workers and newly ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments.

33: En Bloc Business

The Rev'd Fran Kissack moved that this matter be not put, in order to draw Assembly's attention to the short time period between publication and the closing date for removing matters from en bloc. The Clerk pointed out that only one person had contacted him about this, but nevertheless agreed that the time period was short, and gave an assurance that the matter would be taken to the Business Committee so that there could be both better communication of dates and a longer time period. Ms Kissack then withdrew her proposal.

Assembly resolved to accept all resolutions in En Bloc Business:

Ministries - Paper H2, Paper H4

Mission - Paper I4 Vision 2020,

Nominations - Paper J1 & J2

Ministerial Incapacity and Discipline Advisory Group - Papers R1, R2, R3, R5, R7, R8

General Secretariat - Papers M1, M2, M3

Law and Polity Advisory Group - Paper P1

Safeguarding Advisory Group - Paper T1

34: Matters Removed from En Bloc

The Rev'd Paul Whittle presented H3 noting the Ministries Committee had made a change to the policy set out in the paper:

At 3.2.5 it stated –

“it is expected that ministers and lay folk will not charge for pastoral supervision of URC ministers, and will pastorally supervise no less than six ministers per month when fully qualified.”

The change made to the policy by the committee was the expectation that three sessions, not six, a month will be offered.

35: Private Members' Resolution on Travel Expenses

The Revd Anne Sardeson proposed, and the Revd Alex Clare-Young seconded, the following resolution:

Resolution 53

In the light of increasing fuel costs, General Assembly requests the Finance Committee to reconsider the current policy of paying only the lower HMRC rate for travel expenses at General Assembly level, and encourages Synods and other bodies also to reconsider this. The rationale for the request is that the lower HMRC rate of 25 pence per mile (set by HMRC for when a worker has done over 10,000 business miles) no

longer reasonably covers the costs of travel. Based upon conversations that the proposers have had in recent weeks, the lower HMRC rate of only 25 pence/mile is at best discouraging and at worst preventing attendance and participation, and is becoming an issue of exclusion as some are less able to afford to participate.

Agreed

36: Possible One Off Payments to Ministers and Lay Staff

The treasurer, Mr Iain Hardie, introduced Paper G2 and moved the following resolution.

Ms Jo Harris moved an amendment asking Synods also to consider the matter, and Heather Moore seconded. Assembly agreed.

Mr Dan Morell proposed a further amendment adding local churches. A number of members of Assembly indicated their willingness to second the amendment. Assembly agreed.

The Clerk then noted that the Legal Advisor had drawn attention to the unintentional use of the word “work” which might have misinterpreted concerning the employment status of ministers, and proposed that this be changed to “serving”. Many members of Assembly indicated they would second this. Assembly agreed.

The Revd Steve Faber moved that the issue be now put. Many members of Assembly indicated they would second this. Assembly agreed that the amended resolution be now put and the matter moved to a vote.

Resolution 8

General Assembly resolves that, as a gesture of good will towards those serve the Church centrally and bearing in mind the recent energy cost increases for many, with the likelihood of further energy price rises to come later in the year, a gross payment should be made together with October 2022 stipend and salary payments amounting to:

- £800 in the case of each office holder in receipt of a stipend under the URC Plan for Partnership; and
- £500 in the case of each ‘Church House’ employee. General Assembly urges Synods and local churches to consider these issues for their staff.

Agreed

The following members of Assembly formally recorded their dissent:

Mr Tony Corfe

Ms Hilda Darkwah

Mrs Bridget Micklem

The Revd Dr Romily Micklem

The Revd Dr Hazel Staritt

37: Reinvigorating the Ecumenical Vision of the United Reformed Church

Assembly returned to considering Paper I1.

The Revd Philip Brooks moved the resolution below.

Resolution 16

a) General Assembly affirms that Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) continue to be central to the ecumenical mission and vision of the United Reformed Church.

b) General Assembly reminds Synods and local churches that joint or ecumenical members of LEPs have always been and remain members of the United Reformed Church, not just those who were members of the URC at the formation of the LEP.

c) Recognising that the approaches to ecumenism are different in England, Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands, General Assembly affirms the new lighter touch forms of ecumenical co-operation contained in the Churches Together in England documents, A Flexible Framework for Local Unity in Mission and the accompanying Toolkit and encourages the creative use of these resources.

d) General Assembly instructs the Mission Committee and the Synods to consult with the Ministries Committee, to consider whether there are ways in which resource and scoping for LEPs and Ecumenical Areas can be targeted, to address the areas of under-resourcing of our ecumenical commitments at a local level and to report back with recommendations to the 2023 General Assembly.

Agreed

The Moderator adjourned Assembly for Dinner

Session 10

38: Parallel Sessions

Assembly met in parallel sessions to consider reports from Committees.

39: Evening Prayer

Assembly concluded its work for the day with Evening Prayer led by the Chaplain.