

Book of Reports 2026



The
**United
Reformed
Church**





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**THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
MINUTES OF ASSEMBLY EXECUTIVE
MEETING
HELD ONLINE SATURDAY 7th FEBRUARY 2026**



Present

Moderator	Ms Catriona Wheeler
Moderator Elect	The Revd Neil Thorogood
Clerk	The Revd Sarah Moore
Assistant Clerk	The Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young
General Secretary	The Revd Dr John Bradbury
DGS Faith in Action	The Revd Jenny Mills
DGS Ministries	The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith
Chief Operating Officer	Mrs Victoria James
Treasurer	Mr Alan Yates
Deputy Treasurer	Mr Vaughan Griffiths
<u>URC Youth</u>	
Moderator	Miss Maya Withall
Moderator Elect	Miss Kacie Hodgson
Representative	Miss Lizzie Crossley

Assembly Committee Convenors

Business	Mrs Irish Sirmons
Faith in Action	Ms Sara Lane Cawte
Ministries	The Revd Mary Thomas
Nominations	Ms Victoria Blunt
Resources	The Revd Dr Michael Hopkins
Worship, Faith and Order	The Revd Dr Robert Pope

Synod Representatives

Northern: The Revd Kim Money, Mrs Felicity Barker, Mr Matthew Hall, Ms Lis McAvoy

North Western: The Revds Clare Downing and Mike Walsh, Mr Tim Hopley, Ms Elizabeth Hall

Mersey: The Revds Geoff Felton and Ruth Wilson, Mrs Lorna Griffiths, Mrs Pat Cansfield

Yorkshire: The Revds Jamie Kissack and Simon Cross, Mr Tim Crossley, Mr John Everleigh

East Midlands: The Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Dr Graham Jennings, Mr David Greatorex, Mrs Barbara Moses

West Midlands: The Revd Steven Faber, Mrs Rachel Wakeman, Mr Steve Powell

Eastern: The Revds Lythan Nevard, David Coaker and Anne Sardeson

South Western: The Revds David Downing and Richard Gray, Mrs Rachel Leach, Dr Ian Harrison

Wessex: Miss Karen Bell, Mr Clive Snaeshell, The Revds Dr Sarah Hall and Dr Romilly Micklem

Thames North: The Revd George Watt, Ms Nneoma Chima, Mr Peter Knowles

Southern: The Revd Russell Furley-Smith, Miss Pamela Tolhurst

National Synod of Wales: The Revd David Salsbury and Julie Kirkby, Mr Chris Atherton, Ms Megan Price,

National Synod of Scotland: The Revds Lindsey Sanderson and Susan Henderson, Mr Douglas Maxwell

Ecumenical Observers

Church of England
Methodist Church

The Revd Sarah Gower
The Revd Dr David Chapman

In attendance

Chaplain	The Revd Jane Wade
Minutes Secretary	Ms Morag McLintock
Law and Polity	Ms Morag McLintock
Head of Legal Services	Mr Andrew Middleton
Paralegal	Tricia Harding
Designated Safeguarding Lead	Mrs Sharon Barr
Communications Officer	Mrs Anne-Marie Nye
Communications Officer	Mr Laurence Wareing
Head of Communications	Mr Andy Jackson
Evangelism and Ecumenism	Lindsey Brown
Global & Intercultural Church	Miss Karen Campbell
Children & Youth Work and	Dr Sam Richards
Intergenerational Discipleship	
Public Issues	Mr Roo Stewart

Observers/Technical

Southern Synod Clerk	The Revd Martin Hayward
Technical Support	Mr Matt Collins

Session one

Welcome

All were welcomed to the meeting by the Convenor of the Business Committee, Mrs Irish Simmons. The “top table” comprising the Moderator (Ms Catriona Wheelan), General Secretary (the Revd Dr John Bradbury) and the Assistant Clerk (the Rev Dr Alex Clare-Young) introduced themselves. The Chaplain, Revd Jane Wade, led Assembly Executive in opening worship. The Moderator, Ms Catriona Wheeler, formally constituted the meeting. The minutes of the Assembly Executive Budget Meeting held on 25th November 2025 were approved unanimously.

Session two

The General Secretary advised the meeting that Paper F1 On Assisted Dying had been removed from the matters dealt with *en bloc*.

En Bloc Matters

Assembly Executive unanimously accepted the following papers *en bloc*.

Paper A1: Accessing the Legacy of Slavery Fund for small-scale transactions brought by the Business Committee.

Paper A2: Business Committee Revised Composition brought by the Business Committee.

Paper BG1: Terms of References for the Resources and Faith in Action Committees brought by the Resources and Faith in Action Committees.

Paper J1: Nominations Report brought by the Nominations Committee.

Paper R1: Expanding number of ASPD members brought by the Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group.

And voted unanimously in favour of the resolutions contained within namely.

Resolution 1 (paper A1)

Assembly Executive resolves that, with immediate effect, the Faith in Action Committee will have delegated power to approve expenditure of up to £5,000 per transaction from the Legacies of Slavery Fund. Expenditure of amounts greater than £5,000 will continue to require the approval of the Business Committee.

Resolution 2 (paper A2)

Assembly Executive adopts the revised membership of the Business Committee:

- a) An Independent Convenor (who shall be an officer of the General Assembly)
- b) The General Secretary who shall serve as Executive Secretary
- c) The Moderator of the General Assembly
- d) The immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly
- e) The incoming Moderator of the General Assembly
- f) The Clerk and Assistant Clerk to the General Assembly
- g) The Treasurer to the General Assembly
- h) The Convenors of the Faith in Action, Ministries and Resources Committees
- i) The other members of the Senior Leadership Team
- j) Two members appointed by the General Assembly to reflect the breadth and diversity of the United Reformed Church, one of whom will normally be under the age of 26
- k) The Business Committee may invite others to be in attendance when it will assist the making of Assembly Arrangements or the strategic oversight of the business of the Church, including, where appropriate, the convenors of other General Assembly Committees.

Resolution 8 (paper BG1)

The Assembly Executive approves the updated Terms of Reference for Faith in Action Committee.

Resolution 9 (paper BG1)

The Assembly Executive approves the updated Terms of Reference for Resources Committee.

Resolution 12 (paper J1)

Assembly Executive appoints members of committees and representatives of the Church, as set out in paper J1.

Resolution 13 (paper R1)

Assembly Executive amends Section O Appendix H to read as follows:

The Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline comprises:

- a) the Assembly Representative for Discipline,**
- b) eight members of the United Reformed Church appointed by the General Assembly, ensuring a good mix of “lay” members and Ministers or Church Related Community Workers and**
- c) the Moderator of each Synod.**

It is desirable, but not essential, for one member of the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline in each case to have a legal qualification or comparable experience.

The General Secretary presented Resolution 14.

Resolution 14

Assembly Executive appoints The Revd Michael Thomason to serve as Moderator of the North Western Synod from 1st April 2026 to 31st March 2033

This resolution was carried unanimously.

A3-Review of the Structure (brought by the Business Committee)

The General Secretary introduced the paper.

No questions for clarification were asked.

During discussion a plea was made for the consultation to be as widespread and creative as possible in order to engage a wide variety of churches of different size/workings/demographics etc, joint pastorates and to explore options to assist larger churches with matters such as employment governance. Concerns were expressed about potential detrimental financial effects of delaying previously agreed reviews of General Assembly and Assembly Executive remits and memberships. Clarification was sought as to whether Assembly Executive will always meet once in person each year.

The General Secretary thanked contributors for raising these important matters and assured Assembly Executive that the specific matters raised will be considered in the process moving forward. He advised that the financial aspects are unknown at this time but recognised that the decision of General Assembly 2025 to reduce attendance has had a significant financial impact already. He advised that the Business Committee will continue to keep how Assembly Executive meets under review depending on business and will reflect on the experience of this meeting. Assembly Executive considered the resolutions individually. Following concerns of duplication , it was highlighted that Resolution 3 was designed to initiate the review and Resolution 7 offered the means of doing so.

Resolution 3

The Assembly Executive instructs the Business Committee to initiate a review of the Structure of the United Reformed Church in the light of the report in A3 and the discussion at the Assembly Executive, consulting widely in the process

This was carried unanimously.

Resolution 4

The Assembly Executive Instructs the Business Committee to incorporate the review of the Functions of the General Assembly in the Structure into this wider review, bringing revised proposals for the size and functions of the General Assembly, Assembly Executive and associated trust entities in the light of work on the revision of the Structure

This was carried unanimously.

Resolution 5

The Assembly Executive, in adopting Resolutions 3 and 4, recognises a change in the timetable for the work required by Resolution A4 of General Assembly July 2025.

This was carried unanimously.

Resolution 6

The Assembly Executive, in the light of the change in timetable determines that the number of Synod Representatives at General Assembly shall remain 12 until the revision of the Structure is complete.

This was carried unanimously.

Resolution 7

The Assembly Executive invites the Business Committee to appoint a working group to prepare work that can form the basis of wider consultation

This was carried unanimously.

F1: On Assisted Dying (brought by Worship, Faith, and Order Committee)

Prior to this matter being presented, Rev Dr Romilly Micklem stated his belief that this matter was outwith the role of Assembly Executive and was one solely for General Assembly, having declared a view in 2007, to decide upon should it wish so to do. The General Secretary indicated his understanding that the paper/resolutions were competent and were indeed within the remit of the Assembly Executive. The Moderator ruled that the paper was in order and thereafter invited the Rev Dr Robert Pope, Convenor of Worship, Faith, and Order Committee to present it. He did so.

A question was raised as to the necessity for pastoral resources for this specific matter and whether this contradicted General Assembly's position in 2007. The Convenor emphasised that this enabling resolution aimed to facilitate General Assembly the opportunity to revisit its position given societal and legislative lin differing parts of the UK).

During a lively discussion, the study guide issued in 2027 was commended. Concern was expressed at the proposed timescales and whether sufficient purposeful work could be undertaken to allow for meaningful discussions at General Assembly 2026, especially in light of

the current stages the variety of Parliamentary Bills are at and the knock-on consequences of them.

Concern was expressed that General Assembly were being asked to review a decision based on the “mood of the people” and urged that any review, if required at all, should focus on matters such as better provision of palliative care rather than bringing God-given life to a premature end. Others expressed strong support for the resolution highlighting the need for a discussion to be had by General Assembly at this time, given the variety of current Parliamentary (in differing jurisdictions) discussions and decisions, legislative changes, societal needs, and pastoral needs.

In response, the Convenor commended the study guide to all and agreed it was a foundational paper for the Committee’s work in this matter. He agreed that the Committee required to undertake this matter properly, needed time to do so and to only bring relevant matters at appropriate General Assemblies. The Convenor emphasised that the purpose of this resolution was not to make General Assembly change its 2007 position but rather to enable it to review that in light of the current legislative changes and potential changes within the various jurisdictions.

In response to the discussion, the Moderator ruled that Resolution 10 would be taken in parts. Prior to Resolution 10 a) being discussed and in light of the comments made in the discussion, the Convenor moved that part (a) be amended to:

- a) prepare resources to be available for Assembly 2026 and enable informed discussion in the wider church, to help, discern, at a later Assembly, if the 2007 decision is still our understanding of the Mind of Christ.

This amendment was agreed by majority and thereafter 10a was carried by majority.

Prior to resolution 10c being discussed, the Convenor deleted, as a minor change, “by the end of 2026” from it.

Parts b, c and d were thereafter passed by majority.

Resolution 10 (as passed)

Assembly Executive instructs the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee to:

- a) **prepare resources to be available for Assembly 2026 and enable informed discussion in the wider church, to help, discern, at a later Assembly, if the 2007 decision is still our understanding of the Mind of Christ**
- b) **explore with partner churches their approach to working in jurisdictions where Assisted Dying is legal.**
- c) **prepare liturgical and pastoral resources for use in cases where Assisted Dying is an option or has been chosen.**

Session Three

F2: Responding to Christian Nationalism (brought by Worship, Faith, and Order Committee)

The Convenor of Worship, Faith and Order presented Paper F2 and moved Resolution 11.

It was highlighted that Christian Nationalism was not specifically mentioned in the resolution, with a feeling it should be. The Convenor moved to delete the words “in our time” and substitute them with “by “Christian Nationalism” as a minor amendment.

Following discussion supporting this matter, reminders as to why it was required, requests for specific words to be explored, and the recommendation of resources already available, Resolution 11 was passed unanimously.

Resolution 11

Assembly Executive instructs the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee in collaboration with other churches and partners to provide liturgical, pastoral and theological resources to enable the Church to proclaim and live out the gospel of Jesus Christ and confidently navigate the challenges to it thrown up by “Christian Nationalism”.

The convener of the Business Committee, Mrs Irish Simons offered thanks to all for their attendance, contributions and work behind the scenes.

The Moderator adjourned the meeting to meet again on 24th November 2026 online, or such other time and place as may be necessary.

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

- 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

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.

- 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 (Extra) Ordinary Hope

Moderator's Meeting

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Lythan Nevard moderator@urceastern.org.uk Geoff Felton moderator@urcmerseysynod.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 encourage us to reflect on our hope in Jesus and where we can bring God's hope into the world today.
Main points	Despite living through difficult times, we see the radical hope we share in Christ at work in the world today. We share examples of places where hope can be seen – both ordinary and extraordinary. We invite people to reflect on where we can offer the transformational hope of Jesus to our communities.
Previous relevant documents	Previous Synod Moderators' reports.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	Ecumenical partners are welcome to engage with the report.

The Moderators would like to encourage the local churches of The United Reformed Church (URC), to reflect on hope.

It can be hard to contemplate hope at the moment. How can we be hopeful when we are being encouraged to be divisive rather than united as a nation? How can we be hopeful when the people and the natural resources of the world are being exploited by those who already have more wealth than they need? How can we be hopeful when war and inflicting pain on others is still seen as the best way to deal with problems? How can we be hopeful when we can feel inadequate in the face of such dark times?

And yet. And yet we do see these as hope-filled times.

To be hopeful is to be radical.

Hope is a foundational Christian character. It is rooted not in the achievements of individuals or human institutions but on the character and promises of God as fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We see this hope at work in the Church today.

The Catholic Church has just celebrated a year of being Pilgrims of Hope.

We note the “Quiet Revival” report from the Bible Society and have shared stories together of the small but tangible signs of growth within a good number of United Reformed Churches. We hear conversations with younger generations who are disillusioned with the promises of hope from the past – they are asking big questions and longing to find a new focus for hope in their lives.

There was a genuine sense of hope arising from the Extraordinary General Assembly in November. A belief that God is not done with us yet and that together we have created possibilities for churches to focus on discipleship and mission as administrative burdens are lifted.

As Christians, as beloved children of God, we have hope to offer. As it says in 1 Peter “But have reverence for Christ in your hearts and honour him as Lord. Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect.” We are called to hold on to hope, to hold up our hope and to live as people who know that hope in Christ and are ready to share it.

There is something radically missional about living with Christian hope. Hope is not about escaping the reality of present circumstances but living with the hope of Christ despite circumstances with the understanding that in the future all will be well. This living hopefully in the now brings the future to bear on the present. It witnesses to a hurting and despairing world of the love and grace of God.

Hope doesn't have to be big, it can be ordinary. But the Spirit can make it extraordinary. Even if our faith is only as big as a mustard seed, God can do amazing things.

Timothy Keller says: “If you're falling off a cliff, strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch. Salvation is not finally based on the strength of your faith, but on the object of your faith.” We could easily replace the word faith in the above quote for hope.

Here are some signs of hope that the Moderators have seen:

- In West Midlands Synod, a worker in a church decided to create a new Sunday afternoon congregation. After a few months the whole church has been revitalised.
- In Wessex Synod, an idea 10 years in the brewing has turned into a Mission House where three people will live and support mission projects in the area.
- Webinars across the National Synod of Wales thinking about how we can be a More Able church, open and inclusive to everybody – have captured the imagination. The webinars have offered hope, particularly to people of all ages who have a disability.
- Yorkshire Synod framed their October meeting around what young adults wanted to talk about. This engaged and enabled conversation on difficult topics – such as rise

of the far right; Gen Z experience of gender and identity; the place of young adults in the church.

Sometimes what makes a difference is sharing our hope despite the dark times. People don't just want to hear how faith has made everything shiny and new. But that faith gives us the ability to endure and keep going when life is tough.

To echo Paul's words: *And so we boast of the hope we have of sharing God's glory! "We also boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval, and his approval creates hope. This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us."*

Romans 5:2-5

Sometimes holding on to hope means being brave enough to let things go so that something new can emerge. Hope in what we do not yet see as well as what we do.

"For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

Romans 8:24-25

- In East Midlands Synod a congregation had closed but community engagement was still happening within the building. A plea was made by the community not to walk away without exploring the possibility of a new community partnership and the birthing of a new congregation. A Synod Mission Project has been created looking to explore possibilities of a new-build and planting of a new congregation.
- In North Western Synod, the Moderator was reminded that at a closing service they had commented that the commitment and resilience of the members would form the fertile soil by which others would nurture the Word and the Church into the future. They were told: "Although you politely stopped short of calling them the fertilizer of the future, your meaning was clear. And so it has indeed come to pass - you were absolutely right." The resources and members of that church are feeding other churches and new places of mission.

Hope can shine bright or be the smallest of flames. Hope in Christ will always bring light to the darkness. Hope may look extraordinary or it may look like quite ordinary. Hope in Christ will always be transformational.

Personalia

This year we have said goodbye to Bridget Banks from Southern Synod and Clare Downing from North Western, both of whom have retired. We give thanks to God for their faithful service over the years and ask God to guide and uphold them as they begin ventures anew.

We have welcomed Mike Thomason to North Western Synod and eagerly await a new Moderator for Southern Synod. We have appreciated all that Russell Furley-Smith has brought to the meeting as the representative for Southern Synod whilst in vacancy.

Questions for discussion

- **If we say we put our hope in Jesus, how should this shape how we live?**
- **How can we demonstrate that we are hopeful people?**
- **What does hope look like in your context?**
- **What does it mean to let go of what is known with hope?**

Senior Leadership Team Report

Senior Leadership Team

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update the Assembly on the work of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the current and emerging agenda for work emerging from the General Assembly.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	No specific financial impact, but we note that there are major pieces of strategic work that the Assembly has sought or is seeking which at the moment have no identified funding to support them.
External (eg ecumenical)	Where possible we will seek ecumenical partners for the future work strands identified within this paper.

Plant gardens...

Our life together as the United Reformed Church has been significantly shaped by horticultural images in the last while. Jeremiah's image of planting gardens in exile was the text which attached itself to the Church Life Review process. An early part in that process had us reflecting on the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, whose roots were dug around and fertilizer applied, to give it a new chance of life.

The parable of the mustard seed – and the giant chaotic bush that can emerge from a tiny beginning is attaching itself to the M&M review process. Alongside these images, we have also had to face the difficult but necessary work of pruning: cutting back, not for its own sake, but so that future life may be possible.

This has been a demanding season in the life of the Church, but also one in which God may be inviting us to renewed faithfulness. There have been elements of all of this embodied within the life of the Church in the last while.

We became the 'Senior Leadership Team' last year, and the four members, John, Jenny, Nicola and Victoria became the settled form of the team after last year's General Assembly after a period of rapid turnover within what had been the General Secretariat – there were seven iterations of the General Secretariat in 6 years as far as we can count.

Other people are often in attendance to better support our work, particularly Myles Dunnett as he tends the ongoing Church Life implementation work. In a number of quarters, we've actively reflected on what leadership means in a conciliar church, where foundationally, we discern together the direction we need to take and the shapes we need to be.

Leadership

Leadership in that context is very much about enabling the Councils of the Church in their work, hopefully inspiring, bringing ideas and possibilities to spark careful discernment, as well as 'reading the signs of the times', enabling us to look at the horizon, spot new opportunities, possibilities and challenges.

St Paul recognises leadership and administration as one of the spiritual gifts to the life of the Church (1 Corinthians 12:28). In many ways we've been, as a tradition, wary about speaking of 'leadership', for fear it might undermine our conciliar convictions, but for Paul this is part of what enables the body to be the body.

Every local church needs leadership, which is exercised collectively by the Elders with the minister, but within that Elders meetings and Church meetings need individuals who enable and facilitate them to effectively function and discern the mind of Christ. How we equip and enable people across the diverse parts of the body that make up the United Reformed Church to exercise that form of leadership is an important question.

This last year in the Offices of the General Assembly has been challenging in many ways. The staffing restructure last year was a costly exercise for many, but important and in ensuring that we have a staffing structure fit for the middle of the 21st century and that the financial resources of the church are appropriately managed.

Pruning is not easy, but ultimately can bring new life. By and large it has been successful. Silos are breaking down, there are more dots being joined up, and the clarity which has emerged from three departments working to support three General Assembly Committees has been hugely welcome.

Interconnections

As an SLT, together with the Business Committee (and it is excellent this now contains the core committee convenors), it becomes more possible to spot the interconnections between pieces of work. Keep our collective eyes raised to the horizon and begin to enable the body of the Church to feel connected and joined up in ways which bring life.

The restructure has also revealed things to us what was previously less visible. Some of our critical infrastructure no longer meets the needs of the moment. In particular, our database and IT systems, requires urgent attention. Systems which began faithfully in an earlier era and have been carefully coaxed through many changes now need substantial reform if they are to serve the Church well into the future. These will continue to be considerations in the budget processes for the coming years.

The Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) for the Church Life Review process has given us a large and complex agenda for the next period of time. Inhabiting a culture where we all instinctively ask 'is this something that might be most effectively done together' before launching to resolve an immediate issue will take time. We await the full operation of the Church Life Fund Committee with some excitement and hope for what this will enable to better support local churches and new communities of worship and discipleship.

The EGA also tasked us with some major pieces of work. One is about how, together as the whole United Reformed Church, we might better be able to support local churches with their property. A major consultative exercise is currently being planned. Similarly, the root and branch review of the Ministry and Mission fund is underway.

There are some major pieces of project work that Assembly and Assembly Executive have already determined are necessary, but are yet to be fully implemented. This is largely simply about our limited capacity.

Structure

The review of the *Structure* of the Church is one major piece of work that will require careful and widespread consultation coupled with detailed legal and governance work to ensure that our constitutional provisions bring and enable life, rather than become millstones that drag us down.

Similarly, we are trying hard to move forward with a vital review of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging across the whole church which we pray will better enable us to live out many of our deepest commitments rooted in what we hear in Christ's gospel claim upon our life together.

The EGA also pointed to yet more challenges that we need to face together. From the consultative part of the Assembly, two major, interrelated, themes emerged.

One is about the identity of the United Reformed Church. Who are we? What are we called to be? What vision is God placing before us? How does our worship enable us to be encountered by the living God and fed in ways that makes us more truly made in the image of Christ?

Challenges

Another key theme was about the shape of the ministries the church requires to meet the challenges of this and future moments and the practical realities around how this is funded. A long-term piece of work on this latter question we are inviting General Assembly to set off at this meeting.

Identity was a strong theme emerging from our discernment together, and has also been bubbling up in many places in the life of the Church. We are, at the same time as sensing these are important questions, wary of them.

Past attempts at 'identity campaigns' have left wounds and hurts many years on. In a tradition where we foundationally believe that the vocation and purpose of each local congregation is best discerned within that local congregation, in its local context, we are also wary of imposing anything that looks like a denominational 'mission strategy' on local congregations.

Past experience tells us that when we attempt this, with the best will in the world, this is not fruitful. And yet, there are deep convictions, rooted in our traditions, which find embodiment today that we may all be helped if we can better name and own them.

We are a tradition which gathers first and foremost around scripture, which shapes and patterns our worship and our life together. We are a conciliar church, where we believe we discern better together than apart.

Roots and treasures

We are a tradition that treasures the reality that ministry belongs to the whole people of God collectively. We are a tradition with roots in dissent, and a clear conviction that the church has a government distinct from that of the state.

We are a tradition that believes the voices of all, young and old, all shape who we are and help us discern and exercise leadership. We are a church that believes the body of Christ is only experienced in its fulness in its diversity, being a multicultural church that stands against all forms of racism.

Following the EGA we believe it is right that we begin to focus our attention on how we understand and articulate our identity as the United Reformed Church in ways that deepen and enable our local discernment and life together. We are in many ways a small Church (though a large organisation!). From tiny seeds extraordinary things can emerge – as with the mustard bush.

There are still seeds to be planted for the future, which might well bear fruit for those who will come behind us. We are giving active thought to how we might enable the General Assembly, along with Synods and local churches, to begin to engage this question proactively.

In terms of the need for work on technological infrastructure and systems, as well as the work of the Church Life Fund Committee, and the pieces of work emerging from the Extraordinary General Assembly and the Church Life Review, these are all ways the church is digging around roots and fertilizing in the hope that new life will emerge.

Renewal

There are seasons in the life of churches, just as there are seasons in the life of all organisations. This is a season of review, change, and hopefully renewal.

The Church Life Review began to ask fundamental questions about who we are and how we wish to be together and how we are called to use our resources. There have been major structural changes to the work of the General Assembly and the staff team.

We believe we are still in a period of change and renewal that will fit the United Reformed Church for the opportunities and challenges of the middle of the 21st century.

Meeting faithfully the opportunities and challenges we face will continue to require commitment, imagination, prayerful discernment, engagement with scripture, and human and financial resource.

Churches, and organisations have periods of reform and renewal, and periods of more settled life. We believe we are still called to be in a period of reform and renewal, and that if that call is truly from God, we must continue to grasp the Kairos moment and live into that, with all that entails.

Our call is to continue to plant gardens, fertilise roots and scatter tiny seeds that might become great bushes.

As the Senior Leadership Team of the work of the General Assembly, we seek to serve by enabling and equipping the General Assembly and its committees and staff to faithfully respond to this call to be active workers in the garden of God.

Paper A1 Update

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on the work of the Business Committee and report on decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly since Assembly Executive met in February 2026.
Main points	Update on the work of the committee; update on work in progress.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

The general work of the committee

The Business Committee meets once in the year residentially, and three times via video conference. After Assembly Executive, the composition was amended to include the convenors of the three core General Assembly Committees. It therefore brings together the Officers of the Assembly, the Senior Leadership Team, the Core Assembly Committee Convenors and two additional members appointed by the Assembly. The hope is that this will allow for a strategic view to be taken of the whole work of the General Assembly.

The Assembly arrangements work of the committee is now being held by a sub-committee, led primarily by the staff responsible for General Assembly arrangements, supported by the Convenor. This should allow the main agenda of the Committee to concern the overview of all the Business and ongoing work of the Assembly

Ongoing work overseen by the Business Committee

There are a number of key pieces of work instructed by the General Assembly that the Business Committee is responsible for. Of these, two pieces are reported on in separate reports: the review of the Ministerial Disciplinary Process and the Review of Education for Ministry phase one (EM1) and Resource Centres for Learning (RCL) capacity.

Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Review

Assembly 2023 directed that an external consultancy be appointed, working with a steering group, to exercise a review of the life of the United Reformed Church in terms of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB). Initial attempts to find an appropriate consultancy stalled, then the advice of the most likely consultancy to effectively carry out this work advised the key priority would need to be the revision of the Nominations process, which was already underway. We were advised to ensure these changes were made and bedded in, before attempting further EDIB review work.

The changes to the Nominations process are now bedding in, and we have returned to this question. A working group was formed consisting of John Bradbury (General Secretary), Jo Clare-Young (Convenor of the EDIB sub-committee), David Salisbury (Secretary of the EDIB sub-committee), Karen Campbell (Head of Global and Intercultural Church) and Maxine Parker (Head of People and Benefits), and Alex Clare Young (Assistant Clerk). A remit has been produced for consultancy work to form the basis of a tender process which the Business Committee has agreed. The group is currently in the process of seeking out appropriate consultants or consultancies to invite to tender.

The EDIB sub-committee needed to be re-formed in the light of the committee structure review, and it has been agreed that it take on the role of the steering group for the process, and nominations are seeking to fill roles on the sub-committee accordingly.

Review of the Structure of the United Reformed Church

The Committee has begun giving consideration to how this work might most effectively be undertaken. A working group will need to be established, and it is hoped to be able to work through the means of qualitative research which will involve careful facilitation and listening to the concerns of a few representative local churches, as well as engagement with Synods, and a wider call for engagement through a more qualitative process.

When this piece of work was proposed at Assembly Executive, the paper warned that it may take some time for the capacity to become available for this work to progress, and the capacity is unlikely to be available until early 2027 when the General Secretary returns from sabbatical, and when hopefully the Head of Governance Services role has been filled.

The Clerk, Assistant Clerk and General Secretary had a helpful preliminary meeting with Synod Clerks to map the areas for consideration, and give thought to how we might most effectively hear from 'hard to reach' congregations, who perhaps are those who might benefit most from potential changes to the structure in terms of local congregational life.

Further changes to the General Assembly, Assembly Executive and the relation of these councils of the church to the URC Trust (with a view to it potentially becoming a Charitable Incorporated Organisation) will form part of the review of the Structure. Active consideration of this becomes more possible once the Ministerial Pension Scheme Buy-out process is complete, hopefully in the second half of 2026.

Work on the horizon

The Business Committee has given active thought to a number of matters which it believes may need the consideration of the wider Church. One is the question of how the General Assembly is enabled to become more strategic in terms of setting priorities. There is the tendency of business to come from committees, and Assembly to adopt

resolutions and call for pieces of work which are valuable in and of themselves, but we can struggle to resource them. Our life as a denomination might be more effective if we were better able to prioritise, over a period of time, what the key priorities of the life of the United Reformed Church were. This would also enable us to more effectively determine what resource is needed, to enable the priorities the Assembly had set, to ensure that resources were directed towards those priorities. Now the Business Committee fully brings together the core committees of the Assembly, along with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Officers, we will be able to further consideration of this more effectively, and hope to bring proposals to future meetings of the Assembly and Assembly Executive concerning by what processes the Assembly might be enabled to discern the priorities that we are called to for periods of time.

The identity of the United Reformed Church

We are very aware that from a number of places, there are increasing calls for the General Assembly to give consideration to the questions around the core identity of the United Reformed Church. This emerged as one of two major themes from the consultative part of the Extraordinary General Assembly in 2025 (along with questions around the ministries the church needs to thrive). These questions also frequently arise in gatherings of Assembly Office staff, Moderators meetings, and within the wider life of the church. We believe this is potentially a very valuable piece of work to engage with, and continue to give thought to how this might more helpfully, and creatively, be engaged with.

Decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly since the Assembly Executive met in February 2026.

The Terms of Reference of the Committee require us to report on any decisions taken on behalf of the General Assembly between meetings of the Assembly and the Assembly Executive.

Since February, in the absence of an appointed General Assembly Appointments Panel (that Nominations were in the process of appointing), the Business Committee appointed the following appointment and nominations groups for various nomination and term-review processes in accordance with the process for appointments and reviews adopted by the Assembly:

For the term-review of The Revd. Dr. John Bradbury (General Secretary):
Catriona Wheeler (convenor), Gilbert Esambe, Carole Marsden, and Darnette Whitby-Reid

For the term-review of The Revd. Nicola Furley-Smith (Deputy General Secretary Ministries):
Confirmed - John Bradbury (convenor), Nneoma Chima, Ewen Harley, and Tim Llewelyn.

For the review of Ms. Karen Campbell (Head of Global and Intercultural Church):
John Bradbury (convenor), Elizabeth Hall, Dean Taylor, and Paul Whittle

For the review of The Revd. Jamie Kissack (Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod):
John Bradbury (convenor), Graham Jennings, Paul Robinson, and Darnette Whitby-Read

Paper A2

Toward a Fitness to Practice Process

Business Committee – Ministerial Disciplinary Working Group

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 1 General Assembly welcomes the report of the Ministerial Disciplinary Working Group and affirms the direction of travel towards a ‘Fitness to Practice’ process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Progress report on the revision of the Ministerial Disciplinary Report.
Main points	- The working group is developing a new process to replace the current ministerial disciplinary arrangements, aiming for a clearer, fairer, more consistent and legally robust system. - The work has widened from discipline alone to a broader ‘Fitness to Practice/Fitness to Minister’ approach, so that disciplinary, capability, competency and health-related concerns can be handled appropriately. - Further policy and rules work has been commissioned from Ed Morgan KC, including a review of ministries policies and a revised draft framework to support a coherent new process. - Before adoption, the proposals will go through wider consultation and testing with Ministers, Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), Moderators, Safeguarding Officers and others to identify issues and unintended consequences. - Implementation will require governance arrangements, appointments, guidance, training, professional support and transitional planning; adoption is now likely to be sought from General Assembly in 2027.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A3 – Assembly Executive 2025

Consultation has taken place with...	Along the journey so far: online consultation with ministers, with the Moderators Meeting, with CDAG and with Synod Safeguarding Officer. A further round of significant consultation is envisaged.

Summary of impact

Financial	Agreed within current budget process, with significant implementation costs to be budgeted for 2027.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Introduction

Assembly Executive in February 2025 appointed a working group consisting of the General Secretary, the Clerk, The Deputy General Secretary Ministries and the Head of Safeguarding to continue work towards a new disciplinary process. It received, and commended, the recommendations from an initial report from Ed Morgan KC (King's Counsel) which was a comparative process, drawing lessons from similar professional standards processes in sister churches, and other processional bodies.

The working group remains deeply alert to the reality that ministerial discipline is an exercise of the pastoral function of the church. Where things go wrong, there needs to be time, space and appropriate support to enable healing and renewal to take place. It is also a key element in keeping the church safe and ensuring the peace and wellbeing of the body. It is about the credibility of our witness to Christ within the world and an expression of our commitment to the gospel principles of justice. It is trying to embody, within sound process, all these foundational commitments that speak to the heart of our faith. Simultaneously, it is about ensuring that we are safeguarding the people, the finances and the reputation of the church in terms of the effective use of our charitable funds. In an increasingly litigious climate, and a climate in which some with a strong secularist agenda are actively seeking to hold faith communities to account in the furtherance of an ideological agenda, this creates a heady mixture of risks that we are trying to enable the church to carry responsibly and pastorally.

Work has progressed more slowly than initially hoped. This is partly simply a recognition of the capacity of the individual members of the working group, and partly because as work has progressed, we have become aware that to effectively meet the needs of the Church in the area of ministerial discipline is more complex than first assumed, and is inter-related with a wider range of concerns.

We are delighted to welcome Ed Morgan KC to address General Assembly this year. It seemed important to us, as the range of the work we deem necessary expands, for Assembly to have the chance to hear from, and engage, with Ed himself, as the person whose professional advice is supporting this process. Ed is a senior barrister, a deeply committed and faithful member of the Roman Catholic Church, an expert in employment law, regulatory competence, and particularly fitness to practice processes in the professional sphere and has advised a wide range of faith communities on matters relating to his areas of expertise, including disciplinary, performance, and fitness to practice processes. Ed has become a trusted ally of the United Reformed Church as he's offered us assistance in a range of matters over many years.

Developments since February 2025

Following the adoption of the principles of the Interim Report from Ed Morgan received by Assembly Executive 2025, Ed was instructed to produce a draft set of rules for a new disciplinary process. This in and of itself was a major piece of work.

Those draft rules offer us a comprehensive and coherent process that addresses the key issues facing us in the development of a new disciplinary process. This includes measures to ensure the issues identified in the recommendations made by Ed Morgan were met: the new disciplinary process should be clearer, fairer, and more consistent, with explicit behavioural standards, defined jurisdiction, and a duty of disclosure and cooperation; it should have a formal screening stage before full proceedings, improved and reviewable interim measures, precise drafting of allegations, and clearer rules for discontinuing cases where appropriate; it needed robust hearing procedures, a better separation of roles to ensure impartiality, published guidance on sanctions, clearer appeal arrangements, and a more transparent safeguarding role limited to relevant cases. Overall, the aim was to create a process that is legally sound, proportionate, transparent, and properly resourced.

There are various practical issues with the operation of the current process that we hoped a revised process will enable us to refine and evolve positively. These include the amount of time a process can take, the number of volunteers it takes to staff the current process which becomes increasingly untenable, the lack of a responsible person with oversight of the operation of the whole process and a lack of detailed provisions, which at times can lead to vagueness or considerable discretion being exercised by Assembly Commission who are left to operate without detailed procedural guidance.

In the opinion of the working group, the draft rules gave us a much more coherent, logical, comprehensive process from which we can safeguard the life of the church.

Towards a Fitness to Practice/Fitness to Minister process

As we grappled with the realities of the cases that present themselves, whilst also considering the draft new process, we became aware that restricting the work simply to a disciplinary process was unhelpful. There are a range of complex situations which can bring into question someone's fitness to engage in ministry. There are straightforward ministerial disciplinary cases. Human beings are finite and fallen and we do not always live up to the standards expected of us. But there are also at times more complex situations, where someone's ability to engage in ministry safely and competently are rooted in health issues, beyond someone's control, and yet which have a direct bearing on their ability to minister safely. The Church use to have an incapacity process for such situations, which had to be withdrawn because of legal difficulties the use of that process might have caused. There are different situations again, when someone's competency in ministry is called into question. The church has processes to try to support people in their ministry, and enable them to live into the competency that the wider church and congregations need from ministers. Where despite support, that is not forthcoming, the church needs fair, transparent process to enable that situation to be handled.

The working group, on reflecting on the new draft disciplinary rules, and the wider context of the situations that need careful handling, realised that a new process needed to be considerably wider than simply a disciplinary process. It needed to be able to handle the full range of disciplinary, capability and competency issues that can arise. This reflects the complex and often multi-layered situations which arise. The process needs to be able to handle a situation in a way appropriate to all the facts which surround it. This may mean that what begins as a disciplinary matter, needs at some point to change track and be handled as either a competency or a capability matter.

What is needed if a process which can handle the range of fitness to practice concerns which can arise.

This realisation led to the commissioning of some further work from Ed. This led to two key outcomes. Firstly, a review of the whole suite of ministries policies, and secondly, a revised set of Rules for a fitness to practice process.

A process which may bring someone's ministry to a close is a deeply serious matter. It is right that the matters under consideration be considered with care, in detail and fairly, and that a minister has the full right to respond to the concerns raised. But this, in many instances, needs to come right at the end of attempts to support and encourage a minister in their ministry to enable their flourishing. Any fitness to practice process therefore needs to be rooted in a range of effective policies surrounding ministry in the round, including clarity about expected standards, clarity over who such processes apply to, and the necessary policies in place to appropriately support, equip and enable people within their ministries.

Ed Morgan produced for us a review of our current suite of ministries policies, with a view to helping us frame them more effectively to support the development of a new, coherent fitness to practice approach. This affirmed the quality of the approach taken to drafting ministries policies, and pointed to a number of ways the approach might be refined and in places tightened, to provide the appropriate basis for the drafting of a new fitness to practice process. Many of the amendments to Ministries policies coming before this General Assembly find their origin in this work and are a significant and necessary piece of work on the journey to a new fitness to practice process.

A new draft set of Rules, embedded within and expanding the first draft has also been produced which the working group now needs to work through with care, before arriving at a draft that can form the basis of wide-spread consultation.

Towards adoption of a new process

Once a complete revised draft has been arrived at, it is then envisaged that before General Assembly is invited to adopt a new process there will be a widespread process of consultation carried out to enable a final revision. It is expected that various groups will be consulted:

- Ministers and CRCWs: we expect to run a further series of on-line consultations enabling Ministers to fully feedback their comments on the proposed new process.
- Synod Moderators are a key group of people, with an overview of the kinds of situations which arise, and considerable experience of operating the disciplinary process, and a living awareness of the impact on ministers, complainants and congregations.
- Synod Safeguarding Offices are a key group, who have particular functions in cases with a safeguarding element.
- Those who have experience in operating the current process have important insights to offer the development of the new process. CDAG have already been consulted at various stages, and they, and those with particular functions within the current process will be consulted further.
- The Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) sub-committee, who will have an important view on the equalities aspects of running an effective process.

We also envisage running some sessions where various people from different constituencies are invited to run case studies through a mock version of the process to

stress test it and ensure that there are as few unintended consequences to the changes as possible.

Towards implementation of a new process

Agreeing a new set of Rules in and of itself is not an action which brings into being a new process. The Rules are envisaged as just that – the particular ‘rules’ which govern a process, and ensure it is just and fair. Around that there is considerable apparatus which needs to be in place:

- Key appointments to roles within the process
- Support and guidance material to help people navigate effectively what will necessarily be quite a complex set of rules.
- Training and education for those who will have roles within the process.
- Appointments made of professionals who will offer services in the process, for example in investigation or in acting as spokesperson either as case presenters or supporting ministers through the process.
- A process in place to ensure that ministers who need support and representation within the process can find that and are enabled to make informed decisions as to where that might come from.
- Transitional arrangements put in place to ensure a smooth transition from the current process to the revised process.

Governance of Fitness to Practice Process

A coherent governance process will need to be set in place to oversee the operation of the new process. Currently, the Complaints and Disciplinary Advisory Group is largely made up of representatives of key people who are involved in operating the process. This makes it difficult for it to exercise effective governance oversight of the process. It is envisaged that a new, much smaller committee of the General Assembly will offer governance oversight of the process, and be supported in its work by a small rules committee that will have delegated authority from the General Assembly to make minor changes to the rules to aid the effective ongoing operation of the process in the light of experience and/or changes to the legislative contexts in which we work. It is envisaged wholesale changes to the substance of the process would require the authority of the General Assembly, but more minor changes to the process to be delegated to allow effective and efficient development of the process as required.

Timescale

We are wary about offering a specific timescale for the completion of this work, which partly depends on the capacity of various people carrying a range of significant responsibilities. Realistically, consultation and further revision will not be complete by the end of this year which constitutes the paper deadline for Assembly Executive in 2027. It is therefore likely that General Assembly 2027 will be invited to adopt the new process. Following this, there will need to be considerable implementation work before a new process comes into effect.

