

Monday 3 July

Assembly was led in worship by the Chaplain.

Session ten

Moderator Elect Acceptance Speech

The Moderator Elect, the Revd Timothy Meadows, addressed the Assembly.

Synod of Scotland Moderator

The Revd Adrian Bulley introduced the Revd Lindsay Sanderson, who had been appointed the previous day by the Assembly as the next Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland. The Moderator greeted Ms Sanderson, who made suitable reply.

Report of Disciplinary Commissions

The General Secretary notified Assembly that since the General Assembly had last met, two cases have reached the Commission stage and then been completed. The Revd. Brian Stephen Jolly had been deleted from the Roll of Ministers. The total costs of these two disciplinary cases totalled £55,161.31

Minutes

The minutes of Saturday's sessions were approved. The Clerk moved that today's minutes be remitted to the Assembly Officers for final approval.

Agreed

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland presented gifts to the Moderator and the Moderator Elect, and the Moderator presented a gift in return and made suitable reply.

The Revd Clare Downing took the Chair.

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Paper B1

Rev Paul Robinson brought an amendment to Resolution 13, that 'believes', be replaced with 'is minded that', and moved the amendment.

Agreed

Resolution 13

General Assembly is minded that there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.

Agreed

It was noted that the Worship, Faith and Order Committee would also need to be involved in such a consultation if a formal ministry were to be proposed.

The Moderator took the Chair.

The Revd Steve Faber introduced and proposed Resolution 51 in amended form, as Resolutions 51 and 51A, which agreed by the Assembly:

The amended form of the Resolutions was *agreed*.

Resolution 51

General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a working group to examine:

- a) What models of employed lay work can be effective within local churches;**
- b) What infrastructure is necessary to be provided by the wider church to support employed lay ministry work in local churches.**

Agreed

Resolution 51A

General Assembly asks the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.

Agreed

Paper E2 – Facilitation Group

The facilitation proposed an amended Resolution 21:

Resolution 21

General Assembly:

- a) affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred;
- b) commits to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination and requests the Equalities Committee to facilitate this;
- c) recognises the church's failure to challenge the assumptions and patterns of behaviour which lead to transphobia* and acknowledges that church sometimes perpetuates these patterns;
- d) supports the right of all to receive affirming non-directive support and healthcare, and to express their sexuality, gender and identity without coercion or the fear thereof.

*In this instance we define transphobia according to the Crown Prosecution Service definition as "any incident / criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender."

The General Secretary agreed to ensure that the Equalities Committee would undertake to do work on de-transitioning.

Assembly *agreed* that the asterisk and footnote be deleted.

At the Moderator's suggestion, Assembly agreed to address and decide upon each clause as a separate resolution

Resolution 21a

General Assembly affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred;

Agreed

Resolution 21b

General Assembly commits to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination and requests the Equalities Committee to facilitate this;

Agreed

Resolution 21c

General Assembly recognises the church's failure to challenge the assumptions and patterns of behaviour which lead to transphobia and acknowledges that church sometimes perpetuates these patterns;

Agreed, with dissent registered by the Revd Geoff Felton.

Resolution 21d

General Assembly supports the right of all to receive affirming non-directive support and healthcare, and to express their sexuality, gender and identity without coercion or the fear thereof.

Agreed, with dissent registered by the Revd Geoff Felton.

Paper G5 – Facilitation Group

The Facilitation Group moved Resolution 24a:

Resolution 24a

General Assembly encourages synods not currently supporting the M&M Fund from synod resources to do so, as they are able, and those already giving such support to consider increasing that amount.

Agreed

The Treasurer, Mr Ian Hardie proposed Resolutions 24 and 25:

Resolution 24

General Assembly resolves that going forward the target number of stipendiary ministers should be set so that the direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget moves in line with the most recent changes in M&M giving, which are known before the start of each relevant year.

Resolution 25

Recognising that further work is required to ensure this policy is introduced at an appropriate time and in a way which is workable for Ministries Committee's planning purposes, General Assembly directs that the disregard of the 2012 policy by the Finance Committee and URC Trust in preparing the 2023 budget should be extended to apply also to the 2024 budget with firm proposals for the date of introduction of the new policy and details of its implementation being brought for consideration by the 2024 General Assembly.

Agreed

G3 – Finance Committee: Retired Ministers Benevolent Fund.

The Treasurer sought the permission of the General Assembly to withdraw the resolution, which was agreed, and agreed to undertake the consultation suggested in the resolution by correspondence.

Address to the Throne

The Revd Clare Downing read the Address to the Throne, and the Assembly agreed that it be sent to the King:

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty:

The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, meeting in Derbyshire, sends loyal greetings to Your Majesty. Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Creator and Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the first time that the General Assembly has met since your Accession to the Throne and Coronation. We assure you of our prayers as you undertake your new role and responsibilities. We value the historic right to make an Address to the Throne, and its recognition of this nation's tradition of religious tolerance. Since becoming King, you have spoken of the importance of freedom of religion and belief, and pledged to protect the diversity of our country and the space for faith in our national life. We welcome and affirm you in this commitment.

Many around the world do not enjoy this freedom. A record number of people have been forced to flee their homes to escape a fear of persecution because of what they believe or who they are, or because of conflict. The recent sinking of a boat of migrants in the Mediterranean with the loss of hundreds of lives was a tragic reminder of the vulnerable situations faced by many refugees. In this context, the General Assembly expressed its deep concern about current proposals from Your Majesty's Government to prevent people from seeking asylum in the UK, as contrary to our commitment to protecting human rights. When the Illegal Migration Bill was introduced to parliament, the Moderator of General Assembly joined other church leaders to observe that "If ever there was a contemporary example of ignoring our neighbour and walking by on the other side, this is it."

The call to love and serve our neighbours, locally and globally, is central to our understanding of what it is to be church. The General Assembly reflected on how to live out that calling in an ever-changing society as it discussed the results of a wide-ranging review of church life. It also considered the particular struggles that many in our communities are currently facing as a result of the rising cost of living and deepening levels of poverty in the UK. We are shamed and angered that despite our national wealth, unprecedented numbers have needed to use food banks and warm spaces over the last year. The General Assembly called upon political leaders to make tackling poverty a greater priority.

As you repeatedly argued as Prince of Wales in recent years, the scale and nature of the

challenges of economic inequalities and the climate emergency highlight the need for a paradigm shift in our economic system. In the sermon at your Coronation service, as the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke about the transformative Kingdom that Jesus Christ announced, he pointed out that “the privilege of power brings a duty to serve”. This applies to systems as much as it does to individuals. At a time when our economy holds such power over people’s lives and the life of the planet, it is vital that it serves and enables the flourishing of all life. That life of service is, of course, one to which you committed yourself at your Coronation, following the example of Jesus.

As those who know the same calling upon our lives, we pray that the God who is love will strengthen, sustain and guide Your Majesty throughout your reign.

Moderator’s Reflection

The Moderator shared her reflections from her term of office.

Induction of the Moderator

Ms Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo led Assembly in worship during which the Revd Fiona Bennett inducted the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson as Moderator of the General Assembly.

Adjournment

The Clerk announced that the Assembly had completed its business, and stands adjourned to meet again on Friday 12 July 2024 at the Hayes, Swanwick, Derbyshire, or at such other time and place as may be determined.