

Church Life Review Phase 2 (Design): Executive Summaries of the November Extraordinary General Assembly Papers for Synod Meetings

Introduction

General Assembly (November 2025) will consider a package of Church Life Review (CLR) proposals designed to relieve administrative burden, strengthen compliance, release capacity for mission, and support growth. The vision is of a flourishing church, less burdened and better enabled. The proposals centre on a new shared Church Life Fund (CLF) to resource: (1) shared services, (2) lay workers grants, and (3) grants for new communities of discipleship and worship.

A1 – Covering Paper

Frames the Extraordinary General Assembly: recaps CLR context, aims, and consultative methodology; names this as a “Kairos moment.” Asks Assembly to commit the URC to: (i) ongoing, ad-hoc collaborative consultations; (ii) data-informed decision-making; and (iii) a model in which resources/services are developed denominationally and delivered locally. Lays out theological grounding for the programme: Jeremiah 29 (building, planting, seeking the city’s welfare). Also sets out an overview of the proposals.

A2 – Proposal to Establish a Church Life Fund

Creates a shared Church Life Fund (CLF) within URC Trust to fund shared services, lay worker grants, and new communities grants. Governance via a representative Church Life Fund Committee (one member per synod) advising URC Trust; major review after three years, ten-year initial lifespan (with scope for extension). Contributions primarily from synods; local churches/external partners may also wish to contribute. Safeguards: funds used only for CLF purposes; if the CLF is closed, any remaining balances return to synods proportionally. Applications for lay workers and new communities must be made through, and with the support of, the relevant synod. (Note: The CLF does not replace the Ministry & Mission Fund.)

A3 – Denominational Shared Resources Hub

Launches the resources hub: a central portal with policies, templates, and guidance (governance, safeguarding, property, HR, finance, compliance), plus a helpdesk (phone/email/chat) to triage and signpost. Governance: Resources Committee (overall/operations) with reference to PLATO (content input) & CLF Committee (funding). Intention: reduce duplication, improve consistency, and support churches with everyday compliance and administration. Ongoing operations funded via the CLF.

A4 – Accounting Support Service

Responds to church difficulties with bookkeeping/accounting. Proposes a support model with a core provision of training and tools, with an option for synods to request more support for churches who cannot manage their accounts. Aim: scalable, proportionate support. (Note: Elders remain legally responsible for reporting.)

A5 – Denominational Buying / Procurement Support

Identifies inconsistent and under-resourced buying practices across the URC (duplication, missed savings, variable compliance). Notes the benefits of collective buying, including savings (scale/competition), better compliance/risk management, alignment with denominational goals (e.g., environmental commitments), and improved supplier leverage. Asks Resources Committee to cost and propose a service.

A6 – HR, IT, Payroll, and Property (Shared Services)

Addresses the current patchwork of provision. Proposals include further work to develop a denominational IT infrastructure; work to ensure each local church can access professional HR advice; developing a payroll service model for synods/local churches; convening stakeholders (including RMHS) to explore coordinated guidance and future arrangements for trust-held buildings. Intent: build on the effective safeguarding model – denominationally developed resources delivered locally – lowering costs via economies of scale.

A7 – Eido Report on Lay Worker Employment Models

Independent research across eight URC case studies compares church-employed and synod-employed models of lay worker employment. Both can work well, especially where there is: strong line management; up-to-date HR/legal practice; clear role definition; alignment between church, synod, and worker; and parity of pay/benefits. Churches employing directly value proximity and agency but may face risk/administrative burden; synod employment can reduce risk/admin for churches while preserving local agency when relationships are well-managed. A schema and practical toolkit is provided.

A8 – Lay Worker Grants

Implements Paper A7's insights through a CLF grant framework (CLF/URCT will not be the employer and assume no vicarious liability). Applications (via synods) must demonstrate robust employing entity, safer recruitment and legal compliance, appropriate insurance, clear line management and pastoral care, CPD, at least the

Real Living Wage, time-bounded contracts, and provision for redundancy. Distinct boundary from ordained/commissioned ministry is outlined and maintained. Proportionate annual reporting, along with review for continued funding at contract-end against agreed success measures; templates/guidance published on the resources hub.

A9 – New URC Communities of Discipleship and Worship

Provides a permissive framework for the development of new communities (additional expressions of URC life, not replacements), shaped by local context and potentially ecumenical. Shared values and principles include Christ-centred mission, inclusion/anti-racism, accessibility, environmental responsibility, and adaptability. Outlines best practice and opportunities. Presents a framework for new communities grants from the CLF, including holistic review mechanisms (CLF will refer to Accreditation Sub-Committee). Applications come via synods to the CLF.

A10 – End of the CLR & Next Steps

Marks the end of CLR as a programme. Implementation passes to Assembly committees (notably Resources Committee, alongside CLF Committee); strategic work must become embedded across the councils of the Church. Proposes a denominational communications strategy to raise awareness of the CLF and its opportunities; asks Resources Committee to bring a clear implementation timeline to GA 2026. Establishes a Strategic Reference Group (distinct from the CLF Committee) to support ongoing discernment. Outlines outstanding urgent questions and initiates work to address these. Outlines a schema of strategic questions, allowing GA to move into facilitated consultative sessions to consider longer-term questions of purpose, people, and structures.

A11 – Scale and Size of the Fund

This paper, brought late to account for the outcomes of Synod Meetings in October, sets out the scale of the CLF. This paper will be taken together with Paper A2.