

Book of Reports 2024



The
United
Reformed
Church





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Dear Friends,

Welcome to the Book of Reports for General Assembly 2024.

Since the first Council of the Church in Jerusalem as recorded in the Book of Acts, the Church has gathered representatives together to listen to scripture, share experiences of the movement of the Holy Spirit, and deliberate together in an attempt to discern the will of God. As we gather in Swanick this July, we stand in that line of apostolic succession through the centuries. We too will gather, in the light of scripture, the content of our faith and our lived experience of the Spirit, to discern God's will for the United Reformed Church here in this time and place.

Some work was recently done on 'discernment' by a group from Worship, Faith and Order for the Business Committee, which will hopefully eventually inform some of the ways in which we enrich the experience of General Assembly. Whilst any major changes will take time, it is perhaps helpful for me to share a few observations on how we discern well together in this letter. I would ask you to reflect upon the following:

- The Holy Spirit moves as much in the preparation for General Assembly as in the meeting itself. Please take time to read and digest the work of our committees, and engage with those responsible for work before we meet if things strike you you'd like to raise. They may be more creatively responded to with good time, rather than seeking an immediate reaction on the floor of General Assembly.
- The Holy Spirit moves as much in our silences as in our speaking. Something that the Moderator and Chaplains may remind us from time to time, as we wait upon God.
- God is perfect. We creatures are not. Often 'good' is 'good enough'. Sometimes we perhaps need to stop and reflect on whether a resolution is indeed 'good enough' – if not perfect. Is that amendment absolutely essential...?
- The Holy Spirit is heard in the most unlikely of voices, and sometimes it can be difficult for the unlikely voices to be heard within a forum like General Assembly. If the Moderator calls someone to speak who has not spoken previously before someone who has spoken a lot – it is because the Moderator is trying to ensure that we can hear from all the voices to maximise our chance of catching the movement of the Spirit in our midst.

There are many other things we can reflect on about what makes our discernment good. I wonder what you might add to the list above?

I invite your prayers, as preparations for Assembly continue, that we may indeed be a body alive to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst, as we see to catch a glimpse of the mind of God for the United Reformed Church today.

Yours in Christ,

John Bradbury, General Secretary.

**The United Reformed Church
Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting
held via Zoom
Tuesday 28 November 2023**

Monday 28 November

The Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, was in the Chair.

The meeting opened at 19:00 with worship led by the Chaplains, the Revd Stephen Anda-Addo and Miss Karen Campbell.

En Bloc**R1 Complaints Procedure (Section Q)**

Resolution R1 was put before Assembly Executive:

Assembly Executive amends the Complaints Procedure (Section Q of The Manual) by adding the following two words to the third bullet point in the second set of bullets on page 3: “A complaint against **or by an employee, which would be handled by their line manager under the appropriate Human Resources policy of the body which employs them”.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper G1**2024 M&M Budget****Finance Committee**

The Treasurer, Mr Alan Yates, began by offering an apology that the paper did not report the fact that the neither the Finance Committee nor the URC Trust meeting considered the stipend rise recommended by Ministry’s Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee when making their stipend decisions. Unfortunately, the sequencing of meetings meant that the MoM sub-committee had actually met after crucial meetings between the Finance Committee and the Trust. He assured Assembly Executive that steps were being taken to ensure that more joined up working would take place between Finance, the URC Trust and MoM sub-committees in future, and outlined the procedure for the setting of stipends and salaries.

The Treasurer explained that in budget meetings with committees and Church House staff, budget holders were asked to base their requests on actual needs rather than a percentage change on existing operations. The outcome predicts a deficit of almost £1.5m. There are good reasons for treating the reasons for treating the pandemic years as extraordinary, but the 2024 projections are based on the new normal for the Church (eg rising costs, declining giving, and more church closures). The URC’s reserves can cover the deficit for 2024, but it cannot be maintained in the long-term.

Resolution G1 was put:

Assembly Executive adopts the M&M budget for 2024, as set out in the appendix to Paper G1 for the November Assembly Executive.

Assembly Executive *agreed* unanimously.

The Treasurer presented paper G2, along with the draft resolution:

Assembly Executive instructs the Finance Committee to begin work and consultations to manage the budget deficits from 2025 onwards in line with the agreed option:

1. *Reduce the deficit quickly (two to three years); or*
2. *Reduce the deficit slowly (>ten years); or*
3. *Maintain the deficit at today's levels; or 4. Increase the deficit (spend to grow).*
And to report back to Assembly Executive or General Assembly as soon as possible.

The Treasurer explained that since the pandemic, the URC budget has been operating at a significant deficit. On our present trajectory, that deficit is expected to keep increasing by at least 10% a year. The URC Trust cannot fund this deficit indefinitely, so significant changes must be made to eliminate the deficit. The Finance Committee noted that there were three levers available to reduce the budget:

- Reduce spending on Assembly Committees and Church House by 20%
- Increase M&M giving by 8-9%
- Regular grants from Synods.

Mr Yates thanked local churches for the fact that M&M giving had fallen by less than the fall in membership, but said they could hardly be expected to find this extra money amid all the other challenges they face.

A number of Synod representatives indicated that, in principle, they would be willing to explore possibilities for giving grants and/or using Synod funds to maintain M&M giving at current levels.

Mr Yates responded to a number of questions, and the following points were clarified:

- There is nothing precise about the timescales indicated in options 1 and 2. They are merely to indicate 'quickly' and 'slowly'.
- Reducing the deficit does not necessarily imply a blanket reduction across all departments.
- Paper G2 addresses only the M&M budget, without reference to the Church Life Review or synod resource-sharing. Synods remain responsible for their own funds, and retain their liberty to finance local or regional initiatives.

The General Secretary noted that the Church Life Review should come to General Assembly 2025, and the process of implementation would begin thereafter. This will take time. Decisions about the M&M budget need to be taken now.

A fifth option was added, at the suggestion of the Revd Steve Faber:

Option 5: Reduce the deficit medium term (5-7 years).

An informal indication of the mood of the meeting was taken using the *Zoom* polling feature:

Option 1 - 7%, Option 2 - 17%, Option 3 - 0%, Option 4 - 27%, Option 5 - 49%

The General Secretary reminded the meeting that it is the M&M Budget that is under discussion, not the finances of the whole URC including Synods.

At the request of the Clerk, the Legal Adviser clarified that the URC Trust is the Trustee of the church's general funds and is responsible for their appropriate management. There will be a conflict if they are asked to deplete the funds in a way that prevents them from furthering the charitable purposes of the church.

A number of members expressed the view that any budget cut might hasten decline, and that a policy of investing in new initiatives and areas of growth would be more likely to bear fruit and be more in line with the vision of the Church Life Review. Questions were also asked about the possibility of collaborating with Synods.

Option 3 having gained no support, the mood of the meeting was tested with options 2, 4, and 5

Option 2: - 9%, Option 4 - 20%, Option 5 - 71%

Having been in the discussion stage, the meeting moved to the decision stage, and the substantive proposal, option 5, that had emerged from the discussion was put. There voted:

For: 88%

Against: 12%

Option 5 was carried.

The agreed Resolution G2 therefore reads:

Assembly Executive instructs the Finance Committee to begin work and consultations to manage the budget deficits from 2025 onwards in line with the agreed option:

Reduce the deficit medium term (5-7 years).

And to report back to Assembly Executive or General Assembly as soon as possible.

The Treasurer thanked Assembly Executive for its careful attention to this important matter, and assured members that all the various issues raised by the meeting would be noted by the Finance Committee and borne in mind as future plans were made.

Prayer was offered by the chaplains, and the meeting closed at 20:46.

The United Reformed Church

Minutes of Assembly Executive meeting

held at The Hayes, Swanwick
9-11 February 2024

Friday 9 February

Session one

The Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, was in the chair. She welcomed all those attending, especially new members and guests.

24/01

The meeting opened at 14:00 with worship led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

Session two

24/02

Assembly Executive appointed a Facilitation Group comprising:

The Revd Kim Plumpton; Ms Nneoma Chima; the Revd Neil Thorogood; Mr Peter Knowles.

Minutes

The Assembly Clerk moved adoption of the minutes of November 2022 and November 2023.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Mr Alan Yates, on behalf of the Finance Committee, updated Assembly Executive on the progress on addressing the M&M fund deficit. He commended the Synods for their generosity in subsidising the M&M fund in 2023, and outlined something of the various consultations that had taken place since November 2023.

24/03

Paper H1

Ministries: URC Competency Process

The Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Mary Thomas, presented paper H1, and moved the resolution.

Assembly Executive adopts the URC Competency Process in place of the URC Capability Process.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper H2

Ministries: Special Category Ministry

The Convenor of Ministries presented paper H2, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis.

Assembly Executive affirms that:

- a) the SCM programme in its current form is phased out**
- b) 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communities**
- c) such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**

Following discussion, the Revd Fran Kissack moved that the resolution *be not put*.

Seconded by Mr Chris Atherton.

A vote was taken, and the proposal that the resolution *be not put* failed to achieve the required majority, and therefore *fell*.

At the suggestion of the General Secretary, the resolution was remitted to the Facilitation Group.

24/04

Church Life Review

The General Secretary reported on progress of the Church Life Review (CLR), and noted that the deadline for nominations and applications for people to serve on task groups is being extended.

He explained that, while much of the CLR's work will be seeking ways to 'free up' busy people, it cannot be achieved without the involvement of more people in the short term. 'A medium-term solution but a short-term problem'. He asked if it might be conceivable that some of the work needs 'professionalising' eg consultants etc, and asked how the meeting might respond to such a proposal.

The meeting spent some time in informal group discussion, and the following points were raised:

- Church House and Synod staff have the knowledge and expertise – would secondment to CLR task groups be feasible?
- Secondment from Synods and/or committees – are these people not busy enough already?
- A consultant would need to understand fully the structure and governance of the URC.
- If we employ consultants, they are likely to want to consult groups!
- If we were going to pay consultants, why not pay anyone on the groups?
- What would be the financial implications?
- Could the tasks be further subdivided without adding further complications?
- Does all the work have to be done at the same time? Could the tasks be staggered?

- What about 'headhunting' volunteers, rather than seeking applications and nominations?
- Could people volunteer to serve for a limited time?
- What are other denominations doing?

The General Secretary thanked Assembly Executive for its input.

Session three

24/05

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Convenor of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Revd Paul Robinson, presented Paper B1. Assembly Executive met in small groups to discuss and reflect upon the paper.

The Chaplain, the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo, led Assembly in worship, and the session ended at 20:45.

Saturday 10 February

Session four

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:15.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

24/06

Paper R1

Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group

The Secretary of the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group (CDAG), the Revd Adrian Bulley, introduced paper R1, and moved the resolution:

“Amend Section O Appendix K to read:

6: On receiving the material transmitted by the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline, the Assembly Representative for Discipline will appoint an Investigation Team comprising a Human Resources specialist supported by a suitably qualified member of the United Reformed Church, with relevant subject experience, appointed by the Officers of General Assembly on recommendation from the General Secretariat. The Assembly Representative for Discipline will also appoint a member of the Disciplinary Investigation Panel to assist the accused minister to address the issues and, if required, before the Assembly Commission for Discipline or the Disciplinary Appeal Commission. No panel member shall be appointed to assist the accused minister who is related to, belongs to the same local church as, or is otherwise closely concerned with the accused minister or the complainant, has any pastoral or personal involvement with the case or is liable to be a witness.”

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper R3 Ministries Committee and Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group

The Revd Adrian Bulley presented paper R3, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive adopts the new Appendix C in the Ministerial Discipline Process as outlined below.

New Appendix C Assembly Mandated Matters**1. First stages**

1. 1.1 Synods will, usually through their Moderators, make ministers aware of what is required. Ministers who are in any sort of difficulty meeting these requirements (eg illness of self or spouse, sabbatical, or extended leave) will inform their Moderator of these circumstances and discuss suitable ways to meet the Assembly requirements.
2. 1.2 Ministers who undertake Assembly roles are still under the discipline of their Synods and it is for Synods to ensure that these ministers have fulfilled any Assembly mandated activities.
3. 1.3 Where ministers have not engaged, or not engaged fruitfully, in Assembly mandated activities despite information and reminders given by their Synods, the Secretary for Ministries (or their duly appointed deputy) will write to the ministers concerned reminding them of their obligations.

2. Moderator's Recorded Warning

- 2.1 Where a minister has not met these requirements in a timely manner a Moderator's Recorded Warning (Appendix D), issued in line with guidelines from the Ministries Committee, will be the first stage in the process. This recorded warning will include a reasonable deadline for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed.

3. Referral to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

1. 3.1 Where a minister has not fulfilled the Assembly mandated activity by the deadline specified in the Moderator's Recorded Warning the Secretary for Ministries will refer the matter to the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline (ASPD). The referral will outline the various attempts made to encourage the minister to undertake the Assembly mandated activity and this referral will be copied to the minister with a deadline for the minister to respond to the Secretary of Ministries and the ASPD with any comments or mitigation.
2. 3.2 A special ASPD will be set up, convened by the Assembly Representative for Discipline or their duly appointed deputy, to deal with all such cases.
3. 3.3 The ASPD will consider the information from the Secretary of Ministries, any response from the minister, and safeguarding advice, and decide whether to issue an Agreed Caution (giving further time for the Assembly mandated activity to be completed) or refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for

Discipline. If the ASPD refer the matter to the Assembly Commission for Discipline, it shall also consider whether to suspend the minister referring to Appendix J.

4. Referral to the Assembly Commission for Discipline

1. **4.1** If the matter is referred to the Assembly Commission for Discipline (ACD), the Commission Panel will be set up and proceed in the normal way, save that if several ministers are referred at the same time to the ACD it is preferable that the same Commission hear all the cases.
2. **4.2** Prehearing submissions in writing will include:
 - 4.2.1 The Secretary of Ministries' case against the Minister
 - 4.2.2 The Minister's response which might contain rebuttal or mitigation
 - 4.2.3 Advice from a Safeguarding officer.
3. **4.3** At the hearing the case against the Minister shall be presented by the Secretary for Ministries. The Minister may be assisted by a colleague, legal counsel or a Trade Union Representative.
4. **4.4** The Assembly Commission for Discipline will have the usual sanctions outlined in Appendix S at its disposal if matters are proved.

5. Appeals

Appeals proceed in the normal way, save that the Secretary of Ministries, rather than the Investigation team, will either be the appellant or respondent as the case may be.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/07

Paper S1

Safeguarding Committee

The Convenor of the Safeguarding Committee, the Revd Roger Jones, presented paper S1, and moved adoption of the resolution:

Assembly Executive approves the updated matrix of roles eligible for a disclosure and barring scheme checks.

Following discussion, the General Secretary suggested including a 'catch all' clause that would include roles not specified on the list, and that this be addressed by the Facilitation Group and presented to Assembly Executive in a later session.

Following further discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed* that the matter be revisited later.

Paper H2 (from 24/03)**Report of Facilitation Group**

The Revd Peter Knowles, on behalf of the facilitation group, reported that the Facilitation Group had sought to retain the clarity of the original proposal while being respectful of the variety of ministries involved, and proposed that a new clause be added:

- d) **Assembly Executive affirms liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy, and requests Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals.**

Assembly Executive *agreed* that clause d) be included in resolution H1, and continued to address paragraphs 2 and 3:

2. **13 new pioneering posts (one per synod) be created to intentionally grow new Christian communities.**
3. **Such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**

In discussion it was suggested that the words 'to intentionally grow' be omitted. The clear mood of the meeting, however, was to retain them.

The substantive resolution now became:

Assembly Executive gives thanks for the Special Category Ministry Scheme and affirms the change in its emphasis.

Assembly Executive affirms that:

- a) **the SCM programme in its current form is phased out**
- b) **13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) be created intentionally to grow new Christian communities**
- c) **such posts shall be for seven years in the first instance with the possibility of an extension of five years.**
- d) **Assembly Executive affirms liminal ministries both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy, and requests Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries might be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in February 2025 with a report and proposals.**

Assembly executive *agreed*.

Session five

24/08

Paper A1**Business Committee**

The Chief Operating Officer, Mrs Victoria James, on behalf of the Business Committee presented paper A1 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Agrees the revised membership of the Resources committee. Such membership to be Convenor, Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Finance Officer plus 6 further members covering Finance (2), HR (1), Properties (1), Comms (1) and compliance/health and safety/ GDPR.**
- 2. Agrees to the Remuneration Committee continuing as a sub-committee of the Resources Committee.**
- 3. Adopts the Terms of Reference for the Resources Committee and the Remuneration Committee.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

Paper A2

Business Committee

The Chief Operating Officer, Mrs Victoria James, on behalf of the Business Committee presented paper A2 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Adopts the Modern Slavery Statement.**
- 2. Asks Synods and local churches to develop policies in response to this Statement and to implement appropriate supporting procedures.**
- 3. Notes the commitment from Church House to implement a Modern Slavery Policy and revise other policies in response to this statement while also implementing procedures to underpin the policy and overarching statement.**

An amendment was proposed to change 'develop' to 'adopt'. *Agreed*.

An amendment was proposed to change 'Church House' to 'General Assembly Staff and Office Holders'. *Agreed*.

The General Secretary undertook to provide a template policy document for Synods and local churches.

The substantive resolution was put:

Assembly Executive:

- 1. Adopts the Modern Slavery Statement.**
- 2. Asks Synods and local churches to adopt policies in response to this Statement and to implement appropriate supporting procedures.**
- 3. Notes the commitment from General Assembly staff and office-holders to implement a Modern Slavery Policy and revise other policies in response to this statement while also implementing procedures to underpin the policy and overarching statement.**

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/09**Paper A3****Business Committee**

The Deputy General Secretary, Discipleship, the Revd Adrian Bulley, presented paper A3, and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive agrees in principle to the proposal to enter a service level agreement with Place for Hope for five years, with a review in year four, as detailed in Assembly Executive February 2024 Paper A3.

Following discussion, Mr Bulley suggested removal of *'in principle'*, and add at the end *'and asks for conversations between Synods and inter-synod resource sharing Task Group as to how this may be funded'*.

Further discussion took place about funding. The General Secretary warned that, should Assembly Executive agree this resolution, it would be agreeing that General Assembly is the 'backstop' provider of funding.

Further debate took place regarding the appropriate source of funding: General Assembly, Synods, or both.

The Moderator ruled that the resolution be sent to Facilitation Group, which will report back.

24/10**Paper I1****Mission Committee**

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, presented the report.

The Moderator, on behalf of Assembly Executive, thanked the Mission Committee for the considerable amount of work that this report represents.

The meeting adjourned at 13:01.

Session six

Free time.

Session seven

24/11

The meeting resumed at 16:30.

The General Secretary moved the *en bloc* resolutions:

A4 – General Secretariat transitions

A5 – Business Committee: Minutes Secretary

F2 – Worship, Faith and Order Committee: amending terms of office

G1 – Pensions update

J1 – Nominations Committee

R2 – Ministerial resignations

X1 – Mersey and North Western Synods: Synod changes.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/12

Paper Z2

The Secretary of the Education and Learning Committee, the Revd Jenny Mills, reported on the appointment of the Revd Dr Peter McEnhill as principal of Westminster College. In doing so, she paid tribute to the work of the Acting Principal, the Revd Dr Robert Pope.

24/13

Paper S1 (from 24/07)

Report of Facilitation Group

The Facilitation Group reported, and proposed that Assembly Executive agree to:

Add boxes to the matrix to include any roles within URC not mentioned above but falling within the criteria of Regulated Activity as defined by the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 amended by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

Following discussion, Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/14

Church Life Review (from 24/04)

The General Secretary, in the light of earlier discussion, moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive authorises the Business Committee, if necessary, to find alternative ways to forward the work envisaged to be undertaken by the Church Life Review Task Groups determined by resolution at GA 2023 within the ethos of the URC.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/15

Paper A3 (from 24/09)

Report of Facilitation Group

The Facilitation Group proposed a slightly amended resolution A3:

Assembly Executive agrees to the proposal to enter a service level agreement with Place for Hope for five years, with a review in year four, as detailed in Assembly Executive February 2024 Paper A3 and asks the Business Committee in consultation with the URC Trust, URC Finance Committee and Resource Sharing Task Group to identify the most appropriate and sustainable sources of funding.

Assembly Executive *agreed*.

24/16

Paper F1

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

The Revd Dr Robert Pope presented the report of the work of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, and responded to a number of questions.

24/17

Paper Z1

Assembly Executive met in closed session.

The meeting adjourned at 17:25.

Session eight

The meeting resumed at 19:45.

24/18

The Church's Commitment to Net Zero

The Convenor of the Mission Committee, Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, introduced Mr Roo Stewart and Ms Maya Withall, Moderator-Elect of the Youth Assembly, who gave an overview of the effects of global warming and reminded Assembly Executive of resolution 17 of the 2022 General Assembly:

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 paper I2 of General Assembly 2022 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, a representative of 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. *and, encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.*

Assembly Executive met in small groups to reflect on the questions:

- Is your church an eco-church, and is your Synod aiming for a bronze/silver/gold award. If not, why not?
- Share an example of where the issue is being discussed in your church or Synod.
- What practical support do you need to help the church towards net zero.

The Chaplain, Miss Karen Campbell, led Assembly Executive in worship, and the session ended at 20:51.

Sunday 11 February

Session nine

Assembly Executive resumed at 09:30.

Opening worship was led by the Chaplains, Miss Karen Campbell and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo.

24/19

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee

The Convenor of the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Revd Paul Robinson, presented paper B1 and moved the resolution:

Assembly Executive agrees to seek funding for the establishment of a formal ministry for children's, youth and/or family work from either:

- a) by empowering CYWC to ask sources within and beyond the URC for funding, or**
- b) within the M&M budget.**

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- Should we be talking about financing a project when we haven't decided its exact nature?
- The project is not advanced enough for funding patterns to be decided.
- If this is going to be a formal ministry, then it should be funded from M&M.
- 'Seek funding' sounds like asking for funds. Does not a) include b)?
- The CYWC ought to look at this, rather than Assembly Executive deciding.
- We compare this to Children's and Youth workers, but it is different. It is the difference between 'working with' and 'ministering to' young people.
- Make it clear this is a pilot study, and outside funding could be available until it is permanently established.
- The best model is of a CRCW specialising in youth or family work.
- We need a wider discussion about the uses of M&M funding. Where are the priorities?

The mood of the meeting was assessed: no clear mind was discerned, but possibly a slight bias in favour of option a).

The Treasurer noted that a) and b) are not mutually exclusive.

Mr Robinson withdrew the resolution and thanked the AE for its input.

The Revd Ken Forbes was thanked for his long service as Minutes Secretary across two periods of service, presented with a card and gift, and wished well in his retirement. Mr Forbes made suitable reply.

The meeting was concluded with worship and the celebration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion, led by the Chaplains, and the Assembly Executive was adjourned.

Standing Orders for the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church

1. The agenda of the Assembly

- 1.1 At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees which include the Assembly Executive or by Synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

2. In-person, virtual, and hybrid meetings

- 2.1 A meeting may be in-person, virtual, or hybrid. The boundaries between these descriptions are not always clear. A generally in-person meeting may have a minority of members joining the meeting by virtual means. A virtual meeting may have some participants gathered together in one place. In any event, what is always strictly essential is that all participants, both in-person and virtual, can fully see and hear each other in all directions, and that the Moderator is totally confident that participants are able to see and hear each other effectively. The Moderator must also be content and comfortable that they can manage full and proper participation from all participants in the meeting.

3. Records of meetings

- 3.1 Any streaming and/or recording of meetings, including subtitles or captions, does not replace the formal minutes of the meeting and is not a record of the decisions made. Formal minutes shall continue to be maintained and retained.
- 3.2 Meetings should not normally be recorded, in order to comply fully with both safeguarding and data privacy policies.

4. Operating procedure

- 4.1 Meetings will commence when the Moderator opens the meeting, within the requirements set out in the Rules of Procedure.
- 4.2 At the start of any meeting the Moderator shall make reasonable efforts to confirm that any members attending virtually can see and hear, and be seen and heard. The meeting shall not start until the Moderator is so satisfied.
- 4.3 Where available, participants joining a meeting virtually should normally use video as well as audio. Where video is not available, or it is not safe for the attendee to use video, then audio only may be used.
- 4.4 The Meeting will finish when the Moderator formally closes the meeting.
- 4.5 All microphones should be set to mute at the start of the meeting, apart from the Moderator and any necessary technical staff. Microphones should only be unmuted when a participant is speaking.
- 4.6 The Moderator has absolute discretion to pause or adjourn the meeting at any time, and to remove any attendees from the meeting if their conduct falls short of the standards expected in church.

4.7 In all but the smallest meetings, it is helpful if the Moderator is not also the online host. The host may be a staff member(s) or volunteer(s) who are not a member of the meeting in the same way that such people may assist with stewarding meetings.

4.8 In any event, no technical failure shall invalidate any decisions made.

5. Attendance

5.1 All meetings are required to meet any previously agreed quorum, where such a quorum has been specified.

6. Interpretation of Standing Orders

6.1 Where the Moderator is required to interpret any Standing Orders they shall take advice from the Clerk before making a ruling. The Moderator's decision in all cases shall be final.

7. Presentation of business

7.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.

7.2 A Synod may deliver to the General Secretary not less than twelve weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.

7.3 A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its Synod for consideration and, if the Synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the Synod to comply with Standing Order 7.2 above.

7.4 A member of the Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the General Secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a Synod through which the matter could properly have been raised, the General Secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Business Committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.

7.5 Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Assembly Executive or a committee of the General Assembly or a Synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.

7.6 It shall not be in order at any time to move a motion or amendment which:

7.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or

7.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or

7.6.3 pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or

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- 7.6.4 amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or
- 7.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under Standing Order 7.4, or
- 7.6.6 simply reaffirms existing work.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 7.6.1, 7.6.2, 7.6.3, 7.6.5, and 7.6.6) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 7.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

- 7.7 In advance of the meeting, the General Secretary shall, in consultation with the Moderator and Clerk, prepare a proposal for a Facilitation Group for that meeting, for appointment at the beginning of the meeting. Some or all of the members of the Facilitation Group may be called upon by the Moderator at any time to help the Assembly reach a mind upon a question. The Assembly may add or remove members of the Facilitation Group at any time. The Facilitation Group may consult with whoever they deem it appropriate. Draft revised wording of motions should be checked by the Clerk, and by the Legal Advisor where appropriate, before being proposed to the Assembly.

8. En bloc business

- 8.1 The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide which items of business shall be taken en bloc. Placing business in the en bloc category does not imply anything about the importance of any item of business, merely that those planning the meeting think that it may be possible to agree the business without discussion. Any members wishing to have items removed from en bloc business should notify the Clerk by a stated time in advance of the meeting. If six or more members have so notified, then the business shall be added to the agenda of the meeting, otherwise en bloc business shall be voted upon without any discussion.

9. Business requiring discussion

- 9.1 It is not possible to use full Consensus Decision-Making during many meetings, since Consensus Decision-Making relies upon the Moderator being able to sense the mood of the meeting, and the members also being able to sense that and trust the Moderator, which requires senses not always available in online meetings or meetings with online participants. However, all meetings should still be conducted in the spirit and ethos of seeking consensus.
- 9.2 To ensure that all meetings always operate to the same procedure, noting the blurred boundaries referred to in Standing Order 2, all meetings will use the information session and the discussion session from Consensus Decision-Making, and then take a vote for the actual decision-making.
- 9.3 All decisions shall be made by vote, using the procedure set out in Standing Order 10. The Moderator, Clerk, and General Secretary shall together decide in advance which items of business require a simple majority, and which require a two thirds majority, using the principle that routine formal decisions such as agreeing the minutes of the previous meeting might reasonably be taken on a simple majority, whereas matters of policy require a greater level of support than a simple majority. This Standing Order does not override any other provision for a specific majority set out elsewhere in the Standing Orders, particularly procedural motions.

10. Information and discussion sessions

- 10.1 The first stage is the information session. During the information session, members of Assembly may ask questions only to seek clarification or further information.
- 10.2 Once the Moderator decides that the information session has ended, the Assembly moves into the discussion session, in which the substance of the matter may be discussed.
- 10.2.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Assembly, time for thinking during a break, etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage or electronic equivalent, and shall ensure that the full ranges of voices are given opportunity to contribute.
- 10.2.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. If a proposed change is, in the opinion of the Moderator upon the advice of the Clerk, a major change, then a proposer and seconder are required and it is an amendment.
- 10.3 When the Moderator senses that the Assembly may be ready to reach a decision, the Moderator shall state that Assembly is moving into the decision session.

11. Decision session

- 11.1 All decisions shall preferably be made by vote. Those participating virtually should normally use any built in voting mechanism in the software. In a very small meeting, where the Moderator can see everyone at once, it may be possible to resolve this informally.
- 11.2 Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

12. Business and procedural motions

- 12.1 If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Clerk.
- 12.2 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or Synod, under Standing Order 7.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 7.4 of a motion to **refer back** to that committee or Synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.
- 12.3 During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. During the course of the

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debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.

- 12.4 No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder. The only exceptions to this are motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given, and the procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14. The procedural motions in Standing Orders 12.12, 12.13, and 12.14 may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote, and precedence as between the procedural motions is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.
- 12.5 A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserve the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.
- 12.6 An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion or as a further motion.
- 12.7 If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected, a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.
- 12.8 An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.
- 12.9 The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.
- 12.10 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.
- 12.11 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. It shall be for the Moderator, on the advice of the Clerk, to rule when motions shall be considered as alternatives under the Terms of this Standing Order.
 - 12.11.1 When such draft alternative motions have been received by the General Secretary, the Moderators may ask the General Secretary to convene a meeting (in-person or virtual) of the proposers, to ascertain if it may be possible to agree on a single draft motion to put before the Assembly, or to clarify the areas of disagreement.
 - 12.11.2 If the Assembly has alternative motions before it, each proposer shall be given the opportunity to present their motion in an order decided by the Moderator.
 - 12.11.3 After any amendments duly moved under Standing Order 12 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The

first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting.

12.11.4 Once a sole motion remains, further discussion is permissible and votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way.

12.12 In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration **be not put**. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Should the motion be carried, the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

12.13 In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question **be now put**. This is sometimes described as “the closure motion”. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

12.14 During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be **deferred to the next Assembly**. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, **two-thirds** of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the General Secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The General Secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be presented again at the next Meeting of the General Assembly.

13. Timing of speeches and of other business

13.1 Save by prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.

13.2 The Assembly may meet in parallel sessions or breakout rooms to consider the past work of Assembly committees for questions and comments. Any draft motions arising therefrom must be dealt with in a plenary session of the Assembly.

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- 13.3 Save by the prior agreement of the Business Committee, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Assembly Executive, or from any Synod, shall not exceed five minutes per resolution, and in aggregate not exceed 15 minutes (e.g. a committee with four motions may not exceed 15 minutes), unless a longer period be recommended by the Business Committee or determined by the Moderator.
- 13.4 Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than a different specified number of minutes.
- 13.5 When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.
- 13.6 Secretaries of committees and members of staff who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the Convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator. Staff should not normally seek permission from the Moderator to speak outside their area of responsibility.
- 13.7 In each debate, no one shall address the Assembly more than once without the permission of the Moderator, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.
- 13.8 The foregoing Standing Order (13.7) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.
- 13.9 An invited speaker, whether speaking to a draft motion or not, may address the Assembly for such period of time as may be agreed by the Business Committee.

14. Questions

- 14.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the Convenor of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.
- 14.2 A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.
- 14.3 Questions asked under Standing Order 14 shall be put and answered without discussion.

15. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

- 15.1 A member shall have the right to call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.

- 15.2 A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.
- 15.3 The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.
- 15.4 The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

16. Admission of the public and closed sessions

- 16.1 Only those who are members of the meeting, staff members in attendance, or invited guests may join a meeting. However, a meeting in open session may allow guests or be shown as a live stream.
- 16.2 A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Assembly, the Legal Adviser, and any technical staff required to enable Assembly to function may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and the Legal Adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held *in retentis* by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.
- 16.3 A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Assembly, requiring a simple majority. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded, and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately pause while non-members leave the meeting.
- 16.4 If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Assembly Officers, consulting the Legal Adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.
- 16.5 Members of Assembly who leave during a closed session may not be re- admitted.

17. Communications during the course of debate

- 17.1 The primary responsibility of members is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business in respect of business that the Assembly has completed. Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

18. Record of the Assembly

- 18.1 A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Business Committee may determine.
- 18.2 The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the Clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the Officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.
- 18.3 A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the General Secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.
- 18.4 As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a "Record of Assembly" and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each Synod and local church.

19. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

- 19.1 In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.
- 19.2 Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Assembly Executive). The Clerk of the Assembly may from time to time suggest amendments.

Person responsible for editing document: *Clerk of the General Assembly*
Date of last revision: *August 2022*

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Synod Moderators' Report

Synod Moderators

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Jamie Kissack moderator@urcyorkshire.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The report is offered to General Assembly and to local churches to remind ourselves of the centrality of vocation, and to challenge ourselves about the need to articulate our faith.
Main points	Vocation is central to many aspects of our faith, and the Moderators' role involves us in vocations at many levels. We know that God's call is still alive and active in the church. However, we believe that in general we are much less confident and effective at articulating our faith. We encourage the churches to think about what the next step might be to become a community more confident in sharing the faith that is in us.
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' Reports to General Assembly. The Theos report, ' <i>The United Reformed Church, A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads</i> '.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

The theme of 'vocation' is never far away in the biblical narrative.

The prophetic call rings out through the pages of the Old Testament, as in different ages God calls unlikely and reluctant individuals to speak God's truth to the faith community and to the world.

The call of Jesus to his disciples frames the Gospel narratives, from the early encounters of the fishermen by Lake Galilee to the great commission of the risen Jesus. And that calling is not just to the named 12 whom we tend to call 'The Disciples', but to a wider group of women and men who responded to the astounding authority of Jesus, and took radical steps to follow in loving obedience to the God whom he called 'Father'.

And the apostle Paul's profound sense of being called by the Spirit to bring both Jew and Gentile to Christ is nothing if not a vocation – one he pursues with courage, imagination and energy.

From beginning to end, the bible is a book about vocation.

The worship life of the church echoes that strong biblical theme. Some of our most joyful and singable hymnody is about the call of Jesus, and our response:

*Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?*

It is one of the great privileges of our role as Moderators that we are often involved in the discernment of call within the life of the United Reformed Church. Vocations of different kinds come within our remit. It is our experience that there is nothing more rewarding than sharing with others the unfolding of an exploration of a vocation to ministry.

- Moderators are usually among the first to share with those who are exploring a call to one of our formal ministries, and we will often be fellow travellers as individuals progress through the Candidating process, along with our Candidating Secretaries and TDOs.
- We are intimately involved in the discernment process when ministers seek a move between pastorates or roles. This is always more than just 'seeking another job'. Even though the territory is getting much more complicated, with most calls involving groups and teams, nonetheless we do not lose our strong sense that we are seeking the calling of the Spirit in finding a good match between the gifts and graces of a minister and the missional needs of a pastorate. Every settlement process is set within the framework of vocation, and much careful, prayerful work is done to recognise this.
- Within our individual Synods, we delight in the nurturing of vocations to more local ministries, in eldership, lay leadership, lay pioneering, lay preaching and worship leading. We could all tell stories of people who have been transformed through their obedient response to the call to take up ministry within the local church. How wonderful to see people set on fire by the opportunities to minister and lead in different, Gospel-centred ways
- Then there are all those people we meet, week by week, whose involvement in the local church is so much more than just turning up or filling the rota. These are the people who, through their joyful worship and Christ-shaped service, make our churches places where others want to be and serve. It is humbling to see the dedication of those whose vocation is so vital to the church, and yet which often receives little formal recognition.
- And, of course, we as Moderators are all individuals attempting in our context to remain obedient to a very personal call to discipleship of Jesus that has sustained

us through our varied ministries, and to discover what it means in a collegial setting to share and explore that calling together.

*Will you leave your self behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare,
will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?*

From our particular place within the life of the United Reformed Church, we are in no doubt that God is still calling people to vibrant Christian ministry through our churches. How important it is that we listen to those stories of call with a ready, discerning and supportive heart. There is no doubt that the greater resource of the church is its people, called and committed to the work of the Kingdom.

The Theos report, '*The United Reformed Church, A Paradoxical Church at a Crossroads*', published in 2023, celebrated the URC's commitment to vibrant community outreach, but wondered whether we are quite so good at giving an account of the faith which inspires it. We welcome the report, and recognise that it gives an accurate and insightful picture of the United Reformed Church. It fits with our experience of a church in which many people feel called, but in which many also feel unsure as to how to give an account of our faith.

Is it the case, we wonder, that articulating our sense of call has become too private an affair, hidden within the processes of the church rather than being writ large, and spoken out, through the life of the local church in our communities?

*Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?*

Every local church is in a particular context, and will be at a different point in their missional journey. We wonder what it might look like for each congregation to take a next step towards being more confident in articulating their faith to the wider world, and giving an account of why the good news of Jesus actually matters?

Perhaps the challenge is to create the place in which conversations can happen. One church in Yorkshire Synod recently went into partnership with a charity redistributing excess supermarket food, using their premises as a distribution hub. Inspired by Leading Your Church Into Growth, they took the initiative to open up the church worship area for those waiting, providing refreshments, and creating a space to meet people and engage in open conversation.

Perhaps the missional challenge is to have the right resources to start conversations about faith. As part of Mersey Synod's Talking Faith initiative, they bought each of their churches a number of easy-read Bibles to give out during their carol services. The Bibles are good quality, abridged, and have short prayers in the margin for those who are not used to praying.

Or perhaps the missional challenge is to 'get serious' about inviting people to engage with the good news of Jesus. One church from Eastern Synod tells its story like this:

'We have always had a desire to share our faith, but not always found it easy. Eventually, we realised that we had to be far more intentional and plan regular activities, even if we didn't have the numbers. So, we planned accordingly, in faith. Over the past few years, we have had ongoing Alpha courses throughout each year. When we finish one, we have the next planned, and we try and get people who attended to reattend the next course. We have seen more than 30 people attend these courses, and many make commitments to Jesus for the first time. This has led to baptism services and 'welcome to church' evenings. We now have a strong team of people who want to support and lead ongoing Alpha courses.'

There is no shortage of resources to help us share our faith and to develop our missional strategy, from within our own denomination and beyond. But none of this missional activity will count for anything, of course, if we are not ready and equipped to give an account of our own faith commitment. The same church from Eastern Synod goes on to say:

'We have also found that if we want to get better at anything, we practise. So we try and create a culture in church where we practise sharing our testimonies of what God has done for us. This could be very basic, but it enables us to be increasingly confident in sharing the Good News we carry.'

We recognise that giving voice to our own faith needs to be done with care. Good and faithful mission always needs to integrate word and action in a coherent whole; effective evangelism always needs to listen as faithfully as it speaks; and the goal of mission is not to get our own voice across, but to allow God's voice to speak. This said, we encourage the United Reformed Church in all its wonderful, God-given diversity to be serious about how we give an account of the hope that is in us.

*Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.*

John Bell and Graham Maule
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Personalia

Since our last report to General Assembly, there have been a significant number of changes to our meeting. We have said farewell to Simon Walking as he moved into a local pastorate. We said farewell to Dave Herbert and Paul Whittle who have both

retired. We have welcomed Kim Plumpton to the role of Northern Synod Moderator, Michael Hopkins as the Moderator of Wessex Synod, Lindsey Sanderson as the Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland and Dave Salsbury as the Moderator of the National Synod of Wales.

As a meeting, we look forward to completing the team as we welcome David Downing as the new Moderator of South Western Synod.

Questions for discussion

1. How ready and effective are we at expressing our own commitment to being disciples of Jesus, and what might help us to be more effective?
2. How does our way of life, our commitments and priorities, help or hinder other people's openness to the Gospel?
3. How does the way we live our life together in the church strengthen one another's faith?
4. In what ways are the answers to the first three questions the same or different? How do they inform each other?

Paper A1

Revised Terms of Reference

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mark Robinson mark.robinson@urc.org.uk
Action required	To be noted.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Terms of Reference of the Business Committee. To present the remit and strategic role of the Business Committee as approved and adopted from resolutions passed in the Church Life Review Paper N1 at General Assembly 2023.
Main points	Increased membership of the Committee; Remit; operational role; strategic role.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly Task Group Paper N1: Moderators, clerks and councils, Mission Council May 2019.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Business Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Business Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Business.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	General Secretary.

Ex officio members	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The General Secretary. 2. The Clerk of the General Assembly. 3. The Moderator of the General Assembly. 4. The immediate past Moderator. 5. The incoming Moderator of the General Assembly. 6. The Assistant Clerk to the General Assembly. 7. The Treasurer to the General Assembly. 8. The other members of the General Secretariat.
General Assembly appointed members	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A convenor 2. Two members appointed by the General Assembly to reflect the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church.
Length of term	<p>Assembly appointed members of the committee serve a four year term.</p> <p>Other members serve on the committee as dictated by the length of their <i>ex officio</i> roles.</p>
In attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	<p>Head of Communications, Equalities Representative, Head of Children’s and Youth Work, Moderator’s Chaplain(s).</p>
Minute Secretary	<p>PA to General Secretary.</p>
Meeting frequency	<p>Four times per year. However, meeting frequency is determined by factors such as the volume of business to be addressed and the urgency of matters requiring attention.</p>
Subgroups / sub-committees	
Quoracy	
Accountability and reporting duties	<p>To the General Assembly. The Business Committee ensures transparency, accountability and effective governance within The United Reformed Church by reporting on its activities, proposing initiatives and collaborating with others, and establishing systems for addressing emerging challenges and opportunities.</p>
Terms of Reference Review	<p>At least every four years, in consultation with the URC Trust. Next review due April 2027.</p>

Remit, operational role and strategic role of the Business Committee:

Remit:

The Business Committee holds the following responsibilities:

- to oversee the practical arrangements of meetings of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive
- to oversee and order the business of the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive
- to supervise the practical and business arrangements for the General Assembly and the Assembly Executive
- to prepare an order of business embracing all the business known to be arising
- to address such logistical questions as arise which the General Secretariat cannot resolve
- to advise the Moderator(s) on their official duties where required.

Strategic role:

The Business Committee's strategists role involves:

- Keeping a strategic overview of the work of the General Assembly, facilitating the coherence of business across the various committees of the church
- Ensuring the coherence of the strategies of the General Assembly, good governance, and the operational work of the Assembly
- When necessary, instigating new business to ensure the wellbeing of the work of the General Assembly
- In urgent circumstances, taking any necessary decisions on behalf of the General Assembly in between meetings of the Assembly or Assembly Executive, and to report them to the next meeting of the Assembly or Assembly Executive.

Operational role:

- From time to time, the Business Committee will have operational responsibility for elements of the life of the Church as delegated by resolution from the General Assembly.

Paper A2

Business Committee update

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mark Robinson mark.robinson@urc.org.uk
Action required	For note.

1. Overview of the Committee's work

Since the last General Assembly, the Business Committee has undergone significant changes in composition and remit, enabling us to undertake a more strategic role within the church. The updated composition has been expanded, as per resolution 53 of the 2023 Church Life Review paper N1, to now include all members of the General Secretariat, the Assistant Clerk and the Moderator Elect of the General Assembly, as well as an Independent Convenor, the General Secretary as Executive Secretary, the Moderator of the General Assembly, the immediate past Moderator and the Clerk and Treasurer of the General Assembly, and two members appointed to reflect the diversity of the United Reformed Church. This new structure positions us effectively for the strategic oversight and governance tasks with which we have been entrusted.

The committee's expanded remit encompasses overseeing the practical arrangements and ordering the business of the General Assembly and its Executive, maintaining a strategic overview of the Assembly's work, ensuring coherence in governance and operations and, when necessary, taking urgent decisions on behalf of the General Assembly. These responsibilities are detailed in the appended terms of reference document.

2. Revised approach to key tasks

Despite our initial efforts, we were unable to fill the roles required to set up the three intended task groups as outlined in Paper N1, at resolution 48: Task Group on Resource Sharing, resolution 49: Task Group on Local Church Support Services, and resolution 51: Task Group on Locally Employed Lay Workers. Consequently, we have revised our approach to ensure the critical work continues effectively. This is reported on separately.

3. Steering Group formation

Working with the Nominations Committee, we have established a Steering Group to replace the three task groups initially planned. This group will oversee the workstreams, support the Programme Manager and General Secretary, commission work with consultants, and prepare reports and recommendations for General Assembly 2025. The Steering Group consists of individuals with suitable knowledge and experience, drawn from the nominations process and other relevant sources.

4. Finance and resource sharing workstream (resolution 48)

The finance task group was intended to develop models for financial resource-sharing across the United Reformed Church. Given the revised approach, most of this work will now be undertaken by consultants, guided by the Steering Group and supported by the Programme Manager. A series of workshops and events will engage Synods, Trusts and other stakeholders to identify and evaluate resource-sharing options, with feasibility studies conducted by external consultants. This process aims to present well-researched recommendations to the extraordinary General Assembly in 2025.

5. Local church support services workstream (resolution 49)

The task group for local church support services will also be replaced by the Steering Group, which will explore models to provide consistent support functions in areas such as finance, property, health and safety, human resources, and safeguarding. The Steering Group will coordinate consultations and feasibility studies, ensuring comprehensive support models are developed and evaluated against the values and principles adopted by the General Assembly.

6. Lay workers in local churches workstream (resolution 51)

Instead of forming a dedicated task group, we will implement 'living labs' to test models of employed lay work within local churches. These labs will gather examples of good practice, compile job descriptions, and explore infrastructure needs. Moderators, we hope, will help guide the discernment of roles and test sites, and findings will inform the Steering Group's recommendations to the General Assembly 2025.

7. PLATO handbook (resolution 50)

The re-establishment of the PLATO handbook remains a priority. A facilitated consultation event will be organised to agree on the content and structure of the handbook, which will serve as a central online resource for trust, property, financial and related matters. This event is a critical step in ensuring that the handbook is comprehensive and up to date by 2025, and also forms a central plank in the possibility of creating more effective support services for local congregations.

8. Extraordinary General Assembly in 2025

To accommodate the significant decisions arising from the Church Life Review and other ongoing work, an extraordinary General Assembly will be held in addition to the regular General Assembly in 2025. The extraordinary meeting will focus exclusively on the Church Life Review and related strategic initiatives. It will take place from Friday November 14 2025 to Sunday November 16 2025, at Kents Hill Park in Milton Keynes. This venue offers excellent accessibility and facilities to ensure a productive Assembly.

9. Assistant Clerk role review

A paper reviewing the role of the Assistant Clerk is appended for discussion. It highlights the need for clarity in the distribution of duties between the General Secretary and the Clerk, proposing that the Assistant Clerk be recognised as a full member of the General Assembly. This role review is essential as we seek to appoint a new Assistant Clerk who can effectively support the Clerk's responsibilities.

10. Decisions taking on behalf of the General Assembly

The Business Committee has appointed the following people as Synod Moderators on behalf of the General Assembly, following their nomination by the appropriate nominations process: The Revd Dave Salisbury as the Moderator of the National Synod

Business Committee

of Wales; The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins as the Moderator of Wessex Synod; and The Revd David Downing as Moderator of the South Western Synod.

The Business Committee initiated an independent review into the Ministerial Disciplinary process, to be conducted by Dr Ed Morgan, KC. The results and consequences will be reported when the review is complete and recommendations for a revised process have been made.

Assistant Clerk

Review of role – January 2024

1. This paper was prepared by the current post-holder, in consultation with the Clerk of the General Assembly.
2. The Assistant Clerk role was created by Mission Council, acting on behalf of the General Assembly in 2019, arising from the work of the General Assembly task group. The detailed report of the task group can be found in Paper N1 from the May 2019 meeting of Mission Council, with the relevant section concerning the future of the role of Clerk of General Assembly in paragraph 4. Paragraph 4.2 in particular describes the potentially (very) heavy workload of the Clerk, mindful that this ministry in the life of the denomination is a voluntary one. It highlights that this is among the most demanding of the voluntary ministries of the Church, and that the pattern of work from which the creation of the Assistant Clerk role arose was not sustainable. Paper N1 explored a variety of solutions settling on the creation of an Assistant Clerk post.
3. Paper N1 envisaged the possibility of creating a pool of people who would have sufficient experience of the role having served as Assistant Clerk 'for a year or two at a time'. While a commendable sentiment, this was never going to happen for at least two reasons: first, that this simply isn't how nominations in the United Reformed Church generally work, and second, because, as with the role of Clerk, there are not enough individuals with the gifts and graces to serve in either role in the denomination to create such a resource.
4. Ultimately, the decision was made to create the Assistant Clerk post to serve, in the first instance, for a three-year term from 1 January 2020. The original Job Description and Person Specification is appended to this paper. This initial appointment was extended twice, initially until General Assembly 2023 to encompass the search and appointment process for a successor to the current Clerk, and secondly until General Assembly 2024 to enable the current post-holder to continue to serve as Assistant Clerk until induction as Clerk, and so a review of the Assistant Clerk role could take place.
5. It would be fair to say that while the General Secretary is understood to serve officially as Deputy Clerk (although understandings are hazy about where this is stated!), in practice, the Assistant Clerk functions more in this way than as outlined in the original paperwork. This is particularly so in respect of the committee load where the Assistant Clerk is a full member of the Business Committee, the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group, and the Law and Polity Advisory Group. It has been found that there is benefit to these groups, and to the general running of business, that this has been the case. The only 'committee' where attendance is on an *ad hoc* basis is the United Reformed Church Trust; this has been, in part, a result of capacity issues, and also because the constitution of URCT does not currently permit a different arrangement. While the relationship between the Clerk and Assistant Clerk since January 2020 has certainly not been one of a job share, it certainly has been one

of a strong colleague partnership between post-holders, each bringing distinctive, helpful and positive contributions to the totality of the task of the clerkship of the General Assembly and its committees. Thanks must be offered to the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins for his patience and willingness to share a substantial portion of his ministry as Clerk, and to support an at-times nervous apprentice.

6. It is recommended that the position of Assistant Clerk continue with a revised job description. Suggested changes to the detail are indicated in the document attached. Essentially, looking to the next season of this aspect of the support of the General Assembly in particular and the United Reformed Church in general, the following other changes are suggested:
 1. the term of office follow the same pattern as other nominations to voluntary roles in the URC made by the General Assembly or on its behalf
 2. the matter of who serves as Minutes Secretary for General Assembly and Assembly Executive has been resolved for the time being, hence the commentary about this is moot; ultimately, the Clerk and, by extension, the Assistant Clerk, are responsible for ensuring that minutes are recorded; how this is done and by whom is a detail that does not need to be included in the Assistant Clerk's job description
 3. to work with the Clerk progressing appeals and constitutional reviews up to and including the opportunity to serve as clerk at hearings of such should the Clerk not be available to do so on the Clerk's invitation to so serve
 4. to cover for the Clerk during holidays, sabbatical, sickness or other periods of absence.

Role Description

Job title	Assistant Clerk of General Assembly
Area / department	General Secretariat / General Assembly
Reporting to	The Clerk
Direct reports	Various volunteers at General Assembly and Assembly report to the Clerk and Assistant Clerk.
Location	The Assistant Clerk normally works from home.
Travel	Some travel in UK.
Working hours	Not fixed. These vary considerably over the year. Some periods can be very quiet, while others, eg in the days before meetings of the General Assembly or Assembly Executive, overseeing and preparing for an appeal, or attending and completing work for or from a committee, can be considerably busier.
Salary band	Voluntary role. Expenses for travel, subsistence, overnight accommodation if necessary incurred carrying out the business of this role shall be reimbursed in full by the central denomination.
Job summary: To assist the Clerk in being an efficient and impartial source of constitutional advice to the General Assembly, in particular to its Moderators; also, so far as reasonably possible, to others in the URC.	

Background:

Decisions about policy and the central work of the URC are made at an annual meeting called General Assembly. There are about 250 representatives, including lay persons, elders, and ministers. Committees are appointed to carry out the decisions of General Assembly.

Principal responsibilities and duties

Main duties

1. Attend all sessions of Assembly Executive and General Assembly as a member of those bodies.

Business Committee

2. To assist with the provision of advice on the preparation and presentation of business to General Assembly and Assembly Executive, and on procedures for dealing with this.
3. To assist in the production and authorization of the minutes of General Assembly and Assembly Executive.
4. ~~Work with the Law and Polity Advisory Group on issues of constitutional change as required.~~ Attend as a full member the Business Committee, the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group, and the Law and Polity Advisory Group, with the particular remit to support the Clerk in the giving of constitutional and procedural advice where necessary. Be in attendance at URC Trust meetings as appropriate.
5. To assist in the drafting of constitutional documents as required.
6. Offer advice as required to staff and committees of the General Assembly when requested by the Clerk.
7. Offer independent advice on the constitution and procedures of the Church to all members when requested by the Clerk.
8. Act as secretary in certain appeals procedures on behalf of the Clerk, or assisting the Clerk, if required.

Working with committees and volunteers

This section lists the type and level of interaction that this role has with committees and other groups. It will vary from time to time, and as directed by the Assembly.

The Clerk is a member of the following:

1. The Law and Polity Advisory Group
2. MIND, the ministerial incapacity and discipline advisory group
3. The Business Committee
4. The United Reformed Church Trust
5. Task groups requiring the Clerk's help when business involves constitutional change
6. Other committees may call on the Clerk's advice and help from time to time.

The Assistant Clerk will be expected to be a member of the Law and Polity Advisory Group, ~~to attend other meetings once with the Clerk for familiarisation, and to attend some meetings in place of the Clerk.~~ the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group, and the Business Committee. It may be possible for some of the committee work to be divided between the Clerk and Assistant Clerk; however, the benefits of membership of all should be retained. Attendance at the Business Committee and LPAG should be considered a priority. There may be opportunities for the Assistant Clerk to serve alongside, or in place of, the Clerk on other task groups and, according to experience and interest and with the support of the Clerk, take on other pieces of work related to constitutional, legal and procedural matters.

The Assistant Clerk will be expected to clerk certain items of business at General Assembly and ~~Mission Council~~ Assembly Executive. ~~There is currently a Minutes Secretary, however if the Minutes Secretary were unavailable then the Assistant~~

~~Clerk would be expected to take the minutes. If the Minutes Secretary were to stand down in future, the Assistant Clerk may be expected to take the minutes routinely. The General Secretary is the permanent Deputy Clerk, and can cover the role in the unexpected absence of the Clerk and/or Assistant Clerk. This, however, should be understood as an option of last resort because of the risk of conflict between the priorities and responsibilities of the General Secretariat and the need for the councils of the United Reformed Church to access the constitutional and procedural advice they need to do their work. The role of Assistant Clerk is two-fold: to share the volunteer workload, and to provide a pool of people who have experienced the role.~~

Updated June 2019

Expected Standards

This section refers to the way in which the job is done, rather than the duties / responsibilities.

1. Promote a culture of open and effective communication to enable constructive relationships with colleagues and internal and external colleagues.
2. Actively foster an environment which nurtures equality and cherishes diversity.
3. Act in ways that protect their own and others' health, safety and security.
4. Work collaboratively to develop a service culture which fosters continuous improvement.
5. Take responsibility for their own personal development, and develop skills and knowledge to enable effective work performance.
6. Promote, monitor and maintain best practice in data protection principles and practice.
7. Specific job related standard: be attentive to boundaries – of process, office, time-limits and confidentiality – and foster an environment that respects these.

This job description reflects the overall scope and responsibilities of the role. However, it is not an exhaustive list, and the job-holder is expected to undertake any other reasonable duties that might be requested. All jobs change or evolve over time in order to meet organisational or departmental needs, and this job description will therefore be subject to periodic review and change if required.

Person Specification

Job title: Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

Requirements	Essential	Desirable	Measurement
Education and qualifications	1. Member of the United Reformed Church		
Experience and knowledge	2. Thorough knowledge of the United Reformed Church, its structures and councils	Working with legal documents	
Skills and abilities	3. MS Office suite, specifically Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Access (Intermediate level) 4. Excellent communication and interpersonal skills 5. Collaborative working 6. Accuracy and attention to detail 7. Confidentiality		
Other	8. Willing to travel within the UK 9. Flexible in attending meetings, events (eg weekends, residential) 10. Willing to work within the Christian ethos of the United Reformed Church.		

Paper A3

Terms of Reference for Children's and Youth Work Committee

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson (Convenor) paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 1 General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for Children's and Youth Work Committee as contained in Paper A3 General Assembly 2024.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Children's and Youth Work Committee has revised the terms of reference from 1994 when it came into being to reflect the current remit of the committee. Role descriptors have been created to aid the recruitment of future committee members.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Appendix III from GA 1994 <i>Book of Reports</i> Committees of The General Assembly May 2013 Mission Council.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

In 1994, General Assembly set up the Youth And Children's Work Committee with the following remit:

This committee supports, encourages and promotes work among children and young people, giving oversight to Pilots, the National Youth Resource Centre at Yardley Hastings, the YLTO and YWCT programme and relating to FURY Council. It also ensures that its concerns are fully taken into account in committees 1, 2 and 3 facilitating the involvement of young people in all the councils of the church.

*Assembly Standing Committee: Youth and Children's Work -FURY Council**

** FURY Council is not a committee of the Assembly; its members are not nominated by the Nominations Committee and approved by the Assembly. Placing it here emphasises the importance which the Church gives to this council and enables it to approach the General Assembly through the Youth and Children's Work Committee.*

The Committee was renamed Children’s and Youth Work Committee at Mission Council in May 2013.

The current Children’s and Youth Work Committee has revised the terms of reference to reflect the changes within the URC and the work of the committee, and presents the following for adoption.

Children’s and Youth Work Committee Terms of Reference 2024

Committee	Children’s and Youth Work.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	Head of Children’s and Youth Work (HCYW).
Ex Officio members	CYDO+ team representative URC Youth Moderator, Moderator Elect General Secretary Deputy General Secretary (DGS) for Discipleship Moderator of General Assembly.
General Assembly Appointed members	Convenor Six members with collective experience of local church and wider work with children, young people and young adults, including linked organisations (Pilots, URCGSF, Boys’ Brigade, Girls’ Brigade, Messy Church) – with a balance of ordained, commissioned and other members (at least one of each). In addition, when appropriate, a Convenor Elect shall be appointed to serve for one year before becoming Convenor.
Length of term	Initial term of four years, which may be extended by up to two years.
In attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Programme Officer, Children’s and Youth Work Secretary for Education and Learning Secretary for Ministries

	Equalities Committee Representative.
Minute Secretary	Administrator, Children's and Youth Work.
Meeting frequency	Two online and two 24-hour residential meetings per year (20 hours).
Sub-groups / sub-committees (as at 2024)	URC Youth Executive URC Children Task Group C&Y Grants Task Group Lundie Award Task Group.
Quoracy	Four members, always to include the Convenor or Convenor Elect.
Accountability and reporting duties	General Assembly report every other year. The Committee will provide an update report to General Assembly and/or Assembly Executive as appropriate. Responsibility for the implementation of policies and decisions of the Children's and Youth Work Committee rests with HCYW, and ultimately, the DGS Discipleship.
Terms of Reference review	Every four years.

Responsibilities

Children, young people and young adults are central to God's mission and Christ's church (Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-14)

The remit of the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) is to support, encourage and promote work among children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church, and to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in all the councils of the church, ensuring that their voices are heard and all decisions taken consider the impact on future generations.

CYWC Theory of Change

Overall aim: all ages serving, worshipping and being community together.

specific aims: changing church culture to a radical inclusion of children, young people and young adults, focused on whole life discipleship.

objectives: provide strategy and programme of opportunities, resources, support and possibilities to enable churches to engage with children, young people and young adults.

The Children's and Youth Work Committee has key responsibilities across a number of interlinked and interdependent operational areas. These areas are:

- CYDO+ programme – negotiating contributions to the Assembly level programme and resources for Children’s and Youth Work
- URC Youth – supporting the Youth Moderator and Youth Executive in running Youth Assembly and representing URC Youth
- URC Children – enabling children to belong, be seen and heard, supporting all engaging with them in mission and discipleship.

The Committee has delegated authority from the General Assembly in relation to finance. In exercising this authority, the Committee shall:

- Remain within agreed budgetary expenditure
- Manage the various Children’s and Youth Work grant funds and Pilots funds.

The Committee has the authority to set up, and dissolve, subgroups and sub-committees as necessary.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities at least once per year, but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email, with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor / Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it can instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work. The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it is deemed necessary, with reference to the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship for unbudgeted professional fees. The Committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team as deemed necessary.

Role descriptors – Children’s and Youth Work Committee

Members – four year term

Person specification: Bring experience of and passion for local church and / or wider work with children, young people and young adults including linked organisations (for example Pilots, URCGSF, Boys’ Brigade, Girls’ Brigade, Messy Church).

Commitment to listen to children and / or young people and bring their perspectives to the work of the committee.

Time commitment: Two online and two 24-hour residential meetings per year (20 hours of meeting time).

Willingness to contribute to meetings, help to shape strategic direction, share resources widely, gather feedback on issues and concerns, be an advocate for the role of children and young people in the church.

Willingness to be part of a standing subgroup or sub-committee (such as URC Children, Grants, Lundie Award) or shorter term task and finish group to work on a particular task between meetings.

Convenor – four year term

- Chairing meetings
- Planning the agenda and inviting contributions
- Preparing summary minutes to share with other committees and teams
- Liaising with Head of Children's and Youth Work
- Consulting with other Committee Convenors and Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship
- Represent CYWC at General Assembly and Assembly Executive – presenting reports and resolutions
- Preparing reports and papers
- Invited to attend CYDO+ team meetings; CYDO+ line managers meetings; and Youth Assembly.

Paper A4

WFO Terms of Reference

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope (Convenor) rpp20@cam.ac.uk Andy Braunston (Secretary) andy.braunston@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To record the Terms of Reference for the Worship Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	To note the delegated authority of the Committee in support of the work of the Minister for Digital Worship.
Previous relevant documents	Record of Assembly, 2023, pp. 29-30.
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Responsibilities

The Worship, Faith and Order Committee's remit was established by General Assembly in 2023:

- to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
- to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order
- to listen to concerns raised by local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to questions of worship, faith and order

- to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship
- to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

The Committee has delegated authority from the General Assembly in relation to matters of worship and the curation of worship resources, including those previously published. In exercising this authority, the Committee shall:

- respond, as necessary, to ecumenical papers around worship
- oversee the curation of worship materials undertaken by the Minister for Digital Worship and
- establish, from time to time, working groups to create or revise published liturgies.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities at least once per year, but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email, with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor / Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it can instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work.

The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it is deemed necessary, with reference to the Chief Operating Officer for unbudgeted professional fees.

The Committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team as deemed necessary.

