

# Assembly Business Digest



**The 2024 meeting of the United Reformed Church (URC) General Assembly met at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick**

**from 12-15 July.**



Opening the four-day meeting in worship, Karen Campbell, one of the Moderator's Chaplains, announced the

theme for worship: innovation.

Karen and the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo, invited Assembly to say what they treasure about the URC and about General Assembly.

Karen challenged members of Assembly to be aware: "Will we hear all voices?" she asked. "Will we speak and listen in love?"

The Revd Jenny Mills was inducted as Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) in an act led by the Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson.



## **Ecumenical guests**

The Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission), introduced ecumenical guests from the UK and abroad. Dr Gale Richards said that while reflecting on the theme of "Ambassadors of Peace", the recent gathering of the Baptist World

Alliance in Lagos valued hearing different voices, and when we discern the mind of Christ at General Assembly, we have an opportunity to receive "treasure" from different traditions.

## **Synod Moderators' Report**

The Revd Jamie Kissack, Yorkshire Synod Moderator, introduced the new Synod Moderators' since General Assembly last met: the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins – Wessex Synod; the Revd Lindsey Sanderson – National Synod of Scotland; the Revd Kim Plumpton – Northern Synod and the Revd David Salisbury – National Synod of Wales.

At the heart of the report is the question "How does a church, clearly called by God, give voice to the living faith that is within us?" Dr Hopkins said: "I believe that my vocation at this point is to be a minister to ministers and friend of churches. I am fulfilling this role as a ministry. I can do nothing alone, but when I manage to work with God, sometimes a little bit gets done."

## **Paper H11 Safer Recruitment**

The Revd Mary Thomas, Ministries Committee Convenor, presented Paper H11 which focuses on safer recruitment of those who lead worship in local churches and sets out the expectations for churches to safeguard their life and carry out safe recruitment processes for those who are not URC. Following discussions, Resolution 35 passed.

## **Day Two**

In the opening worship of the second day, Karen Campbell reminded Assembly that God



saw all of creation and said it was good. This means that God is in every part of the world, not just ours.

The Bible Study was led by the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans, Moderator of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, one of the ecumenical guests at Assembly.

Picking up on this year's theme of innovation, Dr Cowans told the URC: "You are clearly a people gathered to move by the spirit of God." Did you really hear what they said? You hear when you actively listen. "God in God's own way spoke to them in their worldview and spirituality which saw the sacred in all things."



### **General Assembly Moderator 2025-2026**

Catriona Wheeler was voted in as Moderator of the General Assembly 2025-2026: Catriona is an Elder and the Church Secretary of Trinity United Reformed Church, Lincoln. She is also a worship

leader and Stepwise student.



A lay member of the URC, Catriona is a lawyer and is

trustee to two local charities is Legal Adviser to the East Midlands Synod, a director of the East Midlands Synod Trust and Chair of the United Reformed Church Trust.

### **Paper I2: Environmental Policy review**

The Net Zero Task Group was thanked for its work in trying to encourage the Church to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2030, a goal decided upon at General Assembly 2022.

Most Synods now have an appropriate environmental policy in place. Synods and related Trust companies will now report annually on their progress in reducing carbon emissions.

### **Paper I4: Seven point plan**

The anti-racism training provided by Professor Anthony Reddie for those in positions of leadership in the URC has been very well received, and the Secretary said the group look forward to the insights that

are emerging making a difference to who we are as a Church.

The report also covers the task group's support for the New Free Village movement for land redistribution in Jamaica, and its work with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (Jamaica), which has a seven-point plan for reparations.

Another member thanked the Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson for the way she responded to criticism of the URC's apology published in *The Guardian* in June.

### **Moderator's Address**

"With my nomination as Moderator, I believe the URC needed to see and be part of, if change is to come." Dr Henry-Robinson's driving concern is not colour but love and justice. She said in the many duties she undertook, she observed "the potential we possess to flourish".

At the same time, she said there is a brokenness within the URC arising from a

reluctance to be bold and take risks on people "who are seen as other". She said the URC's identity as united and reformed is still a work in progress and pointed Assembly to the path of ten statements set out in the URC's vision 2020 document.



The Moderator concluded by returning to the words of Micah: "In everything we do, we are required to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. And we can do this together."

### **Faith Wills**

A short video on the Faith Will initiative was shown to Assembly by a Christian Aid representative. The video can also be watched on the [URC's YouTube channel](#).