Paper A3

Resource Centres for Learning EM1 Review

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Dr John P Bradbury, General Secretary john.bradbury@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 2 The General Assembly: A. determines that the Luther King Theological College become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One (EM1). B. determines that the Scottish College becomes the complementary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One. C. invites Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to seek the closest possible collaboration in the delivery of Education for Ministry phase one and in other areas of work. D. determines to cease using Westminster College, Cambridge, for Education for Ministry One. E. instructs the Business Committee, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, Resources Committee and Faith in Action Committee, to agree with Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College new Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements to effect the outcomes sought in A-D, and to ensure the appropriate financial agreements are in place to enable their successful delivery. F. instructs the Resources Committee to work with the three existing RCLs to provide appropriate financial support through a transitional period through to the full implementation of A-D. G. instructs the Business Committee and Resources Committee to work with Westminster College

	Governors as they discern the future for the College and to enable the General Assembly to support this through appropriate governance and transitional financial arrangements when appropriately developed proposals have been made. Resolution 3 General Assembly receives the observations of the Working Group and instructs the Ministries Committee to review these recommendations and return to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive with any appropriate proposals.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To bring recommendations with regard to the future provision of initial ministerial formation (EM1).
Main points	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY This review responds to the United Reformed Church's need to address declining student numbers, over-capacity in training provision, and financial sustainability in Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) as determined by General Assembly 2025. Key criteria The review assessed Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) against core criteria (summarised as): • Excellence in theological and ministerial formation • Integration of academic learning with practice, mission and personal formation • Capacity to support the whole Church's learning, leadership and discipleship • Accessibility and flexibility of delivery • Financial sustainability and scalability • Ability to operate as a strategic partner to the Church Strategic conclusions All three RCLs demonstrate high-quality provision. However, declining vocations (around 5–8 new entrants annually) make it unsustainable to maintain three institutions. The Church must therefore: • Concentrate resources to ensure long-term viability • Move to a model of sustained partnership with one primary and one complementary institution. • Enable the partner institutions to flourish, not merely survive Main recommendations

	1. Luther King Theological College to become the primary Resource Centre for Learning and main provider of EM1, offering integrated formation across multiple ministries in close partnership with the United Reformed Church. 2. The Scottish College continue a complementary provider, enabling distinct pathways for students whose educational, formational or practical circumstances are well served by its model 3. To invite Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to work in close partnership. 4. Cease use of Westminster College, Cambridge, for EM1, primarily due to the number of pathways which would need to be developed which already exist and are tried and tested elsewhere, and reflecting the panel's assessment of its financial profile. Implementation New partnership agreements will be established, with transitional financial support provided. The outcome seeks to ensure sustainable, high-quality ministerial formation and a coherent, integrated approach to learning across the Church.
Previous relevant documents	Assembly Executive February 2025 Paper AD1 General Assembly July 2025 Paper ADH2
Consultation has taken place with...	There was a full consultative process regarding the criteria for the review, with all RCLs contributing, prior to General Assembly July 2025. There has been consultation with all RCLs through paper submissions, visits, and follow-up correspondence through the last year. There has been consultative conversation with ecumenical counterparts from the Methodist Church and the Church of England.

Summary of impact

Financial	See appendix to the report.
External (eg ecumenical)	Any recommendation in line with Assembly's decision to reduce the number of RCLs offering EM1 would have knock-on ecumenical considerations. If these recommendations are adopted by Assembly, depending on the future shape of Westminster College's life, this will impact upon the life of the Cambridge Theological Federation.

Glossary of Key Acronyms used within the Report

AALP:	Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher – recognised lay preaching ministry
CA (Common Awards):	National theological education framework validated by Durham

	University
CRCW:	Church Related Community Worker
CTF:	Cambridge Theological Federation – ecumenical partnership of theological institutions
EM1:	Education for Ministry Phase 1
ESB:	English Standards Board (Community work accreditation)
LKTC:	Luther King Theological College
LMP:	Living Ministry Programme – placement-based training component
CLP:	Church Leadership Programme MoU: Memorandum of
Understanding MWS:	Minister of Word and Sacraments NSM: Non-Stipendiary Ministry
RCL:	Resource Centre for Learning – theological training provider
SLA:	Service Level Agreement – defines services and expectations in partnerships
SM:	Stipendiary Ministry

Introduction

General Assembly in July 2025 passed several resolutions concerned with reducing the over-capacity within the provision for ministerial training and formation for Education for Ministry phase one for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

In the light of those resolutions, the task group continued its work in implementing the process set out (membership The Revd Dr John Bradbury (General Secretary), The Revd Nicola Furley Smith (Deputy General Secretary, Ministries), The Revd. Dr Michael Hopkins (Convenor of the Resources Committee and Moderator of Wessex Synod), Pippa Hodgson (former convenor of the Education and Learning Committee), Victoria James (Chief Operating Officer), The Revd Jenny Mills (Deputy General Secretary, Faith in Action and former Secretary for Education and Learning), The Revd Dr. Michael Jagessar (former Moderator of the General Assembly, theologian and theological educator), The Revd Dr Andrea Russell (external consultant, Warden of Gladstone's Library) and Mr Alan Yates (Treasurer and previous convenor of Education and Learning).

Criteria for decision making adopted by the General Assembly

The criteria agreed by General Assembly were refined to reflect the additional points helpfully raised in debate. They were finalised as:

Theological and ministerial formation for Ministries of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Work

Education must provide a strong foundation in biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and reflective ministry practice.

Mission-focused and integrated learning

Education and Learning for the whole people of God should equip the whole church for mission, and integrate theological study with practical ministry skills, effective placement work, and skills in reflective practice.

Ecumenical and reformed identity

Engagement with other denominations is essential while maintaining a distinctive Reformed ethos in theology and practice.

Discipleship and leadership development

Learning opportunities must support lifelong discipleship, leadership training for Elders, provision must be able to resource structured programs like Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme.

Accessibility and contextual relevance

Education should be accessible, inclusive, adaptable, and delivered in ways that meet the diverse needs of URC members across different nations and ministry settings.

Financial sustainability

Any future model must significantly reduce the £800,000 RCL block grant budget while ensuring both operational and long-term financial viability, including capital investment needs.

Efficient use of Church resources

Training provision should align with Synod-funded learning initiatives, ensuring that overall church spending on education (currently over £1.7M) is used effectively and strategically.

Scalability and future-proofing

Education and Learning provision must be flexible, allowing for expansion or contraction in response to changing church needs and ministerial demands and the ability to respond to external changes in context, for example changes in validation arrangements.

The contribution of RCLs to the development of future academics and theological educators within the life of the United Reformed Church.

The Assembly recognised the need to continue to provide the church with leadership that had had the opportunity to engage at depth, and in research level study.

The ways in which RCL curricula and practice support the denomination's aspiration to be a post-colonial, anti-racist Church engaging seriously with the legacies of transatlantic slavery.

This is about the formational context, as well as the curriculum itself, and the published resources engaged with during study.

The process of the review

The Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) were invited to submit written responses to evidence how their offerings enable the criteria to be met, along with end of year and management accounts, and any business plans.

There then followed a series of visits from the core team of visitors (John Bradbury, Michael Hopkins, Michael Jagessar and Andrea Russell) to each institution. Unfortunately, at the last moment it was not possible for Andrea to visit Luther King Theological College (LKTC), so she arranged a separate visit at a slightly later date. We thank LKTC for making that possible.

The initial timetable agreed by the General Assembly presumed that there would be one round of visits, then a final report would be prepared in draft form for the RCLs to comment on, before final proposals would be brought to Assembly Executive. However, at the end of the first visit, both those who had visited, and the wider working group were not satisfied that we were in a position to make a firm recommendation. It was very clear that we had seen excellence in each institution.

We were also left with questions, and in varying ways some concerns we felt that needed further addressing. The working group therefore took the decision that a further round of visits would be appropriate.

A draft report, summarising the findings of the original visits, and naming the areas where there were continuing concerns about each institution. This was circulated to the RCLs, who all responded both in writing, and then through engagement with a second visit (this time from John Bradbury, Michael Jagessar and Andrea Russell). These visits were concluded early in the New Year.

Having finalised the interim report prior to the second round of visits, the working group also determined that the financial information that had been requested gave detailed information about the past financial situation of each institution, but did not give us information about what the future financial situation would look like, particularly in the light of different potential outcomes of this process.

It was therefore decided that Michael Hopkins and Alan Yates would undertake a further piece of work, supported by the Chief Finance Officer, John Samson, to attempt to model the financial impact on each institution of differing outcomes from this process.

All the RCLs have participated in this process with great grace, patience and generosity of spirit. It is difficult to feel that one is being examined, particularly when the implications for individuals and organisations are so significant. We extend huge thanks to all the staff and governors of all the college for their engagement in the process. All the teaching staff we have engaged with bring passion and commitment to the task of theological education.

In all the RCLs we have found excellent practice and been left excited by the life of all the institutions we have engaged with. It has been a genuinely deeply difficult process for those engaged from the working group, because in an ideal world we are clear that we would wish to be able to support each of these three excellent institutions with the student numbers, and finances, needed for flourishing. Having grappled extensively with whether there is any way that can be possible, we conclude it is not and that the direction of travel the General Assembly has determined is the correct one.

The issue of student numbers

One of the key drivers of this review is the reality of student numbers. Here, the reality is stark. It is worth setting out the numbers for the last few years. Also included for reference in the final column is the total number of students 20 years ago, in 2006, the year General Assembly last revised the number of colleges and courses we used to train ministers.

For reference, in 2006 the URC Yearbook records us having 78,872 members in 1655 congregations. In this year's Yearbook (2026) we have 39,576 members in 1149 congregations (and that is not a like for like comparison, as we now also count all LEP members).

	Students in Training *					
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2006
STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL) CRCW	3	2	2	1	0	6
Northern College (RCL) MWS	9	8	6	5	3	
Scottish College (RCL)	2	0	1	2	2	
Westminster College (RCL)	10	10	7	5	2	
Subtotal	24	20	16	13	7	51
NON-STIPENDIARY						
Northern College (RCL) CRCW				1	1	
Northern College (RCL)	2	2	3	4	2	
Scottish College (RCL)	1	2	1	2	2	
Westminster College (RCL)	1	3	3	4	2	
Subtotal	4	7	7	11	7	14
NON-STIPENDIARY Local						
Northern College (RCL)		2	2	1	1	
Scottish College (RCL)	4	2	2	2	1	
Westminster College (RCL)	3	2	2	4	2	
Subtotal	7	6	6	7	4	
Total New Entry Students**	13	7	11	5	?	
GRAND TOTAL	35	33	29	31	18	78

* Numbers are all actual as at March each year, and projected actuals based on known starters and leavers for March 2027.

** The total number of new starters across all forms of ministry.

Thus far, the indications are that there are seven candidates we would expect to come through from Synods to Assessment Conference in 2027 – meaning that at most there would be seven entrants in 2027 (across all forms of ministry), perhaps more realistically five.

It is interesting to note that our membership has declined by about 50% in 20 years. The number of congregations has declined by around 30%. The number of candidates for all forms of ministry has declined by 64%.

That the church has sustained such levels of numerical decline in the last 20 years, whilst continuing to sustain the same number of RCLs indicates why it has become pressing that further review and change is necessary.

The working group conclude that a realistic potential number of new students each year across all forms of ministry to presume for the purposes of planning is an average of 8. This would likely be higher some years and lower others. Based on the current trajectory, that is as realistic as we can be, and it may, projected forward, soon become an optimistic number.

This fact, taken alone, suggests that radical thinking is needed about how we take seriously as a church challenging people to consider whether they have a vocation, and also to review the shape and modes of preparation for ministry such that it might be possible to begin to see an overall increase in the number of vocations. We note, however, that if we managed to maintain an average of eight for the next decade, that would have halted the decline in the number of vocations – which alone would be in some ways a huge positive.

A paper from the Ministries Committee coming to this year's General Assembly posits that we are potentially at a concerning 'tipping point' and sets out the number of new stipendiary ministers that would be required each year to maintain ministerial numbers at their current levels.

These figures are considerably above eight per year on average. Whilst we are fortunate many years to receive ministers from other churches through certificates of eligibility, we also do need to be alert to a more optimistic view, which might see an increase in vocations. What this does, is underlie the vital need for scalability of provision. We need provision that can shrink and expand, possibly quite significantly in either direction.

In the course of our work, we became aware that in the academic year 25-26, there were only sufficient candidates for one assessment conference. From this, there will be only five students beginning training in September 2026, only 1 of which is for stipendiary ministry on a four-year programme. This reality focused our minds.

The wider ecumenical and higher education context of theological education

Throughout this review, we have been aware that both the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and the Church of Scotland, have been in the process of reviewing their ministerial training and formation programmes. The Methodist Church is still in that process and will bring recommendations to Conference in 2027. The Church of England is preparing a report with recommendations for Synod later in 2026.

The Church of Scotland adopted proposals to its General Assembly in June 2026 to centre its training for stipendiary ministry in the Divinity Faculty of Glasgow University as lead provider. Whilst there have been informal consultation between those engaged in the review processes in all these traditions, none of the denominations undertaking such reviews have given governance consent for them to be undertaken ecumenically. Informal consultation has had to be careful, not least because the direction of travel of such processes is potentially commercially sensitive information for Theological Colleges and training institutions affected. Ecumenical consultation has been real, but by necessity, somewhat limited in scope. Also, during this review, Spurgeon's College, the Baptist College in London suddenly and unexpectedly closed after becoming insolvent. This too, was a stark reminder of the fragility of the theological education sector.

‘Being a good ancestor...’

Michael Jagessar has held before us an idea that we have found helpful. What does it mean to consider ourselves a ‘good ancestor’? Meaning, when people look back in generations to come, will they believe that we took decisions, and stewarded resources in ways which have led to future flourishing?

We found this a helpful lens through which to consider this task, but also an uncomfortable one. All of those involved would love to see the possibility of bequeathing three, flourishing, creative and vibrant centres for theological learning to the future. As we can see from the student numbers above, just in terms of student numbers it is hard to see us, as the URC, sustaining the number of students to enable one college to flourish – though we recognise that all of our RCLs work in partnership with others, which enables sustainability in different ways.

However, there is a very serious danger that were we to carry on supporting 3 colleges as a denomination, we would not bequeath three flourishing institutions to the future, but three struggling ones at best, and three that have become unviable and closed at worst. We cannot but sadly conclude that General Assembly was right in taking the decision in July 2025 to cease using at least one. This enables a concentration of resources, and students, such that the student experience is enriched, and institutional viability is sustained.

Criteria	Luther King Theological College	Scottish College	Westminster College
Theological and ministerial formation for Ministries of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Work Education must provide a strong foundation in biblical studies, theology, church history, ethics, pastoral care, and reflective ministry practice.	An excellent integrated, contextual and practical formation for MWS and CRCWs. Rooted in the Common Awards, with assessments designed to integrate placement and classroom learning. Placements always include an ecumenical placement, often a sector ministry placement, and a long 2 year placement through the final years of the programme. The range of disciplines are taught by staff with the relevant expertise. Students receive ongoing tutorial support. The range of theological disciplines are taught by specialist staff drawn from across the college teaching body. Existing CRCW program delivered using the Common Awards, and to English Standard Boards accredited standards using the integrated contextual and practice based pedagogical approach.	The use of the Scottish faculties gives access to world-leading academic theological faculties as well as the ability for students to engage with the Common Awards programme through the Scottish Episcopal Institute. The college program gives students placements, ministerial skills and reflective practice, accompanied by strong tutorial support. The small numbers mean that formation is highly individualised around the needs of particular students, and no two programmes will be the same. The college programme is in a constant state of evolution, guided by the individual needs of the students at any one time making highly tailored programmes possible. A CRCW programme could be developed, either mapped against Common Awards through the Scottish Episcopal Institute, or in partnership with Community Education programmes in Scottish faculties.	Excellent range of awards available (Common Awards, Cambridge BTH, Cambridge Tripos, Cambridge post-graduate awards, Anglia Ruskin post-graduate awards) alongside a diverse placement programme (3 different placements a year followed by LMP in final year) with college enrichment programme and strong tutorial and academic support. A huge range of subject specialist teachers teaching awards through the CTF. A CRCW programme could be developed, mapped onto the Common Awards. Existing staff experience and expertise in community and youth work, and wider expertise in the CTF in this area. ESB accreditation would be possible through careful mapping on CA.

Mission-focused and integrated learning Education and Learning for the whole people of God should equip the whole church for mission, and integrate theological study with practical ministry skills, effective placement work, and skills in reflective practice.	Use of award teaching for AALPreachers alongside MWS & CRCW candidates gives integration between ministries. The programme itself is the primary driver of the integration – through assessment that requires students to integrate classroom and practice-based learning. The nature of the contextual integration is at the leading edge of its kind. The 3 main placement contexts that students engage with throughout a standard programme gives a range of experience of different mission contexts.	Integration of award learning and placement learning happens primarily through the college residential programme and through tutorial support. The student is the centre of the integrative process, supported by staff. The role that the college plays as TDO for the Synod gives another layer of integration – but joint EM1/Synod learning sessions have reduced post-covid because of timetabling difficulties a result, in the main, of a relative increase in student numbers..	The integration of award and placement learning happens through the college programme and the tutorial process. More recent development of CA assessment that requires integration of classroom teaching and placement work. The student is at the centre of the integrative process, supported by tutors. The final year LMP for full-time students gives a year of near full-time practice alongside reflective practice programme.

Ecumenical and reformed identity Engagement with other denominations is essential while maintaining a distinctive Reformed ethos in theology and practice.	LKTC has a very strong, clear, identity as a dissenting non-conformist place of learning which concentrates on radical and contextual theologies and being an inclusive learning community. It also ensures that the magisterial reformation is represented in the curriculum. The staff team is diverse and reflects a wide range of church traditions. The student body is also diverse, with URC and Baptist ministerial candidates, and independent students from a range of traditions. Uniquely, no one tradition is dominant, allowing students to develop a constructive understanding of their tradition rather than one defined primarily in opposition to an 'other'.	The context of the theological faculties of Scotland give a broad ecumenical space as students engage with award learning there, with staff and students from a range of theological and church traditions, with the majority tradition of the nation being the Reformed tradition in its Church of Scotland guise. The Synod of Scotland, emerging from the Scottish Congregational tradition gives a unique context of a highly minority church, in the context of an overwhelmingly majority church in a related Reformed tradition. This leads the identity of the URC in Scotland to be one which instinctively only understands itself as functioning well in partnership arrangements. Students on the CA with the Episcopal Institute develop collegueship and are taught by staff from the broad Anglican tradition (which expresses itself very differently in Scotland than England).	Westminster identifies itself as standing in the broad Reformed theological tradition, including its dissenting and main-stream European reformation identities. The context of the CTF gives a broad and deep ecumenical context. Students are taught by staff from the Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran traditions. There is theological breadth along radical-conservative axis. Students engage in worship with others from those traditions in the wide variety of those traditions. Students on mid-week programmes engage particularly closely with Anglican ordinands (from liberal catholic and evangelical traditions) and in book weeks with students from a wide range of traditions. There is also an interfaith dimension to the CTF through the Woolf Institute, on the college site.
Discipleship and leadership development	EM1 students are formed through community and worship life in	Students are formed through the residential college programme,	EM1 students feel very formed through the worshipping and

Learning opportunities must support lifelong discipleship, leadership training for Elders, provision must be able to resource structured programs like Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme.	their time in college, as well as through tutorial relationships, and by the communities they engage with on placements. The college currently offers the AALPreachers programme, and the Church Leadership Programme. Staff make themselves available to the wider church, and the college hosts many visitors from the wider church. The responsiveness of the staff to requests to develop new strands of work is noted positively by those responsible for the Education and Learning work of the Assembly.	and through tutorial relationships, as well as through placements. The College also holds the TDO brief for the Synod, offering the range of development opportunities for members and congregations of the Synod.	community life of the college, and also the wider CTF – which is clearly a foundational experience for many. Personal discipleship is fostered through tutorial relationships. Staff engage with a wide variety of wider URC contexts, and a range of diverse people pass through the college shaping its environment – including sabbatical visitors, greatly valued by students.

Accessibility and contextual relevance Education should be accessible, inclusive, adaptable, and delivered in ways that meet the diverse needs of URC members across different nations and ministry settings.	Excellent provision for students with learning needs, with a developing specialism around neurodiversity. The building development programme will make more of the building accessible (though installation of lifts). Weekend and mid-week programmes give a diversity of accessibility for students with good use of on-line learning possibilities. The culture and ethos of the college make it 'feel' accessible to those from non-traditional educational backgrounds.	The college programme is highly tailored around the needs of individuals students. The timing of delivery is worked out once the needs of individuals students are known. Each student will be on a highly individualised programme according to their prior learning and needs. The small student numbers allow for individualised learning support to be offered where needed. Where students have accessibility needs these would inform the choice of venues for residentials. It would be possible for the college to develop partnership with theological education providers elsewhere in the UK, allowing students to engage in an academic award in a department or faculty outside of Scotland, engaging in the college formation programme alongside.	The wide range of award pathways possible to students mean a high degree of flexibility to meet a wide range of needs. The learning support available through the Federation and the universities mean there is excellent support for students with particular learning needs. The college building is accessible and navigable. The breadth of theological perspective found in the teaching allows students to inhabit and develop their personal theological convictions in dialogue with the widest possible range of views. The LMP year allows for placement experience anywhere in the UK. Block week and weekend teaching offers two distinct ways to access teaching. Through the CTF, it is likely that weekend delivery could be developed if required.

Financial sustainability Any future model must significantly reduce the £800,000 RCL block grant budget while ensuring both operational and long-term financial viability, including capital investment needs.	The college is in a good financial position. Considerable investment is needed in the buildings, and plans are at an advanced stage of development. There are sufficient funds to undertake this work, without further fundraising if necessary. The merger of the three entities is allowing for considerable cost savings; the hospitality aspect of the business plan is being maximised. Within the context of higher education, and particularly theological education, the model seems secure. It would move from secure to flourishing with continued URC involvement.	The financial model is very economical. The use of the Scottish faculties and the Episcopal Institute for the delivery of awards, means a small staff team. This leads to an overreliance on the Principal, which is a potential single-point of failure (which the college is aware of, and somewhat mitigated in the appointment of a college manager). The wider sustainability of the enterprise would be supported by an additional full-time member of staff, which would come with associated financial costs, but add to the security of the model.	The financial modelling reflects the view of the college and visitors that the college could operate at a break-even point through its academic and hospitality work. However, this position does not fully cover the ongoing upkeep and development of the building, which is expected to require periodic fundraising or capital support. This funding might be from a range of sources, including foundations outside the URC (potentially Laing). The existing loan from the URC is accounted for on the balance sheet and full repayment is assumed over 15 years in the model. The nature of the building means that it represents a significant cost base, although the scale and timing of investment may vary depending on strategic choices and available funding. There are no urgent major capital works. Work is ongoing to reduce costs and maximise income, both in terms of developing the academic work of the college and independent students, and from the hospitality side of college life.

Efficient use of Church resources Training provision should align with Synod-funded learning initiatives, ensuring that overall church spending on education (currently over £1.7M) is used effectively and strategically.	See financial report.		
Scalability and future-proofing Education and Learning provision must be flexible, allowing for expansion or contraction in response to changing church needs and ministerial demands and the ability to respond to external changes in context, for example changes in validation arrangements.	The college seems to have financial security – and in in that sense future-proof. There is an extensive plan for the regeneration of the site, which needs this urgently. The successful completion of this will be central to the ongoing viability of the college. The extent to which it thrives in its new formation will be affected by the outcome of this process. To some extent future proofing depends on viable cohorts, and this will depend on the number of candidates from the URC and who choose to train for the Baptists – as well as the independent student numbers. There is clear ability to scale up if necessary. The union of the colleges has created a far more viable entity into the longer term, with a total staff structure to support expansion if required, and economies of	The Scottish College works so well in the way that it does precisely because it is small. If the student numbers because too large, the model would have to evolve to enable this. We became confident during the process that such evolution would be possible. The college needs to continue to develop ways in which it is not totally reliant on the one full-time academic member of staff, the Principal. We note the strength and abilities of the tutorial team, who are all excellent. The college is quite reliant on appropriate people to draw on for these roles. Reducing the reliance on the Principal could happen in a number of ways: though an additional member of staff; and/or, potentially through a close working relationship, including the	A great strength of Westminster is the Cambridge Theological Federation. The range of staff expertise and availability to deliver awards gives a strong indication that provision is secure in the longer term. However, the ordinance elements of the programmes are now delivered overwhelmingly for the CofE and the URC. To develop programmes or pathways (for example a weekend pathway) is both likely possible because of the Federation, but cannot be guaranteed by Westminster alone. The Federation tries, wherever possible, to respond positively to requests from member institutions to develop new ways of working. The financial comparison is

	scale in operational matters to be gained.	delivery of teaching, with a partner institution.	dependent on assumptions regarding capital expenditure and funding – but the overall position is obviously considerably strengthened if the college continues to be a primary provider of EM1 for the URC.
Ability to contribute to the evolving learning needs of the denomination as set out in paper ADH1	The college is currently the primary deliverer of learning leading to Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher recognition, and also delivers the Church Leadership Programme. Some of this happens in student groups jointly with EM1 students on the weekend pathway. The college makes available modules from within its programme for audit or credit, for continuous learning for ministers and others within the life of the church. The college offers programmes aimed at continual development of Lay Preachers. Staff from the college make themselves available for education and development work delivered through Synods. Staff are actively engaged in research and publication, enriching the ecology of theology within the	The Scottish College, as a key partner of the Synod of Scotland, also acts as the Training and Development vehicle for the Synod, and therefore offers a range of learning possibilities to ministers, Elders and lay leaders within the life of the Synod. The Principal also makes himself available when possible to the wider church through being invited to participate in learning events elsewhere. The college hosts the URC 'Learning Hub', the denominational on-line learning resource.	The college staff make themselves available to the wider church through Synod run and organised events, as well as running events at the college, for example to deliver continuing education and learning for Lay Preachers and Elders. The college has indicated a willingness to become the primary developer of Stepwise (the denominational discipleship development resource) and would partner with the URC to meet other needs if invited to. The staff are actively engaged in research and publication. Through the Federation, modules are available for audit or credit for continuing learning for ministers and others.

The contribution of RCLs to the development of future academics and theological educators within the life of the United Reformed Church.	There are MA programmes and a PhD program available to students. These possibilities reflect the backgrounds of the staff team, so reflect the contextual, practice-based approach of the whole institution. The staff team noted that they do from time-to-time spot people who could benefit from engaging with academic work at research level, but that the denomination lacks the pathways to make it straight forward to know how that could meaningfully be accessed – and potentially future-theological-educators are lost because of this.	Through the Scottish Faculties students have the possibility of studying at Masters and PhD level in the whole range of academic disciplines as part of their formation for ministry.	Through the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and through Common Awards there would be research degree possibilities for students. Supervision could come from the wide range of Federation staff, or through the academic staff of the Faculty of Divinity of the University of Cambridge. The college has from time to time had a student engage in PhD work through other institutions, as part of formation for ministry.
The ways in which RCL curricula and practice support the denomination's aspiration to be a post-colonial, anti-racist Church engaging seriously with the legacies of transatlantic slavery.	LKTC is seen as a leader in the field of decolonising the curriculum by Durham University Common Awards. There is the active drawing in, through the possibilities of IT, engagement from academics and church practitioners from around the globe in teaching. LKC is acutely aware of the lack of diversity of its own staff team and would love to be able to address this. The concrete steps they take are to draw in voices into teaching from beyond the existing staff team,	This is built in to how the college constructs the college programme, and the way its content is shaped. The current staff and tutorial team are aware of their own lack of diversity but the faculties with which it cooperates are much more so. Glasgow was the first university in the world to complete a historic audit of slavery, Edinburgh followed suit and now SEI and Aberdeen are undertaking the same process. An internal	The CTF, particularly through the evolution of its CA programme, has been actively involved in processes of decolonising the curriculum. There is an attempt to draw voices from beyond the core Federation staff teaching team into many modules to ensure voices on all theological topics are heard from global majority traditions. The staff team are aware of their own lack of diversity, and have acted to

	and through the development of the curriculum and learning resources from a global perspective.	review of the curriculum at Glasgow found Theology to have done an outstanding job in this regard. Glasgow also co-teaches with Stellenbosch University and has formal collaborations with the UWI and we work in partnership with Codrington College.	respond to this by the recruitment of adjunct staff with a range of backgrounds and specialisms. These staff engage in a variety of ways, from the teaching of full modules, to occasional sessions in the enrichment programme.

Diversity of pedagogical approach

We also note that across the three RCLs there are two different broad approaches to integration within EM1 formation. One is student centred, the second enables the student to develop into an integrated practitioner primarily through the integrated nature of the programme itself. We believe both have a valuable role to play in formation, and that there would be a loss to the church if we only were able to offer one of these approaches.

It also must be noted that the approaches are not entirely mutually exclusive, but nonetheless we have come to believe they are real. By integration, we understand the process by which student ministers come to inhabit ministry as reflective practitioners, who effectively bring together their theological learning, their learning through experience, their growing understanding of themselves as human beings called to life-long ordained ministry, and their ability to synthesise these various elements as they grow into ministry.

Westminster College and the Scottish College broadly approach integration within the programme in a student-centred way. By this, we mean that the student themselves is the locus of the integrative process. Students will gain knowledge and experience through an academic award, the college denominational programme, placement experience and tutorial support and reflection. These are distinct, but related, elements to a student pathway. With tutorial support, in both colleges, students themselves are the centre of the integrative process, integrating the various learning experiences that they are exposed to. This is not to say that the awards students engage with, to a lesser or greater extent depending on the award, will not also contain learning and assessment which deliberately encourages integration.

At LKTC, the programme itself drives the integration experience for the student. The design of the award, the integration of placement work within the academic programme and its assessment, is the primary vehicle through which students come to know and understand themselves as integrated, self-reflective ministerial practitioners. This does not mean that the individual journey of each student, particularly through tutorial support, is not fully encouraged and students are supported to explore and own their own development, learning and self-knowledge.

We do not believe that one approach is superior to another, but they are different, and potentially different sorts of student thrive in the different contexts. Any determination about which RCL or RCLs we ought to engage with in the future, needs to bear in mind these different approaches.

A reduced number of RCLs might mean that we need to challenge those RCLs delivering EM1 to think with care about how it might be possible for elements of each of these approaches to be accessible to students who would benefit from them.

Prioritising the criteria

The General Assembly in offering the criteria for this review, did not prioritise them. We recognise that to some extent they are all important and it is hard to do so. However, we have concluded, through the course of our work, that some do carry a weight that perhaps attaches greater significance, and we have come to understand the significance of some of the criteria in slightly new ways. We offer the following observations which have guided our conclusions.

Integrated learning for the whole life of the church

‘Integration’ is a key quality that the URC has sought in its education and learning for many years. It can be understood broadly in two ways. Firstly, integration as reflected above, in terms of how formation is the integration of different forms of personal and formal learning. Secondly, integration is the way in which different ministries and forms of service within the life of the church integrate with one another during formation for service. Whilst this review is primarily about EM1 and formation for ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work, this vital aspect of Education and Learning cannot be conceived of simply on its own.

We believe that the outcome of this review needs to lead to a situation where the RCLs we partner with offer the full range of education, training, formation and discipleship development for the full range of ordained, commissioned and formally recognised ministries, and discipleship development for the whole church more broadly. This was the initial vision behind the colleges becoming ‘Resource Centres for Learning’, but the policies and organisation of the URC have never fully enabled the RCLs to play this part. Moving on from this review, we need an outcome which allows those RCLs we partner with to be the hub in the wheel of denominational Education and Learning, and to be the core resource from which the whole church can draw.

We would wish that those preparing for different forms of ministry, who are expected to work as teams within the context of pastorates, should wherever possible also prepare for those ministries alongside one another. So, whilst EM1 forms the core part of the outcome of this review, we have come to see it cannot and must not be separated from the criteria about the learning needs of the church as a whole. This has been doubly underlined by what we have heard from the RCLs themselves, who have helped us understand that the delivery of EM1 is what gives them the resources of people and material that in turn allows for the effective delivery of education and learning in service of the wider church.

It is key that the provider or providers we partner with for EM1, are also able to be, and trusted to be, the core partners in the resourcing of Education and Learning for all our recognised ministries, and also discipleship development.

Financial flourishing

We cannot fail to take seriously the financial situation of the Church, and the need for spending on Education and Learning, and particularly EM1, to be proportionate. However, we have come to the firm conclusion that this exercise must not simply be about reducing costs, although it must make that possible.

It must also, as a primary aim, lead to a level of financial support for the institutions we partner with in the future not just to survive, but to thrive and flourish. Spreading our resources amongst three RCLs is simply not a viable way to ensure that the Education and Learning the church needs is delivered in the context of colleges that are flourishing.

Therefore, the institutions we partner with as a result of this review must, with the level of URC financial support that can be offered, be able to demonstrate that they will be able to flourish with that level of support and the United Reformed Church must be willing to commit, insofar as it is at all possible, to enabling that flourishing into the long term (recognising they all also have funding from other sources supporting their work to a lesser or greater extent).

Excellence in EM1 Formation for Ministry

It almost goes without saying that the key determinant in this process must be that the Church ends up with partners who offer excellence in EM1 formation for ministry. On its own, however, this criterion does not answer the question for us, because all three of our RCLs do offer such excellence.

In the light of this, and in the light of the two key criteria we have articulated above, we believe that what we are seeking is excellence in the delivery of education, learning and formation for the Ministries of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work in a context which resources formation for the wide range of the church's accredited ministries and discipleship development. This needs to be delivered in institution(s) that can flourish through the resources the United Reformed Church can offer in close, collaborative, partnership. This will need to, over time, evolve with the needs of the Church, to offer new ways of providing education and learning as needs arise.

New partnerships

We are aware that the more recent attempts to arrive at a financial model for funding RCLs was an attempt to make a limited amount of money stretch across three institutions and be sustainable from the point of view of the Assembly budget. That pushed in the direction of a purchaser-provider relationship. However, both the educational needs of the church, and the financial context of the colleges needs to push us in a different direction. This is the direction of a Partnership, where the primary College partners, in close collaboration with the Ministries and Faith and Action Committees, can evolve constantly in relationship to the evolving needs of the United Reformed Church. None of the existing RCLs have been able to function fully in this way to date, partly because of the internal structures and working processes of the Assembly, and partly because of the complexities inherent in working with three institutions.

It has become clear to us that the outcome of this review needs to leave the United Reformed Church with a clear primary partner as its Resource Centre for Learning. This is for the sake of ensuring the longevity and flourishing of our ability to deliver integrated education and learning across the whole range of our ordained, commissioned and accredited ministries and to resource denomination wide discipleship development.

At the same time, we believe that the ability to continue to offer formational experiences rooted in both the key pedagogical approaches outlined above make it beneficial to have a complementary partner. Our hope would be that both RCL partners over time come to work in the closest possible collaboration.

We would envisage one coordinating body, which was rooted in the governance of the two RCLs, and within the Ministries Committee, that acts as the body with oversight of the partnership arrangement, and allows the church and the partner institutions, as one, to evolve together the provision that the church will need in its future. The hope would be that, in time, this partnership would become so deep rooted, that through effective collaboration and resource sharing any future need for a further reduction in the number of RCLs will become unnecessary.

The distinction between the 'primary' and 'complementary' provider is intended to describe differences of scale, resourcing and likely student numbers, rather than differences of institutional quality, academic depth, ecclesial status or educational seriousness. The Review Group recognises that the two colleges embody distinct but complementary pedagogical

approaches, each of which offers significant gifts and which working in close collaboration will create a rich educational partnership for the United Reformed Church.

We need a partnership of RCLs who genuinely will be able to, in partnership with the Assembly, Synods and local churches, resource the learning and development of the whole people of God for discipleship and ministry. This was the clear direction of travel discerned by the Education and Learning Consultation in 2025. It called for the denominational development of Education and Learning materials, enabled by the RCLs, facilitating local delivery which supports congregations, individual church members, and those in accredited ministries in their discipleship development and education and learning.

Recommendations

All of which come with the unanimous support of the working group.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

The General Assembly determines that the Luther King Theological College become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and the primary provider of Education for Ministry phase one (EM1).

After long deliberation, in which all possible outcomes have been considered in depth, it is the recommendation of the working group that the Luther King Theological College (LKTC) become the primary partner for the United Reformed Church in meeting the education and learning needs of the Church, and the primary provider of Education for Ministry phase One.

On the basis of the prioritisation of the criteria made above, we believe that the Luther King Theological College is in the strongest position to become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church. The college already offers EM1 for Ministers of Word and Sacrament as well as Church Related Community Workers.

LKTC also already offers a well-established weekend pathway. Whilst the other RCLs are both in a position to develop a CRCW programme should they be asked to, at LKTC this already exists.

There is also already excellent and well received training for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, and the Church Leadership Programme. All the RCLs contributed to the initial gestation of these programmes, though the specific material was largely developed by LKTC staff. The reality is that these programmes are currently delivered by LKTC and thriving.

Because of the existence of the weekend EM1 pathway, this is already allowing Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and those engaging with the Church Leadership Programme to be engaging together in learning. LKTC therefore already begins to provide a context where education is integrated not only in terms of the rounded formation of individuals, but also training people for different forms of ministry in ways which enable them to engage with and alongside one another in the formation process. We believe this is a strong basis upon which to develop this form of integrated learning further.

LKTC is financially stable. It already has strong independent student numbers, and being in partnership with the Baptist Union, a stream of students for ministry from one of our ecumenical partners. The College is reasonably well endowed in the context of British Theological Education, and even after the redevelopment will sit on a sustainable level of financial reserves. This will mean it will have newly renovated buildings that are easy to maintain, as well as a healthy reserves level to provide additional income and financial stability.

It is our hope that this existing stable basis will become the basis for flourishing with the financial sustainability that the college becoming the primary educational partner for the United Reformed Church will bring.

LKTC has also proved to be an exceptionally responsive partner in the last few years, working with the Ministries and (former) Education and Learning Committee in picking up and developing the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher formation and the Church Leadership Programme. The college has also supported in other areas, such as rewriting the Safer Sacred Spaces Boundary training.

Both in the process of consultation leading to this report, and in the lived reality of the last few years, the College has demonstrated a willingness to genuinely partner with the United Reformed Church in ways we believe can lead to exciting future developments for both College and Church.

The integrated nature of the pedagogical approach to the curriculum is also excellent. We believe that the formation offered by LKTC by a programme which is itself conceived, developed and structure around practice-based, contextual educational experience will meet the needs of most candidates for Ministry within the United Reformed Church. The college is highly accessible, increasingly so in terms of the building, and also in terms of educational background and support for students with particular learning needs.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

The General Assembly determines to continue to partner with the Scottish College as a complementary provider of Education for Ministry One, and in the provision of wider educational resources.

We conclude that the financial pressures, and pressures of student numbers, mean that there should be a clear sense that the URC works with one primary provider. However, we believe that there are gifts and graces in the model that the Scottish College works with that brings benefits to the life of the United Reformed Church, and offers an important additional resource and educational approach, all on the basis of excellent value for money.

The Scottish College model allows a student to be matriculated for an award at another university (normally in Scotland, but not necessarily so), and to engage in a formation programme rooted in that award, placements, tutorial support and the college programme. We have noted that it operates with a model of integration somewhat different from that encountered at LKTC, which requires the student themselves to be at the heart of the integrative process, accompanied in this through the tutorial relationship. We believe that there will be students who, for either practical reasons concerning access, or for educational reasons, will benefit from engaging with a theological award at a university or theological college other than LKTC, and that the Scottish programme gives a valuable way for this to be possible. We believe there is a benefit to retaining this possibility, and that its loss would be noticeable.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

The General Assembly invites Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to seek the closest possible collaboration in the delivery of Education for Ministry phase one and in other areas of work and together in partnership with the Ministries Committee.

We would want to encourage the Scottish College and LKTC to seek the closest possible forms of collaboration. Rather than spell out exactly what that might look like in pre-determined

resolutions of the General Assembly, we believe this would be best left to evolve through continued development of the partnership between the two colleges.

We could imagine, for example, that students enrolled in both RCLs might benefit from parts of the curriculum being delivered jointly across the two RCLs, particularly in the URC identity specific aspects of the programme. We could also imagine the skills of Scottish College staff proving valuable input as the wider provision of education and learning is developed through a partnership between LKTC as primary provider, Scottish College as complementary provider and the United Reformed Church.

We recognise that this recommendation is not one that we can or ought to impose, but is something that we invite the Scottish College and Luther King Theological College to seek to develop together, hopefully for the benefit of both colleges and the wider United Reformed Church.

We are aware of the serious danger that a further review and reduction of RCL capacity may, on the present trajectory, become necessary in future years. We believe that the closest possible co-operation between both LKTC and SC would mean that we have a resource which through close co-operation will offer , jointly, a scalability that will make this unnecessary.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

General Assembly determines to cease using Westminster College, Cambridge, for Education for Ministry One.

It is with deep sadness that we make this recommendation. The educational provision that Westminster offers is excellent and the resources of the Cambridge Theological Federation and the context of Cambridge itself are a rich blessing. There is a superb staff team, and it is clear following a very difficult period in the life of the college in the last few years, in recent times the college has begun a process of transformation.

We are quite confident that educationally, Westminster College could become a sole provider of EM1 and develop in ways which would allow it to meet the wider educational needs of the URC. However, to move towards Westminster being the primary partner for the United Reformed Church in Education and Learning would require it to develop a tranche of new offerings.