Paper A5

Terms of Reference for Ministries Committee

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 2 General Assembly adopts the Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee was last updated in 1984. This paper updates those Terms to current work.
Main points	The paper explains the updated responsibilities and duties of the Ministries Committee.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 1984 Resolution 12.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Ministries Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Ministries.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	Secretary for Ministries.
Ex Officio members	General Secretary Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) Past Moderator of General Assembly Moderator of General Assembly Moderator-Elect of General Assembly.
General Assembly appointed members	Four members with experience of the ministries of the Church (two lay and two ordained); a Synod Moderator; convenor of the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee; convenor of the Assessment Board; the Advocate for Leadership in Worship; convenor Maintenance of the Ministries sub-committee; convenor of Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee.
Length of term	Initial terms of four years, which may be extended for a further term.
In attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Secretary for Education and Learning Secretary for Children's and Youth Work Committee Development Worker for CRCW & SCM.
Minute Secretary	PA to the Secretary for Ministries.
Meeting frequency	Four times per year (36 hours), in February, April, July, November.
Sub-groups / sub-committees	Assessment Board; Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee; Leadership in Worship sub-committee; Maintenance of the Ministries sub-committee; Retired Ministers' Housing sub-Committee.
Quoracy	Six.
Accountability and reporting duties	General Assembly.
Terms of Reference review	Every four years.

Responsibilities

- The Ministries Committee (the Committee) carries the General Assembly's responsibility and care for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, lay preaching, worship leading, lay pioneering and eldership.
- It is concerned with central care and conditions of service of chaplaincies in industry, healthcare, higher and further education, prisons, and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry.
- Along with Synods, it has concern for the wellbeing of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Elders, including supervision where appropriate, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling.
- Oversight of five sub-committees:
- Its particular responsibilities are:
 - Advocacy, recruitment, selection and training of candidates for Ministry of the Word and Sacraments (MWS) and Church Related Community Worker (CRCWs) in co-operation with the Synods
 - Relations with Education and Learning Committee, Resources Centres for Learning, and external bodies that train MWS and CRCWs, both stipendiary and non-stipendiary, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Elders
 - Development and revision of policies and processes to support the ministries of the Church
 - Development and revision of policies and processes about ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work strategy, including deployment numbers appropriate to the life and mission of the Church
 - Development of new ministries to support the life and mission of the Church
 - To work with other committees in the Discipleship Department to ensure best practice in relation to ministries of the Church
 - To work with the Mission Department to ensure best practice in relation to Ministries of the Church
 - Any other pieces of work deemed necessary by the Church
 - Oversight of five sub-committees.

Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee

Functions of the sub-committee:

- the approval and subsequent monitoring of CRCW projects
- the approval and subsequent monitoring of SCM projects
- the approval and subsequent monitoring of new pioneering projects
- the consideration and management of Certificates of Eligibility (acting under delegated authority of General Assembly function xxi and xxiii as set out in the *Structures of the United Reformed Church in The Manual*)
- the consideration and management of Certificates for Limited Service
- the maintenance of the Roll of Ministers
- the advocacy of CRCW ministry

- such other matters as may, from time to time, be allocated by the Ministries Committee.

It meets four times per year: January (Residential), March, June and October.

It reports to Ministries Committee four times a year.

Assessment Board

Functions of the Board:

The Assessment Board has delegated authority from General Assembly for assessing candidates for ministry under function xxix of the General Assembly, as set out in the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church as found in *The Manual*. As such, it has its own Appeals Process.

- The Board oversees the candidating process for ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers on behalf of the United Reformed Church
- Oversees Assessment Conferences each year normally in March and November
- Hears any appeals to the Assessment Conference discernment decisions using the Assessment Board Appeals Process
- Oversees Education for Ministry Phase 1 training through the Secretary for Education and Learning and the RCLs
- Hears concerns from the RCLs concerning students and, where necessary, implements the Amber Light Policy Stage 2 process to makes decisions about the continuation of training for students who are underperforming
- Instigates any Occupational Health Assessments for students in EM, as advised by the RCL
- Administers Assessment Board Training, which all new assessors must attend before they can begin as an assessor, including ASD awareness training
- Continually reviews processes to ensure best practice at all stages of candidating, including Synod and Assessment Conferences, advising Synods of changes to the process as necessary
- Advises Ministries of the accreditation of students in training through the Accreditation (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee
- It meets on an annual basis via Zoom for the Assessment Board AGM
- It oversees two Assessment Conferences, normally in March and November
- It oversees the annual meeting with Candidating Secretaries or equivalent, and the Annual assessor training in October
- It reports to Ministries Committee four times a year.

Leadership in worship sub-committee

Functions of the sub-committee:

- to be responsible for the advocacy of Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching and Locally Recognised Worship Leading within the United Reformed Church
- to support those who lead worship in the United Reformed Church
- to promote the recognition and value of lay preachers/worship leaders, and encourage others to answer the call to this ministry whenever and wherever possible
- to raise issues and concerns in relation to Lay Preaching and Worship Leading to the Ministries Committee
- to act as a reference point on procedures and good practice

- to encourage and enable the production or updating of guidelines, where appropriate
- to arrange an annual Consultation for Advocates in cooperation with the Ministries Office
- to encourage and enable networking between Advocates
- developing an e-newsletter regarding training and development opportunities, ideas for events, resources, etc.

It meets twice a year, in January and June, including the annual retreat / gathering of the Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching Advocates.

It reports to Ministries Committee four times a year.

Maintenance of the Ministries sub-committee

Functions of the sub-committee:

- advising on, and recommending the annual revisions to the stipend to, the Finance Committee using the agreed formula: the average of the Consumer Price Index for the latest month available (September) and the Average Weekly Earnings increase over the latest three months (June-August), for regular pay
- advising on, and recommending, the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Finance Committee
- recommending amendments to ministerial conditions of service, The Plan for Partnership, in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from Church House staff
- resolving questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception
- making decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health
- receiving a report on pension matters and ill health retirements that is made to each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.

The Committee meets twice a year, normally in April and September, but may conduct urgent business via email.

It reports to Ministries Committee four times a year.

Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committee

Functions of the Committee:

- be the point of liaison between Ministries and RMHS on behalf of the URC and tenants, ensuring that all eligible members are adequately housed and supported in retirement
- raise matters with the RMHS directors in relation to the needs of retired ministers and/or spouses
- be responsible for gathering data for projecting future housing requirements for RMHS (URC Minister's Data Privacy Policy 2019)
- determine each applicant's eligibility for RMHS housing provision
- promote good practice among ministers in making provision for retirement, including:
 - a) a seminar ten years before the expected date of retirement, and
 - b) a pre-retirement course
- seek additional funding support from URC synods and Synod Trust companies through URC General Assembly resolutions

- appeal for donations and legacies from URC local churches and church members, through appeals based on resolutions to the URC General Assembly
- appeal for RMHS Volunteer Overseers from the URC membership through General Assembly or Synod meetings
- undertake anything else General Assembly instructs it to do.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities at least once per year, but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor / Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it can instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work.

Paper A6

Revised Terms of Reference

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Elizabeth Welch elizabeth@skerratt-welch.org.uk Adrian Bulley adrian.bulley@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 3 General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee as contained in Paper K1 of General Assembly 2024.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To propose revised Terms of Reference for the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee.
Main points	Amendments proposed to aid clarity and reflect experience.
Previous relevant documents	Mission Council, November 2020 – Paper I1.
Consultation has taken place with...	Chief Operating Officer.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Pastoral Reference and Welfare.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).
Ex Officio members	Synod Moderator (appointed by the Synod Moderators' Meeting) Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer General Secretary.
General Assembly Appointed members	Two lay members One minister member.
Length of term	Four years.
In attendance (to cover their area of expertise)	Secretary for Ministries.
Minute Secretary	Personal Assistant to the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).
Meeting frequency	Three times per year (usually February, July and November) using video-conferencing.
Sub-groups / sub-committees	None. However, the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee works with the Maintenance of Ministry Sub-committee (MoM Committee), a sub-committee of the Ministries Committee.
Quoracy	Four (including at least two Assembly-appointed members).
Accountability and reporting duties	Biennially to the General Assembly. However, the report will only deal with general matters, and the committee will not report on, nor may it be questioned on, individual cases.
Terms of Reference review	March 2027.

Context

Synods, through their pastoral committees (or equivalent) and their Synod Moderators, are the primary locus of care and oversight for ministers and congregations.

The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (the committee) exists to

1. consider cases which are referred to it, normally by Synod Moderators, and
2. to have oversight of the welfare funds of the General Assembly.

As such, the committee seeks to offer support and assistance after other sources have been explored, but no relevant assistance has been found to be available.

The committee has key responsibilities across several interlinked and interdependent operational areas. These areas are:

- Synod Moderators' Meeting
- Finance Committee
- MoM sub-committee.

Responsibilities

1. The committee will consider the cases of United Reformed Church ministers and congregations which are referred to it because of some perceived pastoral need by Synod Moderators, Assembly Executive or the Officers of Assembly.
2. On referral, the committee will seek to enable the minister's service within the URC to be continued, if that is seen by all concerned to be appropriate, and to this end may consider financial support for a course of retraining, or therapy, or counselling.
3. On referral, the committee may initiate discussion with the Synod Moderator and Minister 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.
4. On referral, the committee may authorise the 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 committee. The MoM sub-committee (or such other body as shall in future carry out the functions of the sub-committee) or the Chief Finance Officer will accept this authority for payment.
5. In each case, the committee will make clear to the minister concerned, through the Synod Moderator, the period for which payments will be made, and if it may be extended.
6. The committee will respond to any questions posed to it by the Payroll Manager regarding applications for welfare grants.
7. The committee, in consultation with the Finance Committee, will determine the level of welfare grants to be paid from Assembly funds.

Confidentiality

It is evident that the work of the 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.

Risk management

The committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities at least once per year, but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can be taken via email, with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor / Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it may instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work. The committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it is deemed necessary, with reference to the Chief Operating Officer for unbudgeted professional fees.

The committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team, as deemed necessary.

Paper A7

Terms of Reference for the Education and Learning Committee

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Pippa Hodgson, Convenor pippahodgson147@gmail.com Jenny Mills, Secretary for Education and Learning jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 4 General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Education and Learning Committee as contained in Paper D2 of General Assembly 2024.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Terms of Reference for the Education and Learning Committee.
Main points	Revised Terms of Reference Appendices with background information.
Previous relevant documents	2005 Principles endorsed by General Assembly 2006 Resolutions from General Assembly 2021 Mission Council Member Role Descriptor.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Education and Learning Committee The Discipleship Team.

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Education and Learning Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Education and Learning Committee.
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly.
Secretary	Secretary for Education and Learning.
Ex-officio Members	General Assembly Moderator General Secretary Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship).
General Assembly Nominated Members	Three members with collective experience across the range of Education and Learning.
Length of term	Four years.
Representative members	A Synod Moderator An RCL Principal A representative of the TDO+ Network A representative of the CYDO Network An EM1 Student Representative (one year).
In attendance	RCL Principals (other Colleges) Secretary for Ministries Equalities Committee Representative Ecumenical Representative.
Minute Secretary	PA to Staff Secretary.
Meeting frequency	Four to five meetings per year, one in person over 24 hours (c 20 hours).
Subgroups / sub-committees as of 2024	Continuing Studies Fund (x1 / year) Student Finance Panel (x1 / year).
Quoracy	Six, at least two of whom are the GA appt members.
Accountability and reporting duties	To General Assembly Responsibility for the implementation of policies and decisions for the Committee rests with those employees appointed by Church House to do so, and ultimately the Secretary for Education and Learning.
Terms of Reference review	Two years, or more frequently if things change.

Responsibilities

The Education and Learning Committee (the Committee) has key responsibilities across a number of interlinked and interdependent areas, and works closely with Ministries and Children and Youth teams and the Synod Training and Development+ Network.

These areas are:

- Education for Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers (EM1, EM2, EM3 funding and educational elements)
- Education for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers
- Education for Ordained Elders
- The Learning Hub and its programmes
- Stepwise
- Lay learning
- Funding streams.

In exercising this authority, the Committee shall:

- foster relationships with Synods through the TDO+ Network
- maintain relationships with the Resource Centres for Learning and receive updates and monitoring reports
- have oversight and effective distribution of the education and learning budget, including funding streams
- review processes and programmes to maintain currency and reflect best practice.

Risk management

The Committee will review the Risk Register as it relates to its key responsibilities at least once per year, but will add additional risks as and when they arise.

Conducting business

The Education and Learning Committee aims to endorse, inspire and encourage lifelong learning for all God's people. Our aspiration is that learning opportunities are accessible, inclusive, integrated, and involve cooperation and collaboration across the whole URC.

Discipleship Development Strategy aims:

- to create opportunities for everyone to encounter the living God, whether they already identify themselves as followers of Christ or not
- to encourage everyone in their prayer life and relationship with God to enable them to live as disciples of Jesus
- to encourage everyone to make the most of educational opportunities that are relevant and appropriate for them in their discipleship journey.

We will also intentionally consider the voices of children and young people, equality and diversity, green issues and safeguarding in all we discuss and decide.

In addition to the planned meetings, others can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it.

Decisions can also be taken via email with the same rules of quoracy applying. Such decisions will be recorded by the Convenor / Secretary and noted at the next meeting, with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects, and it can instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work. The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it is deemed deem necessary, with reference to the Chief Operating Officer for unbudgeted professional fees.

The Committee has discretion to seek input from the wider staff team, as deemed necessary.

Context

The Committee has delegated authority from the General Assembly in relation to the provision of education and learning. This is operational delegated authority over General Assembly functions V, VI and VII as set out in the *Structure* of the United Reformed Church in *The Manual*. Matters of major strategic and policy directions will remain subject to General Assembly resolution. Should any dispute arise as to whether a matter is operational or strategic policy making, the Business Committee shall determine how the business is to be treated.

The Education and Learning Committee has the power to initiate or dissolve sub-committees and sub-groups from time to time, as necessary.

Appendices

(Previous relevant information)

1. Our 2005 principles

General Assembly endorses as key training principles for the United Reformed Church: 51

- Integrated education and training to equip the whole people of God for mission – promoted with coherence and in tune with the policies flowing from the Equipping the Saints and Catch the Vision reports; Ecumenical engagement at every stage
- The presentation of a distinctive Reformed Ethos and History in that ecumenical engagement
- The delivery of this policy in a manner appropriate to the circumstances of the three nations in which the United Reformed Church is situated.

2. Resolutions from 2006

- The Synods in England to participate as proactively as possible in the development of the ecumenical Regional Training Partnerships for the training and nurture of the whole people of God in line with the policies agreed by General Assembly and specifically resolution 35 of 2005
- General Assembly, in line with the Training report, welcomes the commitment of the Northern, Scottish and Westminster Colleges to act for the United Reformed Church in a new role as Resource Centres for Learning and to undertake dispersed, integrated training and Christian education for the whole people of God. General Assembly agrees to keep its relationship with these Resource Centres for Learning under ongoing review and asks the Training Committee (*now Education and Learning Committee*) to report on them to the Assembly [of 2012].

3. March 2021 Mission Council D2

Appendix A: Key elements of the Education and Learning Committee member role description

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The booklet '*They've asked me to be a committee member*' provides a full and accurate description of the role and responsibilities of a typical member of our Assembly Committees. The specific additional responsibilities for the Education and Learning Committee are described below.

2 Education and Learning Committee member responsibilities

- 2.1 The Education and Learning Committee has a total of seven Assembly appointed members. Four of these have distinct job or post-related responsibilities:
- RCL Principal representative: only one of the RCL principals is invited to be a voting member; the others are non-voting members
 - TDO Network representative, whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of the teams involved with training and development in the Synods are considered
 - CYDO representative, whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of the teams involved with children's and youth work in the Synods are considered
 - EM1 student representative, whose role includes ensuring the interests and concerns of all EM1 students studying in our RCLs are considered.
- 2.2 Note that the Nominations Committee will be guided in their recommendations for these positions by the networks the positions represent.
- 2.3 The remaining three Assembly appointed members have been classified 'without portfolio'. In other words, they are appointed not because of a present job or position within the URC, but are appointed to look after the interests of the United Reformed Church as a whole.

These members are expected to:

- use all their gifts to support the aims of the Education and Learning Committee
- to accept collective responsibility for all Education and Learning Committee decisions
- to adopt fully the 'blended' working practices of the committee, such as the use of email and videoconferencing
- to ensure the interests and concerns of the denomination as a whole are considered.

April 2024

Review proposed March 2026

Paper A8

Creating a Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund (RMBF)

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer deputy.treas@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 5 General Assembly accepts the recommendations in points 4 (a) to (f) of the Reflections and Proposals section of this paper and agrees to establish a Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund with an initial budget of £39,000 per annum.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report further on work done in assessing the need for a benevolent fund for retired ministers and to present resolutions for consideration by Assembly.
Main points	General Assembly 2023 paper G3 and its Resolution 23 were designed to promote discussion about the need for, and resourcing of, a URC Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund. In the event the lack of time available precluded the paper from being presented so the investigation was delegated to a working group to gather further information and present proposals to General Assembly 2024, if possible.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G3 for General Assembly 2022 and Paper G3 for General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC), Secretary for Ministries Committee, Synod Moderators, Ecumenical partners and Finance Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	No immediate additional cost and we are investigating what resources may be available in Restricted Funds whose terms meet criteria related to retired ministers' support.
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Commentary – Paper G3 (2023)

1. Paper G3 tabled to General Assembly 2023 reported on a GA 2022 instruction to the Finance Committee create a working group to consider:
 - a) whether a benevolent fund might be the right way to provide support to retired ministers in particular financial difficulties; and if so
 - b) in what circumstances might ministers be eligible for support from such a fund, and
 - c) what should be its nature and size, and how it might be resourced.
2. Research carried out suggested sources of support, both within the URC and externally, were patchy.
3. The paper reported that it was difficult to describe in generic terms what difficult situations might be incurred by retired ministers, but it was felt that there was a need for a benevolent fund.
4. It was reported that it was not possible to determine the size of the fund that might be needed until the population requiring support had been clarified. A further working group was therefore convened to develop principles and criteria for determining eligibility. Paper G3 (2023) included an appendix setting out the draft principles and criteria.

Subsequent action

The Business Committee took oversight of this work, and having received feedback as requested by the Treasurer at General Assembly 2023, formed a further working group to consider the questions raised by Paper G3 and the feedback. This group comprises:

- Chair – the Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch
- Moderators – the Revd Geoffrey Clarke and the Revd Steve Faber
- Secretary to Ministries – Nicola Furley-Smith
- Deputy Treasurer – Vaughan Griffiths.

The group gathered anecdotal information from the Moderators and Secretary to Ministries, and then decided to widen the information gathering by sending a survey to all Synods. The results of this survey are given in Appendix I to this Paper.

Reflections and proposals

1. We believe all retired ministers should be treated fairly and equally wherever they live in the UK, and as far as possible, Synods should act similarly.¹ We also believe that the purpose of a retired ministers' benevolent fund is to seek to give a compassionate response to cases of need, within the constraints of available resources.
2. We commend the work done by the small group who prepared the statement of principles and criteria for the report to General Assembly 2023. We largely re-affirm those principles, but with certain changes. The revised principles and criteria are shown in Appendix II.
3. Following a consultation with Synod Moderators, a survey was sent out to them to gather information on the need for a benevolent fund for both serving and retired ministers. This indicated a variety of support, and a variety of resources.

A more detailed commentary on the results is given in the appendix to this paper.

4. Our proposals for a way forward are:
 - a) We adopt the principles reported by the working group to GA 2023, as amended (Appendix II).
 - b) Annual Christmas gifts to retired ministers or their widows/widowers should be administered at Synod level. The Synods are best placed to support retired ministers etc in their area, and can better assess their wider needs than a central committee or secretariat could do. Income from central funds (URC Trust) for retired ministers' welfare should be distributed annually to Synods on the basis of the estimated number of ministers/widows /widowers eligible. The amount distributed is to be encouraged as a UK nationwide standard amount to be paid out, as an expression of the 'no postcode lottery' principle and aiming to be fair to all who are eligible.
 - c) A benevolent fund for supporting retired ministers should be run centrally for the kind of exceptional situations outlined in the principles in Appendix II. The application will be prepared by the Synod to demonstrate eligibility and need, and the central input (see paragraph (d) below) will be only to judge the fairness and consistency of applications, and to hold to the budget for each year's maximum distributions.

¹ For example, a Synod with separate trust funds for supporting retired ministers might be encouraged to consider meeting a need from such funds in line with the RMBF principles.

- d) We recommend that the work of administering this Fund be undertaken by the PRWC.² This will need the agreement of the PRWC and the Business Committee for this to go forward. The RMBF working group will take this consultation forward, and report back to Assembly Executive.

- e) The funding of this benevolent fund will be via a designated fund opened for this purpose, and funded (if possible) from existing designated or restricted funds. An annual budget is tentatively proposed at £39,000, thereafter as agreed by the Resources Committee annually.

- f) It is inevitable that experience will refine the operation of the RMBF. We therefore propose that a first review is carried out in Autumn 2025.

² Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

Appendix one

Some observations on the Synod survey

Responses

1. Responses from Synods were varied; some provided answers in detail, some were unable to do so, but indicated principles or structures for supporting ministers in need.
2. In some cases, welfare benefits are under the control of the moderator alone, so if there was a moderator vacancy, nothing much happened. Alternatively, in some cases, the administration of benefits was out of the Moderator's hands.
3. Some Synods have separate trusts which hold funds for benefit purposes. Where these could be identified, we did look for further information (eg via Charity Commission), but without any great success.
4. Most Synods have resources for benefits to be paid to both serving and retired ministers.

Numbers

1. The largest gift reported appears to be £3,000 as a contribution towards removal expenses; the background circumstances were not reported.
2. All other reported gifts appear to be £750 or less.
3. In the majority of Synods, the main area of support is towards serving ministers, sometimes very markedly so.
4. On the other hand, two Synods spent more supporting retired ministers; one spent £24,469 over three years on housing repairs, and another spent £64,450 over three years, but predominantly over 2022 and 2023. We surmise this was supporting ministers' fuel bills.

Christmas gifts

1. A minority of Synods reported regular Christmas gifts to widows and widowers.
2. Centrally, the Christmas gifts are only paid to widows / widowers of stipendiary ministers; qualification applies to ministers who die in service or when retired.

Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

Appendix two

Appendix to General Assembly Paper G3 (2023) – amended

Principles and criteria for Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund:

1. The Fund must be equally applicable and accessible across the whole URC family (no postcode lottery).
2. The Fund should be a last resort: all statutory sources of benefits etc normally should be explored and claimed where possible.
3. The Fund must be for exceptional cases of hardship. It is not there to provide a guarantee of a universal minimum pension for all ministers.
4. Overall household income should be taken into account in assessing hardship (not just the minister's income).
5. The Fund is for making up a shortfall in income over a period of at least a year. It is not for covering one-off needs such as car repair bills or replacement of white goods, for which Synod welfare funds are often available.
6. Awards from the Fund should be reviewed annually: they will not be 'lifetime' payments.
7. Awards from the Fund must be discretionary and decided on a case-by-case basis: eligibility to apply for an award does not equate to entitlement to receive one.
8. There needs to be an income threshold for eligibility (ie income above the threshold disqualifies an application to the Fund). We suggest that this should be the sum of 50% of the current in-service stipend and the full standard state pension.³
9. There should be an annual cap on the maximum payable under the scheme in each case. We suggest that this should be 15% of the current in-service stipend.⁴

The retired minister's Synod of residence must be responsible for assessing eligibility in the first instance, and for supporting and forwarding applications to the Fund.

³ For 2024/25 this would amount to about £27,500 p.a.

⁴ For 2024/25 this would be about £4,800.

Paper A9

Conflicts of Interest statement and policy

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 6 General Assembly: 1. Adopts the Conflicts of Interests Statement</p> <p>Resolution 7 2. Approves the policy for General Assembly Committees</p> <p>Resolution 8 3. Instructs the committees of General Assembly to work within this policy</p> <p>Resolution 9 4. Encourages Synods, Synod Trust companies and the URC Trust to review, amend or adopt where necessary their own conflicts of interest policy.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The aim is to be able to manage conflicts of interest effectively across the denomination, where there are numerous independent yet related entities, councils and committees. This context means that conflict of interest management is especially important, but complex.
Main points	<p>A Conflicts of Interest Statement and policy has been prepared after consultation, as detailed below. The Statement is aimed to apply across the denomination, and General Assembly is asked to adopt it on this basis.</p> <p>The policy documents are offered on the basis that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The committee version of the policy will apply to all General Assembly Committees 2. Synods and Synod Trusts are encouraged to adapt the Trust policy for local adoption

	<p>3. URC Trust is equally encouraged to adapt the policy for adoption</p> <p>4. It can be a resource to assist Synod Trust Companies review their own policies.</p>
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>URC Trust</p> <p>Law and Polity Advisory Group</p> <p>Synod Moderators</p> <p>Synod Clerks</p> <p>Synod Trust Companies</p> <p>Legal Adviser – Andy Middleton.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	None specifically.
External (eg ecumenical)	None specifically.

1. Background

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church relies heavily on volunteers, ministers, and paid members of staff in local churches, Synods, Synod Trust Companies, General Assembly and its committees, and the URC Trust and other associated bodies. Having people who serve in multiple roles across these different entities is partly a consequence of the fall in membership, but also vital to achieving connectedness across the denomination. This does, however, make managing conflicts of interest more complex. Therefore, having a clear approach to managing conflicts of interest when they arise is important, and doing so in a consistent way, helps support good governance across the denomination.
- 1.2 The detail provided in this paper and the associated resolutions are offered as a way forward to begin to co-ordinate our approach to managing conflicts of interest across the denomination.

2. Proposed statement

- 2.1 After consultation as set out above, a proposed Statement is provided in Appendix 1 of this paper. The intention would be for this statement to be applied throughout the whole denomination, which would then require a response from across the church (see section 3).
- 2.2 General Assembly is asked to adopt the statement.

3. Proposed policy

- 3.1 Again, after the same consultation, a proposed policy is provided in Appendix 2 of this paper. General Assembly is asked to adopt the policy so that it applies to the Committees of General Assembly.
- 3.2 So that we can move towards greater consistency, General Assembly is asked to encourage Synods, Synod Trust companies and the URC Trust to review their own policies against this one, and adapt and adopt as considered necessary.

3.3 It is anticipated that the policy is generally suitable for adoption, as it has been prepared taking into account the consultation which has taken place.

4. Next steps

4.1 If General Assembly adopts the Statement and approves the policy, then:

- a) The Chief Operating Officer will provide both documents to Committee Convenors and Secretaries independently of the book of reports (reflecting any amendments which may be required by General Assembly), and training will be offered accordingly.
- b) A template declaration and register will be provided to Committee Secretaries.
- c) The new Nominations Committee will be offered appropriate guidance on Conflicts of Interest in relation to new Nominations to Committees.
- d) Similarly, the Chief Operating Officer will provide the final copy of the statement to Synods, Synod Trust Companies and the URC Trust, and a Word version of the policy to support local adaptation and adoption.

Appendix one

Conflicts of interest – URC Statement

The United Reformed Church (URC), including all its associated Trust Companies, entities, and committees ('we', 'us', 'our'), is committed to managing conflicts of interest. We know and acknowledge that:

- Conflicts of interest affect organisations of all types and sizes.
- Conflicts of interests may be potential, actual, perceived or alleged.
- Conflicts of interest can have a range of consequences, including inhibiting open and free discussion, or leading to decisions which are not in the best interests of the organisation, or which are invalid or open to challenge.
- Our governance structures mean that individuals will very often hold several roles and/or offices in different aspects of church life which may, from time to time, give rise to potential conflicts of interest. As such, our policies and procedures need to address conflicts which arise out of role / offices held, as well as individual conflicts of interest routinely addressed through company and charity law.

The Charity Commission and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) consider it good practice for charity trustees to implement a conflicts of interest policy, and they have provided helpful guidance and model policies which set out the principal ways to manage the risk of conflicts of interests adversely influencing decision-making. It is important that there is awareness of the potential for conflicts in decision-making by all the various entities, committees and groups that are involved in the life of the URC.

To manage the risk, the URC is committed to ensuring that, across the Church, there are policies and procedures in place to ensure that our decisions and decision-making processes are, and are seen to be, free from personal bias, and do not unfairly favour any individual or group. We are therefore also committed to equipping those who serve within our governance structures to not just be able to identify potential conflicts of interest for themselves and others but be able to handle them effectively as they arise. This will enable us to ensure that the activities of the church and the decisions taken within the various Councils and committees of the Church, are conducted with the highest standards of integrity and governance. The URC also encourages the other associated entities such as Trust companies and charities to take account of the URC conflicts of interest policy for the Committees of General Assembly and the other model policies referred to and to review and update their policies in respect of identifying and managing conflicts of interest.

Appendix two

Conflicts of Interest policy (General Assembly Committees)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy applies to members of all General Assembly Committees, sub-committees, Groups, Advisory Groups and Task Groups. Moderators and Members of the General Secretariat are asked to act within the spirit of this policy when fulfilling their roles in all contexts, not just with Committees, Groups, Advisory Groups and Task Groups.
- 1.2 This policy sets out guidelines and procedures for identifying, monitoring and managing actual and potential conflicts of interest.
- 1.3 In this policy references to:
- a) 'conflicts' or 'conflicts of interest' include actual and / or potential conflicts of interest and / or duty.
 - b) persons who are 'connected' with a committee member means:
 - i. a child, stepchild, grandchild, parent, grandparent, brother or sister of a committee member;
 - ii. the spouse, unmarried partner or civil partner of a committee member or of any person falling within paragraph (i) above;
 - iii. any person who is in a business partnership with a committee member or any person who is in a business partnership with any person falling within paragraph (i) or (ii) above; and
 - iv. any company, business, trust, or organisation in which a committee member (or any other person connected to them) has an interest as a beneficiary or through ownership, control or influence.
 - c) 'benefit' includes any payment or material benefit (including property, loans, goods and services), other than reasonable out-of-pocket expenses.
 - d) 'Committee(s)' means all General Assembly Committees, Sub-committees, Groups, Advisory Groups, Task Groups.
 - e) 'Committee members' means all members of Committees as defined in 1(d) above.
 - f) 'Risks' associated to conflicts of interest primarily relate to financial and reputational risks. The nature of the relationships involved in the conflicts as relevant to the assessment of the level of risk associated to a conflict of interest.

2. The purpose of this policy

- 2.1 The URC has made a Statement outlining its commitment to effective management of conflicts of interests and, as such, seeks to apply the same standards to Committee members as applies to Charity Trustees; the decisions made in Committees are significant for the life of the church and often have financial implications. Committee members have a duty to act in the best interests of the Committee on which they serve.

- 2.2 Committee members must not place themselves in a position where they have, or may have, whether intentionally or not, a direct or indirect interest that conflicts with their duties as a committee member, and must not profit from their position as a committee member.
- 2.3 Conflicts of interest can inhibit open discussions, and may result in committee members taking irrelevant considerations into account, or making decisions that are not in the Committee's best interests. They can also damage the reputation of the Committee, and thereby other entities within the URC, if it appears that the committee members are influenced by personal interests or loyalties. All committee members must, therefore, be alert to the possibility that they, or their co-committee members, could be affected by a conflict of interests.
- 2.4 The procedures in this policy will enable committee members to identify and manage conflicts of interest so that they can ensure that conflicts do not prevent them from making decisions in the best interest of the Committee. The policy will also help protect both the Committee and its members from any appearance of impropriety should a conflict of interest arise.
- 3. Identifying conflicts of interest**
- 3.1 A conflict of interest is any situation in which a committee member's direct or indirect interests could, or could be seen to, prevent them from making a decision only in the best interests of the Committee.
- 3.2 Conflicts of interest may arise:
- a) where a committee member (or a person connected to them) stands to obtain a benefit from the Committee; or
 - b) where a committee member has a duty of loyalty to a third party that conflicts with their duty to the Committee. In the context of the URC, this could include having duties to another Committee within the URC and / or being a director of the URC Trust or a Synod Trust.
- 3.3 When considering if they have a conflict of interest, a committee member must be aware of the following principles:
- a) a conflict of interest exists if there is a possibility that the committee member's personal interest could influence their decision-making, even if the committee member's decision-making is not, in fact, adversely affected by the conflict. A reasonable perception that a conflict of interest exists can be enough for a committee member to be in breach of their duties.
 - b) the interest that gives rise to a conflict may be direct or indirect. A conflict may therefore relate to the interests of someone who is connected to a committee member, as well as to their own personal interests.
- 3.4 It is impossible to set out every situation which may result in a conflict, but common situations include:
- a) selling, loaning or leasing Committee assets to a committee member (or a person connected to them).

- b) the Committee acquiring, borrowing or leasing assets from a committee member (or a person connected to them).
- c) the exploitation by a committee member (or a person connected to them) of any property, information or opportunity of which they become aware while acting as a committee member.
- d) paying a committee member for carrying out a post within Committee or in another charitable entity within the URC.
- e) paying a committee member (or a person connected to them) for providing a service and / or goods to the Committee.
- f) employing a person connected to a committee member at the Committee.
- g) making a grant to a committee member (or a person connected to them) or determining the Committee's grant-making policy where the committee member (or a person connected to them) is a beneficiary.
- h) making decisions in relation to service provision where a committee member (or a person connected to them) is a service user.
- i) when a committee member (or a person connected to them) owes a legal obligation or duty towards another organisation or person (for example, an employer or another Committee of which they are a committee member) that conflicts with the committee member's duty to the Committee; and
- j) when a committee member has a personal sense of loyalty to another organisation (including a Synod Trust or URC Trust) or person that conflicts with their loyalty to the Committee.

4. Procedure for declaring interests

- 4.1 All committee members have a personal responsibility to declare any interest that might reasonably be regarded as potentially giving rise to a conflict. Therefore, training will be given to all new Committee members to help them understand conflicts of interests and the implications of this policy.
- 4.2 On appointment, all committee members must complete a declaration of interests form:
 - a) listing any personal interests, business interests or other direct or indirect interests that might potentially give rise to a conflict of interests.
 - b) listing any interests of persons connected to them that may potentially give rise to a conflict of interest.
 - c) declaring any gifts or hospitality received or offered to them in their capacity as committee member.
 - d) confirming that they are not aware of any conflict, other than those already disclosed, that exists between their role and their personal circumstances or other interests.

- e) confirming that they will update the form annually, or sooner if any changes occur; and
- f) confirming that they will declare any conflict that arises in the future.

4.3 The information provided by committee members must be recorded in a register of committee members' interests. At least once in every 12-month period, all committee members must review the information relating to them contained in the register of interests and declare that the information is correct, or make a further declaration if necessary.

4.4 It is for individual committee members to decide which matters to declare but, if in doubt, they should make a declaration. If a committee member would like to discuss the issue, they may contact the Secretary to or Convenor of their Committee for confidential guidance.

4.5 The information provided by committee members will be processed in accordance with the principles for processing personal data set out in UK data protection legislation. Data will be processed only for the purposes set out in this policy, and not for any other purpose.

5. Maintaining the register of committee members' interests

5.1 The Secretary to the Committee will be responsible for maintaining the register of committee members' interests, and will:

- a) record in the register all conflicts, interests, gifts and hospitality declared by committee members; and
- b) circulate amendments or additions to the register (if any) to the Committee at the start of each Committee meeting.

5.2 The Register of Committee Members' interests will be available (on request) for inspection by any member of the Committee to which the register relates.

6. Declaration of interests by prospective committee members

6.1 Before a prospective committee member is appointed, they must be asked as part of the safer recruitment process to declare any direct or indirect interests they have that might give rise to a conflict of interests. Such information is to be passed to the Nominations Committee as part of the safer recruitment summary.

6.2 If Nominations Committee considers it likely that the prospective committee member will be subject to serious or frequent conflicts of interest, the Nominations Committees should consider whether it is appropriate to proceed with the nomination.

7. Process for declaring conflicts

7.1 The first item on the agenda of each committee meeting will be a standing item requiring all committee members attending the meeting to declare any conflicts of interest relating to the matters to be discussed at the meeting.

7.2 If a committee member considers that they have an actual or potential conflict, they must inform the chair as soon as possible, and always before any discussion

of the relevant matter. The declaration must specify the nature and extent of any direct or indirect interest that gives rise to the conflict.

- 7.3 If a committee member is aware that another committee member has an actual or potential conflict that has not been declared, they must notify the Convenor.
- 7.4 A committee member may give general notice that they or a person connected to them has an interest in a specified company, business or organisation and is to be regarded as interested in any transaction or arrangement with that company, business or organisation that may be entered into by the Committee, after the date of the notice. Such notice must be given at a meeting of the committee members, or the relevant committee member must take reasonable steps to ensure that it is brought up and read at the next meeting of the committee members after it is given. The notice must state the nature and extent of the interest that the committee member or a person connected to them has in the company, business, or organisation.
- 7.5 If the Convenor is declaring a conflict, they must inform the Deputy Convenor (where the Committee has such a role) or the Secretary.
- 7.6 If a committee member is uncertain whether or not they are conflicted, they must err on the side of openness and declare the interest.
- 7.7 The Secretary to the Committee must note all conflicts declared in the minutes of the meeting in which they were declared or, if not declared in a meeting, in the minutes of the next Committee meeting.

8. Procedure for declaring interests in transactions and arrangements

- 8.1 A committee member who has a direct or indirect interest in any proposed transaction or arrangement with the committee must declare the nature and extent of that interest before the transaction or arrangement is entered into by the Committee.
- 8.2 If a committee member has a direct or indirect interest in a transaction or arrangement that has already been entered into by the Committee but has not declared that interest, they must declare the nature and extent of that interest as soon as is reasonably practicable.
- 8.3 If a declaration made under paragraph 8.1 or paragraph 8.2 proves to be or becomes inaccurate or incomplete, the conflicted committee member must make a further declaration giving correct information about the nature and extent of their interest.
- 8.4 A declaration made under paragraph 8.1, paragraph 8.2 or paragraph 8.3 must be made either at a meeting of the committee members or by sending written notice to the other committee members.

9. Procedure for assessing conflicts at meetings

- 9.1 At the start of each meeting of the committee members:
- a) the Convenor must inform the other committee members and the Secretary to

the Committee of any conflict of interest that has been declared by a committee member that relates to the business to be discussed at the meeting; and

- b) the Committee will consider any amendments or additions to the register of committee members' interests circulated by the Secretary in accordance with paragraph 5.1(b).

9.2 The way in which conflicts are dealt with will depend on the nature and extent of the conflict. The non-conflicted committee members must therefore:

- a) assess the nature and extent of the conflict.
- b) assess the risk or threat to decision-making by the committee members.
- c) decide whether the conflict is serious (for example, the conflict is acute or extensive, will or may be seen to prevent the committee members from making decisions in the best interests of the Committee, relates to a significant decision, or risks significantly damaging the Committee's reputation); and
- d) decide what steps to take to handle the conflict.

When considering the conflict, committee members must take all relevant factors into account, make decisions only in the best interests of the Committee, and always protect the Committee's reputation.

9.3 The conflicted committee member must not take part in any discussion or decision about the conflict and how to handle it, and will not be counted in the quorum for that part of the meeting.

9.4 The non-conflicted committee members must consider whether it is necessary to seek the advice of the Clerk or Assistant Clerk on whether the conflict is serious and / or on how to manage the conflict declared.

10. Authorised conflicts of interest

10.1 The committee member's duty to avoid a conflict of interest does not apply if, and to the extent that, the conflict of interest is authorised by:

- a) an express provision in the Committee's Terms of Reference; or
- b) Committee decision.

10.2 Examples where conflicts may be authorised would include:

- a) Ministers, officers and lay staff involved in pension decisions when they are a member of a relevant pension scheme.
- b) Ministers or officers in receipt of a stipend who are involved in decisions relating to any inflationary increase applied to stipends.
- c) Lay staff in receipt of a salary who are involved in decisions relating to any inflationary increase applied to salaries.

10.3 If the Committee authorises a member's conflict of interest, it can do so with or without conditions attached.

10.4 In each case, the committee member must always follow any conditions that apply to the authorisation, and must still follow the procedures for declaration.

11. Procedures for managing conflicts

11.1 If the conflict arises owing to a financial transaction between the Committee and a committee member (or a connected person), or because a committee member (or a connected person) will or may obtain a benefit from the Committee:

- a) any potential or proposed benefit must be authorised in advance (see section 10 (Authorised conflicts of interest) above); and
- b) the conflicted committee member must:
 - i. withdraw from all discussions and decisions in relation to the matter; and
 - ii. not be counted in the quorum (if the committee Terms of Reference provide for a quorum; the majority do not) or from the assessment of the number of the votes required to reach a majority for that part of the meeting.

11.2 If the non-conflicted committee members decide that a conflict is serious, they must consider:

- a) securing the conflicted committee member's resignation and/or appointing a new committee member who is not conflicted.
- b) not pursuing the course of action that gives rise to the conflict, or proceeding in a different way so that the conflict does not arise.
- c) seeking the advice of the Clerk or Assistant Clerk about how to handle the conflict.

11.3 If a conflict is not serious, the non-conflicted committee members must decide what procedures and level of participation by the conflicted committee member are appropriate. Steps that can be taken to deal with the conflict include:

- a) requiring the conflicted committee member to withdraw from the meeting for the relevant item.
- b) allowing the conflicted committee member to remain in the meeting for the relevant item to take part in the discussion, but requiring them to withdraw from the meeting during decision-making and to have no right to vote on the matter; or
- c) advertising for a new, non-conflicted committee member, if the Terms of Reference allow. This would be considered if there were numerous conflicts of interest of the same nature present in a Committee.

11.4 If the non-conflicted committee members decide that the conflict is low risk (in that it will not prevent the conflicted committee member from making decisions in the best interests of the Committee), they may agree that the conflicted committee member may continue to participate in discussions and the decision-making process.

11.5 The chair must inform the conflicted committee member of the non-conflicted committee members' decision about how to manage the conflict.

- 11.6 The minutes of the relevant meeting must include a record of the nature and extent of the conflict, an outline of the discussion' and the actions taken to manage the conflict.
- 11.7 Where a committee member or a connected person receives a payment or benefit from the Committee, this must be minuted and reported to the Chief Operating Officer to record.

12. Advisers and conflicts

- 12.1 Before appointing any external advisers to the Committee, the committee members must consider whether the adviser has, or may be seen to have, any actual or potential conflict with the interests of the Committee.
- 12.2 All advisers to the Committee must be appointed by the committee members under terms that include:
- a) an obligation to inform the committee members if any circumstances arise in which they are or may be conflicted; and
 - b) an obligation to address any conflicts that arise in the work they do for the committee members.
- 12.3 Some employed staff and office holders are members of Committees with an advisory function as part of their role. They too are expected to follow the provisions of this policy.

13. Conflict resolution

- 13.1 In the event of conflicts arising between entities of the Church, then resolution will be facilitated by a non-conflicted party. This could include through the Convenor of another entity, a Moderator, a convenor of a General Assembly committee, or a member of the General Secretariat. If the nature of the conflict means this approach is not possible, then external facilitation may be available. As such external facilitation would come at a cost, this can only be instigated after approval has been received from Business Committee.

All newly appointed committee members must receive training on this policy, on identifying situations that may result in a conflict, and ways in which conflicts can be managed in practice. In addition, committee members must be familiar with the principles contained in the Charity Commission's guidance on conflicts (see paragraph 1.2).

14. Monitoring, enforcing and reviewing this policy

- 14.1 Any committee member who becomes aware of a breach of this policy must report it to the Secretary to the Committee as soon as possible.
- 14.2 The Secretary to the Committee must:
- a) report all breaches of the policy of which they are aware to the committee members at the next committee member meeting; and
 - b) ensure that all breaches are noted in the minutes of the relevant committee meeting.

- 14.3 If the breach relates to actions of the Convenor or Secretary then this should be reported to the Clerk in the first instance for guidance.
- 14.4 The committee members have implemented this policy to monitor and manage conflicts of interest. Any failure to comply with the terms of this policy will not, in itself, result in a decision of the committee members being invalidated, or in any liability to the Committee's beneficiaries.
- 14.5 This policy should be reviewed biennially by Business Committee, or sooner if required, with changes communicated to Committees accordingly.

Paper A10

New Nominations Committee and safer recruitment

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 10</p> <p>1. General Assembly offers profound thanks to Helen Lidgett and Margaret Marshall for their work as Convenor and Secretary of the Nominations Committee as they step down from these roles at this General Assembly 2024.</p> <p>Resolution 11</p> <p>2. General Assembly appoints Victoria Paulding to serve as the Convenor of the new Nominations Committee from General Assembly 2024 to General Assembly 2028.</p> <p>Resolution 12</p> <p>3. General Assembly appoints the representatives reflecting the diversity of the Church to the new Nominations Committee as named in supplementary reports to Assembly.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work outlined in resolution 54 of General Assembly 2023 and to appoint a new Convenor and representatives to the Nominations Committee serving from General Assembly 2024.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	Paper N2, Church Life Review Structures, General Assembly Book of Reports 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Business Committee, the previous Nominations Committee, Assembly Committees, the General Secretariat, Global Intercultural Ministries and the Head of Children's and Youth Work.

Summary of impact

Financial	No additional financial applications over and above those envisaged by resolution 54 of General Assembly 2023.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. General Assembly 2023 determined that all Nominations serving the ongoing work of the General Assembly should be made in accordance with Safer Recruitment policies. It instructed the Business Committee, in consultation with the officers of the outgoing Nominations Committee, to appoint a new Nominations Committee, made up of six members, reflecting the diversity of the Church. We particularly give thanks to Helen Lidgett and Margaret Marshall for their dedication and hard work in making the handover process as smooth as possible.
2. Terms of reference were drawn up which specified that the six members should be constituted as follows: a convenor, a member of the General Secretariat, a Human Resources specialist member of the Resources Committee, a person with Equality Diversity and Inclusion specialism, a person from the Racial Justice Advocates or Global Intercultural Ministries (GIM) Network, and a representative from URC Youth. General Assembly 2023. Resolution 54 outlined a network of champions across the denominations to signpost opportunities to serve on Assembly Committees and sub-committees. In the first instance, it is envisaged that Synod Clerks would be the initial point of contact to assist in highlighting vacancies within each of their Synods. The members of the new Nominations Committee appointed from the Racial Justice Advocate / GIM network and URC Youth would also serve as champions for their relevant areas.
3. The new Nominations Committee will delegate the process of Safer Recruitment to Assembly Committees, but with necessary support in transitioning to incorporate the required procedures. Nominations Committee will continue to receive the names offered by Assembly Committees, ensuring that appropriate process has been followed, including the denomination's commitment to diversity in all of its representation. Nominations Committee will produce a list of nominations to Assembly Executive and General Assembly for appointment.
4. General Assembly 2023 resolution 54 recognised the need for staff administrative support to assist in implementing the safer recruitment processes, and instructed the General Secretariat to put this in place. A temporary member of staff has therefore drawn up generic templates to help the Assembly Committees in this work. Once the new Nominations Committee begins its work post-General Assembly 2024, Assembly Committees will be supported in the implementation of these new procedures.

Paper A11

Future of *Reform*

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 13 General Assembly instructs the Chief Operating Officer and the Resources Committee to manage the future of <i>Reform</i> from August 2024 onwards by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. continuing with <i>Reform</i> magazine, unchanged but requiring annual subsidy of up to £50,000 per annum; or 2.a making changes to <i>Reform</i> (through staffing changes and number of issues) such that the magazine is cost neutral before the end of 2024; or 2.b making changes to <i>Reform</i> (through staffing changes and number of issues) such that the magazine is cost neutral before the end of 2025; or 3. ceasing to publish <i>Reform</i> as a URC communication tool.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To take a decision on any future subsidy of the <i>Reform</i> Magazine.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The external review of <i>Reform</i> is to be read in the wider context of the URC budget, and budget strategy agreed at Assembly Executive in November 2024. 2. The review indicates that <i>Reform</i> magazine has a place within the existing Communications Strategy, but the magazine cannot continue unchanged without subsidy. 3. General Assembly is to decide the extent of the change it seeks in the light of the overall budget deficit.
Previous relevant documents	<p>Communications Paper to GA 2020 and subsequently Resolution 35 from GA 2020. Paper G2 Budget Strategy for 2025 onwards (Assembly Executive Nov 23) Paper G1 General Assembly Budget (Assembly Executive Nov 23).</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	As detailed in Appendix 1.

Summary of impact

Financial	The different options have a financial impact in so far as the subsidy of <i>Reform</i> is relevant to the budget savings which Assembly Executive sought in November 2023.
External (eg ecumenical)	None specific.

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2020, General Assembly received a paper from the Communications Committee which included the summary of subsidy General Assembly / Mission Council had previously given to *Reform*.
- 1.2 At General Assembly in 2020, the following resolutions were passed:
- a) Mission Council recognises the contribution of *Reform* to the life and work of the United Reformed Church and notes the commitment of the Communications Committee and staff team to continue its growth and development over the five-year period from January 2021 to December 2025, a period that includes the 50th anniversary of the URC and the magazine.
 - b) Mission Council acknowledges with thanks the work of the *Reform* team and the wider Communications Team in making savings and reducing the financial cost to the Church, and endorses the further changes outlined in the report. 6 of 70 United Reformed Church – Record of General Assembly, July 2020 General Assembly.
 - c) Acting on behalf of General Assembly, and noting the decision in March 2020 by the Officers of Assembly to support *Reform* in 2021, Mission Council resolves to support *Reform* over the subsequent four year period to December 2025 by continuing with a reduced annual subsidy, not to exceed £50,000 annually, and asks the Communications Committee to make regular reports to Mission Council.
- 1.3 In the light of the budget situation and the decisions taken by Assembly Executive in November 2023 about the approach to addressing the deficit, Business Committee felt it was appropriate to instigate a review of *Reform* to address the question of the subsidy of the *Reform* magazine.
- 1.4 An independent communications consultant was instructed by Business Committee to carry out a review of *Reform*. In doing so, she worked with Jane Humphries who is a member of Finance Committee and Peter Knowles, a former Convenor of the Communications Committee. The report is provided in full in Appendix 1.

2. The current and future status of *Reform*

- 2.1 The review indicates that *Reform* has a place within the current Communications strategy and it sits alongside News Update, social media and the website as our current modes of communication. The review also indicates that the *Reform* magazine should revert to being a magazine for the URC rather than anything

broader than that. Even if General Assembly were to take option 1 above and continue the subsidy of *Reform* then it should be on the basis of this change.

- 2.2 General Assembly would need to decide whether option 1 is an appropriate route to take in the light of the budget deficit. Similarly, in considering option 3, General Assembly needs to decide whether it wishes to continue have *Reform* magazine a mode of communication through 2024 and beyond.
- 2.3 Option 2a and 2b provide the middle ground. Both these options would necessitate change both in terms of staffing and subscriptions. Option 2a honours the previous decision to subsidise until 2025 but the deficit position was not as stark as it now is when that decision was made and therefore option 2b is offered as a way of supporting *Reform* moving forward to taking into our current financial position.

Appendix one

***Reform*: 2024 General Assembly**

External reflections and recommendations for General Assembly 2024

Background

Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer of the URC, on behalf of Business Committee, asked me to act as an external communications consultant looking at *Reform* as part of her preparation for the GA 2024.

This follows my initial work with the URC Communications team, helping them to produce the Communications Strategy that was adopted at the GA last year, July 2023.

In November 2023, I also facilitated an away day with the Communications team to workshop how they could deliver the specific resolutions, namely:

- building a communications profile of each local church and Synod
- building toolkits for churches (most exist already, but need collating into a self-service area on URC background)
- creating a network of Communications Advocates.

General Assembly 2023 urged everyone connected to the Church to read *Reform*, but didn't specifically urge them to subscribe. Victoria and the Business Committee asked me to consider the following questions in the light of the current subsidy of *Reform* being due to run out in 2025.

Process

I undertook desk research including conversations with:

- Victoria James, URC Chief Operating Officer
- Steve Tomkins, *Reform* editor
- Andy Jackson, URC Head of Communications
- Chris Andrews, URC Designer
- Laurence Wareing, URC Content Editor
- Peter Knowles, former Convenor of the Communications Committee.

Ann-Marie Nye, Communications officer provided very helpful stats on digital engagement. Jane Humphries' finance data was very informative too. I also reviewed the results of the last Reform readership survey in 2019.

Questions from the Business Committee and my reflections on them

Over the last five years how has the magazine grown and developed?

Editorial

It's worth reminding ourselves that the purpose of *Reform* is recorded as follows:

The Assembly INSTRUCTS THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE, when established to proceed with the publication of a magazine to be called '*Reform*' which shall be the official journal of the United Reformed Church, and with the publication of a Yearbook and Handbook.

Reform is as old as the URC itself, entwined with its history.

Over the last five years the Editor, Steve, has worked hard to ensure that *Reform* is valued as a magazine that connects across the URC and encourages its readership to engage with issues outside the church. He has also intentionally drawn a breadth of contributors together to ensure that the spectrum of theology across the URC is included.

More than one interviewee reflected that *Reform* under Steve as Editor does a great job in bringing members and leaders together in one place for reflection and debate, in a church where it is often the case that leaders are more 'radical left' than conservative members.

There is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence that *Reform* is valued as a quality magazine that is the envy of other denominations that no longer have one, especially when it tackles topical issues such as the Ukraine / Russia conflict.

The sense from my interviews and research is that *Reform* holds a unique position as a magazine that can connect the URC across the geographic and theological spread within the UK.

It is clearly a magazine for the URC. Both Steve and his colleagues described how efforts to make it a broader Christian magazine in previous years were not successful, but one that encourages the readership to look outward and consider how their faith impacts the world.

Design

The design is iterated year on year, such that the current design does look more refreshed than five years ago, but no significant changes have been made since Steve rethought the whole concept of *Reform* upon taking up editorship in 2013.

Numerically

Since the GA23 resolution, the Head of Communications has pushed the marketing of *Reform* hard, which has seen an increase in numbers, see table (full set at the end of paper).

This is after a consistent period of decline.

Reform subscribers 2012-2023

Month	No	Readership	Change	%	Church membership	Notes
Sep-18	3,148	10,074	-275	-8%		Possible that office copies were included.
Sep-19	3,541	11,331	393	12%		Possible that office copies were included.
Sep-20	3,234	10,349	-307	-9%		Possible that office copies were included.
Sep-21	2,896	9,267	-338	-10%		Possible that office copies were included.
Jan-22	2,576	8,243	-320	-11%		Possible that office copies were included.
Jan-23	1,587	5,078	-989	-38%		
Feb-24	1,764	5,645	177	11%	41,786	New rules about LEP numbers, lots of marketing in 2023.
Apr-24	2,129					

Andy Jackson, Head of Communications, notes that:

"I noticed that there were times when the subscriptions rose and so I wanted to compare the downward trend over the years to one with a small percentage growth. The strategy behind the 11% growth was to settle the new subscriptions process and to try different marketing techniques, such as the mailing to church officers who don't take *Reform*, to grow subscriptions. This clearly paid off. There is now also a new Direct Debit process following the massive delays caused by HSBC last year to the old process. That has helped create long term subscribers and takes very little time to complete".

Steve also continually 'soft markets' the magazine, by preaching regularly in the South East and beyond. This also serves as a way of him keeping in touch with the current and potential readership.

Reform also has a monthly podcast, and Steve leads writing workshops, speaks at events, posts with the team daily online reports of General Assembly, leads writing workshops and has spoken at events.

The team has worked to give the URC added value on top of the magazine itself, and is currently pondering *Reform Live* (some events) as the latest addition in that tradition.

Our current readership/subscribers? (not names but demographic traits and motivations, likes and dislikes)

The current readership stands at around 5,600, with a subscriber base of 1,765. The advertising media pack reflects the perception that each copy is read by at least two other people. So, around 13% of the current membership reads the magazine.

The majority of subscribers are members of the URC, although some are members of other churches, and around 50% hold a leadership position within the URC.

With no specific central ministerial email, there may therefore be a specific and essential role for *Reform* as an inspirational channel of communication for this leadership group.

It is safe to say that *Reform* is not a digital product, despite the fact that digital subscription is offered, only 8% subscribe online, the remaining 92% take the print subscription. Of those 92%, there is anecdotal evidence that older, geographically isolated readers enjoy the opportunity to engage with issues from without and outside the church through the magazine. According to the Editor, there are some geographical areas with no take up at all, so there is potential for growth here.

More than one interviewee reflected that *Reform* under Steve as Editor does a great job in bringing members and leaders together in one place for reflection and debate, in a church where it is often the case that leaders are more 'radical left' than conservative members.

For example, Steve described the concerted effort he made with GEAR, the more evangelical wing of the church, to ensure that they were represented within the pages of the magazine and whilst they may not agree with all articles, will have the right of reply.

The editorial team also works hard to ensure that the breadth of demographic spread within the churches in the UK is reflected in the contributors and content in the magazine.

At present, *Digest* (more of a summary of URC news and ministerial moves) is printed as a separate pull out to *Reform*. This is a hangover from when the magazine was aiming to reach beyond the church and be a more generic Christian magazine.

The editorial team wanted to move *Digest* into the main magazine, but the Communications Committee did not want this to happen. The editorial team would like to put it back into the main content now. I think part of it could go in the magazine as 'news', but more functional updates can go in the well read digital URC News.

Outline of trends, costs and projections (this to include the outcome of the recent push post GA 23)?

Jane's finance report crunches the numbers in detail, my additional thoughts are as follows.

The magazine has been on a decline in recent years, and numbers are only now beginning to rise after a concerted effort to increase readership following last year's General Assembly,

With paper magazines traditionally being passed around between families and churches, you will never get 100% of URC members subscribing to *Reform*. However, there is still potential for growth from the current 13% with a consistent and continued push to subscription.

Could there also be an option to buy one off copies of *Reform* at a higher individual cover price?

Costs of print and postage have increased significantly over the past five years, and yet the annual subscription held at £28 for six years until 2024, when it increased marginally to £29.50.

Steve, Editor, is committed to keeping the annual subscription below the £30 bar, which he perceives is key to retaining / recruiting subscribers.

But it is not sustainable to keep producing the magazine with the current subscription / costs. There are options to reduce the number of editions produced as follows:

Reducing from ten editions down to eight would result in £10,000 of savings, reducing to six would result in a saving of £20,000.

But reducing to six editions would likely lead to a reduction in advertising revenue, whereas retaining eight editions would be far less likely to reduce the number of charities looking to advertise as a fundraising channel.

Increasing readership will increase income. There is possibility of small but incremental growth now that the 2023 push has shown some success here.

Staffing is the biggest cost, and making savings here would be the quickest way to cut costs.

However, it is not quite as simple as saying you can remove a staff member to save money. The nuances therefore need to be worked through as part of an all round review of the URC's communication needs.

What would be the impact on *Reform* in the event of no future subsidy and what form would any future publication need to take to be financially viable and self-funding?

The magazine does not seem to be viable without some form of subsidy.

Yes, it would be easy to cut the colour magazine, but what would you lose if you cut it? How else would you communicate across the denomination to an older demographic?

To be self-funding, the magazine would need to cover its costs from subscriptions, so a significant increase in these numbers is needed.

Advertising brings in c£40,000 with regular advertisements - and I recommend only dropping issues down to eight minimum to not lose this loyal group of income generating advertisers.

Reform could in theory be self-funding if it was a digital only product, but in reality you would lose the advertising income, and with the demographic of the church we cannot simply assume that everyone wants to go purely digital for everything and be happy to pay for it.

Although the Editor does not want to increase subscription to more than £30 a year, this option must be considered as part of financial planning. At the very least, the number of editions needs to fall if the subscription costs remain the same.

What does the denomination need as the core communication tools from 2025 onwards?

The denomination needs a suite of communications tools to serve the next five years.

The mandate of the Communications Team is to:

Promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- giving voice to good news
- facilitating regional / national communications
- supporting the communications of Church House Depts and GA
- resourcing the local church.

Reform does a great job of bringing scattered individuals and congregations together so that they feel they are part of something bigger, and engaged with big ideas together. If produced well, it can tick all of the above boxes.

But it needs to be read by more people if it is to do so properly, so continued uptick in subscription is essential.

It can then exist as part of a suite of resources already approved when the GA2023 approved the Communications Strategy.

- Easy to find toolkits for self service communications at a local level
- The URC website as central host for these
- Local websites provided by iChurch.

In addition, the URC needs to continue to develop its central digital resource.

URC News now reaches over 40% of members, and has a very high open and read rate, and relatively low unsubscribe rate.

It shows that although the demographic of the church is older, digital communication is an essential part of engaging with it.

This does not mean that the church can purely communicate digitally. For inclusivity and practical reasons, there are older members who won't and can't engage that way. And there are younger members who spend their entire working day online and want to engage offline with communications that are for discussion / reflection, which is where a paper *Reform* can stay.

So, it is about being clear about the audience and purpose of each type of communication, eg:

- targeted digital communication for specific roles
- targeted digital channels from the eg children's and youth work team to reach young people
- *Reform* for bringing whole church together and engaging in thoughtful debate
- media content for external media to spread the gospel far and wide
- toolkits to enable local churches to reach outside themselves and with the community.

Does the denomination seek to communicate within itself or have a wider theological / missional / discipling reach beyond the denomination?

The denomination has a clear remit to spread the gospel, for which it simply has to communicate beyond itself. *Reform* as a magazine does serve this purpose, by encouraging and inspiring leaders of the URC to engage with issues outside the church and inspiring them to reach beyond it.

But it was also initially set up to be the official journal and handbook, ie to help the church communicate within itself and to understand itself.

Appendix of useful information

Digital engagement since GA 2023: useful statistics

URC News is produced monthly and goes to 25,000 or around 60% of total URC membership. This is a very high percentage of members, and shows that although *Reform* is not engaged with digitally (with only 8% of subscribers opting for the digital edition against 92% print), members clearly do have email addresses and are willing to use them for URC purposes.

The level of engagement with this email is relatively high, and the level of unsubscribers lower than average at less than 1%.

There was a significant increase in subscribers in February 2024, and whilst there was apparently no specific strategy for recruiting new names, possible reasons for the increase were given as follows, and this is all in the context of the communications team tightening focus.

1. People who were forwarded the campaign decided to subscribe for themselves, because it's a good read.
2. We encouraged people to sign up via social media before the Feb issue was published.
3. We led the February issue with a good human interest story on a topical / national issue, that churches, charities and projects could identify with when Wilsden Trinity Church won its challenge to Barclays bank.
4. We had reported on this story previously when the bank closed the Wilsden's account, so was a good follow up story.
5. As December /January is a double issue, perhaps people, who are forwarded the campaign by others, thought they'd missed a January issue and subscribed for themselves so they didn't miss out on the next issue.
6. Ministries provided us with some new email addresses. As per the report, in December 2023 we had 15,097 NU contacts and in February 2024 this rose to 21,955, a difference of 6,858. Ministries provided us with 822 emails in January and 464 emails in February – a total of 1,286. But that doesn't mean 1,286 was updated.

Eg I've just imported 116 email from Ministries to the NU address book. Out of 116 updated only 42 new emails were added (see screenshot below). This updates the NU address book for May from 25,429 to 25,471. I guess that still leaves 5,572 unaccounted for and I guess they subscribed off their own backs. Which is great!