### **Community Awards**

Six church projects offering outstanding service to their communities were recognised at General Assembly. Three projects won the 2024 Community Project

Awards: The Barn Community Cafe, Livingston United Parish Church, West Lothian



Community Food Hub, Dursley Tabernacle URC, Gloucestershire



Food Hub, Lancaster Road URC, Enfield, London



Another three community projects were highly commended: The Pod, Cheap Street Church, Sherborne, Dorset; Open Church, Heaton Moor United Church, Stockport and The Open Doors TAG Café, Dorking URC, Surrey.

The award winners receive prizes of £2,000 each for their projects, and the highly commended ones receive £1,000. The community project awards have been

sponsored by Congregational for 15 years. Videos about the projects can be watched on the [URC YouTube channel](#).

### **Place for Hope**

Carolyn Merry, Director of [Place of Hope](#), shared with Assembly a short introduction on her background and the call to peace-making and reconciliation.

Place of Hope is an organisation that supports people and faith communities to navigate conflict well. It has begun a new partnership with the URC that will extend over the next five years.

### **[Paper G2 Stipendary Ministers Number](#)**

In response a resolution to the 2023 General Assembly, the Finance Committee defined a process capable of linking stipendary ministry costs to Maintenance of Ministry (M&M) receipts in a fair and transparent way.

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.

The 'direct costs' were listed in the report as: stipends and allowances £9,096,000; pension costs £2,268,000; National Insurance costs £909,000; allowances £148,000; housing costs (for centrally deployed ministers) £56,000; other costs (including pastoral supervision) £48,000 – a total of £12,525,000.

For the purposes of this paper, the costs for 2024 were inflated by 5% (the stipend increase agreed for 2024), giving a predicted cost per minister of £43,910.68. The target for the end of 2024 would be 285.5 FTE ministers, a reduction of 4 on the December 2023 actual.

### **[Paper G3 Annual Accounts](#)**

Alan Yates, the United Reformed Church Treasurer, presented URC Trust accounts for 2023 to General Assembly. He pointed out that it is not up to Assembly to approve, the accounts, the Trust having already done so. The resolution to note the report was passed.

### [Paper G4 Energy Crisis Fund](#)

The Finance Committee asked General Assembly to approve the closure of the Energy Crisis Fund and to return the unused balance of around £1.79m to the URC's General Funds.

During discussion, Mr Alan Yates, the Church's Treasurer, indicated that there are a number of pockets of money around the Church that could be consolidated.

### [Paper G5 Legacies of Slavery](#)

The URC has agreed to establish a fund to cover the operational and project costs of its Legacies of Slavery work.

Having considered the URC's context and financial position, a target of £1m was assessed as a fair figure when considered against the Church of England's response (£100m) which, while not a perfect or easy comparison, is the only currently available yardstick.

### [Paper H3 Pastorates & Scopings](#)

The paper from the Ministries Committee set



out what should happen when a 100% ministry was not sustainable, and it was necessary

to reconfigure the scoping without needing to wait for the minister to move on.

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.

After changes to add the words stipendiary support, and a change to the time periods, the resolution was adopted.

### [Paper H9 Withdrawal of Call](#)

General Assembly was invited to agree additions to the URC Policy on Withdrawal

of Call, which was adopted by General Assembly 2023.

There were three additions to the paper: clarification that, in most cases, a minister's call will come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate, post or partnership; clarification about what happens, when relationships breakdown, to ensure complaints against a minister are not spurious; to confirm additional leeway, up to six months, for synods and pastorates regarding the length of time a minister and their family may remain in the manse after the withdrawal of Call.

### [Paper H10 Synod Mod process](#)

The Ministries Committee brought processes for the Nomination and Appointment of Synod Moderators and other General Assembly roles reserved for Ministers of Word and Sacraments.

The Convenor of Ministries, Mary Thomas, said the Nominations Committee had raised a question of diversity in panels convened to make these appointments. The revised processes reflect this need, including a requirement that panel members should undergo anti-racism training and unconscious bias training.

### [Paper H5 Local Mission and Ministry Review](#)

LMMR was introduced in 2008 as a tool for churches to have an annual reflection on the direction they are going in, and to help ministers review their own call and service. However, Mary said, LMMR has not had the role that was hoped for. Nevertheless, she said, it is still used effectively in some places. The resolution to adopt the revised LMMR and commend it to local churches was passed.