At the moment there is no weekend pathway for training, and also no CRCW pathway. Whilst the college has a long history of work with Lay Preachers, it does not currently offer the Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher training, similarly it does not offer the Church Leadership Programme. We understand that the lack of offer of these courses at Westminster is not the result of an unwillingness to respond to the Church's needs.

Whilst there is no reason to think that the college would be unwilling or unable to deliver all of this well if we asked it to the reality is that it is not delivering these key elements at the moment, albeit, we understand, for reasons beyond Westminster's control. Were the college to develop these to the extent to which integrated learning would be possible between those preparing for different forms of accredited learning might depend on the introduction of an EM1 weekend delivery. For a variety of reasons of history, some more recent, some much older (like the decision taken to base CRCW training at Northern College in Manchester) these offerings exist solely at LKTC, where they are delivered with excellent quality.

It is difficult to envisage the college becoming the primary provider based on the financial criteria above, because there is uncertainty as to whether the college would achieve long term

financial flourishing under the assumptions applied by the working group. It should be noted that these assumptions do not reflect Westminster College's submitted financial position but have been applied by the working group to enable reasonable comparison across RCLs.

The financial modelling suggests that if all the resource available for EM1 was directed to the college, and assuming continual development of independent student numbers and the hospitality activity, the college could operate at or around break-even on an underlying operating basis. In addition, the buildings are expected to require ongoing capital investment with the scale and timing of expenditure dependent on strategic priorities and availability of funding.

The college currently holds a relatively modest level of reserves. It is noted that the underlying operating position is broadly sustainable, with financial pressures arising primarily from capital investment requirements and associated funding.

Westminster College has indicated that it is confident that the wider URC, in the event that it were the sole provider of EM1, would enable this financial provision. The working group has taken a more cautious view and considers there to be uncertainty in this regard. It is noted that there are a range of existing financial commitments across the URC, including those supported by Synods and central funds. The working group considers there to be uncertainty as to the extent that the wider URC can or would be able to support the ongoing running of the college in terms of capital investment into the buildings that may be necessary to support long term financial flourishing.

We consider that there would be a degree of financial uncertainty under this scenario particularly if assumptions about the growth in income are not realised. These conclusions are, therefore, sensitive to assumptions regarding capital investment and funding availability, rather than reflecting the underlying operating performance of the College.

The concern of the working group is with the modest level of reserves and the inevitable need of the building for capital investment over time and the risks which might arise for the URC if the anticipated fundraising strategies did not deliver the results hoped.

If Westminster were the primary provider of EM1 for the URC, this may end up posing a risk either to the URC to the continuity of educational provision over the medium to longer term, or a financial risk to the URC in accepting it may potentially need to meet those capital costs to ensure the ongoing secure delivery of our educational provision.

We recognise, deeply, the loss that ceasing to use Westminster would represent to the life of the United Reformed Church. We also recognise the many questions that this leaves for the governing body of the college to grapple with about the future of the college. We also recognise that the General Assembly has elected the majority of these same governors as Westminster College's trustees.

Therefore, the General Assembly recognises its responsibility to work with the governors to together work out what the future for the college might look like if it is no longer a provider of EM1 for the URC. If the General Assembly agrees this recommendation, the governors, URC and URC Trust will need to engage in a lengthy process of untangling legal, financial and governance relationships (see Recommendation Seven).

Whilst we would not want to predetermine any outcome to that process, we do need to acknowledge, for the sake of transparency, that given the criteria we have explored above, and

the desire for integration across learning and formation for all the accredited forms of ministry of the church and wider discipleship development, that we would envisage these areas of activity residing primary with LKTC, complemented by the Scottish College.

There are various possible avenues for the governors to explore. The college may believe it can continue offering theological education and formation for ministry based on offerings to independent students, graduate and international students and find a pathway to long term financial sustainability. An alternative avenue may be to explore whether it could be possible to stretch still further the net revenue generated from the hospitality part of the business and develop a research focused model in the wider academic context of Cambridge on the basis of its library holdings. This could potentially offer the URC and the wider church something of a theological 'think tank' and research base for Reformed Theology.

It is also recognised, depending on the outcome of further work, some options may prove less viable than others, including the potential for more fundamental restructuring of the College's activities and use of its estate given the restrictive covenant on the land. The URCT, the General Assembly and the College Governors will need to work closely together to securely enable a transition to a new model and that ideally allows for an evolution of the college's charitable purposes and the restrictive covenant on the land, and does not undermine them.

It is beyond the remit of this review to seek resolutions of the General Assembly around these issues, but our hope would be that the URC and the URC Trust would work constructively with the governing body as they determine the future direction, and to support a viable transition to a sustainable future model where possible.

We cannot, however, on the basis of the financial information available and the assumptions applied, commit the central budget of the URC to long term financial support of the College at current levels, given the higher degree of financial uncertainty identified.

Transition to the future

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, Resources Committee and Faith in Action Committee, to agree with Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College new Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements to effect the outcomes sought in Resolutions 1-4, and to ensure the appropriate financial agreements are in place to enable their successful delivery.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

General Assembly instructs the Resources Committee to work with the three existing RCLs to provide appropriate financial support through a transitional period through to the full implementation of Resolutions 1-4.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee and Resources Committee to work with Westminster College Governors as they discern the future for the College and to enable the General Assembly to support this through appropriate governance and transitional financial arrangements when appropriately developed proposals have been made.

Further observations

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

General Assembly receives the observations of the Working Group and instructs the Ministries Committee to review these recommendations and return to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive with any appropriate proposals.

In the course of the visits to the RCLs, and the extensive engagement with staff and governors, we make some further observations that we believe that General Assembly needs to hear and potentially act upon. Not to do so, would not do justice to the quality of time and engagement that colleagues in the RCLs have given to us during this process. We do not report in detail, and these matters will need further work which is likely to be best undertaken by the Ministries Committee.

1. The clear need to be much more intentional about forming potential future theological educators and a deeply theologically informed ministry. RCLs have expressed some frustration that there is something of an 'anti-academic' mood at times within the URC.

There are no obvious routes to funding or extended training for ordinands who might benefit from undertaking higher study, and might be able to serve the denomination in myriad ways were they able to. Opportunities for ministers already serving to undertake higher research degrees are also limited. We suggest that the Ministries Committee, the Ministries and Learning Forum, with the RCLs, give urgent attention to how we might encourage theological study at research level in EM1 and beyond for ministers, as well as for others.

2. Across all the RCLs, there have been instances where decisions of the Assessment Board have given rise to questions within the colleges. In this light, the Ministries Committee may wish to review the criteria employed, together with the shared understanding and formation of those serving on the Board.

We also observe that staff within the RCLs bring considerable experience in discerning the qualities that enable a student to flourish in ministerial formation. It may therefore be timely to consider whether they might have a more substantial and structured role within the decision-making processes relating to candidates for training.

3. We have explored CRCW training with all the RCLs, LKTC who already offer this, and with the Scottish College and Westminster College as we've explored how they might potentially offer a CRCW programme. From all these conversations it appears that it is now unhelpful to require English Standards Board accreditation for CRCWs.

This once made sense, but the landscape of community work education has shifted markedly in the last couple of decades, and this now places an unreasonable and unnecessary burden on training providers. We suggest this be reviewed with a view to lifting this requirement.

4. We note the tiny numbers coming forward for CRCW ministry. The commitment of the URC to community engagement is clearly high, and this was reflected in all the RCLs and the way they form ministers (not just CRCWs).

The opportunity and financial costs of maintaining a separate CRCW training pathway are considerable. We believe that it would be appropriate to initiate a review into the future of the CRCW programme, and its training pathways, to ensure that the ordained, commissioned and accredited ministries of the URC are all sustainable.

5. All of the RCLs have expressed to us that there would be scope for a review of the training requirements for ministry. A standard pathway being 4 years, regardless of the age of a candidate, is not necessarily helpful. There is also concern at the lack of a basic standard for NSM local – a strong preference being made that this should be a certificate pathway to give coherence to the programme.

We would also question the parity of expectation between NSM and SM Word and Sacrament routes. 800 hours of practical placement for NSM ministry, being the same as for SM, potentially makes training almost impossible for those in full-time employment. We sense from many of our conversations, that a review and rationalisation of training pathways for our ministries would now be timely.

Appendix One

RCL Financial Sustainability Review May 2026

Introduction

This report addresses the Financial Sustainability criterion agreed as part of the General Assembly 2025 resolutions concerned with over-capacity in the RCLs. The Convenor of Resources Committee and the Treasurer were tasked to complete this task in time to provide input into the RCL report being prepared for General Assembly 2026.

This report is contained under the following headings:

1. Executive summary: which provides the key findings;
2. Context and objective: describes the aim of the analysis;
3. Approach: explains how the review was planned and undertaken;
4. Luther King Theological College (LKTC): provides the sustainability analysis for LKTC;
5. Scottish College (SC): provides the sustainability analysis for SC;
6. Westminster College (WMC): provides the sustainability analysis for WMC;
7. Analysis: gives the comparison between the three colleges; and
8. Conclusion: identifies the key financial issues affecting the possible RCL resourcing decisions.

Executive Summary

- Continuing to use three RCLs for EM1 is not financially sustainable either for the RCLs or for the URC
- The Scottish College is the only RCL that is 'unconditionally' financially sustainable in the long term without a substantial grant from the URC. This is driven by three features:
 - SC does not own any residential/hospitality facilities.
 - A substantial element of the theological education is provided by other partner institutions.
 - A significant volume of formational teaching and tutorial support is received as a gift from experienced and able ministers and academics.
- Additionally, using the SC as our sole provider of EM1 is by far the cheapest option to operate.
- In all scenarios, LKTC requires a smaller grant to break even than WMC, subject to the Capex assumptions.
- A key variable affecting WMC is the funding required for the possible capital expenditure (Capex) estimated by an independent property consultancy at £3 million over ten years. If the £300k pa capital spend is not included in the WMC scenarios (i.e. no significant refurbishment/development of their facilities) then:
 - The grants needed for WMC become significantly smaller than for LKTC; however
 - the comparison with LKTC will not be equitable as LKTC will be spending £7m on their planned (and funded) upgrade and WMC will only need to be doing modest work until new funding is in place, recognising that a significant upgrade was completed in 2014.
- These results need to be understood in light of the assumptions stated in the main body of the report.

Context and objective

This exercise establishes, in broad but realistic terms, the level of financial support required for each Resource Centre for Learning to operate sustainably if it continues as one of three, two, or the sole, RCL.

It also assesses, at a high level, the financial implications for each institution if the URC were to withdraw.

This is not a forensic accounting exercise, but a strategic stress-test which models data from existing accounts, management information, business plans, and informed institutional discussion, together with a set of prudent assumptions.

Approach

Overview

The acid test for financial sustainability is cash flow. Can enough cash be generated to fund the operations and the required capital works? The analysis focuses on two linked, but distinct, financial flows: Operational Income & Expenses (Opex) and Capital Expenses (Capex).

The flows are connected because surpluses from Opex feed into reserves and can be used to fund Capex. Conversely, Opex deficits reduce reserves, limit the scope for Capex, and reduce investment income. In a financially healthy organisation this relationship creates a virtuous circle; in a financially insecure organisation it becomes a vicious circle.

Although data has been modelled for 2023 and 2024 for comparison purposes, the main modelling is done for 2030 to 2032. This assumes that steady state, following the implementation of GA26 decisions, has been reached.

We have not modelled the transition period, for which bespoke arrangements will be needed whatever decisions are made. This timescale also enables us to assume that the planned major capital works for LKTC will be completed and operational.

Scenarios

For each RCL four basic scenarios will be prepared, where realistic income and capital required for financial stability over the years 2030 to 2032 will be defined:

- A - Where the URC continues to use the three RCLs as today;
- B - Where the URC uses the RCL as its only EM1 provider;
- C - Where the URC uses the RCL and one other as their EM1 providers (excluding using only LKTC and WMC); and
- D - Where the URC does not use the RCL for EM1.

Student numbers

Predicted student numbers is one of the fundamental parameters used in the model. The Deputy General Secretary, Ministries has reviewed the number of students needed to replace those retiring.

The estimate for 2030 and 2031 is eight and four respectively. Given recent numbers (ie for 2026 there is a single student for stipendiary ministry!) these numbers look a little optimistic.

Recognising that providing an accurate forecast for student numbers in the 2030's is not possible, this analysis will use a single, flat forecast of eight students pa for the assessment period. CRCW students are included in these numbers.

The following table gives the estimated student numbers, by scenario, for each of the RCLs using recent SM/NSM proportions (approximately 50/50). SM students are assumed to be full-time (F/T). NSM students are assumed to be part-time (P/T).

SCENARIO	NUMBER OF URC STUDENTS					
	LKTC		SC		WMC	
	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T	F/T	P/T
A – As is	2	1	1	1	2	1
B – Joint provider	3	2	2	1	3	2
C – Sole provider	4	4	4	4	4	4
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	0	0	0	0

Interpreting the results

The data for each RCL model will assess the RCL's income from the URC for each student placed, using an estimated total cost per student, including:

- Course fees,
- Tuition costs¹
- Accommodation costs
- Typical expenses

Note that at present the block grants for LKTC and WMC include course fees and tuition costs. Accommodation costs and most of the other student expenses are funded separately by the URC.

The key outputs from each model will be:

1. The value of the URC grant required for the RCL to break even; and
2. the total costs to the URC.

Please note:

1. The accuracy of these numbers is very dependent on the core assumptions, particularly student numbers and Capex. Consequently, the absolute accuracy of the numbers cannot be guaranteed. However, more credence can be given to the comparisons between the RCLs.
2. Although there is a 'grant' number shown in each of the D scenarios (the RCL not used as a provider) this does not imply a grant will be given, this is simply the sum needed to make the RCL break even.

The assumptions common to all RCLs are:

¹ Per capita course fees and tuition costs have been estimated using previous analysis. These estimates do not represent RCL pricing, they are simply used to calculate the size of the grant needed to sustain the RCL irrespective of the number of students. The costs used for this analysis are £14k pa for F/T students and £7k pa for P/T students.

1. A F/T EM1 course is assumed to be F/T in college for three years, and then P/T in college and P/T in a pastorate for the final year.²
2. A P/T EM1 course is assumed to be half-time over four years. I.e. 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student.²
3. The RCL costs/grants shown below do not include allowable student expenses, which are about £2320 per student pa *on average* (2025 figures). These have been added into the Total Cost to the URC results.
4. All costs in the charts are in £thousands.

LUTHER KING THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE (LKTC)

Assumptions

1. The 2032 forecasts have been used as they better represent steady state.
2. As the major refurbishment will only recently have been completed it is assumed that no significant Capex is required in the analysis period.
3. With capital growth the £7m capital spend only reduces the reserves by about £3m.
4. There is a predicted cohort of 35 non-URC funded students using LKTC in 2032.
5. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that LKTC will continue to run the Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Church Leadership Programme courses – note that decisions concerning these courses will be taken following the GA decisions.

Results summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANT	OTHER URC COSTS (AALP + CLP)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	10	126	287	45	41.3	16.6	23.2	497
B – Joint provider	16	203	240	45	27.7	16.6	37.1	541
C – Sole provider	24	308	145	45	18.9	16.6	55.7	570
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	313	45	N/A	0	0	474

Implications

- Although LKTC has healthy reserves, predicted to be about £4.5m after the redevelopment, the organisation will not have an Opex surplus without a grant from the URC.
- If LKTC is used as a joint or sole provider of EM1 it is likely that their reserves would enable them to survive for at least two decades.
- The grant needed reduces as more students are put through LKTC, reducing to zero should the URC provides about 12 FTE students pa [not seen as likely].
- These results are contingent upon LKTC attracting 12 or more FTE non-URC students each year.

² These assumptions do not change the total URC financial award; they simply change the balance between the per capita payments (for services rendered) and the grant (to eliminate deficit).

- If the URC were to not use LKTC as an EM1 provider their reserves would probably be sufficient to fund them for a decade during which time a revised strategy could be implemented.

SCOTTISH COLLEGE

Assumptions

1. No capital acquisition of facilities will be made.
2. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that the SC will continue to administer Stepwise - note that decisions concerning these arrangements will be taken following the GA decisions.

Results Summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS, FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANT	OTHER URC COSTS (Learning Hub)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	6	77	50	12.5	20.2	11.0	23.2	173
B – Joint provider	10	126	77	12.5	20.3	18.3	37.1	271
C – Sole provider	24	308	48	12.5	14.8	44.0	55.7	469
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	61	12.5	N/A		0	73

Implications

- Although the SC would require some form of limited grant, unless there were 14 or more FTE students pa, the grant sums are low in comparison to the other RCLs.
- Staff numbers in SC would need to be increased should significantly more students use the college (the additional costs are taken account of in the analysis).
- Should the SC not be used for EM1 it is likely that the National Synod of Scotland would still require some financial assistance to support their lay training function. Although this might not be funded from the M&M budget it would be funded from the URC 'family' in some form. Consequently, any 'saving' by not using SC for EM1 would be minimal. Also, extra costs could be incurred for EM1 students who live in Scotland and would not then be able to take advantage of free university education.

WESTMINSTER COLLEGE

Assumptions

1. The average annual cost of capital works for WMC is £300k at today's prices. This is consistent with a recently made professional assessment by Bidwells and has been included in the costs. The Governors wish to emphasise that capital works will only be undertaken if grants or Opex surpluses allow, and that not all works identified are a priority, even over the ten-year horizon of the report. Note that a conservative assumption has been made that no allowance has been made for possible grants supporting their capital works.
2. There is a predicted cohort of 20 non-URC funded students using the WMC in 2030+.

3. Independent of the scenario, it is assumed that WMC will continue to provide archive services to the URC, for which appropriate costs can be agreed.
4. £80k pa is added to account for repaying the loan to the URC.

Results Summary

SCENARIO	No URC STUDENTS FTE	PER CAPITA COSTS	GRANTS	OTHER URC COSTS (eg Archiving)	COST PER FTE	ACCOMMODATION COSTS	STUDENT EXPENSES	TOTAL COST TO URC
A – As is	10	126	466	70.5	59.2	88.6	23.2	774
B – Joint provider	16	203	370	70.5	35.8	107.4	37.1	788
C – Sole provider	24	308	256	70.5	23.5	116.8	55.7	807
D – Not used as a provider	0	0	656	70.5	N/A	0	0	727

Implications

- It is noted that Westminster's operating position (excluding Capex) is broadly similar to LKTC, with financial outcomes materially influenced by assumptions regarding capital expenditure and associated funding.
- One of the key issues for WMC is the capital needed to maintain their facilities. The WMC submission suggests that the funding may be provided by Synods, the URC Trust and external supporters in equal measures. Over the ten-year plan this would amount to £1m each. This assumption has not been adopted in this report.
- WMC have small net reserves and would have limited capacity to fund significant deficits over an extended period.
- These results are contingent upon WMC attracting about 10 (FTE) or more non-URC students each year. Plans are in place for recruitment of these independent students.
- If the assumed £300k pa Capex is not included in the analysis, the results (excluding reserves) are broadly comparable to LKTC.
- If the URC were to not use WMC as an EM1 provider, it is likely that some level of funding would be required to enable a revised strategy to be implemented.

Analysis

The table below shows the grants required by each RCL to break even under the four different scenarios.

SCENARIO	LKTC	SC	WMC
A – As is	287	50	466
B – Joint provider	240	77	370
C – Sole provider	145	48	256
D – Not used as a provider	313	61	656

The table below shows the estimated total cost to the URC for using the RCLs as per the scenarios:

SCENARIO	URC TOTAL COST
A – As is	1444
B – Joint provider – LKTC & SC	812
B – Joint provider – WMC & SC	1059
C – Sole provider - LKTC	570
C – Sole provider - SC	469
C – Sole provider - WMC	807

Please note:

1. The total costs include costs for additional services, such as Archiving and Lay Preaching courses. This analysis assumes that these services will remain with the RCL presently hosting them.
2. None of the costs include possible grants to RCLs no longer used for EM1.
3. Decisions concerning the placement of these contracts will be taken as part of the process for implementing the GA decision regarding which RCLs are to be used for EM1 in the future.

Conclusion

- ‘As is’ is not financially sustainable either for RCLs or for the URC. Although the absolute accuracy of the numbers cannot be guaranteed, the total cost for as-is is highly consistent with today’s actual costs.
- The analysis indicates that a reduction in the number of supported RCLs will be prudent.
- One of the biggest uncertainties surrounding this analysis is around student numbers, both URC and independents.
- The Scottish College is the only RCL that is more-or-less financially sustainable in the long term, without a six-figure grant from the URC, and is far less geared to changes in student numbers. This is driven by three features:
 - SC does not own any residential/hospitality facilities.
 - A substantial element of the theological education is provided by other partner institutions.
 - A significant volume of formational teaching and tutorial support is received as a gift from experienced and able ministers and academics
- Additionally, using the SC as our sole provider of EM1 is by far the lowest cost option to operate.
- In all scenarios, LKTC requires a smaller grant to break even than WMC, subject to the Capex assumptions.
- While LKTC still require a grant in all scenarios (i.e. it is not sustainable indefinitely) its reserves suggest that it could survive (but not thrive) at least for a decade without URC support.
- A key variable affecting WMC is the funding required for the possible capital expenditure (Capex) estimated by independent property consultancy at £3 million over ten years. If the £300k pa capital spend is not included in the WMC scenarios (ie no significant refurbishment/development of their facilities) then:
 - The grants needed for WMC become significantly smaller than for LKTC; however
 - the comparison with LKTC will not be equitable as LKTC will be spending £7m on their planned (and funded) upgrade and WMC will only need to be doing modest work until new funding is in place, recognising that a significant upgrade was completed in 2014.
- These results need to be understood in light of the assumptions stated in the main body of the report.

Paper AB1

Methodist/URC Liaison Group

Business and Faith in Action Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	John Bradbury john.bradbury@urc.org.uk Sarah Lane-Cawte slanecawte@gmail.com
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 4 General Assembly welcomes the proposed consultative meeting between District Chairs and Synod Moderators, and in the light of that directs the Business Committee in consultation with the Liaison Group to report to the 2027 General Assembly with proposals concerning the vision and shape of future possible collaboration.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Methodist/URC Liaison Group (MURCLG) has been meeting twice yearly. Noting the increasing cooperation between the two denominational offices and the meeting of key leaders in the denominations, MURCLG hopes for an intentional gathering of District Chairs and Synod Moderators. This meeting will be encouraged to discern the potential for further sharing at every level.
Main points	To support the meeting of the Chairs and Moderators and to discern further opportunities for cooperation and to follow this up through the Business Committee.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Methodist/URC Liaison Group Senior Leadership Teams, Methodist Church and URC

Summary of impact

Financial	Initially the cost of the meeting, which would coincide with a URC Synod Moderators' Monthly meeting, so is unlikely to incur significant increased costs.

External (eg ecumenical)	Closer working relationships.

METHODIST/UNITED REFORMED CHURCH LIAISON GROUP (MURCLG)

REPORT FOR METHODIST CONFERENCE & URC GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2026

1. The Methodist/URC Liaison Group (MURCLG) meets twice a year to confer and consult on matters of mutual interest, to seek and offer counsel and good practice, and to encourage reciprocity. We act as a conduit for sharing significant developments and matters of interest from Conference and General Assembly. The group is co-chaired – by a Methodist Chair of District (Revd Dr David Chapman) and URC Synod Moderator (Revd Geoffrey Clarke) – and its membership is drawn from the two denominations and includes the two denominational Ecumenical Officers (Revd Steven Cooper and Ms Lindsey Brown), together with ecumenical observers from our Baptist and Anglican partners (Ms Hilary Treavis and Revd Tim Norwood) and specific representation from Wales and Scotland.
2. MURCLG has noted with delight the increasing levels of cooperation between the staff of our two denominational Offices now that both are on the same road. Our November 2025 meeting at Methodist Church House coincided with the meeting of the Secretary, President and Vice President of Conference with the Moderator of General Assembly and URC General Secretary and our meeting encouraged them to pursue greater cooperation and sharing. It is the hope of MURCLG that there will be an intentional gathering of Chairs and Moderators, together with the Secretary of Conference and General Secretary, to discern the potential for further sharing at every level yet without becoming immersed and lost in process and technicalities which many associate with ecumenical endeavour.
3. Topics discussed and addressed in recent meetings have included:
 - Guidelines for Services of Welcome/Induction in MURC LEPs. These have been revised and are commended for use whenever a Presbyter/Minister is welcomed/inducted within a MURC setting.
 - Terms of Settlement – the document signed by URC ministers at the commencement of a new ministry and setting out expectations and commitments on the part of minister and congregations. MURCLG has considered a possible additional text to refer to the expectations of the partner denomination where the ministry is in an LEP. Our discussions have also highlighted the blessings and the occasional mismatch in expectations in cases where ministers of other denominations have been Authorised to Serve by Conference and in particular their relationship with the Circuit and the Superintendent Minister.
 - Financial arrangements have also been recognised as a topic on which even well-established LEPs experience difficulty (given the different ways in which the two denominations fund stipends and associated ministerial costs). It is the hope of MURCLG to produce something simple to compare and contrast the two denominations' methods and expectations.

4. MURCLG continues to champion the places where we worship and serve together and to encourage ever-greater reciprocity.

Geoffrey S. Clarke, Co-Chair, MURCLG.

The resolution above is being taken to the Methodist Conference and the URC General Assembly for a decision from each denomination in July 2026.

One-third of our local churches are Local Ecumenical Partnerships. Approximately half of those are Methodist/URC LEPs, which is around 200.

Paper AD1

Church Life Fund Implementation Progress Update

Business and Resources Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Director of Strategy and Programmes myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 5 Assembly approves and adopts the Terms of Reference of the Church Life Fund Committee, as set out in Appendix Five, and directs Business Committee to review and appoint co-opted members to the Church Life Fund Committee where appropriate.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update Assembly on progress towards implementing the 47 Church Life Review (CLR) Phase Two outcomes from the Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) in November 2025
Main points	Executive Summary This paper updates Assembly on progress implementing the 47 resolutions agreed at the Extraordinary General Assembly (November 2025), with a focus on establishing the Church Life Fund (CLF). The key enabling step is appointment of the Church Life Fund Committee. Once in place, contributions can be received and the Fund can begin operating. Implementation of shared services is underway through a phased approach. The URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk will be delivered first, with accounting, HR, and payroll services to follow. Grant processes are in development, with initial funding expected between Autumn 2026 and early 2027, and first grants in early 2027.
Previous relevant documents	Papers A1-A11, EGA, 2025 Resolutions 1-47 (as enacted), EGA, 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Resources Committee Business Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	Implementation costs are currently being borne out of a designated fund within URC Trust. Once in place, Church Life Fund will provide funding.
External (eg ecumenical)	Exploratory conversations around potential areas for collaboration with ecumenical partners, particularly the Methodist Church in relation to shared services, are currently ongoing.

1. Background

- 1.1. This paper outlines progress towards implementing the 47 resolutions passed at the Church Life Review (CLR) Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA) in November 2025. The resolutions are included as Appendix One, with additional commentary on resolutions which are not addressed in this paper.
- 1.2. Extensive information on the proposals is outlined in Papers A1-A11 from the EGA in November 2025. Please consult these papers for specific information regarding the proposals themselves.
- 1.3. Around half of the resolutions are now complete or in progress, although this includes a number of enabling and procedural items; this does not imply that we are halfway through the implementation process. Progress to date has focused on establishing the necessary governance and design work. Many of the more substantial delivery elements, particularly grant-making, will progress once the Church Life Fund Committee is in place. Shared services are being established according to a phased approach.

2. Recap: purpose of the Church Life Fund

- 2.1. The CLF is designed to resource three areas:
 - Shared support services
 - Grants for lay workers in local churches
 - Grants for the development of new communities of discipleship and worship.
- 2.2. The fund aims to reduce administrative burden, enable local mission, and support sustainable growth in new and existing contexts. The vision is of ***a flourishing church, less burdened and better enabled.***

3. Establishing the Church Life Fund Committee

- 3.1. The priority piece of work has been establishing the Church Life Fund Committee ("the Committee"). Funds offered by synods and trusts can only be received once the Committee is in place. A safer recruitment process has been undertaken, and a list of nominees can be found in the Nominations Committee paper.
- 3.2. The Committee's initial work items will be to:
 - Agree and publish criteria for synods to use when deciding whether applications are appropriate for the CLF
 - Agree and publish application documentation (forms, advice, guidance)
 - Ensure appropriate resources and advice is in place for applicants on the URC Resources Hub
 - Establish a Risk Register with appropriate mitigations
 - Review the communications strategy

- Agree a mechanism for local churches and individuals to contribute
- Agree support arrangement for applicants
- Establish governance relationships with Accreditation sub-committee for new communities work, and Resources Committee for shared services
- Begin providing advice to URC Trust on use of the CLF.

3.3. Draft terms of reference for the Committee were passed at the EGA (Resolution 10, November 2025). As required by the resolution, updated terms of reference are brought before this Assembly, subject to resolution, and are included as Appendix Five.

4. Funding update

4.1. Immediately after the Committee has been appointed by Assembly, the Committee Secretary (Director of Strategy and Programmes) and Convenor will write to synods and trusts, requesting that the offered contributions be sent to URC Trust, along with a pre-agreed restriction to Church Life Fund purposes.

4.2. Please see Appendix Three for an updated version of the fund income table, which was originally included in Paper A11 at the EGA. The current expectation is an income of £3.17m in year one and £3.27m in years two and three. This is the position before any potential contributions from local churches and individuals.

5. Shared services implementation overview

5.1. Resources Committee are overseeing the establishment of the CLF shared services, and have agreed a three-phase process, intended to introduce new shared services in order of priority.

5.2. Phase One

- URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk (launched June 2026)
- Property support service (this is an ongoing consultative process to design the service, as less progress was made on this in CLR phase two – a consultation to begin design work is planned for mid-2027)

Phase Two

- Accounting service
- HR service
- Payroll service

Phase Three

- Buying/procurement service
- IT service

Please see the Gantt chart in Appendix Two for an indicative timeline.

5.3. The URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk, formerly known as MyURC, was renamed through a joint decision of Business and Resources Committees, honoring the commitment made at the EGA to review the name.

5.4. The reason for implementing the Resources Hub and Helpdesk first is that it has a modular design: access to other shared services will be routed through the helpdesk, and supporting documentation for those services will be made available on the hub. Likewise, support documentation for the CLF applications process (forms, criteria, advice, etc) will be made available through the hub.

- 5.5. Phase two is expected to commence after the URC Resources Hub is operational, over the course of the second half of 2026 and into early 2027. Phase three will follow when phase two is completed. Preliminary conversations for the phase two services have already commenced, in line with the proposals set out in Papers A3-A6 at the EGA. It is possible that some work on later-scheduled services may begin sooner than expected. This may include, for example, initial work on the back-end of an IT service, needed to enable future front-end work.
- 5.6. Plans are in place to have much of the shared services implementation work completed between late 2026 and Spring 2027. Staff are balancing the desire to establish services as quickly as possible with the reality of limited capacity. Many staff are balancing implementation work alongside business-as-usual responsibilities. Where necessary and appropriate additional capacity is being sought, for example the new URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk Coordinator role. Capacity requirements will be kept under review, with potential for outsourcing if particular pieces of work require more intensive or specialist support.
- 6. Lay worker and new community grants**
- 6.1. Processes and documentation are being created for the lay worker and new community grant applications, based on proposals brought before the EGA in November 2025. Alongside this, a set of criteria for synods to use when deciding which applications are proceedable to Church Life Fund Committee is being created. Further communication will follow in due course.
- 7. Initial funding availability**
- 7.1. The Committee will meet as soon as practical after Assembly, and quarterly thereafter. Initial funds are expected to be available between Autumn 2026 and early 2027. Due to the phasing of applications, it is likely that initial grants will be made in early 2027.
- 8. Church Life Fund communications**
- 8.1. A communications strategy for the CLF is in development. Further materials for synods and local churches will follow shortly.
- 9. Church Life Review Strategic Reference Group**
- 9.1. Resolution 45 from the EGA established a CLR Strategic Reference Group, to guide the strategic implementation process, drawing on individuals who contributed to the CLR through its steering and working groups. The group does not have any formal governance authority. Business Committee will oversee the work of the group. Terms of reference are included as Appendix Four (but are not subject to resolution).
- 10. Delivery risk management**
- 10.1. A number of risks are being actively managed, including:
- Staff capacity constraints
 - Low uptake of shared services
 - Governance complexity.

- 10.2. Resources Committee own the risk management for shared services implementation. The Church Life Fund Committee will establish its own Risk Register shortly after it is formed.

Appendix One – EGA Resolution Summary

No.	Resolution (as enacted)	Additional notes
1A	General Assembly receives the package of Church Life Review (CLR) proposals and notes that they are the product of extensive consultation across the councils of the Church. Assembly extends its thanks to the wide range of people who have engaged and contributed to the process	Complete
1B	Assembly acknowledges the extraordinary and different nature of this Assembly, and its place in the wider process of change. Assembly commits to consider the proposals in light of this significant Kairos moment.	Complete
2	Based on learnings from the Church Life Review's methodology, General Assembly commits to a denominational intention to continue ad hoc consultations, to allow people from across the councils of the Church to collaborate and discern the future of the denomination together, addressing challenging strategic questions in well-facilitated, safe, honest spaces.	In progress (property services and Ministry and Mission Fund consultations planned)
3	Based on learnings from the Church Life Review process and beyond, General Assembly commits to a way of working where resources and services are denominationally developed and locally delivered.	In progress
4	General Assembly instructs the Business, Faith in Action, Ministries, and Resources Committees to consider their collection, analysis, and usage of data, and to reflect on how data could enhance their decision-making.	In progress
5	General Assembly endorses the proposal to establish a Church Life Fund (CLF) and invites the URC Trust (URCT) to make necessary arrangements to implement the fund. Assembly directs relevant URC staff to support this process as required.	In progress
6	Assembly instructs Business Committee to initiate a review of the Church Life Fund after two years of operation, with outputs brought before the first available Assembly.	Not started
7	General Assembly invites synods, trusts, and others to make contributions to URCT to create a fund known as the Church Life Fund. It is proposed that any such funds will be donated by synods, trusts, and others and received by URCT on the following terms: - The donations will form a restricted fund known as the Church Life Fund whose purposes will be funding new shared services, making grants for lay workers in local churches, and new communities of discipleship and worship. - If the Church Life Fund shall be dissolved at any time in the future any remaining funds after settlement of all liabilities will be returned to the synods, trusts, and other contributors in the proportions to which they contributed to the Church Life Fund	Not started (to immediately follow Assembly)
8	General Assembly resolves that a Church Life Fund Committee is established, with a representative from every synod. URCT is invited to take advice from the Committee on the expenditure of the Church Life Fund and on request the Committee is authorised to provide such advice.	In progress

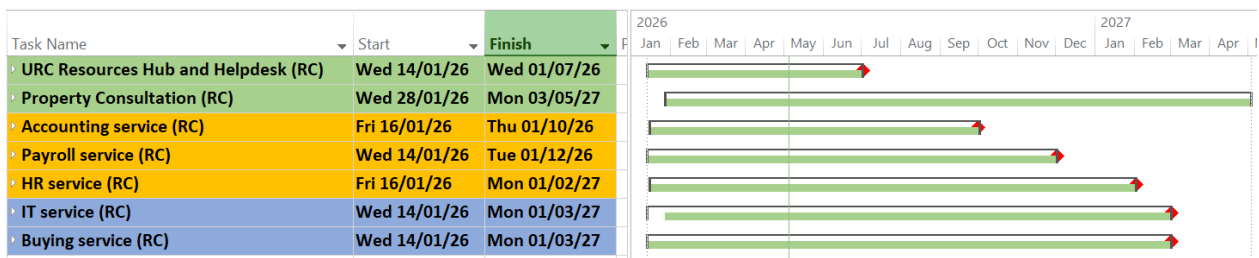
9	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to publish criteria, which synods should use to make judgements about which applications to send to the Church Life Fund	In progress
10	General Assembly notes the draft Terms of Reference laid out in Appendix Three, and instructs that relevant committees undertake the necessary work and bring back final Terms of Reference and proposed members to Assembly/Assembly Executive in 2026	Complete
11	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to make arrangements so that local churches and individuals can also contribute to the Church Life Fund. Assembly recommends that the Committee explores options for grants from external funding bodies	Not started
12	General Assembly resolves that the URC shared resource hub will be known as myURC, and instructs Resources Committee and relevant staff to implement the URC shared resource hub, as soon as feasible.	In progress
13	Assembly resolves to establish a myURC helpdesk to receive and respond to emails, chat, and phone calls from myURC users, and instructs Resources Committee to implement the helpdesk as soon as feasible	In progress
14A	Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to URCT in relation to providing funding out of the restricted Church Life Fund for the operation of the myURC shared resources hub and helpdesk	Not started
14B	Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to review the operation of myURC and the helpdesk annually	Not started
14C	Assembly instructs Resources Committee to ensure sufficient staffing for the myURC helpdesk at its inception, and to monitor and review staffing levels to ensure effective staffing levels are maintained.	In progress
15	Assembly affirms the proposed myURC hub and helpdesk, governance model, and apportions operational governance responsibility to Resources Committee, with PLATO to contribute on questions of content	Complete
16	Assembly instructs Resources and Church Life Fund Committees, along with relevant United Reformed Church (URC) staff, to establish an accounting support service, consisting of support for churches who can prepare their own accounts, and support for those who cannot	Not started (preliminary conversations underway)
17	Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to the URC Trust (URCT) in relation to providing funding out of the restricted Church Life Fund for an accounting support service.	Not started
18	Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to review the accounting support service annually	Not started

19	Assembly invites synods to apply to the Church Life Fund to request direct accounting support on behalf of select local churches, in cases where the church could not otherwise manage their accounts. To enable this, Assembly advises that synods maintain a list of those churches who struggle with their accounts, and refer those that require additional support after training and confidence building activities.	Not started
20A	Assembly extends thanks to Small Charity Support for their willingness to support the denomination, and gratefully accepts the offer of support.	Complete
20B	Assembly instructs Resources Committee to liaise with Small Charity Support, to find ways of working together to establish an accounting Adult Learning Model for the denomination	In progress
21	Assembly advises that the URC should actively incorporate more systematic procurement approaches and improved resources in the future	Not started
22	Assembly instructs Resources Committee to undertake work to further investigate, cost, and propose a preferred procurement model to be adopted by the URC	Not started
23	General Assembly affirms that, wherever possible, the provision of support services for local churches, provided by synods and General Assembly, is best done in a coordinated and joined up fashion. Assembly encourages the whole church to develop a culture in which we develop resources collectively for the benefit of the whole church, whilst engaging within synods and locally to ensure those resources actively support local congregational life.	In progress
24	General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with developing an IT infrastructure that has the potential to serve the General Assembly and the Synods	Not started
25	General Assembly encourages synods to, when possible, move their IT infrastructure provision to that which has been developed for the whole church.	Not started
26A	General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with bringing together key stakeholders together, to devise a means by which each local church has access to professional HR advice, at a minimum in the form of a helpline.	Not started
26B	General Assembly encourages synods to work constructively and generously with the Resources Committee in working towards HR provision available to each local congregation within the United Reformed Church.	Not started
27A	General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with developing a model of payroll services that can be made available to each synod and local church.	Not started
27B	General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with consulting widely with synods and the members of the Church Life Fund Committee to arrive at a workable, affordable funding model for a shared payroll provision.	Not started

28	General Assembly tasks the Resources Committee with hosting a consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from synods, General Assembly and the Retired Ministers' Housing Society to explore issues surrounding the existing, and possible future, arrangements for supporting the maintenance and development of buildings held in trust for United Reformed Church purposes.	In progress
29	Assembly instructs Resources Committee to prioritise this work, starting with more easily attainable shared services, like payroll and HR.	Complete
30	General Assembly receives the findings of the Eido report, and notes and endorses the model and toolkit outlined in the appendices	Complete
31	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to the URC Trust in relation to the making of charitable grants out of the restricted Church Life Fund for lay worker roles, in line with the criteria set out in section four.	Not started
32	Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to publish relevant templates and application advice via the Resources Hub.	Not started
33	Assembly affirms the proposed distinction between lay work and ordained/commissioned ministry, and instructs Church Life Fund Committee to uphold this distinction and seek advice from the Accreditation sub-committee where necessary.	Not started
34	Assembly instructs that funding is only given when Church Life Fund Committee have confidence that the liability of individuals will be limited and all legal obligations will be met. Assembly reminds employers that they are personally responsible for ensuring they are compliant with all legal requirements when employing someone, and failure to comply can lead to serious legal consequences	Not started
35	Assembly recommends that applicants for lay worker grants carefully consider the appropriate employing entity	Not started
36	General Assembly receives the new communities of Discipleship and Worship proposal, and endorses the values and principles in part two.	Complete
37	General Assembly notes the best practice and opportunities in part three, and requests that any new communities established through a Church Life Fund grant follow these recommendations	Not started
38	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to adopt the application and review procedures outlined in part four.	Not started

39	(a) General Assembly instructs Ministries Committee to update the Accreditation sub-committee Terms of Reference to accommodate the proposed application and review model. Assembly requests that updated Terms of Reference are brought before Assembly in 2026. (b) General Assembly instructs Faith in Action Committee and Ministries Committee to promote new Christian Communities and develop the mechanisms by which they might be recognised as a Mission Project or local church of the URC, in collaboration with Church Life Fund Committee. (c) General Assembly encourage synods to identify where these communities might be developed, in collaboration with Church Life Fund Committee.	a) Complete b) Not started c) In progress
40	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to URCT in relation to the making of charitable grants out of the restricted Church Life Fund for new communities of discipleship and worship, in line with the detail set out in this proposal	Not started
41	General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to publish templates and advice for applicants on the Resources Hub.	Not started
42	General Assembly endorses the design and commencement of a denominational communication strategy, aimed at raising awareness of the Church Life Fund and the services, lay worker roles, and new communities it can fund. The strategy should raise hopes, generate enthusiasm, and encourage lay worker and new communities applications.	In progress
43	Assembly acknowledges the role Resources Committee will play in implementing the Phase Two outcomes, and thanks them for this. Assembly instructs Resources Committee to bring a clear timeline back to Assembly in 2026, covering work already implemented and work yet to be completed	Complete
44	General Assembly acknowledges the end of Church Life Review Phase Two, and with it the Church Life Review as a programme. Assembly thanks those involved in phases one and two for their generosity, input, and commitment.	Complete
45	General Assembly instructs Business Committee to form a Strategic Reference Group, with published terms of reference, distinct from the Church Life Fund Committee, which can be drawn on by relevant committees, synods, and others in their ongoing strategic work.	Complete (See Appendix Four for ToR)
46	General Assembly instructs Resources and Ministries Committees to arrange a consultation with synod officers, synod trust company trustees, and other relevant decision-makers, to address underlying theological and other strategic and covenantal questions related to finance and governance, particularly in relation the sustainability of the Ministry and Mission Fund and the ministry provision made possible by that fund.	In progress (non-CLF work – see Paper GH1)
47	General Assembly instructs relevant committees to return to future Assemblies with the outcomes of strategic investigations, in light of the denominational commitment to collaboration	In progress

Appendix Two – Gantt Summary of Shared Services Implementation



This excerpt from the CLF implementation programme plan shows an indicative timeline for shared service implementation. Green items are phase one, orange are phase two, and blue are phase three. The delivery date for phase three services will depend on progress with the phase two services. Please note that, although the plan shows all phases progressing simultaneously, this is not the case – some early work has been undertaken for phase two and three workstreams (hence the bars beginning in January), but intensive work has not begun.