News Update stats July 2023 – May 2024 [report produced Monday 13 May 2024]

Issue	Since first send							
	No of contacts sent campaign	No of unsubscribers	Opens /reopens /shares	Unique opens (new)	Non-openers	Link clicks	Unique link cliques (new)	Click-to-open rate
May 2024 (sent Fri 10 May)	25,987	34	6,256	3,471	18,896	2,325	479	14%
April 2024	27,198	252	13,386	6,172	16,999	2,780	820	13%
March 2024	28,165	303	10,898	5,407	18,402	3,608	675	12%
Feb 2024	21,955	208	10,937	4,885	12,879	3,152	941	19%
Dec 2023- Jan 2024	15,097	7	12,023	4,431	6,714	3,712	1,443	33%
Nov 2023	15,138	13	11,162	4,167	7,038	2,344	738	18%
Oct 2023	15,131	18	10,299	4,131	7,060	2,289	844	20%
Sept 2023	15,332	26	11,079	2,478	6,801	2,478	884	21%
July/Aug 2023	14,863	20	11,688	4,234	7,332	3,896	800	19%

Important notes

- It's important to note the figure for "emails opened" is the amount tracked by Dotdigital, not necessarily the amount that was actually opened. Reports display the number of campaigns that Dotdigital tracks and registers as being opened by recipients. This is a worst-case scenario, as not all email clients or business email servers necessarily allow emails to be tracked.
- News Update is sent out as an HTML and Plain Text email. Once the images are downloaded for an email (html), an open is registered. In order to register a plain text open, the recipient must select a link.

Opens

The amount of opens, people reopening the campaign and / or forwarding on to other email addresses.

Unique opens

Shows the number of campaigns that Dotdigital tracks and registers as being opened by either a new recipient / or someone opening it just once.

Link clicks

Only the top ten (most opened) links are tracked.

Unique link clicks

As above, registers the unique number of users who've clicked links in a campaign.

Click-to-open rate

Calculated as the total number of unique clicks divided by the total number of unique opens, given as a percentage.

People are also unsubscribing. There also seem to be large numbers that unsubscribed in February, March and April. People would unsubscribe for several reasons, no longer wanting to receive NU or changed role in a church / church closed for example.

Reform numbers

Reform subscribers 2012 - 2023							
Month	No.	Readership	Change	% change	Church membership	Notes	
Sep-12	5,196	16,627				Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-13	5,323	17,034	127	2%	59,077	Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-14	4,580	14,656	-743	-14%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-15	4,123	13,194	-457	-10%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-16	3,537	11,318	-586	-14%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-17	3,423	10,954	-114	-3%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-18	3,148	10,074	-275	-8%		Possible that office copies were	

						included	
Sep-19	3,541	11,331	393	12%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-20	3,234	10,349	-307	-9%		Possible that office copies were included	
Sep-21	2,896	9,267	-338	-10%		Possible that office copies were included	
Jan-22	2,576	8,243	-320	-11%		Possible that office copies were included	
Jan-23	1,587	5,078	-989	-38%			
Feb-24	1,764	5,645	177	11%	41,786	New rules about LEP numbers, lots of marketing in 2023	
Oct-24	1,675	5,360				Assumes 5% drop year on year	
Oct-25	1,592	5,094					£50K pa subsidy expires Dec 2025
Oct-26	1,512	4,838					
Oct-27	1,436	4,595					
Oct-28	1,364	4,365					
Oct-29	1,296	4,147					
Oct-30	1,231	3,939					
Oct-31	1,170	3,744					
Feb-24	1,764	5,645				Assumes 5% growth year on year	
Oct-24	1,852	5,927					
Oct-25	1,945	6,223					
Oct-26	2,042	6,535					

Oct-27	2,144	6,861					
Oct-28	2,251	7,204					
Oct-29	2,364	7,565					
Oct-30	2,482	7,943					
Oct-31	2,606	8,340					

Recommendations

In the light of the above, what is the recommendation to GA on the future of *Reform*?

Keep and celebrate *Reform* for the specific role it serves

The magazine is intimately tied to the history and present of the URC, having started 51 years ago and morphed slowly along the years. It provides a unique way of connecting across and communicating both within and beyond the URC that will be difficult to easily replicate digitally.

There is also a (manageable) reputational risk if you were to just get rid of it. The magazine plays a unique role, and is different from a functional news update that can be easily (and successfully) delivered via the digital route of regular emails.

However, *Reform* needs to be more effective financially – here are some options to consider:

Reduce the number of issues and retaining subscription fee level

Reducing to eight issues a year as soon as is practicable whilst keeping the subscription costs the same. Few readers would notice, and the impact on advertising revenue is likely to be minimal.

It is estimated that this would save around £10,000 p.a.

Consider the staffing costs as part of a wider staffing update

The work on *Reform* should link to the wider communication strategy and ‘in year’ plan. As such, the staffing of *Reform* will need to balance the different elements of graphics, content and editorial oversight alongside the wider work of the Communications team in fulfilment of the URC’s needs.

Plan to move to entirely digital magazine, but over a period of time

News Update clearly works as a monthly email, and the engagement rate within it shows that people are happy to receive updates in this format.

But it serves a different purpose to a magazine; the magazine is more reflective and people don’t engage as well with that content digitally.

Reform could move digitally by 2030, as Jane proposes, but to reach that stage a concerted effort to increase digital subscriptions from now until then, and to create a proactive marketing plan for this (thereby reaching new and younger audiences) needs to be put in play.

Paper B1

Children's and Youth Work Committee Report 2022-2024

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson (Convenor) paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	Read and digest.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report of the work of Children's and Youth Work Committee.
Main points	Review of past two years, including URC Youth, URC Children training developments, resource developments, wider URC and ecumenical work.
Previous relevant documents	AE 2022 BDH1 Call and vocation GA 2022 B1 CYWC report Mission Council 2018 B3 CYWC outline strategy.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth CYDO+ team.

Summary of impact

Financial	Within existing budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	Wide-ranging contribution to ecumenical networks.

Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC)

*Children, young people and young adults
are central to God's mission and Christ's church
(Matthew 18:1-14; 19:13-14).*

The remit of the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC) is to support, encourage and promote work among children, young people and young adults (0-25 years old) at all levels of the church, and to facilitate the involvement of children and young people in all the councils of the church, ensuring that their voices are heard and all decisions taken consider the impact on future generations.

Our vision is children and young people playing their part in the mission of God – experiencing, exploring and expressing the way of Jesus in, through and beyond the church.

To think and shape this work strategically, the Children's and Youth Work Committee meets four times a year. The committee has reorganised its meetings, reducing to two in-person 24-hour meetings and two online evening meetings to increase accessibility and reduce environmental impact. The committee values the active contribution of URC Youth members, and strives to include the voice of children creatively in all discussions. The committee has updated its Terms of Reference and drawn up role descriptors. CYWC wishes to record enormous thanks to the Revd Paul Robinson, Convenor, who stepped into the role a year early and has guided the committee prayerfully, graciously and faithfully over the past five years. We welcome the Revd Samantha Sheehan as the new Convenor from the end of General Assembly (GA) 2024.

URC Youth

'Our mission is to discover God, to help each other grow in the Christian Faith, and through our lives reflect God's love to all.' (URC Youth mission statement)

Youth Assembly was held in 2023 and 2024 (for a review of these events see **Round-up-2023-web.pdf (urc.org.uk)** and **bit.ly/YA-roundup-24**)

Jo Harris completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2023.
Philippa Osei completed her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2024.
Heather Moore commenced her term as Moderator at Youth Assembly 2024.

Following a resolution, URC Youth secured General Assembly agreement to enable Youth Assembly to nominate a candidate for General Assembly Moderator from YA2024. A new role of Champion for Younger URC Youth was created, and the first post-holder was co-opted following YA2024.

A Disability Awareness task group worked on resources to support raising awareness of issues surrounding disability and church, and promoting the perspectives of disabled people of all ages in the URC. In 2023, this took the form of two social media campaigns, for Disability Pride Month (July) and Disability Awareness Sunday (September), where disabled people across the URC shared their answers to the question, 'What is one thing you want others to know about disability?' They responded to a YA2023 resolution to encourage churches to introduce quiet spaces producing guidance for churches **Quiet-Spaces-Guidance.pdf (urc.org.uk)** and are producing Conversations Starter resources.

A resolution on raising awareness and support in relation to substance abuse resulted in the Feel Safe poster for churches (**see urc.org.uk/feel-safe**). The issues of gender and sexual identity discriminations were discussed, and URC Youth was involved in the development of the Affirmation of Gender Identity resolution brought by Equalities Committee to GA2023, and have worked to build constructive links with organisations offering support and develop a webpage.

Youth Assembly encouraged churches to engage further with the Warm Spaces initiative. Youth Assembly resolved to encourage more ecumenical resource sharing and supported the Mission Committee resolution brought to GA2023.

Youth Assembly discussed the deteriorating situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and embarked on a wider programme of education and

awareness-raising, including participation in visits to IOPT, and a resolution in 2024 to work with Mission Committee to develop further connections and collaborations with just peace-focused organisations and Churches in Occupied Palestine and Israel.

Youth Assembly 2024 encourages local churches to engage with Student Christian Movement's Honest Church campaign (honestchurch.org.uk) to be transparent about the welcome they offer different groups.

Youth Assembly 2024 received the URC Youth Review from the task group, and the actions already taken to respond to the recommendations in relation to Youth Assembly and the Youth Executive. A new resolution instructs Youth Executive to work with Children's and Youth Work Committee to look at the roles and responsibilities of the URC Youth Assembly Moderator, and the potential for making this a paid role; alongside a review of the roles and responsibilities of the Youth Executive. A new task group to explore this is being set up.

Two members of URC Youth are attending the CWM Assembly in Durban, South Africa this year: Zeerak Shahbaz is representing the URC at the Youth Assembly, and Heather Moore (Moderator) is acting as a steward at the main event.

Youth Assembly is moving to a new venue from 2025, and URC Youth's environmental checklist was employed to help reduce the carbon footprint of the event going forwards. The date is also changing to accommodate Assembly Executive moving to early February. Youth Assembly 2025 will be at Kings Park, Northampton, 7-9 March. Youth Exec has struggled with fewer Synods appointing Synod Reps, and the average age has reduced, with a significant number now under 18. This reflects broader changes at Youth Assembly, with half those attending this year being first-timers and the average age having lowered by a couple of years, accompanied by a visible increase in diversity.

We support Youth Executive through hosting residential weekend meetings, employing a Youth Intern to support their Comms, and hosting preparation events for under-26 representatives at General Assembly and Assembly Executive. How to meaningfully hold membership of a local church, given the fragmented and mobile lives of many young people and young adults, remains a key issue. The wider impact of the pandemic, cost of living crisis, rise in mental health issues and financial pressures have reduced the capacity of many young people to contribute time and energy to the life of the church at local, Synod and denominational levels. We need to be mindful of the demands we place on them, and grateful for all that they do bring to the life of the URC, while continuing to invest in discipling them and learning from them.

In 2023, there was a strategic focus on 11-18s. Local churches were invited to Pray like Paul for and with young people. A joint project with Quakers in Britain produced 'Where are the Young People?' conversation starter resources, hosted on the Education & Learning hub. URC Youth were invited to join French and German 15- to 18-year-olds for a week's tri-nation camp in England, and there are plans to hold a similar event in France in 2025. A training programme for young leaders was trialed, and will be rolled out more widely in 2024. In 2024, our strategic focus is on 18-25s, with plans to develop resources to keep creative connection with local churches when moving on to college or employment, and an ecumenical gathering for young adults in early 2025.

URC Children

Following the launch of URC Children at GA 2022, a range of merchandise to support churches and Synods in building a sense of shared identity for children has been made available, including badges, drawstring bags and birthday cards (designed by children

following a competition). Families on Faith Adventures @ Home, the weekly online resource which started in April 2020 during Covid-19 to enable churches to support families, came to an end at Christmas 2022. Following consultation with churches, a new weekly free online resource, Faith Adventures for Children Together (FACT), was launched in April 2023 to provide churches with a non-lectionary, Bible-based resource of pick-and-mix material to support engagement with 0-11 year olds, including a take-home postcard. From January 2024, this has been supplemented with Faith Adventures Youth Resource (FAYR) for 11-14s based on the same Bible passage each week. There is a thriving Facebook group for those using these resources.

In 2023, a series of videos to encourage churches and Synods to consider children's participation was created. In 2024, Prayer Prompts for children, one set for 4-8s and one for 8-12s, with Widget symbols for increased accessibility, were created to support children's spirituality, following a suggestion from URC Guide and Scout Fellowship. These have now also been translated into Welsh. In November this year, the first URC residential conference for children's workers will be held. We continue to support the Pilots community, and they have been actively involved in the development of URC Children.

CYDO+ team

The team of Synod-employed leads for children's and youth work, collectively known as the CYDO+ team, continues to work collaboratively across the denomination, creating a whole range of resources, opportunities, training and events that we offer as the Assembly-level programme for Children's and Youth Work. The generous gifting of up to 20% of their time by the Synods to this joint work makes us the envy of other denominations, and ensures that the programme offered is relevant and appropriate to the needs of local churches. They also enable children and young people to have a voice throughout the structures of the URC through championing and advocacy. We support the CYDO+ team through hosting fortnightly online catchups, regular meetings, a biannual retreat, and training opportunities. CYWC wishes once again to acknowledge the huge debt owed to the CYDO+ team, and the value of the collegiate working processes that enable them to shape strategic priorities, multiply the impact, amplify the sharing of stories, and enable the URC to keep children and young people at the heart of the life of the church.

1. Northern – Hannah Middleton (part-time) and John Stephenson (part-time)
2. North Western – Leo Roberts
3. Mersey – Steven Mitchell
4. Yorkshire – Megan Tillbrook
5. East Midlands – Richard Knott (since April 2023)
6. West Midlands – vacant since April 2023 – Richard Knott prior to this
7. Eastern – Nicola Grieves
8. South Western – vacant
9. Wessex – Philip Ray and Ruth White
10. Thames North – Lorraine Downer
11. Southern – Tom Hackett
12. Wales – Judy Harris
13. Scotland – Jessica Poole (part-time) and Matt Baines (part-time).

Church House staff

The team of four full-time equivalent staff has remained the same since April 2022: Tricia Harding (part-time Admin Assistant), Sharon Lloyd (part-time Programme

Assistant), Lorraine Webb (Programme Officer), Dr Sam Richards (Head of Children's and Youth Work) and Heather Wilkinson (Administrator), who celebrated 25 years with the team in 2023. The URC Youth Intern (Comms) very part-time one year post has been held by Bertheli Dawson 2022-23 and Rhys Lloyd 2023-24, and we are in the process of recruiting the fourth post holder (funded by the Carmichael Montgomery Trust).

Resources for local churches

Following 2022's theme of Jubilee for the URC's 50th anniversary, in 2023 the theme was Love Is, and in 2024 it is Story, Story, Story. Each year, a themed resource with material for 0-25s and intergenerational suggestions has been produced and sent to each church and to Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. An accompanying free Holiday Club resource has been produced, and small grants to support the running of holiday clubs have been accessed by 26 churches. Plans for 2024 include resources to support churches in preparing children for baptism and communion, with parallel resources for young people to follow in 2025.

We have continued to produce an Advent resource for churches to give away to families with invitations to their Christmas events. In 2022, following feedback that families wanted something much simpler, we produced 5,000 packs at £2 each, of which 3,000 were given away free to churches (at a cost to us of £5,000). Recognising budget restrictions both for local churches and denominationally, in 2023 we asked for pre-orders to ensure no surplus, and sold 3,500 packs at £2.60-£3 each, with grants available for churches who needed free copies. We are already taking pre-orders for Advent 2024 packs. We recognise that these are a significant missional tool for local churches, but as our budget reduces so does our ability to subsidise this resource to the extent of previous years (by £3,700 in 2023).

Grants

We have continued to offer small grants to individuals, supporting young people's access to educational and discipleships opportunities. Following an agreement with the Discipleship Development Fund, we are able to offer quick response group grants, and since April 2024 small grants to support churches building relationships with uniformed groups.

Wider URC work

Wider URC work has included contributing to the Calling and Vocation conversation-starter resource, and supporting Holiday Forum with their children's and youth work provision (offered by the CYDO+ team in 2022 and 2023, and reducing from 2024). The CYDO+ team has also run the youth venues (The Engine and The Den) at Greenbelt Festival in 2022 and 2023, with a commitment to do this for two more years. This involves recruiting and training a team of volunteers, which has cascaded youth work skills and fostered connections. We continue to champion Walking the Way and whole life discipleship throughout our resources. We contribute to You're Welcome conferences for those newly appointed to the URC and to the Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers' training programme.

We have strengthened links with Mission Committee through collaborative working. We have produced the series of Go with Greta (5-11s) / #connect2 (11-16s) resources for Commitment for Life (Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2022, Zimbabwe in 2023 and working on Bangladesh in 2024-25). We have responded to the Legacies of Slavery and anti-racism work by highlighting these matters in our wider resources. JPIT

have contributed to the Advent packs, and we included JPIT material in our all churches mailing.

URC Youth was a case study in the THEOS research for the Church Life Review. They have worked closely with Mission Committee and Equalities Committee in particular to ensure the voice of young people is represented in matters that particularly concern them, such as the environment, ecumenism and equality. Following Resolution 51a at GA 2023, we have been working on a joint residential for URC mission and discipleship animators which will include the CYDO+ team to explore how new worshipping communities are encouraged and supported. We have also continued to support the development of the Newbigin Pioneering Hub training and pioneer community.

The work to develop proposals for a formal ministry of Children's and Youth Work has involved collaboration at a number of points with Ministries, Education and Learning, Finance and Worship, Faith and Order. We see this as an integral part of CYWC's response to the Church Life Review and General Assembly 2023 Resolution 51A which 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.

Training and development for those working with children and young people
A wide variety of training opportunities have been offered through the CYDO+ team, facilitated by agreements with Godly Play UK and Youthscape, in addition to the Youth Mental Health First Aid training offered in response to URC Youth resolutions. The Youth Leaders Gathering has continued to be held each year alongside Youth Assembly as a regular gathering and training opportunity. Glorious Grandparenting workshops were offered in partnership with the Bible Society.

Less-formal training has been offered in partnership with Education and Learning through URC Training as online sessions in Widget, Makaton, the Conversation Starter resources and Resilience for churches. Plans are now in place to offer Makaton 'learn and grow' courses designed for churches in the autumn. A series of 'Find out more' sessions have been offered to help local churches discover URC resources and explore how they might work in their context. A monthly 'Talking About' session offers space to hear from experts and discuss a wide variety of topics in children's and youth work. A new online calendar of events and training has been developed (see bit.ly/URCCYWcalendar).

Ecumenical connections

We actively participate in ecumenical networks, hosting a Roundtable for Denominational Youth Leads (out of which the young adults gathering emerged), founding a UK intergenerational ministry network, and as part of the Children's Ministry Network (CMN) executive. Through the latter, we have been strengthening links to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), and hope to formally link the youth and intergenerational networks to CTBI in the near future. Through CMN, we are developing training programmes for children's ministry and family and intergenerational ministry for the whole Christian sector (superseding Core Skills and before that Kaleidoscope), and a resource to support churches hosting school visits. We represent CMN on the steering group of the European Conference on Christian Education (ECCE), which hosted a conference in Budapest in 2023 and is planning another in Geneva in 2026, with online events in other years. We are co-hosts of Join the Conversation, an international online gathering of intergenerational ministry leads, which grew out of an in-person gathering in

London in 2019. Another project stemming from this came to fruition in 2023 with the publication of *Regenerational*, a resource to help church leaders introduce intergenerational ministry through gathered worship (see bit.ly/Regenerational). We have also been involved in think-tanks and consultations for Messy Church, Bible Society, Hope Together, Youthscape and various research projects.

A significant piece of work, in partnership with Churches Together in England (CTE) and some parachurch organisations, has been a sustained engagement with the National Youth Agency (NYA) over youth work in private dwellings. This resulted in a paper presented at the 4th Commonwealth Youthwork Conference and guidance launched at the National Youth Ministry Weekend 2023 to counter the NYA's headline of 'fundamentally unsafe', and to support the development of best practice around the various types of youth ministry that takes places in homes (see bit.ly/YWinPD). We have been in ongoing dialogue with the NYA and the Department for Culture Media and Sport about the negative impact the NYA guidance is having on provision for young people in faith communities. We also produced guidance for the URC.

We continue to encourage churches to develop and celebrate the welcome they offer children and young people through the accompanied Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme – to date, 17 churches have completed this. The Lundie Award continues to celebrate young disciples playing their part in the mission of God. In the past two years the awardees have ranged in age from 4 to 24, two families of siblings and one Pilot, for everything from creative fundraising, volunteering, and leading churches in technology to environmental issues and inclusion (see bit.ly/URCLundie).

Financial

The CYW Committee has actively been engaged in conversations about the budget and the need for that to be reduced in the years ahead. It is thinking creatively, with others, about the part that Childrens and Youth Work will need to play in that process.

Paper B2

Proposal for a new formal Children’s and Youth Work ministry – update

Children’s and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson (Convenor) paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards (Head of Children’s and Youth Work) sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	For noting.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on collaborative work to bring firm proposals to General Assembly.
Main points	Much work has been done. A task group will now be formed to bring final proposals in 2025.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2023 Paper B1 Recognition of children’s, youth and family ministry Assembly Executive 2024 Paper B1 Towards a formal ministry for children’s, youth and / or family work.
Consultation has taken place with...	CYDO+ team, Education and Learning Committee, Finance Committee, Ministries Committee, Worship, Faith and Order Committee, Synod Moderators, URC Youth.

Summary of impact

Financial	Financial proposals will be presented in 2025.
External (eg ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners are aware of the proposals being explored.

At General Assembly 2023, the following resolution was agreed:

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.

In the past 12 months, a huge amount of work has been undertaken by the Children's and Youth Work Committee (CYWC), in collaboration with Ministries Committee and Education and Learning Committee, to develop these proposals. This work has reached beyond these three committees, and the CYWC has had in-depth discussion with the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, Finance Committee, Synod Moderators, the Synod lead workers for children's and youth work (CYDO+ team), members of URC Youth, the Church Related Community Work Development Worker, discussions at and around Assembly Executive 2024, and youth leaders at the URC Youth Leaders gathering.

What we believe to be a helpful and exciting proposal has emerged that has been shaped by all of these conversations. However, while broadly in favour of the shape of the proposals, Ministries Committee felt unable to support any resolutions that would have looked to action these proposals until some further detailed work had been done:

- It seems that this new formal ministry might best sit alongside Church Related Community Work ministry, creating a new 'Church Related Children's and Youth Work' ministry. This has been met with support since Assembly Executive, and has become a key element of the proposals. Further work is needed to clarify the detail of how the definition of a 'Church- Related' ministry might apply to a new 'Church Related Children's and Youth Work' ministry.
- It is important that a new formal ministry has guiding 'core competencies' or 'marks of ministry' that detail the character and work of the people fulfilling the ministry. There has been some initial work on these, but further work is needed to ensure that these both reflect the level of competencies expect of a ministry of the church, while also reflecting work with children and young people.
- While there has been significant thought and exploration of how local pastorates and Ss might discern the the shape of potential posts with the Synod Moderators, further detailed work is needed to consider how posts might be accredited, managed and reviewed.
- There has been careful thought given to the process of discerning call and, in collaboration with Education and Learning Committee, as to the routes of formation for people responding to call to this formal ministry through Common Awards. It is now timely to draw in the expertise of the Resource Centres for Learning to consider how best to reflect the Church Related nature of the ministry, and seek collaboration with our ecumenical partners.

To address these detailed elements, it has been agreed by the Convenors and Staff Secretaries of Children's and Youth Work Committee, Ministries Committee and Education and Learning Committee that a task group be established of members of each committee to further collaborate and explore the detail needed, before proposals be brought back to a future meeting of Assembly Executive or General Assembly. It is anticipated that the task group will have completed this work by the end of 2024 in order that momentum not be lost.

While we would have been delighted to bring the full proposals to this year's General Assembly, it is right that we take this time to collaborate further to ensure that they are as comprehensive as possible to enable the church to discern the mind of Christ. In the meantime, our thanks go to all those who have helped shaped the proposals and have joined us on this journey. We remain committed to this work, and look forward to presenting full proposals in due course.

Paper C1

Communications update

Communications Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Lucy Brierley lucywokingurc@yahoo.co.uk Andy Jackson andy.jackson@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update General Assembly on the work of the Communications Committee and team since the last meeting, and to outline the work over the next year.
Main points	To challenge churches to think about events, their digital outreach.
Previous relevant documents	Papers C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators, Finance.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

The Communications department exists to promote effective communication and celebration of the Gospel in and beyond the URC by:

- giving voice to good news
- facilitating local, regional and national communications
- supporting the communications of Church House departments and the General Assembly
- resourcing local churches.

The team looks after reputational management, press enquiries and press releases, *Reform*, graphic design, the URC Bookshop, publications, resources, the Community Project Awards, websites, social media and iChurch.

This is the update from the team about its work over the past 12 months, which can be discussed in the parallel session, to which all are welcome.

Please also see the paper on the Future of *Reform*, Business Committee Paper A11.

Communications Strategy

After the General Assembly approved the Communications Strategy at its last meeting, work has been undertaken to shape the research and resource stages.

The research stage is using the Annual Church Returns to build an initial communications profile of each local church, and we have appointed a researcher to contact all URCs to develop this further and to ask what else is needed to help churches communicate and engage more widely.

The second stage is to expand the URC's wide range of resources, and to create a list of new resources and toolkits that churches tell us they need and, more importantly, will use. These toolkits and resources will be informed by our churches, while also being mindful of the reduced amount of volunteer time.

It's worth noting that there are already 40+ resources on the URC website, as well as the iChurch platform.

Alongside this stage, a network of Communications Advocates will be created, with the hope that one volunteer advocate will be recruited in each Synod who can be a link between the Communications Team, churches and Synods to share and remind them about the URC's resources, and to act as a conduit to request and develop new ones.

There is the potential for Communication Advocates to assist in the updating of the URC database, and that the communication profiles are seen not simply as a collection of facts and channels, but key ingredients and resources within the wider ministry of communication and evangelism.

From September, Clare Coombs, the Communications Officer for Mersey Synod, will start to contact all URCs about their communications needs and skills.

Events

The Communications Committee wishes to augment the Communications Strategy to encourage local churches, LEPs and Synods to share their experience of running events, to show how easy and cheap it can be to set up and staff stands at external events such as county shows, Christmas fairs, community events and festivals.

This could include advice from Synods that run major events such as Big Days Out, and knowledge gained from the Communications Team, which exhibits at CRE and other events, such as the Baptist Assembly.

It could also include sharing knowledge from church-based events such as Woking URC's bacon roll commuter giveaway, or West Kirby URC's Staycation.

Commercial events are often viewed as expensive but necessary by local businesses, but are they ever considered by local churches?

Remember that a lot of the work has already been done. The URC publishes a range of resources, such as giveaway booklets and leaflets about the URC and the meaning of Easter and Christmas, with a space for churches to add their details.

The Communications Team can help to create resources for specific events. For example, if local URCs were at a secular Christmas Fair, they might want a leaflet to give away at that event with the location of URCs and LEPs, along with service times.

Some events might need gazebos and roller banners, but these can cost very little and be reused multiple times.

Volunteer time is also a factor, but in many cases, these events are attractive to the church members, volunteers and their families, and so getting a free ticket to the events can lead to increased offers of help.

Spending time and money at shows and events is valuable in telling people about their local URCs or LEPs, offering friendly, one-to-one engagement with the hundreds or thousands of people that you might otherwise not reach, and giving them something to take away, such as the URC's Christmas booklet, and details about the local church.

And it's not something that you do once in the hope that people will drop all of their plans and turn up to all Christmas services. Like brands that invest time and money to get people to buy their products, exhibiting at events must be treated as a three or five year strategy, so that people who return to an event each year get to know that you're also there each year, building trust and credit.

In-person events are making a steady recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic, with many expected to return to pre-pandemic levels this year or next.

Events also:

- enhances the church's visibility
- gets people volunteering with something new, strengthening congregations and outreach teams, especially with start-of-day and end-of-day catch-ups and handovers to other volunteers
- allows volunteers, ministers, CRCWs and worship leaders the chance to meet even more people in their communities
- to reset misconceptions about the Church (with trust levels down to 28-35% according to recent reports)
- encourages different ways of engaging with all types of visitors – all of whom God loves and whom we should welcome if they want to come to Church
- show a positive side of the Church, eg showing videos of our community work such as the videos produced for the Community Project Awards and for Greenbelt.

Case study: Knebworth Christmas Fair

The Knebworth Christmas Fair takes place at the end of November, costs up to £600 for the exhibition space, and attracts more than 16,000 people over the three-day weekend event. That's £200 per day to engage with 5,300 people each day, excluding the cost of resources and volunteer travel.

If that were shared by the 12 URCs within a ten-mile radius of the venue, then the cost would be tiny, and the number of possible volunteers would be in the dozens.

Parallel session discussion

Discussion is invited at the parallel session about whether we should take this forward, and to look at major events around the UK with Synods, with the possibility of helping those synods resource a URC presence.

Staffing

We are delighted that Neil Hunter has joined the staff team on a part-time basis, which means we have been able to further develop many areas of the URC website.

Reform

Increased marketing activity for *Reform* led to an 11% increase in subscriptions from 2023 to 2024. Each issue now includes more content for its readers, and has increased its font size to make the content more accessible.

A reader survey was shared in May which received more than 800 responses. Those answers are being analysed, and will be shared with the Resources Committee.

- **Please see a separate report about *Reform* from the Business Committee, paper A11.**

Bookshop

In 2023, the Bookshop distributed 2,248 orders, as well as supplying shops and Synods, selling more than 15,000 items with a turnover of more than £84,000.

Whereas the majority of orders are placed and paid for online at www.urcshop.co.uk, those who want to order by phone can do so during office hours, on 020 7916 8629. A voicemail service is in operation if no one is available to take the call.

You will be able to find a good selection of URC resources, books and merchandise at the General Assembly bookstall in the sports hall.

Podcast

Steve Tomkins and Ann-Marie Nye have broadcast several episodes of the URC podcast with Isaac Harvey MBE, the Revd Dr John Bradbury, the Revd Margaret Ali, and the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, to name a few. More episodes are planned, and you can download the podcast from wherever you get your podcasts, or by visiting www.reform-magazine.co.uk/urc-podcast

Community Project Awards

These are being presented on the Saturday of the General Assembly. We are deeply grateful for Congregational increasing its support to the URC, so that the awards now consist of three winners' awards of £2,000 and three Highly Commended awards of £1,000. You can read more about the winning projects at www.urc.org.uk/awards

We are grateful to all projects that submitted applications, and the following people who generously donated their time to judge this year's awards: the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Martin Cox (CEO), Imran Laher and Helen Doran of Congregational, Andy Jackson, the Revd Lucy Brierley, the Revd Iain McLaren, Steve Priest, Jonathan Allan, the Revd George Watt, Dr Stephen Tomkins and the Revd Sarah Moore.

Thanks also go to Louise Ault for administrating them once again, and to Sara Foyle for her design work.

You can read about the winners in future editions of *Reform* and watch videos about what they do at www.urc.org.uk/awards.

Communications Committee

This met for the final time in March of this year, with the work and oversight being the responsibility of the new Resources Committee from this General Assembly.

At the meeting the convenor, the Revd Lucy Brierley, led prayers to give thanks to all who have served on the communications-related committees, groups and boards since the URC came into being.

This was firstly the work of Publications and Publicity, part of Finance and Administration, renamed Communications and Supplies in 1987, Communications and Editorial in 1995, and finally the Communications Committee from 2008. The committee also offered prayers and for the work of the new Resources Committee.

Press and PR

Most weeks, there a number of safeguarding and property-related enquiries from the media that come into the Press Office, which are dealt with quickly and in conjunction with the relevant synod staff and church leaders. We thank all who work alongside us on these requests.

Media training is available for groups and individuals who speak to the media as part of their role.

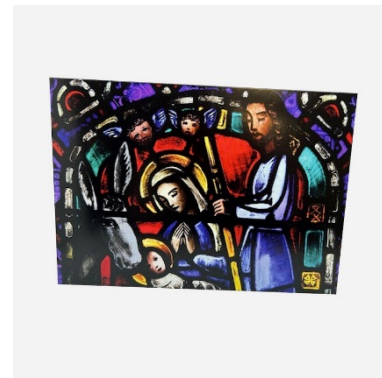
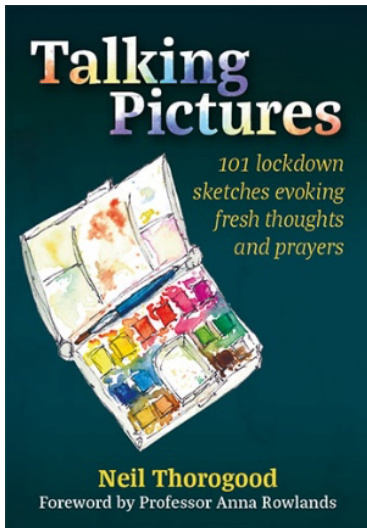
News Update is now sent each month to more than 26,000 recipients. If you want to receive News Update, please sign up on the URC website home page, www.urc.org.uk

Our mandate is to share the good news, and if you have a good news story to share, please let us know: pressoffice@urc.org.uk.

At the same time, if there is a negative story that you are having to deal with, remember that you are not alone – please call us for advice before making any responses. We have an out-of-hours media response line to Ann-Marie Nye and Andy Jackson for emergency calls.

Graphic design

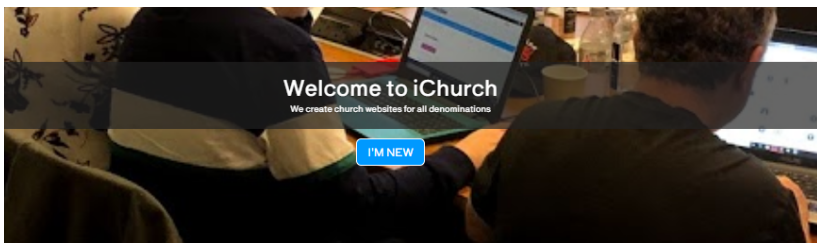
As usual, the graphics team has designed hundreds of resources for local churches, Synods and Church House teams. Three examples are below.




iChurch

iChurch is the platform from the URC that manages websites for churches, synods, LEPs and groups of churches. Now with a new website, www.ichurch.website, iChurch offers an easy to use, very affordable way of churches updating or creating a website.

We thank Dan Morrell who has been leading on iChurch, and still helps out, and to Reuben Watt and Rhys Lloyd for taking on the support for web managers and the creation of new websites. They are aided by Mark Foster at VTS Web Services, who hosts many websites for the URC.






Your Church on the Web

Being online gives the message that you have something you think is worth sharing and that you want to make contact with people. Having an attractive, state of the art website will convince people that it's worth coming to look at.


[Click here to find out where we could take you!](#)



Church websites for all

How can we help you get online? iChurch sits within the Communications Department of the United Reformed Church in London. Tell us what you need, and we'll work with you to try to make it happen. It doesn't have to be a website for a church - we work with individuals and groups too. It is open to all denominations

[Get in touch today!](#)






Growing Community

Your website is an opportunity to engage in conversation with your own communities, both online and offline. When you join the iChurch network, you also join a community of site managers, who share tips, ideas, and inspiration together.

[Click here to visit!](#)

Discover

With over 130 church websites, we would love to give you a taste of our favourites!



[View more](#)

Videos

You can see a wide selection of vides on the URC's YouTube channel, www.youtube.com/URCUK

Prayer Handbook editors

The next editors of the URC Prayer Handbook will be the Revd Dr Susan Durber and the Revd Jonnie Hill. We are indebted to the Revd Susan McCoan and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo for the last three editions, the last of which, *Immersive Joy*, will be available from September.

Paper D1

Education and Learning report

Education and Learning Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Pippa Hodgson, Convenor pippahodgson147@gmail.com Jenny Mills, Secretary for Education and Learning jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of Education and Learning.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2022.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	Costs to Assembly of the various work is covered by the Education and Learning budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Education and Learning general report

Here we are now!

*'To everything, turn, turn, turn
There is a season, turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven.'*
The Byrds (words: Peter Seeger)

These words, taken from Ecclesiastes 3, are words that speak into Education and Learning (E and L). We have seen a lot of changes since 2022 when we last reported to GA, and we have also increased collaboration, conversation and cooperation. So many changes, initiatives, opportunities and possibilities – all very exciting and challenging at once!

CHANGE! This sums up the past two years!

Personnel changes

As the Convenor of the Education and Learning Committee changed (big thanks to Alan Yates and big welcome and thanks to Pippa Hodgson), we have had to work out what the team would look like without Anne Hewling (she retired August 2022), then the Revd David Salisbury (who was appointed to the role of the Moderator for the National Synod of Wales October 2023), then more recently the Revd Jenny Mills (she was appointed to the role of Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) March 2024 and begins this role after this General Assembly); working with a new Principal of the Northern College (we said goodbye to the Revd Dr Rosalind Selby and welcome to the Revd Dr Adam Scott), and Interim Principal for Westminster College (big thanks to the Revd Dr Robert Pope and welcome, from June 2024, to the Revd Dr Peter McEnhill); more changes in our Training and Development Officer+ (TDO+) Network as some moved on to new roles or retired and new people joined us (retiring or moving on: the Revd Peter Ball, Lindsey Brown, the Revd Stuart Scott, the Revd Andy Twilley, and new: Emma Howarth, Lucy Cooke, the Revd Jo Clare-Young, the Revd Julian Templeton).

Finally, big thanks to Marion Brown and Philippa Linton as they continue to offer stability!

Other changes are in relation to: URC Requirements of EM1; a revised EM2 programme; changes to EM3 grant allowance process; closer working relationships with the Resource Centres for Learning including continuing conversations around funding, capital costs, governance, as well as establishing the College Connective (a space for the Principals working more closely with E and L and other teams); the refining of the AALP programme with Northern College and the You're Welcome course, alongside Ministries; more joined up conversations between the TDO+ Network and the RCLs; the Newbigin Hub for lay Pioneer training; the introduction of an E and L bi-monthly newsletter; one revised and one new Stepwise stream; more resources on the URC Learning Hub; and moves in progress to fulfil the 2006 commitment to the RCLs so that they are the places where education, learning and training opportunities are coordinated from (rather than via the Church House team).

It is clear that life never stands still, and there is a season for all things. The words from Ecclesiastes both reassure and challenge us.

Updates from E and L

Discipleship Development Fund (DDF) grants

DDF grants given or agreed since GA 2022, total: £91,610.

- Hodge Hill Stations of the Cross for artwork to reflect the Church's commitment to pursuing racial justice, using a local artist
- Leeds URC Partnership retreat Days
- West Thamesmead Community Church young people attending the Limitless festival 2023 and 2024
- Northerly Synods 2nd LYCiG conference
- Northern Synod Intergenerational Greenbelt attendance
- Yorkshire Synod Eldership development 24 hour conference
- North Wales Worship and Bible Hub
- 20-40s Gathering at Westminster College September 2023
- Children's and Youth Work Committee grants for young people or groups
- Mersey Synod pilgrimage to Corrymeela

- Wooler URC discipleship development activities in the community
- Northern College Envisioning Worship Conference
- North Western Synod Lay Preacher Away Days
- URC Greenbelt team to support BAME young people to attend
- West Leicestershire Resource Area Churches' Quiet Day
- St Columba's URC to support, for one more year, the role of Outreach and Development worker for Trans and Gender non-conforming people
- Redcar Missional House pioneering team members' learning
- Flourishing Churches Initiative in North Western Synod.

The total of grants given since 2021 is £184,000.

The Large Grant Awarding Group meets quarterly, and considers all applications received. We would always welcome more applications. For further information go to: <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/discipleship-development-fund/>

Education for Ministry 1 (EM1) Requirements

One issue that arose from the RCL Funding conversations in 2021 was a need for clearer guidelines about the URC's requirements of RCLs in relation to EM1. E and L and Ministries met with the College Connective, and it was clear that we did not want to develop a curriculum (as we value the autonomy of the three RCLs) but we needed clearer information about what was being covered during ministerial formation. See Appendix 1 for the document, which will, by its very nature, be subject to changes as the world and the URC changes.

Education for Ministry 2 (EM2)

EM2 begins when a Minister of the Word and Sacraments (MWS) or Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) is ordained or commissioned. It is a supported three-year programme where the Minister (from this point 'Minister' applies to both MWS and CRCW) engages with Synod and wider URC opportunities to develop a practice of lifelong learning, building on EM1. The Minister is accompanied by a Ministry Mentor (previously a Pastoral Adviser) as well as the Synod EM2 Officer. The new EM2 programme aims to ensure that all EM2 Ministers have similar experiences, and that support is given during the first three years of ministry. All EM2 Ministers have access to their £350 EM2 grant annually, as well as an annual funded EM2 Summer Retreat, run by the EM2 chaplains. The revised EM2 programme was produced in collaboration between E and L, the College Connective and the TDO+ Network, with reference to the Moderators' meeting. The revised programme includes a one-page information sheet for churches who have a Minister in EM2, as well as a simplified reporting process, and engagement with the RCLs and the Children and Youth Development Officers+ Team. It is hoped that the EM2 Ministers' experience of the revised programme will be of a time where they are surrounded by support and encouragement as they are settling into a new setting and way of being. Those Ministers on Certificates of Eligibility are also included in this revised programme, to support their transition into the URC. For more information contact your Synod EM2 Officer.

Education for Ministry 3 (EM3)

The grant for EM3 (Ministry after EM2) continues to be set at £700 per annum. The grant can be applied for in each calendar year and cannot be carried over without dialogue with the TDO+ (or equivalent) in your Synod, and completion of a Rollover form. Historically, it has not been possible to apply for it in a sabbatical year. From January 2024, the guidelines were altered, and it can now be applied for in a Sabbatical

year. We encourage all Ministers to access and use their EM3 grants to support their discipleship journey, and are also looking to offer specific EM3 opportunities for training to make the learning more easily accessed (ie when an opportunity drops in your inbox, Ministers may be more inclined to attend than having to go seeking the opportunity, whilst being busy in role).

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALPs).

In June 2023, our first cohort of AALPs finished the course run through Northern College. We had seven people undertake and complete the two-year part-time training. The course offers a comprehensive preparation for AALPs, and has been extremely well received. We are grateful for all the work that has gone in to making this so positive, from staff, students and Synod Representatives.

E and L committed to fund training, if required, so that cost was not a barrier. We have to thank the students, local churches and Synods for their generosity in enabling students to undertake the course, and below are the figures showing the contributions made from a central fund.

The course will continue to be offered through Northern College, but with a review around content and costings as part of the E and L future discussions.

AALP training costs	Total course fees paid per annum	Total payments made	Amount to claim from E and L fund
2021-2022	£ 7,000	£ 5,600.00	£1,600.00
2022-2023	£17,000	£15,100.00	£1,900.00
2023-2024	£17,000	£15,200.00	£1,800.00

Stepwise

(Appendix 2 statistics for engagement in SW.) As you can see, there is a steady flow of people engaging with the streams and benefitting from the discipleship development that occurs when doing Stepwise. We are also beginning to see some of those who are accessing Stepwise stepping into new roles, further study or greater engagement with mission through the life of their churches. This is a small but exciting and encouraging outcome of the programme. We are preparing a video for Autumn Synod meetings that gives a 'moving on' flavour of Stepwise, and the fact that we have listened to feedback on Faith Filled Confidence, have made changes and adaptations, and will be launching Faith Filled Conversations. This will be an exciting new stream, taking on the best of FF Confidence, and encouraging the exploration of greater articulation of faith for those participating. A brand new stream coming in is Faith Filled Environment, a stream looking at green issues especially in relation to the theology, effects, justice, action and responses. We hope to launch this in early 2025. We have been encouraged by the interest in Stepwise by Synods who are committed to the programme as a discipleship development tool, and by those seeking to train as Facilitators. The future oversight and management of Stepwise is part of the E and L future conversations (see below), and this will have an effect on the Stepwise Development Group who have worked hard to

refine, advocate for, develop and champion Stepwise. As the journey of Stepwise continues, we give thanks for the large number of people who have been a part of it, and have given of their time, expertise and talents to make it the current URC Discipleship Development Programme.

URC Learning Hub

This is the space that holds the Stepwise Programme, but we have expanded its reach and it has a space for EM2 Ministers where they can access relevant documents, for the TDO+ Network to access and share documents, and for other learning opportunities from the URC: Conversation Starters (Where are the Young People and Call and Vocation) so far, as well as Exploring Eldership and Safeguarding sessions that can be accessed. The E and L future conversations are also looking at the Hub (see below). It can be accessed at <https://www.urclearninghub.org.uk> with some open access material and an overview of Stepwise.

TDO+ Network

It has been so encouraging to be able to work so closely with the TDO+ Network and to hear all that is going on in Synods, as well as their desire to encourage learning and training more widely across the URC. We meet formally on a regular basis, and the TDO+s meet informally in between times. The cooperation, participation and encouragement of learning for all God's people is good to witness in this Network. Sharing ideas, resources, thinking and feeding into the wider E and L documents has been a blessing.

Next year (2025), the TDO+ Network is joining in the 'Conversations at the Crossroads, towards new Christian communities', a gathering of mission and discipleship animators. This gathering will bring together the TDO+ Network, the CYDO+ Team, the Mission Enablers, and others from Synods and Church House, to think about strategy, focus on the Resolution 51a from General Assembly 2023, and on strengthening relationships and joined up working.

This increased collaboration is part of the E and L future conversations (see below), and continuing the increased communication between the RCLs and the TDO+ Network is something that we wish to see more of. The biggest struggle we have is keeping contact and communicating with those Synods who do not have someone in a TDO or equivalent role, which means that much is lost to that Synod, but also to the wider URC.

E and L Newsletter

This is a bi-monthly production from E and L, has been going since February 2023, and contains all sorts of information about opportunities and possibilities for learning, as well as sharing news about learning and E and L across the URC. To register to receive the e-newsletter, please email marion.brown@urc.org.uk

The Newbiggin Pioneering Hub

The Pioneering Hub has been offering lay learning and training opportunities for those within the URC for two years. Pioneering seeks to find new paths, imagine different possibilities, respond to injustices, can help release the gifts and talents and passions of people so they can be a blessing, and Pioneers look for what is strong, not for what is wrong. As the work of the Church Life Review continues, this work with the NPH, with Mission, Ministries, E and L, and the Congregational Federation, working together and exploring ways to connect up this learning with our RCLs, is more exciting and necessary than ever! The next Pioneering course, run in conjunction with the Church

Mission Society, begins in September. For more information go to <https://seedbeds.org/newbigin-pioneering-hub-2>

Where have we found the challenges?

'By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down

Yeah, we wept, when we remembered Zion...

Now how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart

Be acceptable in thy sight here tonight.'

Songwriters: Brent Gayford Dowe / Frank Farian / George Reyam / James Augustus McNaughton
Rivers of Babylon lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, TuneCore Inc., Universal Music Publishing Group

These words, immortalised by Boney M among others, speak into wondering where God is when we find ourselves in tough places, finding God in places we did not expect to be, and seeking to remain faithful and focused.

For many of us involved in E and L in the past two years, it has been challenging and frustrating, as well as deeply rewarding and inspiring. Sometimes in the Church, we shy away from the tough stuff, from the hard things, from the issues that drain us, and only report on the positive. But that is not life, that is not reality, and that is not what God calls us to. God is with us in the messiness, the struggle and the pain. Even if we lose sight of God!

Sometimes when we have a plan, when we think we have it all sorted, things change. This has been the experience for the E and L Team in the past two years. It comes back to 'change': mostly changes in staff and expectations of roles. The E and L Team has had to continue to adjust as people leave and roles change – plans change, roles change, expectations change. What now? See below!

Closer communication with the RCLs (as well as E and L changes) has led us to seek ways of sharing work more fully (see below the future of E and L). But the URC is also dealing with the issue of fewer people coming forward to train for stipendiary ordained or commissioned ministry, and a reducing budget in the light of reducing numbers of people attending our churches, more churches closing, and less money being given through the Ministry and Mission Fund. This means that the RCLs have fewer students and need to find new ways of funding, new opportunities for learning and other income streams. This adds anxiety and pressure on staff and Governors, especially as they need to make long term plans. Education and Learning has been working with Finance and the RCLs for a number of years (even before Covid-19) to review the Funding model to see whether it is still the best model. There have been many conversations, not all of them straightforward and we are dealing with three different institutions with their own ways of doing things, which is an absolute blessing as they each bring something unique and special to the learning and training table. But the hope of bringing a joint Funding Model that will work and is viable, to General Assembly 2024, has not been realised. The current model is not transparent, involves different amounts, different structures and different understandings. What to do when something doesn't work? Rethink, review, reconsider and try again. And that is what we are all doing, together, in partnership, with the intent to work together well. Watch this space for 2025!

What now?

So this is us! We have two new Principals in 18 months, we have the RCLs facing a funding squeeze, we have E and L in a new place because of staff changes, and we have new possibilities that we hope can bring flourishing.

This is our story. And we invite you to look below for the hope.

*'I waited patiently for the Lord
He inclined and heard my cry
He lifts me up out of the pit
Out of the miry clay
I will sing, sing a new song
How long to sing this song?'*

U2 Songwriters: Paul David Hewson / Adam Clayton / Larry Mullen / Dave Evans
"40" lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Int. B.v

This song sets us right, in an uncertain place but trusting in God's grace and mercy, trusting in God's eternal presence, trusting that if we sing the song, and we turn to God, patiently and faithfully, we will be raised up. How long to sing this song? Who knows, but the hope that we have in this paper, in the other GA papers and presentations that speak of growth, evangelism, sharing of resources, collaboration, worship, new Christian communities, of learning for all God's people, of community, of love. All these things and more make the URC (and E and L playing its part) able to offer a different way, a justice-focused, love-filled, hope-full, inclusive and diverse, welcoming and encouraging way that allows God to be known, seen, felt, heard and experienced, as widely as possible.

The biggest change, and that referred to in many places above, is **the future of Education and Learning**. Following the resignation of the Stepwise and Digital Learning Programme Manager, the E and L Committee decided that learning should be offered by those who are trained and employed to provide it and these people are located in the RCLs and Synods, in line with the 2006 GA resolution. So from January 2024 there have been conversations about how to facilitate the work being transferred to the RCLs and how to involve the TDO+ Network more closely as this shift happens. The areas of work that will move are Stepwise, the URC Learning Hub, the Church Leadership Programme (review and revision with no course running 2024-25 to enable this to happen), formalising the Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching being offered through the Northern College, and other pieces of work, including advocacy, to be explored and discussed. This transfer of work honours the 2006 resolution: 'General Assembly in line with the Training report, welcomes the commitment of the Northern, Scottish and Westminster Colleges to act for the United Reformed Church in a new role as Resource Centres for Learning, and to undertake dispersed, integrated training and Christian education for the whole people of God. General Assembly agrees to keep its relationship with these Resource Centres for Learning under ongoing review and asks the Training Committee (*Now Education & Learning Committee*) to report on them to the Assembly [of 2012].'

This transfer of responsibility comes with funding, freed up by changes in staffing. The process to realise these changes is already under way, but will need careful conversations and clear expectations and accountability structures. It is about collaboration and doing our best together. The E and L Committee is clear that there needs to be a reporting body, made up of RCLs and others, to oversee, manage and report the work being done. This will all have further impact on the E and L Team which,

in turn, leads to further questions arising within the Discipleship team. Please hold this work, and the people involved, in your prayers at this time of transition.

Add to the work above the **ongoing funding and governance conversations between the URC and the RCLs**, and we have a continued period of challenge. Finalising a sustainable RCL funding solution that addresses the issues raised in the conversations over the past two years, and enables E and L to manage its budget and the RCLs to flourish as increasingly independent colleges, is vital.

It is anticipated that a paper will come to GA 2025 that addresses all these issues together so that the RCLs can seek to move forward with opportunities for growth, as well as journeying with the URC through the Church Life Review, and offering increased learning opportunities for people lay and ordained, all ages and all stages.

Other work going forward:

- Lay Learning Portal – working with the Leadership in Worship Advocate, RCLs and others to produce a ‘one-stop’ space signposting lay learning opportunities and funding
- Developing portfolio software to be used by all the RCLs and EM1 training and future rollout to all learners
- Training updates and opportunities, in conjunction with Ministries – Safer Sacred Space training and Lay Preacher refresher sessions. New opportunities: Pulpit supply training and mental wellbeing sessions.

How long to sing this song? We trust in God’s grace to guide and enable us – as E and L and as part of the wider URC. We don’t know how long anything will take and exactly where we will end up, but let’s do it together, in harmony and as loudly as possible!

Reports from Our Resource Centres for Learning: Northern College, Manchester; The Scottish College, Glasgow; Westminster College, Cambridge.

Report from Northern College

Northern College offers learning to the whole people of God by working alongside the other Resource Centres for Learning and Synods in the United Reformed Church, as well as our ecumenical partners. We are committed to providing relevant and contemporary ministerial formation, lay training and continuing ministerial development, and believe theological education is best experienced by helping people learn from their own context.

We have gone through a time of transition over the past two years as we have a new principal, but more importantly, as we have been seeking to creatively respond to the changing shape of church life across Britain. We are keenly aware that all the mainstream denominations are experiencing a decline in the size of their congregations, and this is impacting on their resources and ability to live out the Gospel story in ways they have done in the past. This in turn has affected the number of candidates presenting for ministerial formation, and also the type of resourcing churches require. While we share the understandable concerns and anxieties many are experiencing, we are optimistic for the future, working alongside others to follow God into new adventures and towards new horizons, and seeking to build a resilient future.

The following are some of the ways that we have been doing that since General Assembly last met:

Greater commitment to inclusion

We have always sought to be an open and inclusive community of learning, worship and fellowship. But we are trying to find ways of broadening our inclusive ethos across theology, gender, sexuality, disability, neurodiversity, ethnicity and educational backgrounds. This is happening through academic teaching, changing the ministerial formation programme, developing lay training and providing funding for specific projects relating to inclusion. We have also sought to offer training in areas such as resilience, wellbeing, trauma-informed approaches to faith (generally and in ministry practice and biblical studies), alongside further developing our approach to embodied spiritualities.

Rethinking ministerial formation

Historically, the mainstay of our work has been preparing candidates for Church Related Community Work and the ministry of Word and Sacraments. But we recognise that we also have a responsibility in supporting and preparing lay people for the essential leadership they are offering our church communities. We have sought to achieve this through our work with TDOs and Synods, as well as supporting individuals by reducing barriers to accessing theological learning. Northern College has been instrumental in the development of non-stipendiary (NSM) CRCW training, a new approach to CRCW ministry which we hope will open up this important and unique ministry to more people within the church. We are very much looking forward to the time when we can welcome our first cohort of these students.

Equipping preachers and worship leaders

We are particularly proud of the work we have undertaken to develop the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher (AALP) programme on behalf of the denomination. This programme has received excellent feedback from students, and is being adapted continually for the changing needs of those preaching and leading worship. Northern College has sought to keep the programme relevant to local contexts by using visiting speakers who are actively engaged in ministry, in addition to the academics who teach the programme. We have also innovated through mixing the AALP cohort with our NSM students to provide formation weekends where they learn together.

Making theology accessible

Our tutors work hard to maintain their academic standing, with staff members publishing popular theology books and textbooks, as well as contributing to academic conferences, journals and sitting on subject-related academic boards. Our staff team works hard to make high quality theological education accessible to all by facilitating online learning, Elders training, Ministers' Schools, Synod Bible Studies, speaking at Greenbelt, and our own annual 'Envisioning Worship' Conference. Northern College also offers bursaries for those wanting to engage in Higher Education for the first time, those seeking to do doctoral studies, as well as individual grants for accessing conferences and training.

Ecumenical working

We form part of the ecumenical learning community based at Luther King Centre, a theological educational institution operating within Durham University Common Awards. We have also been actively trying to develop our wider ecumenical work, for example with the Moravian Church, through participation in the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher programme. We are also offering ministerial training and development for other denominations, and renewing our ministerial formation programme so that our

students are formed alongside Baptists, Unitarians, Moravians, and Pentecostals. This creates challenges, but students have reported that it is also helping them to flourish.

Collaborating with others

As an ecumenical institution, we always seek to collaborate where we can. We have put significant time and commitment into developing our relationships with Education and Learning, Ministries and the other Resource Centres for Learning. It has been a delight to build new partnerships and see the development of healthy working relationships. Many of our staff team sit on committees within the URC and offer support. Examples include convening the Stepwise Development Group, sitting on Synod Ministry Committees, offering training for URC National Safeguarding Committee, being part of the Interfaith Enabling Group, offering line management and pastoral supervision for CRCWs and ministers, and organising the URC Research Network.

We are aware that the United Reformed Church is in a time of creative flux, with a careful consideration on how our resources can be best used. This has led the Governors and staff team at Northern College to seek ways of building a resilient future through innovation, partnership and risk taking. We feel the areas outlined above show our commitment to this course of action. We are grateful for our good relationship with the URC, particularly with Education and Learning, Ministries and the other Resource Centres for Learning, and want to serve the denomination in the best ways we can as it seeks a resilient future.

Report from Westminster College

Since our last report to General Assembly, there have been many exciting developments in the College.

Although the College had term-time and block-week students prior to the Covid lockdown, the experience of placing all learning and formational activity online, as well as learning new skills associated with platforms such as Zoom, have changed our practice. Through a combination of on-site meetings and online activity, we have sought to integrate the two sets of EM1 students as fully as possible. At certain points during the year, such as the beginning and end of the academic session, all our students are on site for formational and other activities. During the term time, we meet in hybrid form for morning prayer (Monday to Friday), community bible study or tutor group (alternate Thursdays), and for some community evenings. This seems to have been appreciated by the students and, with low numbers, has enabled a sense of a single cohort regardless of someone's year of study.

There have been a number of staff changes. Peter Ball retired from his post as Director of Church Resource Development at the end of 2023. Peter pioneered the role which was designed to help the College and the wider URC to be more connected. Though the Covid lockdown set the work back, much has been achieved, and the College looks forward to continuing to develop this work under Peter's replacement, Robin Barden.

Rick Mearkle will retire fully from his post as Director of Pastoral Studies at the end of July 2024. Rick stepped in at a time of uncertainty, and his long experience of pastoral ministry and education, as well as his flexibility and calming presence, have provided a stability for staff and students. We welcomed his replacement, Dan Pratt, in February 2024.

We thank Peter and Rick for their work on Westminster's behalf and for their collegiality, and wish them well for a long and happy retirement.

Our block weeks are advertised widely, and attract interest. The annual Lay Preachers and Worship Leaders weekend filled the College in 2022 and 2023, and looks set to do so in 2024. In 2022, we tried hybrid; in 2023, online attendance proved not to attract much interest. Westminster has hosted three public lectures organised by the Cheshunt Foundation, which have been hybrid events.

A Ministers' Refresher Week was held in March 2023. As a result of staff changes, one was not offered in 2024, but we plan to return to this in 2025. Our commitment to holding learning events which are relevant to ministry in the modern world can be seen through hosting three Cheshunt Lectures (on theology and depression; theology and the body; theology and refugees and migrants), as well as organising study days, jointly with the Faraday Institute for Science and Theology on 'Living with Chronic Pain: A Christian Response' (November 2022) and on 'Mental Health: A Christian Response' (November 2023). We were also delighted to host a day of Celebration of Black and Womanist Theologians (October 2023).

Westminster has been the location for a number of denominational and Synod events, some of which have had input from the tutors. These have included:

- South West Synod Ministers Summer School (September 2022)
- Eastern Synod Ministers Refresher Week (September 2022); Ministers Gathering (September 2023)
- West Midlands Synod Ministers Summer School (June 2023)
- The denomination's 'You're Welcome' programme for those serving the URC from other denominations;
- An event for 20s to 40s in September 2023, with the aid of the Discipleship Development Fund.
- Wessex Synod young people 'Telling our story and God's story'.

Hopefully this gives some sense of our activity over the past two years. It is not exhaustive, and it is true to say that there have been significant challenges to overcome during that period. We know challenges lie ahead. But we at the College continue to consider its primary mission to be serving the URC and the wider church in every way we possibly can. As such, we pray that in future we will go from strength to strength.

As this report was being written, we are preparing to welcome Peter McEnhill as the new principal. We look forward to working with him and supporting his vision for the College in service of the church in the 21st century.

Report from The Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed) SCIO

The life of the College ebbs and flows. In common with much of ecclesial life, there seems to be always more to do as we learn to work better and more efficiently with partners and stakeholders.

Recent years have revolutionised our ways of working as we have become familiar with using remote conferencing for so much of our learning, administration and support. We have become closer partners with our sister colleges – Westminster College, Cambridge

and Northern College in Manchester. We have developed increasingly close working relationships with the United Reformed Church's Secretaries for Education and Learning, and for Ministries. We appreciate the wisdom, encouragement, gifts and resources that each partner brings, and hope that our involvement adds value to our common endeavours. Our desire is to be a community of learning and companionship rooted in the Scottish context, where our national conversations give substance and strength to the contributions we make to the wider ecclesial bodies to which we belong.

Our student body of ministerial trainees recreates itself continually, as we welcome and send out candidates for all modes of Ministry of Word and Sacrament. Summer 2023 saw four of our number receive leaving certificates, a bumper year for us.

The Scottish College relates to the denomination through our partnership with our National Synod and through Assembly-level relationships, and supports congregational learning and leadership training, as well as continuing ministerial education (EM2 and EM3), primarily in Scotland. This means that we seek to provide an integrated offering to the church in Scotland, as well as welcome ministerial trainees from further afield, and – increasingly importantly – co-operating with colleagues across the church in taking responsibility for areas of URC Education and Learning. The latter is an area of growth and excitement for us as the church considers the future shape of this aspect of its life.

Since our last report, Patsi Dickie, our College Administrator, finished working with the College on 31 December 2022. Patsi worked with the National Synod of Scotland and the Congregational Union of Scotland for more than 40 years, and the College for ten. We thank her for the decade she spent with us, and for the friendship, good humour and kindness that she showed to a generation of students, as well as the support she gave to all of her colleagues.

Our team of tutors, working in support of the Principal, has been consolidated. Andy Braunston, who assisted in a locum capacity while Fiona Bennett served as Moderator of General Assembly, has continued with us following Fiona's welcome return. Professor Scott Spurlock brings wisdom and support as the fourth member of the core team.

Our way of working involves co-operative relationships, and each of these has changed and developed since our last report. Our closest operational partnership continues to be with the Scottish Episcopal Institute. Our collaboration continues in initial ministerial education for those ordinands for whom this is the most appropriate pathway, but the association has been diverse and continues to develop beyond the scope of EM1. We also work with the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow. We are involved in discussions that may result in more integrated co-operating among providers of theological in Scotland, and in the Glasgow region especially.