### [Paper H7 Guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership](#)

The Ministries Committee presented proposed guidelines for Elders in Local Leadership. 'For the sake of the church and for those to whom they minister,' said Mary Thomas, 'levels of accountability and support need to be put in place which are consistent across the denomination.'

## Day Three

Day three began with worship and “marching in the light of God”, to the rhythm of drums played by the Moderator’s chaplain, the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo. If representatives didn’t feel awake at the start, they did by the end – spontaneous applause followed the singing.

This was the story that the Revd Dr Michael Jagessar drew on in his pre-recorded Bible Study.



Dr Jagessar invited Assembly to consider what timely words are being addressed to “the grey-haired cloud of witnesses”; what is Jesus saying to “you excessively wordy Protestants?”.

Warning Assembly not to confuse agenda with mission, he asked if we can “let go” and trust the Spirit to take their own trajectory and transform us in the journey of our lives.

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

John Bradbury, General Secretary of the URC, brought General Assembly up to date with the completion of the first phase of the Church Life Review, and Myles Dunnett, Church Life Review Programme Manager, explained the second phase.

The review came out of a sense in the URC of decline and the burden of regulation, out of budget deficit and out-of-date structures, and a



belief that we are called not to give up but to find new ways to a thriving future.

Phase one of the review raised the question: how do we use the resources we have to relieve tiredness and engage in evangelism? What would it look like to view our resources more collectively? How can synods work together to deliver needed support to local congregations?

Myles explained that phase two of the review is the design phase. It consists of three work streams to unburden local churches: financial resource sharing; shared support services and the employment of lay workers.

A finance consultation took place in June and other consultations will follow. Recommendations will be brought to General Assembly in 2025

Myles announced that the September issue of *Reform* would have a major focus on the Church Life Review, including a vision of what the future could look like when the work is complete, and an update on the process.

### [Paper X2 North Western Synod](#)

The Revd Clare Downing noted that within many Synods, there are churches in areas



of deprivation that have simply closed or disappeared. In North Western, 38 out of 104 locations of church buildings are in the top 10% of most deprived parishes in England.

Clare clarified that the paper is about people on the margins, not just about people in

financial poverty, but that margins involve those living in coastal poverty or rural isolation for example.

North Western Synod is questioning how the URC can use buildings who might not have a viable congregation there. How can the URC replant in those church areas, how can the Church be different? The resolutions were then passed.

### **En Bloc**

The following resolutions were passed En Bloc. The full reports and resolutions in each case [can be read here](#): A3 Terms of Reference for the Children's and Youth Work Committee; A4 Terms of Reference for the Worship, Faith and Order Committee; A5 Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee; A6 Terms of Reference for the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee; A7 Terms of Reference for the Education and Learning Committee; A10 New Nominations Committee and safer recruitment; H2 Change of name to the Accreditations sub-committee; H6 Changes to Schedule A of The Manual confirming the status of URC ministers as office-holders of the church without contractual relations with the church; H8 Changes to rules about the wording of affirmations made by those entering ministries in the URC; P1 Local United Reformed Church Constitutions Changes to constitutions of for local churches; J1 Enacts the new committee structure; J2 Nominations; T1 Annual report of the Safeguarding Committee; X1 Northstowe Church Network (LEP) becoming a local URC.

Also in En Bloc were thanks to the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, who completed his term



as Clerk of the General Assembly for 10 years. He is succeeded by the Revd Sarah Moore, Transition Minister for the National Synod of Scotland.

General Assembly celebrated and gave thanks for "Jubilee ministers" who are marking notable ordination anniversaries in 2024 of 75, 70, 60 and 50 years. Fifteen new ministers (stipendiary, non-stipendiary and one CRCW) were ordained or commissioned into the URC in 2023. Those present were greeted by the Moderator.

### [Paper H4 Plan Amendments to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration](#)

The Convenor, the Revd Mary Thomas, brought four amendments to the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration. Resolution 22 asked Assembly to raise the Fixed Car allowance from £1,200 to £2,400 and the Fixed Motorcycle allowance from £300 to £600 in the Plan for Partnership, with effect from 1 January 2025.

General Assembly agreed changes to wording about holiday entitlement to include when to carry over holiday to the following year for sick leave, parental leave or Jury Service; to clarify expectations for sabbatical and holiday leave; and to include Bank Holidays and days in lieu of Christmas Day and Good Friday.

### **In Memoriam**

Towards the end of the day, the ministers who have died since the last Assembly were remembered and prayed for.