Appendix Three – Updated Church Life Fund Financial Scale

This table was originally included in Paper A11 (EGA, 2025), along with an impact model. This table has subsequently been updated to reflect additional offered contributions.

Synod	Y1	Y2	Y3
North Western Synod	£200,000	£200,000	£200,000
Mersey Synod	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000
Yorkshire Synod	£60,000	£60,000	£60,000
East Midlands	£150,000	£150,000	£150,000
West Midlands	£300,000	£400,000	£400,000
Eastern	£400,000	£400,000	£400,000
South Western	£325,000	£325,000	£325,000
Wessex	£180,000	£180,000	£180,000
Thames North	£541,000	£541,000	£541,000
Southern	£550,000	£550,000	£550,000
National Synod of Wales	£100,000	£100,000	£100,000
National Synod of Scotland	£66,667	£66,667	£66,667
Northern	£200,000	£200,000	£200,000
Total	£3,172,667	£3,272,667	£3,272,667

Appendix Four – Church Life Review Strategic Reference Group Terms of Reference

Group Name	Church Life Review Strategic Reference Group
Convenor	Group member (at the request of Business Committee)
Secretary	Director of Strategy and Programmes
Ex Officio Members	None
General Assembly Appointed Members	All members will be appointed by Business Committee
Length of Term	Linked to the implementation of Church Life Review outcomes, expected to be 1-2yrs To be reviewed by Business Committee once the implementation period concludes, to determine future need for a strategic advisory body
In Attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Chief Operating Officer Any other staff member seeking advice on strategic work
Minute Secretary	Strategy and Programmes Administrator
Meeting Frequency	Two times per year
Subgroups/Sub committees	None
Quoracy	No quoracy requirement (advisory only)
Accountability & Reporting Duties	Accountable to Business Committee Brief, descriptive annual report on activities sent to Business Committee Will provide advice to committees requesting input on relevant strategic work
Terms of Reference Review	Annual

Background

The authority for establishing the Strategic Reference Group (“the Group”) is drawn from Resolution 45 (Paper A10), Extraordinary General Assembly, November 2025:

General Assembly instructs Business Committee to form a Strategic Reference Group, distinct from the Church Life Fund Committee, which can be drawn on by relevant committees, synods, and others in their ongoing strategic work.

It was seen as useful that, as Church Life Review outcomes are implemented and the Church adopts a more strategic posture, we have an identified Group with accrued expertise to review, advise, and support implementation work. The Strategic Reference Group therefore exists to provide time-limited, non-binding strategic advice when requested by Assembly bodies, drawing on members' experience of the Church Life Review and its implementation, as a resource for the church in its continued process of discernment. Although the Church Life Review programme has ended, the Group retains the name in their title, to make clear the distinction from Church Life Fund Committee.

Membership

Membership is invitation-only, limited to those who were closely involved in the Church Life Review process, i.e., the Phase One Church Life Review Group, that Phase Two Steering Group, the Phase Two Finance and New Communities Working Groups, and the Phase Two Sub-Committee. Members are appointed for their ability to reflect across systems, rather than represent particular workstreams.

Responsibilities

The Group has an advisory role across a number of interlinked areas related to implementation of the Church Life Review. The Group may be asked to:

- Review emerging proposals
- Act as a test bed for new services, platforms, and models
- Examine strategic coherence
- Identify risks
- Provide historical context
- Stress-test assumptions.

This work will primarily be undertaken in relation to Church Life Review implementation, as follows:

- Shared services
 - URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk
 - Accounting service
 - HR service
 - IT service
 - Payroll service
 - Property services
 - Buying service
- Matters relating to lay worker and new community grants made by Church Life Fund Committee.

In undertaking this work, the Group may be approached by:

- Business Committee
- Resources Committee
- Church Life Fund Committee
- Other Assembly Committees
- Others, via Business Committee.

If any committee or other body wishes to seek the Group's advice on any matter beyond Church Life Review implementation, this may only be done with the written consent of Business Committee. In such an event, the Secretary will notify the Business Committee Convenor that a request has been made.

Scope

The Group will be advisory only, operating in response to requests. The Group's authority in advising on strategic work will be derived from Business Committee; as such, Committees are encouraged to give due consideration to the Group's advice. In summary, the Group:

- Will not have delegated decision-making authority
- Will not direct staff or committees
- Will not be a budget-holder
- Will not initiate projects.

Risk Management

The Group's role is advisory only, and as such the activity is low risk; no formal risk register will be kept. Any risks associated with strategic work will be owned by the relevant Assembly Committee. Any major risks identified by the Group must be escalated to Business Committee.

Conducting Business

Committees may approach the Group directly; others will make a request for advice via Business Committee.

The Group will meet twice per year, with discretion to request additional meetings related to specific pieces of work. The Group may be consulted via email.

Appendix Five – Church Life Fund Committee Terms of Reference

Church Life Fund Committee

Final Terms of Reference – March 2026

Committee	Church Life Fund Committee (CLFC)
Convenor	The Convenor will be appointed by General Assembly following the Nominations Committee safer recruitment process
Secretary	Director of Strategy and Programmes
Ex Officio Members	Two representatives from URC Trust (See 'Membership' section below)
General Assembly Appointed Members	- One nominated representative from each synod, appointed by General Assembly following the Nominations Committee safer recruitment process - One representative of URC Youth, appointed by General Assembly following the Nominations Committee safer recruitment process - The Committee will have the authority to co-opt additional members (See 'Membership' section below)
Length of Term	Three years
In Attendance when required (to cover their areas of expertise)	Members of the Senior Leadership Team Offices of General Assembly Staff (e.g. Chief Finance Officer, Communications) Other URCT trustees, as required Any others as requested by the Committee
Minute Secretary	Strategy and Programmes Administrator
Meeting Frequency	Quarterly
Subgroups/Sub committees	Accreditation Sub-Committee will review new community applications and progress Possible lay worker application sub-committee Other sub-committees at the Committee's discretion, based on operational requirements
Quoracy	There will be no requirement for in-meeting quoracy, to avoid this becoming an obstacle. However, there will be a requirement for quoracy in ratifying decisions: at least 50% of synods (7) and one URCT trustee. If there are not enough members in a meeting to ratify a decision, this may be done by email.

Accountability & Reporting Duties	Accountability to General Assembly The Committee will be directly accountable to General Assembly, and must submit an annual progress report. Business Committee will initiate and coordinate a major review of the fund after three years of operation. This must include at least one non-URC reviewer. Reporting to the URC Trust The Committee will need to submit its advice on the application of the Church Life Fund to URCT after every meeting.
Terms of Reference Review	Annually

Responsibilities

The Church Life Fund Committee (the Committee) has delegated authority from General Assembly to advise URC Trust (URCT) on the application of the Church Life Fund (CLF), mirroring the role of Resources Committee in relation to the Ministry and Mission Fund.

In exercising this authority, the Committee shall:

Shared services

- Oversee allocation of CLF resources to support new shared services, including accounting support, denominational procurement, HR, IT, payroll, property, and the denominational resources hub and helpdesk.
- Ensure shared services are delivered consistently and effectively, acting on the outcome of Resources Committee reviews.
- Monitor usage of the URC Resources Hub and Helpdesk and identify usage trends.
- Advise URCT on where to direct CLF funds for shared services.
- Ensure that the cost of shared services is proportional given the overall income to the CLF, and in light of the number of applications for lay worker and new community funding.

Lay worker grants

- Consider applications from synods for lay worker grants, ensuring eligibility criteria are met.
- Advise URCT on where to direct CLF funds for lay worker grants.
- Safeguard the distinction between lay work and ordained/commissioned ministry, in concert with the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) and potentially a sub-committee.
- Ensure grant-funded roles meet requirements of legal compliance, safer recruitment, insurance, line management, and pastoral care.
- Monitor outcomes through proportionate reporting and evaluation mechanisms.

New communities grants

- Consider applications for new communities of discipleship and worship, taking advice from the Accreditation Sub-Committee on the suitability of applications.
- Advise URCT on where to direct CLF funds for new community grants.
- Ensure that new communities funded reflect agreed values and principles.
- Oversee the review process, taking advice from Accreditation Sub-Committee.

Fund stewardship

- Ensure that CLF expenditure aligns with Assembly resolutions.
- Ensure funds contributed by synods are applied only for CLF purposes.
- Liaise with synods in the case that applications are not proceedable, trying to find mutually agreeable solutions.
- Act with discretion, seeking to advance innovative and permissive projects which fall within the remit of the Church Life Fund.
- Review the CLF's income and advise synods on the level of contributions needed after the initial three-year term, if the fund continues.
- Explore and enable contributions to the CLF from local churches.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration outside the URC, particularly avenues for funding from external bodies.

Applications: communications and support

- Devise, implement, and oversee a service which seeks to support local churches and synods with applications and identifying opportunities.
- Oversee a communications strategy which aims to raise awareness of the fund and its opportunities.
- Actively advocate for the fund with each synod and across the denomination.

The intention of this remit is to give the Committee broad discretion in identifying which application of the funds available to them will have the greatest impact.

Membership and Appointment Process

Synod representatives

The Committee shall consist of one representative from every synod. Given the complexity of the Committee's remit, there needs to be a wide diversity of skills and experience within the membership. Synods will notify Nominations Committee of two potential representatives; Nominations will then review the proposed synod representatives and undertake a safer recruitment process, including a conversation with each potential member and references. One representative will be selected from every synod. The primary criterion for decision making will be determining which combination of representatives provides the broadest cross-section of skills, experience, diversity, equality, and inclusion. Nominations Committee will present a final list of members to General Assembly, which will be invited to appoint the members of the Church Life Fund Committee.

Skills within the Committee should include accountancy, grant-making, charity law, service provision (e.g. HR, IT, etc), mission work, community development, URC history

and ethos, Reformed theology, and safeguarding. This diversity of skills reflects the breadth of the Committee's responsibilities.

To assist Nominations Committee in making their determination, synods will need to provide a mini-CV for their prospective representatives. This will help Nominations appraise the overall spread of the proposed membership. Ensuring the right diversity of skills, experience, and EDI on the Committee is likely to be a challenge, requiring close collaboration between Nominations Committee and synods.

Convenor

The Convenor will be an additional member of the Committee, rather than one of the synod representatives. The Convenor will be recommended by Nominations Committee following a safer recruitment process and appointed by General Assembly.

URCT members

To ensure URCT have confidence in the advice they receive from the Committee, two URCT trustees will also sit on the Committee in an ex officio capacity.

Youth representative

The Committee will include a representative of URC Youth.

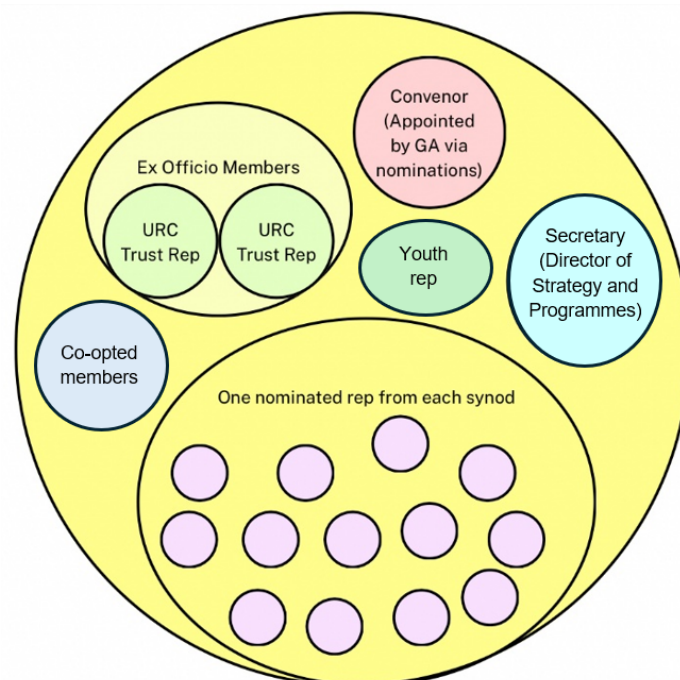
Co-opted members

The Committee will have the power to co-opt members for specific reasons, e.g. to bring additional skills or address Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging imbalances. This must be done in conjunction with Nominations Committee. Co-opted members will be reviewed and approved by Business Committee.

Other routine attendees

It is expected that ex officio members will routinely be in attendance, including the General Secretary and the successor role to the Church Life Review Programme Manager.

All members will need to undergo the URC's safer recruitment process.



Relationships with other Committees

URC Trust

The Committee will provide advice to URCT on the application of the Church Life Fund under delegated authority.

Resources Committee

Close liaison will be maintained where CLF funds shared services, which will fall within Resources Committees' operational remit.

Business Committee

Business Committee will initiate and coordinate the three-year review of the CLF. The Committee must also liaise with Business Committee over the submission of its annual report to General Assembly, as well as any other General Assembly Resolutions which pertain to the Church Life Fund.

Nominations Committee

Appointment of members will be handled via the agreed nominations process, ensuring balance of skills and experience within the Committee.

Conducting Business

Additional meetings can be scheduled, with reasonable notice, if business requires it. Decisions may 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 the Committees membership can be utilised for projects and instruct task groups from beyond its membership to develop specific pieces of work. The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if they deem it 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.

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.

Data Protection

The Committee will comply with data protection regulations (GDPR) and uphold URC guidelines and best practice with regards to data processing.

Paper B1

Faith in Action Report

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Faith in Action Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Jenny Mills, Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action) jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note, for information
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Overview of the work of the Faith in Action Team and Committee since September 2025
Main points	An introduction to the Team and Committee, updates on the work of Children, Youth and Intergenerational; Communications; Equalities, Diversity and Belonging sub-Committee; Evangelism and Ecumenism; Global and Intercultural Ministries; Global Justice and Interfaith; Lay Learning; Public Issues.
Previous relevant documents	Mission and Discipleship Committee Reports up to General Assembly 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Faith in Action Team, Committee and sub-committees

Summary of impact

Financial	None beyond current Faith in Action budget
External (eg ecumenical)	Impact of many areas of work focusing on engaging with partners

Following the decisions at General Assembly July 2025 (Papers A1 and A3) the new Faith in Action Committee and the Equalities, Diversity and Belonging sub-committee were formed.

Following a restructure at the Offices of the General Assembly, the Faith in Action Team was created. This brought together the work of both Mission and Discipleship Teams (with Ministries, Safeguarding and the Minister for Digital Worship moving to the Ministries Team, with the Ministries Committee and Safeguarding Committees overseeing this work, under the leadership of the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)).

Lay learning remains within the remit of the Faith in Action Team. Ordained and Accredited learning sits within Ministries. The two teams liaise closely on their work, through the Ministries and Learning Forum.

The Faith in Action Team

The Faith in Action Team works through the oversight of the Faith in Action Committee, under the guidance of the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action).

As this was a new team, with hopes for increased collaborative working, in September 2025 the team went on a 24-hour residential to get to know each other better, to hear about each other's areas of work and to create a vision and mission document. (See *Appendix 1*) This document will be reviewed in September 2026, alongside the work introduced in Paper B2 (5 Marks of the Faith in Action Team), if agreed at General Assembly July 2026.

It was anticipated that, bringing the Mission and Discipleship work together, would enable closer working relations and crossover between different staff members and areas of work. The size of change in the work of the two Teams (Mission and Discipleship) and the coming together of them has brought both joys challenges and it has taken time to find patterns of working and collaborating, along with new line management structures.

The embedding of the Communications Team into the Faith in Action team has been a particularly positive outcome of the restructure as it means we are far more intentional in our communication, especially our outward facing communications.

The vision and mission document has shaped our purpose and the newly proposed Five Marks of the Faith in Action Team should help us more effectively focus our work. With fewer staff, we have to discern where we should continue current work, what we need to stop doing, and what to take on as new work. This is still ongoing.

One major change that occurred within the Team, in March 2026, was the resignation of the Head of Children, Youth and Intergenerational Discipleship. We give grateful thanks to Dr Sam Richards and all she did in her role and for the wealth, breadth and depth of resources, ideas and work that she offered, produced and completed for the URC.

We have so much children and youth work that we are proud of; the integration of children, young people and young adults in the life of the URC is better because of her work, especially alongside work of the Children and Youth Development Officers+ Team and the CY Work Team. We were able to recruit for the role, and Dr Jo Griffiths joins us and will be with us at General Assembly July 2026.

The Faith in Action Team has much going on as the ensuing reports in the Paper will show. We look forward to continuing to grow as a team facing the joys and challenges of the next phase, responding to the Church Life Review, and also highlighting ways to turn the language of decline into words, actions and resources of hope, with fresh vision.

Faith in Action Committee

The Committee was formed in the Autumn of 2025 and its first meeting was 14th February 2026. The Convenors of the previous Education and Learning Committee and Children and Youth Work Committee continued on the new Committee until July 2026 to offer some continuity; both felt called to step down from the new Committee. It was thought helpful to have continuity of service and so the Convenor of previous Mission Committee agreed to continue in role until her term of service ended (2028); the new

Ministries Committee Convenor continued in her role until the end of her term (2026), for the same reason.

The Committee is recruiting new members after the first round of recruiting enabled four people to join the three past Convenors. The new Committee make-up will be included in the Committees' list in the Book of Reports following General Assembly July 2026. The make-up of the Committee is: four members with a Mission focus, two members with an Education/Lay Learning Focus, two members with a Children and Youth/intergenerational focus, two Youth Members, along with the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action). Staff members attend as required.

The meetings are two in-person and one online, and once a year the Committee comes together along with the networks that serve the Faith in Action Team: The Children and Youth Development Officers+ Team, the Mission Enablers' Network, the Training and Development Officers+ Network, in a residential.

The reason for this once-a-year gathering is to enable the voices of local churches to be directly represented in the Committee's meeting and to enable the work of the Committee to be directly shared, via the work of staff in Synod roles, with the local churches.

The Equalities, Diversity and Belonging (EDIB) sub-committee

EDIB sub-Committee was created at General Assembly July 2025, following resolution 5 in Paper A3. The previous Equalities Committee membership has continued in role as the URC agreed to a consultation around Equalities, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in the URC, which is in planning. Jo Clare-Young agreed to continue in the role of temporary Convenor with David Salsbury continuing as Secretary.

Concerns have been expressed about the status of EDIB in the URC and we hope that the findings of the consultation will help us as we think about the future. For now, EDIB Committee remains a sub-Committee of the Faith in Action Committee with a member of the Faith in Action Committee linking with them and attending their meetings, and the Convenor of EDIB invited to the Faith in Action Committee meetings, having had sight of the agenda. A report from the EDIB Committee is contained in this report.

Reports

CHILDREN, YOUTH AND INTERGENERATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

The shape and size of the Children, Youth and Intergenerational (CYI) Team changed in 2025 and now we have the role of Head of Children, Youth and Intergenerational Discipleship- CYID (see above for more detail and changes), Programme Officer for CYID, and Administrator for CYID (and Evangelism and Ecumenism) working with the CYDO+ Team who are based in synods and work with local churches, as well as giving up to 20% of their time to wider URC work.

Heather Wilkinson (Administrator) and Sharon Lloyd (Programme Officer) have overseen the work of CYID from the end of March until GA July 2026. The CYDO+ Team have also stepped up and taken on new work or ensured current work continues and we thank them all for their commitment and support in this time of transition.

Youth Executive has completed its pilot year with three distinct sub-groups (as per Paper B1 GA 2025). Maya Whithall concluded her year as Youth Moderator at Youth Assembly in March 2026 and deep thanks were expressed for all she offered in her time as Youth Mod. Kacie Hodgson has begun her year as Youth Mod and is particularly focused on engaging with churches and young people and focusing on radical inclusivity and social justice. Alex Clements is the Youth Moderator-Elect.

Constant work

- Weekly online Faith Adventures Children Together (FACT) & Faith Adventures Youth Resource (FAYR)
- Supporting URC Youth Executive and Youth Moderators
- CYI communications and updating website
- Padlet Calendar of training and events
- CYDO+ team coordination
- Supporting URC Youth, Youth Moderators and Youth Executive, Youth Synod Reps meetings
- Offering CYID input to other teams, conferences, courses or ecumenical gatherings
- Bi-monthly Newsletter
- Children and Youth Friendly Church scheme
- Lundie Award
- Grants.

Events

- 2026 URC Youth Assembly, 27 Feb – 1 March – around 100 14-25 years olds gathered at Kings Park for an excellent weekend. Find Round Up here for more information:
<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/YA-Round-up-2025-web.pdf>
- 2026 URC Youth Leaders Gathering 27 Feb – 1 March – 19 leaders attended weekend conference at Highgate House with input from Ash Barker.
- Are We Ready? 11 March - day conference hosted at Church House under Churches Together in Britain and Ireland umbrella. 14 denominations developing response to the challenge of Quiet Revival to welcome, engage and disciple young people and young adults.
- Intergenerate UKI – Sam Richards hosted webinar on intergenerational small groups.
- 1T4 11-14s event 2-4 May a whole weekend of fun, faith, and friendship for URC Youth at Whitemoor Lakes
- Sharon Lloyd (Programme Officer) representing URC CYW in New Zealand with the Council for World Mission 13 - 27 May.
- European Conference on Christian Education Conference Switzerland 8-12 June attended by Programme Officer and some CYDO+s.

Other work

- Production of Wise Words annual themed resource for 2026 sent in all churches mailing
- New materials to support local churches with child and young person baptism and beyond
- Young Leaders training materials
- CYDO+ allocations for 2026-27
- 'Talking About' monthly sessions, Mental Health First Aid training offered
- Children's Ministry Essentials pilot course, Youthscape Essentials course

- Holiday Club and Advent 2026 overseen by CYDO+ team assisted by CYID team
- *Go with Greta* combined work with CYDO+ team, CYID and Commitment for Life.

Awaiting new post holder

- C&Y Programme Enabling Group (sub-committee of Faith in Action Team) - continued development
- URC Youth task group – draft strategy
- Finalising Memorandum of Understanding between Synods and the wider URC for the 20% allocated work
- Training opportunities for children's, youth, family and intergenerational ministry – develop summary resource for Enquirers and other events
- Preparing churches to welcome and disciple young adults – Quiet Revival
- Develop intergenerational discipleship strategy and resources
- Responding to Church Life Extraordinary GA from CYID perspective - fostering CY focused ministry, lay workers, new communities, resource hub.

COMMITMENT FOR LIFE

This past year the United Reformed Church has remained steadfast in its pursuit of justice and peace in the world. *Commitment for Life* (CFL) is a treasured URC programme through which local congregations can enable practical actions for disaster relief, poverty reduction, and empowerment of some of the poorest people in the world.

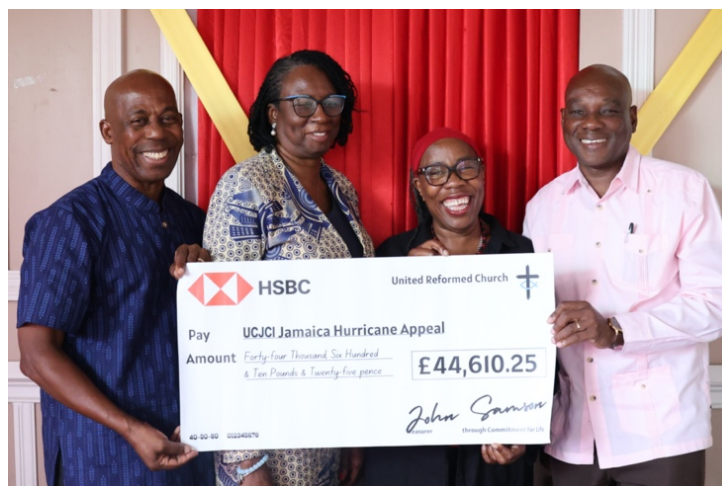
CFL-supporting congregations know that poverty and injustice are ultimately spiritual issues and thus place at the centre of their action intercessory prayer. Many are using the CFL's *Prayer Partners* for inspiration as most of its prayers are written by people at the very coalface of justice. CFL offers a host of useful resources that can be and are 'mined' for educative purposes, storytelling, all-age worship, advocacy, and sharing opportunities.

Together with the Methodist Church in Britain and All We Can, Commitment for Life supported the *Gaza and Lebanon Justice Appeal*. The response was so deeply moving. The United Reformed Church was able to send almost £19,000 of the monies raised to our partners in Lebanon, an incredible effort. This year, congregations were invited to share of their gifts in the *Middle East Solidarity Justice Appeal*, which has supported incredibly brave and innovative partners in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, and Syria.

In partnership with *All We Can*, this appeal was relaunched just after Easter 2026 following the intensification of the US and Israel's illegal wars of aggression against Iran, Lebanon, and Palestine. Please continue to support the work of our partners like the *Compassion Protestant Society* in Beirut. CPS is the diaconal wing of our partner church in the region, NESSL (*Near East Synod of Syria and Lebanon*).

See <https://www.allwecan.org.uk/appeals/middleeast>

Congregations have also generously supported the Jamaican hurricane relief efforts. CFL has made important connections with partners in the ongoing drive to make a difference as part of the wider URC commitment to addressing the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade. In this work, the CFL Reference Group and *All We Can* are finding ways to work in collaboration given the alignment of theology, principles, and practice of justice common to both the URC and the Methodist Church in Britain. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Faith in Action Committee.



Commitment for Life thanks all those who supported the appeal for support for our partners in Ukraine, the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia.

CFL continues to host lay-preacher training so that local congregations can benefit from having a *Commitment for Life* service of worship within their preaching calendars.

Finally, we wish to express our deep gratitude to all our congregations. Your support for CFL is a modern retelling of the widow's olive oil jar that God keeps refilling. Donations are, once again, up from the preceding year (up £25,000 to £256,167 excluding emergency appeals). This is a clear sign of the importance that the hope of our faith in Jesus - making a practical difference for the poorest - enlivens and motivates local our wonderful URC congregations and Local Ecumenical Partnerships.

COMMUNICATIONS

Reformed magazine

Following a consultation with its readers, the Senior Leadership Team and with the Faith in Action Committee, *Reform* magazine was renamed *Reformed*, to distance itself from the populist political party, which had caused concern from subscribers and confusion by some members of Reform UK who had subscribed.

The first issue with the new name was published in May 2026. The take up of free sample copies of *Reformed* and new subscriptions has been very encouraging at the time of writing.

Please allow us to send you a free copy, or some free copies for your church or community: www.urc.org.uk/ed

iChurch

iChurch, the URC's website platform for local churches, looks after more than 160 church, Synod and Local Ecumenical Projects websites, and continues to grow.

After many years without any price increases, rising hosting and other costs meant that its annual fee had to increase slightly in 2026 (by £2 to £11.99 per month), but for the

service it delivers, iChurch remains much cheaper than other church website providers, some charging hundreds of pounds more per year for an equivalent service.

With the changes in society and the ever-increasing use of mobile phones, a local church without a website is failing in its mission to invite people to consider coming to church.

Most of the 58 million people who use a smartphone each day spend three hours per day on the internet, and most scan QR codes.

External noticeboards with QR codes lead those scanning them to the church's website, meaning those interested in discipleship, faith, worship and other activities in churches can find out more and make contact.

If your church needs a website, iChurch can help.

We are grateful for Reuben Watt, Daniel Raddings, Jessica Gough, Hannah Fleming-Hill and Dan Morrell for their continued work with iChurch. Visit www.ichurch.website for further details.

URC Bookshop

At the time of writing (end of April 2026) the URC Bookshop had despatched 540 orders with 3,091 products with a value of more than £12,700 from January to April. In 2025, the Bookshop despatched a total of 2,154 orders with 10,665 products with a total of more than £71,000 including sales at Synod events, General Assembly, and other events.

Terms of Reference

At the February meeting of the Assembly Executive, the Terms of Reference for the Faith in Action Committee and Resources Committee were updated to allow for effective governance following the staff restructure in the Offices of General Assembly (Church House) which took place during the summer of 2025.

It was agreed that the Faith in Action Committee would be responsible for the communications strategy and content work, including bookshop items, and the Resources Committee was responsible for the trading aspects of the communications team, namely iChurch, *Reformed* Magazine and the URC Bookshop, handling the commercial and financial aspects of these enterprises.

The Resources Committee continues to oversee the URC website and now has responsibility for managing the URC database.

Community Project Awards

These are being presented at the General Assembly and we are grateful again to Congregational for its generous financial support. You can read all about the winners after the Assembly in *Reformed* magazine and online at www.urc.org.uk/awards.

EQUALITIES, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND BELONGING (EDIB) SUB-COMMITTEE

Last year, we reported to General Assembly as the Equalities Committee, our final report in that form. After General Assembly 2025 the committee transitioned almost

seamlessly to become the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging sub-committee of the Faith in Action Committee, or EDIB for short.

We have adopted new Terms of Reference for the sub-committee which were agreed by Assembly Executive in November and are working on creating role descriptions for members and officers. Meanwhile, most of the membership from the 'old' Equalities Committee has been carried over during this transitional period. We did, however, say goodbye to Judy Rogers and Janet Raven who have stood down from the committee and we thank them for their service. By the time assembly meets the sub-committee will have met three times, always on Zoom.

We have continued to work on developing a resource exploring Trans identities, written by people drawing on their own lived experience and professional expertise and which looks in some detail at theology and scripture, history, biology and pastoral care. A decision was made in the summer of 2025 not to produce this as a paper document but to develop it into a web-based resource using the URC's Learning Hub.

Regrettably, progress has not been as swift as we would have liked due to the availability of time and resources but it is still the sub-committee's intention to make these resources available at a future date.

The EDIB sub-committee has continued to work alongside business committee to improve accessibility at meetings of General Assembly and Assembly Executive. This has included making representation to the venues (in 2025 both The Hayes and Kent's Hill Park) as well as suggesting improvements at the online Assembly Executive meeting in February. We have also engaged with nominations committee as they review the diversity of representation at General Assembly as part of their work on Resolution 7, General Assembly 2025.

Some members of the EDIB sub-committee are working with others to initiate a review of Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging across the whole denomination as requested by Resolution 55, General Assembly 2023. This will be reported separately, but suffice to say the outcomes may change significantly the way in which the EDIB sub-committee works within the denomination as we continue to strive for greater equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging within the United Reformed Church as part of our Christian witness to the world.

EVANGELISM AND ECUMENISM

Evangelism

We continue to promote and encourage evangelism in Synods and local churches as part of our mission across the URC, including through the following:

- FaithTalk webinars ('everyday evangelism in the URC') are now quarterly. Recent webinars have been tackling Big Questions from URC Youth, helping us to articulate key areas of our faith and stimulate conversations in our churches. *The planning group: Lindsey Brown, Karen Campbell (Head of GIC), Stuart Radcliffe (Mersey Synod, Discipleship Enabler), Debbie Brown (GEAR), Linda Rayner (NW Synod; former Fx / pioneer lead), Christine Ntim (former Thames North youth representative)*
- In collaboration with URC Children and Youth and the Ugly Duckling charity, coasters were produced encouraging 'pre-evangelism' conversations in our churches. They

were distributed to all churches and Synods in summer 2025, and stories are still emerging of how churches have been putting them to use. As well as three questions on the coasters there is also a QR code taking people to a daily question, helping them to stay up-to-date and reusable. Coasters are still available – please get in touch.

- The Synod Mission Enablers Network meets twice yearly to discuss mission, including evangelism, with recent guests including Dave Mann (Seedbeds / Bonny Downs) and Lydia Neshangwe (President of the All Africa Conference of Churches)
- Thames North / Eastern Synod Spring School workshops: *“How do our churches welcome and disciple those who don’t have a grounding in faith?”*
- Presentations / workshops at the launch of East Midlands Synod evangelism strategy, Talking Faith



TF3: the launch of East Midlands Talking Faith strategy. Faith Talk Easter poster

- A series of Easter-themed FaithTalk posters were distributed in an all-church mailing to be used as conversation-starters; further digital posters are available on the Evangelism webpage
- Presentations of Bible Society and other ‘revival’ research to the Synod Mission Enablers Network and the Synod Moderators’ Meeting; article for *Reform Generation Church* (Issue 1 2026)
- Workshop at Youth Assembly: Wise Words for Sharing Faith
- Presenter and panel member on Missional Discipleship at the Council for World Mission (CWM) School for Transformative Evangelism (Nairobi)



Marking Thursdays in Black at the CWM Conference in Nairobi

- Part of planning group for 2027 CWM / FEx conference on new Christian communities
- Twice-yearly Buildings for Mission Forum webinars have recently tackled sustainability and using the Five Marks. These are supported by the Faith in Action team and Synod property officers and consultants.

Ecumenical Relations

We celebrate many healthy and active ecumenical relationships, and continue to work on those areas which bring challenges, particularly in local ecumenical relationships. Our Synod ecumenical officers work hard on the ground to encourage flourishing and trouble-shoot where necessary.

We have a number of active bilateral dialogue groups:

- Roman Catholic / URC Dialogue Group: a new phase has begun, Being the People of God. The first full meeting of the newly constituted group will meet later this year, chaired by Bishop Paul Hendricks and Revd Dr John Bradbury. Our close partnership led to an invitation to present at the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Coordinators, on the experience of bilateral dialogues, in May.
- Methodist / URC Liaison Group: chaired by Moderator of East Midlands Synod Revd Geoffrey Clarke and Methodist District Chair Revd Dr David Chapman, the group this year has been working on guidelines for services of welcome and induction into LEPs. A report from the group can be found in Paper AB1 (Business Committee Methodist/URC Dialogue)
- A new Church of England / URC Contact Group has been formed, chaired by Bishop Anne Hollinghurst and Revd Steve Faber, Moderator of West Midlands Synod. Initial core meetings have been enthusiastic and productive, and the full group will meet for the first time later this year.



Relaunch of URC / CofE Contact Group

We are also active ecumenical observers on the Methodist Anglican Panel for Unity in Mission (MAPUM) and the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity (CCU), which has among other things led to some practical research into the mission benefits of LEPs. We have contributed to recent interviews with The Times on the use of churches as mosques and with The Church Times on the resilience of LEPs.

Churches Together in England (CTE)

We are actively represented by our Ecumenical Officer in a number of CTE groups:

- Monthly LEP meetings with Anglican, Methodist and Baptist colleagues
- Monthly National Ecumenical Roundtables (quarterly CTBI Roundtable)
- Living With Diversity working group, focused on issues of human sexuality. *This group models working well together with difference, rather than trying to reach any agreement*
- Group for Evangelisation
- Planning and delivery group for the All Ecumenical Representatives annual conference
- Planning and delivery group for the New Ecumenical Officers annual training
- Enabling Group for Member Churches
- Free Churches Group member church meetings

Revd Dr Tessa Henry Robinson is currently serving as the President of the Free Churches Group. In that capacity she attended the enthronement of the Archbishop of Canterbury Revd Sarah Mullally, at which we were also represented by the Moderator to General Assembly Catriona Wheeler.



Ecumenical guests at a service of thanksgiving to mark 80 years of the United Nations, at Methodist Central Hall

Revd James Breslin continues to serve as Chair of Trustees of the Free Churches Group.

Representatives of the URC have attended / will be attending the following partners' events:

- Methodist Conference: Lindsey Sanderson
- Assembly of the Congregational Federation: Kacie Hodgson, Youth Moderator
- Moravian Provincial Synod: Revd Neil Thorogood, Moderator-elect
- Landessynode / Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz :
- Waldensian Synod: Tim Meadows

The Church of Scotland made their annual visit to the Offices of General Assembly in December. We continue to value the close relationship and dialogue.

European ecumenism

The URC will be hosting the biannual *Evangelische Kirche der Pfalz* / United Reformed Church theological consultation in October 2026. The theme is The Prophetic Voice, and will include a visit to the German Church in East London, owned by our Lutheran partners and famously associated with Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Local churches will be hosting guests following the Conference.

The URC is working with the *Protestantse Kirk in Nederland*, the Fresh Expressions movement and CWM on a 2027 global conference on contextual mission.

The Faith in Action Team is grateful for the East Midlands Synod's advocacy for meaningful solidarity with our ecumenical partners in Ukraine. Commitment for Life set up an appeal for the diaconal work of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia following a solidarity visit by the URC Head of World Justice and Inter Faith. Thank you to everyone who supported this.

In May the National Synod of Wales hosted the steering committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The three WCRC member churches in Wales are the URC, Undeb yr Annibynwyr, and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. The steering

group was most grateful for the generous hospitality of the synod. President Jenny Dobers from Sweden highlighted the many gifts offered by the Welsh Reformed churches for the wider European context.

Victoria Turner was elected as a member of the WCRC executive, and Kevin Snyman serves as one of the Vice Presidents for the WCRC Europe steering group.

GLOBAL AND INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

A. Global & Intercultural Church (GIC) Networks

There are three active networks:

1. Black & Ethnic Minority Ministers
2. Cascades of Grace: Black & Ethnic Minority Women
3. Racial Justice Advocates

The networks have each met twice: One separate online gathering plus one overlapping residential, intended to enable joined-up work towards the URC's 'anti-racist Church' commitment.

Emerging issues/points:

- 'Global Majority' affirmed as the preferred inclusive term to enable broad conversation when referring to colleagues collectively.
- Questioning of the URC disciplinary process – is it disproportionately or unfairly meted against Global Majority colleagues?

A desire to:

- Grow and strengthen the Racial Justice Advocates network.
- Broaden the supportive space for Global Majority women – eg via regional gatherings.
- Extend the supportive space beyond Global Majority ministers, eg to include colleagues serving as lay preachers, elders, and in synod roles.
- Revisit the bi-annual Multicultural Celebration to
 - promote inclusivity & celebrate diversity
 - counteract current divisive rhetoric.

B. Legacies of Slavery (LoS)

1. **Local – anti-racism training:** Two sessions took place in December 2025. Professor Anthony Reddie will be asked to deliver the training for all active ministers, plus interim moderators, elders and accredited lay preachers. Planning continues towards cascading the learning into local churches.
2. **Regional – mentoring of young Black men:** The LoS regional sub-group is working with Independent Consultant, Revd Ronald Nathan, to bring the proposed four projects to fruition – one each in northern and southern England, Scotland and Wales. A potential partnership with a London-based charity is being explored. An application has been submitted to the Council for World Mission (CWM) to part fund this work.

'Standing Together' (November 2025) – a one-week programme in partnership with Ascension Trust/Synergy Network, exploring creative solutions to serious youth violence. Insight and expertise were brought by two colleagues from Jamaica. Programme participants included church leaders, youth leaders, support agencies, the

police, a funeral director, victims, former perpetrators, and young adults. An exposure visit to Birmingham included the Town Centre Chaplaincy based at Carrs Lane URC, and creative approaches to youth engagement developed at Lodge Rd Community Church. Learning from Standing Together is feeding into the regional proposals.

3. **Global** – the Head of GIC visited Jamaica in February 2026 to progress the partnership with the Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) – see separate LoS Report. Work is ongoing to bring aspects of CRAF's work under the Commitment for Life umbrella for a set period of time – joining the dots of the URC's LoS & global justice engagement.

C. Jamaica Hurricane Appeal

The Head of GIC delivered a cheque for £44,610 during her February visit to Jamaica. Our partners in the United Church of Jamaica & the Cayman Islands express their sincere gratitude and appreciation to all individuals and churches who contributed.



[URC donates nearly £45,000 to help Jamaica rebuild after Hurricane Melissa](#)

D. Council for World Mission: Partners in Mission (PIM)

In 2025, Ms So Young Jung, sent by the Presbyterian Church of Korea, successfully candidated to train for stipendiary ministry in the URC, bringing her tenure as PIM to a close. Revd Yufen Chen, sent by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, started her third and final term of service in January 2026 after a positive evaluation process.