The College, having become a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation in 2021, has consolidated its governance. Douglas Hay retired after as a trustee many years. Wendy Bowen has begun a first term of service.

Where possible, we have sought synergies, and opportunities for those in different roles and phases of training to learn together. In May, we held a joint training weekend to bringing together students in the first and second phases of Education of Ministry. Our EM1 'Worship Workshops' were also offered to lay preachers and others. Ministry

students joined ministers in the Scottish Synod for an overnight learning event in October 2023.

We hope this report gives some sense of the spirit and means of working at the Scottish College. It doesn't cover everything, of course. We have achieved much against a background of substantial obstacles during recent years. We see challenges ahead, but are confident that we can still, with the whole church and our colleagues in other places, dream Kingdom dreams and support the church as it moves forward.

Appendix one: Education and Learning

EM1 URC Requirements from RCLs

URC requirements for learning and preparation for accredited ministries. The RCLs will provide these requirements in partnership with the Synod TDO+ Network and Education and Learning.

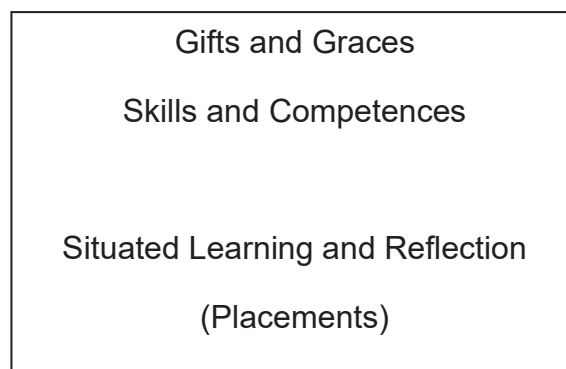
Pre-study

- Attendance at You're Welcome (E&L and Ministries)
- DBS / PVG
- Safeguarding – Synod / RCL confirm training date, if required arrange attendance
- College 'Induction'.

Also consider:

- individual circumstances
- prior learning
- wellbeing/resilience.
- awareness of self and others.

*Ministerial Formation and Accredited & Non-Accredited Study
(in college community)*



Requirements	S.MW&S	CRCW	NSM 1-3	NSM 4	NSM CRCW
Things to be done					
Qualification: Diploma in Theology (minimum)	√	√	√	x	x
Placement hours (minimum) F/T expect to be on placements 2/7	800	800	400	400	400
Safer sacred space	√	√	√	√	√
Biblical studies – new and old testaments	√	√	√	√	√
Summer retreat (annual)	√	√	√	√	√
Portfolio (G, G, S, C)	√	√	√	√	√
Church history	√	√	√	√	√
Pastoral care	√	√	√	√	√
Leadership	√	√	√	√	√
Skills to gain					
Public speaking	√	√	√	√	√
Conflict resolution	√	√	√	√	√
Reformed theology – why the URC does things this way	√	√	√	√	√
Theological reflective practice	√	√	√	√	√
Multi Church pastorates	√	√	√	x	x
Team working – including response to change	√	√	√	√	√
Political social engagement	√	√	√	√	√
Wellbeing and resilience	√	√	√	√	√
Experiences to have					
Children and Youth – Intergenerational	√	√	√	√	√
Interfaith (exposure)	√	√	√	√	√
Equality, diversity and inclusion	√	√	√	√	√

World Church +	√	√	√	√	√
New and alternative Christian communities	√	√	√	√	√
Anti-racism	√	√	√	√	√
Elderly Care / Ageing	√	√	√	√	√
Closing Churches	√	√	√	√	√

+this could include a trip/visit/placement overseas and would be decided during training, by the RCL.



Appendix two

Number of people engaged with Stepwise – up to and including May 2024			
Faith-filled Life			
Active groups: 15	Participants: 115	Facilitators: 26	
Completed groups: 37	Participants: 215	Facilitators: 54	
Groups that didn't continue due to Covid-19: 2	Participants: 12	Facilitators: 3	
Total groups: 52	Total participants: 342	Total facilitators: 83	
Faith-fuelled Leadership			
Active groups: 0	Participants: 0	Facilitators: 0	
Completed groups: 3	Participants: 20	Facilitators: 5	
Total groups: 3	Total participants: 20	Total facilitators: 5	
Faith-filled Community			

Active groups: 1	Participants: 5	Facilitators: 1	
Completed groups: 2	Participants: 11	Facilitators: 4	
Total groups: 3	Total participants: 16	Total facilitators: 5	
<i>Faith-filled Worship</i>			
Active groups: 3	Participants: 21	Facilitators: 6	
Completed groups: 5	Participants: 35	Facilitators: 8	
Total groups: 8	Total participants: 56	Total facilitators: 14	
Groups participating by year: February 2024			
Groups 2021	Groups 2022	Groups 2023	Groups 2024
23	11	15	6

Number of Synods engaging – 12 (of 13)

Paper E1

Report on ongoing work

Equalities Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd David Salsbury, Committee Secretary david.salsbury.urcwales@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To share with the General Assembly a summary of the committee's work.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Equalities Committee report to General Assembly 2023 Paper E2 and Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Purpose and Remit

1.1. The Equalities Committee exists to remind the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the denomination. It does this by monitoring and, where appropriate, challenging the practice of the Church, supporting programmes and initiatives, and by listening to the voices of those who are on the margins of church or society.

2. Committee membership and pattern of meetings

2.1. The Equalities Committee currently has six nominated members, plus a Convenor and Secretary. It is seeking additional members through the new nominations process. In addition to these members, the committee also includes the Equality and Diversity rep from URC Youth Executive, the Chief Operating Officer, and the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries.

2.2. In 2023/24, the committee met on three occasions, and always online. We have attempted to be inclusive by holding meetings on various days of the week, and at different times. This has helped most members to be able to attend most meetings.

3. In addition to receiving feedback from other assembly committees where Equalities Committee has a monitoring and observing role, the Committee considered these other main items of business:

4. Support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people – responding to Resolution 21, General Assembly 2023

- 4.1. Following General Assembly 2023 the committee formed a small task group to take forward the resolution exploring support for trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. This group is convened by Kirsty-Ann Mabbott, and includes Judy Rogers, Rosie Martin, Jayne Taylor, Megan Westgarth, Chrissie Chevasutt, Alex Clare-Young and Daniel Raddings.
- 4.2. The group’s aspiration is to create a discussion booklet with accessible information and questions on several theological areas such as: health; legal identity; sex and gender; de-transition and re-transition; Bible; pastoral care; youth / children and transitioning. Alongside the booklet will be a video and modular course that covers areas such as: history; biology; theology; transition; pastoral care; trauma, crisis and needs; the golden rule; and the intersectionality of all these.
- 4.3. There is an aim to have ‘golden threads’ running through these resources along the lines of compassion, theology and bodies (embodiedness), so that theology and academia are combined with experiential learning. The objective is to create accessible learning for all, with references and links to the Resource Centres for Learning where they offer academic theological modules that would be of interest to those who wish to go deeper.
- 4.4. The task group notes that no funding is set aside by General Assembly to create these resources and the Equalities Committee doesn’t have any budget. The group is working on producing a costed proposal which will form the basis of an application to the URC Legacy fund, which will be submitted by Equalities Committee in due course.
- 4.5. Meanwhile, the task group’s representatives from URC Youth have offered to work with URC Youth to create a URC Learning Hub ‘Conversation Starter’ along the same lines as “Vocation and Call” and ‘Where are the Young People?’ This offer was received with excitement and is also currently being worked on.
- 4.6. The aim is to have some resources ready to launch at General Assembly 2025.

5. Positive action and anti-racism training

- 5.1. General Assembly in 2023 resolved that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC (Resolution 32, 2023).
- 5.2. Members of the Equalities Committee worked alongside others from the Mission department and Professor Anthony Reddie to develop this training. The first session took place in January 2024 and its roll-out is ongoing. Most members of the Equalities Committee participated in the training session in April 2024.

6. Exploring a Living Library for the United Reformed Church

- 6.1. Building on an idea that had been developed in the local NHS Trust of one committee member, the Equalities Committee explored whether it might be feasible to establish a 'Living Library' for the United Reformed Church.
- 6.2. The concept of a Living Library is that people who have stories to tell of lived experience from an equality and diversity perspective are available to a wider audience to be 'borrowed'. This is so that they can share their stories and help others better understand the challenges and joys of their everyday lives. The benefit of doing this is to break down barriers of prejudice and misunderstanding which can result in discrimination and the sharing of ignorance about those who are in some ways different.
- 6.3. The committee warmed to the Living Library concept, but thought that the practicalities of trying to set something like this up across the URC would be too complex and demanding of the church's ever shrinking resources.
- 6.4. Despite this, the committee continues to encourage those with stories to tell to find ways of sharing these in safe spaces and appropriate ways, and for the wider church to hear these stories and to learn from them.

Paper F1

Update on current work

Worship, Faith and Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope rpp20@cam.ac.uk Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	N/A.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Update on the work of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee.
Main points	This paper outlines the areas of work the Committee has undertaken as well as its future work.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	The work of the Committee has an impact on ecumenical relationships, as this is the body which is called on by ecumenical partners to discuss how to improve areas of co-operation and mutual understanding.

The remit of the Worship, Faith and Order Committee is:

- to address issues of worship, faith and order on behalf of the URC
- to participate in and respond to ecumenical and inter-faith discussions on faith and order issues
- to advise the assembly, its officers and committees on questions of worship, faith and order
- to listen to concerns raised by Local Churches, Synods and individuals and to advise as appropriate
- to publish and disseminate occasional materials relating to worship, faith and order to act as a sounding board for the Minister for Digital Worship
- to receive reports from the United Reformed Church Spirituality Group.

General Assembly 2023 brought the Worship, Faith and Order Committee into existence. Since then, the Committee has:

1. Discussed the Environmental Policy, and stressed that the reduction of in-person meetings to one per year had partly addressed the issue, while careful consideration will be given to where the residential meeting will be held to keep travel to a minimum.
2. Continued a discussion about membership and 'isolated membership', having heard the response that this was not quite meeting the need that had been identified. Part of our discussion has revolved around how someone might belong to the URC in ways other than belonging to a local church. This remains work in progress as we have yet to reach a point of resolution.
3. Prepared and discussed a paper on the theological implications of the Vocation and Call paper which emanated from the Education and Learning, Ministries, and Children's and Youth Work committees. A version of the paper (discussed though not endorsed by the WFO Committee) can be found on the URC Learning Hub.
4. Drew to an end the work of the Worship Reference Group as a body separate from but reporting to the Committee. Thanks go to those involved, especially the Revd Samuel Silungwe for chairing the group.
5. Began a discussion about how the schedule of promises might be made available within a liturgy that used expansive language, following a question raised during the parallel sessions at General Assembly 2022. A small group was established, convened by the Revd Dr Susan Durber with the Revd Andy Braunston as secretary, with a remit to draw on ecumenical experience in considering what might work liturgically. The group's work has been completed, with the words approved by the Committee.
6. Maintained contact with the work of the Ministries Committee through the regular attendance of the Secretary of Ministries, the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith. She has submitted occasional papers for our consideration, including one discussing a 'Theology of Safeguarding'.
7. Looked again at the 'priesthood of all believers', considering an initial paper which led WFO to resolve to do further work and think about how our deliberations might be more widely disseminated.
8. In light of discussion informed by one of our members, Ms Diana Paulding, we supported the arrangements made for a 20s-40s event, which proved to be a success. It has particularly helped our discussion about membership.
9. Reflected, in initial discussion with the Children's and Youth Work Committee, about how Children's and Youth Work Ministry might be formally recognised in the URC, highlighting what might be the WFO issues involved.
10. Brought to light that appointees to the Committee were asked to serve for six years. This was felt to be out of step with other Committees, and also to be a length that could put off some people from serving on the Committee. As a result, the Committee asked Assembly Executive to agree that the initial term of service for

appointees should be four years. Such an appointment can be renewed for one further four-year term.

11. Discussed and commended the Methodist Church's document *God in Love Unites Us* as a resource for the United Reformed Church, and WFO will continue to reference it when relevant to our deliberations.
12. Had initial discussions about the matter of 'discernment', and some further work will be undertaken in discussion with the Business Committee.
13. Received a report from the Spirituality Group in line with our new remit. We currently plan an annual reporting mechanism with a representative of the Spirituality Group in attendance at one of our meetings annually (probably an online meeting).
14. Discussed the Methodist Church's Justice Seeking Church Report. WFO intends to return to this Report in the future, with a view to seeing how some of its principles and recommendations, alongside its theological approach, may be appropriated for the United Reformed Church.
15. Begun a discussion about the five Marks of Mission, and what a rewrite appropriate to the age and to the URC might look like.

Some of this work is ongoing. We have been asked to consider diaconal ministry, and a theological response to AI.

The Minister for Digital Worship reports as follows:

In 2021, General Assembly resolved to create the new post of Minister for Digital Worship to create and curate a range of worship resources to help local churches, elders, lay preachers and ministers, as digital technology gives the Church opportunities not seen since the invention of the printing press in the 16th Century. Andy Braunston took up this role in February 2022 and reports to General Assembly through the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee which he serves as joint Secretary.

Andy oversees the production of services for local churches to use via PowerPoint, with videos of a minister giving an introduction, sermon, and blessing and, at least monthly, presiding at Holy Communion. Readings, prayers and hymns are provided in audio format, too. Local churches can adapt these and lead readings and prayers locally from the script provided or use all the material on PowerPoint. Churches find this useful when they have no minister or lay preacher to lead worship, and some are making these services a regular part of their repertoire, using them monthly. The PowerPoint material is sent out a month in advance, alongside audio recordings and full scripts, which some churches distribute to those unable to attend who do not have access to the internet. On average, 139 congregations each week use some or all of this material.

Those who lead these services also provide Worship Notes which contain all the prayers, an all-age activity, a selection of hymn suggestions and notes to build into a sermon. This material can be used as is, adapted, or used to stimulate ideas. On average, 634 people a week download this material – and our reach extends from the URC, with people from a range of other denominations using the material, too. As the material is produced several months ahead of time, Andy has overseen a small team of people producing Weekly Intercessions designed to be more topical yet still related to

the Lectionary readings for a given Sunday; these are produced in the week before they are designed to be used, and more than 100 people a week download these.

Biblical reading and reflection are hallmarks of Reformed spirituality, and the Daily Devotions continue to be a key part of the URC's spiritual life. Themes range from working through a Biblical book, using art to access Biblical truths, asking guest writers to tackle a series and, increasingly, using voices from around the world to stimulate our thinking. This year, we have heard a range of voices from the wider Church ponder the Revd Dr Graham Adam's reworking of the Anglican Five Marks of Mission, and voices from Myanmar reflect on the plight of that troubled nation. We have read through St Mark's Gospel, looked at a range of representations of Jesus in art, pondered evangelism with Eddie Boon, and are looking forward to reading through Hebrews with John Proctor. About 4,000 people are sent the Daily Devotions each day; some listen to them as podcasts, and 250 local church contacts receive them in booklet format to print and give to members of their churches without internet access. Some Daily Devotion series are turned into small group studies for local church use.

Andy has also served as Secretary to a small working group who edited the various initiation, ordination and commissioning services in *Worship From* to update them in light of Assembly Resolutions on Expansive Language. The changes also reflect various changes in URC polity since *Worship From* was published (for example the removal, for all intents and purposes, of District Councils), and corrected some typographical mistakes.

Andy is grateful for the many Daily Devotion writers, crafters of worship and intercessions, and the team of people who record the material; they all help enrich the Church's worship. Particular thanks are due to the Revd Walt Johnson who provides quite technical support, in particular, for the Podcasts. Thanks are due, too, to Neil Hunter, the Digital Content Manager, who carefully attends to the production of the service podcasts, booklets and PowerPoint files week after week.

As per our remit, members of the Committee would be pleased to receive comments and feedback from members of Assembly. We would also be pleased to receive questions regarding the URC's worship, faith and order for deliberation during, or between, our meetings.

Paper G1

General report 2023 to 2024

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk John Samson, Chief Finance Officer john.samson@urc.org.uk Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer deputy.treas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the central budgets and other finance-related areas of work over the past year.
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The M&M Fund 2023 net expenditure results were significantly higher than anticipated in the budget. 2. The Ministers' Pension Support Restricted Fund had a healthy balance at the end of 2023. 3. Other matters considered by the Finance Committee this year are noted. 4. The work of the Pension Committee is reported on. 5. An update on the work done towards achieving a balanced budget within five to seven years is given.
Previous relevant documents	Finance Committee papers for General Assembly 2023. Finance Committee paper for Assembly Executive 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Secretary for Church and Society; The Legacies of Slavery Task Group; The URC Trust; Synods/Synod Trusts; Officers of General Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	Nothing new in the report itself.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Financial results

1. The appendix to this report sets out the 2023 income and expenditure statement for the URC M&M fund, and the budget agreed at the November 2023 Assembly Executive for 2024.

2. 2023 income was nearly £350k above budget at £18.341 million. This was, in part, the result of a significant effort by some Synods to 'top up' the giving of churches into the M&M fund. As the year drew to a close, it was looking like we would have a shortfall in this area, but the generous giving in November and December meant we finished the year £56k above budget. We were grateful for this generosity. The income from our investments was significantly above what was expected thanks, in the main, to rising interest rates.
3. While income was better than expected, the story is different for expenditure, as this ended the year more than £900k over budget. A few significant factors contributed to this. About £700k of this overspend relates to the pension costs. As a result of the old direct benefit schemes closing at the end of February 2023 rather than at end of 2022, there were two months of additional pension contribution costs, amounting to £400k. A further £310k costs towards the administration of the now closed fund only came to light after the 2023 budget had been agreed.
4. Professional and consultancy fees were overspent by about £130k. This was due in the main to legal bills, which are incredibly difficult to predict, being significant in the year. This revolved particularly around the disciplinary process and legal advice around the change in pension schemes.
5. The IT costs to support the work done in Church House were overspent to the tune of £100k. A significant portion of this was a result of not being able to close off an old system due to incompatibility of some programmes with the new platform. This was unexpected and resulted in a significant amount of work done to make the change as quickly as possible while still allowing the normal work of Church House to be done.
6. The year ended with a deficit of £1,221k, a figure that was £558k above budget. The church's reserves were able to absorb this deficit but the church cannot support such deficits on an ongoing basis. The November 2023 Assembly Executive meeting addressed this issue and plans to tackle the deficit budget are discussed in more detail below.

Legacy fund

7. Requests to the central United Reformed Church which are not earmarked for specific purposes are added to the legacy fund. Following a decision at the 2023 General Assembly, half of this fund was transferred to the Church Life Review Fund. Currently, the fund is in a position to award grants of approximately £120k a year, of which £100k was committed or paid to innovative mission projects in the year.

Church Buildings Fund

8. Similarly, grants made from the church building fund via the inter-Synod-resource-sharing process amounted to £65k in 2023, although the fund had about £150k available to support churches undertaking certain types of building development.

URC Investment Committee

9. We remain grateful to the members of the URC Investment Committee who oversee the work of, and results achieved by, our investment managers in managing the investments held by the URC Trust (and the MPF).

URC pensions update

Ministers' Pension Fund

MPF Deficit Funding

10. Contributions to the Ministers Pension Support Restricted Fund (the fund holding and utilising Synod contributions towards the MPF deficit) had sufficient in hand to pay the required £4.7m deficit contributions for 2023.

11. The fund also holds a balance in hand to roll over into 2024.

MPF triennial valuation

12. The MPF is due to have its formal three-year valuation of the fund position as at 1 January 2024. The valuation was presented on a first draft basis by our actuaries in March, and the final (signed off) valuation should be completed in Q4 of 2024.

13. Current indications are that the deficit is significantly reduced from what was calculated three years ago and hence it might not be necessary to call in all the Synod contributions scheduled through to 2030. More information will be communicated when we have it.

MPF strategy towards de-risking

14. The MPT Board has been actively considering de-risking the pension investments, and in April £46m of equities was re-allocated into gilts. as a way of locking in recent valuation wins and deficit reduction.

TPT Staff Pension Scheme

15. The TPT defined benefit pension scheme was closed to accrual on 28 February 2023 and remains close to being fully funded.

Pensions Committee

16. Following the move to DC (defined contribution) pension arrangements the Pensions Committee has been reconstituted with Revd Dr Janet Tollington as Chair.

17. The Pensions Committee reports to the Finance Committee in the first instance.

18. The Pensions Committee acts as the representative of the Church in dealing with pension providers who are:

- a) The Ministers' Pension Trust (MPT) – now closed to accrual
- b) TPT who run the Staff Salary Scheme – now closed to accrual
- c) AON Master Trust – the provider of the new defined contribution scheme
- d) The Pensions Committee also has responsibility for the oversight of the arrangements for death in service and ill health retirement benefits
- e) The Pensions Committee meets quarterly. AON will be asked to attend every meeting and the MPT and TPT will be asked to attend alternate meetings.

19. Meetings with AON will review:

- a) Service levels provided to members
- b) Use of the AON Portal by members
- c) Investment performance
- d) Communication with members
- e) Any particular issues arising in the operation of the AON Master Trust.

20. Meetings with MPT and TPT will deal with business as with AON (above) but only as far as it relates to schemes closed to accrual.
21. The Pensions Committee will report to each Finance Committee meeting and a report of its work will be provided to General Assembly.
22. The Pensions Committee has met three times so far this year, setting up the above process and reviewing the work of the MPF, TPT staff scheme and the AON master trust. Highlights include:
- a) MPF – route to de-risking implemented (see above)
 - b) TPT – discussions on de-risking this scheme (but complicated by the “benefits review” underway – see above)
 - c) MPF, TPT and AON – pressing to complete pension booklets for existing and future members
 - d) Review of how new Ill Health benefits system is working
 - e) Future considerations on pension expertise to serve the church.

Pensions Committee – Terms of Reference (ToRs)

23. Terms of Reference are being revised but it seems the changes are unlikely to be very significant.

Update on balancing the budget

24. Following the resolution made at the Assembly Executive in November 2023, the Synods were asked to maintain their M&M fund contributions at their 2023 actuals and Assembly Committees and Church House operations were informed that the budget target for 2025 was to be 5% less than 2024, and that target reductions would continue, albeit at a lower level, for the foreseeable future.
25. At the Synod Treasurers’ consultation in March 2024, the Synod Treasurers were asked to review their M&M pledges for 2024 (which were made before the AE decision taken in November 2023) and come back to the CFO by July with (hopefully) an increased offer. Please note that at least one Synod had already provided a pledge for 2024 that is significantly higher than their 2023 actual, for which we are grateful.
26. At the time of writing (end of April) preparations are being made to start the Church House budgeting process early, so that a draft budget will be available around mid-August. It is likely that budget savings identified will not be sufficient to meet our budget deficit reduction plan and further budget negotiations are likely to be needed.
27. The General Secretariat have already mooted that the assumption made by Finance, that the budget savings will be bigger in earlier years and get progressively smaller, may not come to fruition. And in fact, significant savings may well come in years two and three, because structural changes (which will create the biggest savings) will take longer to implement. If that is the case, unrealised savings in 2025 will be carried forward to 2026.

UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
URC M&M FUND
For the year ended 31 December 2023

Appendix

TOTAL	Actual 2023	Budget 2023	Budget 2024
	£	£	£
Income			
Income from Churches & Synods	16,315,691	16,259,240	15,845,000
Donations, Legacies & Grants	174,685	152,000	175,500
Income from training & academic activities	1,380	1,000	1,200
Other income	39,402	12,000	23,780
Income from Investments	1,433,209	1,189,000	1,287,000
Income from Trading Activities	205,225	216,900	216,600
Property income	171,767	162,550	188,950
Profit on sale of properties	10,230	0	0
Total Income	18,351,588	17,992,690	17,738,030
Expenditure			
Stipends & associated costs	12,692,421	12,441,019	12,588,552
Other Minister costs	139,787	143,600	236,420
Salaries & associated costs	2,741,726	2,638,957	2,716,330
RCL Support	738,842	694,580	693,037
Student Fees & Support	585,245	506,000	434,600
Programme expenditure	270,990	192,850	270,023
Committee & other meeting costs	240,328	266,850	316,467
Grants	416,842	390,760	383,623
Travel, accomodation & subsistence	189,244	144,700	141,864
Office & other staff costs	270,773	270,150	243,213
Professional & Consultancy fees	344,444	213,850	241,920
Telecoms	37,551	33,000	35,391
Facilities & buildings costs	127,727	140,500	178,760
IT Costs	305,053	205,100	290,191
Cost of sales	130,852	150,000	161,800
Sundries	17,936	13,500	22,000
Depreciation	86,506	91,598	86,820
Irrecoverable VAT	237,222	120,000	175,000
Total expenditure	19,573,487	18,657,014	19,216,011
Net expenditure	1,221,899	664,324	1,477,981

Paper G2

Linking stipendiary ministry costs to M&M receipts

Finance Committee and Ministries

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk John Samson, Chief Finance Officer john.samson@urc.org.uk Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer deputy.treas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Finance Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Introduction

1. **1 Corinthians 12:12 and 14**

‘For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ... For the body does not consist of one member but of many.’

2. Covenantal relationships are modelled throughout the Bible, between God and humankind, and between human beings before God, as witness. A covenantal relationship brings with it responsibility and blessing. Stipendiary ministry in the URC is funded through a covenantal relationship between members and the Church.

In the URC, church members pay into the M&M fund according to their ability to pay, and receive ministry according to their needs, moderated by the total ministry available to the Church.

3. At General Assembly 2023, a resolution was passed to link the costs of stipendiary ministry to the M&M receipts.¹ To implement this resolution, there are a number of questions that need to be answered:
 - a) Who is included in the target?
 - b) What is included in the ‘direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget’?
 - c) How are these direct costs converted into a target number of ministers?
 - d) What is the starting point for the linkage?

Who is included in the target?

4. It has been noted that a target for the number of ministers² is used by different departments for different purposes. In order to eliminate any confusion, it is suggested that this analysis includes all active³ ministers who are provided with a stipend, with the exception of the element of the stipends funded by the Synods for the two ministers deployed as National Ecumenical Officers in the National Synods of Scotland and Wales.
5. Users of this target can then make relevant deductions for their own purposes. For example, Ministries provide a deployment target for each Synod, and these targets do not include, for example, Synod Moderators, CRCWs, Special Category Ministers, Chaplains employed by other organisations, and Ministers deployed in Church House. Please see the breakdown for the end of 2023 and for 2022 given in Appendix I below.
6. This analysis shows that M&M receipts funded 309.76 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) ministers at the end of 2022, and 289.2 at the end of 2023, giving an average for the year of 299.5.

What is included in the ‘direct cost of supporting the ministry from the Assembly budget’?

7. The following cost categories constitute the direct cost of supporting ministry, together with the actual costs for 2023. Please note that these categories appear under several lines of the accounts. For example, in addition to the main expenditure line in the high-level reported accounts (stipends and associated costs), other stipend costs, principally for central and Assembly posts, appear in other lines.

Stipends and allowances	£9,096k
Pension costs	£2,268k
National insurance costs	£ 909k
Allowances	£ 148k
Housing costs (for centrally deployed ministers)	£ 56k
Other (including pastoral supervision)	£ 48k
Total	£12,525k

How are these direct costs converted into a target number of ministers?

8. To make the process as clear as possible, in this description we are assuming we have reached 2024 and have a final set of accounts for 2023.

Step 1

9. To derive a target number of ministers, we need to calculate the average, direct cost of a minister. This will be done using the total 2023 costs in the defined categories as given above. As it is expected that the number of ministers who received stipends from the M&M fund will vary over the year, the average cost will be calculated by dividing the total cost by the average of the number of full time equivalent (FTE) ministers at the beginning of 2023 and at the end of 2023.
10. For the purposes of this paper, to calculate the average cost of a minister, we have used the numbers given in Appendix 1. This gives the average cost of a full-time minister in 2023 as $(12,525/299.5)$ £41,819.70

Step 2

11. Once we have an average cost per minister for 2023, the average cost for 2024 will be estimated by applying expected stipend rises (typically agreed at Assembly Executive in November) and the forecast of other cost increases.
12. For the purposes of this paper, we assume the costs for 2024 will be inflated by 5% (the stipend increase agreed for 2024), giving a predicted cost per minister of £43,910.68.

Step 3

13. The amount of money to be spent on ministry in 2024 needs to be calculated. This is done by calculating the percentage fall (or rise) in M&M receipts expected in 2024. The actual spend on ministry in 2023 is then multiplied by this factor to calculate the target spend for 2024.
14. For 2024, we assume that the M&M receipts will remain the same as for 2023. This gives us the Ministries' budget for stipendiary ministry to be as per the expenditure in 2023, which is £12,525K.

Step 4

15. The target spend for 2024 is then divided by the forecast average cost for a minister in 2024. This provides us with the target for the number of stipendiary ministers in 2024. Longer term targets can be calculated by estimating cost inflation and the reduction in M&M receipts (and hence ministerial spend) for further years.
16. Please note that M&M receipts used in these calculations will include any sums given by Synods to bolster the receipts.
17. For 2024, the target number of ministers becomes $(12,525/43,910.68)$ 285.2.
18. The spreadsheet given in Table 1 summarises this approach for 2024 and provides further estimates for 2025 and 2026.

Category	2023 act	2024 f/c	2025 f/c	2026 f/c
Costs of Ministry, £k	12,525			
Expected fall in M&M receipts, %		0%	0%	0%
Target cost of ministry, £m		12.525	12,525	12,525
No. of ministers at end of 2023	299.5			

Ave cost of ministry for 2023, £k	41.820			
Expected increase in ministry costs, %		5.0%	3.0%	2.5%
Ave cost of ministry in future, £k		43.911	45.228	46.359
Target number of ministers	299.5	285.2	276.9	270.2

Table 1: Example calculations for 2023 to 2026

19. Consequently, the target for the end of 2024 would be 285.5 FTE ministers, which represents a reduction of 4 on the December 2023 actual.

How and when will the target be applied?

20. Should this paper be approved by General Assembly in 2024, it is assumed that the linkage would start from 2025. This means that the 2024 costs will be used to define the stipendiary minister target for the end of 2025 (note that a single target is given for the whole year).

21. To use the process as described above in its basic form could be problematic because it assumes that the forecast movements and timings will prove accurate. This is not a practical assumption. Therefore, in applying the proposed process, some form of 'room for manoeuvre' will be needed. Consequently, if the actual number of ministers overshoots the target by 1% or less this will be deemed to be satisfactory. Should an overshoot of more than 1% be predicted, ministries are requested to consult with the Treasurer and CFO to establish if there is room in the budget for any additional overshoot.

Conclusion

22. We believe that this process will fairly and accurately fulfil the 2023 GA resolution for the cost of ministry to track M&M receipts. It is not anticipated that this policy and process will curtail URC-ordained stipendiary ministry; the main impact will be to 'regulate' the number of certificates of eligibility issued each year. Neither is it intended to restrict those offering themselves for ministerial training. Should the glorious circumstances occur when we have 'too many' offering themselves for ministerial training I'm sure the denomination would find money to support all of them through training and beyond.

23. Finally, it must be recognised that this paper does not address the strategic question of what is the minimum level of ministry needed to viably build God's Kingdom on earth.

Appendix one

Ministerial deployment and funding

MINISTERIAL FUNDING Dec 2023				
	CATEGORY	NUMBER	FTE	BUDGET HOLDER
A	December 23 payroll	307		Various
B	Retired	2		?
C	Part time ministers	32	17.2	Various
D	Full time ministers	273		Various
E	FTE ministers		290.2	Various
F	National Ecumenical Officers	2	1	50% Synod, 50% M&M
	Ministers funded by M&M		289.2	M&M
MINISTERIAL DEPLOYMENT Dec 2023				
	CATEGORY	NUMBER	FTE	BUDGET HOLDER
	Full time MWS pastorially deployed	209.8	209.8	M&M
	Part time MWS pastorially deployed	31	16.7	M&M
	Full time CRCWs	13	13	M&M
	Part time CRCW	1	0.5	M&M
	Full time MWS in Synod posts		14.2	M&M
	SCM	12	12	M&M
	Mission partners	2	2	M&M
	National Ecumenical Officers	2	1	50% Synod, 50% M&M
	RCLs	3	3	Westminster College
	Ministers deployed in Church House	7	7	
	Synod Moderators	11	11	
	TOTAL		290.2	
MINISTERIAL FUNDING Dec 2022				
	CATEGORY	NUMBER	FTE	
A	December 22 payroll	328		
B				
C	Part time ministers	36	18.76	
D	Full time ministers	292		
E	FTE ministers		310.76	
F	National Ecumenical Officers	2	1	
	Ministers funded by M&M		309.76	
MINISTERIAL DEPLOYMENT Dec 2022				
	CATEGORY	NUMBER	FTE	
	Full time MWS pastorially deployed	226.8	226.8	
	Part time MWS pastorially deployed	35	18.26	
	Full time CRCWs	13	13	
	Part time CRCW	1	0.5	
	Full time MWS in Synod posts		14.2	
	SCM	12	12	
	Mission partners	2	2	
	RCLs	3	3	
	Ministers deployed in Church House	7	7	
	Synod Moderators	13	13	
	TOTAL		309.76	

Paper G3

URC Trust accounts 2023

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 14 General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ending 31 December 2023.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To draw General Assembly's attention to the availability of the audited accounts for 2023 and accompanying Trustee's report.
Main points	The annual accounts will be available to members before the paper is due to be discussed at General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	Audited accounts for 2023 are available on the URC website.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Trust and the General Secretary.

Summary of impact

Financial	General Assembly are asked to note the audited accounts – there is no financial impact.
External (eg ecumenical)	The Report provides a publicly available summary of the Church's activities and financial state.

- Both the Finance Committee and the URC Trust have considered the findings of the audited accounts and agreed to sign them off.
- Members of the General Assembly are invited to review the audited accounts in preparation for passing this resolution, which are on the URC website and can be found on this page (www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly-papers).
- If for any reason the accounts are not available online before General Assembly meets, the Treasurer will seek to withdraw the paper from consideration by members of the General Assembly.

Paper G4

Energy Crisis Fund

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk John Samson, Chief Finance Officer john.samson@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 15 General Assembly approves the recommendation of the Finance Committee to close the Energy Crisis Fund and return the unused balance to the URC's General Funds.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	URC response to the rising energy costs facing churches.
Main points	In 2023, the URC Trust set aside £2m for a designated fund to assist churches with rising energy bills. The aim was that this fund would work alongside Synod funds to help the whole Church. Following consultation with the Synod Treasurers, it appears that the need for the fund is not there to the extent it was thought it would be, and therefore the unspent balance of the fund (£1.79m) could be returned to the general funds of the URC. The discussion with Synod Treasurers identified a need to assist churches with making their buildings more energy efficient.
Previous relevant documents	Paper G4 for 2023 General Assembly and paper G2 for 2002 Assembly Executive.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Treasurers, the Legacy of Slavery Task Group.

Summary of impact

Financial	£1.79m is released back into general fund to help the URC Trust meet its target level of reserves. £250,000 of the released fund is moved to a restricted fund for the Legacy of Slavery task group reparations.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. During 2022, there was a sharp increase in inflation rates, with CPI and RPI running at levels not seen for a few decades. The increases in the cost of provision of gas and electricity was one area that was particular high, and contributed significantly to the Cost of Living Crisis.
2. Church buildings, by their nature, require a good level of energy to heat, and therefore it was expected that energy bills for churches would increase sharply.
3. In response to the Finance Committee's paper G2 presented to the 2022 Assembly Executive, it was agreed to set £2m aside to seed an Energy Crisis Fund to assist churches with their rising energy bills. The aim was this fund would be augmented by contributions from the Synod.
4. Paper G4 presented to General Assembly in 2023 was an update on progress, and noted that a working group was to be set up to look at qualifying criteria for the fund.
5. The above steps were taken before it was known what measures the government would take to try and alleviate the situation.
6. Initially, a grant of £210k was made to one of the less wealthy Synods to help with this issue.
7. Recent discussions with Synod Treasurers have revealed a low level of requests for help with energy bills, or the requests have been at a level that the Synod has been able to fund the requests from their own resources. These discussions also revealed that there were more requests coming for assistance with making church buildings more efficient.
8. There is currently a Church Buildings Fund held centrally with a substantial balance, and is available for churches to apply to (via their Synods). A number of Synods also have their own building funds to assist with making grants for such work.
9. The Church Building Fund falls under the Resources Sharing Task Group, and there is already work being done there to ensure that the criteria for making grants not only includes, but encourages works to make buildings more energy efficient. This ties in with the Church's Net Zero commitment.
10. Based on the above discussions it is felt that the need for the Energy Crisis Fund is not really there, and that Synods' building funds and the Church Building Fund can be used to meet the need for supporting local churches with making energy efficient improvements to their buildings.
11. A further consideration for recommending that the Energy Crisis Fund be closed revolves around the level of free reserves that the URC holds.
12. When the Covid-19 pandemic struck in 2020, the URC went very quickly from seeing annual surpluses in its general funds to annual (and significant) deficits. The subsequent years' results have also reflected further significant and growing deficits. The 2024 budget and 2025/2026 projections presented to the November 2023 Assembly Executive reflected a continuation and worsening of this situation.

In response to a second paper taken to that Assembly Executive, a steer was given to the Finance Committee to aim to achieve a balanced budget within five to seven years.

13. Each year, the Finance Committee discusses the Reserves Policy which calculates, on a risk-based approach, what level of reserves the URC should ideally aim to hold. The reserve level looks only at 'free reserves' and excludes monies held in designated funds, which includes that held in the Energy Crisis Fund. The recent deficits and the projected ones will make significant inroads into the URC's reserve levels, and most likely result in the level of free reserves dropping below the level the Finance Committee believes it is prudent to hold.
14. Releasing the £1.79 million left in the Energy Crisis fund would boost the URC's reserves and help 'buy time' to get the URC back to a balanced budget in the time frames noted by the November 2023 Assembly Executive.
15. The Finance Committee therefore proposes the resolution above to close the Energy Crisis Fund and return the balance of £1.79m to general funds.
16. The Finance Committee is also minded to use a portion of the returned funds as 'seed money' for a new fund to be used to enable the Legacies of Slavery task group to do the reparations work agreed by the denomination. A separate paper will be brought to General Assembly to deal with this.

Paper G5

Funding our Legacy of Slavery Task Group

Finance Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Alan Yates, Treasurer alan.yates@urc.org.uk John Samson, Chief Finance Officer john.samson@urc.org.uk Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer deputy.treas@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 16 General Assembly will: 1) Reallocate the energy crisis fund back into general funds Resolution 17 2) Transfer £250k into the Legacies of Slavery Fund Resolution 18 3) Seek contributions from Synods to reach a minimum target of £1m for the Legacies of Slavery Fund.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The URC seeks to establish a fund to cover the operational and project costs of our Legacies of Slavery Work.
Main points	Having considered the URC's context and financial position, a target amount for the fund of £1m is reasonable. This is assessed as a fair figure when considered in the light of the Church of England's response which, while not a perfect or easy comparison, is the only available yardstick.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Mission Team.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Introduction

- 1) Over the past few years, Mission Council, Assembly Executive and General Assembly have all given overwhelming support to the direction of travel suggested by the Legacy of Slavery Task Group (LoSTG), which is overseen by the Mission Committee. While most of their significant (in terms of cost) plans are embryonic, the aim of this paper is to provide guidance on the funding that might be available to support their goals, and to provide credence to the URC's Apology for our role in the enslavement of black people and the continuing legacies of racism and deprivation.
- 2) This paper deals with the two aspects of funding the LoSTG: namely, operational costs and project costs, project costs being the big number!

Operational costs

- 3) General Assembly in 2023 agreed to allocate £20,000 for the initial tranche of anti-racism training in 2024. This was added to the Mission Committee's budget for 2024. The recommendation is that all of the LoSTG operational costs are accounted for, and managed within, the Mission Committee budget. The costs include staff and travel costs, but also include the anti-racism training as the original sum was added to the 2024 budget. Assuming a 5% reduction for 2025, this would give an expected budget of £19,000 for LoS training in 2025.

Project costs

- 4) These costs will include all the expenditure needed to deliver the agreed restorative justice projects within the global, regional and local categories (as defined in the GA 2023 paper – except for anti-racism training as mentioned above).
- 5) Clearly, the breadth and depth of these projects will be influenced by the 'budget' provided to the LoSTG. The sooner we can provide a budget for the team the better. The LoSTG is particularly concerned about developing detailed project plans which, for whatever reason, fail to be funded by the URC. This will neither honour the work of the team nor our apology. At this stage, I do not believe the URC can commit to an overall budget because that requires a broader conversation with the denomination, specifically through the Synods and their Trusts.
- 6) We suggest the way forward to establish a restricted LoS fund is two-fold.
The Convenor of the Finance Committee will:
 - a) undertake to organise these broader conversations in the URC, with the aim of agreeing a firm fund total before the 2025 General Assembly.
 - b) work with the URC Trust to provide a guaranteed minimum for the initial fund to enable some of the detailed project work to begin.

Overall budget

- 7) Setting a target for the overall budget is not a straightforward matter, and will need to take account of what is affordable (even if it is sacrificial), significant enough to make a difference and enough to honour our apology.
- 8) When considering an appropriate figure for the URC to allocate, the previous Treasurer estimated and suggested the value of £1m for the fund which, when considered in context, is a reasonable initial (possibly minimum) target.

- 9) One of the only yardsticks available is the Church of England's (CoE) allocation of the investment income from £100m. This is not a straightforward yardstick, for three reasons:
- a) The URC's positive and negative involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is very different from the CoE's involvement.
 - b) The CoE's has (only) allocated the income from the £100m, not the capital itself.
 - c) The CoE is using this fund as a starter to encourage others to support the fund, with the aim of developing a total of £1bn.
- 10) However, it is probably the best yardstick we have, and it may be one used by others. Assuming a net investment return of 5%, the CoE fund will provide an income of £5m per annum. Over a ten-year period, this will provide funding of £50m.
- 11) To define an equivalent sum for the URC, two different methods have been used.
- a) By regular worshippers. In 2022, the CoE had about 984k regular attendees. The URC had about 36k. By this metric, an equivalent investment for the URC would be about £1.8m.
 - b) By investments. The Church Commissioners' total investment portfolio is worth about £10bn. For the URC (all Trusts) this is about £250m (data taken from the Moore Kingston Smith report for the Church Life Review in February 2023). By this metric, the equivalent investment would be £1.25m.
- 12) Therefore, with a target of £1m for our LoS fund, a reasonable 'starter' from the URC Trust would be about £250k, if both restricted and unrestricted funds are included, or about £125k if we only consider unrestricted funds.
- 13) If we are able to transfer the remaining £1.79m of the Energy Crisis Fund back into general (unrestricted) funds, we recommend allocating £250k from this surplus to the LoS fund.

Governance

- 14) As this fund represents a significant investment for the URC, we need to establish a governance process above and beyond the LoSTG. This will safeguard the LoSTG such that any reporting to General Assembly can be made with the assurance of independent governance for major items of expenditure.
- 15) The LoSTG is a task group established on the behalf of the denomination by the Mission Committee in 2019. It is not the intention of the Finance Committee to change that arrangement. The day-to-day operations of the LoSTG will continue to be managed and funded by the Mission Committee. However, any major LoS project expense would be funded through the restricted LoS fund. The LoSTG will apply to the Business Committee for funding on a project-by-project basis. Once approval is given, the LoSTG will be able to draw on those funds as needed.
- 16) Please note that as this fund will be for LoS purposes only, any income from the unspent fund will be added to the principal and be available for project expenditure.

Paper H1

General report

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@wessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith ministries@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update on the work of main Ministries Committee and its five sub-committees: Accreditations sub-Committee, (CRCW and SCM), Assessment Board, Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committees.
Main points	To update General Assembly on work of the sub-committees of Ministries Committee.
Previous relevant documents	Ministries Report to General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

General report

The committee is responsible for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, lay preaching and eldership. It is concerned with central care and conditions of service, chaplaincies in industry, higher and further education, prisons and in the armed forces and 'special category' ministry. It has concern for the pastoral support of ministers, Church Related Community Workers and lay preachers, including supervision, appraisal, self-evaluation and counselling. It oversees the Assessment Board, and is assisted by four sub-committees.

Membership:

Convenor: Mary Thomas

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Nominated members:

Gill Bates, Chris Kellertt, Terry Jin, Lesley Moseley,
 Convenor of the Accreditations Sub-Committee: Paul Dean
 Convenor of the Assessment Board: Bill Gould
 Convener of the MOM Sub-Committee: David Coote
 Convener of RMHS sub-Committee: Paul Whittle
 Leadership in Worship Advocate: Maggie Kirkbride
 Synod Moderator: Jamie Kissack

In attendance:

Head of Children's and Youth Work, Secretary for Education and Learning and the Development Worker for CRCW and SCM.

1. Discipleship

The Committee continues to do its work as part of the discipleship department at Church House as we seek to support those who provide leadership in local churches, partnerships and other mission settings. We believe that this leadership, which includes ordained and commissioned ministry as well as lay preachers, worship leaders, lay pioneers and elders, is key in fostering a culture of discipleship across the Church. Collaboration across discipleship and Committee with colleagues from the mission committee in developing discipleship has become the norm:

Paper I2 resolution 31c GA 2023 asked the Mission and Ministries Committees and the Synods to reflect on how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission. As part of the commitment of both Committees, work will focus on helping Synods to listen to the marginalised where often churches have not understood the language of poorer communities. The committee is aware of the ongoing work in North Western Synod, and supports the adaptation of that strategy for different context in other Synods. The committee considered whether Synods should be strongly urged to prioritise the 13 new pioneering posts for areas of deprivation. It was aware that to make this a criteria for granting such posts would simply add another priority for Synods in the difficult task of managing the deployment process.

Paper I4 resolution 39 GA 2023 Three applications have been received from Synods for one of the six ecumenical posts outside of deployment to reinvigorate the URC's ecumenical vision. These posts are intended to redress the balance of the URC absence in Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Two have been granted, with a third pending. A further three will be granted next year.

Paper H2 Assembly Executive 2024 affirmed liminal ministries, both lay and ordained, including but not limited to Chaplaincy, and asked Ministries and Mission Committees to consider how such ministries may be supported and developed, returning to Assembly Executive in 2025 with a report and proposals. A task group has been agreed between both committees to move this work forward.

Further collaboration has happened with Worship, Faith and Order, Finance Committee and the Safeguarding Committee on Safer Recruitment, culminating in the joint Worship Faith and Order/Ministries resolution to mandate promises for all who engage in public ministry.

2. Policies and processes

The committee is mindful that, since its last full report, it has produced a raft of policies and processes to support the values and work of the Church. It has not undertaken this work lightly. Policies are important because they define what is and is not acceptable and, when created in the right way, will provide transparency and accountability, protect those who exercise ministry within our churches, allow for consistent and efficient decision-making, provide a framework for fairness, ensure compliance with the law, and limit risks.

The committee believes it has caught up with the backlog of work, and looks forward to the development of new ministries to support the life and mission of the Church, including those that support Resolution 51a (GA 2023) to create new Christian communities, as well as new ways of supporting existing ministries so that we may truly be a flourishing church God intends us to be.

3. Well-being

Ministry is not and has never been easy. In today's world, it can seem a lonely experience. Not only are ministers likely to have fewer colleagues than might be the case in other forms of work and may have been true in ministry even ten years ago, but the changing nature of ministry means there is less clarity regarding the expectations and realities of a minister's role.

As office holders, ministers (ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) are self-directed and enjoy a valued and valuable sense of autonomy. However, when the place of 'work' is also the home and in the blurring of boundaries between ministerial life and personal life, ministers need to make time for their own self-care and ensure a healthy work/life balance.

Wellbeing is more than just 'feeling good'. A positive wellbeing involves the interplay of a number of factors. Physical, emotional, and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation, all contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing.

It can be hard to regulate hours served and to know whether you're 'at work' or not. Such pressures are often felt by ministers' partners, children and wider family and friendship networks, and can be unseen by others.

The value of an ongoing personal supportive relationship in which issues to do with their ministry can be shared in complete confidence, usually on a one-to-one basis, has been recognised by many ministers. The Church is committed to support in ministry, particularly people or places that can help ministers to reflect healthily on their current ministry and their vocation.

- 3.1 After an initial slow start, **Pastoral Supervision** has been embraced by almost all who are required to undergo supervision. Testimonials state ministers have found it fruitful and supports and affirms their wellbeing, as well as developing their ministry as they reconnect with their ministry vision, discerning what God is saying to them in their particular context. The tiny minority who have not yet found their supervisor are actively doing so.
- 3.2 Although ministers are no longer required to engage with the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal, all ministers are encouraged to regularly reflect on their ministry. To this end, the Committee has given a lighter touch to the **Local Mission**

and Ministry Review (LMMR) to include an annual reflection by the minister of the local church's Living Document. The purpose is to reflect helpfully within pastoral ministry, which has few obvious successes and failures. Ministry is about planting seeds, often in secret, without knowing what the nature or timing of the harvest is to be. That is often not in our hands. The goal of this scheme is to find a way of echoing God's praise for all that is good in ministry, and to help people address whatever can be improved.

3.3 The Churches Ministerial Counselling Service (CMCS) is available to all ministers (stipendiary and non-stipendiary) and Church Related Community Workers, as well as those who have been formally accepted as students for ministry of the United Reformed Church, from the time of acceptance until ordination or commissioning. Counselling is also available to ministers' spouses/partners and children over the age of 18; in fact, all who make up the minister's household, except children. This service is designed to maintain confidentiality, and the names of those who use the service will not be known to their denomination.

3.4 Every minister is entitled to take up to two weeks' study leave per year for formal and informal learning and refreshment opportunities. This can include retreats and other means of spiritual nourishment, as well as other forms of learning. Our Resource Centres for Learning can also provide details of available courses. Ministers are encouraged to take up these opportunities designed to enable ministerial flourishing.

The pressures of ministry can creep up on anyone, even for those who are flourishing. Much of the above is about what ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers can access. The committee will be exploring wellbeing resources to support the other formal ministries of Church.

4. Reviews

Three reviews have been, or are being, undertaken on behalf of the committee:

4.1 SCM Review

In February 2024, Assembly Executive agreed the change in focus for Special Category Ministry to that of 13 new pioneering posts (one per Synod) to intentionally grow new Christian communities. Pioneering is not primarily about solving the problem of decline, but about people who are living out of calling and seeking to respond faithfully to the Spirit. With the intentional introduction of pioneering, URC stands at a threshold moment. We are transitioning from what we once were in some big and transformative ways. But we haven't arrived at what we might become next. This means we haven't discovered the benefits and advantages of the new thing yet. We carry the burdens of doing Church together in smaller and more resource-scarce ways, but we haven't yet realised what the good things are, or the up-side of this new thing we are becoming. Pioneers recognise that their primary call is to see new communities of disciples emerge in new contexts. They are not mission enablers with a general remit for mission in a place; their call is more focused. Their gift is to start with context, and allow that to shape church.

4.2 CRCW

The Theos Report (2023) highlighted the real opportunities for URC churches to draw further on CRCWs as catalysts of holistic local mission. As a result, the Committee has now set up a task group to review of the CRCW programme to

determine any learning points which will assist the Church as it explores what it means to be a flourishing church.

4.3 Non Stipendiary CRCW locally

In November 2020, following on from the increase in applications for NSM Model 4 (ministry of the Word and Sacraments), Mission Council agreed a ministry of 'locally called and locally appointed' non-stipendiary Church Related Community Worker. Candidates would be expected to follow an individually designed training path, as determined by the Education and Learning Committee in consultation with the RCL that is relevant to their local context and local opportunities.

While the academic and professional training path for non-stipendiary CRCWs is to the same standard as for stipendiary CRCWs for the general models, the aim of the new model intended to remove the training restrictions for locally called, locally appointed non-stipendiary CRCWs.

In reality, the hope was that there may be a much larger number of people who might consider a call to become a NS CRCW if they can access the required training and continue to minister in their local context for the required minimum of ten hours per week. This has not yet come to fruition.

In 2021, the Assessment Board interviewed one potential candidate for NS locally called locally appointed CRCW ministry but, at the conference, it was deemed by the RCLs that the ministry would not meet the English Standards Boards (ESB) standards, and the assessors approved they should begin to train for NSM Model 4.

There have been no other applications for non-stipendiary CRCW ministry since 2004.

As part of a consultation on Education for Ministry (EM1) provision, discussion focused on NS CRCW in all forms, and reasons why potential candidates are not coming forward. This included:

- a) the training requirements at present require a professional qualification.
- b) the difficulty in establishing posts which meet the ESB standards.

The outcome of this part of the consultation is for Northern College to revise the current model of locally called, locally appointed in line with a NSM CRCW Model 4

5. Lay Preaching

After a hiatus of 18 months, the Committee is blessed to have Maggie Kirkbride as the Advocate for Worship Leading. The Synod Lay Preaching advocates continue to meet twice a year. They have approved a Handbook for Worship Leading and Lay Preaching. It has been written primarily for those who have been commissioned as an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher or appointed as a Locally Recognised Worship Leader within the URC. It will also be helpful for those who, up to 2021, were appointed to be Locally Recognised (or Synod Recognised) Lay Preachers.

The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. Worship is at the heart of the life of the United Reformed Church and each of its congregations. Worship is vital. It is the single most important thing the Church does. It is through worship that God first makes Godself known to the church (see Basis of Union, paragraph 13). It is through this encounter with God that we are

given the strength and inspiration to witness, evangelise, and serve. The United Reformed Church is richly blessed to have a growing ministry of worship-leading and lay preaching within our churches.

6. Call and vocation

Call and Vocation remains very much on the Committee's agenda. Enquirer's Events advocating ministry of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Children's and Youth Work remain popular, particularly for the first three named ministries, and hearing the stories of those who discerning what God is asking of them is a real privilege. However, the best advocacy for all these ministries undoubtedly comes from those who are already engaged in them, and the Committee will be looking ways in which we can support Synods and individuals in their encouragement of others' exploration of what God is asking of them.

7. Thank you

We continue to be so blessed to have ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Elders, Lay Preachers and Lay Pioneers who serve so faithfully. The work of Ministries could not be achieved without the expertise and commitment of the volunteers who make up the Ministries Committee and its sub-committees. Our thanks go to those who will have retired from our committee since General Assembly last met: Stuart Scott and Sally Willett.

Accreditations (CRCW&SCM) sub-committee

Maintaining the roll of ministers, this sub-committee accredits those applying for inclusion after training, and those coming from other denominations. It is concerned with numbers and recruitment. It also deals with applications for special category ministries. It supports the work of CRCW ministry.

Convenor: Paul Dean

Secretaries: Nicola Furley-Smith and Steve Summers

Members: Jacob Bali (SCM post holder), Bill Gould (convenor of the assessment board), Carole Marsden, Alison Micklem, Joanne Patterson (CRCW post holder), Jamie Kissack (Synod Moderator), Mary Thomas (convenor of ministries committee)

1. This second full report of the Accreditations sub-committee (CRCW and SCM) since its formation marks a change of emphasis in our work in the light of policy decisions linked to the Church Life Review. The plan is for Special Category Ministries to continue for the time being, until existing postholders complete their terms. The Joint Secretaries and the committee are working towards facilitating new Pioneer ministries in each Synod, and continuing to support chaplaincies and in a term used by Assembly Executive, 'liminal' ministries.

2. Certificates of Limited Service

2.1 Certificates of Limited Service allow a minister of another denomination to serve in, and be paid by, the URC, in a specified post only and for a limited period of time. They provide a flexible way of responding to particular local ministry needs and opportunities.

2.2 Five new certificates have been issued in the last year (Jessica Marie Ashcroft-Townsley, Yufen Chen, Marcus Llewellyn Griffiths, David George Pitkeathley, Yohan

Song), and three have been renewed (Brian Matthews, Martin Spain, Jonathan Soyars), and no certificates have been closed because of retirement.

2.3 In 2021, it was agreed that, for a period of three years, part-time certificates of limited service of 50% or less would not be counted against a Synod's deployment target. This was renewed in April 2024, and the Ministries Committee agreed to continue this for a further period of three years until 2027.

3. Certificates of Eligibility

Ministers who have come from other denominations to serve in the United Reformed Church make a vital contribution to the URC as a whole. Ministries Committee is responsible to General Assembly for oversight of the projected number of ministers for future years. On the basis of these projections and other relevant factors, decisions are made concerning the number of certificates of eligibility that can be issued to ministers of other denominations for both stipendiary and non-stipendiary service, enabling them to receive a call to service in a pastorate or post.

Since last General Assembly, there have been 36 applications. Six Certificates of Eligibility have been issued in the past 12 months, to ministers from the Methodist Church (2), Church of South India (1), United Church of Zambia (1), Reformed Church of Zambia (1), Presbyterian Church of Ghana (1).

Two NSM Certificates of Eligibility were granted to Noel Irwin (Methodist Church) and Darren Holland (Methodist Church).

4. Admission to the roll of ministers of Word and Sacraments (from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024)

4.1 **By ordination and induction:** Gillian Barbara Bailey, David George Cumbers, Margaret Ruth Dewis, Walt Wallace Johnson, Karen Helen Jones, Derek McDonald, John Francis Arthur O'Hanlon, Roberta Mary Ritson, Mark Andrew Rodgers, Louise Sanders, Lesley Jean Thomson

4.2 **By transfer from other churches:** Rodolphe Blanchard-Kowal (Church of Scotland), Gilbert Esuh Esambe (Presbyterian Church in Cameroon), Nathan Eddy (United Church of Christ, US).

4.3 **By changes within the Roll of Ministers:** There have been no changes within the roll of ministers.

4.4 Deletions from the Roll of Ministers:

By resignation

Alison Mary Dummer
Richard Turnbull
Henriette Wentink
Jennifer Gwendoline West

By transfer to another denomination

None to report

By deletion under the disciplinary process

None to report

4.5 Re-admission to the Roll: Lance Stone, Karen Knight

4.6 Jubilee Ministers:

Celebrating 75 years of ordained ministry in 2024:

Peter John Humphrey Brewer
Malcolm Hill.

Celebrating 70 years of ordained ministry in 2024:

Leslie Newton
Brian Edward Ranford
Anthony David Tucker.

Celebrating 60 years of ordained ministry in 2024:

Robert John Blows, Anthony John Coates, James Ashford Hollyman, Neville Jarrett, Frank Jones, Joseph Ross McLaren, Derek Alan Newton, Robert Freeland Philip, Adrian Stanley John Phippen, Stephen Mitchell Thornton, Derek Geoffrey Wensley.

Celebrating 50 years of ordained ministry in 2024:

George Clifford Graham Bembridge, Bernard Alan Collins, Richard Frank Davis, Anita Margaret Evans, Peter Heckels, Walter John Houston, David Howlett, Ann Frances Jackson, Anthony Roger Lee, William Dick McNaughton, Gerald Christopher Moule

4.7 Ministers who have retired from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024:

Martin Paul Belgrove, Alexander Donald Brown, Mitchell Stewart Bunting, Charles Le Mesurier Croll, Patricia Davis, Paul Bruce Dean, John William Downing, Jacqueline Gaylor Embrey, Peter Leslie Flint, Rowena Elaine Francis, Carla A Grosch-Miller, David Anthony Herbert, Derek Munro Hopkins, Michael Nathaniel Jagessar, Leonora Henriette Jagessar-Visser't Hooft, Peter John Lyth, Donald Alexander Stormonth Macalister, Dawn Mather, Rickey Lynn Mearkle, Jennifer Millington, Rachel Morag Poolman, Alan Philip Poolton, Pauline Rate, Stuart Peter Scott, Rosalind May Selby, Andrew Russell William Sellwood, Gregory Thompson, Kirsty Elizabeth Thorpe, Paul Raymond Whittle.

4.8 Ministers who have died from 4 July 2023 to 10 April 2024:

Listed elsewhere

5. Admissions to the roll of Church Related Community Workers (from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024):

5.1 By commissioning:

Alice Victoria Louise Gilbert

5.2 Deletions from the roll by resignation and / or transfer to another denomination or by the disciplinary process:

There have been no deletions to the roll.

5.3 CRCWs who have retired from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023:

6. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers

6.1 The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination:

04 Yorkshire – Bruce Edwin Hale

05 East Midlands – David Neil Dennis, Claire Ette, Simon Charles Michael Goodman

06 West Midlands – Rachel Louise Morrall, Rachel Coward

07 Eastern – John Driver, Jean Alison Summers

The following have received Assembly re-accreditation between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

None to report

6.2 Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by resignation, removal and / or transfer to other Churches or death from 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

Maria Anne Mills, David Noon, Janet Mary Parkinson

6.3 Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024:

Gerald Leslie Gibbs, Jacqueline Haws, Deborah Jane Hoddinott,

Nancy Beatrice McOnie

Assessment board

Convenor: Bill Gould

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members: Liz Mullen (2), Keith Reading (3), Jamie Kissak (4), Liz Sharples (5), Samuel Silungwe (5), Mark Tubby (7), Sohail Ejaz (7) Gerald England (8), Sue McCoan (10), Martyn Neads (10), Simon Loveitt (11) Mercy Nimako (11), Jan Adamson (13)

Because of the spread of candidates across the Synods we have also needed to call upon the services of previous assessors: T Ewen Harley (13)

Flow of candidates

Since the 2023 report, two Assessment Conferences have been held (November 2023, March 2024), all in-person Assessment Conferences in the traditional in-person format. Overall, 12 candidates were considered by the Board, of whom nine were accepted. One candidate was already in training and transferred from NSM 4 to NSM 1-3. One candidate was brought back to the following Assessment Conference for a final decision. Most of these candidates begin their EM1 training programme in the September after their acceptance, but, because of the portfolio nature of their training format, the NSM4 candidates are able to formally enter the training programme at other times of the year.