### **Day Four**



Day four, 15 July, began with worship and a Bible study. “To which new thing might God be calling?” asked the Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo, Chaplain. Dr Lisa Adjei of Christian Aid and the Sankofa Collective preached.

Dr Adjei pointed to three things that Jesus did that we are called to do too: We must reorder power. Jesus changes who is at the centre of the story. We must reimagine. Dr Adjei quoted Akan phrase from Ghana, ‘Sankofa’. It can literally mean ‘Go back and get it’, but is also about learning from the best of the past and restoring what has been lost. We must renew. Dr Adjei quoted Vanessa Machado de Oliveira saying that the world as we know it is ending and we must embrace the new world. We must stand alongside those who have been on the outside.

### **Session 11**

Northstowe Church Network (LEP) was welcomed at Assembly as a local United Reformed Church, you can watch a video about it here:

<https://youtu.be/D6pikiQzEXo?si=sYuueZ7axZGJWIJI>

### **Moderator-Elect Acceptance Speech**

The Moderator-Elect of the URC General Assembly 2025-26, Ms Catriona Wheeler addressed Assembly.

Ms Wheeler said that, through the support of others and through prayer, she will discern how God can use her “as together we face a somewhat uncertain future and work through the Church Life Review”. Concluding, she quoted Psalm 115: “Not to us, Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.”

### **[Paper A8 Retired Ministers Benevolent Fund](#)**

General Assembly accepted the recommendations to establish a Retired Ministers’ Benevolent Fund with an initial budget of £39,000 per annum, following work instigated by the 2023 General Assembly.

### **[Paper A9 Conflicts of Interest policy](#)**

General Assembly adopted the Conflicts of Interests Statement and the policy for General Assembly committees, along with instructing the committees of the Assembly to work within the policy. It also encouraged Synods, Trusts, local churches and the URC Trust to review, amend or adopt its own conflicts of interest policy.



### **[Paper I3 – the Gaza Crisis](#)**

The Mission Committee brought Paper I3 about the Gaza Crisis to General Assembly.

The report came after much careful work, research, conversation and discussion, the Convenor of the Mission Committee reported. The committee hoped that in bringing the resolutions, it was responding because peaceful solutions are not yet within reach. And the resolutions were not just a reaction to the events in Gaza in October last year.

“We are a church,” the convenor continued, “and not a single-issue campaign group – we have a wider role. The letter of James reminds us that faith without action is dead.”

General Assembly passed a number of resolutions on the current conflict in Israeli and the occupied Palestinian Territories, called for an immediate, permanent ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, arms sales, embargoes, acts of antisemitism in the UK, acts of Islamophobia in the UK, and encouraged every local church and Synod to reach out in friendship and welcome local faith communities. The full text of the amended resolutions can be found in the [minutes of the General Assembly](#).

### **Address to the Throne**

The Revd Fiona Bennett, former General Assembly Moderator, delivered the Address to the Throne to Assembly, after which Assembly voted to approve.

### **Induction of the Revd Timothy Meadows as Moderator of the General Assembly, 2024-2025.**

The Revd Timothy Meadows was inducted as the Moderator of the General Assembly 2024-2025, during an act of worship at the close of the 2024 General Assembly.

“Recently one church person asked me if the URC could not find any British people to do the job. To which I replied, ‘whatever gave you that idea, I’m from Liverpool, can’t you tell from my accent?!

“I originally come from rural America, where Christianity was instilled in me from a very early age. I am well-appointed with the evil exacted on the queer community by society and the church, although that is not the impetus of my moderatorial year.

“The URC is a gift to the body of Christ. Yet our work is far from finished. It was, and is, time to share our faith. Revival and resurrection is in the air. Let’s go out and share our treasure. We are diverse and we are united in being followers of Jesus Christ. Now is the time to recentre on that which we hold most dear, a Jesus-shaped church for all.”

The Revd Sarah Moore was inducted as Clerk of the General Assembly. Sarah has been Assistant Clerk for several years and

takes over from the Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, the new Moderator for Wessex Synod, who has stepped down from the role after 10 years.



General Assembly closed and will meet twice next year (subject to confirmation); the regular meeting from Friday 4 – Monday 7 July at The Hayes, Swanwick, and the extraordinary meeting from Friday 14 – Sunday 16 November at Kents Hill Park, Milton Keynes. Please check the URC website and with Synod offices for further details.

**Reporting team: Andy Jackson, Ann-Marie Nye, Steve Tomkins and Laurence Wareing. Photos: Chris Andrews.**



*The*  
**United  
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**General  
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