

Saturday 13 July 2024

The Chaplains led Assembly in worship and the Revd Dr Gordon Cowans delivered a Bible Study.

Session Three

9 Moderator 2025-6

The Moderator, the Revd Nigel Uden, took the chair and invited Mrs Catriona Wheeler to address Assembly regarding her nomination for Assembly Moderator 2025-2026. Mrs Wheeler then answered an unseen question. Following prayer, Assembly voted by secret ballot.

10 Mission

The Moderator invited Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of the Mission Committee and the Revd Philip Brookes, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) to introduce paper I2 *Environmental Policy Progress Review*.

The Revd Steve Faber proposed an amendment adding the words "Local Churches" to the resolution. This was seconded by Chris Atherton and agreed by General Assembly.

Resolution 36

General Assembly requests that Local Churches, 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.

Agreed

The Moderator invited Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of the Mission Committee and Ms Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, to introduce Paper I4 *Legacies of Slavery-acts of repairing justice: progress report*.

This was warmly received by Assembly.

The Moderator invited Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of the Mission Committee, and the Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission), to introduce paper I3 *The Gaza Crisis*.

The Legal Advisor reminded Assembly that there has not as yet been any court declaration of illegalities and encouraged caution to avoid reputational risk with word choices in decision making and onward distribution. Following discussion, the matter was remaindered.

Session Four

11 Moderator's Address

The Moderator, the Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch, took the chair and invited the Revd Margaret Ali to announce the election of Mrs Catriona Wheeler as Moderator of General Assembly 2025-6.

The Moderator invited the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson to address Assembly.

Dr Henry-Robinson thanked St Andrew's, Brockley, who first nominated her and all those who had supported her along the way. She spoke of the obligation to do justice outlined in Micah and encouraged the URC to continue to be lovingly prophetic reminding us that we are, and should be, seekers of justice who love one another.

The Moderator invited the Revd Fiona Bennett, Immediate Past Moderator, to present *The African Bible Commentary* to Dr Henry-Robinson as a gesture of thanks for her service as Assembly Moderator.

12 Christian Aid Presentation

The Moderator, the Revd Dr Henry-Robinson, took the chair and invited Mr Richard Lewney to address Assembly. Mr Lewney introduced a video from *Christian Aid* which promoted their new campaign *Faith Wills* encouraging legacies. Local churches and Synods were asked to utilise and share the available resources from this initiative.

13 Community Project Awards

The Moderator introduced the Community Project Awards and expressed Assembly's deep gratitude for Congregational's increased support this year. The Moderator noted that for the first time, a total of £9,000 is being awarded to churches in prizes: three Winners' awards of £2,000, and three Highly Commended awards of £1,000. The Moderator invited Helen Doran, Congregational's Head of Church Underwriting Operations, to jointly present the awards.

Assembly noted the winners were:

- *The Barn Hospitality Project* at Livingston United Parish Church; the award was accepted by Norma and Ken Brown.
- *The Community Food Hub* from Dursley Tabernacle URC. Naomi Skelton, the Food Hub Coordinator of the project, received the award.
- *Lancaster Road URC Food Hub* in Enfield. Clare Locke, the co-ordinator of the Food Hub and Church Secretary, and the Minister of Lancaster Road URC, the Revd Ruth Dewis accepted the award.

Assembly noted the Highly Commended projects were:

- *The Pod Church and Community Together*, from Cheap Street Church in Sherborne, Dorset. Lynn & Richard Heaton received the award.
- *The Open Church* project at Heaton Moor United Church in Stockport. JoAnne Roy the Community Worker at Heaton Moor United Church, received the award.
- *The Open Doors TAG Café* at Dorking URC. The Revd Bridget Banks, Moderator of Southern Synod and one of the judges of the awards, the Revd Lucy Brierley, received the award on its behalf.

Session Five

The Clerk proposed that Assembly approve the minutes for Friday 12th July subject to minor typographical changes.