E. Taiwan Ecumenical Forum (TEF)

TEF gathers partners to stand in solidarity with Taiwan's struggle for self-determination. A global gathering (April 2026) included input from oppressed peoples from various contexts, including Dalits, Latin America and West Papua. Current global tensions elicited the questions – 'Who will be next?' and 'Is it just a matter of time for Taiwan?' The Head of GIC serves on the TEF steering group and was joined in Taiwan by former URC General Assembly Moderator Revd Dr Michael Jagessar.

F. Ecumenical Visitors

We were delighted to host 2 visits from senior representatives from the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and to facilitate WCRC colleagues preaching in local URC congregations. The guests included Revd Philip Peacock

(General Secretary), Revd Dr Hanns Lessing, and Revd Dr Karen Georgia Thompson (President).



G. URC Participation in CWM Global Initiatives

- **Transformative Masculinity Against Gender Based Violence (Nov 25, Johannesburg):** Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo; Jake Penny (Young Adult)
- **School of Transformative Evangelism (Dec 25, Nairobi):** Lindsey Brown
- **Deconstructing Racism; Reconstructing Justice (Feb 26, Malaysia):** Revd Mark Robinson
- **Church in Action: A Place of Refuge (May 26, Thailand):** Fozia Aftab
- **ReVisioning Education with Children (May 26, New Zealand):** Sharon Lloyd
- **Europe Region Assembly (June 26, Utrecht):** Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson; Karen Campbell; David Jonathan (Johnny); Stan Chatikobo (Young Adult); Shelia Stewart (Young Adult)
- **CWM Internship:** Philippa Osei (Young Adult) – currently serving in Singapore, with GIC receiving glowing reports of her contribution.

H. Ecumenical Racial Justice Relationships

- **Methodist Church's Reparations Advisory Group** – the Head of GIC contributes insights from the URC's LoS journey.
- **Racial Justice Advocacy Forum** – seeks to speak prophetically on behalf of Global Majority Christians to the government on racial injustice challenges and reparations. The URC is a founding member.

I. **GIC Webpage** – has been vastly improved. Many thanks to Ann-Marie Nye and Neil Hunter: <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/global-and-intercultural-church/>

J. **Ongoing** – contributing to URC focus on Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging (EDIB)

GLOBAL JUSTICE AND INTERFAITH - report in Interfaith Paper B3

LAY LEARNING

Ministries and Learning Forum

This group, which brings together accredited and ordained learning with lay learning opportunities, is currently focusing on responding to the E and L consultation 2025. The group consists of the 3 Principals from the Resource Centres for Learning- RCLs (Luther King Theological College- formerly Northern College, the Scottish College and

Westminster College), a CYDO+ representative, a TDO+ representative, the DGS (Ministries) and the DGS (Faith in Action). We have discussed developing the idea of Denominationally Developed, Locally Delivered learning and training resources we decided the ones that are most urgent are: Elders, Vocations, Ethos and History.

We are going to be developing the outline of what is required, how best to offer this learning/training, the content, the cost and then go to the Faith in Action Committee with a proposal. It was suggested that we use the URC Learning Hub that we already have and use and consider creating the resources using the Stepwise format eg. Faith Filled Eldership. It builds on what people are already increasingly familiar with. The Forum will also be considering future opportunities for Education for Ministry 1, 2 and 3 as well as other accredited and lay learning (including the History and Ethos of the URC, Safer Sacred Space, refresher courses).

Stepwise

Jenny Mills and Linda Harrison (Stepwise Administrator based at the Scottish College) meet regularly to discuss the ongoing support; making minor edits and sorting link issues; ensuring we have the correct contact details for both group facilitators, synod advocates and participants; trialling the new streams and the new Introduction module. We receive great support from Neil Hunter (Digital Content Manager) with any work on the website or additional support for the URC Learning Hub

Our future plans include updating the format/appearance/ease of access of the Stepwise streams. This will also be a proposal to the Faith in Action Committee about the best way forward on this.

We have begun a social media and publicity push as we find more people are discovering the benefit of exploring Stepwise and it is helping them on their discipleship journey and leading them on to further training or calling to new roles. Some major changes have occurred in the past year: two new streams have been developed and are now available for use.

The streams, Faith Filled Environment and Faith Filled Conversations, build on the strong foundations already established and offer participants more choice, flexibility, and depth in their learning journey and can be accessed at <https://www.urclearninghub.org.uk/>.

The URC Learning Hub hosts a variety of other courses that can be openly accessed: Conversation Starters on Where are the Young People, Disability Awareness for All, Vocation and Call; Exploring Eldership, Safeguarding Foundation Course (with guest access) and the Introduction taster. Stepwise has introduced a one-session "Introduction to Stepwise" taster. This is designed to help participants – individuals or small groups – explore what Stepwise is all about before committing to a full stream. This short, accessible session can be run locally or online.

While Faith-Filled Life remains recommended as a helpful grounding experience, it is now no longer a requirement to complete it before starting any other stream. Participants can freely choose the stream that best fits their context, need, or curiosity after completing the introduction. Finally, all cost implications for Stepwise have been removed, making the resource free. By removing the cost implication and thereby reducing the administration, the programme becomes more inclusive and open to all

who wish to deepen their discipleship, develop faith-based skills, and explore how their learning connects with everyday life.

PUBLIC ISSUES

Since September 2025, the Public Issues work of the Faith in Action Team has been augmented by Offices of General Assembly staff members Ann-Marie Nye, Communications Officer, and Veronica Daniel, Administrator, who both now have a focus on Public Issues as part of their roles. This has helped to extend our reach and capacity in new ways, while we still feel the loss of colleagues who finished in their roles in August 2025.

Roo Stewart maintains a strong connection with the Joint Public Issues Team. He joined the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) Advisory Board on Ethical Issues in early 2026.

Joint Public Issues Team

The Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT) has entered into a new 'resourcing partnership' with the Iona Community. This emerging relationship aims to extend JPIT's ability to produce excellent worship materials connected to our [areas of work](#) while providing the [Iona Community](#) with expert support and resourcing of campaigns in areas of common concern.

The Joint Public Issues Team welcomed Adam Aucock as Advocacy Coordinator in January. He is employed by the Methodist Church.

The URC continues to benefit significantly from its membership of JPIT, enabling the Church to pray, speak out and take action knowledgeably, in unison with larger organisations, on a much wider range of public issues and in more detail than is possible on our own. Highlights in 2025-2026 include:

1. 'For Goodness Sake' JPIT conference in Derby in November, attracting 200 attendees and featuring [Very Revd Sally Foster-Fulton](#) and [Rt Rev Dr Guli Francis-Dehqani](#)
2. New '[Justice Weekly](#)' prayer reel and webpage
3. Online support gatherings for church leaders caught up in anti-migrant protests
4. Analysis and briefings on [the recognition of Palestine](#), [asylum policy](#), the Budget and the [Child Poverty Strategy](#)
5. Almost 200 churches interested in joining the Constituency Action Network, with seven churches already signed-up as members. A [new promotional video is available](#) and churches are encouraged to view it and discuss joining
6. [Prayer and action for Gaza](#)
7. Public letter on [the scapegoating of refugees](#), response to new government [asylum proposals](#) and government consultation on [earned settlement](#)



8. Campaign for [refugee family reunion](#) mobilising over 800 faith leaders and achieved national media coverage
9. Public letters and statements on [Human rights](#) and the [right to protest](#).
10. Climate Coalition lobby week (September), campaign action on [Rosebank](#), a [faith leaders' letter on international transition away from fossil fuels](#).



Public Statements and Responses

[Rosebank/Fossil Fuels](#)

[Scapegoating of Migrants](#)

[Response to Heaton Park Synagogue attack](#)

[Gaza ceasefire](#)

[Protecting Human Rights](#)

[Child poverty strategy](#)

[Refugee family reunion](#)

[Solidarity with Jewish community \(arson attack on ambulances\)](#)

[Response to Derby city centre incident](#)

[Climate Leadership – Letter to Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero](#)

[Israeli government bombing of Lebanon during apparent ceasefire](#)

[Freedom to protest – Crime and Policing Bill](#)

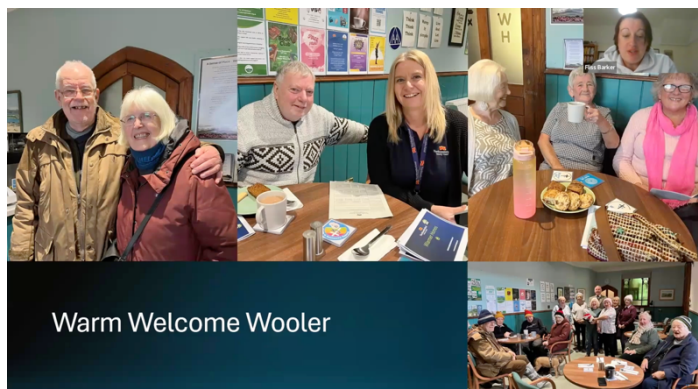
[Wessex Synod welcomes legal notice on St George flag](#)

A Church with People at the Margins

Responding to [General Assembly 2024 Resolutions 52 & 53](#)

In 2026, we are hosting four online webinars on being a Church with People at the Margins. The webinars feature practical, theological and inspirational input, with space for discussion and questions and answers with Mike Hart (Transformation Director, North West Synod), Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) and others with significant experience of being the Church with people at the margins.

A Legacy Fund grant has enabled Mike Hart to extend beyond his synod role to encourage growth in this key area of mission for the whole URC. All are welcome to attend the webinars, to share their own experience and to discover what approaches have been working in a wide range of contexts. More information and resources available at urc.org.uk/margins



The Far Right and Christian Nationalism

Responding to [Assembly Executive February 2026 Resolution 11](#)

URC Public Issues and the Joint Public Issues Team have been [sharing resources](#) and contributing to events including a 'Talking About...' online session for URC children's and

youth workers in May and an upcoming in-person gathering in Manchester on 24 October featuring prominent Christian Nationalism lecturer Revd Dr Helen Paynter. Members of the URC were invited to contribute to “A Million Acts of Hope”, 13-20 May. This was a national initiative comprised of faith groups, charities and civil society organisations to flood our media with the good things that happen daily in the UK to drown out racism and hate and instead promote community cohesion.

Welcome Churches

We held a webinar featuring Welcome Churches in June. This ecumenical Christian charity seeks to link migrants with supportive and welcoming churches in their area. There are currently around a dozen URC congregations that have registered with Welcome Churches. We would like to at least double that this year. It is free to be added to the register, and regular webinars and superb advice are available from the supportive team.

Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory

In March, an ecumenical trip of solidarity and relationship building in Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory (IOPT), which was to include Catriona Wheeler, General Assembly Moderator, had to be postponed due to the commencement of US, Israeli and Iranian military activity in the Middle East. We hope to visit as soon as it becomes safe to do so, at the request of Palestinian Christians who seek advocates who can speak out on their behalf.

The Public Issues team is exploring being part of a Just Peace Coalition, with a diverse group of Christian organisations and charities, that will focus on a shared strategy of action and advocacy, equipping local churches and church leaders, and sharing resources centred around the witness of Palestinian Christians.

THE TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS'+ (TDO) NETWORK

A result of the restructure in the Offices of the General Assembly is that the staff in synods who oversee learning and training and the work they do straddle both Ministries and Faith in Action. Their work supports those who are in accredited and ordained ministries, as well as for lay people.

The TDO+ Network in the past year has continued to meet online regularly and now has a pattern of meetings that means one meeting is just TDO+s, one with the two DGS (Mins and FiA), and the annual gathering alongside the FiA Committee, CYDO+ Team and Mission Enablers Network.

There have been new members of the Network and some have moved on in role. Due to this, and the increasing collaboration between the TDO+s, they are redoing the TDO+ Handbook so they are using the same resources, up to date documents, and work from the same policies (especially in relation to sabbaticals, EM2 and EM3 expectations and grants).

Many of the TDO+s (and some others from synods without such roles) have engaged in the Place for Hope Train the Trainer. This means that they are now ready to begin offering local foundational courses to local churches on topics related to conflict, change, challenging behaviour and living well with difference.

PLACE FOR HOPE

The Place for Hope Partnership continues with a growing number of trained mediators. The ongoing rollout to synods means that, after July, the Synod of Scotland, North Western, Wessex, and Wales Synods will be working under the agreement terms.

Other synods may still access support from Place for Hope, but their cases will be subject to Place for Hope's standard terms and conditions and will depend on the capacity of the Place for Hope team. Furthermore, a team of Trainers from the United Reformed Church have been trained to deliver Place for Hope's foundational course: Growing through Change and Conflict. <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/place-for-hope-partnership/>

Appendix 1



Faith in Action Team Vision Statement

A team that inspires and resources the United Reformed Church

Mission Statement:

Enabling all generations to share the love of God through worship, word and action:

- strengthening communities
- deepening relationships
- transforming the world

Supporting Statements

1. For the internal Faith in Action team

- We will grow as a trusted, agile, and collaborative team that provides clear, relevant, and timely support.
- We will connect churches, synods, and partners to share ideas, successes, and challenges.
- We will develop deliver and signpost opportunities, information, events, and resources that help others flourish.

Key Benefits (two-year outlook):

- **Increased** clarity of our purpose and identity as a team
- **Increased** confidence and capability to serve the whole church
- **Improved** collaboration with other teams within the Offices of the General Assembly and wider partners
- **Decreased** duplication of effort
- **Removed** silos and isolation

2. For those external to the Team

- We will encourage Jesus-shaped discipleship and mission that is practical, informed by theology and connected to contextual issues.
- We will amplify local voices, stories, and successes so people see their faith making a difference.
- We will provide inspiration and tools to act together on justice, peace, anti-racism, and care for creation.
- We will ease the burden of leadership by offering practical tools and peer support.
- We will support connections between local churches, synods, and the wider denomination, encouraging local and regional partnerships
- We will support ecumenical and interfaith connections, locally, nationally and globally
- We will equip churches in order to inspire growth, inclusivity, and community engagement.

Key Benefits (two-year outlook):

- **Increased** confidence and courage to express and live out faith in daily life
- **Increased** engagement with resources, events, and networks

- **Improved** optimism and sense of belonging to a wider, diverse church family
- **Decreased** feelings of isolation and decline
- **Removed** barriers to sharing good news and taking action for justice in communities and in the world
- **Increased** congregation confidence and courage in their purpose
- **Increased** flow of relevant information and inspiration to support local mission and discipleship
- **Improved** relationships and trust between local churches and the wider URC
- **Removed** confusion about available resources and denominational priorities

Paper B2

The Five Marks of the Faith in Action Team

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Faith in Action Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Jenny Mills jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 6 General Assembly commends this paper and encourages next steps to be taken in developing this work within the Faith in Action Team and beyond, as appropriate.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Initially this is proposing a framework for the new Faith in Action team, to support its work and help to set priorities.
Main points	Using a framework based on the Five Marks of Mission and adapting it for the work of the Faith in Action team, helping the team to ensure coverage of all areas related to discipleship and mission. Possibly leading on to seeing how other teams or groups could adapt this framework to prioritise their work.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	The Faith in Action Committee and Team The Senior Leadership Team The Director of Strategy and Programmes

Summary of impact

Financial	None beyond current budget allocation
External (eg ecumenical)	As it is a development of the Five Marks of Mission, which are ecumenical in their offering, there may be the chance to share this way of working in the future.

The Faith in Action Team came together in September 2025, following the restructure of the Offices of the General Assembly, combining the work of the Mission and Discipleship Teams.

This paper proposes exploring building on the Five Marks of Mission as a shared framework for the Faith in Action (FiA) Team, drawing together our current work in a coherent, holistic way, helping us set priorities, creating the Five Marks of the Faith in Action Team.

Background and context

Over recent years, the URC has engaged in multiple vision and review processes, programmes and initiatives (Vision4Life, Vision 2020, Walking the Way, the Theos Report and its outworkings, including the Church Life Review and Church Life Fund). Alongside this, the FiA Team is responding to a wide range of General Assembly resolutions (e.g. Legacies of Slavery, ecumenism, Church at the Margins, new Communities of Discipleship and Worship, the environment and Net Zero, children and young people, Discipleship Development).

There is a need for a broad, descriptive framework to clarify the work of the Faith in Action Team and how we speak about it. This need is endorsed by the Faith in Action Committee.

Key insights on mission and discipleship

- Joining in with God's life-giving activity is a journey, not a destination
- Worship is the central expression of our church life
- Evangelism and witness are key to our calling as followers of Jesus
- Discipleship is understood as growth and lifelong learning through participation in God's work on earth
- We are called by God to address issues of social action and injustice
- Authentically welcoming churches can transform communities

The Five Marks

- The Five Marks of Mission were adopted by the URC in 1999 (*Growing Up*).
- In 2024, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee noted this history and explored the Revd Dr Graham Adams' ecological and liberationist reworking, including through Mission Committee discussions and Daily Devotions
- Further work is underway to make the language more explicitly URC-friendly, though this is not yet finalised
- In practice, the Marks (often summarised as Tell, Teach, Tend, Transform, Treasure) are a memorable, helpful, accessible tool, especially when presented holistically rather than as a hierarchy

Proposal

The Faith in Action Team is already working across all five marks.

The proposal is to use the Five Marks as:

- A unifying framework through which existing and future work is decided and described
- An evaluative lens to ensure breadth of coverage across the team's activity

- A way to encourage holistic, ecumenical, and contextual thinking
- An integrated tool, among others, for governance, operations, and communications

Why this matters now

- There has been a tendency to split our work into Mission and Discipleship. This framework leads us to unpack the words and work more collaboratively
- Since the restructure and the creation of the new Faith in Action team, there has been a desire for clarity around the priorities of our work and this framework offers this
- Research suggests particular strengths in *Tend* and *Transform*, with relative weakness in *Tell* and *Teach*, leading to challenges for local churches in connecting social action with explicit Jesus-centred faith
- We are looking to carry out a consultation around Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, and engaging with Church with people at the Margins, and this all feels part of the journey

The Five Marks (revised for our use, by the Faith in Action Team)

TELL – the good news of Jesus
 TREASURE – the whole of creation
 TRANSFORM – unjust structures
 TEND – to the needs of others
 TEACH – faith, hope and love

TELL – talking about our faith
TREASURE – restoring and protecting it
TRANSFORM – working for peace, equity and reconciliation
TEND – especially those who are hurting
TEACH – through community



Next steps for consideration

- Further conversation within the Faith in Action Team and Committee to develop this thinking, and map the current work onto the Five Marks. This would particularly support the Team in deciding what to stop doing, what to continue and what new work to begin
- Exploring whether this approach could underpin work over the next five years
- Wider URC consultation with other committees around the application of the Five Marks way of working and the framework, to see if it has a wider application.

Future suggestions

- A shared framework offered out more widely could help synods and churches “join the dots” as they engage in ministry and mission, without introducing a new strategy or initiative
- Develop a distinctively URC resource to support local congregations in engaging with the Five Marks
- Create or commission improved visual resources to support this approach.
- Encourage a shared language and joined-up approach to mission and discipleship across the Offices of General Assembly, synods and congregations, while remaining open to ecumenical, organisational, and intergenerational learning
- Review the framework within Faith in Action Team after a year to see if it achieves the focus and clarity anticipated

The Faith in Action Team brings the resolution commending and encouraging this work to General Assembly as it continues to develop.

APPENDICES 1-4

Appendix 1

There was a lot of discussion about Mission while we were preparing this paper and the Revd Dr John Bradbury, our General Secretary, fed this into the discussions and we thought it worth sharing.

A Little Bit of Theology from our General Secretary

Mission is a complicated word, and one we should use with care. It is superficially odd that the Latin translation of a Greek word in the New Testament primarily concerned with the procession of the Spirit from the Father, has become a Church term which can mean almost anything to do with the life of the Church. A word that can mean anything, can come to be meaningless if we're not careful. It has complex origins in life outside of the Church. In the early colonial period, countries had 'missions', which were essentially political colonial enterprises that they located in foreign countries they were colonising – one can see the Church use following that political colonial use, and not the other way around. There is a danger in using the word mission that we sideline other great words that call us to various aspects of the Christian life: being Apostolic, being Disciples, Evangelism, Witness and so on. It is also a word which tends to sideline Worship in popular usage. The first task of the Church is to glorify God in worship. One way of trying to diversify our use of language is to talk of the vocation of the Church being to: Worship, Witness, Evangelism and Service – but whilst this can be helpful, there is still a rich vocabulary bequeathed us in Christian history that we should enjoy and be challenged by.

Appendix 2

Education and Learning Committee. The Way Forward Paper

General Assembly 2020

Discipleship Development Strategy

Strategy summary

As God has loved you, so love the world and its people as you encounter them, with all the imagination, energy, wisdom and resources available to you.

There are four intertwined aspects to this strategy, each of which have defined objectives and implementation tasks endorsed by Mission Council:

- Accounting for hope
- All are pilgrims on the journey
- Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning
- Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Accounting for hope

Creating opportunities to encounter, develop a relationship with and enjoy a dynamic prayer life with, the living God.

All are pilgrims on the journey

Intended to address the realities of inequality (due to vocation, age, specific learning differences, economic or time poverty, culture, geography, etc) by emphasising equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Ask, seek, knock: God-given senses in the service of learning

Developing the necessary gifts, skills and aptitudes, as educators and learners, in order that we all continue to grow in our own vocation and discipleship.

Bread for the journey, shared and replenished

Evolving our strategy to develop people and congregations through the continued equipping of all in leadership as facilitators of learning, identifying strengths and needs, and advocating policies to share resources in a spirit of generosity.

Appendix 3

Vision2020

In 2010, the United Reformed Church adopted a ten-year strategic framework for mission called vision2020. Its aim was to encourage and support mission planning at every level of the Church: local, synod and Assembly. Vision2020 included ten priorities for mission and offered them to local churches to help them identify one or two mission priorities that were particularly relevant to their context.

We felt that this also speaks into this conversation, and we note here the ten priorities for mission:

1. Spirituality and prayer

We will grow in our practice of prayer and spirituality, nurturing strength for our witness to Jesus Christ, and developing our discernment of where God is and what God is calling us to do by reading and studying the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. Identity

The URC will be a Church where every local congregation will be able to say who they are, what they do and why they do it.

3. Christian Ecumenical Partnerships

We will be more confident in our identity, valuing the treasures of our tradition, discerning when to seek ecumenical partnerships, and when and how to seek the further unity of the Church.

4. Community partnerships

We will be a Church that is more active in the life of local neighbourhoods.

5. Hospitality and diversity

We will be a Church committed to becoming even more welcoming and hospitable, and embracing all people equally.

6. Evangelism

We will be more confident to engage in evangelism, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God with friends, families and strangers, through story and action.

7. Church growth

We will be a growing Church with an increasing membership.

8. Global partnerships

We will be a Church that is an active partner in God's global mission with other Churches around the world.

9. Justice and peace

We will be a Church committed to peace making and reconciliation that keeps faith with the poor and challenges injustice.

10. The integrity of creation

We will be a Church that has taken significant steps to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

Appendix 4

A Mission Creed was developed during the Vision 2020 work.

We have revised and adapted it for the Faith in Action Team in 2026.

The Faith in Action Team Creed.

We believe in God's mission:
breathing us into existence to delight in creation,
reflecting God's diversity,
intercultural, intergenerational and interdependent.

We believe in God's mission:
bringing good news in person,
reaching those on the margins,
to co-create communities of faith, hope and love.

We believe in God's mission:
righting injustice and putting faith into action,
so that we might be at one with each other,
and at peace in and with all creation.

We are commissioned
by God: Creator, Saviour, Sustainer,
source of the mission we seek to join,
to be God's people in the world.

Paper B3

Inter Faith Report

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Faith in Action Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Jenny Mills, Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action) jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 7 General Assembly warmly commends the journey towards a joint Christian-Muslim declaration, encouraging the Faith in Action Committee through the Inter Faith Enabling Group to deepen these ongoing inter faith efforts, tasking them to report back to General Assembly in 2027 on progress and action. Resolution 8 General Assembly commends the prayerful study of the <i>Kairos II</i> document across the URC and tasks the Faith in Action Committee to keep under review ways in which deep solidarity might be expressed to our partners in the region. Resolution 9 General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to establish a task group to address issues surrounding antisemitism within the life of the United Reformed Church, in consultation with the Inter Faith Enabling Group, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, The Faith in Action Committee and the Ministries Committee, and to bring terms of reference, membership, and budget to Assembly Executive in February 2027 for approval.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Building effective inter faith relations within and in communities.
Main points	Resisting the rise of far-right nationalism; commending inter faith efforts towards a Christian-Muslim Declaration and council; addressing antisemitism.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Inter Faith Enabling Group; Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland; Imams, archbishops, bishops, and other faith leaders in the UK and Ireland, hosted by the Duke of Buccleuch and

	Queensberry; CTE, CTBI, Irish and European faith representatives; the Woolf Institute; the Council for Christians and Jews; Faith in Action Committee.

Summary of impact

Financial	A clear picture of the financial requirements of Resolution 1 and 3 has yet to emerge, though it is anticipated that these will be drawn from the Faith in Action budget e.g. for travel and education, and also from the Inter Faith Fund, which is perfectly set up for precisely this kind of work.
External (eg ecumenical)	It is anticipated that the resolutions will positively impact on our inter faith relations with Muslims and Jews, and also on inter faith activity across society, enabling effective engagement with government, media, business, education and civic life, while supporting people of all faiths, beliefs, and age-groups to work together towards more integrated social cohesion.

Far-right nationalism and Christian Muslim relations

This past year has been a wake-up call for the Church's commitment to inter faith work. The rise of far-right nationalism invoking the name of Jesus to vilify other religions is sending shockwaves through the Church. The URC's Inter Faith Enabling Group (IFEG) has for many years supported actions that directly address the danger of religious 'othering' by those claiming to speak in the name of Jesus. We have encouraged the councils of the Church to deepen their inter faith work. For example, very recently the URC's online congregation **yourchurch** has been resourced to host events specifically focussed on how far-right nationalism impacts on faith communities.

The IFEG continues to support a critically important reconciliation initiative being undertaken by the Chief Imam of Scotland, the Archbishop of York, and representatives of a wide range of Muslim and Christian bodies. At a time of increasingly fractured, identity-driven narratives and the instrumentalising of religious language and institutions to prop up divisive political discourse and policy, mistrust among faith communities can accelerate wildly. This distrust is fuelled by deeper shifts in media ecosystems, often controlled by financial and political interests, thus weakening trust in democratic and religious institutions.

Given these underlying shifts, Muslim and Christian leaders in the UK have recognised the need for suitably structured and sustained engagements at a denominational as well as local level. Important bilateral and local inter faith initiatives exist across the United Kingdom, but there is presently no recognised structure for sustained Christian-Muslim engagement at senior denominational level with shared institutional responsibility.

Christian-Muslim joint declaration

Our good friend and inter faith interlocutor Imam Dr Sayed Ali Abbas Razawi OBE, Chief Imam of Scotland, has worked tirelessly to bring together senior leadership members of Muslim (Sunni, Shia, Ismaili, and Bohra) and Christian (Free Church, Reformed, Anglican, Catholic and Eastern and Western Orthodox) communities. The hope of these gatherings is to bring about a joint Christian-Muslim declaration that is both timely and constructive. Consideration is also being given to the establishment of a



representative leadership council in the United Kingdom and Ireland, with wider European connectivity that reflects the sustained dialogue, relationship-building and co-operation. The consultation process has been designed to enable public engagement and effective communications, particularly during periods of heightened public attention. It has aimed to foster a deeper appreciation of other traditions to promote both social cohesion and community resilience, while addressing misinformation, encouraging youth engagement, and offering pastoral support during times of social strain.

General Assembly is asked to offer its warm support for these initiatives, tasking the Faith in Action Committee to bring a report to the 2027 General Assembly on progress.

Following the closure of the Inter Faith Network

The closure of the Inter Faith Network for the UK (IFN) has raised an important and pressing question: ***What comes next for inter faith cooperation in England?*** The IFN operated across the whole of the UK, and though there are national inter faith bodies in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, England is the exception. The closure of the IFN creates a vacuum there. The URC's Inter Faith Enabling Group is supportive of the ongoing efforts to build a constructive and sustainable future for inter faith engagement. These efforts are working on how best to create arrangements that advocate for inter faith activity across society, engage effectively with government, media, business, education and civic life, and support people of all faiths, beliefs, and age-groups to work together for the common good.

Any new structure is envisaged to be a national, multi faith organisation, partnership, or federation to oversee the strategy and management of multi faith and inter faith developments in the UK. Some of the issues include whether, for example, it will be provided with a grant from the government to facilitate this mission, with annual increases awarded in line with inflation. Questions being dealt with include: Will it be given the authority via a charitable status to raise funds, including from The National Lottery Community Fund, in accordance with the aims and objectives of the agency? Will it be given clear principles and guidelines to provide direct representation to government, political parties, civil servants and major NGOs on faith development (cf. the National Council for Voluntary Organisations) and also to engage, participate, and share good practices of Interfaith strategies outside of the UK?

In November 2025, representatives of faith and belief groups and stakeholder organisations were invited to discuss the way forward. A working party has been formed, supported by a 'sounding board' of a wide range of stakeholders. These stakeholders

receive all the meeting notes and help to shape the consultations. The working party itself has representatives of the groups that had been members of IFN. It benefits from having a balance between Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions. It promotes gender representation.

This working party is undertaking a series of regional consultations with specific interest groups. There will be an online consultation with recommendations for consideration by a wide range of stakeholders. The working party is chaired by the Revd Canon Hilary Barber, former co-chair of the IFN, and Zerbanoo Gifford, President of the World Zoroastrian Organisation.

Finally, it is right that the government has recognised the significance of Inter Faith Week, mentioning it in the recently published strategy for social cohesion, *Protecting What Matters* (see <http://bit.ly/4wfemQv>).

‘Reaching out in love’ Interreligious Dialogue Toolkit

The Revd Peter Colwell, a URC minister and inter faith lead at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, has been instrumental in the creation of an excellent interreligious dialogue toolkit. This new resource builds on more than five decades of experience in facilitating Church engagement with interreligious encounters and dialogue, which are integral to the call to Christian unity in a society that is increasingly diverse and multicultural.

‘Forming friendships and collaborative partnerships are important and valuable steps. This course emphasises the distinctive contribution that an intentional focus on dialogue can make, deepening those relationships and supporting all to live out their faith at the service of the whole community.’

‘The toolkit is aimed at Christians seeking to initiate or develop interreligious dialogue in their local communities and/or other contexts in which they work. It is explicitly grounded in our calling as followers of Christ and the values that flow from our faith and seeks to build on the learning from the dialogue of difference that has been developed in our ecumenical journey. It emphasises that, in engaging in this work, we are building on a long tradition of Christian thought and practice in which we can find inspiration and guidance.’

One can find, download, and share the toolkit on the inter faith page of the URC website - <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/inter-faith/>



Kairos II

In response to the events in Gaza since October 7, 2023, the Kairos Palestine movement issued a renewed call for justice through the release of a second document, *Kairos II*. The document was developed collaboratively by lay and ordained Palestinian Christians and underwent extensive review and editing within the Palestinian Christian community. *Kairos II* was launched at a conference at Bethlehem Bible College on Friday November 14, 2025, under the tagline 'A Moment of Truth: Faith in a Time of Genocide.'

In March 2026, a URC group comprising our General Assembly Moderator, along with youth, local congregation, and staff representation was scheduled to participate in an ecumenical visit to the Holy Land. This trip was cancelled due to safety fears following the illegal US and Israeli attacks on Iran and Lebanon and subsequent retaliation. The Methodist Liaison Office in Jerusalem and our Commitment for Life partners across Israel and Palestine have witnessed first-hand the rapidly intensifying injustices faced by Palestinian communities, especially Palestinian Christians, who fear for their existence and survival in the Holy Land. Palestinian Christian leaders are asking for a show of solidarity by supporting the *Kairos II* document, pressing the UK government to uphold international law, and opposing Israel's proposed death penalty legislation for Palestinian prisoners. The Faith in Action Team therefore requests that General Assembly commends the *Kairos II* document for prayerful study and engagement across the councils of the Church. The Faith in Action Committee will keep under review ways in which deep, ecumenical solidarity with our partners in the region might be exercised and shared wherever possible, undertaking this solidarity in partnership within the broader Christian Community. The *Kairos II* document and a congregational study guide developed by the Palestine Justice Network of the Presbyterian Church (USA), with United Methodists for Kairos Response, and Friends of Sabeel North America can be found on the URC website here – <https://urc.org.uk/who-we-are/what-we-do/inter-faith/>

Christian-Jewish relations

We continue to support the Council for Christians and Jews, whose work to deepen Jewish-Christian relations and to confront antisemitism is vital both to the URC and to the UK. Antisemitism has deep roots in the Christian tradition, and in corruptions of our readings of Scripture and our theological formulations. Churches across all theological traditions, from the second half of the 20th century onwards, have been actively confronting this, particularly in the context of theology and Church life after the Shoah. We were starkly confronted by this in the last year, when a social media post inadvertently caused major offence to Jewish communities. A report commissioned by the Senior Leadership Team and the Officers of the General Assembly into this incident, in which the Woolf Institute from Cambridge provided specialist Jewish-Christian expertise, has made recommendations that we need to review in light of the clear, though often unconscious, antisemitism embedded in our life as a Church. It recommends consideration be given to education in Jewish-Christian relations, and understandings of Judaism within our theology and practice. The Worship, Faith and Order Committee has also considered this and believes further work would be helpful. We are committed to being an anti-racist Church, and this requires us to contemplate antisemitism within our life as seriously as any other form of racism.

Paper B4

Future of URC presence at Greenbelt

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roo Stewart roo.stewart@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 10 General Assembly: a) Welcomes a continuing presence at, and partnership with, Greenbelt Festival for three more years, recognising the positive impact of the URC presence at Greenbelt on festivalgoers and URC volunteers. b) Instructs the Faith in Action and Resources Committees to facilitate this engagement through an appropriate allocation of funds and staff time in keeping with 2026 costs, adjusted for inflation. c) Instructs the Faith in Action Committee to measure and report on the impact of this engagement annually, using qualitative and quantitative data.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To decide if the URC's engagement at Greenbelt Festival should continue for three more years, with appropriate funding.
Main points	The URC's presence at Greenbelt enables the United Reformed Church to be seen, explored and better understood beyond the walls of our buildings in spaces. Our work has a transformative, discipling impact on a large group of URC volunteers and hundreds of people who participate in our festival activities. Our reputation as a trusted, innovative, welcoming space has grown over eight festivals; continuing this work requires ongoing investment to cover partnership fees and volunteer support.
Previous relevant documents	Paper I3, Mission Council March 2016

Consultation has taken place with...	Resources Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	Requires a new allocation of funding of up to £100,000 in total, spread over three years.
External (eg ecumenical)	Potential audience of 10,000-12,000 festivalgoers per year; ongoing collaboration with other festival partners (incl. Trussell, Methodist Church, Iona Community)

Where have we come from?

The URC has had a presence at Greenbelt Festival since 2016, seeking to:

- 1) generously invest in, join with and contribute to a festival which has an outstanding and unique track record of encouraging and equipping Christians with their discipleship and ministry for over 50 years;
- 2) accompany Greenbelt as we collectively explore God's mission for today, envision how we may be and do Church more imaginatively and discover how disciples of Christ might live out their faith more effectively;
- 3) encourage, gather together and strengthen the sense of community for the numerous URC members who have been part of the Greenbelt movement for many years, and to provide a recognisable presence for URC members new to Greenbelt.



Themes such as 'Treasure Hunt', 'Scrap the Church' and 'Revoltng Christians' have left a lasting impression on festivalgoers. We have all been challenged to re-examine our attitudes and rethink how we might live our lives in the light of Jesus' call to us today.

Our current level of associate partnership with Greenbelt Festival affords us a large hospitality venue where we can effectively engage with people of all ages. Through face-painting, storytelling, crafts, interviews,

discussions, music, testimony, URC worship services, reflections, prayers, alongside teas, coffees, cakes and thousands of high-quality meals (using food rescued from going to landfill), the URC has told a different story to false and tired narratives of churches' decline and irrelevance.

With justice-seeking and welcome high on the agenda, the URC has developed a prized reputation at Greenbelt and on social media after the event as an excellent place to meet, dine (especially for families on a budget since other food outlets can be very expensive), relax, be creative or grow in faith. We occupy a prime location on site, and have earned the trust of Greenbelt staff, who rely on us to provide a low-cost family café and discussion-based venue to explore justice issues.

In addition, the URC CYDO+ team ran the youth venues at Greenbelt for three years. These were very popular and impactful, a testament to the time and talent that went into planning and delivering these remarkable experiences for young people.

As well as significant discipleship opportunities for URC people who volunteer or attend, Greenbelt Festival is the largest event that the URC as a denomination is involved in. It exposes us to more people in a single weekend than any other single event, with positive engagement with Christians, seekers, agnostics and atheist activists who find a warm welcome at the festival.



How have we grown?

All of this activity and engagement can only happen with a great team of URC volunteers. Many return from year to year, but we prioritise new volunteers so that many different people can experience the festival.



We began with 27 volunteers and a small ‘take-away tent’, but as we have expanded our reach, it now takes 60 volunteers each year to make our ‘big top’ venue a success. With some training and support from Offices of General Assembly staff, these volunteers run the café, the programme and craft activities. As a thank you, they receive access to the festival (when they’re not on a shift), food vouchers for one meal per day and a T-shirt to wear in the URC’s venue, emblazoned with the URC logo and our festival theme.

Since 2022, when we began running ‘yoURCafe’ at the festival, we have served **7,196 meals**, alongside drinks, cakes and other snacks. Our ingredients are sourced as ethically as possible, with much of the food saved from landfill through supermarket

schemes, and prepared by our kitchen team volunteers. REfUSE Durham, a zero food waste charity, has been an important partner for us in delivering this, and we have also welcomed a growing team from **Lodge Road URC** in Winson Green, Birmingham, to serve alongside them.

In 2025, we began partnering with Trussell, the anti-poverty charity, known for its coordination of many foodbanks in the UK, sharing our space and programme with them. This relationship strengthens our offering and shares the considerable cost of erecting a large tent with a kitchen and equipment in a green-field site.

What have we done?

In the last few years, we've explored:

- Action for the climate
- Creating safer sacred spaces for LGBTQIA+ people
- Destigmatising poverty
- Disability in the Church
- Engaging well with MPs or people you disagree with
- Israel and Palestine
- Responding to far-right protests
- Surviving climate crisis in Bangladesh
- Welcoming refugees

“Meeting other URC members and Christians and observing and listening to how their faith impacts on their actions and life is inspiring.” – URC volunteer

We've stimulated discussion and debate and platformed voices often marginalised by society. People have learned about Commitment for Life and the Joint Public Issues Team. Through themed craft activities we have engaged with people of all ages both across the festival site and in our churches (who post their craft to us to display in the venue).



And we have invited the whole of the URC to join us for our Sunday evening service at Greenbelt, in association with **yourchurch**, welcoming keynote speakers such as Graham Adams, Tim Meadows, Lola Brown and Anthony Reddie.

What impact has it had?

The most measurable impact we have is on the volunteers who make our presence at Greenbelt possible.

Discipleship impact (URC Volunteers, 2025)	Frequency
I feel more comfortable/confident/positive being associated with the URC or being called a Christian	23
My perspective on faith or society has broadened	18
I was exposed to different ways of believing or being	13
Not sure/I am still processing the experience	2

“Lots of opportunities to learn stuff and hear different points of view. It feels reassuring to be a part of a bigger group – I'm not alone thinking like I do.”
– URC volunteer

“I believe that what we do at Greenbelt is part of the best of the URC – caring for people, for the world, for each other and providing an open, welcoming, accessible space. I love it.”
– URC volunteer

How might your Greenbelt experience contribute to the life of your local church or your neighbourhood? (URC Volunteers, 2025)	Frequency
I have fresh ideas or energy to help others	20
I am more aware of the barriers to faith and inclusion that people outside my local church might experience, and want to help remove these barriers	17
I want my church to be more connected to Commitment for Life, Trussell or other programmes	10
I want to use my gifts more	10
I have a renewed sense of hope for my congregation	9
I want to learn more about serving the community/my congregation	9
I want to be more involved	8
I feel more connected to/appreciative of my local church	6

How might your Greenbelt experience contribute to the life of your local church or your neighbourhood? (URC Volunteers, 2025)	Frequency
Other responses	
I am more aware and informed about being more involved in local partnerships with statutory agencies for the benefit of the local areas	
It really makes me want to get involved in the wider URC	
Our presence may encourage other URC folk to attend GB and be challenged, changed and refreshed in their own faith and discipleship, which they then take back to their own churches – and so it continues	
Some frustration that my local church is not engaged in the community	

“This is what the URC does so well: create safe space and sanctuary for vulnerable and marginalised communities. Stepping into the URC café felt like a home coming.” – URC volunteer

Volunteering at Greenbelt energises and inspires URC folk who return to their churches with fresh vigour and motivation to make a difference in their congregation and neighbourhood.

On social media, café users responded positively to their experience. Here’s a short selection:



Steve Thackray
Great craft activities for kids and a lovely friendly team .

12w Like Reply 5



Gail McMillan
I loved the revolting Christians theme: the posters were fabulous and brought about conversations.

12w Like Reply 6



Steve Kings
A fab venue, thank you URC ❤️

12w Like Reply 3



Wendy Tucker
Lovely people, lovely food.

12w Like Reply 1



Vivienne Thomas
And the cakes were terrific.



Diane Barnard
I stopped off to pick up a drink and stayed on for a chat because of the lovely background music.

12w Like Reply 2



India Farrow
Super duper place, really well done to the team!