Date of Conference		No. of Candidates	Number accepted
Nov-23	CRCW	0	0
	Stipendiary Ministry	1	0
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	2	1
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	0	0
	Transfer NSM4 to NSM 1-3	1	1

TOTAL		4	2
Mar-24	CRCW	0	0
	Stipendiary Ministry	4	3
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry	1	1
	Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	2	2
TOTAL		7	6
GRAND TOTAL		9	7

Students in Training, by Synod as of 31/03/2024

Synod	Name
02 North Western	
CRCW	
	Joanne West
Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	
	Aftab Mughal
Stipendiary Ministry	
	Tom Miller
03 Mersey	
Non-Stipendiary Ministry	
	Rita Griffiths
05 East Midlands	
Stipendiary Ministry	
	Simon Cross
06 West Midlands	
Non-Stipendiary Ministry	
	Rachel Coward
Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4	
	Julie Caroline Jefferies
Stipendiary Ministry	
	Clare Nutbrown-Hughes
	Edward Lyne
	Stephanie Grace Atkins
07 Eastern	
Non-Stipendiary Ministry	
	Robert Dart
Stipendiary Ministry	
	Jo Moreira
	Machrina Ejaz
	Maria Jung Youn Lee
	Tina Louise Wilson
08 South Western	
Non-Stipendiary Ministry	
	Rachel Leach
09 Wessex	
Stipendiary Ministry	
	Abigail Ann Perrow

Simon Peters
Siobhan Louise Antoniou

10 Thames North

CRCW

Rachel Joanne Harvey

Stipendiary Ministry

Azeem Qadir Bakhsh
Carolina Davey
Joseph Amoah

11 Southern

CRCW

Carol Clack

Non-Stipendiary Ministry

Joyce Edeki

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

Susan Ann Knight

Stipendiary Ministry

Maurice Philips Omorojie
Yukyung Kim

12 Wales

Stipendiary Ministry

Kate Elaine Wolsey

13 Scotland

Non-Stipendiary Ministry 4

David Townsend
Eilidh Young
Margaret Winifred Higton

Students in Training statistics as of 31/03/2024

	Students in Training	Anticipated entry into URC Service			
	Mar-24	2024	2025	2026	2027
STIPENDIARY					
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	2		1		1
Northern College (RCL) MWS	8	2	2	3	1
Scottish College (RCL)					
Westminster College (RCL)	10	4	1	2	3
Subtotal	20	6	4	5	5

NON-STIPENDIARY					
Northern College (RCL)	2				2
Scottish College (RCL)	2			1	1
Westminster College (RCL)	3			1	2
Subtotal	7			2	5
NON-STIPENDIARY 4					
Northern College (RCL)	2	1	1		
Scottish College (RCL)	2	1	1		
Westminster College (RCL)	2	1	1		
Subtotal	6	3	3		
GRAND TOTAL	33	9	7	7	10

MWS: Ministry of Word and Sacraments

CRCW: Church Related Community Worker

2. Training activities

2.1 The Board has affirmed that all students must be exposed to, and assessed in, at least some in-person format in the course of their EM1 programme, even if it means some delay in completion of the originally prescribed programme, as direct personal involvements must remain a long-term characteristic of any ministry. This affirmation was needed as a result of complications and problems that had arisen as a result of the earlier period of necessary, but temporary, predominance of distance learning during the Covid-19 period while ordinands were continuing their EM1 programme.

2.2 The Board convened two annual assessment interview training consultations, attended not only by new Assessment Board members but also, and predominantly by, Synod Representatives, to satisfy the considerable needs for appropriate training for Synod and local panel members who consider possible candidates earlier in the assessment process. The consultation further strengthens the links between the Board and Synods. They were both facilitated by the Revd Mary Thomas and Revd Lis Mullen.

2.3 There were also training sessions in June 2023 and April 2024 for Board members and Synod Representatives on neurodiversity and autism awareness. The Board is awaiting Racial Awareness training, although some members have undergone this training due to other roles within the denomination.

Ordinations and commission

		Type of Ministry	Date of ordination	Date into URC	History for Yearbook
Gillian	Bailey	Non-Stipendiary Minister	15/07/2023		Christ Church Milton 2023-
Rodolphe	Blanchard-Kowal	Stipendiary Minister	06/10/2023	03/07/2023	Bexley, Geddes Place & Emmanuel Sidcup 2023-
David	Cumbers	Stipendiary Minister	16/09/2023		All Saints, Burgess Hill 2023-, Haywards Heath 2023-, Hassocks 2023-
Margaret	Dewis	Stipendiary Minister	23/09/2023		Bush Hill Park 2023-; Christ Church 2023-; Lancaster Road 2023-
Nathan	Eddy	Non-Stipendiary Minister	29/01/2006	19/09/2023	St Peter's Church & Chaplaincy 2006-11; Lowestoft North 2011-14; Thames North Synod 2023-
Gilbert	Esambe	Stipendiary Minister	17/12/2014	02/11/2023	Presbyterian Church in Cameroon -2023; Lancashire East Missional Partnership 2023-
Alice	Gilbert	CRCW	26/08/2023		Priesthill and Shawlands CRCW Project 2023-
Walt	Johnson	Non-Stipendiary Minister	29/07/2023		Bolton & Salford Missional Partnership 2023-
Karen	Jones	Stipendiary Minister	09/09/2023		North Staffordshire Group: Burslem; Chesterton; Longton; Tomkin; Uttoxeter 2023-
Derek	McDonald	Non-Stipendiary Minister	12/08/2023		Greenock East URC 2023-
John	O'Hanlon	Stipendiary Minister	22/07/2023		Rivertown URC 2023-
Roberta	Ritson	Non-Stipendiary Minister	22/07/2023		Bellingham LEP; Wark LEP; Horsley Village Church 2023-
Mark	Rodgers	Stipendiary Minister	19/08/2023		West Midlands Synod, Shropshire Team Ministry: Preeshenlle URC, Christ Church URC/PCW, Shrewsbury URC; Church Stretton

Louise	Sanders	Stipendiary Minister	29/07/2023	URC, Oakengates Telford URC, Trinity Newport URC (2023- St Andrew's, Monkseaton 2023- Trinity, Ashington LEP 2023-
Lesley	Thomson	Stipendiary Minister	01/07/2023	Barrhead URC; Stewarton URC; Shawlands URC 2023-

Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee report

Advises on the level of stipend and ministers' conditions of service through the Plan for Partnership. It is also concerned for pensions through its associated Pensions Committee.

Convenor: David Coote

Secretary: Nicola Furley-Smith

Members:

Adrian Bulley (DGS Discipleship), Dr Janet Tollington (convenor of pensions committee), Mary Thomas (convenor of ministries committee), Vaughan Griffiths (assistant treasurer).

In attendance: Mary Steele (Payroll)

1. The MoM sub-committee meets twice a year on Zoom, but conducts much of its business by email as and when a decision is called for concerning stipends or allowances for individual ministers.

2. Plan for Partnership

Our main role is to interpret the Plan for Partnership, and to agree such changes as are considered necessary. When situations are referred to us that do not exactly fit the terms of the Plan, we try to apply the Plan fairly and reasonably. The situation is considered carefully, and can lead to amendments to the Plan; sometimes it is decided that the Plan is adequate, or might need a small clarification to make what is intended clearer. Since our last report, there have been various suggested changes to the Plan where clarification is considered necessary, and some tidying up. These are also reflected in the Resolution elsewhere in this report. We have also carried out a review of the Fixed Car Allowance which has not been reviewed since its inception, and this review has resulted in the Resolution that is elsewhere in this report.

3. Stipend increase

Our proposal for the stipend increases each year is based on a formula using the consumer price index (CPI) plus Average Weekly Earnings (AWE). When the formula was applied in 2023 to provide a recommended stipend increase, the CPI was at 6.7% and AWE was at 7.8%.

4. Long-term sickness absence

We continue to monitor and improve our care for ministers who, having been on sick leave for six months, have come to the end of their entitlement to full stipend.

We know that these can be stressful times for those involved, and we do sometimes have painful decisions to make, but we strive to bring wisdom and compassion to the judgments that are entrusted to us. Even at this current time, Covid-19 in the form of long Covid is still, in some cases, impacting on health issues, and sometimes adds to those difficult decisions we have to make. We are grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MoM office, who pays the stipends, monitors the sickness cases and brings to our attention when decisions need to be made, organises medical and moderator reports, and deals with all the correspondence.

5. Committee changes

The committee has, since its last report, gone through the changes that were brought to General Assembly 2022 to change its membership. These changes have bedded in now, and are working well.

Paper H2

Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee – Change of name to the Accreditations sub-committee

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 19 General Assembly agrees to the change of name of the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee to the Accreditations sub-committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appropriate rename the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) Sub-Committee to reflect its role.
Main points	The Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee accredits people and posts not just limited to Church Related Community workers and Special Category Ministry. Its name, therefore, does not describe its full role. The removal of the initials in brackets does.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H1 2019 (Mission Council).
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. In 2019, Mission Council agreed to dissolve the Accreditations Committee of the Ministries Committee to form a new committee with the CRCW Programme sub-committee, namely the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) Sub-Committee (ASC).

2. In 2023, the ASC asked to review the committee as part of its due diligence, and at its meeting in March 2024 concluded the initials in brackets do not describe the full remit of the committee.
3. The ASC is also involved in the interviewing and granting of Certificates of Eligibility and Certificates for Limited Service to ministers outside of the URC, as well as maintaining the Roll of ministers of the Word and Sacraments (MWS), Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and Elders.
4. The committee feels it is now well established, and does not need the initials in brackets.

Paper H3

Process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 20 General Assembly adopts the process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The paper sets out what should happen when a 100% ministry is not sustainable and it is necessary to reconfigure the scoping without needing to wait for the minister to move to a new Call. It has been trialled in a couple of Synods already to good effect as it is seen as a pastoral measure to a difficult and non-sustainable situation.
Main points	The paper gives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the process for the reconfiguration of scoping when a 100% ministry is not sustainable 2. the process for rescoping during the course of a ministry 3. manse provision and expenses for when a Call is withdrawn because of scoping has altered 4. stipend provision for when a Call is withdrawn because scoping has altered 5. the right of Appeal.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings

1. Call and vocation

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God – believers or not.
- 1.2 However, within the whole people of God 'the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).
- 1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry, the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as ministers of the Word and Sacraments '...may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers '... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period.' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22).
- 1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union* is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed and ensure good order.
- 1.5 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which, through its Councils, offers concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.
- 1.6 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.
- 1.7 For the sake of clarity in this document, the term minister shall apply to both ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. Ministers Move On

- 2.1 Ministers, of course, may end a Call by seeking a new call at any time for a number of reasons:
- a) a minister might accept a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded
 - b) a minister might retire
 - c) a minister might resign seeking some other form of work outwith the Church
 - d) a post might be time limited
 - e) a minister might wish to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post
 - f) a minister may need to leave because the pastorate can no longer be sustained as a 100% ministry.
- 2.2 It is this last category, 2.1.f, that this policy addresses.
- 2.3 This policy does not deal with the breakdown of relationships, which is addressed through H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023.

3. Deployment across the URC

- 3.1 Stipendiary ministers of the URC are available to serve the whole denomination, and are paid a stipend from central denominational funds.
- 3.2 Ministers of Word and Sacraments are a precious resource to the church – most often deployed to help to lead local churches, through working with the Elders in a team to enable the church in its life and witness.
- 3.3 The URC, through its General Assembly and the Ministries Department, seeks to ensure a fair share of ministers across all 13 Synods using a calculation based on the number of members (60% of the weighting) and the number of churches in each Synod (40% of the weighting). A target figure for deployment is therefore produced for each Synod.
- 3.4 Many Synods are faced with working out how to achieve their target: to reduce 'overscoping', to find ministers for vacancies, and to ensure a fair spread of leadership through the churches in the Synod.
- 3.5 The review of pastorates and scoping is not new. Model Terms of Settlement produced by the Ministries Office state: *The Pastorate and minister are willing to re-negotiate these terms of settlement during the course of a ministry at the request of the Synod through the Synod Pastoral Committee.*
- In particular, it is recognised that, following appropriate consultation, an alteration to the scoping of the pastorate may be necessary during the course of the ministry. Any suggested changes from the pastorate or the minister will be subject to the agreement of the Synod through the local Synod Pastoral Committee.*
(Movement of Ministers Mission Council 2006 last updated 2020)
- 3.6 There will continue to be a need for full-time stipendiary ministers in the URC. Yet the URC cannot longer promise any of our ministers that they will be able to stay where they are while the church changes around them. Ministers need to be flexible and prepared to change the shape of their pastorates, and even to move across the denomination as God calls them to new challenges.

- 3.7 It is important to remember leadership in churches is not just provided by stipendiary ministers of Word and Sacraments. There are also: a team of Elders in every church, Synod Local Leaders, employed lay workers, Church Related Community Workers, and a range of non-stipendiary ministers.
- 4. Reconfiguration of scoping when a 100% ministry is not sustainable**
- 4.1 On occasions, pastorates, or projects, and ministers find themselves in a position where there needs to be a reconfiguration of scoping. Normally, this would happen where one or more Church Meetings in a multi-church pastorate makes the decision to close.
- 4.2 The effect of closure may be that a 100% scoping cannot be maintained in the long term and, unless the pastorate can be reconfigured to a 100% scoping, the Call to the minister has, in effect, ceased. The options open to the minister in that situation are to either take a reduced scoping and, therefore, a reduced stipend, or to come back onto the Moderators' List to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
- 4.3 If the Call to a minister is affected where more than one church closes, the Synod Ministries Committee (or equivalent) will explore whether the closure does make 100% scoping for the pastorate unviable and, if so, whether it is possible to reconfigure the pastorate. If the Synod Ministries Committee can reconfigure the pastorate, possibly with the addition of another church(es), then the Synod will put in provision for:
- a) the churches to be introduced to one another to form a new pastorate with all that that entails and
 - b) the minister to be introduced to the church(es) and the Call to be tested in the usual way.
- 4.4 If the Synod Ministries Committee is unable to reconfigure the pastorate, then the effect of the withdrawal of Call from one part of the pastorate or role is to withdraw the Call from the entire pastorate or role, or for the minister to accept a reduction in stipend. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision of the Synod Ministries Committee using the normal appeals process.
- 4.5 Because stipendiary ministry is a valuable resource, while recognising some ministers have geographical constraints, our theology of Call means that it is not possible to create roles for specific ministers. Any role is open to any minister, and a Call to a role is always tested in the normal way.
- 4.6 Ministers, as office holders not employees, are not eligible for redundancy processes. Since they are called to serve the whole church, the Moderators will assist in helping the minister to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
- 4.7 In such cases, Pastoral measures will be put in place for those who come onto the Moderators List in line with Paper H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/H5-2023-Withdrawal-of-Call-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>
- 5. Rescoping pastorates during the course of a ministry**
- 5.1 Synods, through their appropriate committee, are responsible for the scoping and grouping of churches. The Manual Section B 2.(4)(iii) states the functions of the

Synod include: *To decide upon all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of Local Churches.*

- 5.2 In some cases, in churches where numbers are no longer practicable, Synod Ministries Committees (or the body responsible for deployment), in determining viable pastorates, may need to reshape the pastorate. In these cases, the Synod will need to share information accurately, directly and at the same time with all the affected churches and ministers, setting out the proposals, but inviting further discussion in the (no less than) nine months before any changes are due.
- 5.3 Where one or more ministers are serving congregations which are reconfigured into a larger group pastorate, it is possible the new pastorate might be over-deployed. In these cases, to address the issue of deployment, the Synod Ministries Committee will need to determine, with transparency and clarity, scoping arrangements for the newly created pastorate. As expectations and patterns of ministry will inevitably be changed, a new Call process will be required to address this.
- 5.4 The process for reconfiguring during the course of a ministry will be as follows:
- a) There shall be a consultation period involving the Synod Ministries Committee, the minister(s) and the churches which leads to the proposal where consideration should be given to the issues which may be low membership, finance, state of buildings and a possible way forward should be considered. A church's/pastorate's Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) will be useful here. The period of consultation shall be for no less than three months.
 - b) Feedback from the consultation will be considered by the Synod Ministries Committee in formulating the proposal for reconfiguration.
 - c) The Synod Moderator or their deputy, on behalf of the Synod Ministries Committee, contacts all churches and minister(s) affected by the rescoping stating:
 - i) the proposal
 - ii) the new configuration of churches and ministers
 - iii) the new scopings.
 - d) The Synod Moderator or their deputy visits the minister(s) individually out of pastoral concern to hear their views. This should be in person.
 - e) The Synod Moderator or their deputy along with representatives of the Synod Ministries Committee meet in a joint meeting with the elders/members of the churches affected. This should be in person.
 - f) It may be desirable to introduce the minister to the church(es) for three months prior to any final decision about scoping so that minister and church(es) beginning to build trust in one another's ministries.
 - g) The Synod Ministries Committee will consider the feedback from those meetings, which may include other configurations not considered previously. If the Ministries Committee decides to change the proposal, it must repeat stages a-c.

- h) In their negotiations to form a new pastorate, the Synod Ministries Committee, in consultation with the churches, will decide whether this is a dissolution of the old pastorate or an expansion to form a new pastorate. The decision will affect whether the minister(s) will be required to receive a Call from all churches, or only the additional church(es).
 - i) The Synod Moderator meets again with the ministers individually to ascertain whether to accept the reconfiguration and/or rescoping or not. If the ministers decide to proceed, the ministers go through the Call process with all the churches in the new pastorate
OR
The ministers go through the Call process with the additional church(es) only.
 - j) If the minister decides not to proceed with the rescoping, they will submit their profile to the Synod Moderator for the Moderators' List to receive a new Call. Once a new Call has been received, they will have, in effect, resigned from their present pastorate.
6. It is hoped that the preparation work of matching churches/pastorates and minister will result in a Call. Where this is not possible and a Call has not been issued by the new pastorate as a whole or by the additional church(es) as in (h) above, the Synod Moderator will assist in helping the minister to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
7. Pastoral measures will be put in place for those who come onto the Moderators List in line with Paper H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023 <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/H5-2023-Withdrawal-of-Call-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>
- 8. Manse provision and expenses when a Call is withdrawn**
- 8.1 Manses are provided rent free for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.
- 8.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.
- 8.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project, or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.
- 8.4 If the whole Call is withdrawn, the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the Minister (and/or family) and the Synod or Pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time, all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal, eg car and other allowances.
- 8.5 A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months. Any extension to this would be a matter of the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements.

- 8.6 Whilst the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the Synod or pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.
- 8.7 When the scoping has been reduced, the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping, although in some cases the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 8.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.
- 8.9 Where scoping is reduced, a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping, although in some cases the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 9. Stipend when a Call is withdrawn**
- 9.1 The stipend should continue while the minister is seeking a new Call for six months.
- 9.2 After six months, and where there is concern for welfare, the Synod Moderator may wish to make application to the GA Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for stipend support.
- 10. Appeal**
- 10.1 Ministers wishing to appeal against the decision taken must write to the Moderator of their Synod submitting their reasons for the appeal within seven working days of receiving the decision.
- 10.2 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure.

Paper H4

Amendments to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 21</p> <p>1. General Assembly agrees to a change of wording in 6.3.2 from spouse and children to spouse/partner and dependent children in 6.3.2.</p> <p>Resolution 22</p> <p>2. General Assembly recommends that the Fixed Car allowance be increased from £1,200 to £2,400 for cars and £300 to £600 for motorcycles, and urges local churches to implement this from September 2024.</p> <p>Resolution 23</p> <p>3. General Assembly agrees a change of wording from Ministerial Working Week to Ministerial Hours in 7.</p> <p>Resolution 24</p> <p>4. General Assembly agrees the changes to holiday entitlement in 8 to include when to carry over holiday to the following year for sick leave, parental leave or Jury Service; expectations for sabbatical and holiday leave; Bank Holidays and days in lieu for Christmas Day and Good Friday.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper brings the latest revision to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration.
Main points	A change of wording in 6.3.2 from spouse and children to spouse/partner and dependent children in 6.3.2;

	<p>To increase the Fixed Car allowance from £1,200 to £2,400 for cars and £300 to £600 for motorcycles and urges local churches to implement this immediately;</p> <p>A change of wording from Ministerial Working Week to Ministerial Hours in 7;</p> <p>To clarify changes to holiday entitlement in 8 to include when to carry over holiday to the following year for sick leave, parental leave or Jury Service; expectations for sabbatical and holiday leave; Bank Holidays and days in lieu for Christams Day and Good Friday.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Plan for Partnership 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	For local churches.
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. The Plan for Partnership in Ministerial remuneration has not seen significant change since 2012.
2. For the purposes of this paper, ministers refers to both ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.
3. The amendments are as follows: Part III – Entitlements

3.16.3.2 Manses are provided for the pursuance of a minister's duties. The revision clarifies what is meant by immediate family. *Manse Accommodation: for the purposes of the Plan a manse means a home for the minister and their immediate family (spouse/partner and dependent children), owned or leased by the church, provided and maintained in good repair and decoration, free of rent, ground rent, council tax, all rates (where payable), water/sewage charges and property insurance (see Appendix D – National Manse Guidelines).*

3.26.3.4.2 and Appendix 1 Approved Rates under the Plan: Fixed Car Allowance. The fixed car allowance has been £1,200 per annum since it was last review in 2008. Over the past 13 years (2010-2023) inflation as measured by CPI has risen 46%. Arguably, car prices have risen by more than CPI; one source suggests car prices have risen between 54% and 123% in the ten years 2012-2022. This also means that car prices are a significantly higher proportion of median income. Interest rates have risen in the past 18 months, although this is difficult to generalise as car dealers often have offers on car finance deals.

Therefore, Ministries Committee believes the Fixed Car allowance should be £2,400 per annum for cars and £600 per annum for motorcycles.

4. 7 Ministerial Working Week to become Ministerial **Hours**. Fewer ministers are able to take a fixed day off per week as they are accommodating larger pastorates and the spread of their work. Ministries still urges ministers to be sensible about the number of hours they serve to be spread across a calendar month.

7. *Ministerial Hours*

*The 2010 General Assembly resolved that there should be more clarity in defining hours of **service** and recommended that, translated into hours in a four-week period, a minister should be serving no less than 160 hours and not more than 192 hours.*

- 4.18 Holiday Entitlement. There is a new 8.1 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4 to give clarity to when it is possible to carry holiday over to the next year; what happens when a minister's regular day off falls on a Bank Holiday, and time off in lieu of working Christmas day and Good Friday.

8.1 *Ministers are entitled to five weeks' holiday in each calendar year and one further Sunday away from the pastorate, plus bank holidays. When a minister only serves for part of a year, the holiday provision should be pro rata.*

8.2 *One week of holiday may be carried forward to the following year. Holiday entitlement is not affected by sick leave, parental leave or Jury Service. Such periods of leave/absence may result in more than one week's holiday being carried forward into the following year. It should be possible to take a sabbatical and holiday entitlement within one calendar year.*

8.3 *Where a minister's regular day off falls on a Bank Holiday, another day should be taken in lieu within one calendar month.*

8.4 *If ministers serve on Christmas Day and Good Friday (as ministers in pastorate would normally be expected to), another day should be taken in lieu within one calendar month.*

Paper H5

Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) revised

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 25 General Assembly adopts the revised Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) and commends it for use in local churches/pastorates.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>When the Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) was introduced into the URC in 2008, it was envisaged as a reflective look at the whole life of a local church that would guide its future life in the way God is calling it. Each church was encouraged to write its Living Document which would assist the Synod by making it aware of their needs thus enabling the Synod to make informed decisions when awarding grants and loans.</p> <p>However, instead of being a tool to be used for support and accountability, it became people-hungry and difficult to implement and onerous.</p> <p>This paper gives a lighter approach to the writing of a Living Document.</p>
Main points	<p>It is now clear that removing the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal component of LMMR may not have been helpful, as this removed a useful tool for both pastorates and ministers to reflect on the Living Document, thus removing the 360° review of its life and witness in a local setting.</p> <p>This revision invites the church/pastorate, and where there is a minister in place, to reflect on its life and witness on an annual basis as part of its whole life discipleship.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Papers C and C1 Mission Council 2008.

Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.
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Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 God calls us into ministry. In the United Reformed Church, those who are called by God to ministry of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work have that sense of call tested. The Church gives authority for the exercising of that ministry.
- 1.2 The basic theological concept behind ministry review is that we are all accountable to God, and to each other as the Body of Christ, for the way we use his grace-given gift of ministry. In the New Testament, discipleship themes regarding the full use of gifts and talents in God’s service, good stewardship and the need for each of us to play our proper part in the life of the Body so that it grows and develops, show the need to review where we are and our vision for the future.
- 1.3 The assurance of God’s grace helps us to continuously recommit in his service.

2. Wellbeing

- 2.1 Ministry is not, and never has been, easy. The pressures of ministry can creep up on any of us, even for those of us who are flourishing. Most ministers are self-directed: we are in control of our own diary and enjoy a valued and valuable sense of autonomy. However, when the ‘workplace’ is also the home, and in the blurring of boundaries between ministerial life and personal life, ministers need to make time for their own self-care and ensure a healthy work/life balance.
- 2.2 The care and wellbeing of ministers is crucial to the health of the mission of the church. Healthy, fulfilled, maturing, joyful ministers who feel valued and supported are an enormous gift to God’s church. A sense of being cared for and loved will give energy and vigour when they face ministerial or pastoral challenges.
- 2.3 The wellbeing of ministers has been high on the church’s agenda for many years, now with the introduction of pastoral supervision. Wellbeing is more than just ‘feeling good’. A positive wellbeing involves the interplay of physical, emotional and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation. All contribute to an overall sense of wellbeing.

- 3. When the Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) was introduced into the URC in 2008, it was envisaged as a tool to be used for support and accountability for ministers (both ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) within the Church. This support is built on the foundation of the covenant relationship between pastorate/post and minister as agreed in the Terms of Settlement. This relationship shapes ordained ministry within the United

Reformed Church along with Education for Ministry 2, Education for Ministry 3, Resilience Courses, Refresher Courses, Synod staff support, Churches Ministerial Counselling Service, Occupational Health and, of course, Pastoral Supervision.

3.1 The URC is committed to adding to the wellbeing toolbox.

4. LMMR – where we are

4.1 However, when the General Assembly adopted the URC Policy for Pastoral Supervision, the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal component of LMMR was dropped as it was felt Pastoral supervision should become the principal way of ensuring ministers reflect on their practice and identify appropriate actions to develop and find support. It will therefore replace MASA (Minister's Accompanied Self Appraisal) and any similar requirements¹.

4.2 However, it is now clear that removing the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal component of LMMR may not have been helpful, as this removed a useful tool for ministers to reflect on the pastorate's Living Document, thus removing the 360° review in a local setting.

4.3 Every viable local church has a God-given purpose which will depend on its location and the resources it can marshal; these will change with time. So, in looking to the future, churches should be encouraged to reflect upon their sense of purpose. This is what the Mission part of the LMMR intends to do. LMMR should not be seen as onerous, but as a useful tool in helping churches flourish. Ministries would still consider the writing and updating of the Living Document a worthwhile exercise.

4.4 The LMMR Strategy (Ministries Committee Consultation 2017) suggested each LMMR focused on four core provisions for churches and minister to address:

- What does the pastorate/team seek to do by way of mission and service in the next identifiable period (eg five years)?
- What tasks and activity are necessary to ensure that happens?
- Which of these tasks and activities do we expect the minister to do?
- Who will do the others, or ensure that they are carried out?

However, in light of LMMR experience and reflection, Ministries wishes to change those core questions to:

- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- Whom do we do it for?
- What value are we bringing?

4.5 We acknowledge that most churches will be regularly reviewing their life, and that is good, but for those who are not, Appendix A offers a useful template for a Living Document. The question raised above can be addressed in section six.

¹ Mission Council acting as GA July 2020 Book of Reports page 166 section 9.1

5. LMMR and Pastoral Supervision – the relationship between the two

5.1 LMMR and Pastoral Supervision are designed with two purposes in mind, as detailed below:

5.1.1 Pastoral Supervision, as outlined in the URC Pastoral Supervision Policy (2023), offers an ongoing, safe space for a minister to reflect on experiences in their ministry, and to formulate responses to them. The intention of such regular and focused reflection is to support a change of culture in the life of the Church from one in which practice is often isolated and vulnerable to one of accountability, support and increased safety.

5.1.2 LMMR should focus more closely on specific aspects of ministry in context. It considers areas of ministry where a closer look can be taken at a particular element of the work. Ministers can often be embedded in a context for several years, and LMMR offers the opportunity to look at aspects of the work over a period of time with perhaps a different focus at each review. The elements of ministry that are selected for review could be carefully drawn from themes discussed during supervision (or indeed those noticeably not discussed) and/or expectations outlined in the Marks of Ministry or those arising from the deployment strategy of a Synod.

6. Accountability

6.1 As agreed at General Assembly 2016, each church or pastorate writes and subsequently updates its Living Document. If churches/pastorates have difficulty in writing their Living Document, they may wish to speak with their Synod Mission Enabler or equivalent.

6.2 It is the responsibility of the Synod, through its appropriate committee, to ensure that each local church and/or pastorate has a Living Document.

6.3 Rather than complicated and people-hungry processes hindering a 360 review, it is suggested that, annually, and at an elders meeting (or equivalent in an LEP), the eldership (or equivalent in an LEP) uses part of one of its meetings to reflect on the four core questions above. In a multi-church pastorate, the elders may wish to come together to look at the document.

6.4 If a minister is in post, the minister will be part of that reflection.

6.5 The minister, as part of their self-care and wellbeing, should reflect upon their ministry within the context of what has been written. They may wish to share this with their pastoral supervisor. They should send their reflection to the Synod Office for their file.

7. The Role of the Synod

7.1 It will be helpful to both the minister for the Synod, through its appropriate committee, at five-yearly intervals, to engage with the church and minister in reflecting on the Living Document.

Appendix A

The Local Mission Review

This is a specially customised version of the United Reformed Church's Pastorate Profile document for particular use by churches who are engaging in a Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR).

A Living Document is a multi-purpose tool for:

- producing a pastorate profile when a minister moves
- undertaking the scoping exercise
- engaging in a pastoral consultation with the Synod and
- seeking financial support from the Synod or other sources.

The component parts of the Living Document are:

- What do we do?
- How do we do it?
- For whom do we do this?
- What value are we bringing?

NOTE: This is not just a form filling exercise. This is about whole life discipleship. We encourage a creative approach – but the points/questions below should be covered. You have great freedom to write up the things you care about most: you can bring out the things you most cherish, but write them up and bring them out within the template.

What do we do?

Town, suburban, inner city, urban priority area, city centre etc and adding other relevant detail (eg local employment, culture, deprivation)

Describe the population of the communities being served both numerically – with other relevant detail (eg growing/static/declining) and by social composition (eg age, ethnicity etc).

Describe the ecumenical scene. What other churches are in the area? What are relationships like? Are there any local formal arrangements (eg local covenants)?

What is your ministry vision or mission statement? Is there a biblical basis for your mission purpose?

How do we do it?

Give a brief pen portrait of the pastorate, who you are, including key points in its history; what is distinctive about the pastorate, its theological outlook and worship style.

What skills, gifts, experiences are there in the church?

What property resources are available? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

What financial resources are available? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

What other resources do you have? What are their strengths and weaknesses?

For whom do we do this?

What are the opportunities for the church?

What are the trends in the life of the church and in the community context?

What challenges does the church face locally?

What are the priorities, the targets, goals, objectives for the next few years?

Priority 1:

Objectives:

.....

Priority 2:

Objectives:

.....

Priority 3:

Objectives:

.....

How will we get there?

What plans are there for making progress on the priorities agreed by the church?

What time frame is there for their implementation?

What value are we bringing to God's Mission?

Why are we doing this?

How will the plans be monitored and evaluated?

Paper H6

Basis of Union paragraphs 19-24: Ministry in the United Reformed Church

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly adopts the changes to Schedule A of The Manual with regards to Ministry in the United Reformed Church (paragraphs 19-24).

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The additions to Schedule A confirm the status of ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community workers as office-holders of the church.
Main points	Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to serve by God and, as members of the church, live out their committed discipleship as office-holders, in which their membership, service to, support and relationship with the Church and community has never created, has never been intended to create, and does not create any contractual relations.
Previous relevant documents	None.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Legal Adviser.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	In line with our ecumenical partners.

1. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (thereafter known as ministers) are members of the church who live out their committed discipleship as office-holders not employees, in which their service to the Church and community, together with the support provided by the Church, has never created, has never been intended to create, and does not create any contractual relations.
2. The relationship between and office-holder and the Church arises from the constitution of the church.
3. Hitherto, while the status of an office-holder and their relationship with the Church is implicit in the governing documents of the church, it is not explicitly described. Doing so helps provide clarity.
4. The additions to Schedule A (in blue) clarify the relationship between ministers and the Church as one of an office-holder.

Schedule A Paragraphs 19-24

Ministry in the United Reformed Church

19. The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it. This service is given by worship, prayer, proclamation of the Gospel, and Christian witness; by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility; and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one. The preparation and strengthening of its members for such ministry and discipleship shall always be a major concern of the United Reformed Church.
20. For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church. The United Reformed Church recognises that Christ gives himself to his Church through Word and Sacrament and through the total caring oversight by which his people grow in faith and love, the exercise of which oversight is the special concern of elders and Ministers. Those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills: the United Reformed Church having solemnly acknowledged their vocation and accepted their commitment shall appoint them **as committed disciples** to their particular ministry and give them authority to exercise it within the church, setting them apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces for its fulfilment, which solemn setting part shall in the case of Ministers and elders be termed ordination and in the case of Church Related

Community Workers be termed commissioning. In the United Reformed Church all ministries within the life of the Church shall be open to both men and women. Appropriate affirmations of faith shall be made by those entering upon all ministries within the life of the Church.

21. Some are called to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. The ordination and induction of Ministers shall be in accordance with Schedules C and D. They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world.

Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case the service is given within an area of a Synod, and in the context it has approved.

22. Some are called to the ministry of Church Related Community Work. After approves, preparation and training, they may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed church, event, commission to the office of Church Related Community Worker, and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with schedules D&F. Church Related Community Workers are commissioned to care for, to challenge, and to pray for the community, to discern with others, God's will, for the well-being of the community, and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim with love and mercy through the working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world. Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a Synod and in a context it has approved.

- 23. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to serve by God and, as members of the church, live out their committed discipleship as office-holders, in which their membership, service to, support and relationship with the Church and community has never created, has never been intended to create, and does not create any contractual relations.**

- 24. The church cares for and supports these office-holders, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, through careful training, loving nurture, and prayerful oversight. As office-holding members of the church, ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are accountable through the church's various Councils for the satisfactory performance of their ministries. Through the Councils of the Church, discernment through the Holy Spirit is found regarding: accepting candidates for ministry, the nurture and support necessary for flourishing of church and office-holder, their deployment to particular ministries, the oversight necessary for healthy discipleship and for the circumstances when it is necessary to lay down the responsibilities of being an office-holder.**

Paper H7

Guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 27 General Assembly adopts the guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership and commends the document for use in Synods.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>In 2008, in its ‘Challenge to the Church’ (Assembly Resolution 23 and accompanying report) the General Assembly expressed its ‘belief that each congregation and mission group has a need of its own local leader to work in partnership with the elders’ meeting to challenge, enable and equip the saints and be a focus of Christian presence in the local community’ but left it to Synods to ‘make arrangements for the recruitment, training, calling and support of local church leaders’.</p> <p>Some Synods have implemented Local Church Leaders but, in some cases, there is little or no accountability.</p> <p>This is not to devalue the work of those already engaged in such ministry. However, for the sake of the church and for those to whom they minister, levels of accountability and support need to be put in place which are consistent across the denomination.</p>
Main points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All Elders in Local Leadership should embody the Marks of Ministry of an Elder. 2. A process for Safer Recruitment of Elders in Local Leadership should be adopted. 3. Guidance is given on mandatory training.
Previous relevant documents	Challenge to the Church 2008.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators.

Summary of impact

Financial	Some, but the same as Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers or assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 In 2008, in its 'Challenge to the Church' (Assembly Resolution 23 and accompanying report), the General Assembly expressed its 'belief that each congregation and mission group has a need of its own local leader to work in partnership with the elders' meeting to challenge, enable and equip the saints and be a focus of Christian presence in the local community' but left it to Synods to 'make arrangements for the recruitment, training, calling and support of local church leaders'.
- 1.2 The Assembly saw the need for the recognition of an individual who 'would have a pastoral and teaching role, would be the first point of contact in the event of pastoral need, would provide continuity of worship and nurture, and would be the focus of the Christian presence in the wider community'. (Assembly Reports 2008, p.226, para.7.1). The present need suggests this ministry may also provide leadership in mission.
- 1.3 Prior to Resolution 23, some Synods had a number of people in church posts that would now be considered Local Church Leader posts or Elders in Local Leadership. For the purpose of this paper, the designation of Elders in Local Leadership (ELL) shall be used.
- 1.4 In some cases, it is possible that appointments were made to local leadership relatively informally, and limited formal provision was made as to role description, terms of agreements, training or review. Ministries Committee is seeking to regularise the approach to these issues, and to achieve parity/consistency and accountability for local leadership to form a Synod-accredited ministry, namely Elders in Local Leadership
- 1.5 With the reduction in stipendiary ministry numbers, some Synods are looking to establishing ministry teams across available ministries, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Lay Preachers or Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers. A ministry of Elders in Local Leadership would enhance this team, and give recognition to, and accountability for, ministry which is already happening, but sometime in a rather *ad hoc* way. This paper has been written with the assistance of the Synod Moderators.

2. Marks of Ministry of Elders in Local Leadership

- 2.1 God delights in each person's unique gift and calling to any form of ministry.
- 2.2 Elders 'share with ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the

elders' meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care' (The Manual, Schedule A 23). They are 'associated with ministers in all the councils of the Church'. Elders promise at their ordination to 'accept the office of elder of the United Reformed Church' and promise 'to perform its duties faithfully'.

2.3 All ELLs must embody these Marks of Ministry of an Elder:

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; to be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given, and open to journeying as a disciple with others.
- **A person of integrity and prayer:** self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for elders); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; upholding values of faithfulness, trust and respect.
- **A person who cares for others:** sharing with others, including the minister, in offering and sustaining pastoral care; regarding all persons with equal love and concern; rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support; wise in knowing their limits and boundaries when more specialised help is needed; reliably dealing with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality.
- **A person of accountability:** committed to serving as an Elder within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support for elders; observing proper boundaries in relationships; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; understands their role as a Trustee (where appropriate) in administering the assets of the church; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God.

3. Discerning the call and appointment of an ELL to a local church

- 3.1 The concept of 'call' is fundamental to our understanding of discipleship. The Bible says much about the variety of tasks to which people may be called, perhaps most notably in Paul's use of the image of the body (eg 1 Corinthians 12). The 'call' is primarily the call of God, but may be heard and interpreted in various ways.
- 3.2 Each ELL position is unique, and the role is not transferrable outside the local church to which they have been appointed.
- 3.3 All ELLs must be Elders in the United Reformed Church, and the Marks of Ministry for Elders, the Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour for Elders (General Assembly Reports 2010, Appendix 3c) and the Disciplinary Policy for Office Holders apply to all ELLs.

4. Safer Recruitment of Elders in Local Leadership

- 4.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church. Synods will use the process for the safer Election of Elders in Local Leadership.
- 4.2 As with any ministry within the URC, call is a discernment process. Call is always a gradual process of coming to know who God is calling you to be. Therefore, the candidate must first speak with their Synod Moderator about their sense of call, and the vocation to which they feel called.
- 4.3 If the Synod Moderator discerns a sense of call, it is at this point that exploration will be given to the role they will play in the life of their local church. The Synod Moderator shall determine whether the local church is in agreement to the appointment of an ELL. If so, the Synod Moderator shall forward their details to the Synod Candidates and Students Committee or equivalent.
- 4.4 The Synod Candidates and Students Committee Convenor (or equivalent) shall supply an application form to the candidate setting out details of the candidate's:
- journey of faith
 - character/spiritual maturity
 - prior local church experience, including positions of responsibility held, with brief summary of dates and nature of duties, and experience of the wider councils of the church (eg attendance at Synod meetings, General Assembly, membership of national or Synod committees)
 - previous theological studies (if any) (eg theology degree, TLS Foundation Course, accredited lay preacher training in the United Reformed Church or another denomination)
 - participation in 'Stepwise' or similar courses exploring discipleship
 - previous practical training (eg elders' training courses – give details of subject-matter covered)
 - Experience of reflective practice
 - Life experience/training gained in the workplace
 - Other information the candidate considers relevant to assessment of his or her training needs.
- 4.5 Upon receipt of the completed application form, the Candidates and Students Committee Convenor (or equivalent):
- a) takes up references (one from minister/interim moderator and one other);
 - b) organises an assessed service where the call is to a preaching ministry (normally two people) and a written report of the service;
 - c) organises a Synod interview and a written report. The candidate is able to bring a 'supporter' who will not be part of the formal interview, but may be invited to speak at the end of the interview.

5. Training

- 5.1 If the candidate is successful, training shall be through either the route for:
- a) Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers
 - b) Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers
 - c) URC Church Leadership Programme

- d) An equivalent Synod Course as agreed by the Training Development Officer or equivalent.
- e) Funding for training will be through the 'normal' route for funding
 - i) From the individual and/or
 - ii) The Synod and/or
 - iii) Education and Learning.

5.2 Applicants

- a) attend the in person You're Welcome: An Ethos and History of the URC course held at Westminster College, Cambridge
- b) will undergo safeguarding training and other mandatory training appropriate to their role as well as any further training which the denomination shall determine from time to time
- c) an annual grant of £300 shall be available [equivalent to Lay Preachers] for further training.

5.3 Upon completion of training, the Synod Moderator or their representative shall:

- a) meet with the elders of the local church to finalise the role description and Terms of Settlement
- b) organise a Service of Commissioning for the ELL.

6. Oversight

- 6.1 All ELLs must be subject to the supervision of a Minister of Word and Sacraments, who will be appointed as a pastoral advisor. When making the appointment of any ELL, it is the responsibility of the Synod to ensure that adequate provision is made to ensure such oversight is carried out.
- 6.2 ELLs may be appointed to one church as part of a team ministry where there is a multiple church setting, alongside Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

7. Appointments

- 7.1.1 The initial appointment shall be for three years, with a review at year 2.5 with the possibility of renewal.

Paper H8

Amending the Basis of Union Paragraph 24

Worship, Faith, and Order and Ministries
Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Andy Braunston andy.Braunston@urc.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Acceptance of resolution.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 28 General Assembly amends the Basis of Union paragraph 24 to read (new words in blue)</p> <p>24. All other ministries recognised by the uniting churches at the date of unification (as defined by the United Reformed Church Act 1981) shall continue to be exercised in the United Reformed Church without further commissioning, subject always to the decisions of the General Assembly. The URC shall determine from time to time what other ministries may be required and which of them should be recognised as ministries in the whole church. It shall decide how those who are to exercise them shall be set apart. The affirmations in Schedule B (adapted for the particular ministry) shall be made by those entering upon all such ministries within the life of the church.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To ensure that all public ministries of the church have parity of esteem and expectations.
Main points	The Expansive Language Working Group reported to the Worship, Faith and Order Committee an anomaly in that the service in <i>Worship From</i> to commission Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers had affirmations based on Schedule B (those used for Elders) and the Statement on the Nature Faith and Order. The Group put the same requirements in the new service for Locally Recognised Worship Leaders but drew the Committee's attention to this anomaly.

	<p>The Committee, mindful of the old maxim <i>what we pray so we believe</i> thought that the long-standing practice in <i>Worship From</i> was a good one. Those whom the church has discerned a call to various forms of ministry Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and new ministries which may emerge, eg youth and family workers, should have parity of esteem. To prescribe a public affirmation of faith and behaviour is to ensure that no existing or new ministry is diminished by having different requirements for their public recognition. Rather than revise the Basis every time a new ministry is recognised we hope the language suggested is clear enough to cover all the ministries that God raises up in the Church.</p>
Previous relevant documents	Ministries.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Paper H9

Withdrawal of Call

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 29 General Assembly agrees the additions to the URC Policy on Withdrawal of Call.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	General Assembly 2023 adopted Paper H5 and instructed the Ministries Committee to bring a revised policy to General Assembly 2024 with three additions to the paper.
Main points	The three additions are: 1.7 To clarify that, in most cases, a minister's call will come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate/post/partnership. 3.2 To clarify what happens to ensure complaints are not spurious. 5.5. To extend the period that a minister and their family may remain in the manse after the withdrawal of Call from three to six months although this would be a matter of the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H5 General Assembly 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Paper H5 GA 2023

1. Call and vocation

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God – believers or not.
- 1.2 However, within the whole people of God 'the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).
- 1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry, the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments '...may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers '... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22).
- 1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union* is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed, and ensure good order.
- 1.5 It is recognised that, while a call process may be used for non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs) with concurrence given by the Synod, NSMs (categories 1-4) are appointed by the Synod to their particular ministry. However, Synods always appoint to, and sustain in, such roles considering the views of the church with whom the NSM will be ministering.
- 1.6 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which, through its Councils, offers concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.

- 1.7 *Most calls come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate/post/partnership. Concurrence to leave the pastorate/post/partnership is required in both the sending and receiving Synods.
- 1.8 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning, recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.
- 1.9 For the sake of clarity in this document, the term minister shall apply to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. Withdrawal of a Call through discipline or capability processes

- 2.1 There are two scenarios where a Call might be withdrawn which are covered by existing URC policies and processes:

2.1.1 *As a result of the Discipline Process*

An Assembly Commission for Discipline may, following a finding of ministerial misconduct, curtail a Call or Appointment. Such a sanction might be seen as more serious than a warning, but less serious than deletion from the Roll of Ministers.

2.1.2 *As a result of the Capability Process*

Where a minister's competency is questioned by the Elders' or Church Meeting, the Local Steering Group of a Church in Community Project, or the Synod Moderator and Pastoral Committee, or by the ministry supervisor in a Special Category post, Synod or General Assembly role, the Capability Process can be used, which may result in the Call to serve in that particular context being withdrawn.

3. Ministers move on

- 3.1 Active ministers, of course, may end a Call by seeking a new Call at any time for a number of reasons:
- a) a minister accepts a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded
 - b) a minister retires, normally upon reaching the normal retirement age unless the processes for an extension of service have been followed
 - c) a minister resigns seeking some other form of work or ministry outwith the United Reformed Church
 - d) a post might be time-limited
 - e) a minister wishes to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post.
- 3.2 *When there have been relationship breakdowns, it is always open for complaints to be made – complaints about ministers are normally dealt with through the Manual's Section O process. Sometimes it is appropriate to deal with complaints through the Section Q process with the agreement of the complainant. However, a minister may wish to complain about how Elders or

other office holders have behaved. In these cases, either the Manual's Section Q or the Discipline of Office Holders process should be used.

4. Breakdown of a pastoral relationship

- 4.1 On occasions, pastorates or projects and ministers find themselves in a position where there is a breakdown in relationship, with talk of withdrawing Call. This breakdown might be because of intractable difficulties which aren't related to capability or discipline, such as a complaint under Section Q of the Manual, or might simply be as a result of a sense that this ministry has gone on for too long.
- 4.2 In these cases, the Elders Meeting¹ should invite the Moderator (or their deputy) to speak with the minister, and indicate their feeling that circumstances are such whereby the view is that the minister should consider seeking a new call through the Moderators' List. The Moderator will need to determine whether the complaint is vexatious or not. The Moderator will explore with the Elders' Meeting and the minister whether mediation would be fruitful.² The local pastorate must engage with the Moderator, the minister and the relevant Synod Committee or equivalent if mediation is to take place.
- 4.3 In a multi-church pastorate, the Moderator (or their deputy) shall speak with the Elders' Meeting of each church to ascertain whether the issues have been replicated across the pastorate.
- 4.4 In these cases, the Moderator should also consider whether using the Competency Process is appropriate.
- 4.5 In a local pastorate or Church-in-Community project, it is always open to the Elders' Meeting/Steering Group to ask the Church Meeting to withdraw the Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Moderator will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to chair the Elders' Meeting/Church-in-Community Project Steering Group and the Church Meeting/s for this matter. The Interim Moderator (or deputy such as representatives from the Synod Pastoral Committee) will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting / Church-in-Community Steering Group explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister, either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting(s) which shall vote on the resolution 'the Minister shall continue in office'. If the Minister attends in person, the Interim Moderator will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.6 In an LEP where a URC minister is in post, it is always open to the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) to ask the Church Meeting to

¹ For Elders' Meeting read any equivalent body eg the Steering Group of a Project or Church-in-Community, in Synod or General Assembly role, Pastorate Steering Group or Council in the case of a joint pastorate.

² See 1 above

withdraw the Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Moderator will discern whether mediation would be fruitful, as well as consulting with the appropriate leadership personnel in the denominations which are partners of the LEP, to ensure they are fully informed at all stages of the process. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to chair the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) and the Church Meeting(s) for this matter. The Interim Moderator (or deputy such as representatives from the Synod Pastoral Committee) will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister, either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting/s which shall vote on the resolution 'the Minister shall continue in office'. If the Minister attends in person, the Interim Moderator will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.

- 4.7 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a Synod role, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, or in a Special Category Ministry, and the Synod occurs, it is always open to the Synod to appoint a Commission to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Pastoral Committee will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Synod shall appoint a Commission of three people unconnected to the post holder, or others who have experienced difficulty, to decide the issue. These may be members of another Synod. The Moderator will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt the relationship has broken down. The Commission will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite a representative from the Synod to speak. The Minister will also be invited to speak. The Commission shall then decide, by majority, on the question of 'the Minister shall continue in office'. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.8 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a General Assembly role and the General Assembly occurs, it is always open to the General Assembly to appoint a Special Group from the General Assembly Appointment Panel, in the case of those appointed by the Nominations Committee, or an Assembly Commission in the case of those appointed by an appointments panel, to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call. In such circumstances, the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt that the relationship has broken down. The Special Group will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite the Minister's ministry supervisor and the Minister to speak. The Special Group shall then decide, by majority, on the question of 'the minister shall continue in office'. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.

- 4.9 Given that it is the local church/pastorate that calls, and the Synod which gives concurrence, the appropriate councils of the Church need to be involved in the process for a Call to be withdrawn. Therefore, the local church/pastorate/church in community, the Synod and its appropriate committee will all be involved.

5. Manse provision and expenses when a Call is withdrawn

- 5.1 Manses are provided rent free for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.
- 5.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.
- 5.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.
- 5.4 If the whole call is withdrawn, the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the minister (and/or family) and the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time, all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal eg car and other allowances.
- 5.5 *A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months, but this may be extended to six months. Any extension to this would be a matter of the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
- 5.6 While the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the synod or pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.
- 5.7 When the scoping has been reduced, the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping although, in some cases, the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 5.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.
- 5.9 Where scoping is reduced, a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping although, in some cases, the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- ## **6. Stipend when a Call is withdrawn**
- 6.1 *The stipend should continue while the minister is seeking a new Call for six months.
- 6.2 After six months, the Synod Moderator may wish to make application to the GA Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for the committee to consider stipend support.

7. Appeal

- 7.1 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure, as set out in the Rules of Procedure, and should be notified to the Clerk of the appropriate Council of the Church. Appellants should ask for a copy of the minute of the decision within 14 days of being notified of the decision, and lodge their appeal with the Clerk of the appropriate Synod within a further 14 days.

Paper H10

Process for the Nomination and Appointment of Synod Moderators and other General Assembly roles reserved for Ministers of Word and Sacraments

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Nicola Furley-Smith nicola.furley-smith@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 30 1. General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of Synod Moderators as contained in annexe two of paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025. Resolution 31 2. General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of other General Assembly roles reserved for ministers of Word and Sacraments as contained in annexe three of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025. Resolution 32 3. General Assembly requires that the notes for nominating groups for other Assembly-appointed posts as contained in annex four of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024 be noted and disseminated as appropriate.

	<p>Resolution 33</p> <p>4. General Assembly resolves that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. fixed terms be removed from all current Assembly-appointed minister posts, from the close of General Assembly 2024; ii. all future such appointments be untermed; iii. requires that the terms of settlement of all ministers currently serving in such posts be revised to reflect this change. <p>Resolution 34</p> <p>5. General Assembly instructs the Clerk to update the Rules of Procedure as soon as possible to reflect the decisions taken by General Assembly, and that the Business Committee is authorised to approve these changes reflecting the will of General Assembly, and the updated Rules of Procedure be published as soon as possible.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To propose a revised process for the nomination of Synod Moderators and other General Assembly roles reserved for ministers of Word and Sacraments.
Main points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed changes to the process for the nomination and appointment of Synod Moderators • Proposed changes to the process for the nomination and appointment for those posts reserved for ministers of the Word and Sacraments • Proposed changes to the terms of settlement of all ministers and Church-Related Community Workers in Assembly-appointed posts.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2004:32 and 2004:33 – Appointment of Synod Moderators.
Consultation has taken place with...	External HR Consultant Synod Moderators (including Moderators-elect) All other ministers in General Assembly appointed posts Fiona Bennett (as the General Secretary's line manager) Chief Operating Officer Assistant Clerk / Clerk-elect Designated Safeguarding Lead Westminster College Governors.

Summary of impact

Financial	Minimal.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Background

- 1.1 In the light of some specific issues which have arisen surrounding the process for nominating and appointing Synod Moderators, the Ministries Committee was asked to establish a small task group to undertake a review of the process.
- 1.2 The terms of reference agreed by Ministries Committee in October 2023 are included as annex one.
- 1.3 Ministries Committee appointed the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), Secretary for Ministries and Convenor of the Ministries Committee to undertake the review.
- 1.4 The task group brings the following report, to be read alongside the proposed revised processes included at annexes two (Synod Moderators) and three (other posts reserved for ministers), and the matters to be noted in annex four (posts open to both lay and ministerial applicants).

Scope

- 2.1 There are currently 16 Assembly-appointed posts which have been reserved by General Assembly for ministers of Word and Sacraments: 13 Synod Moderators, the General Secretary, the Secretary for Ministries, and the Minister for Digital Worship.
- 2.2 Our recommendations apply to all 16 of these posts.
- 2.3 There are currently a further four Assembly-appointed posts which are filled by ministers (either ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers) which were advertised as being open to either ministers or lay applicants: the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), the Deputy General Secretary (Mission), the Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries and the Secretary for Education and Learning.

Assisting the discernment of vocations to such posts

- 3.1 Synod Moderators are among those who are key to helping ministers access further training through Education for Ministry 3 which will enable them to develop. They are also among those vital in developing opportunities for ministers to be used in wider church roles that will both stretch them and equip them for further service. Through their pastoral engagement with ministers, they are in key relationships, as part of which they might encourage ministers to apply for assembly-appointed roles.
- 3.2 The use of nominations for Assembly-appointed roles is an important means for moderators and others to signpost suitable ministers to the wider church.

Advertising

- 4.1 We are aware of important conversations elsewhere that are taking place under the banner ‘making spaces’, which are to be encouraged.

- 4.2 Continuing to use a twin-track process of nomination and application for garnering applications to Assembly-appointed roles is crucial.
- 4.3 Careful consideration should be given when advertising other Assembly-appointed posts (beyond the 16 reserved posts) to using the facility for declaring a genuine occupational requirement that applicants be a Christian.
- 4.4 Job descriptions and person specifications for all roles need to be bespoke for a post (rather than generic), with consideration given to using the Marks of Ministry as a benchmark for the 16 reserved posts.
- 4.5 All advertisements should be inclusive, avoid the use of any language that may directly or indirectly prevent suitable candidates from expressing an interest, and include reference to the URC's commitment to safeguarding.
- 4.6 Role descriptions, person specifications and advertisement wording shall be dual checked by the general secretariat for any inconsistencies against the URC's approach to equality and diversity.

Applications

- 5.1 The review group has carefully considered the question of anonymity in the application process for reserved posts. The group reached the conclusion that, since it is impossible to achieve anonymity without removing vital information from the application form, we should remove the need for anonymity from the application process.
- 5.2 Application forms need to be bespoke rather than generic for such reserved posts, and include an assurance that reasonable adjustments will be made as appropriate throughout the process to accommodate a candidate's needs.

Constitution of nominating panels

- 6.1 We recommend that the pool from which people are drawn to serve on nominating panels be significantly reduced, to a team of eight people who commit to undergoing training and making themselves available to serve on the majority of such panels for a five-year period.
- 6.2 The pool for nominating panels will continue to be recruited by the Nominations Committee using appropriate safer recruitment processes.
- 6.3 We recommend that nominating panels for Synod Moderators should consist of three representatives from the Synod, together with three representatives of the General Assembly. If the Synod Clerk is not included in the Synod's cohort, with the agreement of the nominating panel they could attend as a non-voting member.
- 6.4 We recommend that nominating panels for the other reserved Assembly-appointed posts should consist of three people, unless there is good reason for increasing that number, and recognise that this would require a change to the Rules of Procedure in the case of the General Secretary.
- 6.5 In both instances, we further recommend that an independent, non-voting, convenor be appointed by the General Assembly who will not be part of the discernment process but present solely to facilitate the discernment process.

6.6 A representative of the General Secretariat and an HR representative should also be present, in both instances in a non-voting capacity, to advise as necessary.

6.7 All members of the nominating panel should have received training in HR practices (including scoring applications, framing questions, discernment etc), safer recruitment, unconscious bias, interpreting psychological and written tests, and how they might frame questions about anti-racism prior to becoming part of the panel.

Convening of nominating panels

7.1 See 6.5 above.

7.2 As well as the training listed above, the convenor should also receive training in facilitating meetings prior to the commencement of the process.

The shortlisting processes

8.1 All panel members should be encouraged to stay locally the night before the interview day in order to facilitate an earlier start and a fuller day.

8.2 If more than two candidates are shortlisted, consideration should be given to scheduling interviews to take place over two days, including overnight accommodation for the middle night.

8.3 Only with the consent of all candidates shall the identity of each shortlisted candidate be shared in confidence with all candidates.

8.4 All shortlisted candidates should be asked to undertake a monitored written assessment prior to the interview day based on a scenario agreed by the nominating panel. Expected outcomes, ie 'what good looks like' or a clear benchmark as to what is expected within the written responses as a minimum, should be agreed among the panel at the same time. Such written assignments are to be circulated to the panel ahead of the interview day.

8.5 We recommend that the current practice of using generic psychometric tests be replaced by asking all shortlisted candidates to undertake a bespoke psychological test, similar to that currently used by the Assessment Board for ministry candidates. A written report is to be circulated to the panel before the interview day.

8.6 Interview questions always need to be bespoke to the post, and include candidate-specific questions.

Interview day(s)

9.1 All interviews should take place in a neutral venue away from either the Synod Office or Church House.

9.2 A presentation should be compulsory for all reserved posts. Topic / expected timing should be agreed prior to the interview day and shared with applicants, normally at the point of letting a person know that they have been shortlisted.

9.3 Time should be allowed to meet with the professional responsible for administering the psychological testing in order that they may respond to questions from the panel.

9.4 Time should be allowed to discuss the written and psychological tests with the candidate separate from the interview questions.

The use of psychological tests

10.1 See 8.5 and 9.3-4 above.

The appointment processes

11.1 We see no reason to diverge from current practice which has the nominee telling their pastorate or post immediately prior to a communications team announcement, and appointment following, preferably at Assembly Executive or General Assembly.

The appropriateness of timed appointments

12.1 As the juxtaposition of a fixed retirement age and timed appointments is difficult to manage, our recommendation is that fixed terms be removed from all current Assembly-appointed minister posts, and all future such appointments be untimed. This should apply to all such posts whether one of the 16 reserved posts or not.

Review and appraisal

13.1 We recommend that all Synod Moderators should have a small support group, appointed by the Synod in consultation with the Moderator. The support group needs to consist of people who are grounded in the Synod, understand its nuances and can help the moderator reflect upon their ministry in that particular context. We see this as being complementary to pastoral supervision.

13.2 Synod Moderators are responsible to the General Assembly through the General Secretary.

13.3 Ministers in Assembly-appointed posts other than Synod Moderators already have a designated ministry support person (formerly known as a line manager).

13.4 In common with all URC ministers and CRCWs, ministers in Assembly-appointed posts are expected to adhere to programmes and training requirements mandated from time to time by the General Assembly (currently safeguarding training, safer sacred space training, anti-racism training and pastoral supervision).

13.5 All ministers in Assembly-appointed posts should undertake an annual Ministry Development Review using a form based upon the Church House Personal Development Review form but adapted to include reflection upon the Marks of Ministry (rather than expected standards). The Ministry Development Review is intended to help an individual reflect upon what has gone well, what has gone less well, what their training needs might be, and what the priorities should be for the coming 12 months. The Ministry Development Review takes the form of accompanied self-appraisal.

13.6 For Synod Moderators, the Ministry Development Review should be initiated by a designated member of the support group, and then reflected upon with the entire group.

13.7 For ministers in other Assembly-appointed posts, the Ministry Development Review should be carried out in conjunction with their ministry support person.

13.8 At the end of the Ministry Development Review process, a copy of the completed and signed form should be sent to the General Secretary, who will ensure that it is appropriately filed.

13.9 A 360° appraisal will take place in year five for all Assembly-appointed ministers, and every five years thereafter. This review is to be initiated by the general secretariat. The details of the how this review is structured needs to be worked out.

The provision of pastoral support for partners

14.1 Where the partner of a Synod Moderator is a minister serving in the same Synod, formal arrangements should be made for pastoral support to be offered by another Synod Moderator.

14.2 Where the partner of a Synod Moderator is a minister, it should be recorded by the secretary(ies) of the moderators' meeting, and notified to the General Secretary, the relevant Synod Clerk and Synod Safeguarding Officer, which colleague will act should a ministerial discipline case be necessary, or a safeguarding concern raised. The minister should also be informed as to what arrangements have been put in place.

14.3 We anticipate that a partner who is a member of a local church will receive pastoral support through the arrangements made by the church.

14.4 Where a partner is not part of a local church, the Moderator's support group should offer a conversation with that person to determine what pastoral arrangements would be both feasible and welcomed.

Annex one

Review of Process for Appointing a Synod Moderator

Terms of Reference

To be carried out under the auspices of the Ministries Committee.

Suggested review group membership:

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)
Secretary for Ministries, and
Ministries Committee Convenor.

Robert Burden (HR Consultant) to be consulted throughout.

Consultation will need to take place with Synod Moderators and any other relevant stake holders.

Review to include:

1. Expansion of process to include all Assembly-appointed minister posts.
2. The process for appointment, including:
 - a) assisting the discernment of vocations to such posts
 - b) advertising
 - c) applications
 - d) make-up of nominating panels
 - e) chairing of nominating panels
 - f) shortlisting process
 - g) nomination process
 - h) the use of psychometric tests
 - i) appointment process.
3. The appropriateness of timed appointments.
4. The process for review and regular 'appraisal'.
5. Provision of pastoral support for spouses / partners.

Annex two

Process for the Nomination and Appointment of Synod Moderators

1. Background

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has 16 General Assembly Appointed posts reserved specifically for ministers of Word and Sacraments (13 Synod Moderators, the General Secretary, Secretary for Ministries and Minister for Digital Worship).
- 1.2 All recruitment processes for Assembly-appointed posts are about seeking consensus in prayerfully discerning God's will. All the elements of the process – written and verbal – contribute to that end. No single element of the process stands alone as definitive.
- 1.3 This paper sets out a process for the appointment of ministers of Word and Sacraments to these posts from the vacancy until ratification by the Council of the Church with responsibility for appointment, namely Assembly Executive or General Assembly.

2. Applications

- 2.1 The United Reformed Church believes that all applications for nomination and appointment for General Assembly appointed posts should be treated as a discernment process.
- 2.2 For all Assembly Appointed posts, the twin-track process for applications is important. Ministers can either be nominated or apply directly.
- 2.3 Role Descriptions and Person Specifications for all posts need to be bespoke and not generic.
- 2.4 The application form needs to be bespoke for the post; the Marks of Ministry for ministers of Word and Sacraments shall be used as the benchmark.
- 2.5 No appointments shall be time limited.