Agreed.

14 Place for Hope

The Moderator invited Carolyn Merry Director of Place for Hope to address Assembly. Ms Merry introduced three members of the Place for Hope team and outlined her own experience of peacemaking, conflict transformation, and non-violence. Ms Merry outlined that conflict is normal, and necessary, in church life but that it needs to be handled well. She noted various training programmes that Place for Hope are developing and celebrated the new 5 year

partnership with the URC, entitled *Living Reconciliation*, which starts on 1st August 2024. Members of Assembly discussed issues of conflict and warmly responded to Ms Merry's presentation.

15 Finance

The Moderator invited Alan Yates, Treasurer, the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries, and John Samson, Chief Finance Officer, to present paper G2 *Linking Stipendiary Ministry Costs to M&M Receipts*

Resolution 58

General Assembly adopts the process for linking stipendiary ministry costs to M&M receipts as defined in the main body of the paper.

Agreed

The Moderator invited Alan Yates, Treasurer to introduce Paper G3 *URC Trust Accounts 2023*

Resolution 14

General Assembly notes the Trustees' Report and Financial Statement for the year ending 31 December 2023.

The Moderator invited Alan Yates, Treasurer and John Samson, Chief Finance Officer, to introduce paper G4 *Energy Crisis Fund*.

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.

The Moderator invited Alan Yates, Treasurer, John Samson, Chief Finance Officer, and Vaughan Griffiths, Deputy Treasurer, to introduce *G5 Funding our Legacy of Slavery Task Group*.

Mr Yates informed Assembly that Resolution 16 had been withdrawn as it duplicated Resolution 15.

Resolution 16

General Assembly will reallocate the energy crisis fund back into general funds.

withdrawn

Resolution 17

General Assembly will transfer £250k into the Legacies of Slavery Fund

Agreed

Resolution 18

General Assembly will seek contributions from Synods to reach a minimum target of £1m for the Legacies of Slavery Fund.

Agreed

The Moderator invited Ms Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of the Mission Committee and the Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary, Mission, to return to paper I3 *The Gaza Crisis*

The Mission Committee offered new wording on Resolutions 37 and 38 having discussed the matters with the Legal Advisor. Assembly agreed to allow this new wording.

The Revd Clare Downing and the Revd Dr Romilly Micklem proposed adding the words “and all those responsible” after “ Hamas” in Resolution 37. This was accepted by both the proposers and General Assembly.

Ms Muna Levan Harris proposed changing “should” to “may” in Resolution 37 but this fell due to a lack of a seconder.

The Revd Russell Furley-Smith proposed adding “by Hamas” to the start of resolution 37 after “deadly attacks”. Many members of Assembly indicated they were willing to second this. After discussion Mr Furley-Smith withdrew this amendment.

Mr Celvon Binns proposed a further amendment removing the word “all” from the amended resolution 37. A number of members of Assembly indicated they would second this. This amendment, however, did not find favour with Assembly.

The Revd Craig Muir proposed a further amendment to replace the words “Israeli citizens” with “on Israel”.

The Rev'd David Grosch Miller proposed, under Standing Order 12.13, that the resolutions be now put. A number of members of General Assembly indicated their willingness to second. The procedural that resolutions 37, 38, and 39 by now put was carried overwhelmingly, easily exceeding the required two thirds majority.

The chaplain offered a prayer before Assembly moved to a vote.

Resolution 37

General Assembly denounces the deadly attacks on Israeli citizens, which took place on 7 October 2023, including the holding of hostages, for which Hamas, and all those responsible should be held accountable in accordance with international law.

Agreed

Resolution 38

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, for which those responsible should be held accountable in accordance with international law.

Agreed

Resolution 39

General Assembly calls for an immediate, permanent ceasefire between Hamas and the Israeli Defence Force, and for the immediate de-escalation of hostilities regionally.

Agreed

The Assembly paused for a brief break.