12w Like Reply 2



Pippa Marie
And decaf tea and coffee ❤️❤️



Frances Stanfield
Our fave snacking venu which showed the way – just got to love non-conformists!

12w Like Reply 3

And in our final session in 2025, we asked participants to write on paper tablecloths what their experience had been.



Previous funding

Since 2016, a Legacy Fund grant and Offices of General Assembly resources have been carefully used to enable this work. For 2026, mindful of the uncertainty brought by structural changes within the URC, the Faith in Action Committee supported an application to the **Disciple and Development Fund**, which was kindly granted, to continue the URC's presence at Greenbelt Festival.

item	2023 [actual]	2024 [actual]	2025 [actual]	2026 [estimated]
Associate partner fee, tent hire, kitchen equipment, volunteer passes	£21,800	£22,800	£27,600	£27,600
Craft materials	£490	£427	£600	£600
Programming costs	£228	£435	£175	£875
Printing & T-shirts	£1,193	£2,265	£2,300	£1,600
Volunteer meal vouchers & shower passes	£1,434	£1,894	£1,900	£1,800
TOTAL	£25,145	£27,821	£32,575	£32,475

This level of activity, access and engagement requires a significant amount of money. The totals in the table are large, viewed as a **cost**. It might be helpful to view it in terms of the **investment** for each volunteer, or the congregations they represent, of up to **£541.24 per person**.

This costing doesn't factor in the value of greater visibility, raising the profile of the URC, where the 'audience' is a great fit, and the impact it has on people beyond the URC. One Faith in Action Committee member commented:

"YoURCafe is the **beating heart of the festival**. It is a space where people with no home church find a place to belong."

Note: the income from the sale of food in the café is shared between the URC and the kitchen teams to offset food and other café costs, transporting team and equipment. It is not included in the costings above since these incomes and outgoings balance out.

Future plans

Greenbelt Festival has been at Boughton House, near Kettering in Northamptonshire, in 2014, but **will be moving to a new site in 2027** that will be cheaper to run. The greenfield site at Boughton House has been a wonderful, relaxing oasis, but increasing costs of hire, transport, etc. have made this luxury unsustainable. A new (but hopefully still beautiful and inspiring) site will allow for significant reductions in operating costs, but **it is as yet unclear** how these changing circumstance might impact on the associate partner fee and hire of equipment for the URC, should we maintain our current level of associate partnership which opens all of the above opportunities to us.

This major change within Greenbelt gives us an opportunity to reassess how we engage with the festival. Due to this uncertainty of costs and location at time of writing (April 2026), we have not included a costed proposal, but are proposing a direction of travel based on:

1. Providing a family café at Greenbelt in 2027, 2028 and 2029
2. Continuing to fund around 60 volunteers to enable this, with an appropriate level of staff time in preparing for the event and providing leadership at the event
3. Recognising this level of engagement with Greenbelt is only possible with an Associate Partner fee
4. To cost a similar amount to 2026, adjusted for inflation. Any unused monies would be returned.

Should another opportunity arise with the move to a new Greenbelt site, in discussion with Greenbelt Festival staff we would negotiate for an arrangement which allows for a similar impact on festivalgoers. However, the URC at Greenbelt planning team believes that the current format is very effective for us, and we wish to hold on to this if possible.

This word cloud captures responses from our volunteers, who were asked, 'How would you describe your experience at Greenbelt in a few words?' The larger words show more frequent responses.



affirming, awesome, beautiful diversity, brilliant at always, encouraging, energising, **enjoyable**, excellent witness, exhausting, exhilarating, fabulous, fantastic, full, fully amazing, good fun, great, great weekend, **inspiring**, joyful, life-changing, loved it, motivating, new challenges, revoltingly enjoyable [referring to our theme 'Revolting Christians!'], tiring, uplifting, worthwhile

Paper B5

Net Zero Task Group

Faith in Action Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roo Stewart, Head of Public Issues roo.stewart@urc.org.uk
Action required	Update only
Draft resolution(s)	none

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report to General Assembly on Net Zero Task Group activity, including annual synods' report on progress towards net zero
Main points	• Publishing synods' progress on net zero for second year • Learning and sharing good practice to continue • Better connection with URC Green Apostles network
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2022 Resolution 17 General Assembly 2024 Resolution 36
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

Summary of impact

Financial	none
External (eg ecumenical)	Our carbon footprint has an impact on our planet and everything in it, including on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable in society, especially in the Global South.

Activity in 2025-2026

The Net Zero Task Group (NZTG), brought into being at the request of the URC General Assembly in 2022, continues to meet regularly to develop advice and resources for the whole Church. The chair of the group since 2022 has stepped down, so the group is now looking for a new convenor. An updated Terms of Reference has been submitted to this General Assembly.

Engagement with synods in 2025-2026 was mostly limited to a feedback and advice session for the purposes of annual synod reporting, alongside the reporting template itself. The task group aims to increase its communications with committees, synod offices and church members in 2026-2027 through webinars, published articles, the URC's greener church webpage and possibly through the URC Resources Hub when this is available.

As other denominations have made progress with national and regional action plans, the NZTG recognises its limited capacity but resolves to address this lack within the URC as the required resources become available and expertise can be utilised. A strengthened connection with the URC Green Apostles network has already helped build capacity, knowledge and expertise, and

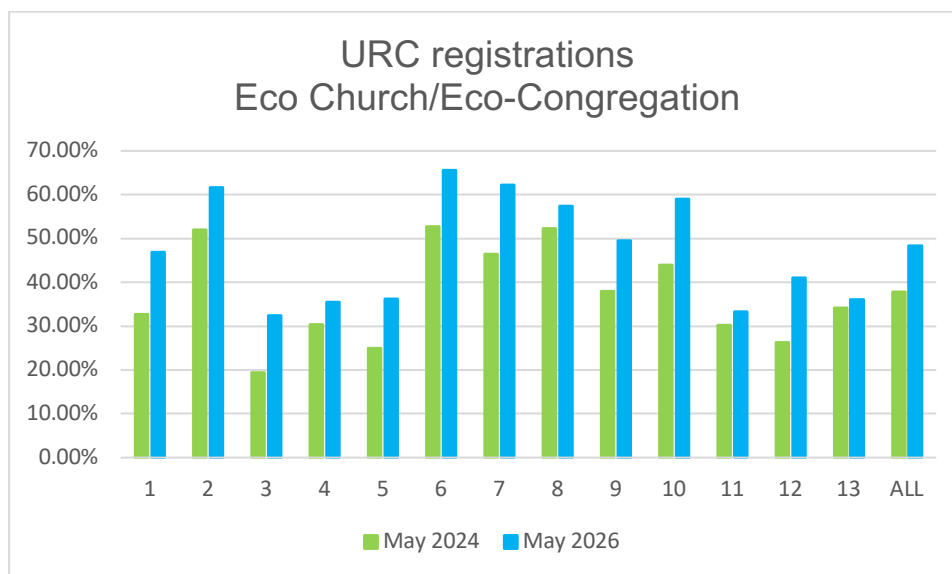
we are pursuing a similarly strengthened relationship with synod property officers and their equivalents.

Annual Synod Reporting

Eleven out of 13 synods have submitted reports this year, and we have seen an uptick in the quality and depth of these reports, thanks to the work and commitment from synod officers, Green Apostles and church treasurers who have responded to requests for information.

The reports will enable the NZTG to give personalised feedback, to explore key areas where each synod might be able to make progress.

Growth in Eco Church/Eco-Congregation participation by synod



Overall, the URC has increased its Eco Church registrations from **444 in May 2024** to **544 in April 2026** (48% of all congregations). This is a hugely encouraging step forward and we are grateful to all the eco groups in our churches who are working hard in this area.

Growing Eco Synod awards

Eight synods are now holders of bronze awards from Eco Church (England and Wales). (Eco-Congregation Scotland does not yet have an equivalent award.) We hope that the other synods will be able to reach bronze soon.

A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme will shortly be releasing a new Silver Eco Synod survey; we hope some of our synods will be able to reach 'Silver' soon as well.

URC Youth Assembly received a letter of commendation from Eco Church in 2022 in recognition of its leadership in environmental action.

Some new steps taken by synods in 2025-2026

Northern Synod

- Appointed Trustee Board Member and an Ecological/Environmental team
- Recognition of the need to work alongside Mission and Discipleship Committee
- Planning to involve young people in promoting caring for creation
- Synod team developing the skills to carry out energy audits

North Western Synod

- Carbon literacy training
- Synod land audit and carbon offsetting tree planting programme
- Manchester and Salford Urban Missional Partnership: Zero Carbon Church Demonstration Project
- Ministers and EM2 training on care for creation

Mersey Synod

- Mersey Synod Eco Group has representatives from 12 churches plus the Synod Property and Communications Officers
- Sharing good news and inspiration on our website and via the Synod newsletter
- Undertaking eco surveys of churches to raise awareness and assess priorities
- Planning continuing professional development sessions on 'Being More Eco' with the Synod Training & Development Officer

East Midlands

- A member of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Group attending Historic England course become a Carbon Bookkeeper
- Preparing to trial an energy audit
- Progressing our Eco Synod application by offering to support the church from which Synod leases its offices in order that it may register for Eco Church



Eastern Synod

- Guidance and planning documents issued
- Sustainability plans must be included as part of grant applications

South Western Synod

- Developing our Synod Manse Policy has already had a significant impact on our carbon footprint
- Transfer of ownership of manses to Synod makes future eco changes easier to complete
- Eco articles appear regularly in Synod e-news

Wessex Synod

- Appointing a Net Zero lead
- The 50% grant scheme includes insulation to current standards, installation of double glazing and replacement of boilers with heat pumps. (Like-for-like replacement of gas boilers do not qualify for a Net Zero grant, even though any new boiler is almost certainly much more efficient than the old one it replaces.)

Thames North Synod

- Eco Day – now an annual event hosted by a local church – with at least one talk/workshop aimed at encouraging and equipping people to address Carbon Footprint
- Promoting the Carbon Literacy for Christian Congregations training pack, provided by the CofE through the Carbon Literacy Project with commitment to pay for certificates



- Training day – Designing for the future: Creating beautiful and sustainable buildings (joint with Eastern)
- Undertaking a project to understand how to support the eco journey of local churches – involved four local churches of different building types

Southern Synod

- Increased and positive engagement from local church treasurers who have submitted energy use of church buildings
- Outliers in energy use have been identified and prioritised for support

National Synod of Wales

- Travelling by train where possible and encouraging car sharing where not. We offer preferential mileage rates for those bring passengers to synod meeting
- Funding detailed energy audits for churches seeking to take significant action to lower their carbon footprints
- Opening a bespoke ethical investment account which contains sustainable investments in green technologies
- Explaining the 360Carbon online tool at every roadshow event
- The Synod Creation Care Steering Group has run a series of eco roadshows around Wales, which included presentations from A Rocha UK
- The Synod has funded heating feasibility studies for four churches
- We launched an expanded Green Team at our most recent synod meeting and we will be recruiting for more people to get involved

National Synod of Scotland

- The energy crisis fund from the Central URC Trust has been expended; £210,000 in local church grants has been distributed
- Seeking to create a new Net Zero Action Fund in the synod; applying to OSCR for the reorganisation of a restricted fund, which may take up to six months
- All manse purchases must have an energy performance certificate of C or higher. The manse purchase we made in 2025 has solar panels on the roof for the benefit of the household

Measuring carbon footprint

Five of the synods which responded have calculated the carbon footprint of their synod offices, and four or five are measuring carbon footprints for their business travel, synod activities or manses.

Five synods have begun building a picture of local church building energy footprints too. This is time-consuming data to gather, and in response we are seeking new ways to simplify this.

Most of the synods that have responded admit that a lack of capacity and expertise in this area has hampered progress. As we share advice and gather more data in further years, we will be able to build a clearer picture of successful progress and offer targeted support to synods.

The URC Retired Ministers' Housing Society has been making significant steps towards increasing the energy efficiency (and lowering heating costs) for its buildings. It will be sharing the expertise it has gained and reporting on its progress in future.

Green Apostles, Eco Church and Eco-Congregation

While the Net Zero Task Group is working toward a national strategy, our Green Apostles network is providing expertise, energy and enthusiasm at grassroots level.

Each URC Synod has at least one Green Apostle/Advocate or a Green Team or Eco Team. They are passionate and joyful about helping congregations and their synod to develop caring for God's creation as part of our mission. As well as sharing regular news updates, hints, tips and suggestions through synod newsletters or eco newsletters, Green Apostles have planned eco days in several synods in 2026 to encourage deeper engagement.



An excellent way to monitor and celebrate congregations' and synods' progress in caring for creation is through A Rocha UK's Eco Church programme (in England and Wales) and Eco-Congregation Scotland. All URC congregations are invited to register for free, to receive regular news, ideas and resources. Our network of Green Apostles welcomes the opportunity to share its knowledge and expertise with any congregation that asks for help with their eco journey. You can contact your Green Apostle/Synod Eco Team through your synod office or by contacting public.issues@urc.org.uk.

Paper B6

Net Zero Task Group Terms of Reference

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Roo Stewart, Head of Public Issues roo.stewart@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 11 General Assembly adopts the terms of reference for the Net Zero Task Group as set out in paper B6.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Terms of Reference for Net Zero Task Group
Main points	Terms of Reference, clarifying that a Convenor (rather than a Chair) is to be appointed for the task group, and that the task group will be a hub for mutual accountability, to urge and equip progress within the United Reformed Church.
Previous relevant documents	<u>General Assembly 2022 Resolution 17(d)</u> <u>General Assembly 2024 Resolution 36</u>
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	Includes ecumenical representation from Methodist Church

Net Zero Task Group Terms of Reference

Task Group	Net Zero Task Group
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly following the nominations safer recruitment process (to be included in the numbers below in task group make-up)
Members	Appointed by General Assembly following the nominations safer recruitment process, constituted as below: • one member of the Finance Committee • one representative of the URC Trust • one representative of URC Youth • one Synod Green Apostle • one Synod Moderator • one Synod Property Officer • the Chief Operating Officer • the Head of Public Issues.
In attendance when required	Additional Synod Green Apostles or Synod Property Officers with appropriate skills and experience may be co-opted. An ecumenical representative of the Methodist Church's Action for Hope team.
Length of term	Four years renewable once
Minute Secretary	PA to the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)
Accountability and reporting duties	Accountable to Faith in Action Committee Reports to General Assembly
Frequency of meetings	Approximately six times per year
Terms of Reference review	Every four years or more frequently if required

Responsibilities

The Net Zero Task Group exists to:

1. Oversee progress in implementing the Environmental Policy of the United Reformed Church 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. Encourage and facilitate the sharing of experiences across the Church, including celebrating achievements.

Structure

The General Assembly (2022, Resolution 17) established the Net Zero Task Group to include within its membership:

- one member of the Finance Committee
- one representative of the URC Trust
- one representative of URC Youth
- one Synod Green Apostle
- one Synod Moderator
- one Synod Property Officer
- the Deputy General Secretary (Admin and Resources) (now Chief Operating Officer)
- the Secretary for Church and Society (now Head of Public Issues)

The task group meets every one or two months as required. Aware of Resolutions 10-12 from General Assembly 2021 encouraging meetings with online access and out of normal working hours, meetings may be scheduled in the evenings or at weekends as well as standard working hours. Meetings are usually online.

It is important that the membership of the committee reflects the diversity of the URC. The Net Zero Task Group members should have an active interest in care for creation, a willingness to grow in their knowledge and understanding of net-zero-related issues and have a desire to see the URC reduce its carbon footprint.

Summary notes are produced from each meeting: it is expected that, as representatives of various parts of URC life, Task Group members will share these with their peers and invite conversation and feedback that will help inform the direction and decision-making of the Task Group.

Relationship with the wider denomination

The Net Zero Task Group seeks reports from each synod once a year on their progress in reducing their carbon footprint. The Task Group reports this to General Assembly annually through the Faith in Action Committee's report paper.

The Net Zero Task Group offers a hub for mutual accountability within the denomination, urging action and offering support in the implementation of carbon footprint-reducing policies.

The Task Group aims to support General Assembly, committees, synods and congregations in their journey of reducing their carbon footprint through a variety of means, including webinars and webpages, to inform, educate and challenge. The Group wishes to learn from the good practices observed within and beyond the URC and share these broadly for the wider benefit of the church and society.

Delegated authority

The Net Zero Task Group gathers information from local churches, synods and related Trust companies as instructed by General Assembly (2024, Resolution 35). It reports to the Faith in Action Committee.

Links with the wider church

Recognising that other denominations are striving for similar goals and will have complementary and relevant knowledge and experience, we seek to include ecumenical representatives in our Task Group meetings and share good practice with other churches and faith groups when appropriate.

External relations

The Net Zero Task Group does not relate externally, but the resources it produces for the denomination may also be available publicly.

Inclusion

The Net Zero Task Group seeks to support the whole URC. The convenor will be expected to have received anti-racism training to help address conscious and unconscious biases. The task group seeks to have representation from children and young people: this may be through appropriate inclusion of the children and young people themselves, and/or through a Children and Youth Officer. The group seeks a diverse membership which is representative of the breadth of diversity of the URC.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding is at the heart of all our activities as a church. The task group will adhere to the URC safeguarding policy. Recognising that there is potential for members of the task group to be under 18 or an at-risk adult, safer recruitment will be implemented for all new members of the task group.

Risk management

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

Paper B7

Legacies of Slavery – Affirming the Will & Finding the Way(s)

Faith in Action

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Sarah Lane Cawte, Convenor of Faith in Action Committee slanecawte@gmail.com Karen Campbell, Head of Global & Intercultural Church karen.campbell@urc.org.uk
Action required	Discussion and decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 12 General Assembly adopts the specific three-strand Repairing Justice proposals offered by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group Resolution 13 General Assembly adopts the allocation of monies from the Legacies of Slavery Fund in the following proportions: • Up to 30% to be apportioned to the regional strand • A minimum of 60% to be apportioned to the Global strand – including, but not limited to, the development of New Free Villages in Jamaica. Resolution 14 General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to continue its work establishing partnerships both in the UK and globally to be resourced by the URC Legacies of Slavery Fund. Resolution 15 General Assembly delegates the authority to determine specific funding allocations for each project to the Faith in Action Committee, to be advised by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, bringing updates to General Assembly via the usual reporting processes. Resolution 16 General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Senior Leadership Team, the Legal

	Advisor, The United Reformed Church Trust and other relevant bodies as necessary to ensure that appropriate governance and safeguarding structures are in place to honour the URC's fiduciary responsibilities.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A report from the URC's Legacies of Slavery Task Group: • Providing a timeline of the URC's Legacies of Slavery journey to help us understand the present, reaffirm our commitment to the practical out-working of the 2022 URC statement of Confession and Apology, and propose possibilities to enable our responses to continue and flourish. • Addressing concerns about the legality of the Legacies of Slavery Fund, established after endorsement by General Assembly 2024. • Seeking a mandate for the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to continue its work, with oversight from the Faith in Action Committee, without needing to return to future General Assemblies for 'permission' to do the work with which it has been tasked.
Main points	• An update as to where we are regarding the three-strand 'repairing justice' proposals presented to successive General Assemblies since 2022. • An update about the Legacies of Slavery Fund. • Addressing concerns about the legality of contributing funds into the Legacies of Slavery Fund (ie does this fall within our charitable aims?), and concerns about lines of accountability – including a response from the Law and Polity Advisory Group.
Previous relevant documents	Paper I1: Mission Committee Report to General Assembly 2025 Paper I4, Legacies of Slavery – acts of repairing justice: progress report – General Assembly 2024 Paper I3: Legacies of Slavery – proposals for repairing justice, General Assembly 2023 Paper I6: Legacies of (transatlantic) Slavery - General Assembly 2022 Paper E1: Affirmative action towards an anti-racist Church (Equalities Committee) - General Assembly 2022 From 'Not Racist' to Anti-Racist – Mission Council November 2020 Healing: Hope in Action – Mission Council, November 2019

Consultation has taken place with...	The Senior Leadership Team; General Secretary; DGS Ministries; Synod Moderators; Chief Finance Officer; Resources Committee; Law & Polity Advisory group; URC Legal Advisor; Revd Ron Nathan (Consultant)

Summary of impact

Financial	Giving confidence to synods to contribute to the Legacies of Slavery Fund; continued commitment of central funds to cascade anti-racism training to all active ministers.
External (eg ecumenical)	Enabling partnerships to be initiated and/or further developed in the UK and globally. Four mentoring projects to be initiated/supported in the UK – impacting the partners themselves plus their local contexts. In Jamaica – homes being provided for people who have no other means of securing properties and enabling the potential for wealth production to foster long-term stability. Our progress is watched by and impacts the journeys of various ecumenical partners including the Methodist Church, Church of Scotland, Racial Justice Advocacy Forum.

Legacies of Slavery: Affirming the Will and Finding the Way(s)

It is now four years since General Assembly adopted the URC statement of Confession and Apology concerning the legacies of transatlantic slavery. Much has happened in the ensuing period — not all of which has been immediately visible. Indeed, not everyone is aware of the journey which led to General Assembly 2022. This paper seeks to:

- remind us of the journey we have been on
- help us understand the present
- reaffirm our commitment to the practical out-working of the URC Apology
- propose possibilities to enable our responses to continue and flourish.

1. The URC Journey

Below is a broad timeline of key dates and developments in the URC's Legacies of Slavery (LoS) journey. It does not seek to capture everything — much of which has already been reported to previous General Assemblies by way of proposal and update papers drafted by the evolving LoS Task Group since its inception in 2019. Neither does the timeline start at the beginning of our journey; there have been individuals aware of the need for this work long before our focussed engagement began. Of particular note is the late Revd Dr Peter Cruchley, a URC Minister working with the Council for World Mission (CWM) — the driving force behind CWM's Legacies of Slavery Project which became the spur for the URC's own focussed engagement.

2017	Launch of CWM's Legacies of Slavery Project. The project sought to engage with the history of transatlantic slavery particularly pertaining to the

Church, uncover the hidden/untold histories, and recognise and address the legacies which continue to impact Black communities today.

- 2018 CWM project report published. CWM sought to engage with its own past, while member churches were encouraged to engage with their respective histories and contexts.
- 2019 URC LoS Task Group formed under the remit of the Mission Committee, to engage with the CWM report, and consider the URC response under three headings: Apology; Reparations; White Privilege.
Task Group report, 'Healing: Hope in Action', recommended that the URC should make an apology; should offer reparations, and should actively seek to address and dismantle the phenomenon of 'white privilege' in our Church and communities. The report was received by Mission Council, autumn 2019, with a request for further consultation.
- 2020 COVID; George Floyd's murder; Black Lives Matter.
URC's public statement following George Floyd's murder led to exploration of the question 'Do Black Lives Matter in the URC?'
URC commitment to journey from 'not racist' to becoming actively 'anti-racist' (Mission Council, November 2020)
- 2021 LoS Task Group begins a URC-wide consultation, including presentations and discussion at synod meetings and other gatherings. Individual and group responses received, collated, and publicised.
- 2022 General Assembly adopts statement of Confession and Apology regarding transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies.
General Assembly commits to acts of repairing justice; concrete and costed proposals to be brought to Assembly 2023.
Revd Dr Gordon Cowans — United Church of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (UCJCI), and Churches' Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) — reaches out to accept the apology and offers to partner with us on repairing justice.
- 2023 Three-strand 'repairing justice' proposals presented to General Assembly:
Local (within the URC) — anti-racism training;
Regional (across the URC/UK) — Mentoring of young Black men;
Global — working with global partners to address areas of work identified by them.
Assembly mandates anti-racism training for specific colleagues/roles, to be funded centrally. Professor Anthony Reddie engaged to deliver the training.
LoS Task Group asked to continue its work, aiming to bring costed proposals for regional and global strands to GA 2024.

- 2024 URC participation in ecumenical pilgrimage to Jamaica to further the CRAF partnership with particular focus on New Free Villages. General Assembly Moderator, the Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, delivers the URC apology, in person, in Jamaica. UCJCI Moderator, Revd Gary Harriot, accepts the Apology and pledges church-owned land as UCJCI's input to development of New Free Villages.
General Assembly agrees creation of URC Legacies of Slavery Fund to finance regional and global strands. Initial input of £250k from central funds with synods invited to input as they feel led.
- 2025 LoS Regional Sub-Group begins work with independent Consultant — the Revd Ron Nathan
Standing Together Programme (in partnership with the Synergy Network) — a week-long initiative exploring serious youth violence and creative church/fait-based responses. Relationships and insights feeding into regional proposals.

2. So, where are we up to?

a. Local: Anti-Racism Training

Sessions organised by the Global & Intercultural Ministries team (now Global & Intercultural Church) and delivered by Professor Anthony Reddie took place throughout much of 2024, with a limited number in 2025. Most of the postholders and groups mandated to receive the training have been reached (see Appendix 2), with the exception of 'Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers', with focus now shifting to those roles. Feedback reflects wide agreement that sessions were generally 'not what I expected' — but all the better for that fact. Considerable thought has been given to how the training might be cascaded to reach all active URC ministers, and other colleagues who occupy key roles, or have significant points of engagement with local churches — such as interim moderators, accredited lay preachers, elders, etc. Initial focus was on developing a resource which is denominationally produced and locally delivered. Following conversations with Synod Moderators and consultation with the Senior Leadership Team, it has been decided that we ask Professor Reddie to complete the rollout of anti-racism training to active ministers, delivering a minimum of one session in each Synod. Thought is being given to follow-up 'refresher' sessions to ensure the learning points become embedded in what we do, and how we do it.

The Head of Global & Intercultural Church (GIC) will work with the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) to ensure the successful rollout to ministers. The LoS Task Group/GIC will continue work on developing the denominational resource to be used locally for congregations and church groups.

(See Appendix 1 for the current task group membership.)

b. Regional: Mentoring of young Black men

In 2025, the Regional Sub-Group engaged the services of the Revd Ron Nathan as an Independent Consultant. Revd Nathan brings a wealth of relevant experience, including the areas of establishing governance structures, lines of accountability, and sustainable partnership working. He has created a roadmap for bringing each of the proposed projects from concept to fruition over a 24-month period, including strategies for oversight, management, evaluation, and shared learning. The sub-group, accompanied by Revd Nathan, is exploring an exciting potential partnership with a London-based, Black-led charitable organisation engaged in early intervention, mentoring, and support, primarily reaching young Black men. If this comes to fruition, further projects will be explored in Wales, Scotland and the north of England (4 projects in total). In each case, conversations will be sought with the respective synods as part of the decision-making process to foster ownership of the emerging project.

The task group proposes that the projects, as they develop, will relate to the Faith in Action Committee via Global & Intercultural Church, with in-person updates by invitation, and less frequent updates to General Assembly as helpful.

An application has been submitted to CWM's 'The Onesimus Project' (TOP) towards funding of the mentoring proposals. If successful, this could attract up to £100k. (We anticipate receiving a decision by the time General Assembly meets.)

c. Global: CRAF and New Free Villages

Our partnership with the Church Reparations Action Forum (CRAF) has particular emphasis on the creation of New Free Villages, addressing the situation in which 30% of Jamaica's population are classed as squatters. The work will see the Church in Jamaica and the UK each engaging with the legacies of slavery as pertains to them — the Jamaican Church (initially the UCJCI) offering land inherited as a legacy of slavery and colonisation on which the villages will be built, the URC contributing resources towards the development and construction. Prospective residents will be allocated housing, modest but resilient, each with a small plot of land, offering the possibility of growing food and generating income. It is intended that each village will be overseen by a local management group and include residents from a mixture of economic backgrounds. While this work was already urgent, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Melissa has exposed and exacerbated the underlying issues of housing poverty (both quantity and quality), food poverty, financial poverty, and more. It is *because* of these ingrained legacies that Melissa was able to wreak such havoc. The hurricane highlighted that the work is even more urgent than previously recognised.

The CRAF construction plans are being revisited in the wake of the hurricane. Research into 'Melissa-proof' construction and its costs is ongoing — currently estimated at £5m for each village of 40 dwellings, housing an estimated 120 residents. The National Housing Trust, the public sector body charged with increasing Jamaica's housing stock, will be approached to collaborate in the design process and provide potential funding options for eventual recipients to develop and possibly expand their new homes.

3. Resourcing the journey

a. The Legacies of Slavery Fund

When General Assembly adopted the URC Statement of Confession and Apology in 2022, this was accompanied by an ‘in principle’ commitment to acts of repairing justice. Assembly 2023 endorsed the rollout of mandatory anti-racism training and asked the task group to continue exploring regional and global proposals, aiming to bring costed proposals to Assembly 2024. Conversations in light of the budget deficit revealed that no funds had been allocated to finance any regional or global proposals. Further conversations with the URC Treasurer and Chief Finance Officer led to the creation of the URC Legacies of Slavery Fund, endorsed by General Assembly 2024. The Fund was started with a £250k input from central funds, with synods invited to contribute as they felt able, seeking to resource the work and encourage whole-Church ownership. The Fund currently stands at £1,133, 524.34, with £875k having been contributed by synods. Further monies have been pledged but not yet received. The LoS Task Group wishes to thank all synods which have contributed. We also offer sincere thanks to Avenue St Andrews URC, Wessex, for their contribution — the proceeds from a Communion offering. While the fund necessarily seeks to resource our repairing justice commitment, we are very clear that the underlying issue *is not* ‘money’. It is not the size of the contribution that essentially matters but offering what we can to make a difference. We point to the biblical examples of the feeding of the 5,000, and Jesus’ affirmation of the widow’s mite.

b. Fiduciary and governance concerns: Does the Church have the legal power to make donations to the Fund?

This concern has been heard and taken seriously, with the Law and Polity Advisory Group (LPAG) offering the following response:

“There have been questions raised in some quarters about the Church's power to make donations to the Legacy of Slavery Fund. The Law and Polity Review Group has been asked to express an opinion.

The key question is whether such donations align with the charitable purposes of the funds. In this case, the Legacy of Slavery Fund advances the Christian faith in accordance with the principles and practices of the United Reformed Church (URC), which is consistent with the charitable objectives of the general funds. These purposes apply across synods. Furthermore, the General Assembly has endorsed this initiative, and as the body responsible for defining the URC's principles and usages, its support reinforces the legitimacy of this allocation.

The URC's charitable purposes include ancillary purposes which extend beyond worship to include visible and practical expressions of Christ's love in the world. The Legacy of Slavery Fund, as described, supports charitable work (that is, charitable according to the law of England and Wales or Scotland, as the case may be) internationally.

The only caveat is regulatory: trustees must ensure that funds sent abroad are used for their intended charitable purposes, but there are several guidance notes issued by the Charity Commission to help the trustees of the Fund apply the funds safely. The Group offers this guidance robustly and confidently.”

The Chief Finance Officer has further clarified that the LoS Fund is designated as a restricted fund and needs the permission of the Faith in Action Committee for payments up to £5,000, and authorisation from the Business Committee for expenditure greater than £5,000, as per Paper A1, Assembly Executive February 2026.

The LoS Task Group deeply appreciates the consideration given by Law Polity and Advisory Group (LPAG) and the Chief Finance Officer and recognises the need for appropriate oversight of the Fund. At the same time, the task group feels compelled to remind the whole URC that the LoS Fund *is not* about ‘charity’, or what will be done with ‘our money’. The establishment of the fund was always intended as an outworking of our Apology — an act of ‘giving back’ or releasing, acknowledging that something is in our hands which rightfully belongs elsewhere. This understanding is central to the principle of repairing justice, with the story of Zacchaeus providing a biblical underpinning for this approach. We need to exercise a light touch, holding the fund only as tightly as enables us to practice release by letting it go. As Revd Dr Collin Cowan (CRAF Principal) reminds us: Jamaica and the UK are two sides of a shared history; a relationship broken by the sin of slavery, which denied the human dignity of one for the gain of the other. Reparations (or repairing justice) is about restoring dignity, agency, getting out of the way so people can determine the best paths for themselves. We can walk the path with them, alongside them — by invitation, but we should never act in ways which dictate or restrict their path. And if, or when, they might go wrong, let’s lament with them — without judgment — remembering this work is made necessary by the wrongs of our forebears which we have so far failed to put right, and there are times when we still go wrong today.

c. Funding and Accountability

- Local: Anti-Racism Training — costs of the training for those for whom it is mandatory will continue to be met centrally, and the work overseen by GIC and Ministries.
- Regional: Mentoring of young black men — this will be part-funded by a grant from CWM’s The Onesimus Project (should our application be successful), and part from the URC LoS Fund. Independent Consultant, Revd Ron Nathan, has a specific brief to help develop appropriate governance structures with prospective partners. While it is intended that the regional work will include supporting ‘start-up’ initiatives, the task group is currently exploring a relationship with an established charitable organisation – starting with ‘low-hanging fruit’ while remaining open to more challenging options down the line.
- Global: CRAF Partnership — the New Free Villages initiative ‘belongs’ to CRAF and the Jamaican people. While monies released from the URC LoS Fund will contribute to resourcing the construction of the villages, the homes developed will belong to and

be maintained by partners in Jamaica. CRAF is a registered charity in Jamaica, with close links to the UCJCI, and will ensure compliance with relevant Jamaican regulations. There is no intention of any ongoing legal or management responsibility for the URC once a village comes to fruition — although it is hoped we will retain the friendships developed through our partnership working.

4. Affirming the Will and Finding the Way

The LoS task group is well aware that this report presents work very much in progress. At General Assembly 2022, when we first referred to costed proposals being brought the following year, no one foresaw just how complex the journey would necessarily be. There have been many moving parts — all of which the task group has negotiated as effectively as could realistically be expected. The group has evolved according to the emerging contexts, with members learning through engaging. The task group is convened by a long-time member of the URC, and includes URC staff members, two Children's and Youth Development Officers, two Racial Justice Advocates, lay and ordained members, five Black colleagues plus an expert consultant (see Appendix 1). Some of the information the Church would like to have is not yet concrete and, as we have indicated in previous updates, has no definitive answer — but the task group has been travelling the path and feels confident in negotiating the way forward. How much will the mentoring projects cost? We will know that once we confirm the partnerships and respond to the specific dynamics of each context. How much do we propose to contribute to the creation of New Free Villages in Jamaica? This depends on how much we have available to offer; the fund may not yet have reached its final tally — however, we certainly know our contribution will never exceed the sums needed for this work. The task group will continue its conversations with CRAF to explore how we can work together to bring this work to fruition, bringing further specific proposals to future General Assemblies as and when they are clarified. In addition, both the regional and global contributions from the fund will be influenced by whether and how much we receive from our application to CWM.

While the conversations about money may appear somewhat circular, the direction of travel is definite and purposeful. The LoS task group has diligently carried out its work, sometimes at great personal cost to its members for whom this is not just 'another area of work' but relates to their history and life's journey. The commitment to repairing justice is not new but was made in 2022 at the same time that General Assembly adopted the Confession and Apology. The proposals are not new but were brought to General Assembly in 2023 (Anti-Racism Training; Mentoring), 2024 (proposals regarding the partnership with CRAF), and there have been ongoing updates at every stage. The aim of this report is to ask General Assembly to formally endorse the work of the task group of which Assembly is already aware — and, indeed, requested, and entrust the task group to bring that work to fruition as it engages with existing and prospective partners in consultation with the URC's legal advisor, LPAG, and other bodies as might be necessary to ensure we honour our fiduciary responsibilities. In short, once Assembly affirms its will, those entrusted to do so will find the way(s).

This work is important, as underscored by the recent UN resolution declaring transatlantic slavery to be ‘the gravest crime against humanity’ (March 2026). It matters to the Black communities in the UK and beyond who bear the ongoing wounds of that crime, have seen our Apology, and await our promised actions. It matters to CRAF who never fail to champion our efforts — and to our ecumenical partners who look to our work as a point of reference and encouragement for their own engagement. This is an invitation for us to finish what we have started – and it matters that we do so.

5. Suggested Reading

A lot of material has been written concerning the Legacies of Transatlantic Slavery and the call for reparations and reparative justice. Particularly accessible for enabling personal/local church reflection are:

- We Will Repay — <https://ctbi.org.uk/resources/we-will-repay-bible-study/>
- Faith in Repair — a Christian Aid resource. (A weblink/access information will be sourced by the time General Assembly meets.)

6. What are we asking of General Assembly?

The Faith in Action Committee proposes the following resolutions:

1. General Assembly adopts the specific three-strand Repairing Justice proposals offered by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group.
2. General Assembly adopts the allocation of monies from the Legacies of Slavery Fund in the following proportions:
 - Up to 30% to be apportioned to the Regional strand
 - A minimum of 60% to be apportioned to the Global strand — including, but not limited to, the development of New Free Villages in Jamaica.
3. General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to continue its work establishing partnerships both in the UK and globally to be resourced by the URC Legacies of Slavery Fund.
4. General Assembly delegates the authority to determine specific funding allocations for each project to the Faith in Action Committee, to be advised by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, bringing updates to General Assembly via the usual reporting processes.
5. General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Senior Leadership Team, the Legal Advisor, The United Reformed Church Trust and other relevant bodies as necessary to ensure that appropriate governance and safeguarding structures are in place to honour the URC’s fiduciary responsibilities.

Appendix 1: Current members of the Legacies of Slavery Task Group

Professor David Reynolds — Convenor

Karen Campbell — Head of Global & Intercultural Church

Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo

Revd Dr John Campbell (Racial Justice Advocate)

Lindsey Brown — Head of Ecumenical Relations and Evangelism

Revd Zaidie Orr (Racial Justice Advocate)

Veronica Daniel

Lorraine Downer (Children & Youth Development Officer)
Tom Hackett (Children & Youth Development Officer)

Revd Ron Nathan - Independent Consultant

Appendix 2:

Paper I3, GA2023 Legacies of Slavery – proposals for repairing justice

Resolution 32

General Assembly resolves that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Officers of the General Assembly
- The General Secretariat
- Staff Secretaries
- Assembly Committee Convenors and Secretaries
- Synod Moderators
- Synod Clerks
- Members of the Panel for General Assembly appointments
- Members of the Assessment board
- The Assembly Standing Panel on Discipline
- The Disciplinary Investigation Panel
- The Commission Panel
- The Disciplinary Appeals Commission List
- The CYDO+ Team
- Synod Racial Justice Coordinators and Advocates (RJAs)
- Active Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (Categories 1, 2, 5 and 8 as defined in the Active Ministers Policy, Paper H5 Assembly Executive 2021)
- Members of Assembly Committees and Advisory Groups
- Training and Development Officers (TD+ Network)
- Synod Mission Enablers.

Paper C1

Ministries Committee Report

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	For information
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To update General Assembly on the work of the Ministries Committee, its sub-committees, the Lay Preaching Advocates Network and the Ministries and Learning Forum
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Ministries Committee Report to General Assembly 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Ongoing consultation across the denomination

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

Ministries Committee

The committee is responsible for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Work, Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneering and Eldership. Through its main committee and sub-committees, it is concerned with facilitating the ministry of the whole people of God in the United Reformed Church, through working to promote the policies of the church; advocating ministry in its widest sense; supporting ministry in its varied forms; facilitating the formation, training and learning for accredited ministries of the church.

Membership:

Convenor: Mary Thomas

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Nominated members:

Gill Bates, Elizabeth Hall, Terry Jinn, Lesley Moseley, Dean Taylor

Convenor of the Accreditations sub-committee: Alison Micklem

Convenor of the Assessment Board: Bill Gould

Synod Moderator: Jamie Kissack
 Minister for Digital Worship: Andy Braunston
 Resource Centre for Learning (RCL): Principal: Adam Scott

In attendance as required:

Convenor of the Maintenance of the Ministry (MOM) sub-committee: David Coote
 Convenor of Retired Ministers' Housing Society (RMHS) sub-committee: Paul Whittle
 Leadership in Worship Network: Maggie Kirkbride

1. A Committee in transition with an expanded remit

- 1.1 This report is brought at a time of significant transition. A revised committee structure has required new patterns of working to be established, while at the same time receiving a broader and more integrated remit than previously. This has involved not simply the incorporation of Education for Ministry, Phase 1 (EM1), EM2 and EM3, but also the substantial body of work that accompanies them: the education, formation and ongoing development of all the accredited ministries of the Church. Taken together, this represents a significant expansion in both scope and responsibility. It creates the opportunity for a more coherent and integrated approach to ministerial formation, holding together discernment, training and lifelong development across the whole ecology of ministry, and reflects a theological conviction that formation is not bounded by ordination or commissioning, but is sustained throughout the life of the Church and held corporately within its councils.
- 1.2 This expansion of responsibility has taken place within a context of limited capacity. While the Committee has sought to respond faithfully to the breadth of its remit, the scale of the work now being held has inevitably affected pace and prioritisation. This report is therefore offered not only as an account of work undertaken, but as an honest reflection of the pressures under which that work is being carried, and the implications this has for the Church as a whole.

2. Capacity constraints and the pace of work

- 2.1 Across the breadth of work, a consistent tension is evident between the scale of what is required and the capacity available to deliver it. As will be evident from the number and range of papers brought to this Assembly, the current portfolio spans ministerial formation, active and inactive ministry, retirement review, sabbaticals, sickness and ill-health processes, expected standards, theological education, lay ministry, pioneering, chaplaincy, stipend principles and ministerial wellbeing. Each of these areas carries not only operational demands, but also significant theological, pastoral, legal and financial weight.
- 2.2 The consequence is that some areas of work have had to be staged or deferred. Work on chaplaincy and ministry in liminal spaces, for example, awaits the full establishment of the Head of Ministries Learning and Development role, and the reshaping of EM2 is unlikely to be fully operational before 2027. This is not simply a matter of administrative delay; it signals a wider denominational risk. Under-capacity inevitably affects pace, responsiveness and resilience, and this should be recognised as part of the strategic context within which the Church is seeking to order its life and ministry.