3. The Nominating Panel

- 3.1 The Nominating Panel for an appointment by General Assembly shall consist of six people, three appointed by the Nominations Committee, and three appointed by the Synod where the vacancy is to occur. If the Synod Clerk is not included in the Synod's cohort, with the agreement of the nominating panel they could attend as a non-voting member.
- 3.2 The URC Nominations Committee shall appoint two people from the URC Nominations Panel elected by General Assembly ensuring a balance of diversity across the entire panel.
- 3.3 An independent non-voting Convenor shall be appointed from the URC Nominations Panel elected by the General Assembly who shall not be part of the discernment process but present solely to facilitate it. Their role shall be to arrange dates for shortlisting and interview with the Synod Clerk and a member of the General Secretariat.

- 3.4 A member of the General Secretariat and an HR representative from Church House should also be present in a non-voting capacity. The member of the General Secretariat shall normally act as secretary to the Nominating Panel. The HR representative shall offer administrative support and procedural guidance to ensure a fair and impartial appointment process.
- 3.5 All members of the Nominating Panel should receive training in HR practices (including scoring applications, framing questions, discernment, etc), unconscious bias and anti-racism training prior to becoming part of the panel.
- 3.6 In addition, the independent Convenor shall receive training in facilitating meetings.

4. The nomination process

- 4.1 A member of the General Secretariat initiates the process as far in advance of the vacancy as possible, but no more than one year before. They shall seek a meeting with the Synod Clerk to explain the process and agree the timetable.
- 4.2 The HR facilitator shall then provide the Synod Clerk with a recruitment pack containing general information, a sample job description and person specification, instructions for the creation of a Synod profile, and a sample advert, bearing in mind that job descriptions and person specifications for all roles need to be bespoke for a post and not generic.
- 4.3 The four members of Synod shall be appointed by the Synod to form one part of the Nominating Group for the post. They shall normally be co-ordinated by the Synod Clerk or another Convenor appointed by the Synod, and shall be responsible for the creation of the Synod profile. They may wish to bring together a larger, fully representative group from across the Synod to help with consultation and the drafting of the final document. Their consultation should be as comprehensive as possible and should include the churches of the Synod and ecumenical partners. The Synod members of the Nominating Group shall also be responsible for adapting the role description, person specification and advert to reflect local and regional / national concerns and priorities.
- 4.4 When the documents are ready, the Synod Clerk shall forward them to the HR Facilitator, who shall circulate them to the entire Nominating Group for comment. The Group shall agree a final version. This shall normally happen by email. However, the Nominating Group convener may decide to call a meeting of the Group to resolve any serious disagreement.
- 4.5 The HR facilitator shall consult with the Synod Clerk on the wording of the advertisement to ensure it positively reflects the URC's approach to providing fair and equal opportunities to all. They shall ensure that it is placed in *Reform* and on the URC and Synod websites. The advertisement shall make it clear that both nominations and applications are welcome.
- 4.6 In the case of nominations, the person offering a nomination shall be asked by the HR representative whether they are happy for their name to be revealed to the nominee.

- 4.7 The Secretary (the member of the general secretariat) shall write to each person nominated, emphasising that the Church is involved in a process of discernment leading to a call, offering prayerful support, and inviting the nominee to consider whether they would be willing to explore the possibility of a call to the post. The letter shall refer the nominee to the documentation on the URC website and ask that a nominee wishing to be considered should submit an application form.
- 4.8 All nominees shall receive what is essentially the same letter, and if the person submitting the nomination has given consent, they shall be advised who has nominated them. The names of the other candidates shall be held in confidence.
- 4.9 The Secretary shall urge each candidate to make provisions for personal support. Pastoral care is appropriate to accompany the candidate in their discernment process, offer support following the interview (regardless of its outcome) and, in the case of unsuccessful candidates, continue exploring what the Spirit has said through the process.
- 4.10 The closing date for applications shall allow for copies of the application forms to be circulated to members of the Nominating Panel at least one week before the shortlisting meeting.

5. Shortlisting

- 5.1 The Nominating Panel shall consider the applications, with the member of the general secretariat and the HR representative acting as independent advisers, and agree a shortlist to be interviewed.
- 5.2 Shortlisting normally happens in a video conference, but if the Panel so decides, it can be in person.
- 5.3 If, in the judgment of the Panel, there are no suitable applicants, the Panel may re-advertise the post and invite applications from people, or nominations of people, who have not yet been considered.
- 5.4 Interviews should be in person. The maximum number of candidates to be interviewed in one day is two. If more than two candidates are shortlisted, interviews should be scheduled to take place over two days, including overnight accommodation. All Panel members should be encouraged to stay locally in order to facilitate an early start on the interview day.
- 5.5 The Panel shall also identify interview questions. While the HR facilitator can provide example questions that have been previously used, questions should be tailored to both the role description and to the person's application.
- 5.6 All candidates shall be required to make a presentation and complete a written assessment based on a scenario relevant to the post. This requirement, along with the expectations and instructions, shall be stated clearly within the application pack, although the title of the presentation will not be given until a candidate is shortlisted. Similarly, if shortlisted, the written exercise shall not be given until the test is taken during the week prior to the interview. However, notice shall be given of expectations and instructions to

shortlisted candidates by HR at the point of being shortlisted. Expected outcomes from the written exercise, ie 'what good looks like' or a clear benchmark as to what is expected within the written responses as a minimum, should be agreed amongst the panel at the same time as determining the question to be asked.

- 5.7 Psychometric testing shall be arranged by HR for candidates prior to interview. All shortlisted candidates should undertake a bespoke psychometric test similar to that used by the Assessment Board. A written report is to be circulated to the panel before the interview day.
- 5.8 The HR facilitator shall take up references for the shortlisted candidate(s) prior to interviews, and circulate them to the Nominating Group

6. Interviews with shortlisted candidates

- 6.1 Interviews should take place in a neutral venue away from either the Synod office or Church House.
- 6.2 Candidates coming for interview shall be offered their travelling expenses and, if necessary, reimbursement of the cost of one night's accommodation.
- 6.3 Prior to the interview with the candidates, time shall be allowed to meet with the professional responsible for administering the psychometric testing in order that they may respond to questions from the panel.
- 6.4 Time shall also be allocated by the Nominating Group to discuss the written and psychometric tests with the candidate separate from the interview questions.
- 6.5 Each candidate shall make a presentation on the title agreed previously by the Nominating Group.
- 6.6 The scoring of interviews should be considered to be one tool among several for reaching consensus.
- 6.7 In the event of the failure of the group to find consensus amongst themselves, a 5-1 majority decision would be acceptable, if it seems to the convenor and panel that this is fair and reasonable.
- 6.8 The member of the general secretariat overseeing the process shall normally be the person who telephones the candidate(s) to tell them whether or not the Call is to be extended to them. Such phone calls shall be made as soon as possible after a decision has been made by the Panel and, normally, on the same day.
- 6.9 The member of the General Secretariat shall offer to give feedback to unsuccessful candidates, either personally or through the Convenor of the Nominating Group.
- 6.10 The name of the person to be nominated for appointment should be kept confidential until the news of the nomination has been shared with the person's pastorate or post, except with the explicit consent of the nominee.

At the point that the pastorate has been informed, the member of the general secretariat shall arrange for an announcement on the website.

7. Appointment at Assembly Executive or General Assembly

- 7.1 The appointment of Synod Moderators is a function of the General Assembly.
- 7.2 The Nominations Committee shall be responsible for bringing the name of the nominee to General Assembly for appointment or, if necessary, Assembly Executive.
- 7.3 Once a decision has been made by the General Assembly, there is no appeal against such an appointment.
- 7.4 Particular sensitivity should be exercised if one or more of the unsuccessful candidates are members of the appointing Council.
- 7.5 Once confirmed by the relevant Council of the Church, this decision will be relayed in writing to the nominee by the General Secretary.

8. Induction

- 8.1 The Synod Clerk shall be responsible with others for the Induction Service.
- 8.2 The Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) shall be responsible for oversight of the denominational induction process of the minister to the role of Synod Moderator.

Annex three

Process for the Nomination and Appointment of those Assembly Appointed Posts reserved for Ministers (General Secretary, Secretary for Ministries and the Minister for Digital Worship)

1. Background

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has 16 General Assembly Appointed posts reserved specifically for ministers of Word and Sacraments (13 Synod Moderators, The General Secretary, Secretary for Ministries and Minister for Digital Worship).
- 1.2 All recruitment processes for Assembly-appointed posts are about seeking consensus in prayerfully discerning God's will. All the elements of the process – written and verbal – contribute to that end. No single element of the process stands alone as definitive.
- 1.3 This paper sets out a process for the appointment of Ministers to these reserved posts from the vacancy until ratification by the Council of the Church with responsibility for appointment, namely Assembly Executive or General Assembly.

2. Applications

- 2.1 The United Reformed Church believes that all applications for nomination and appointment for General Assembly appointed posts should be treated as a discernment process.
- 2.2 For all Assembly Appointed posts, the twin-track process for applications is important. Ministers can either be nominated or apply directly.
- 2.3 Job Descriptions and Person Specifications for all roles need to be bespoke for a post and not generic. The Marks of Ministry for ministers of Word and Sacraments shall be used as the benchmark.
- 2.4 No appointments shall be time limited.

3. The Nomination Panel

- 3.1 The Nominating Panel shall consist of three people, appointed by the Nominations Committee from a panel elected by the General Assembly, ensuring a balance of diversity.
- 3.2 An independent non-voting Convenor shall be appointed from the URC Nominations Panel elected by the General Assembly who shall not be part of the discernment process, but present solely to facilitate it. Their role shall include arranging dates for shortlisting and interview with the other members of the Nominating Panel.
- 3.3 A member of the general secretariat and an HR representative from Church House should also be present in a non-voting capacity. The member of the General Secretariat shall normally act as secretary to the Nominating Panel. The HR representative shall offer administrative support.

- 3.4 All members of the Nominating Panel should receive training in HR practices (including scoring applications, framing questions, discernment, etc), unconscious bias and anti-racism training prior to becoming part of the panel.
- 3.5 In addition, the independent Convenor shall receive training in facilitating meetings.

4. The nomination process

- 4.1 A member of the General Secretariat initiates the process as far in advance of the vacancy as possible.
- 4.2 A member of the General Secretariat, in consultation with others, shall be responsible for ensuring the adaptation of the role description and person specification to reflect denominational concerns and priorities. Role descriptions and person specifications should be tailored to the post with consideration given to using the Marks of Ministry as a benchmark.
- 4.3 For the avoidance of doubt, the Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship shall have responsibility for the process for appointing the Secretary for Ministries and the Minister for Digital Worship..
- 4.4 The HR facilitator shall then provide the member of the General Secretariat with a recruitment pack containing general information, a sample job description and person specification, and a sample advert, bearing in mind that job descriptions and person specifications for all roles need to be bespoke for a post and not generic.
- 4.5 When the documents are ready, the member of the General Secretariat shall forward them to the HR Facilitator who shall circulate them to the entire Nominating Panel for comment. The Group shall agree a final version. This shall normally happen by email. However, the Nominating Group convenor may decide to call a meeting of the Group to resolve any serious disagreement.
- 4.6 The HR facilitator shall consult with the member of the General Secretariat on the wording of the advertisement to ensure it positively reflects the URC's approach to providing fair and equal opportunities to all. They shall ensure that it is placed in *Reform* and on the URC and Synod websites. The advertisement shall make it clear that both nominations and applications are welcome.
- 4.7 In the case of nominations, the person offering a nomination shall be asked by the HR representative whether they are happy for their name to be revealed to the person.
- 4.8 The Secretary (the member of the General Secretariat) shall write to each person nominated, emphasising that the Church is involved in a process of discernment leading to a call, offering prayerful support, and inviting the nominee to consider whether they would be willing to explore the possibility of a call to the post. The letter shall refer the nominee to the documentation on the URC website, and ask that a nominee wishing to be considered should submit an application form.

- 4.9 All nominees shall receive what is essentially the same letter, and if the person submitting the nomination has given consent, they shall be advised who has nominated them. The names of the other candidates shall be held in confidence.
- 4.10 The Secretary shall urge each candidate to make provisions for personal support. Pastoral care is appropriate to accompany the candidate in their discernment process, offer support following the interview (regardless of its outcome), and, in the case of unsuccessful candidates, continue exploring what the Spirit has said through the process.
- 4.11 The closing date for applications shall allow for copies of the application forms to be circulated to members of the Nominating Panel at least one week before the shortlisting meeting.

5. Shortlisting

- 5.1 The Nominating Panel shall consider the applications under the guidance of the member of the General Secretariat and the HR representative, and agree a shortlist to be interviewed.
- 5.2 Shortlisting normally happens in a videoconference but, if the Panel so decides, it can be in person.
- 5.3 If, in the judgment of the Panel, there are no suitable applicants, the Panel may re-advertise the post and invite applications from people, or nominations of people, who have not yet been considered.
- 5.4 Interviews should be in person. The maximum number of candidates to be interviewed in one day is two. If more than two candidates are shortlisted, interviews should be scheduled to take place over two days, including overnight accommodation. All Panel members should be encouraged to stay locally in order to facilitate an early start on the interview day.
- 5.5 The Panel shall also identify interview questions. While the HR facilitator can provide example questions that have been previously used, questions should be tailored to both the role description and to the person's application.
- 5.6 All candidates shall be required to make a presentation and complete a written assessment based on a scenario relevant to the post. Expected outcomes from the written exercise, ie 'what good looks like' or a clear benchmark as to what is expected within the written responses as a minimum, should be agreed amongst the panel at the same time. This requirement, along with the expectations and instructions, shall be stated clearly within the application pack, although the title of the presentation will not be given until a candidate is shortlisted. Similarly, if shortlisted, the written exercise shall not be given until a few days before the interview. However, notice shall be given of expectations and instructions to shortlisted candidates by HR at the point of being shortlisted.
- 5.7 Psychological testing shall be arranged by HR for candidates prior to interview. All shortlisted candidates should undertake a bespoke psychological test similar to that used by the Assessment Board.

A written report is to be circulated to the panel before the interview day.

5.8 The HR facilitator shall take up references for the shortlisted candidate(s) prior to interviews and circulate them to the Nominating Group

6. Interviews with shortlisted candidates

6.1 Interviews should take place in a neutral venue away from Church House.

6.2 Candidates coming for interview shall be offered their travelling expenses and, if necessary, reimbursement of the cost of one night's accommodation.

6.3 Prior to the interview with the candidates, time shall be allowed to meet with the professional responsible for administering the psychological testing in order that they may respond to questions from the panel.

6.4 Time shall also be allocated by the Nominating Group to discuss the written and psychological tests with the candidate separate from the interview questions.

6.5 Each candidate shall make a presentation on the title agreed previously by the Nominating Group.

6.6 The scoring of interviews should be considered to be one tool amongst several for reaching consensus.

6.7 In the event of the failure of the group to find consensus among themselves, a majority decision would be acceptable, if it seems to the convenor and panel that this is fair and reasonable.

6.8 The member of the General Secretariat overseeing the process shall normally be the person who telephones the candidate(s) to tell them whether or not the Call is to be extended to them. Such phone calls shall be made as soon as possible after a decision has been made by the Panel and, normally, on the same day.

6.9 The member of the General Secretariat shall offer to give feedback to unsuccessful candidates, either personally or through the Convenor of the Nominating Group.

6.10 The name of the person to be nominated for appointment should be kept confidential until the news of the nomination has been shared with the person's pastorate or post, except with the explicit consent of the nominee. At the point that the pastorate or post has been informed, the member of the General Secretariat shall arrange for an announcement on the website.

7. Appointment at Assembly Executive or General Assembly

7.1 The appointment of the General Secretary is a function of the General Assembly.

7.2 The Nominations Committee shall be responsible for bringing the name of the nominee to General Assembly for appointment or, if necessary, Assembly Executive.

- 7.3 Particular sensitivity should be exercised if one or more of the unsuccessful candidates are members of the appointing Council.
- 7.4 Once confirmed by the relevant Council of the Church, this decision will be relayed in writing to the nominee by the relevant member of the General Secretariat.
- 7.5 For the other two reserved posts, the Nominating Panel acts as the appointing group.
- 7.6 Once a decision has been made by, or on behalf of, the General Assembly there is no appeal against such an appointment.

8. Induction

- 8.1 For all appointments, the Induction Service will take place at the next General Assembly or, if necessary, Assembly Executive.
- 8.2 A member of the General Secretariat shall be responsible for oversight of the denominational induction process of the minister to their new role.

Annex four

Matters to be noted by nominating groups for other Assembly-appointed roles

1. There are Assembly-appointed roles which are open to lay or ordained, but which are served at present by a minister of Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker.
2. All recruitment processes for Assembly-appointed posts are about seeking consensus in prayerfully discerning God's will. All the elements of the process – written and verbal – contribute to that end. No single element of the process stands alone as definitive.
3. For Assembly posts which are open to lay or ordained, careful consideration shall be given when advertising to use the facility for declaring a genuine occupational requirement that applicants be a Christian.
4. No appointments shall be time limited unless they have to be due to the issuing of a time-limited Certificate of Limited Service.
5. Job Descriptions and Person Specifications for all roles need to be bespoke for a post and not generic.
6. An independent non-voting Convenor shall be appointed from the URC Nominations Panel elected by the General Assembly who shall not be part of the discernment process, but present solely to facilitate it. Their role shall include arranging dates for shortlisting and interview with the other members of the Nominating Panel.
7. All members of the Nominating Panel should receive training in HR practices (including scoring applications, framing questions, discernment, etc), unconscious bias and anti-racism training prior to becoming part of the panel.
8. In addition, the independent Convenor shall receive training in facilitating meetings.
9. For the avoidance of doubt, the process for the appointment of Church House Assembly Appointed posts shall be overseen by the relevant member of the General Secretariat.

Paper H11

Guidelines on the safer recruitment of those who lead worship in our churches

Ministries and Safeguarding Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Roger Jones rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 35 General Assembly adopts the Guidelines for those who Lead Worship in our Churches.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>This paper sets out the expectations for local churches for the various categories of lay preachers when inviting preachers to occupy their pulpit.</p> <p>The safer recruitment of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Synod Recognised Lay Preachers (before 2021) and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders has already been agreed.</p> <p>For the first time, guidance is put in one place for ease and clarity.</p>
Main points	<p>Guidance is also given for regular preachers/speakers/worship leaders, whether from our own or from other Denominations or organisations who are in a preaching/speaking/worship leading role, Regular preachers / speakers / worship leaders not in that role within their own denomination or organisation, Ad hoc (1-3 times a year) preachers / speakers / worship leaders from another denomination or organisation, and preachers / speakers / worship leaders who no longer attend any church or who are not from an organisation.</p> <p>The responsibilities of the local church are set out clearly.</p> <p>This guidance has been developed following increased requests from local churches for clearer guidelines.</p>

Previous relevant documents	Paper D/H1 General Assmby 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officer Safeguarding Committee Ministries Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	This process is used in all the major denominations.

Safer recruitment of those who lead worship in the United Reformed Church

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church.
- 1.2 Lay preachers (non-ordained) share with ministers of Word and Sacraments in the leadership of worship in local churches. In their role of leading worship, there may be times when a lay preacher is called upon to exercise a pastoral role when a minister of Word and Sacraments is not available, and they need to adopt similar standards of integrity in their lives and relationships. Hence there is a need for all lay preachers and worship leaders to be safely recruited.
- 1.3 All Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Synod Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Lay Preachers are required by the United Reformed Church to be safely recruited.
- 1.4 However, there are lay preachers and leaders of worship from other denominations and / or organisations, and from none, who are invited to preach, some on a regular basis, others on an ad hoc basis.
- 1.5 This paper sets out the expectations for local churches for the various categories of lay preachers when inviting preachers to occupy their pulpit.
- 1.6 This paper also acknowledges that it is the function of the Elders Meeting to arrange for pulpit supply.

2. Safer Recruitment of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (from July 2021)

- 2.1 Lay preachers are an integral part of the church. Along with the other recognised ministries in the United Reformed Church, lay preaching affirms that ministry is the work of the whole people of God.

‘The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service equipped by him for it..... For the equipment of his people for this total ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ

gives particular gifts, and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church.'

Schedule A paragraph 19 and 20 (page 6) of The Basis of Union
https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf

- 2.2 Among the offices so recognised by the United Reformed Church is that of a lay preacher.

'The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen, the United Reformed Church shall (a) take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained ministers of the Word and sacraments are readily available to every local church; (b) provide for the training of suitable men and women, members of the United Reformed Church, to be accredited by Synods as lay preachers.'

Schedule A paragraph 25 (page 6) of The Basis of Union
www.urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf

- 2.3 The provisions of paragraph 25 are intended to establish the principle that worship should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as by the local church *to do and to bear his will all the days of their life.*
- 2.4 Schedule B (page 4) of the Manual Details the functions of the elders' meeting which can be found at https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/B-The_Manual_-_Section_B-2019.pdf
- 2.5 Lay preachers, in addition to their promises as members of a United Reformed Church, at their commissioning service reaffirm their faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and undertake to exercise their ministry in accordance with the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church.
- 2.6 Those thinking of becoming an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher should, where possible:
- attend an Enquirer's Event organised by the Ministries Office, and normally held in February and October each year via Zoom
 - be a church member for at least one year
 - be given copies of the leaflet 'Become a Worship Leader, even a Lay Preacher' <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/become-a-worship-leader-lay-preacher>
 - have a conversation with the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner
 - have a conversation with their minister/interim moderator
 - agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting.
- 2.7 The applicant should contact the Ministries Office for a registration form, plus copies of:
- The Marks of Ministry of an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher
 - URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Preachers
 - A course outline.

- 2.8 The Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner should ensure the Ministries Office receives:
- a) the application form
 - b) a Church meeting minute that the church meeting approves of the candidate going forward;
 - c) two references – one being the minister of the church, or the interim moderator where there is no minister.
- 2.9 Should these not give cause for concern, then the Ministries Office would organise the DBS (can't do PVGs for lay preachers so they are all DBSs); if there is a blemish, this is followed up by the Secretary for Ministries and the URC Designated Safeguarding as per the usual process;
- 2.10 Any concerns during training come back to the Ministries Office where the concerns would be dealt with.
- 2.11 An Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 2.12 All Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.
- 2.13 An Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher is accredited by the United Reformed Church:
- a) to preach at any church which invites them
 - b) to preside at the Sacraments at any church in the Synod which has sought permission from the relevant Synod Committee
 - c) training is recognised at a level comparable to training received by those with an equivalent ministry by our ecumenical partners
 - d) if an AALP moves Synod, their training and accreditation means their Assembly Accreditation will be recognised.
- 3. A Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher** (this role ceased to be trained and recruited from March 2021 when Mission Council adopted the new policies)
- 3.1 The names of all Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preachers should be kept on a list by the Synod Lay Preaching Advocate (or equivalent).
- 3.2 A Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher will be required to have a current DBS (every five years).
- 3.3 A Synod is asked to ensure that a Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church and the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers.

- 3.4 A **Locally (Synod) Recognised Lay Preacher** appointed before March 2021, is commissioned by the Synod:
- to preach at any church within their local area which invites them (normally the area served by the old district Council)
 - is not authorised *per se* to preside at the sacraments
 - their local recognition may not be recognised ecumenically
 - their recognition is not transferable to another Synod.
- 3.5 A **Locally (Synod) Recognised Lay Preacher** shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 3.6 All Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preachers are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.

4. Safer Recruitment of a Locally Recognised Worship Leader (from March 2021)

- 4.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church.
- 4.2 Those thinking of becoming an a Locally Recognised Worship Leader should, where possible:
- a) attend an Enquirer’s Event organised by the Ministries Office, and normally held in February and October each year via Zoom
 - b) be a church member for at least one year
 - c) be given copies of the leaflet ‘Become a Worship Leader, even a Lay Preacher’ <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/become-a-worship-leader-lay-preacher>
 - d) have a conversation with the Synod Lay Preaching Advocate (or equivalent)
 - e) have a conversation with their minister/interim moderator
 - f) agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting.
- 4.3 The applicant should contact the Training and Development Officer (or equivalent) for a registration form plus copies of
- d) The Marks of Ministry of a Locally Recognised Worship Leader
 - e) URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Preachers
 - f) A course outline.
- 4.4 The Synod Lay Preaching Advocate should ensure the Training and Development Officer (or equivalent) receives:
- d) The application form
 - e) A Church meeting minute that the church meeting approves of the candidate going forward
 - f) Two references – one being the minister of the church or the interim moderator where there is no minister.
- 4.5 Should these no give cause for concern, then the Synod Office would organise the DBS (can’t do PVGs for lay preachers so they are all DBSs); if there is a

blemish this is followed up by the Secretary for Ministries and the URC Designated Safeguarding, as per the usual process.

- 4.6 Any concerns during training should be directed to the Synod Moderator where the concerns would be dealt with.
- 4.7 All Locally Recognised Worship Leaders shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 4.8 All Locally Recognised Worship Leaders are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.
- 4.9 A Locally Recognised Worship Leader is commissioned by the Synod
- a) to preach in their own church or pastorate¹
 - b) to preside only if they are an Elder and have been recognised by the appropriate Synod Committee as an Authorised Elder.
- 5. Regular preachers / speakers / worship leaders from other denominations or organisations who are in a preaching / speaking / worship-leading role**
- 5.1 Some churches may wish to invite preachers from other denominations/ organisations to preach on a more regular basis. For the purposes of clarity, regular shall mean four times or more per year.
- 5.2 In an LEP, a Methodist local preacher is subject to safer recruitment. Therefore, if the preacher comes from the Circuit plan, please liaise with the relevant Methodist contact to ensure the safer recruitment requirements are met.
- 5.3 If the preacher is from outside of a circuit and from another denomination / organisation, even if known to members of the congregation, the local church through their nominated person (normally the Pulpit Supply Secretary) shall be responsible for ensuring the preacher:
- a) is in good standing with their lead denomination by contacting the relevant authority, ie the local minister or regional office where they hold their membership. This should be done preferably by email so that there is a record of their status (see Appendix 1)
 - b) has a current DBS. The lead denomination shall be asked to provide details of the certificate number and the level of DBS check.
- 5.4 Any concerns should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the lead denomination / organisation, as any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination / organisation.

¹ In an LEP, a pastorate is a local group of churches and should not be read as eligible to preach across the Circuit.

6 Regular preachers / speakers / worship leaders not in that role within their own denomination or organisation

- 6.1 Some churches may wish to invite those to lead worship on a regular basis who are a member in another denomination or work for another organisation who does not perform that role in their own denomination. For the purposes of clarity, regular shall mean four times or more per year.
- 6.2 Even if known to members of the congregation, the local church through their nominated person (normally the Pulpit Supply Secretary) shall be responsible for ensuring the preacher is suitable for the role by undertaking safer recruitment processes including:
- a) Seeking a reference to ensure they are in good standing with their denomination or organisation by contacting the relevant authority, ie the local minister or regional office where they hold their membership. This should be done preferably by email so that there is a record of their status (see Appendix 1)
 - b) a DBS check to be completed by the local church verifier before they preach.
- 6.3 Once safer recruitment has been carried out for the preacher, they will then be required to undertake mandated training and support.
- 6.4 Any concerns related to that preacher should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the Synod Safeguarding Officer and the lead denomination or organisation, as any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination / organisation. They should not be invited to preach until the matter has been completed.

7 Ad hoc (1-3 times a year) preachers / speakers / worship leaders from another denomination or organisation

- 7.1 Some churches may wish to invite speakers or preachers from another denomination or organisation to speak / preach on a one-off basis.
- 7.2 An elder shall be designated to accompany the preacher/ speaker/worship leader while they lead worship.
- 7.3 Any concerns should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the lead denomination or organisation, as any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination/organisation.

8 Preachers / speakers / worship leaders who no longer attend any church or who are not from an organisation

- 8.1 On occasions, local churches have been known to invite someone to preach who is not in membership with any denomination, but once was. Given that any lay preacher or worship leader represents the wider church to the local, the local church should think seriously about whether it is appropriate to invite someone who is not in fellowship with others to occupy the pulpit.
- 8.2 Should a local church wish to do this, they must seek advice from their Synod.

Appendix one

Example letter of good standing, which can be completed by telephone call, but full details must be recorded of date, time and person contacted.

Dear XX

XXX URC has invited AA to lead worship *on Sunday XX 202X or regularly with them (delete as appropriate)*. AA has given me your name as the lead contact person in their church/organisation and has shared that they are in the role of xxx within your church/organisation.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that AA is in good standing with your church/organisation, by which we mean:

- They have undergone a safer recruitment process (delete if the person is not in a role)
- They are not under any disciplinary investigation
- They are not subject to any restrictions in the role they undertake
- To the best of your knowledge, is suitable to lead worship and be seen in a Position of Trust within our church.

Please could you also supply the date, certificate number and level of their current DBS. If there was any content on the DBS check, would there be any transferable risks that we need to consider?

Thank you.

With best wishes,

BB

Paper I1

Myanmar report

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Lindsey Brown lindsey.brown@urc.org.uk Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report on the partnership work between the URC and the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM) in the wake of the 2021 military coup.
Main points	Recent crisis donation Match-funded crisis appeal Ongoing partnership work.
Previous relevant documents	N/A.
Consultation has taken place with...	The Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, former URC General Secretary John Proctor, the leadership of the PCM.

Summary of impact

Financial	All financial expenditure is contained within an existing ringfenced fund for the PCM.
External (eg ecumenical)	Active contribution to PCM Roundtable, facilitated by the Council for World Mission (CWM).

1. Partnership between the United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar (PCM)

The United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar have a long and close relationship (*URC webpage soon to be available*). In 2023-24, we sought to re-energise this partnership, which had lapsed during the pandemic, the 2021 coup and following personnel changes in both Churches.

With the help of former General Secretary, the Revd John Proctor, we were able to understand the background and history, and build on new connections with the PCM

leadership. This was greatly aided by two visits to Church House in 2023 from the PCM's General Secretary, the Revd Pek Muan Cuang. We were able to hear first hand about the challenges faced by the Church and the state, and explore new ways to partner with them. On the Revd Muan Cuang's first visit in June, he met with John and members of the General Secretariat and Mission team. As part of his second visit in November, he spent time with a range of people and projects in Cambridge, including Robert Pope at Westminster College, Nigel Uden and Alex Clare Young and the congregation at Downing Place, and Lythan Nevard, Moderator of Eastern Synod.

The PCM is responding strongly to the oppression and violence that has escalated since the military coup in February 2021. Its churches are predominantly in regions that continue to suffer regular shelling, destroying villages, including homes, churches and essential infrastructure. As a result, the churches are supporting thousands of displaced people with food and shelter, and establishing simple medical centres and primary schools. Many young men are caught up in the violence, either by joining the civil opposition (the People's Defence Force) or trying to avoid conscription into the army. The normal institutions of state have almost entirely ceased: healthcare, education (including universities), the justice system. This is having a devastating impact on civil society, now and for the future. We have heard many heartbreaking personal stories.

The Church, meanwhile, continues to look to the future, pushing on with an ambitious project to relocate and expand its Agape Hospital, supported by the Council for World Mission and other Church partners: www.cwmission.org/cwm-organises-working-grouping-meeting-for-agape-hospital-relocation-project-in-myanmar/#:~:text=Established%20by%20the%20Presbyterian%20Church,under%2Derved%20by%20medical%20facilities.

2. The PCM's priorities

- Continuing to provide food and shelter for displaced people
- Building on the work of churches to offer schooling and medical centres
- Rebuilding churches and homes in shelled villages
- Pastoral support for young men who have fled to the cities
- Peace work with all parties.

3. The URC's work

- Regular participation in a CWM-hosted partners' Roundtable, to hear news and updates
- Participation in a WhatsApp group to hear immediate and urgent news for prayer support
- An initial £10,000 crisis grant in May 2024 from a historical fund
- A page on the URC website to raise awareness among our churches (*this will be available soon*)
- A two-week series of Daily Devotions (3-15 June) written by a wide range of UK and global friends and partners to raise awareness and prayer support
- A fundraising campaign, match-funded, to our local congregations to enable them to support the crisis work of the PCM (launch June 2024)
- Early conversations to support the PCM in their peace work.

4. Appeal to General Assembly

We ask members of General Assembly to pray for our friends in the Presbyterian Church in Myanmar, and support the ongoing work of the URC for this partnership, including the fundraising campaign.

Paper 12

Environmental Policy progress review

Mission Committee – Net Zero Task Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Chris Baillie, Convenor of Net Zero Task Group baillie.chrismin@yahoo.com Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	Update and decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 36 General Assembly requests that Synods and related Trust companies should report by 31 March each year on an assessment of progress made during the previous calendar year in reducing carbon emissions across the Synod, including Synod Offices, manses and church buildings held in trust by Synod Trust companies and Synod activities and that this report be shared with the Net Zero Task Group so that overall progress across all the Synods can be recorded and reported to General Assembly annually by the Mission Committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This update seeks to encourage the Church to respond to the Environmental Policy adopted at the 2022 General Assembly.
Main points	Assessing progress made; highlighting potential actions and resources; and committing the denomination to reporting its progress in terms of reducing carbon emissions.
Previous relevant documents	Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church (adopted by General Assembly in 2016, updated by Mission Council in May 2019) Creating a climate of change: a new approach to ethical investment (Mission Council, May 2019) Environmental Policy progress review (Mission Council, July 2020) Environmental Policy (General Assembly, July 2022).
Consultation has taken place with...	The Net Zero Task Group has representatives drawn from the Moderators, the Finance Committee, the URC Trust, the General Secretariat, URC Youth, Synod Property Officers and

	Green Apostles. Consultation is continuing with all Assembly Committees.
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Summary of impact

Financial	This report does not propose any additional expenditure. Some areas of practice are recommended which should reduce costs. Work to make our buildings more environmentally efficient will be costly, but these continue to be decisions for Synods and local churches in response to the URC's Environmental Policy adopted at General Assembly 2022.
External (eg ecumenical)	The Net Zero Task Group has drawn especially on the resources of the Methodist Church and the Church of England.

The Environmental Policy adopted by the 2022 General Assembly set an ambitious and urgent target for the denomination: 'to reduce carbon emissions across the whole of church life, with the aim of reaching net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030'. It mandated the formation of a Net Zero Task Group (NZTG) to oversee progress to this aim; to identify and advocate for resources; to engage with Assembly committees; and to encourage the sharing of experiences and achievements across the Church.

Two years on from this bold decision, it seems appropriate to review progress towards the aims expressed. For the URC to achieve net zero involves more transformation than adaptation. Most notably in our buildings, but significantly in our forms of transport and in our gatherings, we are looking at fundamental changes. These require us to rediscover and embrace the Church's fundamental nature, while potentially letting go of expressions of Church that are long-established and much cherished.

1. What has the NZTG concluded so far?

- a) It is *achievable* to '**reduce** carbon emissions across the whole of church life by 2030'.
- b) It is potentially *achievable* to bring General Assembly's 'committees and bodies under its control' to 'net zero emissions of greenhouse gases by 2030'.
- c) It is **unachievable** to reach net zero 'across the whole of church life' by 2030.
- d) A working distinction should be underlined between General Assembly bodies that are *required to comply*, and associated bodies that General Assembly *encourages to act*, outlined in the 2022 resolution as 'including Trusts, the Retired Ministers, Housing Society, and Resource Centres for Learning, Synods and local churches'.

2. Progress so far

- a) General Assembly committees are identifying and planning the necessary actions they need to take. There are varied understandings of the need for in-person (face-to-face) meetings, though there is already widespread use of internet platforms.
- b) In response to feedback from the committees and others, supporting advice is being drafted in the areas of:

- buildings and other premises (guidelines for adapting buildings are soon to be available).
 - transport (reduction, low-carbon means and reduced alternatives)
 - venues (checklist to support selecting carbon-conscious settings).
- c) Most Synods have an appropriate environmental policy. Synod Property Officers and Green Apostles have commented helpfully on the document 'Net Zero 2030 Buildings Guidance', which will soon be available.
- d) Local churches vary between those which have qualified as Gold Award Eco Churches (Scotland: Eco Congregations) and those that feel they simply do not have the capacity to make meaningful cuts in their carbon footprint. Eco Church/Congregation is now a major movement in British churches, and about a third of URC congregations are either already signed up or have expressed an intention to do so. Becoming an Eco Church/Congregation does not involve a commitment to net zero as such. NZTG see this as an important first step for congregations to begin their journey in a manageable way. Net zero can understandably seem an impossible goal for many local churches. Better to start positively than discard the aim as too overwhelming to contemplate.
- e) NZTG has produced a statement on the key and contentious matter of carbon offsetting, and offers it in appendix i to this paper as a potential resource for the denomination.
- f) Action towards net zero requires clarity. To help reduce confusion in discussions and documents, a paper providing definitions of terms as NZTG uses them is offered (see appendix ii).
- g) Information and advice is currently somewhat dispersed, and a one-stop approach is being developed for the URC website to support all parts of the church in taking action.
- h) Central trusts and other associated bodies have not yet been asked to provide information. However, the URC Trust is represented on NZTG, and some initial conversations have begun.

3. Challenges

- a) Finance presents the greatest challenge. The willingness to act far exceeds the capacity of available funds, whether that be at local, Synod or central level. For example, no Synod could enable all their existing local church buildings, manses and transport arrangements to reach minimal emissions. Church building closures may ease this to a degree. NZTG has scarcely begun to assess the impact of the funding shortfall. It is clear though that, to achieve net zero, a massive rationalisation of buildings would be required. The likely scale of disposal of buildings necessary would present the denomination with a substantial pastoral challenge, as it would call for a rediscovery of local church identity and operation that is free of ties to buildings that cannot affordably be adapted. Some local churches are showing capacity for radical action; some have the opportunity to explore ecumenical partnerships to reduce the number of premises in a community; and some could utilise more net-zero-friendly buildings in their community. The massive challenge presented by our buildings may be an opportunity to rediscover that being a church does not require the ownership of a

physical building. However, some buildings are strategically important for mission, and a focus on funding these is worth exploring.

- b) Several of our ecumenical partner denominations have been able to assign staff capacity centrally to oversee the push to net zero. This would not suit the structure of the URC, where oversight of buildings is decentralised and local congregations are responsible for the upkeep of church buildings, which are largely held in trust by Synod Trust companies. Nevertheless, ecumenical knowledge, resources and tools already in existence (or being developed) can helpfully be adapted to URC needs. NZTG has agreed a working partnership with the Methodists in which each denomination has a representative sitting on each other's environmental working group.
- c) The Environmental Policy agreed by the 2022 General Assembly included a section on 'travel and transport'. We question whether the denomination has taken sufficiently serious note of the request 'to offer incentives to use lower carbon modes of transport'. Some of our ecumenical partners, for example, no longer pay expenses for car travel to meetings, unless there has been prior authorisation. Equally, the URC Environmental Policy makes clear that 'within Europe, the default option should now be to travel by train, unless there is compelling reason not to do so'. With scarcely more than five years to go before 2030, it is valid to ask whether we are genuinely making every effort to adhere to the travel rubric laid out in the 2022 Environmental Policy.
- d) We all recognise the pressures on local churches and Synods, with a widespread picture of dwindling congregations and lack of volunteers. It is easy to see how the enormity of the task and the lack of resource mean that, for some local churches and Synods, it can feel that they simply do not have the capacity to give the reduction of their carbon footprint the priority they would wish. The emphasis in this paper is to encourage Synods and local churches to take even the smallest steps, rather than being overawed by the headline aim of net zero. With this in mind, we ask General Assembly to support the resolution requesting that each URC Synod and related Trust company review its progress on carbon reduction annually, and then provides a summary report of their actions to the Net Zero Task Group.

4. Opportunities for further action

- a) Encouraging church members to consider their own net zero opportunities could have a more immediate impact than a focus on buildings. The combined emissions impact of our daily lives is potentially greater than that created by church premises. Developing such discipleship would call for a serious step change.
- b) Net zero means decarbonising all our uses of energy, replacing fossil fuels with green energy. This can involve major refits (eg of boilers) for premises, but it can be a planned process and the guidance document mentioned above offers advice on this. A simple first step is to switch to green energy suppliers.
- c) Reducing in-person (face-to-face) meetings where it is viable to use internet platforms is an obvious direction of travel for committees and other bodies to

develop (recognising that data centres use significant energy). We note that considerable changes have already been made in this area post-pandemic. The Education and Learning Committee has developed a spreadsheet to optimise journeys. This tool can be adapted for use across the church, and will soon be made available.

- d) Children and young people will live the whole of their lives with the impacts of our carbon and other greenhouse emissions. Across church life, we need to be intentional about hearing their wisdom, insights, concerns and hopes. Young people have leadership to offer that is essential to the whole church moving towards a better and prophetic response to the climate crisis.

5. Conclusion

We are grateful to members of NZTG who have met faithfully each month trying to grapple with the task given to them by the 2022 General Assembly. Without any budget or resource, they have valiantly attempted to make progress in terms of the denomination's aim of reaching net zero by 2030. As will be seen from this report, for some areas this ambition remains a possibility, but there are significant areas, particularly in terms of our buildings, where the 2030 goal is simply unachievable. However, this should not deflect us from making every effort to reduce our carbon footprint across the whole of the church wherever possible.

Appendix one

NZTG Statement on Carbon Offsetting 2023

Carbon offsetting is part of the landscape of efforts to combat climate change. To help us determine how it fits in to the URC Environmental Policy and net zero target, NZTG offers the following statement.

1. **Eliminating emissions as far as possible is the priority.** Offsetting does not offer an alternative to this. Only when all possible measures to eliminate carbon (and other) emissions have been identified should offsetting be considered. It is a last resort.
2. **Some emissions are unavoidable**, and achieving net zero will involve offsetting these. Many unavoidable emissions can be measured or estimated, and steps to offset these can be calculated. Additional allowance should also be made to offset those emissions which cannot be adequately quantified.
3. **Carbon offset schemes need to be chosen with care.** Some are scams, some enable 'greenwashing', some are ineffective, some damage biodiversity and/or local communities. Pending the identification of an accreditation body, we recommend using schemes that have been verified (eg www.goldstandard.org/tags/carbon-offsetting; www.climatestewards.org/offset). Good schemes will take up and store atmospheric carbon, and will add benefits such as:
 - a) enabling carbon-neutral technologies where they cannot be locally afforded.
 - b) helping restore indigenous biodiversity.
 - c) supporting local communities.
4. **Offsetting is part of the journey** rather than the destination. When we do it, we have not arrived and should find ways to further reduce emissions. Offsetting can also be used during the period between a decision on an emissions-reduction measure and its implementation.

Appendix two

NZTG definitions

The Net Zero Task Group was established by Resolution 17 of General Assembly 2022, which aims to reach net zero emissions of greenhouse gasses by 2030 “across the whole of church life.” It instructs the committees and bodies under its control to form and implement plans to achieve net zero by 2030 and encourages all other elements of the URC to put into practice the Environmental Policy (Paper 12, General Assembly 2022).

As the meanings of much-used words and phrases can become blurred, we thought we'd clarify how we understand and use some key terms.

Net Zero

Cutting greenhouse gas emissions created by our activities to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions assessed and the equivalent a) offset by generating and selling green electricity, b) re-absorbed from the atmosphere or c) offset using verified offset schemes. The intention is to avoid adding to the climate problems resulting from emissions.

God's image

Includes that humanity is created, equipped and called to function within creation in partnership with God. God's creation is not ours, but we are invited to enjoy it with God and each other, and to be God's co-workers in its care. This is a key aspect of loving God and neighbour, and is the foundational mission given humanity “in the beginning.”

Climate change

The climate has always changed, but very slowly, giving people and all life time to adapt. The problem is the speed of climate change caused by the scale of some human activities, and the effects of the resultant extreme weather.

Carbon neutral

A balance between emitting carbon and generating and selling green electricity, absorbing or 'capturing' it from the atmosphere.

Carbon sequestration (carbon capture)

Removing carbon from the atmosphere and storing it.

Greenhouse gas emissions

Loading the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and other gases that trap heat, leading to global warming.

Offsetting

Compensating for carbon dioxide emissions arising from human activity (e.g. church activities) by enabling an equivalent amount of carbon to be absorbed from the atmosphere. Plants grow by taking up carbon from the air, and many offsetting schemes work with this. See our 'Statement on Offsetting.'

Church activities

Worship gatherings, mission action, pastoral action, administration, meetings, etc, whether of a local congregation or any aspect of the wider church, all create emissions and so contribute to climate change.

Green energy

Power (probably electricity) that is sourced renewably, such as from sunlight, wind or water, and that can be produced and provided with minimal emissions. This contrasts with energy produced from fossil fuels (such as oil, gas, coal).

Paper I3

The Gaza Crisis

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Philip Brooks philip.brooks@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 37</p> <p>1. General Assembly denounces the illegal and deadly Hamas attacks on Israeli citizens which took place on 7 October 2023, including the holding of hostages, in contravention of international humanitarian law.</p> <p>Resolution 38</p> <p>2. General Assembly denounces the deadly attacks on Palestinian civilians in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force, and its devastating destruction of civilian infrastructure along with essential services, in contravention of international humanitarian law.</p> <p>Resolution 39</p> <p>3. General Assembly calls for an immediate, permanent ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, and for the immediate de-escalation of hostilities regionally.</p> <p>Resolution 40</p> <p>4. General Assembly calls on the UK Government both to cease arms sales to Israel, and to monitor existing embargoes on arms sales to nations that might be supporting Hamas militarily, in fulfilment of the UK's obligations under the international Arms Trade Treaty.</p> <p>Resolution 41</p> <p>5. General Assembly denounces all acts of antisemitism in the UK, expresses deep concern over its unacceptable rise in our communities, and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Jewish neighbours.</p> <p>Resolution 42</p> <p>6. General Assembly denounces all acts of Islamophobia in the UK, expresses deep concern over its</p>

	<p>unacceptable rise in our communities, and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Muslim neighbours.</p> <p>Resolution 43</p> <p>7. Given the unacceptable rise in religious hate crime, General Assembly encourages every local church and Synod to reach out in friendship and welcome to their local faith communities using interfaith dialogue and/or other resources available to them for this purpose.</p> <p>Resolution 44</p> <p>8. In order to encourage learning and deeper awareness, without taking a view itself on these terms, General Assembly instructs Mission Committee in collaboration with the Education and Learning Committee and Youth Assembly, to consider how best to resource the URC with a better understanding of the theologies and history that help to shape and feed the crisis in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory as these relate to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Christian Zionism and Supersessionism ii. The Balfour Declaration iii. Antisemitism and Islamophobia iv. Peace, Violence, Security, and related, relevant topics <p>so that Synods, local churches, and members can grow in their awareness of these issues and respond in loving prayer, gracious advocacy, and Jesus-shaped solidarity.</p> <p>Resolution 45</p> <p>9. In the light of the continuing and worsening breaches of international law by the Israeli government in relation to the occupied Palestinian territory, General Assembly requests that URC Synod Trusts and the URC Trusts and Pensions Funds avoid knowingly investing in Israeli registered companies until such time as Israel once again abides by international law.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Gaza Crisis: Mission Committee’s report to General Assembly 2024 for reflection, discussion and further learning, with the aim of aiding a just, lasting and equitable peace in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.
Main points	Call for a ceasefire in the Gaza conflict, respect for international law, improving understanding and peace-building in local communities.

Previous relevant documents	Resolution 37 General Assembly Record 2016 Paper I2 General Assembly 2021.
Consultation has taken place with...	Representatives of Children and Youth, Education and Learning, URC Resource Centres for Learning, URC Interfaith Enabling Group, Commitment for Life, URC North Western Synod, Churches Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) Investment Management, The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), The Methodist Church of Great Britain, The Church of Scotland, Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), ecumenical partners in Palestine, URC General Secretariat, URC Sabeel-Kairos, the Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ), URC ministers and members with relevant expertise such as participants of the 2019 URC educational visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT).

Summary of impact

Financial	There may be a future call on the budgets of Mission Committee and Education and Learning for the proposed training, but no planned additional expenditure in current budgets for 2024 and 2025.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	The resolutions and report express commitments and views which many of our ecumenical partners share.

The Gaza Crisis: Mission Committee’s report to General Assembly 2024

1. Overview

Mission Committee offers this report as an encouragement to the United Reformed Church (URC) both for reflection and further exploration of what are contested, controversial matters concerning the current conflict in a land that has been described as ‘competitively loved’.¹ The report should not be viewed as a positional document for or of the URC. Rather, it should rightly be viewed as a reflection of the differing views within the denomination, an analysis of work undertaken by URC members and leaders, and recommendations for next steps.

Mission Committee wishes to make it abundantly clear that in the making of any observation or in the taking of any position on Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT), we start on the basis that this is neither our land(s) nor our conflict.² We are observers who wish, insofar as this is within our gift, to bring about peace and justice for Israelis and for Palestinians. We can and must frame our calls for justice within a spirit of humility and empathy, recognising that our

¹ Please refer to the resource document from CTBI, *Torn in Two* in <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Torn-In-Two-Responding-to-Conflict-in-IsraelPalestine-FINAL.pdf>

² This should not be read as inferring that the UK had no historical role in creating the conditions for the current conflict, as even a cursory understanding of the Balfour Declaration makes abundantly clear. For an accessible film/discussion on this topic see <https://balfourproject.org/film-of-britain-in-palestine-1917-1948/>

knowledge and expertise will always be limited and partial. We are grateful for the work undertaken by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) to remind us of this framing.³

At its core, this report is a call for a deepening understanding, a further educating, and a careful listening to as wide a variety of voices as possible. No document can or should attempt to be definitive or exhaustive. There must be room for further consultation, and this is envisaged through the resultant resolutions. A guiding principle for the discussion is the centrality of international law as equally applicable to all. Combined with the URC's Jesus-centred tenet that every person is made in God's image and so is God's deeply beloved, Mission Committee offers the report to General Assembly.

1.1 The conflict

On 7 October 2023, about 3,000 armed Hamas militants broke through the heavily fortified Gazan security perimeter and attacked and murdered 766 Israeli civilians and 373 military personnel. In all, 1,139 Israelis and foreign internationals were killed in the fighting, while 253 Israelis and foreign nationals were taken hostage⁴ in contravention of international humanitarian law such as the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols.⁵

The brutal and inhumane Hamas attacks have had a profound effect on Israeli civil life. Israel is a small country made up of cohesive communities. Most people in the country are in some way connected to those who were killed or taken hostage. For some, the attacks triggered the memory of the Holocaust, a devastating shared reality for many people living in Israel. Up to 300,000 residents have been evacuated from the north and south of the country.⁶ They are being supported by volunteers from every corner of society. The United Reformed Church joined millions in unequivocally rejecting the violence, destruction and despair wrought by Hamas on 7 October 2023.

In the wake of the Hamas attacks, the Israeli Defence Force immediately tightened its existing blockade on Gaza. It then conducted one of the most comprehensively destructive bombing campaigns in modern history.⁷ On 27 October 2023, the Israeli forces laid siege to Gaza City. On 2 November, Israel moved its forces on to Khan Yunis to the south.

Serious questions have been raised over what many people see as the alarmingly disproportionate military response by the Israeli government. Queries regarding the legality of the Israeli invasion have given rise to several UN Security Council debates calling for a ceasefire. On 25 March 2024 the UN Security Council finally

³ <https://ctbi.org.uk/torn-in-two-responding-to-israel-palestine-conflict/>

⁴ There are many sometimes conflicting sources for this information. Figures used here will change as the war progresses – see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel–Hamas_war

⁵ The International Committee of the Red Cross offers a very useful summary of how international humanitarian law attempts to manage military violence <https://www.icrc.org/en/war-and-law>

⁶ For those wishing to offer support for displaced Israelis, you could donate to, for example, <https://www.israaid.org/donate/>. Support families of the Israeli hostages <https://giveback.co.il/project/75048>

⁷ Various sources, but see <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/middle-east/2023/12/06/israels-gaza-attack-one-of-historys-heaviest-conventional-bombing-campaigns/>

passed a resolution⁸ calling for an immediate ceasefire and unconditional return of the hostages, with the UK voting in favour and the US abstaining. This followed the Israeli government announcement of its intention to invade the southern city of Rafah in Gaza, currently home to 1.5 million Gazans, most of whom have already been internally displaced multiple times.

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) heard verbal submissions⁹ from South Africa in its case against Israel for the crime of genocide. In an interim ruling, the Court found that the Palestinian people's right to be protected from genocide was 'plausibly' at risk. The ICJ issued a series of provisional measures, including an order for Israel to stop killing Palestinians 'with immediate effect'. The case highlights the risk of complicity in acts of genocide for governments including the UK and US that continue to provide material support for Israel's military campaign. On 28 March 2024, the ICJ issued additional measures¹⁰ in response to famine warnings, ordering Israel to take all necessary and effective measures to ensure without delay the unhindered provision at scale of basic services and humanitarian aid. In early March, the UN's special envoy on human rights in Palestine, Francesca Albanese, issued a report called *Anatomy of a Genocide*¹¹ in which she stated she believed there were reasonable grounds to believe that Israel may be committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. On 16 May 2024, the ICJ held additional hearings¹² of a case brought by South Africa seeking an emergency halt to the assault on Rafah. In response, Israel's Deputy Attorney General for International Law Gilad Noam accused South Africa of having ulterior motives and of offering a military advantage to Hamas. Tamar Kaplan Tourgeman, principal deputy legal adviser of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denied that Israel had shut down the Rafah and Kerem Shalom crossings in southern Gaza. Israel was simply defending itself from Hamas, and South Africa was distorting statements by Israeli leaders to show genocidal intent that simply was not there.¹³

The world watched in dread as the destruction and death toll mounted. The statistics are sobering, though figures quoted ought to be prefaced with caveats regarding accuracy, given the sheer challenge with respect to obtaining accurate figures in the chaos of conflict. At the time of writing, then:

- The vast majority of the more than two million Palestinians in Gaza have been internally displaced
- More than 35,000 people killed
- More than 15,000 children killed
- More than 79,000 injured
- More than 17,000 children unaccompanied, orphaned, or separated from family
- More than 6,000 women killed

⁸ See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68658415>

⁹ These can be obtained here <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231229-pre-01-00-en.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/icj-orders-additional-provisional-measures-in-south-africa-v.-israel#:~:text=Noting%20the%20worsening%20conditions%20of,basic%20services%20and%20humanitarian%20aid>

¹¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/03/1147976>

¹² See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1149846>

¹³ This case is being heard at the time of writing and these quotes should be taken as only a small indicator of the wider dispute over the competing claims and interpretations over the IDF assault on Rafah. Quotes here are taken from only one source due to report deadlines (May 17th) so please do bear that in mind – see <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2024/5/17/icj-live-israel-to-respond-to-south-africa-appeal-for-rafah-attack-halt>

- Many more than 10,000 people missing or trapped under building rubble
- More than 100 journalists killed
- More than 360,000 buildings damaged or destroyed
- 392 educational facilities have been damaged or destroyed
- 267 churches and mosques have been damaged or destroyed
- 15 out of 35 hospitals are partially functional
- 83% of ground water wells damaged
- 11 bakeries destroyed.¹⁴

The Israeli government continued to lay siege to Gaza in what appeared to be defiance of the rulings of the ICJ which called on them to implement provisional measures designed to prevent the crime of genocide. Food, medicine and lifesaving equipment were being held at borders. Fewer than 100 trucks of aid were being let through per day when many more than 500 trucks were required pre-7 October. Troops shot to kill starving people,¹⁵ desperate to reach the convoys that did manage to get through. Hunger, famine, and disease were set to take more lives than the bombs, with 2.2 million people at ‘imminent risk of famine’.¹⁶ The UK along with the US and other countries and regions withdrew funding from UNWRA¹⁷ while continuing the sale of weapons to Israel.¹⁸ The situation was described by Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, on 4 March 2023 as the following:

‘It is impossible to adequately describe the suffering in Gaza. Doctors (are) amputating limbs of children without anaesthetic. More than 100 people killed a few days ago while desperately seeking food. Babies, just a few months old, dying of malnutrition and dehydration.’¹⁹

The potentially deliberate targeting of vehicles carrying World Central Kitchen (WCK) workers was described by founder José Andrés²⁰ as ‘not a mistake’, but ‘systematically, car by car’. The Israeli government has said that the strike was a ‘grave mistake’ and has apologised, promising an independent investigation. While this targeting of Western aid workers is by no means an isolated event, and though the Western media’s tendency to treat Western deaths as more newsworthy than Palestinian deaths is arguably racist,²¹ this WCK incident seems to point to a possible Israeli Defence Force (IDF) policy seeking to prevent aid

¹⁴ It is difficult as mentioned in the body of the text to give precise figures. Utilities and services in Gaza have been decimated. It may take years for accurate figures to be available, meaning that all of these may have to be revised up or down. Find updates at - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>

¹⁵ The UN condemned the so-called ‘flour massacre’ and urged Israel to end its campaign of starvation - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-flour-massacre-urge-israel-end-campaign-starvation-gaza>

¹⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/21/1232605200/humanitarian-aid-gaza-israel>

¹⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145987>

¹⁸ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/report-us-quietly-approved-more-than-100-arms-sales-to-israel-since-october-7/>

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/UNRWA/status/1764755516599808086>

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68727828>

²¹ “Racism” or “internalised prejudice” is cited as one of the primary reasons for skewed reporting on the WCK deaths in the article - <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2024/04/world-central-kitchen-workers-killed-israel-gaza-idf-jose-andres.html>. For a deep dive into western media bias over reporting, see <https://cfmm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/CfMM-Report-Final-MEDIA-BIAS-GAZA-2023-24-ePDF.pdf>

flowing freely into Gaza.²² There is also the fear that Israel's military actions in Gaza, along with calls from some in Netanyahu's cabinet for greater military action in the north of the country, may spark a much wider regional conflict.²³

2. Response of the URC's close ecumenical partners

We are very grateful for the work undertaken by the URC's close ecumenical partners with a presence in Jerusalem. The Church of Scotland continues to offer a peace-building presence in the region, and has produced an excellent Jewish Christian Glossary.²⁴ We share in the Methodist Church of Great Britain's sense of deep alarm over the deliberate targeting by the IDF of hospitals in Gaza. Their President of Conference offered this reflection: 'Time will tell whether what we witness in Gaza today is an ethnic cleansing of the present population. The Methodists have urged the UK government to 'demand an immediate halt to the shelling for the preservation of innocent life and require that Israel abide by the provisional ruling of the International Court of Justice.'²⁵

The Revd Munther Isaac, Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem and Academic Dean of the Bethlehem Bible College, has been a powerful voice crying out in the wilderness of the Holy Land. He contributed to the 2021 General Assembly, and partners with Yourchurch online each Advent. Dr Isaac is well acquainted with the needs of Palestinian Christians, and what support they would wish to see from the global church. He has asked partner churches to undertake several actions, including a call for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire²⁶ and pushing for a just solution to end the Palestinian crisis. He also asks that churches promote the learning materials offered by Sabeel-Kairos *Cry for Hope*,²⁷ and various Palestinian liberation theologies.²⁸ The Methodists have endorsed the resource, and we encourage URC members to engage with the document.

We commend the work of our close ecumenical partners as they urge the UK government to honour its obligations under the international Arms Trade Treaty. We share in ecumenical partners' deep concern²⁹ over the sale of UK weapons to Israel. These actions may make the UK Government complicit in the deaths of thousands of Palestinians.³⁰ These weapons include the production of drone components manufactured by Elbit Systems³¹ used in the bombing campaign in Gaza. We urge this General Assembly to join in solidarity with the Methodist

²² <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/war-gaza-killing-aid-workers-israel-plan-destroy-gaza>

²³ See this article on the growing concern over a sharp escalation in the scale of the conflict with Hezbollah <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/11/closer-israel-gets-destroying-hamas-more-likely-war- Hezbollah-becomes>

²⁴ https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/108745/ocr23-01_a-jewish-christian-glossary_a4_v4.pdf

²⁵ <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/news/a-statement-from-the-president-and-vice-president-on-the-situation-in-gaza/>

²⁶ The URC has consistently supported ecumenical partners in the call for an unconditional, immediate ceasefire, as noted in the text.

²⁷ For a deep dive into the issues, see also <https://cryforhope.org>

²⁸ <https://www.sabeel-kairos.org.uk/category/taking-action/>

²⁹ See [Christian organisations: "grave concerns" over UK arms for Israel – Christian Aid | Mediacentre](#)

³⁰ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/elbit-systems-israel-arms-uk-government-contract-ministry-of-defence-7-october/>

³¹ <https://www.elbitsystems-uk.com/media-events/recent-news/elbit-systems-uk-remain-at-the-forefront-of-british-armed-forces-training>

Church in its call for an arms embargo³² in the region. We worry that UK weapons may also end up in Hamas military hands. Our contention is that weapons do nothing to solve the deep political and social divisions in the region. On the contrary, they exacerbate these difficulties. Commitment for Life's partner *Global Justice Now* has a campaign to end UK arms sales to Israel, and Commitment for Life supporters are invited prayerfully to consider supporting this action³³.

Importantly, many Israeli administrations and commentators³⁴ have considered the 1967 borders as unworkable using security, socio-political, legal and, at times, biblical arguments. But the Israeli settlements built in the occupied Palestinian territory are deemed illegal precisely because they contravene the 1967 borders.

The borders are based on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 242 that emphasises the 'inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war'. It also calls for the 'withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied during the June 1967 War'. Israel has consistently argued that resolution 242 does not mandate it to withdraw from the territories it has occupied since 1967. Most legal experts, however, suggest that Israel's reading is inconsistent with the provisions of international law that prohibit states from acquiring territory by force. For this reason, the United Reformed Church should be clear that its 2021 General Assembly Resolution (28) calling for a Palestinian state must be along the internationally recognised 1967 borders. This is important to counter the proliferation of illegal Israeli settlements and reverse Israel's policies of *de facto* annexation of the Palestinian territory.³⁵ Anything less would mean that in any so called 'two-state' scenario, one very powerful state would be in control both militarily and economically of a series of weak, disconnected South African style Bantustans.³⁶

3. Impact in the UK

The UK has not remained unaffected by the Gaza Conflict. The Community Security Trust, a UK organisation dedicated to tracking and recording the utterly contemptible scourge of antisemitism, has reported an alarming spike in antisemitic hate crime. Mission Committee recommends that URC members make every effort to familiarise themselves with how antisemitism operates insidiously and often unconsciously in the wider community to impact negatively

³² See page 19, 2010, in [Microsoft Word - Methodist Conference and Council Reports and Resolutions on Israel-Palestine 2002-2013 \(d1yuutt686hfi0.cloudfront.net\)](https://d1yuutt686hfi0.cloudfront.net): "calls for a full arms embargo against all sides in the conflict."