3. A whole ecology of ministry

- 3.1 A consistent theme emerging from the work is the need to understand ministry as an ecology rather than a set of discrete roles. Ministry in the United Reformed Church is not constituted by isolated offices, but by a living and interdependent body, in which different forms of ministry are discerned, authorised and exercised in relationship to one another. Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, both stipendiary and non-stipendiary, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers, Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, Elders, and Elders in Local Leadership together form the ministerial life of the Church. Each has its own integrity, calling and pattern of formation, yet none exists in isolation, and none can be sustained apart from the others.
- 3.2 To speak of an ecology is therefore to make a theological claim. It recognises that ministry is held within the life of the whole Church, discerned through its councils, and sustained through patterns of mutual accountability, support and formation. It also acknowledges that pressure or change in one part of the ecology inevitably affects the whole. Questions of stipendiary ministry, lay leadership, vocations and training cannot be addressed in isolation but must be considered together if the Church is to remain faithful and sustainable.
- 3.3 Within this developing ecology, the establishment of the Ministries and Learning Forum is a significant step. Bringing together colleagues from Ministries and Faith in Action, Resource Centres for Learning and Synod networks, the Forum seeks to hold learning, formation and discipleship more coherently across the Church. Its areas of focus - Elders' training, vocations, and discipleship development (including pathways such as Stepwise and the Church Leadership Programme) - reflect a growing recognition that the sustainability of ministry depends not only on ordained pathways, but on the formation, confidence and discipleship of the whole people of God.
- 3.4 Such an ecology does not imply interchangeability. Rather, it requires clarity about the distinctive nature of each ministry, alongside a renewed understanding of their interdependence. It calls for greater coherence in how ministries are discerned, formed, authorised and supported, and for a shared understanding across the Church of how different ministries contribute to worship, mission, pastoral care and governance. The future life of the Church will depend not simply on sustaining particular roles, but on nurturing a pattern of ministry that is relational, accountable and responsive to the context in which the Church is called to serve.

4. Sustainability of stipendiary ministry

- 4.1 Consideration of the sustainability of stipendiary ministry has been central to the work brought to this Assembly. Recent Assessment Conferences have seen very low numbers of candidates for stipendiary Ministry of Word and Sacraments, while the projected pattern of retirements continues to reduce available capacity over the coming years.
- 4.2 In bringing the accompanying paper, the Committee has sought to focus the Church's attention on a single, pressing question: **what level and pattern of stipendiary ministry is the United Reformed Church called to sustain in the years ahead?** This question moves beyond matters of affordability alone and

invites deeper theological discernment about the nature and purpose of ministry within the life of the Church.

- 4.3 The issue is therefore not simply numerical or financial. It concerns the proclamation of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments, pastoral care, conciliar oversight, ministerial wellbeing and the capacity of local congregations to flourish. There is a growing recognition that the Church is at, or very close to, a tipping point, and that the response required cannot be reactive. Rather, it must be whole-church, strategic and rooted in theological reflection on what it means to be the Church in this time and place.

5. Ministerial standards, accountability and fitness to practice

- 5.1 A significant body of work brought to this Assembly reflects a developing and more integrated approach to ministerial standards, accountability and fitness to practise. What is presented is not a series of isolated policy developments, but a connected suite of work which together seeks to clarify expectations, strengthen oversight, and ensure that ministry is exercised in ways that are safe, accountable and faithful to the Church's calling.
- 5.2 At the heart of this is the recognition that ministers serve in positions of trust. Clarity regarding ministerial status has therefore emerged as a pressing issue. There remain ministers on the roll for whom current activity, accountability and authorisation are not always clearly understood. This raises pastoral, safeguarding and reputational concerns for the Church. It is essential that the Church is able to identify who is authorised to act in its name, and under what conditions that authorisation is held.
- 5.3 The development of the Active and Inactive Ministers policies forms a key part of this work. These seek to provide clearer definitions of activity, accountability, good standing and fitness to practise, alongside more consistent patterns of oversight. This includes consideration of regular communication with ministers, the role of Synods in maintaining appropriate accountability, and clearer expectations in relation to safeguarding, mandatory training and the public representation of ministry.
- 5.4 Alongside this, work to consolidate competencies and expected standards into a clearer and more authoritative framework is intended to articulate more fully what is required of those who hold ministerial office. This is not simply a regulatory exercise, but one that seeks to support ministers in understanding the nature of their calling and the expectations that flow from it, providing a basis both for accountability and for ongoing formation and development.
- 5.5 The continued development of Safer Sacred Space training forms an important part of this wider framework. Its emphasis on reflective practice, self-awareness and the maintenance of healthy boundaries recognises the relational nature of ministry and the trust placed in those who exercise it. In this context, the integrity of ministry is not secured solely through formal processes, but through the cultivation of wise, attentive and accountable practice.
- 5.6 The Committee has also given attention to the place of reasonable adjustments within ministerial life. This reflects a commitment to ensuring that those who are called to ministry are enabled to exercise that calling as fully as possible,

including where disability or long-term health conditions are present. At the same time, it recognises the need for clarity and consistency, ensuring that adjustments are grounded in appropriate professional assessment and held within a framework that maintains the essential responsibilities of ministry.

- 5.7 These strands of work are closely connected to a growing awareness of the importance of ministerial wellbeing. Wellbeing cannot be treated as a discrete or reactive concern, but must be understood in relation to workload, deployment, expectations, support structures and the changing nature of ministry itself. Ensuring that those who are called to serve are sustained in that calling is integral to the health of the Church as a whole.
- 5.8 Taken together, this suite of work begins to form a more coherent framework within which questions of conduct, capability and wellbeing can be held appropriately. It provides a necessary foundation for the ongoing development of disciplinary processes, ensuring that any such processes are not isolated or reactive, but are rooted in a clear understanding of ministry as a position of trust, exercised within the life and accountability of the whole Church.

6. Reshaping ministerial formation

- 6.1 A further significant strand of work concerns the reshaping of ministerial formation across the life of the Church. What is emerging is not a series of discrete adjustments, but a move towards a more coherent and integrated pattern which holds together discernment, initial training, early ministry and ongoing development. This reflects a growing recognition that formation is not confined to a particular stage, but is a lifelong process, held corporately within the Church and exercised within its councils.
- 6.2 Within this, work to draw together Education for Ministry, Phase 1 (EM1), EM2 and EM3 has been central. In particular, proposals for EM2 signal a shift towards a more structured and intentional approach, including the development of a portfolio-based framework. This seeks to enable reflective practice, clearer articulation of learning, and more consistent support during the early years of ministry. It also provides a means of ensuring that ministers are accompanied, challenged and affirmed as they grow into the responsibilities of ordained or commissioned service.
- 6.3 Alongside this, EM3 has been identified as an area requiring renewed attention. Uptake remains relatively low, and continuing professional development is not yet consistently embedded within ministerial life. Consideration is therefore being given to the development of a more intentional programme of ministerial development from 2027 onwards, one which would provide clearer expectations, accessible pathways and a stronger culture of ongoing learning. Such work recognises that the changing context of ministry requires ministers to continue to grow in understanding, skill and resilience throughout the whole of their service.
- 6.4 Questions arising from Non-Stipendiary Ministry (Local) have also contributed to this wider reflection. While this pathway has enabled new expressions of ministry to emerge, it has highlighted issues of consistency, clarity and robustness in relation to formation and training. In particular, concerns have been raised about the coherence of training pathways and the absence, in some cases, of clearly recognised qualifications.

- 6.5 It has therefore been recognised that NSM (Local) ministry cannot be considered in isolation. Those entering this pathway are still being formed for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, even where that ministry is exercised within a particular local context. Questions of expectation, formation and accountability must therefore be held within the wider framework of ordained ministry and within the developing ecology of ministry as a whole.
- 6.6 Taken together, this work points towards the need for a more coherent, consistent and theologically grounded approach to formation across all pathways of ministry. It invites the Church to consider not only how ministers are prepared for particular roles, but how a culture of formation can be sustained which enables all those called to ministry to grow in faithfulness, competence and confidence over time.
- 7. Lay leadership and vocations**
- 7.1 A further significant area of development has been a renewed and more intentional focus on lay ministry, leadership and vocations. This arises not as an isolated strand of work, but as a necessary response to the wider questions facing the Church about sustainability, formation and the shape of ministry for the future. Elders, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers are not peripheral to the Church's life; they are integral to its worship, mission, pastoral care and governance. Yet it has become clear that patterns of support, formation and ongoing development have not always been consistent or sufficiently resourced.
- 7.2 In response, the work of the Ministries and Learning Forum has begun to provide a more coherent space in which these questions can be held together. Bringing into conversation colleagues from Ministries, Faith in Action, Resource Centres for Learning and Synod networks, the Forum is helping to shape a more integrated approach to learning and formation across the Church. Its current areas of focus—Elders' training, vocations, and wider discipleship development—reflect a recognition that the strengthening of ministry begins with the formation of the whole people of God.
- 7.3 Particular attention is being given to the formation of Elders. As those who share in the spiritual leadership and oversight of the local church, Elders require not only initial preparation but ongoing development in confidence, theological understanding and leadership. Work is therefore underway to consider how training for Elders might be strengthened, resourced and made more accessible, ensuring that this vital ministry is properly supported across the denomination.
- 7.4 Alongside this, the question of ongoing development for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers has been brought into sharper focus. While initial accreditation provides a strong foundation, there is a growing recognition that opportunities for continued learning, reflection and enrichment are essential if this ministry is to flourish. This includes not only the deepening of theological understanding and preaching practice, but also engagement with the changing contexts in which worship is offered.
- 7.5 The work on vocations is equally significant. If the Church is to sustain and renew its ministerial life, it must attend carefully to how vocation is recognised, nurtured and encouraged at every level. This includes ordained and commissioned

ministry, but also lay ministries and emerging forms of service. There is a need for a more intentional culture in which calling is discerned corporately, supported locally and accompanied through appropriate pathways of formation.

- 7.6 Proposals relating to lay pioneering have been considered within this wider context, and the Committee is grateful for the work undertaken by Seedbeds in developing a vision for pioneering that is attentive to local mission, innovation and engagement with communities. The approach offered has helped to stimulate important reflection on how the Church might respond creatively and faithfully to emerging contexts. At the same time, it has been recognised that such work needs to be carefully integrated within the theological identity, polity and practices of the United Reformed Church. Questions of accreditation, formation, accountability and alignment with existing structures therefore require further discernment. It has been judged helpful to pause the development of new proposals at this stage, not as a rejection of the work, but as an opportunity to reflect more fully on how pioneering ministry can be most fruitfully embedded within the Church's wider approach to formation and ministry
- 7.7 Alongside the consideration of these proposals, there is a growing recognition that the training and formation of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers would benefit from further development. There is clear affirmation of the importance of pioneering ministry, and of the contribution made by Seedbeds in shaping this area of work. The task now is to build on this foundation, exploring how formation pathways can be strengthened so that they are both contextually responsive and firmly rooted in the theological and conciliar life of the United Reformed Church. This includes ensuring that training is appropriately robust, coherent and sustainable, and that it equips those called to pioneering ministry not only for innovation, but for ministry that is accountable, well-supported and able to flourish within the life of the denomination.
- 7.8 Taken together, this work signals a shift towards a more intentional and theologically grounded approach to lay ministry and leadership. It recognises that the future life of the Church will depend not only on the number of ordained ministers, but on the confidence, formation and discipleship of all who are called to serve. The task before the Church is therefore not simply to sustain existing patterns, but to nurture a culture in which vocation is recognised, ministry is supported, and leadership is exercised faithfully across the whole Body.

8. Daily Devotions

- 8.1 Daily Devotions continues to be a significant point of outward engagement for the United Reformed Church, offering a regular rhythm of prayer, scripture and reflection that extends well beyond the gathered congregation. Its reach into homes, workplaces and daily routines enables the Church to be present in the ordinary patterns of life, often connecting with those who may have little or no other contact with a local congregation.

In this way, it serves not only as a resource for discipleship, but as a quiet expression of the Church's public witness – accessible, consistent and rooted in the Reformed tradition of Word and prayer. It reminds us that ministry is not confined to physical spaces, but is exercised wherever people encounter the gospel, and that the Church's voice, when offered with care and theological integrity, has the capacity to speak meaningfully into a wide and diverse context.

- 8.2 The Committee is pleased to note that Amy Boon has now been appointed as Digital Content Assistant, bringing dedicated capacity to support and develop this important area of the Church's outward-facing ministry.

9. A large number of policies!

- 9.1 The Committee is bringing a significant number of revised policies to this General Assembly. This should not be understood as policy revision for its own sake, but as a necessary consequence of the wider revision of the Section O disciplinary process. That work has required related ministerial policies to be reviewed and aligned, so that the Church's processes are consistent, pastorally attentive and properly accountable.

- 9.2 Together, these revisions seek to ensure that matters relating to ministerial conduct, capability, status and support are held within a coherent framework. The aim is to provide greater clarity for ministers, Synods, committees and office-holders, while ensuring that the Church acts with fairness, transparency and care.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 This report has set before the General Assembly a substantial body of work which, taken together, reflects both the scale of the challenges facing the United Reformed Church and the seriousness with which they are being engaged. Across questions of formation, sustainability, accountability, wellbeing and the shaping of ministry for the future, there is a clear direction of travel: towards greater coherence, deeper theological grounding, and a more integrated approach to the life of the Church. Much of this work remains in development, and will require continued discernment by the councils of the Church. It is offered in the hope that it will assist the Assembly in its shared task of seeking how we are called to be faithful in this time and place.
- 10.2 In the midst of this, it is a particular pleasure to welcome the Revd Dr Phil Wall as the new Head of Ministries Learning and Development. His appointment comes at a significant moment, and it is anticipated that his experience and insight will play an important role in shaping and sustaining this work in the years ahead.
- 10.3 The Committee also wishes to record its thanks to those who have completed their service. Professor Bill Gould, the Revd Terry Jin and the Revd Lesley Moseley have each contributed generously to the life and work of the Committee, bringing wisdom, experience and careful attention to the matters before them. Their contributions have been valued and are received with gratitude.
- 10.4 In a particular way, the Committee offers its sincere thanks to the Revd Mary Thomas in her role as Convenor. Through a period of considerable transition and expanding responsibility, she has provided wise, steady and gracious leadership. Her ability to hold together complex strands of work, to create space for thoughtful discussion, and to guide the Committee with clarity and care has been deeply appreciated. Her service has been instrumental in enabling the Committee to undertake its work with both integrity and purpose.

Accreditations sub-committee report

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: Alison Micklem

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Members: Bill Gould (Convenor of the Assessment Board), Jamie Kissack (Synod Moderator), Mary Thomas (Convenor of Ministries Committee), Marie Trubic (Church Related Community Worker (CRCW post-holder), Carole Marsden, Joanne Patterson.

1. Certificates of Limited Service

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 new certificates has been issued in the last year, no certificates have been renewed and no certificates have been closed because of retirement.

Yufen Chen (Presbyterian Church of Taiwan) until 31/12/2028

Karl Hanton (Baptist Union of Great Britain) until 01/10/2028

2. 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 39 applications. Five Certificates of Eligibility have been issued in the past 12 months, to ministers from the Church of Scotland (1), Church of England (1), United Churches of Christ (USA) (2), Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa (1).

3. Admission to the Roll of ministers of the Word and Sacraments (from 1 April 2025 to 30 April 2026)

By ordination and induction: Margaret Elizabeth Dexter-Brown, Susan Ann Knight, Clare Nutbrown-Hughes, Maurice Philips Omorojie, Tina Louise Wilson

By transfer from other churches: Packiaraj Asirvatham (Church of South India), Juan Cruz (Presbyterian Church in the Philippines), Nomaqhawe Marambi (United Church of Zambia)

By changes within the Roll of Ministers: There have been no changes within the roll of ministers.

Deletions from the Roll of Ministers:**By resignation**

Lucy Berry

Matthew James Rigden

By transfer to another denomination

None to report

By deletion under the disciplinary process

Naison Mavesere Hove

Re-admission to the Roll

Robert Vaughan Jones

4. Jubilee Ministers**Celebrating 70 years of ordained ministry in 2026:**

Robert William Courtney, Charles Knowlson Meachin, David Stollery Morris

Celebrating 60 years of ordained ministry in 2026:

Clabon James Allen, Robert Andrews, David Batchelor, Michael John Cruchley, David Murray Cuckson, Lesley Gordon Giller, Rosemary Ruth Hartley, Glyn Jenkins, Kenneth William Marsh, Hugh Nixon McKee, Donald William Norwood, Leonard Rees Phelps, David Alistair Pratt, Rodney Alan Ward, Leonard John Wigg, David Wiseman

Celebrating 50 years of ordained ministry in 2026:

Derek Corner, Jack William Dyce, Brian O'Neill, David Raymond Peel, David Trafford, Elizabeth Anne Welch.

5. Ministers who have retired from 1 April 2025 to 30th April 2026:

Bridget Jane Banks, Philip Anthony Brooks, Heather Cadoux, Andrew Coyne, Christopher James Ford, Annette Elizabeth Haigh, Helen Margaret Higgin-Botham, Terence James Hinks, Michael Alan Hodgson, Anthony William Howells, Trevor Jamison, Craig M Jesson, Susan McCoan, Alison Mills, Zaidie Antonette Orr, David Brown Pattie, Jeremy James Phelps, Neil Stuart Riches, Jonathan Douglas George Sermon, Michael Shrubsole, Lynda Joyce Spokes, Anthony John Spring, Peter Fred Stevenson, Alison Anne Termie, Julian Paul Thomas, Nigel Uden, Helen Amy Elizabeth Warmington, Cecil Ernest White, Ruth Angela Wollaston, Philip James Woods.

6. Ministers who have died from 1 April 2025 to 30th April 2026

Name of Minister	Age	Date of Death
William James Nicol	94	02/04/2025
John Heywood-Thomas	98	06/04/2025
James L McCormack		08/04/2025
Gwendoline Mary Barr	99	05/05/2025
James Martin	90	20/05/2025
Margaret Elizabeth Laurie	92	26/05/2025
George Clifford Graham Bembridge	75	04/06/2025
David Roy Viles	91	05/06/2025
Alexander David Mabbs	59	13/06/2025
Roy Patrick Bones	92	16/06/2025
Alison Frances Hall	86	19/06/2025

Robert Francis Damer	85	20/06/2025
Michael James Rigney	80	22/06/2025
Alwyn John Knight	84	23/06/2025
John Wadhams	91	25/06/2025
Malcolm Hill	95	01/07/2025
Ambrose David Wright	92	08/07/2025
Alan Frederick Edward Wise	99	08/08/2025
Valerie Ann Towler	76	12/08/2025
Peter Charles Cruchley	59	15/08/2025
Kenneth Mervyn Coles	81	17/09/2025
Harold Robert Tonks	93	20/09/2025
Robert John Way	90	26/09/2025
Janet Calderley	67	03/10/2025
Robert Freeland Philip	85	14/10/2025
Peter Digby Ball	68	26/10/2025
Stephen Alexander Wilkins	76	27/10/2025
Barbara Plenderleith	88	18/11/2025
John Mackenzie Chisholm	95	07/12/2025
Antony Richmond Ritchie	93	09/12/2025
Elizabeth Jean Brown	91	13/12/2025
Brian Sadler Stone	96	13/12/2025
Keith Leonard Havers	96	14/12/2025
John Alan Stanyon	96	02/01/2026
Robert John Blows	88	09/01/2026
Derek Charles Redfern	82	14/01/2026
Geoffrey Herickx	86	31/01/2026
Colin George Bones	71	02/02/2026
John Colbeck Durell	79	22/02/2026
Elizabeth Denise Megson	86	28/02/2026
Kenneth Harris	94	28/02/2026
Myra D Dillistone	89	11/03/2026
Malcolm Bernard Clarke	76	11/03/2026
Lillian Evangeline Dean	94	21/03/2026
Graham Herbert Dadd	72	26/03/2026
Lesley Anne McNeil	82	07/04/2026
Michael John Lay	94	07/04/2026
James Norman Walker	97	11/04/2026
Meryl Court	80	11/04/2026
Michael John Bemrose Spencer	83	19/04/2026
James Ronald Garfitt	97	22/04/2026

7. Admissions to the Roll of Church Related Community Workers (from 1 April 2025 to 30 April 2026):

By commissioning:

None to report

Deletions from the Roll of Ministers:

None to report

By resignation:

None to report

By transfer to another denomination

None to report

By deletion under the disciplinary process

None to report

CRCWs who have retired from 1 April 2025 to 30 April 2026:

None to report

8. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Preachers

Assembly Accreditation

The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination:

02 North Western	James Mawdsley
03 Mersey	Helen Bennett
03 Mersey	Pat Cansfield
03 Mersey	Gail Rose
04 Yorkshire	Claire Nutt
11 Southern	Leonard Martin
13 Scotland	Laurence Wareing

2026

10 Thames North	Neil Mackin

Assembly re-accreditation between 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026

None to report

Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers by resignation, removal and / or transfer to other Churches or death from 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026

Death

Roger James Allen
 Ralph David Graham Bradshaw
 Lindsey Anne Cole
 Hugh Trefor Suddick
 Wendy Elizabeth Smith

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026:

Alan John Myers
 Thelma Edna Roberts

9. Roll of Assembly-Accredited Lay Pioneers

Assembly Accreditation

The following have received Assembly accreditation between 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026 as a result of having completed a URC course of study or having prior accreditation from another denomination:

04 Yorkshire	Clare Nutt
13 Scotland	Sarah McGrory

Assembly re-accreditation between 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026

None to report

Deletions from the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers by resignation, removal and / or transfer to other Churches or death from 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026

None to report

Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers Retired from 1 April 2025 and 30 April 2026:

None to report

Assessment Board Report

Assessment Board Convenor: Professor Bill Gould

Assessment Board Convenor elect: Martyn Neads

Secretary to the Board: DGS (Ministries)

Assessors: Members: Liz Mullen (2), Keith Reading (3), Jamie Kissak (4), Samuel Silungwe (5), Mark Tubby (7), Gerald England (8), Sue McCoan (10), Martyn Neads (10), Jacob Bali (11) Sohail Ejaz (11) Simon Loveitt (11) Mercy Nimako (11), Jan Adamson (13).

1. Flow of candidates

Since the 2025 report, one Assessment Conference has been held (March 2026). Seven candidates were considered by the Board, of whom 5 were recommended for Education for Ministry Phase 1 (EM1) training.

March 2026 Assessment Conference	Ministry	Number of candidates	Number accepted
	Stipendiary	1	1
	Non- Stipendiary	1	1
	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	5	3
	CRCW	0	0
Total		7	5

Date of Conference	Ministry	Number of candidates	Number accepted
March 2026	Stipendiary	1	1
	Non-stipendiary	1	1
	Non-stipendiary (Local)	5	3
	CRCW	0	0
	CRCW NSM	0	0
	CRCW NSM (Local)	0	0
	Total	7	5

2. Students in Training by Synod as of 30 April 2026

Synod	Ministry	Student
01	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	Ann Sinclair
02	CRCW	Joanne West
	Non-Stipendiary	Timothy Hopley
	Stipendiary	Thomas Miller
03	Non-Stipendiary	Rita Griffiths
04	Non-Stipendiary	Caroline Pathak
05	Non-Stipendiary	Andrew Bodsworth
06	CRCW	Bev Lyne
	Non-Stipendiary	Rachel Coward
	Stipendiary	Edward Lyne
		Nathanael Paul
07	Non-Stipendiary	Robert Dart
	Stipendiary	Machrina Ejaz
		James Instone-Brewer
		Joanne Moreira
		Charlotte Remblance
08	Non-Stipendiary	Rachel Leach
	Stipendiary	Alex Mabbott
09	Non-Stipendiary	John Sinclair
	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	Susan Nichols
	Stipendiary	Abigail Perrow
		Simon Peters
10	CRCW	Rachel Harvey
	Stipendiary	Azeem Bakhsh
11	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	Lynne Le Masonry
	Non-Stipendiary	Joyce Edeki
		Gail Marshall-Jones
	Stipendiary	So Young Jung
		Yukyung Kim
		Zeerak Shahbaz
13	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	Eilidh Young
	Non-Stipendiary	Margaret Highton
	Stipendiary	Yvonne Hamilton

3. Students in Training statistics as of 30 April 2026

	Students in Training	Anticipated Entry into URC Service			
	April 2026	2026	2027	2028	2029
Stipendiary					
Luther King Theological College (LKTC) Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) Resource Centre for Learning (RCL)*	2	1	1	0	0
LKTC Minister of Word and Sacrament (MWS) (RCL)*	6	2	1	1	2
Scottish College (RCL)	2	0	0	1	1
Westminster College (RCL)	7	2	3	1	1
Subtotal	17	5	5	3	4
Non-Stipendiary					
LKTC CRCW (RCL)*	1	0	0	0	1
LKTC MWS (RCL)*	4	0	2	0	2
Scottish College (RCL)	2	1	0	0	1
Westminster College (RCL)	5	1	2	0	2
Subtotal	12	2	4	0	6
Non-Stipendiary (Local)					
LKTC CRCW (RCL)*	0	0	0	0	0
LKTC MWS (RCL)*	1	1	0	0	0
Scottish College (RCL)	2	1	1	0	0
Westminster College (RCL)	1	1	0	0	0
Subtotal	4	3	1	0	0
GRAND TOTAL	33	10	10	3	10

4. Ordinations and Commissionings including Certificates of Eligibility

	Type of Ministry	Date of Ordination	Date into URC	Ministerial Service History for Yearbook
Clare Nutbrown-Hughes	Stipendiary	30/08/2025		South Wales Valleys Pastorate 2025-present
Tina Louise Wilson	Stipendiary	06/09/2025		Norwich Area URC Mission Partnership (Ipswich Rd Norwich, St Peter's Jessop Rd Norwich LEP, Wroxham and Hoveton URC, Wymondham URC) 2025-present
Susan Ann Knight	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	06/09/2025		Reigate Park 2025-present
Maurice Philips Omorojie	Stipendiary	20/09/2025		Synod Directed 2025-2026; St Andrew's, Cheam 2025- ; Sanderstead 2026-present
Margaret Elizabeth Dexter-Brown	Non-Stipendiary (Local)	05/10/2025		East Cheshire & Derbyshire Borders Missional Partnership 2025-present
Packiaraj Asirvatham	Stipendiary	08/06/2008	01/06/2025	Ponders End, Palmers Green and Winchmore Hill 2025-present
Juan Cruz	Stipendiary	02/08/2004	21/02/2026	Wilmslow, Macclesfield & Bollington and Lymm URC 2026-present
Nomaqhawe Marambi	Stipendiary	21/02/2016	21/03/2026	Lancashire East Missional Partnership 2026-present

Maintenance of the Ministry (MoM) 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 the Pensions Executive.

Members:

Convenor: David Coote

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Convenor of the Ministries Committee: Mary Thomas

Deputy Treasurer: Vaughan Griffiths

Convenor of the Pensions Committee: Janet Tollington

In attendance:

Payroll Officer

Mary Steele

1. Over the past year we have undertaken our work in relation to the various sickness cases that come up over the year and those which involve longer term sickness and periods where ministers are unable to perform their duties. These are reviewed in line with the Plan for Partnership and with a great deal of sensitivity in the individual cases. We like other professions and workplaces, are still seeing the effect of the covid pandemic being related in sickness cases. We are grateful for the work of Mary Steele in the MoM office, who pays the stipends, monitors the sickness cases and brings to the attention of the committee when decision need to be made, organizes the medical and moderators report and deal with the correspondence.
2. We have also dealt with situations which fall outside the paramotors of what is allowed by the Plan for Partnership which are again dealt with as sensitively as possible. Since the last General Assembly with have consulted on the changes to the Plan of Partnership which came to that General Assembly and have tweaked them where it was felt further clarification was needed after the consultation.
3. There has also been a review and an updating of the expenses policy for non-stipendiary ministers. We have also agreed to attach a copy of the Terms of Settlement to the Plan for Partnership as we consider these should be owned by the denomination. We have also reviewed and updated the grant and loans that are available on a yearly basis. The Fixed Car allowance will also be added to this list, and various forms connected with these grants are being updated.
4. The stipend increase for this year was recommended based on the agreed formula which is based on CPI and Average Weekly Wage and this produced a recommendation for the increase of 4.3%. This recommendation was slightly above the rate of CPI at the time of calculation and also slightly higher than last year's recommendation and also CPI was lower at time of calculation last year.
5. Over the year there have been discussions concerning the possible coming together of the MoM sub-committee and the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) as one committee as there is overlap in the work they each undertake. The results of those discussion have resulted in the paper which has been brought to General Assembly this year.

6. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the committee for their giving of their time and for the sensitivity with which they have dealt with the cases over the last year.

Retired Ministers Housing Society (RMHS) sub-committee report

Be the point of liaison between Ministries and RMHS on behalf of the URC and tenants, ensuring that all eligible member are adequately housed and supported in retirement.

Convenor: Paul Whittle

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Members:

David Coote, Martin Camroux, David Lawrence, Don Nichols

1. The work of the RMHS Sub-Committee has been relatively easy during the past year, owing to the positive operational changes that have been taking place within the Society. The Sub-Committee has welcomed the new ways in which the Society has been operating and the fact that this has been reflected in improved services to and relationships with tenants. We are pleased that staffing levels are now close to where they should be and that governance has improved, in part by some restructuring of the working of the Board.
2. A particular benefit to tenants has been the change in the provider of emergency and out of hours repairs and the Sub-Committee has welcomed the significantly improved service this has achieved.
3. We retain our responsibility to bring practical matters of concern to the Board, but welcome the fact that action has been taken on a number of such issues raised by the Sub-Committee over the past few years.
4. We welcomed that the Board has been strengthened by some appointments from outside the URC of people with housing experience, including a new chair, and that the post of the Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Irmani Smallwood, has been made permanent.

Lay Preaching Advocates Network report

Be responsible for the advocacy of Assembly Accredited Lay Preaching and Locally Recognised Worship Leading within the United Reformed Church.

1. The Advocates for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALPs) and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders (LRWLs) has met once since the last General Assembly to reflect on current developments in lay ministry formation, accreditation and support across the United Reformed Church.
2. The advocates have reflected on the developing transition from a more formal committee structure within Ministries Committee to a network model of working. This change has been welcomed positively. The network approach allows advocates from across the Synods to share experience, resources, concerns and good practice more collaboratively and less procedurally than before. In a context

where lay ministry continues to develop in diverse ways across the Church, the network model was seen as encouraging flexibility, mutual support, shared learning and stronger communication between Synods.

3. The work this year has included:
 - a revised registration process for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALP) and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders (LRWL) has been introduced, including:
a new accessible electronic application form with clearer information regarding church membership and references and clearer expectations regarding accredited ministry;
 - a more streamlined approach to accreditation processes;
 - an emphasis on the importance of appropriate support and training for those involved in assessment, including the development of online training opportunities for assessors;
 - an emphasis on the importance of a 5 yearly refresher training for AALPs;

Several Synods reported encouraging growth in the number of LRWLs and those undertaking AALP training.

Ministries and Learning Forum report

The functions of the forum are to be a place of oversight and coordination for the technical, policy, governance and finance decisions and actions for the education/learning work undertaken by the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) on behalf of the General Assembly

Members:

Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)	
Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)	
Principal of Luther King Theological College:	Adam Scott
Principal of the Scottish College (Congregational and United Reformed):	John McNeill Scott
Principal of Westminster College:	Peter McEnhill
Children's Youth Development Officer:	John Stevenson
Training and Development Officer:	Lucy Cooke

1. The Ministries and Learning Forum has met three times since General Assembly to consider a wide range of matters relating to discipleship, lay learning, ministerial formation and continuing development across the life of the United Reformed Church (see the Faith in Action report for the remit and make-up of the committee). It has reflected on the growing commitment across the denomination to creating a more coherent and sustainable culture of lifelong learning.
2. The Forum identified three significant and interconnected streams of work which will continue to shape priorities over the coming period. These are to be denominationally designed but locally delivered:
 - the development of training and formation for Elders;

- the continuing development of the “You’re Welcome” ethos and history programme; and
- the strengthening of vocational discernment, formation and continuing development pathways across lay and ordained ministries.

3. *Elders*

The development of Elders’ training emerged as a significant priority. The Forum recognised that, whilst Elders hold a central leadership role within the conciliar life of the Church, provision for training and ongoing formation remains uneven across the denomination. Discussion therefore focused on developing more coherent and accessible learning pathways, including portfolio-based approaches and the use of online platforms.

Work will now begin on defining the required content, delivery methods, costs and overall framework, before bringing proposals to the two . It was suggested that the existing URC Learning Hub should form the foundation for this work, with resources developed in a familiar Stepwise-style format, for example ‘Faith Filled Eldership’, building on approaches already well recognised across the Church.

4. *You’re Welcome*

The URC’s “You’re Welcome,” an Introduction to the ethos and history of the URC course continues to play an important role in introducing Ministers of other denominations, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and others to the theology, polity and ethos of the URC. The Forum reflected positively on the increasingly interactive nature of the “You’re Welcome” course, particularly its movement away from purely information-based delivery towards a more reflective and participative model of learning.

The use of case studies drawn from real situations within the life of the Church was seen as especially valuable in helping participants engage not only with the structures and polity of the United Reformed Church, but also with the culture, ethos and patterns of conciliar discernment which shape its life. Discussion-based learning was recognised as enabling participants to wrestle with the practical realities of ministry, accountability, decision-making and relationships within the denomination in ways that are both grounded and formative.

At the same time, the Forum recognised the opportunities offered by developing additional video and digital learning resources. Such materials could provide accessible introductions to key themes within URC theology, history, polity and practice, whilst also supporting ongoing ministerial and lay formation. There was interest in exploring professionally produced resources that could be used flexibly within a range of contexts, including Education for Ministry pathways, Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher training, Elders’ development and wider discipleship programmes. The Forum recognised that high-quality digital resources could help strengthen consistency of learning across the denomination whilst remaining adaptable for local use and discussion.

5. *Vocation – New beginnings*

The Forum also recognised the growing importance of developing accessible resources around vocation and discernment for use within local churches. There was a shared awareness that conversations about calling are too often left until individuals have already reached formal candidating processes, rather than being nurtured naturally within the ordinary life of congregations. The development of denominationally rooted

vocation resources was therefore seen as an important way of helping churches become places where gifts can be recognised, explored and encouraged at an earlier stage. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that such resources are accessible, practical and usable within local contexts.

The intention is to equip ministers, Elders and congregations to engage confidently in conversations about discipleship, service and ministry in all its forms, including lay leadership, pioneering, accredited ministries and ordained ministry. By making vocational reflection more visible and approachable within the life of local churches, the Forum hopes to encourage a healthier culture of discernment in which individuals are supported to recognise both the breadth of ministry within the Church and the ways in which God may be calling them to serve.

6. *And Endings*

The Forum also reflected on the ongoing development of resources to support churches approaching closure or significant transition. It was recognised that many pastorates would benefit from accessible conversation starters and theological resources to assist them in discerning faithful endings and new possibilities for mission and ministry.

Paper C2

Sustainability of Stipendiary Ministry in the United Reformed Church

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	Discussion
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper argues that the sustainability of stipendiary ministry in the United Reformed Church is now a critical theological and strategic issue, not simply an organisational or financial one. Ministry of the Word and Sacraments lies at the heart of the Church's life, and the question facing the denomination is what a faithful and sustainable pattern of ministry should look like in the future.
Main points	The paper highlights that the URC currently has around 241 deployable stipendiary ministers serving approximately 1,200 churches – a ratio of around 1 minister to 5 churches – which places the Church at or beyond a significant “tipping point” of sustainability. While ministry continues, increasing strain is being carried through overwork, reliance on retired ministers and lay leadership, longer vacancies, and growing fragility within pastoral and sacramental life. Projected trends suggest a continuing decline in minister numbers over the next decade, with potentially around 128 deployable ministers remaining by 2035 unless substantial action is taken. Recruitment alone cannot reverse the short-term decline because ministerial formation takes time. In response, the paper proposes thinking not simply about numbers, but about a wider “ministerial formation ecology” in which ordained, commissioned and lay ministries are understood as interconnected and mutually sustaining. Ministers of Word and Sacraments, CRCWs, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Lay Pioneers, Elders and other

	forms of leadership are all seen as part of one coherent pattern of vocation, formation, accountability and service. The paper does not offer a single predetermined solution. Instead, it invites the whole Church into shared discernment around three key questions: • what the Church is actually trying to sustain; • what level of stipendiary ministry it is willing and able to support; • and what a faithful and sustainable ecology of ministry might look like by 2035. Its central argument is that the URC must move from reactive management of decline towards intentional, theologically grounded decision-making about the future shape of ministry and Church life.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Within the Reformed tradition, the ministry of the Word and Sacraments is not an optional feature of the Church's life but lies at its very heart. The Church is gathered, nourished and sent through the faithful proclamation of the Word, the right administration of the Sacraments, and the pastoral oversight of God's people. Ministers are called, formed, and set apart by the Church to serve the whole people of God, enabling the Church to remain rooted in Scripture, sustained in sacramental life, and ordered within its conciliar structures.
- 1.2 This ministry is exercised not in competition with the priesthood of all believers, but in service to it. Ministers equip, discern, and enable the gifts of the whole Church, holding together Word, Sacrament, pastoral care, and mission.
- 1.3 Questions about the sustainability of stipendiary ministry are not simply organisational or financial; they are theological questions about the ordering faithfulness and future shape of the Church's life.
- 1.4 This is a moment not simply to preserve inherited patterns but to discern what a faithful and sustainable pattern of ministry now requires.

2. Purpose of this Paper

- 2.1 This paper brings together a wider piece of work on the sustainability of stipendiary ministry and the development of a coherent framework for ministerial formation.
- 2.2 It is offered to the Church as an invitation to shared discernment at a critical moment in our common life.
- 2.3 It arises from a growing recognition that the sustainability of stipendiary ministry can no longer be assumed, and that the questions we now face are not simply about numbers or structures, but about the faithfulness, coherence and future shape of the Church's ministry.
- 2.4 The purpose of this paper is therefore threefold:
- it seeks to name, with honesty and clarity, the present reality in which we find ourselves, including the pressures, constraints and emerging risks within our current patterns of ministry;
 - it offers a theological and strategic framework within which those realities can be interpreted, moving the conversation beyond reaction towards discernment;
 - it invites the whole Church to engage in a shared process of decision-making about the future, recognising that no single council or committee can determine this alone.
- 2.5 This is not a paper that offers a single solution or predetermined outcome. Rather, it seeks to create the space in which the Church may ask the right questions, attend to the leading of the Spirit, and take responsibility together for the pattern of ministry it is seeking to sustain and embody in the years ahead.
- 2.6 At its heart, this is an act of stewardship. It is about how we care for those who are called to ministry, how we order our common life, and how we remain faithful to the gospel in a time of significant change.
- 2.7 At its heart lies a single question: **What would a faithful and sustainable ecology of ministry look like for the United Reformed Church in 2035 – and what must we begin to do now to move towards it?**

3. Present Position

- 3.1 At the time of writing (March 2026), the United Reformed Church has 241 deployable stipendiary Ministers of the Word and Sacraments across approximately 1,200 churches, excluding Synod Moderators and those serving in Assembly appointed roles.
- 3.2 This gives a ratio of 1 minister to approximately 5 churches, placing the Church already within what may be described as a high-risk zone.
- 3.3 At that level, the system does not immediately fail but it becomes increasingly fragile. Worship continues, structures remain in place, and ministry is still exercised. However, this apparent stability conceals a growing fragility.
- 3.4 The church is increasingly dependent upon:
- over-extension of stipendiary ministers;

- significant reliance on lay leadership;
- the availability of retired ministers;
- interim and vacancy arrangements;
- ecumenical sharing of ministry.

3.5 In such a context, sustainability is no longer primarily a question of whether ministry happens somewhere, but whether it can be offered in a way that is regular, pastoral, sacramental, safe formational, and resilient.

4. Sustainability Thresholds and the Tipping Point

4.1 Experience across the Church, supported by ecumenical comparison, suggests that sustainability in stipendiary ministry operates within identifiable thresholds.

4.2 At approximately **300 deployable ministers** (around 1:4 churches), the Church is broadly sustainable. Ministry can be exercised with resilience, reasonable geographical spread, and space for leadership, mission and pastoral depth.

4.3 At around **250 ministers**, the system becomes stretched but remains manageable. Signs of strain begin to emerge, particularly in vacancy length and geographical coverage, but the overall pattern remains coherent.

4.4 At approximately **240 ministers (1:5)**, the Church reaches a **tipping point**. At this level, the balance shifts from sustainability to managed strain. Expectations placed upon ministers begin to exceed what can be sustained in a healthy and consistent way. Ministry becomes increasingly reactive rather than intentional.

4.5 Beyond this point:

- at around **200 ministers (1:6)**, the Church experiences severe strain, with growing inconsistency in pastoral presence, sacramental provision and oversight;
- below **150 ministers (1:8)**, the Church enters structural fragility, where inherited patterns of ministry and pastorate organisation become increasingly difficult to sustain;
- at approximately **120 ministers (1:10)**, the system approaches critical failure without significant reconfiguration.

4.6 On this analysis, the United Reformed Church is now operating **at or just beyond the tipping point** where sustainability can no longer be assumed.

4.7 This does not mean that ministry ceases. Rather, it means that the cost of sustaining ministry becomes increasingly high: borne in overwork, inconsistency, diminished pastoral depth, and increasing reliance on contingency rather than design.