³³ <https://act.globaljustice.org.uk/support-campaign-end-uk-arms-sales-israel-0>

³⁴ See <https://jcpa.org/article/israels-1967-borders-arent-defensible/>

³⁵ See Resolution 30 of the 2021 General Assembly Book of Reports <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/book-of-reports-2021.pdf>

³⁶ Bantustans were disparate geographical areas set up by the National Party in apartheid South Africa. Covering about 13% of the overall land, each Bantustan had a parliament, a coat of arms, and the forced offer of citizenship. This gave the appearance of self-rule for each tribal majority, but in effect legalised the uprooting of people living in designated White areas, the bulldozing homes, and the forced relocation of entire communities into these Bantustans. See Allister Sparks' comments following a trip to the occupied territory <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140124-visualizing-palestine-in-a-two-state-solution-a-state-of-palestine-or-a-palestinian-bantustan/>

Jewish communities. The URC must become allies in the task of confronting, resisting, and ending these awful acts.³⁷.

The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) hosted a webinar on the worrying trend of growing antisemitism in the UK. Many Jews in the UK speak about their growing unease. Many have a close and deeply meaningful personal bond with Israel. A significant number possess dual citizenship and/or have family and friends who live in Israel. It is completely understandable that many of our Jewish partners speak about how an attack on Israel directly affects their sense of security and wellbeing.

During the past seven months, the UK has seen the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of civilians marching peacefully almost weekly calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza. Some politicians and religious leaders have characterised them as ‘hate marches’, causing community tensions to heighten further. In addition, senior political figures who have spoken out against the atrocities being committed in Gaza have found themselves subjected to increased threats and abuse both online and in-person.³⁸

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) makes it clear that criticism of the State of Israel is not *per se* antisemitic.³⁹ Indeed, some of the most vocal critics of current Israel policy, particularly under its current, ‘extreme right wing’⁴⁰ administration, are Jewish. They love Israel and earnestly wish to see the country they love thrive, and unequivocally so does the URC.

There are nevertheless important considerations to be given to criticisms of Israel, given that antisemitism is so deeply rooted in western societies, shaped by generations of supersessionist or replacement theologies⁴¹ that rely heavily on antisemitic categories. To focus criticism solely on Israel while ignoring conflicts, occupations and acts of genocide in other parts of the world would be deeply problematic.

In addition, uncritically conflating Jews in the UK with Israel, or holding Jews anywhere in the world responsible for the actions of the secular Israeli state, is deeply antisemitic. Jews in the UK must not be held responsible for the actions of the Israeli government. It is vital that Christians make every effort not to underestimate the effects of actively malicious antisemitism enacted over millennia that has led to the deep sense of anxiety and fear that most Jews

³⁷ The Community Security Trust is dedicated to tracking and recording the utterly contemptible scourge of antisemitism in the UK. Please make every effort to make these incidents known in your churches for the sake of confronting, resisting, and ending these awful acts <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog?tags%5B21%5D=1>

³⁸ <https://twitter.com/zarahsultana/status/1769845582422520078>

³⁹ See <https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism>

⁴⁰ This assertion is reasonably widely accepted. See for e.g. Jonathan Guyer’s article in Vox - <https://www.vox.com/world/2023/1/20/23561464/israel-new-right-wing-government-extreme-protests-netanyahu-biden-ben-gvir>

⁴¹ See for example Young, David 2023: *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A brief consideration of ‘Replacement theology.’* On Kindle. See also “Replacement Theology” discussed in the CCJ-CTBI resource on antisemitism “Connected Communities” <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Connected-Communities.pdf>, and also in the Church of England’s document “God’s Unfailing Word” <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/godsunfailingwordweb.pdf>

experience daily.⁴² Arguably, no other society or culture knows what it is like to be shaped – psychologically, religiously and culturally – by a Holocaust preceded by 3,000 years of persecution, with much of that persecution propagated and championed by Christians. Christians are very often influenced by reflexive, unexamined theologies of Christian Zionism⁴³ that are leveraged to justify support for the policies and actions committed by the State of Israel in contravention of international law.⁴⁴ To this end, we ask this General Assembly to support the resolution in this report which seeks to improve educational resources in the denomination.

As the denomination makes a careful response to the Gaza crisis, it is important to avoid replicating the conflict in the Middle East in the UK. We should be cognisant of the fear of being labelled antisemitic for making a principled critique on humanitarian grounds of the Israeli Government, but at the same time recognising that it is not antisemitic to criticise the Israeli government if or when it flouts international law.

4. Response of the United Reformed Church

The United Reformed Church in partnership with our UK ecumenical partners has taken a multi-faceted approach to its response to the crisis:

- 4.1 On 15 December 2023, when the number of Palestinians killed stood at 15,000, the URC joined with Christian Aid, 67 humanitarian agencies and global church leaders to urge the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.⁴⁵ The call said:

‘We write as religious leaders to say enough is enough. We cannot remain silent as generations of families in Gaza are wiped out in an instant.

‘World leaders cannot sit by while Palestinian civilians in Gaza experience such catastrophic destruction and trauma... The relentless and unrestrained bombing campaign with horrific indiscriminate effects and the ground invasion by Israel must end... We weep with broken hearts as we hear of hospitals, mosques, churches, and schools damaged and destroyed by this war. In Gaza, there is no safe place. There is no refuge. There is no escape.’

The church’s call went unheeded. The death toll worsened significantly, with between 100 and 200 Palestinians killed every day since.⁴⁶ The death toll more than doubled since that first call for a ceasefire on 15 December, with the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF)⁴⁷ reporting that Gaza has ‘witnessed the fastest decline in a population’s nutrition status ever recorded’.

⁴² Ibid. See the Community Security Trust website.

⁴³ In 2004 the Presbyterian Church (USA) declared its ‘active opposition’ to those theologies that can be categorised as ‘Christian Zionism’. Revd Peter Colwell (CTBI) has written a very helpful, unpublished paper on Christian Zionism, which can be obtained from the Mission Team in Church House or contacting Peter directly.

⁴⁴ See for example <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34057252-the-case-for-zionism>

⁴⁵ <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/news/middle-east-crisis-appeal/ceasefire-now-call-for-peace>

⁴⁶ View the latest figures here <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker>

⁴⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/childrens-lives-threatened-rising-malnutrition-gaza-strip>

What that means, the report states, is that ‘children are starving at the fastest rate that the world has ever known’.

- 4.2 The URC moderator signed an urgent letter from churches⁴⁸ to the House of Lords, urging the House to oppose the *Economic Activity of Public Bodies Bill*,⁴⁹ a controversial piece of legislation that has drawn criticism from many human rights organisations in the UK. Amnesty International⁵⁰ warns that the bill would undercut human rights, fudge the distinction between products made in the illegal settlements in occupied Palestine and those from Israel, and undermine the drive by devolved governments to embed human rights in their procurement procedures. It should be noted that Baroness Deech, prior to any engagement with faith representatives on the issue before her criticism, characterised as ‘antisemitic’⁵² those churches and organisations that signed this letter.
- 4.3 URC Congregations were asked to consider not lighting their second Advent Candle⁵³ in solidarity with Christians in Palestine. There was a heart-warming response from URC congregations to this request from our church partners in Palestine through Commitment for Life.
- 4.4 The URC and the Methodist Church sent a joint letter lobbying the Minister for Faith, asking them to ensure that Christians are afforded safe passage to go on pilgrimage to Bethlehem. This is a uniquely relevant and adroit way for Christians to speak into the conflict, particularly as this issue is directly affected by the activities of illegal settlers⁵⁴ in the West Bank.
- 4.5 The URC Moderator⁵⁵ signed a declaration by the Methodist president and vice president on the situation in Gaza:

‘The International Court of Justice has called on Israel to ensure that its forces do not commit any of the acts covered by the Genocide Convention. Yet attacks on Gaza have continued with inadequate regard to the protection of civilians. For those crowded into Rafah there is nowhere left to go. It is disturbing to hear that some in the Israeli government are discussing the possibility of creating new Israeli settlements across the Gaza Strip. Time will tell whether what we witness in Gaza today is an ethnic cleansing of the present population.

‘Meanwhile, for those sheltering without food and water the situation is critical. To meet the basic human needs of such a large population there is no alternative to an immediate ceasefire. We urge our government to demand an immediate halt

⁴⁸ <https://jpit.uk/the-governments-re-writing-of-history>

⁴⁹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3475>

⁵⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/amnesty-international-briefing-economic-activity-public-bodies-bill-commons-second-0>

⁵² [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-20/debates/1906FBFC-C909-4322-8F64-AFCD6C706E31/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies\(OverseasMatters\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-02-20/debates/1906FBFC-C909-4322-8F64-AFCD6C706E31/EconomicActivityOfPublicBodies(OverseasMatters)Bill)

⁵³ <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Second-Candle-liturgy.pdf>

⁵⁴ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-human-rights-chief-deplores-new-moves-expand-israeli-settlements-occupied>

⁵⁵ <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about/news/a-statement-from-the-president-and-vice-president-on-the-situation-in-gaza/>

to the shelling for the preservation of innocent life and require that Israel abide by the provisional ruling of the International Court of Justice.⁵⁶

- 4.6 Commitment for Life (CFL) and the online URC congregation 'Yourchurch' invited Christian Aid to update the URC on the current condition of our partners in Gaza and the West Bank. A video link is available on request (CFL). The CFL Spring Mailing on IOPT contains updates on the work of URC partners in Gaza, with news of the director of partner organisation, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Raji Sourani, being pulled out of the rubble of his bombed home, who then went on to give evidence at the ICJ in support of South Africa's call for interim measures against Israel.
- 4.7 Commitment for Life (CFL) has set up a Gaza Appeal⁵⁷ so that local congregations and members can contribute. More than £50,000 over and above normal contributions was donated by Commitment for Life to our Christian Aid partners PARC on the West Bank and to CFTA in Gaza.

DONATE TO THE CFL GAZA



- 4.8 A Yourchurch member, and 2019 participant on the URC educational visit to IOPT, convened a URC Palestine Network that is tasked with contemplating a spectrum of views on how best to respond to the Gaza situation, and to co ordinate that response in dialogue with Mission Committee.
- 4.9 The Interfaith Enabling Group (IEG) has spent a significant amount of time considering the inter faith ramifications of the Gaza predicament. It supports Mission Committee's actions in response to the crisis. The IEG supported a petition calling on Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, to reverse his decision⁵⁸ to withdraw funding from the Inter Faith Network⁵⁹ after promising he would not do so for the 2023/24 financial year. At a critical time for inter faith relations in the UK, the cabinet minister singled out the only Board member

⁵⁶ At the time of submission, the ICC Prosecutor Karim Kahn is suggesting that there are "reasonable grounds to believe that Hamas's Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Diab Ibrahim Al-Masri (Deif) and Ismail Haniyeh 'bear criminal responsibility' for murder, extermination and taking hostages – among numerous other crimes – since the Gaza conflict erupted in the wake of Hamas-led attacks in southern Israel on 7 October. There are also reasonable grounds to believe that Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, Israeli Minister of Defence, are responsible for other crimes and crimes against humanity 'committed on the territory of the State of Palestine'. For updates see <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/05/1149966>

⁵⁷ <https://donate.giveasyoulive.com/fundraising/commitment-for-life-gaza-appeal>

⁵⁸ Behind a paywall, annoyingly, but see <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/24/interfaith-network-closes-links-muslim-council-britain/>

⁵⁹ See <https://youtu.be/MsiKBtdVlas> and this reflection by CTBI's Revd Dr Peter Colwell <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/IFN-and-the-Importance-of-i-FWork.pdf>

representing the Muslim Council of Britain, Hassan Joudi, in what some have described as a cynical attempt to leverage the culture wars in support of short term and self-centred party-politics.⁶⁰

- 5.10 The IEG is encouraging all URC congregations and LEPs, where possible, to reach out in friendship to local mosques, synagogues, temples, and gurdwaras. This action should be offered as a sign and symbol of solidarity and welcome. There are excellent resources available⁶¹ for those congregations and Synods that are determined to build peace among their faith neighbours into their mission. The Mission Team commends its own experience of maintaining and deepening inter-faith relations with Jewish friends and colleagues, especially during this time of heightened tensions, when others have sought to distance relationships.
- 5.11 The Mission Team has sought ways to encourage all URC members to be peacemakers in a global context that increasingly seems to devalue or denigrate the critical value of peace. Our General Assembly Moderator has heeded this call by actively deepening ties with the General Secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain, Zara Mohammed, whose organisation was unjustly targeted by Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, Michael Gove and which resulted in his decision to withdraw funding from the Inter Faith Network. The URC is deeply concerned about the sharp increase in Islamophobic incidents⁶² reported across the UK, and works in partnership with inter-faith partners in addressing this worrying trend.
- 5.12 A small planning group met to discuss an initiative called '*Voices in Exile*' seeking to bring together the theological voices of the global south in a consultation on the intersections of oppression as they manifest in Palestine. The initiative has the support of some Baptist, Methodist, and URC members, in consultation with the Revd Dr Munther Isaac, Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, who has offered profoundly important insights into how best to structure this consultation.
- 5.13 On Thursday 14 March 2024, Oxfam organised a Gaza ceasefire lobby day of MPs at Parliament, with URC members in attendance. Commitment for Life working with Children and Youth encouraged young adult URC members to support the Christian Aid April 28th *Pilgrimage for Palestine* to stop arming Israel as well as to end UK government complicity in the violence. The URC continues to support the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel

⁶⁰ <https://youtu.be/MsiKBtdVlas>

⁶¹ An internet search will bring up a plethora of resources. See for example:

<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/dialogue-1>

<https://wilmetteinstitute.org/a-learners-how-to-list-for-engaging-in-interfaith-dialogue/>

https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/108745/ocr23-01_a-jewish-christian-glossary_a4_v4.pdf

<https://www.uri.org/uri-story/20230210-top-10-tips-designing-and-facilitating-interfaith-dialogue-your-community>

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2011/9/14/guidelines-for-engaging-in-productive-interfaith-dialogue.html>

<http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org/journal-articles/2011/9/14/guidelines-for-engaging-in-productive-interfaith-dialogue.html>

⁶² A recent report outlining this growing issue has been published by Tell Mama <https://tellmamauk.org>

(EAPPI). The URC Sabeel-Kairos group⁶³ has offered to share resources with congregations who wish to learn more about the root causes of ongoing conflict. URC members have marched, petitioned, prayed and protested, motivated by a desire to see an equitable and lasting peace proceeding out from the permanent end to violence, hatred, and occupation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory.

- 5.14 Antisemitism: The Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ) held a webinar for church leaders on antisemitism.⁶⁴ There has been a significant and alarming spike in antisemitic incidents across the UK. History has shown that antisemitism is often a precursor to rising fascism, the shutting down of free debate, attacks on human rights, and attacks on other marginalised groups, such as Muslims, Roma, and LGBTQ+ communities. In our actions regarding Gaza, it is vital to address the deeply rooted and unconscious antisemitism that resides within Christians by virtue of the fact that we are shaped by empire's systems of domination⁶⁵ that have 'othered' Jews, blaming them for Christ's death. We must learn from our Jewish associates and friends and partners how antisemitism informs our thinking, theology and actions, hence the reason why this General Assembly is asked to consider future learning in these areas for the denomination.
- 5.15 In January 2024, URC Youth Assembly passed a resolution encouraging General Assembly to request that Mission Committee investigates and develops further connections and collaborations with just-peace focused organisations and Churches in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory (IOPT). URC Youth has satisfied itself that the significant and extensive connections already in place fulfil the intent of the Youth Assembly resolution, and endeavours to continue its engagement on matters relating to IOPT, in collaboration with the wider URC.

6. Proposed URC Ethical Investment Fund

In 2021, the URC General Assembly passed two resolutions (32 & 33)⁶⁶ relating to its investment policies, requesting that URC Trusts not invest in companies that profit from the occupation. The barrier to its implementation has been the ability of some fund investment companies to provide the screening envisaged by the 2021 resolutions. In particular, many of the URC Trusts place funds with the Churches Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) Investment Management. The good news is that negotiations with CCLA for the provision of a bespoke URC investment instrument are well advanced.

This fund would operate in line with the screening laid out in the 2021 General Assembly resolutions. The fund will be open to ecumenical and other partners who also wish to ensure a level of screening that matches their advocacy on IOPT issues and so enable them to 'walk the talk' with regard to their ethical investments. It is important to note that this proposed new Fund will screen out companies that are listed on the American Friends Service Committee Divest

⁶³ Resolution 37A of the 2016 URC General Assembly recommends to formation of Kairos communities.

⁶⁴ <https://ccj.org.uk/videos/antisemitism-briefing>

⁶⁵ For a penetrating analysis of the collapse in the west's moral authority revealed in this crisis, see French philosopher Frédéric Lordon's essay, 'End of Innocence' <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/end-of-innocence>

⁶⁶ <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/assembly-record-2021.pdf>

List⁶⁷ for ‘involvement in state violence and human rights violations as part of occupations’. It does not, therefore, specifically single out Israel.

An agreed level of investment screening was passed at General Assembly in 2021. However, since then there has been, in addition to the Gaza crisis, a continuation of the breaching of international law on the West Bank,⁶⁸ with violence flaring regularly as illegal Israeli settlers under IDF protection attempt to intimidate and kill Palestinians.

It is appropriate, therefore, to test the mind of Assembly whether an increase in the level of screening on our investments might be warranted. Such has been the deterioration since the 2021 General Assembly resolutions were passed that perhaps the time has come to ask that Central and Synod Investment Funds do not invest money in any Israeli registered company. The proposed URC ethical fund is specifically designed to comply with URC General Assembly resolutions. The hope is that the Israeli government will effect a change in policy in line with international law, in which case General Assembly is free to reconsider and withdraw its request regarding investment policy and Israel.

There is a case to be made that the real impact of any screening process lies not in any financial pressure placed on a particular country. Our investment amounts are relatively small, though there is hope that other funding pots will be added to the URC mix. Also, on occasion it has been suggested that the lack of external investment could act as a stimulus to the economy of the country in question, thus appearing to undermine the original intent of the action. However, the real power of targeted sanctions lies not in the financial repercussions imposed but rather in the action’s focused, non-violent capacity to strip away the moral arguments proffered by a country in contravention of international law.

7. Closing thoughts

The fundamental question with which we wrestle is this: what is the core principle on which we base the United Reformed Church’s response to the Gaza crisis? Whose cry do we place front and centre? Who do we see around us who are hungry and naked? Are we not compelled to put front and centre the cries of those who are most affected by oppression, hunger, hostage-taking, and war?

It is critical too that the URC shows solidarity and care for affected communities in England, Scotland and Wales, many of whom, as succinctly expressed by Justin Cohen,⁶⁹ are ‘full of dread, full of fear, like I’ve never seen before’.

Acknowledging the fears of all communities of faith and in the context of the many issues raised in the report, Mission Committee offers its resolutions to General Assembly.

⁶⁷ See <https://investigate.afsc.org/occupations>

⁶⁸ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143087>

⁶⁹ Justin Cohen of *Jewish News* quoted in <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67494802>

Paper I4

Legacies of Slavery – acts of repairing justice: progress report

Mission Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Mission Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	None.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery – progress report from the task group regarding the URC commitment to acts of Repairing Justice.
Main points	Progress regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • anti-racism training • Proposal for developing/supporting regional mentoring projects for young black men • Proposals for collaboration with global partners. Report on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica, April 2024.
Previous relevant documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper I3: Legacies of Slavery – proposals for repairing justice (General Assembly 2023) • Paper E1, Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church (General Assembly 2022) • Healing: Hope in Action – Mission Committee Paper, September 2019. <p>Related past resolutions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • URC statement of Confession and Apology regarding the legacies of transatlantic slavery (2022) • General Assembly commitment to concrete acts of repairing justice in response to the continuing legacies of transatlantic slavery (2022) • From ‘not racist’ to anti-racist – Mission Council November 2020.
Consultation has taken place with...	The URC Treasurer The Chief Finance Officer Members of CRAF (Jamaica)

	<p>The Revd Les Isaac (OBE) Dr Lisa Adjei Ecumenical partners including CWM, the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, Christian Aid, the Methodist Church, the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum.</p>
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Summary of impact

Financial	The URC Treasurer will bring a separate paper addressing a funding proposal for the repairing justice work.
External (eg ecumenical)	Most of our ecumenical partners are engaging in work concerning the legacies of transatlantic slavery. Different churches/entities are taking different approaches and are at varying stages of the journey – very few have reached the point of offering an apology. Several are looking to the URC for inspiration and/or guidance. Our partners in Jamaica are also looking to us to continue the journey we have started with them and to be an advocate for the reparations work they have researched, and which now needs resourcing to bring to fruition.

Legacies of Slavery: Repairing justice – an update for General Assembly 2024

Introduction

The URC is definitely on a journey – and it is a joy to be part of the journey; to see how quickly it is taking shape. Despite the current speed of movement, the process has been well considered, and is being thought through at each stage. The overarching journey has not been quick. The current path has been shaped, and the foundations laid, by decades of dedicated racial justice work in the URC, carried out by activists and allies who have refused to be silent or to be silenced. But it feels like something is shifting – or something has shifted – and we are in a particular moment, right here, right now.

Recent background

Many people thought we would never see the day when the URC would publicly acknowledge a role in, and benefit from, transatlantic slavery – but in July 2022, URC General Assembly did indeed adopt a statement of Confession and Apology concerning the role of our antecedent bodies in transatlantic slavery and the continuing legacies which blight both Church and world. At the same time, General Assembly made a commitment to acts of ‘repairing justice’ – concrete actions seeking in some way to ‘put right’ that which has been damaged and distorted by the trafficking of African bodies, and the legacies of racism, injustice and inequality which continue today.

General Assembly 2023 adopted a further resolution proposing a three-strand approach to repairing justice:

- Local – within the body of the URC
- Regional – within the UK
- Global – working with partners in the Caribbean and Africa, possibly with and through the Council for World Mission (CWM).

Since then, the URC Legacies of Slavery (LoS) Task Group has subdivided itself to follow up and develop the proposals.

Repairing justice: progress to date

a. Local: Anti-racism training

This focus builds on work carried out in the wake of George Floyd's murder which prompted the denomination to pose the question, 'Do Black Lives Matter in the URC?' and led to the November 2020 commitment to journey from 'not racist' to becoming an 'actively anti-racist' Church – after all, how can the Church speak with integrity unless we are committed to setting right within our own body that which we challenge and critique in the world around? Further work was carried out by the Positive Action Task Group and Senior Leadership Group which, in conversation with the LoS task group, proposed that our local action should take the form of widespread anti-racism training within the denomination.

General Assembly 2023 adopted a resolution making anti-racism training mandatory for certain groups and individuals holding positions of leadership, decision-making and influence in our Church. The training was developed by Professor Anthony Reddie, and delivery began in January 2024.

While some concern was expressed in advance of the training, particularly questioning whether the approach used would make white people feel guilty for being white, the sessions have been overwhelmingly well received. Feedback repeatedly indicates that participants find the sessions deeply challenging, yet thoroughly enjoyable. A sentiment expressed by one person, and reflected by many, is as follows: 'I thought I'd come away feeling guilty; instead, I felt empowered to recognise and use my privilege for the good.'

Of course, the training has not been to everyone's liking. The sessions could be described as an exploration of anti-oppressive practice rather than 'training' in anti-racism, and no attempt is made to 'supply the right answers'. These points can, however, be viewed as strengths rather than criticisms. Professor Reddie encourages participants to see that the issues are multi-layered, so there are no one-size-fits-all easy solutions. He facilitates a specifically theological journey in which people are enabled to recognise that the status quo is not neutral, and to consider the part we each can play in shaping the way things are and in bringing about change.

At the time of writing, seven sessions have been delivered involving more than 115 participants from various networks, including, but not limited to, the Mission Committee, General Secretariat, Officers of Assembly, Synod Moderators, and individuals engaged in the breadth of the URC's Disciplinary Process. Further sessions will be delivered by Professor Reddie as we work through the initial groups for whom the training is mandatory. Members of the LoS sub-group are giving serious consideration to how the training can be cascaded more widely across the denomination.

b. Regional: mentoring of young black men

The LoS task group decided from an early stage to focus its regional proposals on the mentoring of young black men. This was in no small way influenced by two Children's and Youth Development Officers (CYDOs) allocated time to work with the group. Why young black men? Because while inequalities and injustices are experienced by African diaspora communities in the UK in general, young black men particularly bear the brunt of multiple inequalities.

The vision for the regional proposal is to support mentoring projects in four locations across the UK which have clear historical links with transatlantic slavery – one each in Scotland, the North of England, the South of England, and Wales. Each project will be linked with a local URC – possibly offering its building for use, as appropriate, but definitely holding the work in ongoing prayer. A further dimension would see the creation of one pioneering post in each location, hosted by the local URC, with the postholders embodying and further developing the link between the local church and the mentoring project. The aim is for the four postholders to collaborate with each other to form a network of learning and expertise across the URC.

It is immediately apparent that the regional proposal is incredibly ambitious – and it was always going to be the most challenging to bring to fruition. The sub-group has been grappling with questions which include:

- What do we mean by ‘mentoring’? Mentoring towards what?
- Which projects/individuals might we work with?
- Who are other potential partners who might help resource the vision?

While many questions remain on the table, there have been some exciting developments. The subgroup has been challenged by the Revd Les Isaac OBE, founder of Street Pastors, to buck the trend by choosing to work with projects which are not yet well established, but may involve grassroots individuals who themselves have fallen foul of various systems and are now seeking to share their lived wisdom with others who are coming behind. The Revd Isaac has offered to work with the subgroup in the role of consultant, to make introductions and help get the relationships established and properly supported. There is the potential here for true partnership-working; the possibility for making a real difference to the lives of the potential mentors seeking to turn things around, and the lives of potential mentees who will have the opportunity to access the projects.

c. Global: collaborating with partners in the Caribbean and Africa

The global strand emerges from a place of humility. The aim is to collaborate with our global partners to support work they have identified for themselves, rather than us presuming to know what is needed in their contexts.

In truth, we have not yet progressed work with partners in Africa; this is simply because of time and resource constraints, and has not been forgotten. In contrast, developments have been rapid and exciting with specific reference to Jamaica. As reported at General Assembly 2023, the Churches’ Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) – currently focused on Jamaica, but with conversations spanning into the wider Caribbean – became aware of the URC’s statement of Confession and Apology; the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans reached out on behalf of CRAF to accept our apology and extend an offer to partner with us in our commitment to repairing justice.

CRAF has done considerable work researching and articulating a 7-Point Plan for Reparations (see appendix 1). The Plan starts with Apology and goes on to outline various interlinked areas which need to be addressed to bring about healing of societal wounds caused by chattel slavery and its enduring impacts.

During a UK visit in June 2023, CRAF invited representatives from a number of UK Churches to visit Jamaica to further their respective journeys concerning transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies; the seed was sown for an Ecumenical Pilgrimage to Jamaica which took place in April 2024. Three members of the URC, including the Revd

Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the General Assembly, took part in the Pilgrimage alongside colleagues from the Church of Scotland, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and Christian Aid. They were later joined by a further URC participant as part of his sabbatical.

Members of the LoS global sub-group had already engaged with the CRAF 7-Point Plan prior to the Pilgrimage, and had particularly warmed to the proposal for the development of 'New Free Villages' (point 5), addressing the landlessness of a large proportion of Jamaica's population, and the lack of means to create wealth. This proposal would see the Church in Jamaica contributing land gained as a legacy of slavery and colonisation, while partners such as the URC would help to resource the development of housing and infrastructure (see appendix 2: New Free Village Movement). In this way, the Church in the respective contexts would embark on a journey together – each addressing the legacies as pertains to them; each contributing to the process of 'putting right'. The Pilgrimage provided opportunity to visit the site of one prospective development located in Jackson Town, where up to 40 households (120 direct beneficiaries) might potentially be housed.

Black identity, image and self-worth

The CRAF 7-Point Plan also highlights the issue of psychological trauma affecting black identity and self-worth (point 2). The 2019 LoS task group report Healing: Hope in Action picked up the same theme, recommending programmes to support positive Black self-image and self-worth as part of reparations proposals for the URC, the UK, and in relevant global partner contexts. In light of this, a second dimension to the global proposal has emerged – the development of a three-way pilgrimage (Africa, Caribbean, and UK) gathering African and African diaspora people to explore issues of identity, belonging, broken histories and hidden histories, with the aim of reclaiming their God-given self-worth. The aim is for a rolling programme in which different cohorts of participants build ongoing relationships by meeting and exploring together in all three contexts. The programme will include a particular focus on young people, recognising that for real change to be effected, there must be a cross-generational approach.

God really is good. Dr Lisa Adjei, the Christian Aid presence in the Jamaica Pilgrimage, is also founder of the Sankofa Collective, a Christian charity engaged in work along the lines being proposed. As the charity's website explains, 'The name Sankofa [from the Akan tribe in Ghana] means we should reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward. Whatever we have lost, forgotten, forgone, or been stripped of, can be reclaimed, revived, preserved, and perpetuated.' (sankofacollective.org). It has been suggested that the URC and CRAF, in conversation with Dr Adjei, could pilot an initial programme, even while we explore and bring on board Africa-based partners in the near future.

The URC apology – did it matter?

This paper cannot be concluded without further reference to the URC's statement of Confession and Apology. For those who argued that a URC apology was meaningless and could make no difference, developments since General Assembly 2022 have shown that they were undoubtedly wrong. CRAF names Apology as the first step in the process of reparation and healing. It was our apology that drew these partners to us. It mattered to them.

A special service was held during the Jamaica Pilgrimage, in which the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, Moderator of the General Assembly of the URC, read aloud the

Confession and Apology. She hand-delivered a copy of the document, which was received by the Revd Gary Harriott, her counterpart in the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI) as he subsequently pledged church-owned land to further the reparations proposals. The URC Apology mattered to the people gathered to witness this historic event.

In the ensuing days – as we were invited to contribute to interviews on Jamaican television and radio, as we listened to people share their reflections, and as we heard the testimony of one man who was moved to tears at witnessing the Church own up to its guilt and expressing a commitment to putting right – there was no doubt that our Apology absolutely mattered.

Relationships and reparations

A clear and frequently repeated learning point from Jamaica, and from CRAF specifically, is that reparation is first and foremost about the healing of relationships – the bringing together of those who have been divided by a hideous history and its continuing impacts. It is only then, in relationship, that financial reparations find their true meaning. If I love my neighbour as I love myself, or as I would wish to be loved, it follows that I will do what I can to enable their wellbeing – even more so if I am aware of my complicity in their struggles. It is with this conviction that the task group has been in conversation with the URC Treasurer and Chief Finance Officer to seek meaningful ways of resourcing the reparations (repairing justice) proposals outlined in this paper. Reparations do not start with money – but it does require money to resource the practical actions needed to bring about change.

Resourcing the repairing justice proposals

Local: Anti-racism training – has been funded from the Mission Committee budget and will continue to be funded in this way. We give God thanks.

Regional: Mentoring Projects – conversations are underway. In the Revd Les Isaac, we have the interest and potential commitment of a grassroots expert-consultant. We will require funding – for the mentors, for the creation of the pioneering posts, for ongoing costs. Even while potential partners are being sought, what might the URC feel inspired to offer? How ambitious dare we be in our dreaming?

Global: New Free Villages – the UCJCI has pledged land, and other church denominations in Jamaica are being urged to do the same. To what extent can the URC partner this initiative by offering practical financial support? Equally important, are we ready to offer prayer support? And how can we inspire other UK entities to catch the CRAF vision, becoming partners in the work too?

Global: Three-Way Pilgrimage – CRAF is ready to work with us to pilot a programme as soon as practicable. We have connections with the Sankofa Collective, an existing charitable organisation with expertise in delivering projects along the same lines. We are exploring other potential sources of funding – but what can the URC commit?

Members of the URC Finance Committee have caught the vision of the repairing justice proposals and have been working on a financial plan to enable the URC's LoS journey to continue – to move the task group's work from vision to reality. We pray that as one part of Christ's body, focused on the healing and wellness of all parts, the URC will achieve and surpass all that is being proposed.

New Free Village Movement

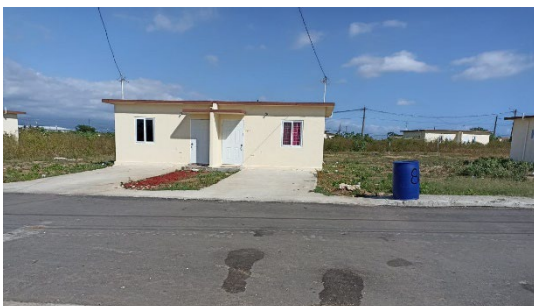
The New Free Village movement is on a mission for Churches to take the lead in contributing to land redistribution and the facilitation of the more economically challenged members of society to access viable housing solutions for themselves and their families. It is in this context that the suggestion to establish New Free Villages emerges. Churches would contribute land, and seek resources to allow for the survey and subdivision with necessary utility infrastructure for settlement of community members who would, for the first time, become legitimate owners of real estate. Collaboration with state agencies would allow for timely development of housing solutions and other appropriate land use.

The United Church would earmark three plots of land in the proximity of congregations, one in each county. Optimal size per plot is ten acres.

Substantial capital is needed for the professional works of subdivision, provision of public utilities, and housing design and construction. That capital will undergird the design and construction for the maximum number of housing solutions suitable in each location. Three locations which have been given careful consideration include Jackson Town.

A projects task force of CRAF is far advanced in the computation of the costs associated with the implementation of this programme. The high-level estimate of the cost of implementing each ten-acre project is £2.4 million (J\$ 480 million), housing up to 40 households – with an expectation of about 120 direct beneficiaries.

Examples of the types of starter housing developments proposed are shown below:





Churches' Reparations Action Forum (Jamaica)

Seven point action plan

1. Apology

Churches and para-church organisations are urged to summon the moral courage to confront the realities of the past complicity and, in recognising the persistent deleterious impact of the legacies, commit to publicly atone for their historical participation in these dehumanising atrocities. Slavery was an affront to human dignity against which, in unity, the children of God must stand.

2. Addressing the psychological trauma affecting identity and self-worth

Reparations are meant to contribute to the healing of people and communities from generations of psychological trauma. This healing approach focuses on the reconnection of the descendant to his/her dignity and worth.

The churches, energised by the power of the Holy Spirit, are best placed to engage this work towards the holistic healing of the person, body, mind and spirit and the healing of relationships. In this process, the church will confront the harmful results of some ecclesiastic and theological positions which in the past provided support, if not encouragement, to forces of oppression in the process of dehumanising large swathes of humanity.

New and liberating ways of interpreting Scripture will provide the moral underpinning for actions of healing and reconciliation. Some of these practical programmes of healing are addressed in Appendix one.

3. Promoting safety and security through repudiation of violence

The centuries of trauma have significantly affected attitudes and approaches to human relations, family formation and parenting. Established systemic authoritarian attitudes are reflected in institutions of authority like schools, security services and other public services.

The evidence of the lingering results of the psychological trauma are more and more prevalent in the aggression on display in the society. The required work of repair must include confronting the deep-seated historical legacy of violence and its institutionalised undergirding. The church can establish programmes in community which reshape attitudes to children, parenting models, gender relations and the

sanctity of life. Such work must influence persons at all age levels, rescuing the children from the violence-ridden conditions in which too many are socialised. Appendix two is an example of such a practical community programme.

4. Reimagining education

So much of the societal repair work could flow from educational interventions. Post-Emancipation Christian missions contributed much to the early evolution of education. Reparations in this era must advance that foundational work by greater and more focused involvement in public education for all age cohorts from early childhood, to primary and secondary.

These acts of reparatory justice would focus not only on the access to education, but also on what is being taught. Curriculum development in this era requires a determined effort to include the pre-colonisation history of Africa, African cultures, heritage and Afro-centric thinking. African approaches to knowledge accumulation, storage and dissemination need to be exposed to a young generation in an effort to deepen their understanding and enhance their self-concept.

Theological education

A particularly important input of reparatory action of churches in education should be in theological education.

The society could benefit greatly from the provision of resources from European churches earmarked to strengthen the curriculum of theological education and ministerial formation. Such enhancement would focus resources and effort on facilitating access for students and infecting the curriculum of existing institutions with a theological discourse on decolonisation and freedom. Practical approaches to such a project are explored below.

5. Sharing citizen property ownership and wealth creation

Among the most devastating legacies of the colonial slave debacle is the continuing landlessness of large swathes of these post-colonial populations. It is perhaps the most significant factor which has hindered formally enslaved people in their drive to generational wealth creation.

As in education, the post-emancipation church contributed much by way of attempting land distribution practices which were made available to the formerly enslaved.

New free villages

Among those efforts were the establishment of free villages, and the establishment of saving and investment models like credit unions and building societies. In this era, a renewed commitment to repair would include churches offering church-owned land

resources for the resettlement of landless persons, community resources for training in financial literacy and exposure for improved attitudes to investment and wealth creation in all levels of society.

Community transformation

Most of the current decaying urban settlements can trace their depreciating conditions to the inequitable spread of material resource which is a hallmark of post-colonial societies.

At independence, there were no funds given to develop Jamaica by the British government, though they had benefitted enormously from the chattel slavery of the Africans and their descendants.

Today in the Caribbean, and especially in Jamaica, we find many communities that are called garrison communities. Defined as geographically discrete, fortified, urban areas, they are marked by poverty, gang violence, political manipulation, and confrontational relationships with law enforcement institutions. The persons who live in these communities are mainly those of African descent who have become entrenched in a vicious cycle.

It will take resources and effective strategic partnerships to make their transformation a reality. Multi-sectoral partnerships, such as with the public and private sectors, educational institutions, non-governmental organisations and the diaspora community, will effect this repair.

A key stakeholder for community transformation, and one which should play a leading role, is the church. With reparation funding provided, the church could play a most effective role as it is one of the primary change agents in society, having given its continual service to community residents and continuing to enjoy high levels of trust.

6. Establishing spatial markers and honoring of ancestors

Reparations must affect attitudes to collective memory of ancestors. Millions of forebears whose names we do not remember or know must become central in this generation's commitment to repair.

Post-colonial societies are too often replete with monuments and other spatial markers which commemorate the coloniser to the detriment of any positive reference to the formerly enslaved and oppressed.

Reparatory action in this era would engage communities in the process of establishing spatial markers which reflect the contribution and struggle of the majority of the ancestors. Their courage and resilience would be celebrated as

gardens, art installations and other poignant spatial markers, and provide continual reminders of their contribution to their community's existence.

7. Addressing agriculture and climate change

Poor attitudes and approaches to agriculture have largely held back these societies and their economies. The natural environment of the colony has borne the damaging effects of aggressive, extractive economic activity focused on meeting needs of foreign palates and building foreign economies. The Caribbean's colonial history has significantly contributed to societies in which the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources has created conditions that left economies more precarious and nations more vulnerable to climate shocks, and has diminished their capacity to utilise abundant renewable energy resources in a disciplined and productive way.

Climate crisis

Often, crops chosen to be cultivated were not indigenous to this region, and choice lands utilised for aggressive agricultural and other practices would leave hillsides denuded, indigenous fauna bereft of their natural habitat, air and waterways polluted, and coastlines decimated.

They now find themselves in the clutches of the global climate crisis.

Food insecurity

In post-colonial societies, some economies reside in a state of persistent food insecurity.

Land reform and sustained effort towards attitudinal change in favour of sustainable agricultural practices will lead to recovery from the damage and contribute to the staving-off of further climate-change damage. In this, the churches could be resourced to play a significant role through community action for sustainable agricultural development.

Paper J1

Report to General Assembly 2024

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mrs Helen Lidgett hnlidgett@gmail.com Mrs Margaret Marshall nominations.secretary@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 46 1. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of this Report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary Reports to Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 47 2. General Assembly accepts the resignations set out in paragraph 6 of this report and discharges them with thanks for their service.</p> <p>Resolution 48 3. General Assembly dissolves the Nominations Committee from the close of General Assembly 2024. General Assembly discharges the officers and members and thanks them for their service. General Assembly transfers its functions and responsibilities to the new Nominations Committee set up by the 2024 General Assembly.</p> <p>Resolution 49 4. General Assembly dissolves the following committees from the close of General Assembly 2024: Finance Committee, Communications Committee, Human Resources Committee and the Church House Management Group. General Assembly discharges the members and thanks them for their service. For the avoidance of doubt, General Assembly transfers any functions and responsibilities not explicitly mentioned to the Resources Committee with effect from the close of General Assembly.</p>

	<p>Resolution 50</p> <p>5. Assembly thanks the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins for his ten years' service as Clerk of General Assembly and offers him its good wishes for his future ministry.</p>
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Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To appoint members of various committees and groups and external appointments, to note changes to be implemented from General Assembly 2024 and to thank people standing down from service.
Main points	As above.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	Wide consultation with staff and officers of General Assembly, Synods, local churches and the committees and groups where appointments are required.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Report to General Assembly 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The committee brings to General Assembly for authorisation the names of people to serve as Assembly Officers, as convenors and secretaries of Assembly committees, or as members of those committees, for set periods. It also recommends names of people to serve on various Panels and to represent the United Reformed Church on other bodies.

2. Nominations Committee

- 2.1 The Nominations Committee has served the United Reformed Church for 52 years with just a few changes to its Terms of Reference. Throughout that time, every Synod has been represented on the Nominations Committee, whose members served for as long as their Synod determined. They brought knowledge of the skills, experience and interests of ministers and members in their Synods to inform recommendations, greatly helped by the experience of the General Secretaries and senior members of staff supporting the Committee. It has been well served by several Secretaries, who since 1987 have been volunteers appointed by Assembly for four year periods with occasional extensions.
- 2.2 The acceptance by the 2023 General Assembly of the recommendations of the Church Life Review introduced major changes in the way nominations are managed. All officers and members of the current Committee are standing down

at the end of this Assembly (although the Secretary will complete post-assembly work before handing over). We ask Assembly to offer them sincere thanks for their work.

- 2.3 General Assembly will appoint a new Nominations Committee of six people, supported by Nominations Champions in each Synod, the Youth Executive and Global and Intercultural Ministries. Secretarial support will be provided by Church House Administrative staff. The safer recruitment process will be followed for all nominations.

3. Work since the 2023 General Assembly

- 3.1 With the implementation of Church Life Review recommendations, the number of URC Committees has been reduced. The work of the following committees will be incorporated into the Resources Committee: the Church House Management Group, the Communications Committee, the Finance Committee and the Human Resources Advisory Group, and therefore these committees are no longer included in the Nominations list. We ask General Assembly to dissolve these committees, discharge the officers and members, and thank them for their work.
- 3.2 Considerable Committee time has been spent exploring proposals for the future management of the nominations process and ensuring, as far as possible, that there is a smooth handover. It has also responded to the questions posed by the Net-Zero Task Group, and the recommendations of the Positive Action Task Group.
- 3.3 In the course of the year, we have selected 12 people from the Panel for General Assembly Appointments to serve on three Synod Moderator Nominating Groups.
- 3.4 Further members have been nominated to serve on the various panels of the Disciplinary Process. We thank the Revd Andy Braunston for continuing to identify, interview, nominate and train members of the panels.
- 3.5 The Committee sought to ensure that the membership of all Committees and Panels is compliant with the equalities guidelines of the United Reformed Church. Care was taken to ensure the Assembly membership of Nominating Groups for Synod Moderator and Staff appointments reflected as far as possible the diversity of the Church.
- 3.6 The Committee collects and records monitoring data. All those invited to serve on the Church’s committees, working groups and Panels were asked to complete a monitoring form. This information is requested to track the URC’s journey to becoming an anti-racist church. Following a suggestion made by the Assembly Moderator, we are using a revised terminology in the summary monitoring report for 2023-4 included below.

61 acceptances to the invitations sent were received between September 2023 and April 2024.

Ordained	32	52.5%
Lay	29	47.5%

Male	31	51%
Female	30	49%

An analysis of 74 responses – acceptance/refusals providing monitoring data shows this age spread:

Under 26	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
3	9	10	18	16	18
4%	12%	13.5%	24.5%	21.5%	24.5%

74 responses gave ethnic origin:

Global Majority	Global Minority ('white')
15	59
20.5%	79.5%

4. Clerk of the General Assembly

4.1 The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins has served as Clerk of the General Assembly for ten years. He has consistently demonstrated an encyclopaedic knowledge of United Reformed Church procedures and policies, which he deployed with wisdom, good humour and necessary flexibility to keep Assembly, Assembly Executive and Mission Council meetings on track. He worked alongside two General Secretaries, the Revd John Proctor and the Revd Dr John Bradbury, advising and supporting them. He has always been willing to advise Synod Clerks and Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries, and responded with admirable swiftness to queries.

Faced with unprecedented issues in the light of the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, he produced revised Standing Orders for use in virtual meetings and then hybrid (combined in person and virtual) meetings.

He undertook the role of Clerk as a volunteer, with all its demands on his experience, skills and time, while serving as the full-time minister of local churches. In this time, he also managed to complete his PhD, and wrote a book, 'Pastoral Care in Practice', a helpful guide to a core part of local church life. This year, he was inducted to a new role as Moderator of the Wessex Synod. If Assembly agrees, he will also be the Convenor the Resources Committee.

4.2 The Nominations Committee is sure that Assembly will wish to thank Michael for his long service as Clerk, and wish him well for his future work. It presents a Resolution to that effect.

5. Thanks to all who serve on Assembly Committees

The Church continues to be blessed by many willing members who give their time and gifts to serve on its committees, panels and working groups, or who represent it on outside bodies. The formal acceptance of this report and the long list of names that follows is offered with a real sense of gratitude for all who serve in this way.

6. Resignations

6.1 General Assembly is asked to note the following resignations:

<i>Ref</i>	<i>Committee/Group</i>	<i>Name</i>
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Mr Stuart Dew
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Mrs Jean Innes
2.5	Disciplinary Investigation Panel	Professor Jean McLelian
2.5	Disciplinary Panel – Senior Member	The Revd Dr Janet Tollington
4.1.1	Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee	The Revd Tim Clarke
4.4	Safeguarding Committee	Mr Alex Walker

7. Those to be appointed or re-appointed

Those agreeing to be appointed for the first time, for a further term, and those returning following a break in service are listed in the table below.

Key: ** = new appointment, † = extension of term of service, †† = further term of service after a break.

Ref	Committee/Group	Name	Role	Years
2.2.1	Panel for General Assembly Appointments	The Revd Janet Adamson	Member [†]	GA24- GA26
2.7	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee	The Revd Ruth Dillion	Member ^{**}	GA24- GA28

2.7	Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee	Mrs Bridget Akinyombo	Member**	GA24- GA28
4.2	Education and Learning Committee	Mrs Margaret Marshall	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.2	Resources Committee	The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins	Convenor**	GA24- GA28
5.2	Resources Committee	Ms Joanna Morfoh	Member**	GA24- GA28
5.2	Resources Committee	Ms Jane Humphrey	Member**	GA24- GA26
5.2	Resources Committee	The Revd Nick Mark	Member**	GA24- GA28
5.2	Resources Committee	Mr Steve Tringham	Member**	GA24- GA28
5.2	Resources Committee	Mr Tim Llewelyn	Member**	GA24- GA28
5.3	Equalities Committee	Mrs Judy Rogers	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.5	United Reformed Church Trust	The Revd James Breslin	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.5	United Reformed Church Trust	Mr David Greatorex	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.5	United Reformed Church Trust	Mr Clifford Patten	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.5	United Reformed Church Trust	The Revd Nick Mark	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.6	United Reformed Church Pension Trust Ltd	Mr Colin MacBean	Member†	GA24- GA28
5.7	Investment Committee	Mr Lyndon Thomas	Member†	GA24- 31 st

				December 2026
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	Mr Ray Dunnett	Member †	GA24- GA28
10.4	Milton Mount Foundation	The Revd Kevin Swaine	Member †	GA24- GA28
10.5	Silcoates School	The Revd Jason McCullagh	Member †	GA24- GA27
10.5	Silcoates School	The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby	Member**	GA24- GA27
Ref.	Committee/Group	Name	Role	Years
11.2	Churches Legislation Advisory Service	Ms Muna Levan Harris	Member †	GA23- GA27
11.3	Congregational Fund Board	The Revd Bacheland Yemtsa	Member**	GA24- GA28
11.11	United Reformed Church History Society	The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar	Member †	GA24- GA28

8. Assembly committees and other appointments

Notes:

1. The General Assembly Moderator, the Assembly Moderator-elect, the Immediate-past Assembly Moderator and the General Secretary are members *ex officio* of every standing committee. Deputy General Secretaries are members *ex officio* of every standing committee within their department. Any *ex officio* member may arrange for an appropriate deputy, such as any Deputy General Secretary or an officer of Assembly, to attend on their behalf. Any committee may invite other Assembly officers (or their deputies) or staff members to attend in a non-voting capacity where the business so requires.
2. Symbols have been used as follows: ** denotes those whom General Assembly is invited to appoint for the first time; † denotes those who have been invited to extend their periods of service; †† denotes those returning after a break.
3. Numbers in round brackets following names indicate the member's Synod: (1) Northern, (2) North Western, (3) Mersey, (4) Yorkshire, (5) East Midlands, (6) West Midlands, (7) Eastern, (8) South Western, (9) Wessex, (10) Thames North, (11) Southern, (12) Wales, (13) Scotland. This numbering is not shown where it is not relevant.

4. When a member of a committee is there as a representative of another body or a particular category, this is indicated in round brackets following the name.
5. Committee membership is normally for a period of four years, though this may sometimes be renewable. Committee convenors serve an additional preliminary year as convenor-elect. In sections one to five of the report, appointments with a different term are noted.
6. Dates in square brackets following names indicate the date of retirement, assuming a full term.
7. In accordance with the decision of General Assembly 2000, some nominations are made directly by the National Synods of Wales and Scotland.
8. New committee members normally take up their roles at the conclusion of General Assembly.
9. Nominations to Assembly committees and their subcommittees, and to advisory and task groups serving Assembly and Assembly Executive, should be of members of the United Reformed Church, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly. A term of service maybe completed at the discretion of the Convenor if someone ceases to be a member of the URC during their term.
10. Nominations of URC representatives to external bodies should either be URC members, or youth representatives who meet the criteria for membership of Assembly, or URC staff who have relevant expertise. The nomination of a staff member would automatically lapse if the person concerned ceased to hold a URC post.
11. The names in the following list are submitted for approval by General Assembly and it will be updated after the close of Assembly. The latest list approved by General Assembly, by Assembly Executive or by Assembly Officer Action on its behalf is available at: <http://bit.ly/URCNom>. Committee Secretaries are advised to refer to this list for the membership of their Committee.

Officers of Assembly

Assembly Moderator:	The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson
Assembly Moderator-elect:	The Revd Timothy Meadows
Immediate past-Moderator:	The Revd Fiona Bennett
Clerk of General Assembly:	The Revd Sarah Moore [2030]
Assistant Clerk of Assembly:	Vacancy
Honorary Treasurer:	Mr Alan Yates [2029]

1. Assembly Executive

Assembly Executive acts on behalf of General Assembly. It consists of the officers of Assembly, the immediate past and elect Assembly Moderators, the General Secretary and Treasurer and their Deputies, four representatives from each Synod, normally, but not necessarily, including the Moderator and the Synod Clerk, together with the Convenors of Assembly Committees, the Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust and three members for URC Youth, including the URC Youth Moderator. In attendance

are staff secretaries, Assembly Moderator's chaplain and others as appropriate.

1.2 Law and Policy Advisory group

Convenor: Ms Morag McLintock [2028][†]

Secretary: Mr Neil Mackenzie [2026][†]

General Secretary

Clerk to General Assembly

Assistant Clerk to General Assembly

Synod Clerk representative: Mr Tim Hopley {2027}^{**}

Property, legal and trust officers' representative: Ms Muna Levan-Harris

Nominated members:

The Revd Steven Manders [2025]

Mr Dean Taylor [2026]^{**}

In attendance: Legal Adviser

1.3 Listed buildings advisory group

Convenor: The Revd Dr James Mather [2025][†] (nominated by the group)

Secretary: Mr Geoff Milnes [2025][†] (nominated by the group)

General Secretary

Synod Representatives:

Vacancy (1)

Mr Michael Williams (2)

Ms Alison Lee (3)

Vacancy (4)

Mrs Judith Booth (5)

Mr Matthew McDade (6)

Mr Peter West (7)

Mr Roger James (8)

Vacancy (9)

Mr Christopher Buckwell (10)

Mr Colin McCracken (11)

1.4 Resource sharing task group

Convenor: The Revd Steve Faber [2026] (Synod Moderator)

Secretary: Mr Chris Atherton

Treasurer: Vacancy

Miss Margaret Atkinson

Mr Mike Gould

URC Treasurer

1.5 Net Zero task group

Convenor: The Revd Chris Baillie

Representative members:

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

The Revd George Watt [2025]

Synod Moderator

Mr Bill Potter

Finance Committee

Mr Clifford Patten

URC Trust

Mr Simeon Mitchell

Ms Victoria James

Chief Operating Officer

Ms Maya Withall

URC Youth

Ms Judy Harris

URC Children

Mr Matthew McDade

Synod Property Officer

Ms Eileen Newington

Synod Green Apostle

2. General Secretariat

2.1 Worship, Faith and Order Committee

The Convenor and Members normally serve for four years

Convenor: The Revd Dr Robert Pope [2026]

Secretaries:

The Minister for Digital Worship: The Revd Andy Braunston

Mission Support Officer: Ms Lindsey Brown

Nominated members:

The Revd Dr Andrew Prasad [2029]	The Revd Sue McCoan [2026]
Ms Diana Paulding [2026]	The Revd Kristin Ofstad [2026]
The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson [2027]	

2.2 Nominations Committee

Names to be brought by the Assembly Business Committee

2.2.1 Panel for General Assembly appointments

Members usually serve for five years, as training is required.

Retiring 2024

Dr Paul Ashitey (10)

The Revd Sal Bateman (10)

Mr David Gartside (3)

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson (9)

The Revd George Mwaura (5)

The Revd Paul Robinson (12)

Mr Alex Walker (4)

Mr Matthew Barkley (9)

The Revd Lucy Brierley (9)

The Revd Peter Henderson (7)

Mrs Pippa Hodgson (5)

Ms Victoria Paulding (5)

Mr Patrick Sheard (1)

Mr Reuben Watt (11)

Retiring 2026

The Revd Janet Adamson (13)

The Revd Reginald Mudenda (11)

The Revd Mark Robinson (9)

Mrs Helen Lidgett (5)

Mrs Pat Poinen (1)

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid (10)

Retiring 2027

Mrs Sue Brown** (9)

Mrs Wendy Dunnett** (9)

Mr Trevor Orr** (4)

Ms Lorraine Downer** (10)

The Revd Elaine Hutchinson** (6)

Retiring 2028

Ms Linda Austin**

Mrs Barbara Ellis† (3)

The Revd Alison Hall †(3)

Ms Megan Price ** (12)

Mr Donald Swift (3)**

Mrs Sheila Davies † (3)

Mrs Rita Griffiths** (3)

The Revd Stephens Manders**

Mr Bill Robson †† (13)

2.3 Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group (formerly MIND)

Convenor: The Revd Steven Manders [2026]**

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary for Discipleship

General Secretary

Secretary for Ministries

Consultant to Investigation Team: The Revd Ian Kirby [2027]

Consultant for Ministers: Mrs Fiona Smith [2026]

Training Officer: Vacancy

Synod Moderator: The Revd Bridget Banks [2025]

Convenor for Assembly Commission for Discipline: The Revd Nigel Adkinson [2028]

Senior Member Investigation Team: The Revd Martin Spain [2029]

Secretary Assembly Commission for Discipline: Mr Philip Laws [2026]

Secretary Disciplinary Appeal Commission: The Revd Andy Braunston
Clerk of General Assembly: The Revd Sarah Moore [2030]
Assistant Clerk of General Assembly: Vacancy
Designated Safeguarding Lead: Ms Sharon Barr

2.4 Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline

Minister members:

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson
The Revd Nick Mark

The Revd Raymond Singh

Elder members:

Mr Tim Crossley
Mr Dodie Khurshid

Ms Sandra Wood

2.5 Disciplinary Investigation Panel

Senior Member: The Revd Martin Spain [2029]

Deputy Senior Member: Vacancy

Members (not time-limited):

Mr John Collings
Mrs Chris Harris
Mr Andrew Howes
The Revd Lesley Moseley
The Revd Zadie Orr
Mr Giles Robinson
Mrs Margaret Smith
Mrs Liz Swanwick
Dr Gordon Woods

The Revd Martin Ferris
Mr Keir Hounsome
Ms Alison Jiggins
The Revd Craig Muir
Mr Mark Rigby
Ms Cathy Simpson
The Revd Martin Spain
The Revd Dr Janet Tollington
The Revd Geoff Wright

2.6 Assembly Commission for Discipline Panel

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Adkinson [2028]

Deputy Convenor: Dr David Jones [2028]

Members (not time-limited):

The Revd Nigel Adkinson
Ms Mary Coole
Ms Janine Cowie
Mr Remi Ferguson
Mrs Cathy Glazier
The Revd Dominic Grant
Prof Graham Handscomb
The Revd Jonathan Hill
Dr David Jones
The Revd Maria Lee
The Revd Alan McGougan
Ms Morag McLintock
The Revd Sarah Moore
Mr Dean Taylor
Ms Marie Trubic
Mr Gordon Wanless

Ms Nneoma Chima
Mr Ian Corless
Mrs Barbara Ellis
The Revd Peter Flint
Ms Barbara Goom
The Revd John Grundy
The Revd Marcus Hargis
The Revd Terry Jin
Mrs Mary Kelly
The Revd Sue McCoan
The Revd Martha McInnes
Dr James Mawdesley
The Revd Wilbert Sayimani
The Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe
Mrs Janet Virr
Ms Darnette Whitby-Reid

2.7 Disciplinary Appeals Commission

Appointed by the Officers of General Assembly

Secretary: The Revd Andy Braunston
The Revd Fiona Bennett

The Revd Bill Bowman

The Revd Clare Downing
 Mr Alastair Forsyth
 Ms Elizabeth Lawson KC
 Mrs Val Morrision
 The Revd Nigel Uden

Mr John Ellis
 The Revd Walt Johnson JP
 Ms Muna Levan-Harris
 Mr Richard Pooler

2.8 Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch [2027]**

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

General Secretary

Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator: The Revd Bridget Banks [2026]

Nominated members:

The Revd Ruth Dillon [2028]

Mrs Bridget Akinyombo [2028]

Mrs Hilary Miles [2026]**

3. Mission department

3.1 Mission Committee

Convenor: Sarah Lane Cawte [2028]

Deputy Convenor-elect: The Revd Wilbert Sayimani [2024 -2028]**

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

The Revd Katrina Hackett (1) [2027]**

Mr Aftab Mughal (2) [2025]

The Revd Stuart Nixon (3) [2026]

The Revd Barry Welch (4) [2027]**

The Revd Jane Wade (5) [2027]**

The Revd Debbie Brown (6) [2027]**

The Revd Alex Clare-Young (7) [2027]**

The Revd Henriette Wentink (8) [2027]†

The Revd Ray Stanyon (9) [2025]

The Revd Eddie Boon (10)** [2027]**

The Revd Martin Knight (11) [2026]**

The Revd Branwen Rees (12) [2026]†

The Revd John Bremner (13) [2027]**

3.1.1 Commitment for Life (CfL) reference group

Convenor: Mr Richard Lewney [2028]†

At least two CfL advocates

Representative of mission team

Representative of mission committee

Representative from Christian Aid

Representative of Global Justice Now

Programme Officer for Global Justice and Partnerships

3.1.2 Interfaith enabling group

The Convenor is nominated by the Mission Committee.

Convenor: The Revd Tracey Lewis [2028]†

Secretary:

Programme Officer – URC Global Justice and Partnerships

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales

Nominated members:

Ms Victoria Turner [2025]

Mr Andy Lie [2027]†

Co-opted members

The Revd Dr Graham Adams [2024]

The Revd Dr Mark Godin [2024]

The Revd Dr John Parry

3.1.3 Joint Public Issues Team strategy and policy group

Deputy General Secretary (Mission)

Synod Moderator: The Revd Steve Faber [2024]

3.1.4 Rural strategy group (United Reformed Church / Methodist)

Future being reviewed by the Mission Committee.

3.1.5 Pioneer and Fresh Expressions Enabling group

Representatives:

Mission Committee	Ministries Committee
Education and Learning Committee	Children and Youth Work Committee
URC Pioneer Network	

3.1.6 Legacies of Slavery Task Group

Convenor: Professor David Reynolds

Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Programme Officer (Global, Justice and Partnerships)

The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo

The Revd John Campbell

The Revd Zaidie Orr

Ms Victoria Turner

4. Discipleship department

4.1 Ministries committee

Convenor: The Revd Mary Thomas [2026]**

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Leadership in worship advocate: Mrs Maggie Kirkbride [2027]**

Synod Moderator: The Revd Jamie Kissack [2026]

Convenors of the Accreditations (CRCW and SCM), Maintenance of Ministry and

Retired Ministers' Housing sub-committees

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Nominated members:

Mrs Gill Bates [2028]†

Mr Chris Kellett [2025]

The Revd Lesley Moseley [2025]

The Revd Terry Jin [2027]**

4.1.1 Accreditations (CRCW and SCM) sub-committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Paul Dean [2025]

Joint Secretaries: Secretary for Ministries and CRCW and SCM Development Worker

Convenor of the Assessment Board

Representatives:

Synod Moderator: The Revd Jamie Kissack [2025]

SCMs: Vacancy

CRCWs: Ms Jo Patterson [2026]**

Nominated members:

The Revd Alison Micklem [2025]

The Revd Carole Marsden [2026]**

The Revd Jacob Bali [2026]**

4.1.2 Maintenance of ministry sub-committee

Under review.

4.1.3 Retired Ministers' Housing Society sub-committee

Terms of service shall be for four years with the possibility of a further term of four years. The Convenor shall be a member of the Ministries Committee nominated by that Committee.

Convenor: The Revd Paul Whittle [2027]†

Secretary: Secretary for Ministries

Synod Moderator: The Revd George Felton [2025]

Nominated Members:

The Revd Don Nichols {2026} **

The Revd David Lawrence [2027] **

Representative members:

Tenants:

The Revd Dr Martin Camroux

Retired Ministers' Housing Society:

The Revd Simon Walkling

Co-opted member:

The Revd David Coote

4.1.4 Assessment board

Members usually serve for five years as training is required.

Convenor: Professor Bill Gould [2026]†

Retiring 2025

Ms Mercy Nimako (11)

Ms Liz Sharples (5)

The Revd Samuel Silungwe (5)

Retiring 2026

The Revd Lis Mullen (2)

The Revd Sue McCoan (10)

The Revd Gerald England (8)†

Retiring 2027

The Revd Jamie Kissack (4)

The Revd Tim Lowe (4)

Mrs Kate Yates (10)

The Revd Jacob Bali (11)

Mr Simon Loveitt (4)

Retiring 2028

Mr Keith Reading (3)

4.2 Education and Learning Committee

Convenor: Mrs Pippa Hodgson [2027]**

Secretary: Secretary for Education and Learning

Nominated Members: (nominated by the Nominations Committee)

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2028]

The Revd Andrew Mudharara [2026]**

Ms Maggie Eldridge-Mrotzek [2028]**

Ex officio members:

A General Assembly moderator (current, past or elect)

General Secretary

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Representative members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

RCL Principals: The Revd Dr John McNeil Scott [2026]**

Synod Training and Development Officers: The Revd Dr Rob Hoch [2026]**

CYDOs and other Children and Youth Work officers: Mr Richard Knott [2026]**

EM1 students

Non-voting members: (nominated by the appropriate group)

Synod Moderator: The Revd Clare Downing [2025]

Methodist Church representative (in attendance as required):

Mr Richard Armiger [2026]

RCL Principals:

The Revd Dr Robert Pope (Interim)

The Revd Dr Adam Scott

Secretary for Ministries

4.2.1 Stepwise development group

Convenor: The Revd Alison Davis

Administrator: Stepwise Programme Assistant

Secretary for Education and Learning Stepwise Programme Manager

Education and Learning Instructional Designer

Education and Learning Programme Officer (by invitation)

Convenor of the Stepwise Learning Standards Board

Representatives – serving appropriate terms of service:

Children's and Youth Work Committee: Mr Leo Roberts

Synod mission enablers network: The Revd Stuart Radcliffe

Synod training and development officers: Vacancy

Resource Centres for Learning: a tutor

Together Ethnic and Minority URC: The Revd Zaidie Orr

Co-opted members:

The Revd Simon Goddard (Fresh Expressions)

The Revd Peter Henderson

Mr Iain Johnston (Faith in Community Scotland)

The convenor and the co-opted members are appointed by the Education and Learning Committee.

4.3 Children's and Youth Work Committee

Convenor: The Revd Samantha Sheehan [2028]

Secretary: Head of Children's and Youth Work

URC Youth Moderator

URC Youth Moderator-elect

Pilots representative

Nominated members:

Mr Matthew Barkley [2027][†]

Mr Reuben Watt [2027][†]

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2028][†]

The Revd Julian Sanders [2025]

Ms Caroline Akinyele [2025]

4.4 Safeguarding Committee

Convenor: The Revd Roger Jones [2026]

Secretary: Designated Safeguarding Lead

Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

Secretary for Ministries

Training and Development Coordinator

Policy Development Coordinator

Nominated members:

Mrs Kate Yates [2026]**

Synod Safeguarding Practice Group representative:

Ms Julie Rafferty [2026]**

Synod Moderator: The Revd George Watt [2025]

National Synod of Scotland representative: Ms Ruth Gould [2026]**

URC Advocated Survivors Group representatives (up to two): group not yet operative

Independent members:

Mr Tim Carter (Methodist Church) [2026]**

Ms Fi Cisneros [2026]**

In attendance:

Head of Children's and Youth Work

Secretary for Education and Learning

5. Administration and resources department

5.1 Business Committee

Convenor: The Revd Mark Robinson [2025]

Convenor-elect:

Secretary: General Secretary

Moderator of General Assembly

Moderator-elect and Immediate-past Moderator of General Assembly

Clerk of General Assembly

Assistant Clerk of General Assembly

URC Treasurer

Nominated members:

Ms Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

Mr Reuben Watt [2026]**

5.2 Resources Committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins [2028]

Nominated members:

Ms Jame Humphrey [2026]

Mr Tim Llewelyn [2028]

The Revd Nick Mark [2028]

Ms Joanna Morfoh [2028]

Mr Steve Tringham [2028]

Vacancy (Human Resources)

Ex-officio Members:

The Chief Finance Officer

Chief Operating Officer – Secretary

Treasurer

Deputy Treasurer

5.3 Equalities Committee

Convenor: The Revd Naison Hove [2026]

Secretary: The Revd David Salsbury [2027]†

URC Youth Equalities and Diversity Representative: Ms Megan Westgarth [2027]**

Nominated members:

The Revd Jayne Taylor [2027]†

Ms Judy Rogers [2028]

Mrs Janet Raven [2026]**

Ms Kirsty Mabbott [2027]**

The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo [2027]**

5.3.1 Affirmative Action task group

Convenor: Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Secretary: Equalities Committee Secretary

Representative Members:

Mission Committee: Ms Lindsey Brown

URC Youth: Ms Philippa Osei

Members:

Ms Muskaan Jonathan

The Revd John Macaulay

The Revd Andrew Mudharara

The Revd George Mwaura

Mrs Pat Poinen

5.4. Pensions Committee

Convenor: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington [2026]**

Secretary: Pensions Manager

Nominated Members:

Ms Joana Marfoh [2028]†

The Revd John Piper [2025]†

Co-opted members, maximum of three:

Mr David Martin

Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer

Convenor of the Investment Committee

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee

Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

In attendance:

Chief Finance Officer
Secretary for Ministries (for Ministers' Pension Fund matters)

5.5 United Reformed Church Trust

Members normally serve for four years and may only serve a maximum of two terms (eight years). The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The members of the Trust elect the chair from among their own number and appoint a Secretary and Deputy Secretary.

Chair: Ms Catriona Wheeler [2026]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Deputy Secretary: Mr John Samson

Members:

Group one (Synods 1, 2, 3, 4, 13):

The Revd Nick Mark (13) [2028]

Group two (Synods 5, 6, 7, 8, 12):

Mr Clifford Patten (7) [2028]

The Revd James Breslin (5) [2028]

Dr Stephen Thompson (7) [2026]**

Mr David Greatorex (5) [2028]

Mr David Lathbury (6) [2026]†

Group three (Synods 9,10,11):

The Revd Julian Macro (9) [2025]

The Revd John Macaulay (10) [2026]**

There is one vacancy for a group member

URC Youth appointee: Vacancy

Moderator of General Assembly

Clerk of General Assembly

General Secretary

Treasurer

In attendance:

Convenor of the Investment Committee Minute Secretary

Chief Finance Officer

5.5.1 Remuneration Committee

Convenor: Mr William McVey

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources)

Ms Sushila Jetha (Methodist HR)

URC Treasurer

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

5.6 The United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Ltd

Terms run until the AGM in September. The directors of the Trust appoint new directors from those appointed as members. The board members elect the chair from among their own number and appoint the company secretary.

Chair: Mrs Bridget Micklem [December 2027]†

Deputy chair: Mr Lyndon Thomas

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Church Nominated Trustees / Directors:

Mr Colin MacBean [2028]

Mrs Faith Paulding [2025]

Convenor of the Pensions Committee: The Revd Dr Janet Tollington

URC Deputy Treasurer: Mr Vaughan Griffiths

Convenor of the Maintenance of Ministry sub-committee: Mr David Coote
(Pending a review of MoM sub-committee)

Convenor of the Investment Committee: Mr Richard Nunn

Member Nominated Trustees / Directors:

The Revd Caroline Vodden [2026]

The Revd Daniel Cheyne [2026]

Two vacancies

5.7 Investment Committee

Convenor: Mr Richard Nunn [2026]

Secretary: Ms Sandi Hallam-Jones

Members:

Dame Katharine Barker [2027][†]

Mr Lyndon Thomas [31.12.2026]

Mr Mark Kirkbride [2027]**

Mr Timothy Lancaster [2027]**

URC Treasurer

Convenor, pensions committee

Chair of United Reformed Church Trust or another director

Chair of United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust or another director

Treasurer, Westminster College

In attendance: Chief Finance Officer

6. Representatives to meetings of sister churches

6.1	General Synod of the Church of England	Mission Committee nomination
6.2	Methodist Conference	The Revd Geoffrey Clarke
6.3	Congregational Federation	Mission Committee nomination
6.4	Church of Scotland	Assembly Moderator and Synod representative
6.5	United Free Church of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.6	Scottish Assembly of the Congregational Federation	Synod nomination
6.7	Scottish Episcopal Church	Synod nomination
6.8	Methodist Church in Scotland	Synod nomination
6.9	Baptist Union of Scotland	Synod nomination
6.10	Presbyterian Church of Wales	Assembly Moderator
6.11	Union of Welsh Independents	Synod nomination
6.12	Covenanted Baptists	Synod nomination
6.13	Church in Wales Governing Board	Synod nomination
6.14	Provincial Synod of the Moravian Church	Mission Committee nomination

7. Representatives on ecumenical church bodies

The following have been nominated as United Reformed Church representatives at the major gatherings of the ecumenical bodies listed.

7.1 World Council of Churches 2022 Assembly

Delegates: The Revd Sarah Moore and Ms Karen Campbell

7.2 Council for World Mission Assembly

The following are appointed for the 2024 CWM Assembly:

Ms Karen Campbell

Ms Lindsey Brown

The Revd Tim Meadows

Mr Zeerak-Shahbaz

7.3 World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) General Council

Representatives are appointed for each meeting of the Council.

7.4 Conference of European Churches Assembly

Secretary for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations and one other

7.14 Churches' committee on funerals and crematoria

The Revd Sally Thomas

7.15 Churches' forum for safeguarding

Designated Safeguarding Lead

7.16 Churches' network for nonviolence

Head of Children's and Youth Work

7.17 Churches Visitor and Tourism Association

Mrs Valerie Jenkins

7.18 Joint liturgical group

The Revd Dr Ana Gobledale

8. Representatives on formal bilateral and multilateral committees

8.1 Methodist/United Reformed Church liaison group

Co-convenor: The Revd Geoffrey Clarke (Synod Moderator) (five-year term) [2026]

Co-secretary: Mission Support Officer

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Scotland

Ecumenical and Interfaith Officer for the National Synod of Wales

Nominated Members – serving one or two four -year terms:

The Revd Memona Shahbaz [2027**] Mr Tim Hopley [2025]

8.1.1 Methodist / United Reformed Church strategic oversight group

The General Secretariat

8.2 EMU Partnership (Scottish Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church in Scotland and the United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland)

[see note 7]

Appointed by the National Synod of Scotland

8.3 Conversations between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Anglican Communion

The Revd Dr Julian Templeton

8.4 Roman Catholic / United Reformed Church Dialogue Group

Co-chair: The Revd Philip Brooks

Co-secretary: Ms Lindsey Brown

Members:

Mr John Cornell

The Revd Dr Sarah Hall

The Revd Jason McCullagh

The Revd Lindsey Sanderson

9. Representatives on governing bodies of theological colleges, etc

9.1 Northern College

The Revd Raymond Singh [2025]†

Mrs Margaret Marshall [2028]

The Revd John Grundy [2025]

The Revd Mark Bates [2026]†

Dr Lesley Coote [2026]**

Synod Moderator: The Revd James Kissack [2024]

In attendance: Secretary for Education and Learning

9.2 Westminster College: board of governors

Governors serve six-year terms, which may be renewed.

Convenor: The Revd Nigel Uden [2026]

Convenor-elect: Vacancy:

Clerk to the governors: The Revd Naomi Young-Rodas [2028]**

Honorary Treasurer (Westminster College): Mr Gilbert Heathcote [2029]**

Principal: The Revd Dr Peter McEnhill

Mr Gilbert Heathcote [2029]**

Mr John Ellis [2029]†

Mrs Darnette Whitby-Reid [2025]

The Revd Stuart Scott [2024]†

The Revd David Miller [2028]

The Revd Ryan Simons [2028]**

Note 1: A further six governors are appointed by the Cambridge Theological Federation, the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University, the college's teaching staff, its students and the Cheshunt Foundation.

Note 2: The Secretary for Education and Learning and the URC Treasurer are normally in attendance.

9.2.1 The Cheshunt Foundation

The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo [2026]

9.2.2 Cambridge Theological Federation

Convenor, Westminster College governors

10. Governors of colleges and schools with which the United Reformed Church is associated

10.1 Caterham School

Southern Synod Moderator

10.2 Eltham College

Mr Martin Fosten

10.3 Walthamstow Hall

Vacancy

10.4 Milton Mount Foundation

Mrs Daphne Bembridge [2027]†

Mr Ray Dunnett [2028]

The Revd Kevin Swaine [2028]

The Revd Derek Lindfield [2026]†

Mrs Ann Bulley [2028]**

Five URC governors serve four-year terms, which may be renewed.

10.5 Silcoates School

The Revd Jason McCullagh [2027]

The Revd Dr Rosalind Selby [2028]

Governors serve three-year terms.

10.6 Taunton School

Baptist governor at present

10.7 Bishops Stortford College

Mr Richard Harrison

11. Miscellaneous

The United Reformed Church is represented on a variety of other national organisations and committees as follows:

11.1 Arthur Rank Centre

The Revd Elizabeth Caswell

11.2 Churches Legislation Advisory Service

Ms Muna Levan Harris [2027] General Secretary

11.3 Congregational Fund Board

The Revd Janine Atkinson [2027][†]

Mrs Mary Steele [2027][†]

Mr Mike Hart [2024]

The Revd Howard Sharp [2027]**

One vacancy

11.4 Congregational Memorial Hall Trust

Mr John Ellis [2027][†]

Mrs Margaret Thompson [2024]

Mr Philip Bonnier [2025]

The Revd Derek Wales [2025]

The Revd Julian Macro [2026]**

One vacancy

Representatives serve four-year terms which may be renewed.

11.5 Historic England Places of Worship Forum

Convenor of the listed buildings advisory group

11.6 Lord Wharton's Charity

Mr Neil McKenzie [2027]**

11.7 Retired ministers' and widows' fund

The Revd Julian Macro

One vacancy

Ms Liz Sharples

11.8 Roots for Churches Ltd

The Revd Jenny Mills**

Nominated by the Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship)

11.9 Samuel Robinson's Charities

Mr Tony Alderman

11.10 Scout Association – URC General Assembly Chaplain

The Revd Keith Morrison

This appointment is made by the Children's and Youth Work Committee.

11.11 United Reformed Church History Society

The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar [2028]

Mrs Jean Wyber [2027][†]

Dr Simone Maghenzani [2028]**

Council Members serve five-year terms, which may be renewed.

11.12 World Day of Prayer

England, Wales and Ireland:

The Revd Jane Weedon [2027]**

Scotland: Synod appointment.

11.13 Westhill Endowment Trust

The Revd Clare Callanan [2027]**

The Revd Dr Kathryn Price [2027]**

Details of these appointments were updated by the Nominations Committee Secretary following the Assembly Executive in February 2024. These updates will not be shown on the website until following General Assembly 2024.

Paper N1

Church Life Review progress report

Church Life Review

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett (Programme Manager, Church Life Review) myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on the revised process and general progress of Church Life Review Phase Two (Design).
Main points	A revised approach will be taken to the Church Life Review (CLR), consisting of a single Steering Group overseen by a sub-committee of the Business Committee. Subsequent revisions have been made to the approach to CLR workstreams, including an increased role for external consultants and the establishment of living labs. Progress has been made in accordance with the revised approach and a plan for delivery is in place.
Previous relevant documents	Papers N1 and N2, General Assembly 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	Business Committee, General Secretariat, Synod Representatives, CLR contributors and stakeholders.

Summary of impact

Financial	Budgetary implications of the revised approach are estimated to be covered by the existing CLR allocation.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

1. Background

- 1.1. The work of the previous Church Life Review (CLR) Group concluded following the completion of Phase One. Phase Two (Design) has now commenced.
- 1.2. Three task groups were planned on the strength of General Assembly 2023 Resolutions 48, 49, and 51. These three task groups aligned with the CLR's three workstreams: finance resource sharing, employment of lay workers, and provision of shared support services.

- 1.3. Too few nominations and applications were received to populate the three task groups, requiring a revised approach. As this revised approach was taking shape, the Programme Manager commenced in role.
- 2. Phase two objectives**
 - 2.1. The primary objectives of CLR Phase Two are to investigate new ways of working in each of the three workstreams, analyse the outcomes of these investigations, and then deliver a set of recommendations to an extraordinary session of General Assembly in November 2025. The emphasis of Phase Two is on exploration and design, giving scope for creative responses to emergent change.
- 3. Revised approach – CLR structure**
 - 3.1. A revised approach to the CLR was approved by the Business Committee on 16 April, 2024. The three task groups will be replaced by a single Steering Group, responsible for guiding the content of the Church Life Review. This Steering Group will be overseen by a Church Life Review Sub-Committee, drawn from the Business Committee. Any substantive changes to the agreed programme process will be referred to the Business Committee in its full composition.
 - 3.2. The Steering Group will be composed of eight experienced individuals who have an interest in all three Church Life Review workstreams. The Steering Group will inform the work of the CLR, support the Programme Manager and General Secretary with events and consultations, oversee work led by external consultants, inform and advise on the development of living labs, secure additional capacity where necessary, and prepare reports and recommendations for General Assembly in November 2025 following the conclusion of its investigations and trials. The Steering Group will not be expected to undertake the bulk of the work themselves, but to guide and inform the process.
 - 3.3. The CLR sub-committee will be responsible for day-to-day programme governance, including monitoring progress and budget.
 - 3.4. The CLR will be supported by a wider informal consultative network, consisting of interested individuals who will be drawn into key conversations based on their skills and expertise. This network will include individuals who applied to one of the original task groups and remain interested in contributing to the CLR.
- 4. Revised approach – CLR workstreams**
 - 4.1. The new approach to programme structure requires a new approach to the work itself. The CLR consists of three workstreams: financial resource sharing, employment of lay workers, and provision of shared support services. The aim of all this is to unburden local churches, equipping them for future flourishing.
 - 4.2. The work in the financial resource sharing workstream will mostly be carried out by external consultants, who will undertake feasibility studies on three models of resource sharing, and report back to the Steering Group. Conversations with consultants are ongoing. Expert consultants will bring with

them professional financial and legal expertise. Care will be taken to ensure that any consultants engaged by the CLR are properly briefed and understand the nuances of the context.

- 4.3. For the support services and lay worker employment workstreams, the Steering Group will collaborate with key stakeholders to devise new ways of working, and test these ideas through living labs, designed and run in collaboration with Synods. The living labs will enable the CLR to trial new models on the ground, and see how they work for local churches. They may also be one of the ways in which we might discern how God is moving.
- 4.4. The shared support services workstream is closely related to a piece of ongoing work in the Admin and Resources team around a compliance resource portal for local churches, to replace the PLATO handbook. An initial questionnaire to local churches is planned. Following this, a set of resources will be prepared, and Synods will be invited to a consultative event to consider the new resources and other ways to unburden local churches. This conversation will inform the work of the shared services workstream. The relationship between these work items will evolve over time.

5. Consultative events

- 5.1. There is a commitment to making the Church Life Review process transparent and inclusive. There will therefore be a number of formal and informal consultative events throughout Phase Two.
- 5.2. A finance consultation took place on 13 June, 2024. Synods were invited to send three representatives; members of the Steering Group, applicants to the original finance task group, and a number of other individuals were also in attendance. The aims of the event were to:
- discuss and shape a vision for what new models of resource sharing might look like and enable, in line with the Values and Principles agreed by General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 47)
 - reach common ground on three models of resource sharing for external consultants to explore through feasibility studies.
- 5.3. Future events will include a shared support services consultation with Synods (referenced in 4.4 above), to take place after local churches have responded to an initial questionnaire. Initial information about the questionnaire was shared in the May 2024 News Update. No date for this event has yet been fixed, but it is intended to take place around October 2024.

6. General progress update

- 6.1. In addition to the work outlined above, we have:
- seven confirmed Steering Group members
 - a full complement of five sub-committee members
 - an outline plan for how we will use consultants efficiently and to maximum benefit
 - programme documentation and processes in line with best practice.

7. Next steps

7.1. The major next steps are:

- ongoing meetings of the Steering Group and sub-committee throughout 2024 and 2025
- delivery of programme communications as progress continues
- contracting and briefing consultants in Summer 2024
- planning and delivering an initial set of living labs in Q3 and Q4 2024
- managing a portfolio of ongoing investigations, including feasibility studies and living labs
- receiving and analysing the outcomes of investigations in mid-2025
- delivering a set of recommendations to General Assembly in November 2025.

8. The Church Life Review is considering complex and interrelated matters; iteration and evolution will be necessary. Amongst this complexity, we are committed to making the Church Life Review a transparent and inclusive process. Changes and updates will be communicated as the programme evolves.

Paper P1

Local United Reformed Church Constitutions

Law and Polity Advisory Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Neil Mackenzie ravelston20@hotmail.co.uk On behalf of Law and Polity Advisory Group
Action required	Note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Starting with local churches, we aim for drafts for each Church Council (except District Councils and Area Councils) which those concerned can follow and distinguish between the Church functions and the charitable application of funds.
Main points	Please see narrative below.
Previous relevant documents	The model constitution for local churches.
Consultation has taken place with...	Consultation will take place immediately following Assembly with Moderators and PLATO concerning the amended model. There will be consultation with the Synod for Scotland concerning a model drafted for local churches in Scotland following discussions with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

Summary of impact

Financial	We intend to take counsel's advice on the impact of forming S/CIOs on the personal liability of church officers.
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Local churches in the Synod of Scotland have been registered with the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) in their totality, which is inconsistent with charity registration in England and Wales where the Charity Commission recognises that the URC as an institution is not a charity, and neither are its local churches. However, a recent registration which OSCR has accepted is of the funds of a local church in Scotland, which is consistent with registration in England and Wales. OSCR, in this case, has treated the church institution as not being a charity, and the charitable funds as distinct.

This has prompted the Law and Polity Advisory Group (LPAG) to review the constitutional documents for local churches which have been adopted by General Assembly (GA) and agreed with the Charity Commission. There was an urgency, but concerns were expressed about the revised draft, and further work by LPAG has been carried out in consultation with those who had expressed concern.

However, on further consideration, LPAG believes that the existing constitutional documents should be amended to clarify and distinguish better the church arrangements from the charitable funds administered and managed by, and in connection with, the local church.

A further driver for a revised draft local church constitution is the call of GA for a review of the governance of the United Reformed Church (URC) and its relationship with the United Reformed Church Trust (URCT) in the carrying out of the work of the URC. For example, the URCT is regarded by the Charity Commission as the charity trustee of the GA funds.

The result of these developments is that the production of a model local church constitution is taking longer than anticipated. Our hope is that any local church in Scotland which has not registered with OSCR will register with the agreed model, and those churches already registered will adopt the agreed model in place of any existing constitution, making it clear that what is registered is the funds.¹ Our intention is to have discussions with OSCR as soon as possible.

The model defines the charitable funds and the charity trustees, namely the eligible² elders who serve for the time being, acting in accordance with their usual procedure. The model distinguishes between the church, which is not a charity and is not subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission or OSCR, and its charitable funds, which are subject to such jurisdiction. The model is ready to put to the Charity Commission in England and Wales, and to National Synod of Scotland officers and to OSCR for approval.

In the same way, there could be separation between GA and its funds, and Synods and their funds. We aim for drafts for each Church Council (except District Councils and Area Councils), which those concerned can follow and distinguish between the Church functions and the charitable application of funds.

LPAG is aware that there is a strong wish in England and Wales to form Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) and, in Scotland, Scottish CIOs (SCIOs) (together referred to as S/CIOs). This is seen as a way of limiting the personal liability of officers. With regard to S/CIOs, we have moved forward from a position that no Council of the URC could exist as a S/CIO³ to the possibility that the funds and property belonging to a Church Council can be incorporated as a S/CIO. Our legal advice so far confirms that forming a S/CIO in this way will protect members of the Church Council concerned from personal liability.

If our model constitution for local churches (and similar models for the other Church Councils) can be agreed by the Commission and OSCR, it should be straightforward to

¹ This would include any land and buildings held for the general purposes of the church but not the church buildings. Church buildings are held on the trusts set out in the URC Acts

² Those elders who have not been disqualified from acting as a charity trustee.

³ Which is still the case because neither the URC nor any of its Councils is charitable in law.

move on to identify and constitute S/CIOs because the charity funds and trustees have been identified⁴ and the purposes are repeated in the same terms.

⁴ At present, the charity trustees of funds of GA and in England and Wales of Synods are their respective associated Trust Companies, so far as the Commission is concerned – we believe the only exceptions to this are Thames North and Mersey.

Paper T1

Annual report

Safeguarding Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roger Jones – Convenor rjones@urcsouthern.org.uk Sharon Barr – Secretary sharon.barr@urc.org.uk
Action required	To note.
Draft resolution(s)	None.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Overview of safeguarding in the URC.
Main points	Highlights Risk Areas Areas of development Summary of Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2023.
Previous relevant documents	Paper S1 URC roles eligible for a criminal record check from Assembly Executive 2024.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Background

The Safeguarding Committee is now into its second year of formation, and has established a pattern of meeting to fit in with workflow for Assembly Executive and General Assembly. The committee meets four times a year, with one of these being a full-day in-person meeting. The committee is made up of 15 people with various roles, both within the URC and external representatives. We have recently had two resignations because of outside commitments; for one place, we have a nomination to fill the role; the other, which is for an independent external representative, will need further work to identify the most appropriate person.

Outside of the formal meetings, the Convenor and Secretary meet regularly to review and monitor the work of the Safeguarding Committee.

Highlights

Church House Staff Team

Following a period of instability within the central safeguarding team, the current team has been working together since February 2023, and are made up of the following members:

Sharon Barr – Designated Safeguarding Lead (part time)

Carrie Kaunda – Training and Development Coordinator (part time)

Kerry Baker – Policy Development Coordinator (part time)

Emma Pearce – Administrative Assistant (full time)

Do please make contact with them; they are here to support the work of safeguarding across the denomination in partnership with the Synod Safeguarding Officers.

We are soon to add to the team, with a part time Case Work Supervisor joining over the summer period. This role was created in response to the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and following the URCs Past Case Review (PCR), where the need was identified for consistency, the introduction of a denomination-wide case management system for safeguarding, and accountability in the work the safeguarding teams undertake denominationally and at Synod level. We hope that all Synods will engage with this new role, and that the post-holder will be key to the internal auditing process that is explored further in the Areas of Development section of this report.

Safeguarding Team Away Days

Last year, the Synod Safeguarding Officers and the Church House Safeguarding Team met for the second time for a two-day residential; again, it was well received by all who attended, and the coming together to learn as a team has been a positive for a group of people supporting the Church who are often quite isolated in their roles. We had a session led by Anna Chaplaincy on supporting older people in church, Northern College led us in a session on Burnout, and there was a self-led session on Victim Blaming Psychology. Due to the benefits of these events, the plan is to continue to run them annually.

Case Management System

The URC's Past Case Review, and subsequently the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, highlighted the importance of effective recorded systems for safeguarding, and it was with much anticipation that the United Reformed Church's case management system came into being last year. Feedback from the safeguarding team who are using it to log concerns has been positive, and the system is being well used. The system will ensure consistency across the denomination for recording, and allow for far better auditing and compliance management of cases which, alongside the new case work supervisor role, will be invaluable.

Training

Carrie has continued to offer specialist training courses to anyone across the denomination, and these have been really well received and attended, with 600 people attending the various courses, which include adult safeguarding, domestic abuse, and supporting survivors. The foundation eLearning course also has a high take-up and, at the time of writing, 680 courses have been completed during the past year. Most Synods are now offering the Advanced Safeguarding course.

It has been identified that Paper T5 the Safeguarding Training Framework adopted by General Assembly 2021 needs amendments to better fit the developing work of the

church; this is currently being undertaken by Carrie and the training reference group, supported by the safeguarding committee; the hope is to bring the revised document to General Assembly 2025 following a period of consultation.

Policy

The URCs Good Practice documentation was robustly reviewed and launched in 2023. A new format was introduced and, following feedback from churches and Synods, the documentation aimed to be clearer on where safeguarding responsibilities lie. The positive feedback that has been received about the documentation has been huge, and work continues on other safeguarding documents such as DBS/PVG and the update service, and the safe management of those that pose a risk, and template policies. The updated paper *S1 URC roles eligible for a criminal record check from Assembly Executive 2024* can now be found on the URC website.

Safeguarding Symposium

In 2023, the URC's second Safeguarding Symposium was held, which attracted almost 300 attendees, double that of the first symposium in 2020, and we hope this is a reflection of how important safeguarding is to the denomination. Kerry Baker launched *Good Practice 6* and we had a guest speaker, Dr Leroy Logan MBE, who spoke on the topic *Recognising unconscious bias: overcoming barriers of equality in safeguarding*. The hope is that this symposium can be a bi-annual event where we focus on two areas, one related specifically to safeguarding in the URC, and then a guest speaker who can help us explore topical safeguarding issues outside of the denomination.

Safeguarding Strategic Plan

The wider safeguarding team, including Synod and local church staff and volunteers, continue to achieve and work towards the objectives of the plan, sometimes unknowingly. Synods work with the plan differently, and the hope from the committee is that any subsequent plan would be engaging, understandable and achievable for all areas of the church. The current plan is due to conclude in 2025, and the Safeguarding Committee will be considering the future of a strategic plan in its meeting in September 2024.

Collaborative working

Last year and continuing into this year, there appears to be a real shift in the culture and value of safeguarding within the denomination. There has been some productive collaborative working across the teams at Church House, and this has included:

- Children's and Youth Work, where we have worked with them on training, resources and the URC's guidance on overnight trips.
- Ministries, where we have produced guidance on the safer selection of those who lead worship, following feedback from the safeguarding returns in 2022. The designated safeguarding lead is also part of a working group looking at the disciplinary process for ministers.
- Moderators' meeting, which the wider safeguarding team has attended once a year for the last year two years; this year's focus was thresholds for reporting to external agencies and those agencies that we may come across in safeguarding.

Risk areas

Risk Register

As with all committees, the group submits a risk register biannually; the two highest risk areas that were identified in the URC's risk register for safeguarding are:

1. Compliance with the reporting of safeguarding serious incidents to the Charity Commission; this may involve the need for local churches, Synods, Synod Trusts and the URC Trust (URCT) to make notifications. The URCT is having a policy drafted for Serious Incident reporting, which will not cover the process for any other area of the church. The DSL will continue to work with the Compliance team at Church House to ensure we are offering guidance to other areas of the church to support them in their work.
2. Ministerial Discipline process, particularly around firstly how it should complement safeguarding practice and risk management, and secondly the length of time that Section O processes have been taking. Both of these areas are being addressed, firstly the review of the Disciplinary Process, which is ongoing, and then trial of the use of an external HR company to carry out the investigation stage of the Section O process.

Areas of development

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse Working Group

Following the conclusion of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and its final report being published, a working group was set up with key safeguarding personnel from the URC to review the report's findings related to faith organisations, looking particularly at the recommendations from these reports, and drawing upon any learning and action points that should be implemented by the URC. The group's findings were presented to the committee in January 2024, with eight recommendations for consideration. The committee decided to move forward with six of these, most notably:

- the development of work with survivors
- producing resources for children and young people to increase their understanding of keeping themselves safe
- support the work of the children and youth work in young people being represented at Synod and local church level.
- the need for internal and external auditing of our safeguarding practices and case management.

The committee and the wider safeguarding team will work on these in the coming years, and bring any relevant papers and recommendations to future General Assemblies.

Training framework in Wales

There have been some changes introduced by Social Care Wales (sponsored by the Welsh government) around safeguarding training requirements that third sector organisations need to comply with. A piece of work is being carried out by the Synod of Wales and the denominational safeguarding team to see where these new requirements fit, and where they diverge from current URC safeguarding training. It is likely that there may need to be a different training framework and training materials for those requiring safeguarding training within the URC in Wales.

Annual safeguarding report 2024

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2023, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers through their reporting due to time frame for submission. Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2024 Safeguarding Committee for reflection and action.

Introduction

81.8% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns.
5.3% of churches have no Safeguarding Co-ordinator.

Comments: There has been an increase in the percentage of churches completing their annual safeguarding return this year, which is positive, and also the number of churches without Safeguarding Co-ordinators had reduced, which is encouraging.

As a wider safeguarding team, we continue to raise the awareness of local churches to the additions to the URC Structure which were made following General Assembly 2021. They set the expectation for churches to submit their annual return, have a Safeguarding Co-ordinator in role and review their policy annually. As a safeguarding team, our hope is that as a denomination there is a shift in the safeguarding culture with all involved in the life of the URC, acknowledging that safeguarding is a Christian calling and core to all we do, and not a tick box governance and compliance issue.



Safeguarding concerns

Number of concerns related to children: 63, the main two categories of abuse that these reports fall under are physical abuse and neglect.

Number of concerns related to adults: 145, the three highest categories of abuse being supported by local churches are self-harm, domestic abuse and emotional abuse.

Comments: The number of safeguarding concerns is in line with 2022 figures, and safeguarding concerns related to adults is higher than children.



There is a shift in the areas of concerns being reported by local churches on previous years related to children which have historically been self-harm and mental health, whereas this year it is physical abuse and neglect. As a safeguarding team, we need to consider how we can support local churches in this area with training, resources and signposting.

There had been calls generally for more specific training for adult safeguarding, which the safeguarding team have responded to with training sessions being run denominationally on areas such as domestic abuse, adult safeguarding, modern slavery – further details can be found here: www.urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/National-safeguarding-2024-4.pdf

Pastoral care and support

Comments: Local churches and Synods continue to source pastoral care and support for individual and groups in need of this, and although it has been discussed more widely, it is not currently the plan to have one provider of this support across the denomination.

Managing risk

62 known offenders and / or those who pose a risk to children or adults are attending URC churches.

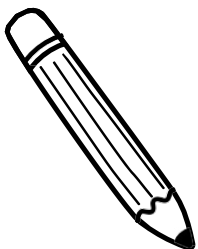
Comments: Those on safeguarding agreements in local churches continue to be supported by Synod Safeguarding Officers. The URC's guidance for the management of those who pose a risk is currently being revised by the Policy Development Co-ordinator, and specific training for those that support those on agreement is being developed by the Training Development Co-ordinator.



Safer recruitment

Comments: Safer recruitment training has been delivered across the denomination and is always well attended. There seems to be an understanding of the importance of this in the Church, and that safer recruitment is more than just a DBS check. 1997 DBS/PVGs were carried out for roles across the denomination in 2023, with 5% of those having a blemish that required a risk assessment on the suitability for that individual to carry out the role.

Following feedback from the 2022 annual returns seeking clarity on what should be the safer recruitment process to follow for those that lead worship in local churches that don't fit into any of the recognised categories, a paper is being brought by Ministries to this year's General Assembly to offer guidance on this.



Additional comments

The Safeguarding Committee would like to thank all local churches and church safeguarding coordinators for taking the time to complete the annual return, it really does support the work of the Synod Safeguarding Officer and that of the Church House safeguarding team.

Paper X1

Northstowe Church Network (LEP) becoming a local United Reformed Church

Eastern Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	David Coaker clerk@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 51 General Assembly receives Northstowe Church Network (LEP) as a local church of the United Reformed Church.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Eastern Synod receives with delight the request from The Northstowe Church Network (LEP) to become a local United Reformed Church. We request General Assembly to authorise this.
Main points	Northstowe Church Network (LEP) wishes to become a local United Reformed Church, having been formed as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and a Partnership Agreement between Anglicans, Baptists and the United Reformed Church. The Eastern Synod affirmed in October 2023 the United Reformed Church (Eastern Province Trust) decision to support, with a budget for up to £750,000, the Northstowe Church Network bid for Section 106 land for faith and community use. The Eastern Synod voted in March 2024 to bring the above resolution to General Assembly.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Church of England, Diocese of Ely Baptist Union of Great Britain Eastern Synod Lindsey Brown, Mission Support Officer.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	This is built on, and will continue to foster relations with, the new town of Northstowe (being built on former RAF land near Cambridge), the Diocese of Ely and the Eastern Baptist Association.

Paper X2

A Church with People at the Margins: A Strategy for Mission and Ministry

North Western Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Clare Downing nwmoderator@nwsynod.org.uk Tim Hopley clerk@nwsynod.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 52 In response to General Assembly 2023 resolution 31 (c) the North Western Synod commends its strategy document ‘A Church with People at the Margins: A Strategy for Mission and Ministry’ to the wider church. We encourage all parts of the church to reflect on its implications for their own areas of responsibility.</p> <p>Resolution 53 We request that Assembly Committees and Task Groups consider the implications of our strategy particularly in respect of the priority that is given to the allocation of resources (people, finance and other resources) for ministry and mission to churches working within the most economically deprived neighbourhoods and with low-income communities. Proposals to demonstrate our commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation should be brought to General Assembly 2025.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Encourage further discussion, reflection and action on the expressed desire to challenge poverty and marginalisation.
Main points	Presenting the North Western Synod’s response to General Assembly 2023 Resolution 31 (c).
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Ministries and Mission Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

At its meeting in October 2022, the North Western Synod Meeting asked that an “Anti-Poverty” Strategy be developed for the Synod in partnership with Church Action on Poverty.

A working group including colleagues from Church Action on Poverty, Synod Officers and Staff, Ministers and lay representatives from local churches met over the last twelve months to develop a strategy that recognises the contribution that both North Western Synod as a whole and the individual churches who make up the Synod can make to this important agenda.

The principles of providing Dignity, Agency and Power and responding to those who are poverty experienced had been considered by Synod at its last meeting. These principles and other emerging aspects of the strategy were circulated to local churches for discussion and consideration following that meeting. These were also considered at the meeting of the Mission Network in November.

The proposed strategy is set out in the document, “A Church with People at the Margins: A Strategy for Mission and Ministry” which follows this report. The body of the document comprises four sections:

- Our Call to Mission
- Our Commitments as a Synod
- Our Challenge to our Member Churches
- Our Support for our Member Churches.

In response to feedback from the consultation, the document also contains an appendix which provides short definitions of “Dignity, Agency and Power.” The strategy as drafted is intended to provide a long term focus for the life of North Western Synod. In order to provide time for all Synod Committees to consider how to respond to the strategy (assuming it is adopted), the recommendations propose that the implementation plan is initially reported to the North Western Synod Meeting in twelve months’ time. This will also provide time for some of the immediate commitments to be put in place and recognised at a Synod Meeting. In Summer 2023, URC General Assembly passed a number of resolutions regarding the church’s response to poverty. One of the resolutions (31(c)) asked: *“the Mission and Ministries Committees and the Synods to reflect on how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission, and bring proposals, if appropriate, to a future General Assembly”*

The Strategy presented for adoption at this meeting sets out how North Western Synod demonstrates its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation. North Western Synod now wishes to offer its Strategy document to General Assembly and invites General Assembly to consider whether the document, or elements from it, could assist in the development of work within the denomination as a whole, as a response to, and reflecting the desire expressed in the 2023 General Assembly Resolution 31.

URC North Western Synod – A Church with People at the Margins

A Strategy for Mission and Ministry

Our call to Mission

The prophet Amos (5:24) reminds us that we should:

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,” and Jesus in his teaching reminds us of the centrality of service for others in the mission and ministry of the church (Matthew 25:37&40)

“Then the righteous will answer him ‘Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink’.... And the king will answer ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these... you did it to me’”

Two of the five marks of mission emphasise the calling of the church to the service of others:

3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.

This document sets out our commitments to respond to that call to mission and ministry.

Our responsibilities in responding

In living out our calling to be a church with people at the margins we believe that we must both respond to people’s needs with compassion but also hear and respond to their voices about changes needed in our society.

We believe that all people are created in the image of God and should have life in all fullness and to flourish with all of God’s creation. We believe that the creation of community where all people are able to live with Dignity, Agency and Power is essential to that ambition.

We commit ourselves to listening to God’s voice through the experiences of people living at the margins and to build our response on those messages. In our actions in mission and ministry we seek to demonstrate our principles in action by ensuring that those we encounter are provided with Dignity, Agency, and Power.

Our commitments as a Synod

In our work as a Synod of the United Reformed Church, our priorities for mission and ministry will respond to the challenges we have set ourselves in adopting this strategy. This strategy compliments the commitments we have made in our Environment Policy and also in regard to Racism and Modern Day Slavery. We direct the Synod Trust to act in accordance with these priorities where it is using monies and other resources held on behalf of the Synod.

Some of our responses will demonstrate how we will support our churches in responding to the needs of their local communities, particularly in areas of the most acute disadvantage in our province. These will be set out in the final part of this strategy. Others will be actions we will take collectively as a Synod, with our Trust company, to

demonstrate how we are seeking to create community based on dignity, agency, and power for all people.

In adopting this strategy, we make these specific commitments:

Church Action on Poverty

We will continue to support the work of Church Action on Poverty through money and other support. In particular, we will be an active participant in their research on Church at the Margins and seek to put into practice lessons learnt from that work.

Living wage

We believe that fair pay is an important Christian principle. As a demonstration of this the Synod commits to achieving accreditation with the Living Wage Foundation as a Living Wage employer by the end of 2024.

Food

Access to food is essential to people's wellbeing. We will continue to support the important work played by foodbanks in addressing the basic needs of too many people in our communities. However, we believe that choice in food is part of providing people with dignity, agency and power and we will in particular support the development of Your Local Pantry and other "food clubs" where members are able to exercise dignity, choice, and hope.

Housing

We see the availability of truly affordable housing (1) as vital to people's dignity. The Synod commits to working with Housing Justice's Faith in Affordable Housing Project to develop such provision prioritising the use of our surplus land and buildings for this purpose. We will seek the support of the Synod Trust who act as Custodian Trustee for all our land and buildings in this ambition.

Community empowerment

We see community empowerment as a key part of ensuring that all people have agency and can exercise power over their life. The Synod will offer to become a funding partner in any Citizens UK Chapters (Currently Lancashire and Greater Manchester) established within our area and to encourage local churches to work with Citizens UK on matters of importance to people in their local communities.

Campaigning

The Marks of Mission call us to "transform unjust societies." We will seek to be active participants in campaigns relevant to our vision of a Just society. Most immediately we will support the work of the "Let's End Poverty" campaign in ensuring that the challenges of poverty and disadvantage are key themes in the campaigning at the next General Election. We will continue to listen actively to people with lived experience to understand their needs and priorities. We will continue to consider how best to develop this strategy in the light of that feedback.

Our challenge to our member churches

Local churches who constitute the North Western Synod are key to the delivery of this strategy. They are able to focus on the particular needs of their local community. Over a third of our churches are located in parishes serving the 10% most deprived communities in England (2). These needs arise from a variety of different contexts, urban, rural, and coastal and are located across all areas of our Synod.

All of our churches are located in areas where parts of their community experience disadvantage and exclusion. Many of them already work actively in those communities and we celebrate and support that work. We encourage our churches to partner with other local organisations and be willing to contribute to their work to address the needs of people who are disadvantaged or excluded.

Our principles for the use of resources are based on our shared responsibility for mission and ministry as part of God's family, as set out in the Synod's policy for the use of resources (3). In that spirit we encourage our churches to be generous with one another so that our collective resources are focused on supporting the most disadvantaged in our region.

The vision which we want to create is of a network of local churches working not just for these communities but with the people in those communities who experience disadvantage to enable them to live their lives with dignity, agency, and power.

We want to encourage all of our churches to:

- Be integral to the life of the local community, listening actively to the views of local people, particularly those who are otherwise excluded
- See all people as made in the image of God, and working to support and develop local community leadership
- Walk with people in their communities in the most difficult of situations
- Use their resources to express the Gospel message of justice and compassion for all people in word and deed
- Foster a family of church and faith communities committed to work together to address issues of poverty and injustice in their locality
- Show generosity to one another, open to sharing and learning together
- Be intolerant of injustice and provide a prophetic challenge to secure the structural changes necessary to ensure that all can live with dignity, agency, and power.

As a Synod we will make opportunities available to all churches to be equipped to listen and respond to their local communities in ways consistent with these principles.

Our support for our member churches

Research by Church Action on Poverty (4) indicated that between 2010 and 2020 significantly more church closures had taken place in low-income communities. The report challenges denominations like the URC about how we focus our resources on continuing to serve those communities.

As a Synod we will prioritise resources to support those churches who are located in the areas of most significant deprivation. As well as funding, this will include access to Synod staff and resources. We will seek to prioritise the deployment of ministry (including CRCWs) to churches serving those communities. We will provide multi-year funding to enable churches to employ people working with local communities. We will advocate more widely within the URC for the prioritisation of resources (people, finance, and other resources) to support churches working with the most deprived communities.

Priority Churches

We will, in partnership with others, create a network of priority churches to which all churches located in the 10% most deprived communities (5) will be invited to become members. The churches who join the network will receive:

- Regular support, advice, and consultancy from the Synod Field Staff
- Access to resources to support communication with local communities
- Regular meetings to share and learn from other churches in the network
- Participation in consultation on the development of the programme of support including creation of communities of interest
- Priority access to the Church with people at the margins learning programme.
- Priority for grant funding to support community development activities.

The Synod and its Trust Company will work with network churches to develop arrangements that ensure the continued presence of church in these communities.

For all Churches

We recognise that the communities served by all our churches include groups of people who experience disadvantage and exclusion. We will continue to offer small grants to all churches working with partners on programmes to address issues of community exclusion and disadvantage. This will also be a priority for the use of our general grants programme. We will work with partners to develop training programmes accessible to all churches to support the development of mission and ministry consistent with the ambitions contained in this strategy.

Appendix: Dignity, agency, and power

Introduction

Dignity

For Christians, the centrality of human dignity is based on the foundational theological principle that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. Poverty is not only deprivation of economic or material resources but, according to the United Nations, it is also fundamentally a violation of human dignity.

In the UK, poverty is strongly associated with public attitudes of stigma and blaming individuals for their own poverty. This has been described as the ‘othering’ of people living in poverty. In the words of Wayne Green, who spoke at the first National Poverty Hearing in 1996: *“What is poverty? Poverty is a battle of invisibility, a lack of resources, exclusion, powerlessness... being blamed for society's problems.”*

Agency

As Christians we believe that all people are created with God given skills talents and free will, and this is intrinsic to what it is to be human. To have *agency* is to be able to make use of our talents, to make choices for ourselves, to ‘have a voice.’ However, there is a deep-seated prejudice that people in poverty lack intelligence or motivation to ‘make good choices’ and need to be ‘rescued’ from their poverty. In Church Action on Poverty’s experience, people who live with poverty on a daily basis have powerful insights into the challenges they face, a deep understanding of what needs to change, and frequently the best ideas for doing so. Any attempts to tackle poverty which ignore the talents, ideas, and voices of people in poverty deny them their God’ given agency. *‘Nothing about us without us is for us’* must be our guiding principle.

Power

Christians frequently have a problem with the idea of power. It makes us uneasy. But there are more references to power in the Bible than to prayer.

Power is always present in all human situations. What makes power constructive or destructive is how it is used. People struggling against poverty frequently feel 'powerless,' and that their voice counts for nothing in wider society (and sometimes if we are honest, also in the church).

Martin Luther King challenges us to think differently: *"[Power is] the ability to achieve a purpose... It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change."*

If we are serious about transforming unjust structures, we have to find the courage to both to 'speak truth to power' ourselves, and more importantly, to find ways of enable people struggling against poverty to speak truth to power themselves.

Notes

- 1) Affordable housing
Homes let at least 20% below local market rents (affordable rental properties) or let at rates set between market rents and social rents (intermediate rental properties).
Homes England Fact Sheet 9: What is Affordable Housing: Available to Download [here](#)
- 2) NW Synod Principles for the use of resources
 - that our priority is God's mission;
 - that the strong should help the weak; and
 - that we belong to each other under God.
- 3) Church Urban Fund Look up tool [CUF Look Up Tool - CUF](#)
- 4) Church on the Margins: A study of church closures in Greater Manchester between 2010 and 2020. Church Action on Poverty. Available for download from Church on the Margins - Church Action on Poverty (church-poverty.org.uk)
- 5) As defined by the Anglican Parish in which the church building is located determined with reference to the Church Urban Fund Loop up tool [CUF Look Up Tool - CUF](#)

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Paper X3

The URC will have no mandatory retirement age for both full or part time stipendiary ministry

Thames North Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Sally Massey Thomas minister.stpaulsbayswaterurc@gmail.com Ms Darnette Whitby-Reid dwhitbyr@aol.com
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 54 General Assembly expresses its desire that the United Reformed Church remove the retirement age for ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. It instructs the Ministries and Finance Committees to consider the feasibility of this, bringing proposals to General Assembly in 2025.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	That Assembly express its desire to remove the retirement age for ministers, and instructs the Ministries and Finance Committees to consider the feasibility of doing this, bringing proposals to GA 2025
Main points	<p>1. Justice and Equality are often affirmed as part of the DNA of the United Reformed Church and mostly they are. As the report of the Equalities Committee to the 2023 General Assembly admirably stated at 1.1.</p> <p>‘The Equalities Committee existed to remind the United Reformed Church that equality is enshrined in its theology, life and work, and to facilitate the development of equality, diversity and inclusion throughout the denomination. It does this by challenging the practice of the Church, supporting programmes and initiatives, and by listening to the voices of those who are sometimes on the margins of church or society.’</p> <p>2. In other areas the URC upholds and abides by Government Policy. In the case of retirement, however, the URC self-evidently fails to practice justice, inclusion and equality and</p>

currently rejects not only Government legislation but also the policies of other denominations.

3. The UK government website states, there is no UK retirement age or default age of retirement (forced age of retirement). This is because the default retirement age of 65 no longer applies. You can work as long as you can and decide when to retire. There are limited exceptions where a compulsory retirement age is permitted. These being -

- the job requires certain physical abilities (eg in the construction industry)
 - the job has an age limit set by law (eg the fire service)
- The physical risks and demands of such work are not the case for ministers.

<https://www.gov.uk/working-retirement-pension-age>

4. Age UK states – Employers used to be able to force workers to retire at 65 (known as the Default Retirement Age), but this law was scrapped in April 2011, following a campaign by Age UK. This means that you can keep working beyond 65 if you want or need to.

5. The General Assembly of 2002 resolved that ‘full-time stipendiary service for Ministers and CRCWs will cease at the end of the month in which a person reaches her / his 65th birthday’. An extension of up to three years would be considered ‘in exceptional circumstances’.

The General Assembly of 2006 agreed a ‘duty to consider’ which extended and clarified possible limited extensions to ministry beyond retirement age.

At the 2012 General Assembly Resolution 25 agreed that retirement from full time stipendiary service for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers would be 68. The previously agreed procedures for extensions continued to apply.

6. We welcome and support the URCs commitment to equip and train people for lay leadership and would not rule out a time when stipendiary service is phased out. However, such an aspiration is years away from being achieved and ministry is needed now.

7. Up to now the URC has defended a compulsory retirement age on the grounds that Terms of Settlement do not compare with a Contract of Employment. We maintain that this is disingenuous. Both contain almost identical clauses. Age discrimination is unacceptable and needs to end.

	<p>8. Retirement Policies of other denominations indicate that in passing this Resolution the URC would be aligning with partner denominations, not contradicting their practises. Given the many Local Ecumenical Partnerships we have it makes sense to be aligned. See Appendix 1</p> <p>6. Finally, and crucially, we bring this Resolution because the URC needs those who wish to continue working full time beyond the age of 68. This includes candidating for a new ministry. In reality this is, and will continue to be, a small number of people. Alongside this it is sadly the case that a significant number of ministers and Church Related Community Workers are requesting early retirement. Even allowing for the reduction in deployment numbers for Synods, a cursory look at the list of vacancies alongside available ministers, makes it obvious that all these vacancies cannot be filled. The former argument that continuing to work denies opportunities for young ministers no longer applies, if it ever did. We maintain that older ministers blessed with good health and fitness plus, crucially, who still feel called to stipendiary ministry, should be welcomed and encouraged.</p>
Previous relevant documents	<p>Ministries Committee Paper November 2022 Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the Normal Retirement Age https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/extension-to-stipendiary-ministerial-service-beyond-the-normal-retirement-age/</p>
Consultation has taken place with...	<p>Thames North Synod Meeting on 16 March 2024 Ecumenical partners – see Appendix one.</p>

Summary of impact

Financial	Minimal – this will enable current stipendiary deployment levels to be maintained.
External (eg ecumenical)	Passing this Resolution will establish parity with most ecumenical partners and be appreciated by them.

Appendix one

Retirement policies of other main stream denominations

Methodist

There is no retirement age but when you candidate you are asked to declare that you can offer at least ten years of active service. You and the church have to be confident that you are able to offer 10 years of service from entering probation.

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/ministries/called-to-ordained-ministry/frequently-asked-questions/>

Church of England

In the Anglican Communion the current retirement age of 70 is under review, and the Archdiocese of Perth Australia have just abolished retirement age. It is anticipated that this will also be the decision in the UK.

Baptist Union

In most church employment situations, it is not possible to adopt a fixed retirement age. Most retirement policies do not specify a fixed retirement age. The nationally recognised default retirement age of 65 no longer applies. We expect that in most cases a flexible retirement date will apply and a retirement policy for 'no fixed retirement age' can be found at Annex 8.

We [The Baptist Union] currently do not have a fixed retirement.

You are therefore free to retire when you wish to do so and will not pressurise you into retiring because you have reached, or are approaching, a certain age.

. . . We will not make generalised assumptions that performance will decline with age, whether due to competence or health issues. If we think there are problems with your performance or ill-health, these will be dealt with in the usual way, through our Capability Procedure or Sickness Absence procedure.

Undeb yr Annibynwyr Cymraeg (Union of Welsh Independents)

There has never been a retirements age so a written policy is not required.

Eglwys Bresbyteraidd Cymru (Presbyterian Church of Wales)

The handbook, which has not been updated since 2012, states. 'Subject to the consent of the Church you may postpone your retirement beyond your normal retirement date'.

The current situation is that many are continuing in stipendiary ministry.

Moravian

There is no retirement policy.

The Church of Scotland

The Default Retirement Age (DRA) was phased out in 2012. This change means that whether or not any contracts of employment issued by your Kirk Session or Congregational Board contain an age at which your employee has to retire, you will not be able to use the DRA to compulsorily retire employees. No employee can be forced to retire simply because they have reached the age of 65 (or other contractual retirement age). Compulsory retirement will be treated as a dismissal like any other and will be unlawful unless it can be objectively justified and is fair within the meaning of the legislation.

Roman Catholic

Diocesan priests are generally expected to retire at the age of 75. It is the role of the Ministry to Priests team to assist and advise with planning ahead for this.

Resolutions

Resolution 1

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for Children's and Youth Work Committee as contained in Paper A3 General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 2

General Assembly adopts the Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee.

Resolution 3

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee as contained in Paper K1 of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 4

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Education and Learning Committee as contained in Paper D2 of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 5

General Assembly accepts the recommendations in points 4 (a) to (f) of the Reflections and Proposals section of this paper and agrees to establish a Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund with an initial budget of £39,000 per annum.

Resolution 6

General Assembly:

1. Adopts the Conflicts of Interests Statement

Resolution 7

2. Approves the policy for General Assembly Committees

Resolution 8

3. Instructs the committees of General Assembly to work within this policy

Resolution 9

Encourages Synods, Synod Trust companies and the URC Trust to review, amend or adopt where necessary their own conflicts of interest policy.

Resolution 10

1. General Assembly offers profound thanks to Helen Lidgett and Margaret Marshall for their work as Convenor and Secretary of the Nominations Committee as they step down from these roles at this General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 11

2. General Assembly appoints Victoria Paulding to serve as the Convenor of the new Nominations Committee from General Assembly 2024 to General Assembly 2028.

Resolution 12

General Assembly appoints the representatives reflecting the diversity of the Church to the new Nominations Committee as named in supplementary reports to Assembly.

Resolution 13

General Assembly instructs the Chief Operating Officer and the Resources Committee to manage the future of *Reform* from August 2024 onwards by:

1. continuing with *Reform* magazine, unchanged but requiring annual subsidy of up to £50,000 per annum; or
- 2.a making changes to *Reform* (through staffing changes and number of issues) such that the magazine is cost neutral before the end of 2024; or
- 2.b making changes to *Reform* (through staffing changes and number of issues) such that the magazine is cost neutral before the end of 2025; or
3. ceasing to publish *Reform* as a URC communication tool.

Resolution 14

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ending 31 December 2023.

Resolution 15

General Assembly approves the recommendation of the Finance Committee to close the Energy Crisis Fund and return the unused balance to the URC's General Funds.

Resolution 16

General Assembly will:

1. Will reallocate the energy crisis fund back into general funds

Resolution 17

2. Transfer £250k into the Legacies of Slavery Fund

Resolution 18

Seek contributions from Synods to reach a minimum target of £1m for the Legacies of Slavery Fund.

Resolution 19

General Assembly agrees to the change of name of the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee to the Accreditations sub-committee.

Resolution 20

General Assembly adopts the process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings.

Resolution 21

1. General Assembly agrees to a change of wording in 6.3.2 from spouse and children to spouse/partner and dependent children in 6.3.2.

Resolution 22

2. General Assembly recommends that the Fixed Car allowance be increased from £1200 to £2400 for cars and £300 to £600 for motorcycles and urges local churches to implement this from September 2024.

Resolution 23

3. General Assembly agrees a change of wording from Ministerial Working Week to Ministerial Hours in 7.

Resolution 24

General Assembly agrees the changes to holiday entitlement in 8 to include when to carry over holiday to the following year for sick leave, parental leave or Jury Service; expectations for sabbatical and holiday leave; Bank Holidays and days in lieu for Christmas Day and Good Friday.

Resolution 25

General Assembly adopts the revised Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) and commends it for use in local churches / pastorates.

Resolution 26

General Assembly adopts the changes to Schedule A of The Manual with regards to Ministry in the United Reformed Church (paragraphs 19-24).

Resolution 27

General Assembly adopts the guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership and commends the document for use in Synods.

Resolution 28

General Assembly amends the Basis of Union paragraph 24 to read (new words in blue):

24. All other ministries recognised by the uniting churches at the date of unification (as defined by the United Reformed Church Act 1981) shall continue to be exercised in the United Reformed Church without further commissioning, subject always to the decisions of the General Assembly. The URC shall determine from time to time what other ministries may be required and which of them should be recognised as ministries in the whole church. It shall decide how those who are to exercise them shall be set apart. **The affirmations in Schedule B (adapted for the particular ministry) shall be made by those entering upon all such ministries within the life of the church.**

Resolution 29

General Assembly agrees the additions to the URC Policy on Withdrawal of Call.

Resolution 30

1. General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of Synod Moderators as contained in annexe two of paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025.

Resolution 31

2. General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of other General Assembly roles reserved for ministers of Word and Sacraments as contained in annexe three of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025.

Resolution 32

3. General Assembly requires that the notes for nominating groups for other Assembly-appointed posts as contained in annexe four of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024 be noted and disseminated as appropriate.

Resolution 33

4. General Assembly resolves that,

- i. fixed terms be removed from all current Assembly-appointed minister posts, from the close of General Assembly 2024;
- ii. all future such appointments be untermmed;
- iii. requires that the terms of settlement of all ministers currently serving in such posts be revised to reflect this change.

Resolution 34

General Assembly instructs the Clerk to update the Rules of Procedure as soon as possible to reflect the decisions taken by General Assembly, and that the Business Committee is authorised to approve these changes reflecting the will of General Assembly, and the updated Rules of Procedure be published as soon as possible.

Resolution 35

General Assembly adopts the Guidelines for those who Lead Worship in our Churches.

Resolution 36

General Assembly requests that Synods and related Trust companies should report by 31 March each year on an assessment of progress made during the previous calendar year in reducing carbon emissions across the Synod, including Synod offices, manses and church buildings held in trust by Synod Trust companies and Synod activities and that this report be shared with the Net Zero Task Group so that overall progress across all the Synods can be recorded and reported to General Assembly annually by the Mission Committee.

Resolution 37

1. General Assembly denounces the illegal and deadly Hamas attacks on Israeli citizens, which took place on 7 October 2023, including the holding of hostages, in contravention of international humanitarian law.

Resolution 38

2. General Assembly denounces the deadly attacks on Palestinian civilians in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Force and its devastating destruction of civilian infrastructure along with essential services, in contravention of international humanitarian law.

Resolution 39

3. General Assembly calls for an immediate, permanent ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, and for the immediate de-escalation of hostilities regionally.

Resolution 40

4. General Assembly calls on the UK Government both to cease arms sales to Israel and to monitor existing embargoes on arms sales to nations that might be supporting Hamas militarily, in fulfilment of the UK's obligations under the international Arms Trade Treaty.

Resolution 41

- 5. General Assembly denounces all acts of antisemitism in Great Britain and expresses deep concern over its unacceptable rise in our communities and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Jewish neighbours.**

Resolution 42

- 6. General Assembly denounces all acts of Islamophobia in Great Britain and expresses deep concern over its unacceptable rise in our communities and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Muslim neighbours.**

Resolution 43

- 7. Given the unacceptable rise in religious hate crime, General Assembly encourages every local church and Synod to reach out in friendship and welcome to their local faith communities using interfaith dialogue and/or other resources available to them for this purpose.**

Resolution 44

- 8. In order to encourage learning and deeper awareness, without taking a view itself on these terms, General Assembly instructs Mission Committee in collaboration with the Education and Learning Committee and Youth Assembly, to consider how best to resource the URC with a better understanding of the theologies and history that help to shape and feed the crisis in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory as these relate to:
 - i. Christian Zionism and Supersessionism**
 - ii. The Balfour Declaration**
 - iii. Antisemitism and Islamophobia**
 - iv. Peace, Violence, Security, and related, relevant topics****

so that Synods, local churches, and members can grow in their awareness of these issues and respond in loving prayer, gracious advocacy, and Jesus-shaped solidarity.

Resolution 45

In the light of the continuing and worsening breaches of international law by the Israeli government in relation to the occupied Palestinian territory, General Assembly requests that URC Synod Trusts and the URC Trusts and Pensions Funds avoid knowingly investing in Israeli registered companies until such time as Israel once again abides by international law.

Resolution 46

- 1. General Assembly appoints committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraphs 7 and 8 of this Report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary Reports to Assembly.**

Resolution 47

- 2. General Assembly accepts the resignations set out in paragraph 6 of this report and discharges them with thanks for their service.**

Resolution 48

- 3. General Assembly dissolves the Nominations Committee from the close of General Assembly 2024. General Assembly discharges the officers and members and thanks them for their service. General Assembly transfers its**

functions and responsibilities to the new Nominations Committee set up by the 2024 General Assembly.

Resolution 49

4. General Assembly dissolves the following committees from the close of General Assembly 2024: Finance Committee, Communications Committee, Human Resources Committee and the Church House Management Group. General Assembly discharges the members and thanks them for their service. For the avoidance of doubt, General Assembly transfers any functions and responsibilities not explicitly mentioned to the Resources Committee with effect from the close of General Assembly.

Resolution 50

Assembly thanks the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins for his ten years service as Clerk of General Assembly and offers him its good wishes for his future ministry.

Resolution 51

General Assembly receives Northstowe Church Network (LEP) as a local church of the United Reformed Church.

Resolution 52

In response to General Assembly 2023 resolution 31 (c) the North Western Synod commends its strategy document 'A Church with People at the Margins: A Strategy for Mission and Ministry' to the wider church. We encourage all parts of the church to reflect on its implications for their own areas of responsibility.

Resolution 53

We request that Assembly Committees and Task Groups consider the implications of our strategy particularly in respect of the priority that is given to the allocation of resources (people, finance and other resources) for ministry and mission to churches working within the most economically deprived neighbourhoods and with low-income communities. Proposals to demonstrate our commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation should be brought to General Assembly 2025.

Resolution 54

General Assembly expresses its desire that the United Reformed Church remove the retirement age for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. It instructs the Ministries and Finance Committees to consider the feasibility of this, bringing proposals to General Assembly in 2025.

Notes

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