5. Projected Trajectory, Risk, Recruitment and Strategic Implications

5.1 Current patterns point to a significant decline in deployable ministers over the next decade: around 200 by 2028, below 150 by 2032, and approximately 128 by 2035. This indicates that the Church has already entered unsustainable territory, with acute strain expected within three years and structural risk within the decade. The length of ministerial formation means this short-term decline cannot be quickly reversed.

- 5.2 This challenge is not purely numerical. It is intensified by geography, uneven distribution, increasing complexity of ministry, longer vacancies, and pressures on wellbeing. The result is a gradual “thinning” of ministry, where organisational continuity may remain but depth of pastoral care, sacramental life, and missional leadership is diminished.
- 5.3 To maintain the current level of 241 deployable ministers, **113 new ministers** are required between 2026 and 2035 (**around 11–12 annually**). Allowing for a realistic completion rate, recruitment needs to exceed this baseline; however, current figures already fall short, and variability in training pathways adds further uncertainty.
- 5.4 Strategically, recruitment from 2026 onwards will not prevent decline before 2029. The Church must therefore manage short-term sustainability through retired ministers, lay leadership, flexible deployment, and prioritisation of core functions while addressing the longer-term scale and shape of ministry needed for the future.
- 6. So what is the answer? Ministerial Formation as an Ecology**
- 6.1 At the heart of the Church’s life lies not a set of disconnected pathways, but a shared participation in the call of God. To speak of a ministerial formation ecology is to name the conviction that all accredited ministries – Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Lay Pioneers and Elders – belong within a single, coherent pattern of discernment, formation and accountability.
- 6.2 Ecology is a deliberate and theological metaphor. It holds together ordained, commissioned and lay ministries; discernment, training and lifelong learning; and the life of local church, Synod and Assembly, as an interconnected whole. Formation is not a sequence of isolated stages, but a living system in which each part shapes and is shaped by the others. Its health is measured not simply by the functioning of individual elements, but by the coherence and vitality of the whole.
- 6.3 Such an ecology assumes interdependence, lifelong formation, and attentiveness to context. It resists mechanistic control, calling instead for careful nurture, wise stewardship and ongoing discernment. The question is not only whether ministers are formed, but whether the Church’s pattern of forming them is itself life-giving and sustainable.
- 6.4 This vision is grounded in a Reformed understanding of vocation: that calling is both inwardly discerned and outwardly recognised by the councils of the Church. Formation is therefore held corporately. The Church calls, forms, authorises and sustains those who minister in its name, within the shared life of this ecology.
- 6.5 What follows does not present a final model for the URC to follow as this is a whole Church issue. Rather, it offers a structured set of questions and a proposed process by which the denomination may discern a faithful and sustainable pattern of formation for the years ahead.
- 7. Questions for the Church**
- Question 1**
- What are we trying to sustain – numbers, or a faithful pattern of ministry?**

At the heart of this work lies a prior and more fundamental question: Are we seeking to sustain a number, or are we seeking to sustain a faithful pattern of ministry within the life of the Church?

It would be possible to approach the present situation as a problem of numerical deficit, to be addressed through increased recruitment into stipendiary ministry. Such an approach would naturally lead to a focus on pipelines, targets, and throughput. However, that in itself does not answer the deeper ecclesiological question.

The more searching question is whether the United Reformed Church is being called, in this season, not simply to maintain what has been, but to discern what a sustainable, theologically coherent and properly ordered pattern of ministry now looks like. That requires us to attend carefully to the relationship between Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Non-Stipendiary Ministers, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers, Elders, and the wider life of the local church.

This is not a question of abandoning stipendiary ministry, but of ensuring that it is held within a ministerial ecology that is faithful, resilient, and appropriately shaped for the context in which we now find ourselves.

Question 2

What level of stipendiary ministry is the Church willing and able to sustain?

The data set out in this paper makes clear that the present trajectory is not neutral. It requires the Church to exercise discernment and to make an intentional decision about what it is seeking to sustain by 2035.

Broadly, there are three possible directions of travel. The first is one of replacement, in which the Church seeks to hold the current number of deployable ministers at around 240. The second is stabilisation, involving modest growth towards approximately 260 ministers. The third is recovery, which would involve intentional and sustained growth towards 300 or more deployable ministers. Each of these pathways carries significant implications. There are clear financial consequences, particularly in relation to the Ministry and Mission Fund. There are implications for recruitment expectations, for the scale and nature of ministerial formation, and for the way in which deployment is understood and enacted. There are also, importantly, theological implications, touching on how the Church understands the nature of ministry, oversight, and presence.

Without clarity at this point, the Church risks remaining in a reactive posture, responding to pressures as they arise rather than shaping its life with intention and theological integrity.

Question 3

What would a faithful and sustainable ecology of ministry look like for the United Reformed Church in 2035 and what must we begin to do now to move towards it?

Even with renewed energy around recruitment and formation, the reality is that the number of deployable ministers will fall over the next three to five years. Formation takes time, and there is no immediate way of reversing that trend.

The question before us, therefore, is not only what the Church might look like in 2035, but how we are called to live faithfully, responsibly and pastorally in the meantime.

This will require more than incremental adjustment. It calls for a shared and deliberate approach across the whole Church. We will need to think carefully about the contribution of active retired ministers, be clearer about what we are asking of those currently serving in stipendiary ministry, and invest with renewed seriousness in lay leadership in all its forms.

It will also mean being more intentional about what we prioritise. The ministry of Word and Sacraments, the pastoral care of God's people, and the forming of disciples cannot become optional or squeezed to the margins. If anything, they need to be held more clearly at the centre.

Alongside this, we will need to face, with honesty, the fact that some of our inherited patterns of deployment and pastorate structure are becoming harder to sustain. That will require careful, and at times difficult, reconfiguration.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The United Reformed Church is not facing immediate collapse, but it has reached a critical threshold.
- 8.2 The issue is not simply how many ministers the Church will have, but what form of ministerial life will enable it to remain faithful.
- 8.3 At heart, this is not simply a question about capacity. It is a question about vocation. What kind of Church are we being called to be in the next five years – and how do we live that faithfully, not only in the decade ahead, but now?
- 8.4 This paper invites the Assembly to act with honesty, theological clarity and shared responsibility in shaping the next phase of the Church's life.

Paper C3

A Three-Year Review and Strategic Framework for Ministry (2026–2029)

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 19 Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee to conduct a review of learning and formation across all accredited ministries in the United Reformed Church in accordance with the outline in paper C3.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper proposes that the Ministries Committee undertake a three-year strategic review of learning and formation across all accredited ministries in the United Reformed Church, with the aim of bringing a coherent proposal to General Assembly by 2029. At its centre is the question: What would a coherent, faithful, and sustainable ecology of ministerial formation look like for the URC in 2035, and what must be done now to move towards it?
Main points	The paper argues that ministerial formation should be understood as a single interconnected “ecology” rather than a series of separate pathways. Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Lay Pioneers, and Elders are all part of one shared system of discernment, formation, accountability, and lifelong learning. Formation is described as relational, contextual, lifelong, and corporately held across the local church, Synod, and Assembly. The paper identifies several key areas for discernment: • the theological purpose of accredited ministry and the Church’s calling; • the nature and relationship of different ministries within a shared ecology;

	- standards and formation required for trusted ministry; - pathways for lifelong learning and development; - and the need for simplicity, sustainability, and possible structural change. Overall, the paper invites the Church into a process of theological discernment and strategic leadership about the future shape of ministerial formation in the URC.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to invite the Ministries Committee to initiate and shape a three-year review and strategic framework for learning and formation across the accredited ministries of the United Reformed Church, ordained, commissioned, and lay, so as to bring forward a coherent proposal to General Assembly.
- 1.2 At the heart of this work lies a single, guiding question: **What would a coherent, faithful, and sustainable ecology of ministerial formation look like for the United Reformed Church in 2035 – and what must we begin to do now to move towards it?**

2. Introduction

- 2.1 At the heart of the Church's life is not a set of pathways, but a shared participation in the call of God. The language of a ministerial formation ecology expresses the conviction that all accredited ministries, Ministers of Word and Sacraments (MWS), Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs), Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (AALPs), Lay Pioneers (AALPis), and Elders belong within a single, coherent pattern of discernment, formation, and accountability.
- 2.2 This language is not decorative. It is descriptive. It names a way of seeing the Church's life as relational, interconnected, and alive. Formation is not something that happens in parts, or is owned by particular institutions. It is held across the whole life of the Church: local, Synod, and Assembly; discernment, training, and lifelong learning.
- 2.3 Within such an ecology:
 - no ministry exists in isolation, but is sustained by, and contributes to, the others;
 - formation is lifelong, not confined to entry;
 - formation is contextual, shaped within real communities;

- discernment takes precedence over control;
- the question is not simply whether parts function, but whether the whole is life-giving and sustainable.

- 2.4 This reflects a deeply Reformed understanding of vocation: that calling is both inwardly discerned and outwardly recognised by the councils of the Church. Formation, therefore, is not owned by any one pathway or provider. It is held corporately. The Church calls, forms, authorises, and sustains those who minister in its name.
- 2.5 This paper does not seek to present a final model. Rather, it offers a disciplined framework for discernment, identifying the key areas in which the Church is asked to exercise theological judgement and strategic leadership.

3. Areas for Discernment

- 3.1 The questions set out below are not exhaustive. They are intended to focus the Church's attention on the key areas which will shape the future of ministerial formation.

3.2 Theological Purpose

What is God calling the United Reformed Church to be, and what place does accredited ministry hold within that calling?

- 3.2.1 Before structures are considered, the Church is invited to attend to its theological intent. This includes reflecting on the nature of the Church's calling in this present moment, and the relationship between accredited ministry and the ministry of the whole people of God.
- 3.2.2 It requires clarity about what must be held as constitutive of our identity particularly in relation to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Work and where change may be required, not as a concession to circumstance, but as an act of faithfulness.
- 3.2.3 Underlying this is a necessary question: *Are we shaping formation around what we have been, or around what we believe God is calling us to become?*

3.3 The Nature and Shape of Ministry

What are we forming people for and how do the Church's ministries relate to one another within a single ecology?

- 3.3.1 Clarity about formation depends upon clarity about ministry itself. The Church is invited to consider what it expects of Ministers of Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, and Assembly Accredited Lay Ministries, not only at the point of entry, but over time.
- 3.3.2 This includes giving attention to the distinctiveness of each ministry, while also ensuring that each is located within a shared and coherent pattern of service.
- 3.3.3 Particular care is required in articulating the relationship between role and office: between what a person does and the nature of the trust they hold within the councils of the Church.

3.4 Standards and Formation

What does it mean to be formed well enough to be entrusted with ministry in the name of the Church?

- 3.4.1 This question lies at the heart of the Church's responsibility. Authorisation to ministry is not simply a matter of capability but of trust.

- 3.4.2 The Church is invited to consider what must be held in common across all accredited ministries: theological grounding, engagement with Scripture, formation for conciliar life, safeguarding, ethical practice, and reflective discipline.
- 3.4.3 Within this, the relationship between stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry must be addressed with care. Any move towards proportionate formation must not lead to diminished formation.
- 3.4.4 The question to be held is a simple but searching one: *How do we ensure that all who are authorised for ministry are formed well enough to be trusted with it?*

3.5 Pathways and Lifelong Formation

What pattern of formation will sustain ministry over time?

- 3.5.1 Formation does not end at ordination, commissioning, or accreditation. The Church is invited to consider the coherence of the whole pattern of formation, from discernment through Education for Ministry phases 1,2 and 3 (EM1, EM2, EM3). And whilst this applies to MWS and CRCWs, what should we have in place for AALPs, AALPis and Elders?
- 3.5.2 This includes reviewing the current structure of pathways, identifying areas of duplication or gap, and considering whether more flexible or staged approaches might better serve the diversity of ministries.
- 3.5.3 It also requires attention to the integration of ongoing learning, ensuring that ministers are formed not only for entry into ministry, but for sustainability, resilience, and growth over time.

3.6 Simplicity, Sustainability, and Change

What must we reshape, simplify, or let go of in order to sustain a faithful pattern of formation?

- 3.6.1 This work calls for honesty as well as imagination. Not all that is currently held can or should be sustained.
- 3.6.2 The Church is invited to consider which structures or practices are maintained by conviction, and which by habit; where simplification may strengthen formation; and what risks the Church is prepared to take in order to remain faithful.
- 3.6.3 A final question may be held alongside this work: *If we were designing formation from first principles today, what would we do differently?*

4. Structure of the Three-Year Review

- 4.1 It is proposed that this work be undertaken over three years, allowing for careful discernment, consultation, and development.
- 4.2 **Year 1: Listening and Theological Grounding (2026–2027)**
This phase will map current provision, gather evidence from across the Church, and articulate a theological framework for formation. It will include engagement with Synods, Resource Centres for Learning, and those currently in formation and ministry.
- 4.3 **Year 2: Design and Development (2027–2028)**
Building on this work, a coherent framework will be developed, identifying shared core formation and differentiated pathways. This will include proposals relating to validation, delivery structures, and the integration of EM1, EM2, and EM3.

4.4 **Year 3: Implementation and Proposal (2028–2029)**

Detailed proposals will be brought to General Assembly, including structures, pathways, and financial implications, together with recommendations for implementation.

Paper C4

Revised Active Ministers Policy – Fitness to Practise

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 20 General Assembly adopts the revised <i>Active Ministers Policy – Fitness to Practise</i> and directs its implementation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This policy establishes a coherent and theologically grounded framework for the recognition, authorisation and accountability of <i>active ministers</i> of the Word and Sacraments, and Church Related Community Workers, within the URC. It responds to the practical and pastoral need for authorised ministry across the Church, particularly in times of vacancy, transition or increased demand, ensuring that worship, sacramental life and pastoral care are exercised with confidence, consistency and proper oversight.
Main points	It clarifies what it means to hold active status, simplifying categories to support consistency across the Church, and affirms that all active ministers remain under the oversight of the councils of the Church. Rooted in the Reformed understanding that Call is both inwardly discerned and outwardly confirmed, the policy emphasises that authorisation is ongoing, supported by continuing formation, regular review, and annual confirmation of ministerial status. The policy places accountability at its heart, presenting it as a safeguard for both ministers and those they serve. It defines Fitness to Practise as a continuing, relational discernment, supported through supervision, development and early pastoral intervention where needed. Clear expectations are set for active ministers in relation to conduct, safeguarding, participation in conciliar life, and ongoing development. Provision is also made for retired ministers who continue in authorised ministry. Safeguarding

	responsibilities and the Church's commitment to ministerial wellbeing are embedded throughout. Overall, the policy seeks to uphold the integrity and good order of ministry while enabling ministers to serve faithfully and sustainably within the life of the Church.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H5 Active Ministers Policy 2021
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy exists so that the United Reformed Church can respond faithfully, wisely, and pastorally to the needs of its people and communities. Across the United Reformed Church there are times of vacancy, transition, illness, and increased local demand when congregations require the support of authorised ministers who can lead worship, celebrate the Sacraments, conduct weddings and funerals, and offer trusted pastoral care. This policy therefore provides a clear framework for authorisation, accountability, safeguarding and oversight so that such ministry may be exercised with confidence, consistency and proper support.
- 1.2 It also clarifies what it means for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers to hold active status within the United Reformed Church. It describes how good standing is expressed, how accountability is exercised within our conciliar life, and the responsibilities that accompany recognised office-holding ministry.
- 1.3 This policy is intended not only as a regulatory measure, but as a pastoral safeguard promoting the wellbeing of ministers and CRCWs and those among whom they serve.

Failure to adhere to its requirements may result in disciplinary, capability, safeguarding or other formal processes being initiated.

2. Definition of “Active Minister”

- 2.1 Active ministers are Ministers of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Workers serving in a ministry, appointment, placement, or pastoral role authorised by Synod or Assembly.
- 2.2 General Assembly 2021 Paper H4 defined nine categories, from pastorate ministry to the leading of public worship.

- 2.3 A retired minister may hold active status where authorised to exercise ministry within the life of the Church.
- 2.4 Active ministers remain under the pastoral care and oversight of the Councils of the Church appropriate to their ministry context.

3. Categories of Active Minister

- 3.1 General Assembly 2021 Paper H4 defined active ministers as being in one of nine categories as in the table. However, these categories have caused confusion for Synods in determining whether a minister is active or not.
- 3.2 The following table is considered more appropriate and is offered as a guide to assist discernment and consistency of practice across the Church:

Category	Former Category	Definition
1	1, 3, 4	Stipendiary minister
2	2	Non-stipendiary service in a recognised ministry post
3	5-9	exercising an occasional ministry providing recognised voluntary service on behalf of the URC at the invitation of the councils of the Church: Interim Moderator; serving on a Synod or GA committee; representing the URC on an external body; leading worship, including weddings and funerals. This list is not exhaustive.

4. Ministerial Accountability

- 4.1 Ministers are in a position of trust. They are entrusted with people's stories, vulnerabilities and spiritual wellbeing, and they represent the Church's witness in the world. Accountability ensures that this trust is honoured with integrity, transparency and responsibility. It protects congregations, upholds the credibility of the Church's ministry, and provides ministers themselves with a clear framework within which they can serve faithfully, confidently and safely.
- 4.2 Ministerial accountability within the URC is rooted in our Reformed understanding of Church governance and the priesthood of all believers. The Church recognises that, while ministers hold particular offices and responsibilities, they remain accountable to God through the community of faith in the councils of the Church. This theological principle shapes every aspect of how accountability is structured and exercised within the denomination.
- 4.3 The Basis of Union emphasises that ministry is a calling that comes with both privileges and responsibilities. Ministers are servants of the Church, called to specific tasks of preaching, teaching, pastoral care, and leadership, and CRCWs

are called to the specific task of community development as an outreach and mission of the Church, but always within the context of mutual accountability and shared responsibility with the wider Christian community.

- 4.4 Such accountability reflects the denomination's commitment to both pastoral care and professional standards. The multi-layered structure of accountability, operating through the councils of the Church (from local church through Synod to General Assembly), provides comprehensive oversight while maintaining the flexibility needed to address diverse ministerial contexts
- 4.5 The emphasis on shared responsibility, funded support through pastoral supervision, mandated training, ongoing development and, where necessary, additional support, creates an accountability framework that serves both ministers and the churches they serve.

5. Ministerial Authorisation

- 5.1 Ministerial authorisation is the means by which the Church discerns and affirms God's calling of individuals to ministerial service, ensuring that such service is exercised with proper authority, accountability and support within the life of the Church.
- 5.2 It is fundamentally grounded in the Reformed principle that an inner sense of calling must be confirmed by external discernment, namely the councils of the Church. The principle of concurrence to Call is an essential part of this process.
- 5.3 Once authorised, ministers are entered onto the Roll of Ministers or CRCWs upon ordination or commissioning. Ministers are categorised according to this Policy (Section 3 above), which defines different categories of ministerial standing and responsibility.
- 5.4 Authorisation in the URC is not a one-time event but an ongoing process. Following ordination or commissioning, ministers enter Education for Ministry Phase 2 (EM2), a post-ordination/commissioning period lasting typically three years. This ensures continued development and accountability in ministerial practice. Following this, ministers enter Education for Ministry Phase 3 (EM3) where ministers are expected to engage in on-going professional development of their skills.
- 5.5 The authorisation is a sign of the Church's continuing trust in the minister and recognition of their good standing within the denomination.
- 5.6 To this end, the Ministries Office shall write to each minister on its Roll on an annual basis to confirm whether they hold active status or not.
- 5.7 Responsibility for responding to this contact will rest with the minister, and the ministerial records and database will be updated accordingly. This is one demonstrable way of ensuring accountability.
- 5.8 Synods shall be informed annually of those recognised as active ministers.
- 5.9 Where a minister fails to respond to reasonable and repeated correspondence concerning their engagement in ministry, this will be treated as a matter of

accountability. The appropriate council of the Church may proceed to review the minister's status and, in the absence of sufficient engagement, may determine whether the minister should be regarded as active, inactive, or subject to further process in accordance with the discipline of the Church.

6. Fitness to Practise

- 6.1 The question of Fitness to Practise in the Church cannot be reduced to a single test or moment. It is a continuing, relational and accountable discernment, held within the Church's theological convictions about vocation, grace, responsibility and the care of God's people.
- 6.2 At its heart, Fitness to Practise flows from the Church's understanding of ministry as a gift and a trust. Ordination (or commissioning) affirms a calling, but it does not remove the need for ongoing discernment to establish whether a minister is currently able to exercise ministry safely, faithfully and fruitfully.
- 6.3 It arises from the Church's understanding of ministry as a gift and a trust. Therefore, it is important that the Church is explicit about what is expected of those who minister in its name.
- 6.4 Fitness to Practise includes:
 - theological competence and faithfulness to the Church's doctrine;
 - appropriate pastoral boundaries;
 - safeguarding compliance;
 - emotional maturity and self-awareness;
 - capacity for collaboration, accountability and participation in conciliar life;
 - ethical conduct, including honesty and transparency;
 - willingness to engage in learning, supervision and review.
- 6.5 Fitness to Practise must be assessed against clear and explicit expectations.
- 6.6 The Church discerns it over time through:
 - initial and ongoing ministerial formation;
 - structured continuing professional development;
 - regular reflective review (e.g. ministerial reviews, appraisal (Local Mission and Ministry Review), or pastoral supervision);
 - opportunities for feedback from peers, councils and those served;
 - a pattern of reflective practice that is itself a key indicator of fitness.
- 6.7 Where questions arise about Fitness to Practise, the Church should distinguish carefully between:
 - support needs (e.g. burnout, skill gaps, health issues);
 - capability issues (where competence or capacity is temporarily or persistently impaired);
 - conduct or safeguarding concerns (which may require formal procedures).
- 6.8 Fitness to Practise processes work best when early pastoral intervention is normalised, rather than waiting until matters escalate into a disciplinary matter.
- 6.9 Early pastoral intervention is always preferable to delayed formal action.

- 6.10 Any formal finding affecting Fitness to Practise must be proportionate, evidence-based, transparent and subject to review or appeal.
- 6.11 The purpose of such discernment is restoration, good order and appropriate support wherever possible. Sometimes this will mean adjustment, retraining, or a time-limited pause in ministry; occasionally it will mean concluding that a particular role can no longer be exercised.

7. Responsibilities and expected standards of Active Ministers

7.1 Active ministers are expected to:

- **Live out their Call:** preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, offering pastoral care, engaging in community development and leading in ways that reflect Christ's love. They only do this in posts and roles authorised by the Church.
- **Keep the vows** they make at ordination/commissioning and subsequent inductions and uphold the various expectations the Church places upon them.
- **Safeguard the Vulnerable**, complying with Church safeguarding policies and statutory requirements, undertaking regular training, and acting promptly on concerns.
- **Maintain Professional Boundaries**, treating all with dignity and respect, and avoiding conduct that may cause harm or bring the URC into disrepute.
- **Commit to Ongoing Formation** through theological reflection, ministerial education, spiritual practice, and professional development.
- **Recognising the mutual accountability of Reformed ministry**, they demonstrably participate in our conciliar structures, which provides the ministry of oversight by engaging positively with local church, Synod and Assembly policies, systems, and training such as ministerial reviews, support networks, safeguarding protocols, mandated training, pastoral supervision, and interconnected responsibilities and obligations.
- **Attend to Wellbeing**, caring for their own health and spiritual life so that they can sustain long-term ministry.

7.2 See the Ministries Policy on Expected standards.

8. Retired Ministers Holding Active status

- 8.1 Ordination and commissioning are lifelong. Retirement alters responsibility but not ministerial identity.
- 8.2 A retired minister may exercise ministry only where authorised by the Church.
- 8.3 Such ministry remains subject to safeguarding, accountability and oversight.
- 8.4 It is normally good practice for ministers to take a period of 6–12 months away from active ministry at retirement. During this time they remain with the designation of active.

9. Safeguarding

- 9.1 Safeguarding is a sacred trust and a legal responsibility. The URC is committed to safeguarding in every area of its life and ministry. Safeguarding is the action taken to promote and protect the wellbeing and human rights of individuals. This means we will:

- Do all we can to create and maintain a safe and caring environment for all people;
- Respond promptly and effectively to any form of abuse and neglect, including reporting abuse to statutory agencies as necessary;
- Seek to prevent abuse in any form from occurring (See *Good Practice 6*).

9.2 Active ministers, therefore, must

- hold the appropriate current safeguarding clearance (e.g. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)/Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check) and follow URC safeguarding procedures;
- not minister without their safeguarding training being up to date;
- and any breach of safeguarding responsibility shall be addressed through agreed safeguarding and disciplinary processes.

9.3 All active retired ministers will be required to undertake a shortened training course in line with the Safeguarding Training Matrix, equating to one half day on the topics of attitudes and values and grooming.

10. Support and Care

- 10.1 The Church recognises that ministry can be both rewarding and demanding. Therefore, the Church, whether through the local pastorate, the Synod or the Offices of General Assembly, commits to providing pastoral support; and by encouraging regular rest, retreat, pastoral supervision and sabbatical opportunities, and considering ministerial wellbeing in deployment, workload, and role expectations.

Paper C5

Inactive Ministers Policy

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 21 General Assembly adopts the Inactive Ministers Policy and directs its implementation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This policy provides a clear framework for recognising and overseeing ministers who remain on the Roll of Ministers but are not currently authorised to exercise ministry on behalf of the United Reformed Church. It exists to protect the peace, unity and good order of the United Reformed Church by distinguishing clearly between ordination or commissioning, which is lifelong, and current authorisation to minister, which depends on present accountability, safeguarding and recognised context.
Main points	The policy affirms that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers hold office as persons in a position of trust. They must not present themselves as exercising ministry on behalf of the United Reformed Church, or undertake ministerial functions, unless duly authorised by the councils of the Church. Inactive status therefore provides an ordered and recognised category for those who remain ordained or commissioned, but who are not currently authorised, appointed or permitted to exercise public or representative ministry. It makes clear that inactive status is not in itself disciplinary and should not be confused with suspension, incapacity or misconduct. It recognises that inactive status may arise for a wide variety of reasons, including retirement, ill health, caring responsibilities, relocation, vocational transition or voluntary withdrawal from active ministry. At the same time, it establishes that unauthorised exercise of ministry by an

	inactive minister is a serious matter affecting the Church's discipline and good order. The policy sets out how inactive status is determined, recorded and reviewed, and confirms that ministers who are inactive remain within the pastoral care, oversight and discipline of the Church. It also provides a pathway for return to active ministry, making clear that such return is not automatic but requires formal discernment, appropriate safeguarding, confirmation of good standing, and readiness to resume authorised ministry. It should be read alongside the Active Ministers Policy.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators URC Legal Adviser

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy exists so that the United Reformed Church can respond faithfully, wisely, and pastorally to the needs of its people and communities. Across the United Reformed Church there are times of vacancy, transition, illness, and increased local demand when congregations require the support of authorised ministers who can lead worship, celebrate the sacraments, conduct funerals, and offer trusted pastoral care.
- 1.2 Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, and Church Related Community Workers, hold office as persons in a position of trust, recognised and authorised by the Church to exercise ministry on its behalf. This trust carries both privilege and responsibility, requiring integrity, accountability, and clarity in how ministry is represented. Accordingly, individuals should not present themselves as ministers of the United Reformed Church, nor undertake functions associated with that office, unless they are duly authorised to do so by the councils of the Church.
- 1.3 This policy sets out how the United Reformed Church recognises, records and oversees ministers who remain on the Roll of Ministers but are not currently authorised to exercise ministry on behalf of the Church.
- 1.4 It exists to provide clarity concerning ministerial standing where a Minister of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker is not holding active status, while ensuring that vocation, accountability and pastoral care remain properly held within the life of the Church.

1.5 The policy protects the peace, unity and good order of the Church by distinguishing clearly between ordained or commissioned status and current authorisation to exercise ministry.

1.6 Inactive status is a recognised ministerial category within the Church's ordered life. It is not intended to imply misconduct, incapacity or failure.

2. Definition of Inactive Ministry

2.1 Inactive ministry is a formally recognised status in which a minister remains ordained or commissioned and on the Roll of Ministers, but is not currently authorised, appointed or permitted to exercise ministerial functions publicly or representatively on behalf of the Church.

2.2 A minister holding inactive status:

- remains ordained or commissioned within the United Reformed Church;
- retains ministerial standing unless removed from the Roll;
- does not hold an authorised appointment, pastorate, placement or recognised ministerial role;
- may not preach, preside at the Sacraments, lead public worship, exercise pastoral leadership, conduct funerals, or in Scotland solemnise a marriage, or undertake representative ministry unless expressly authorised.

2.3 For the avoidance of doubt, the frequency with which ministry is exercised does not remove the requirement for authorisation. Ministers who preach or otherwise exercise any ministerial function, whether regularly or on an occasional basis (including fewer than four occasions within a calendar year), do so as persons in a recognised position of trust. Accordingly, they must hold the appropriate authorisation, including a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)/Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check where required, prior to undertaking such ministry.

2.4 Where a minister does not hold such authorisation, they shall be regarded as holding inactive status and may not exercise ministerial functions. Ministers who wish to resume or undertake such ministry must request designation as active in accordance with the Active Ministers Policy.

2.5 Inactive status must be distinguished from:

- active ministry;
- retirement with active authorisation;
- suspension under the disciplinary process;
- limited authorisation granted for specific purposes.

2.6 Inactive status reflects the Church's understanding that vocation remains lifelong, while the exercise of ministry requires present authorisation, accountability and recognised context.

3. Circumstances in which Inactive Status may apply

3.1 A minister may hold inactive status for a variety of reasons including:

- retirement without active authorisation;
- voluntary withdrawal from active ministry;
- health or wellbeing considerations;
- caring responsibilities;

- vocational discernment or transition;
- relocation;
- absence from authorised service;
- other circumstances agreed by the Church.

3.2 Inactive status may be entered voluntarily by request of the minister or by formal determination of the Church through its proper councils.

3.3 Inactive status shall not be used as an informal substitute for capability, incapacity or disciplinary procedures where those processes are more appropriate.

4. Authority for determining Inactive Status

4.1 Inactive status shall be determined by the Accreditations Sub-Committee acting on behalf of the Ministries Committee, following appropriate recommendation and notification.

4.2 A recommendation may arise from:

- written notice from the minister;
- Synod Moderator;
- Synod Pastoral Committee;
- relevant denominational office or process.

4.3 The effective date of inactive status shall be formally recorded on the database.

4.4 The minister shall receive written confirmation of:

- status;
- date of commencement;
- any review arrangements;
- any restrictions applying.

5. Restrictions applying to Inactive Ministers

5.1 A minister holding inactive status may not exercise public ministry unless specifically authorised.

5.2 This includes:

- preaching;
- presiding at the Sacraments;
- conducting baptisms, weddings or funerals;
- exercising recognised pastoral leadership;
- representing the Church ministerially in formal settings.

5.3 Any limited permission granted by the Synod must be explicit, time-defined and formally recorded.

5.4 Unauthorised exercise of ministry by an inactive minister constitutes a disciplinary matter affecting the peace and good order of the Church.

6. Accountability and Continuing Relationship with the Church

6.1 Ministers holding inactive status remain within the discipline and pastoral oversight of the Church.

- 6.2 They remain subject to:
- safeguarding expectations where relevant;
 - standards of conduct;
 - denominational discipline;
 - obligations arising from ministerial standing.
- 6.3 Ministers who are inactive shall maintain connection with the Church through:
- membership in a United Reformed Church congregation; or
 - inclusion on the Isolated Members Roll where appropriate.
- 6.4 Such connection sustains accountability within the covenant life of the Church.
- 6.5 The absence of any meaningful connection with the United Reformed Church may result in the removal from the Roll, or a determination that the minister is no longer considered to be in good standing with the denomination. It is recognised that, for some ministers, regular attendance within a local United Reformed Church may not be possible because of the nature of their personal circumstances. In such cases, membership should ordinarily be held within a wider fold church, details of which may be found at the Synod Office.

7. Annual Review of Inactive Status

- 7.1 The Ministries Office shall contact ministers holding inactive status annually.
- 7.2 This annual review shall confirm:
- continued inactive status;
 - contact details;
 - membership connection;
 - whether return to active ministry is being considered;
 - whether continued inclusion on the Roll remains appropriate.
- 7.3 Synods shall be informed of ministers within their pastoral area holding inactive status.
- 7.4 The denominational database shall be maintained accordingly.

8. Pastoral Care of Inactive Ministers

- 8.1 The Church recognises that periods of inactivity may arise through complex personal, vocational or pastoral circumstances.
- 8.2 Synods shall therefore ensure that reasonable pastoral contact is maintained.
- 8.3 Such care should respect privacy, dignity and proper boundaries.
- 8.4 Pastoral care does not in itself imply active authorisation.

9. Return to Active Ministry

- 9.1 Return to active ministry is not automatic and requires formal discernment.
- 9.2 A minister seeking return shall contact:
- the Synod Moderator; and
 - the Ministries Office.

- 9.3 Before return can be considered, the following must be confirmed:
- good standing;
 - safeguarding clearance;
 - current training requirements;
 - Fitness to Practise;
 - readiness for authorised ministry.
- 9.4 Additional formation, supervised re-entry, mentoring or refresher learning may be required.
- 9.5 Recommendation for return shall normally be made by the Synod and confirmed through the Accreditations Sub-Committee.
- 9.6 Active status begins only when formal authorisation has been given and recorded.
- 10. Relationship with Other Policies**
- 10.1 This policy shall be read alongside:
- Active Ministers/Fitness to Practise Policy
 - Ministerial Capability Process
 - Discipline Process
- 10.2 Where concerns arise involving health, conduct, safeguarding or capability, the relevant specialist process shall take precedence.

Paper C6

Review of the Minister's Retirement Policy

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 22 General Assembly affirms that: a. the normal retirement age of 68 for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers remains an appropriate and proportionate policy within the present life of the United Reformed Church; b. the existing Procedure for Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the normal retirement age remains the proper and sufficient mechanism for discerning continued stipendiary ministry beyond 68; c. requests Ministries Committee: i. to keep under review the pastoral and practical support offered to ministers approaching retirement, including matters relating to wellbeing, deployment and transition into later forms of ministry; ii. to further consider the relationship between the normal retirement age and fixed-term appointments with a report to Assembly Executive 2027.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper presents the outcome of the review of the United Reformed Church's retirement policy for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. It concludes that the current policy, including a normal retirement

	age (NRA) of 68, remains appropriate, proportionate, and necessary within the URC's present context.
Main points	The paper affirms that ministry is a vocation held within the life of the whole Church and exercised in seasons. Retirement is therefore understood not as the end of calling, but as the completion of one form of recognised responsibility, enabling space for new ministries to emerge. A defined retirement age reflects the Church's commitment to mutual discernment, shared accountability, and the orderly life of the Body of Christ. Strategically and pastorally, the NRA of 68 continues to serve several essential purposes: it provides clarity and dignity in transition; supports intergenerational fairness; enables effective deployment and succession planning; protects ministerial wellbeing; and reduces the likelihood of difficult capability or fitness-to-practice disputes at a local level. In a context of declining stipendiary numbers and increasing complexity of ministry, such clarity is increasingly important. Financially, predictable retirement patterns remain one of the few stable elements in an otherwise uncertain environment. The sustainability of stipendiary ministry, supported by the Ministry and Mission Fund, depends in part on the ability to forecast vacancies and plan responsibly. Removing or altering the retirement age would introduce significant uncertainty at a time when careful stewardship is required. Evidence from the 2026 consultation indicates broad support for retaining a clear and transparent retirement framework, with 68 continuing to function effectively as the normal point of transition. Ministers particularly value the pastoral permission this provides to retire without guilt, alongside the flexibility offered by the existing extension procedure for those able and called to continue. The paper therefore recommends retaining the current policy, including the NRA of 68 and the established process for extension beyond that age. It also identifies the need for ongoing attention to the support offered to ministers approaching retirement, and for further work on the relationship between retirement age and fixed-term appointments.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H4 GA 2025 Review of the URC Retirement Policy
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators 255 URC ministers aged 55 and over

Summary of impact

Financial	None

External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Every minister knows that Call has its seasons. There is a time to begin, a time to serve with energy and faithfulness, and a time to lay down primary responsibility so that others may take it up. Within the United Reformed Church, retirement policy is therefore not merely administrative. It belongs within our understanding of vocation, stewardship, mutual accountability and the ordered life of the Church.
 - 1.2 At General Assembly 2024, Ministries Committee undertook to review the present retirement policy for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers in order to consider whether its purposes remain justified in the denomination's present circumstances. That review has taken place against a background of declining stipendiary numbers, increasing pastoral complexity, pressure on Ministry and Mission receipts, and continuing questions about how the Church best sustains ministry in a period of significant change.
 - 1.3 Retirement sits within the rhythm of the Christian life, a rhythm of letting go and making room for God's new work. The Bible teaches that seasons change, but the faithfulness of God endures. Just as ministers promise to serve "for as long as God gives strength and grace," so the Church promises to support them in both their serving and their ceasing. Holding a normal retirement age expresses our belief that ministry is not possession but participation; not an entitlement but a gift. To step aside is not to cease to serve, but to trust that the Spirit continues to call others as once we were called.
 - 1.4 At present, ministers are expected normally to retire on or before the final day of the month in which they reach the age of 68. Those who believe there are good grounds to continue in stipendiary service beyond that point may apply through the established extension procedure, under which continuation is considered case by case and subject to review.
 - 1.5 It has already been acknowledged that holding together a normal retirement age and fixed-term appointments may give rise to some tension. This is not resolved here and will need to be revisited in a further paper to be brought to the Assembly Executive in due course.
 - 1.6 This paper concludes that the present policy remains both wise and proportionate. The normal retirement age of 68 continues to serve clear theological, pastoral, strategic and financial purposes, while the extension procedure provides sufficient flexibility where continuation is genuinely justified.
- ## 2. A theology of call, season and mutual discernment
- 2.1 The United Reformed Church understands Call not as a private possession but as a gift discerned and sustained within the life of the whole Church. Ministers are called by God, recognised by the Church, and sustained in ministry through mutual covenant with pastorates, Synods and the wider councils of the denomination.

- 2.2 Because Call is held in common, the conclusion of stipendiary office must also belong within shared discernment. Retirement therefore reflects not the ending of vocation, but the completion of one form of recognised responsibility within the wider life of the Church.
- 2.3 A normal retirement age honours this mutuality by ensuring that continuation in office does not depend solely upon individual desire, local attachment, or immediate pastoral convenience, but remains accountable to the wider discernment of the denomination.
- 2.4 Without a defined point of retirement, ministers may feel obliged to continue beyond healthy limits because of local dependence, pastoral loyalty, or anxiety about leaving congregations unsupported. Equally, congregations and Synods may struggle to voice the need for transition where longstanding relationships make such conversations difficult.
- 2.5 The normal retirement age therefore provides a gracious and dignified point of transition, allowing both minister and church to mark the ending of one phase of service with thanksgiving rather than uncertainty or tension.

3. The legitimate strategic objectives of a normal retirement age

- 3.1 The United Reformed Church has long recognised that the normal retirement age is not arbitrary. It exists because it serves clear and legitimate denominational objectives which remain necessary today:
- 3.2 These objectives include:
- intergenerational fairness;
 - responsible deployment of ministers;
 - financial stewardship;
 - protection of ministerial wellbeing;
 - orderly succession;
 - avoidance of avoidable capability disputes.
- 3.3 **Intergenerational fairness**
A clearly defined retirement age promotes fairness between generations by ensuring that opportunities remain open for those newly entering ministry. In a denomination where the number of deployable stipendiary posts is finite, unrestricted continuation beyond retirement age would inevitably reduce opportunities for younger ministers, delay first settlements, and narrow pathways for future vocations.
- 3.4 The Church's responsibility is not only to those currently serving but also to those whom God is calling now and in years to come. A normal retirement age helps maintain that balance by ensuring that established ministries do not unintentionally prevent emerging ministries from flourishing.
- 3.5 **Dignity and avoidance of disputed capacity**
A fixed retirement point protects dignity. It reduces the likelihood that questions of effectiveness, stamina, resilience or suitability become personalised disputes between the minister, pastorate and the Synod.

- 3.6 Without a retirement age, increasing numbers of situations would depend upon difficult local judgements about whether ministry should continue, potentially requiring greater recourse to capability procedures, pastoral tensions, or withdrawal-of-call processes.
- 3.7 A normal retirement age therefore avoids many situations in which local churches would otherwise carry burdensome responsibility for judging whether transition is needed.
- 3.8 **Responsible deployment**
The denomination depends upon predictable patterns of retirement in order to manage deployment.
- 3.9 Known retirement dates enable:
- Synod deployment planning;
 - vacancy forecasting;
 - pastoral reorganisation;
 - first settlement planning;
 - matching ministerial supply with realistic pastoral need.
- 3.10 Removing the retirement age would significantly weaken long-term deployment planning because future vacancies would become increasingly uncertain.
4. **Financial Stewardship and Sustainability**
- 4.1 Financial stewardship also requires predictability. At present, Ministry and Mission receipts support approximately 290 stipendiary ministers, while the denomination currently sustains 272 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers. Alongside this, students completing training and Certificate of Eligibility ministers awaiting settlement must also be considered within forward planning.
- 4.2 The projected pattern of retirements over the next decade remains one of the few stable indicators available to the Church in forecasting future stipendiary capacity. While Ministry and Mission giving remains uncertain and Synods have increasingly contributed to sustaining present levels of ministry, retirement dates provide an essential framework for realistic planning. Removing that predictability would weaken already fragile financial forecasting.
- 4.3 There is also pastoral wisdom here. Ministry carries sustained spiritual, emotional, relational and practical weight over many years. For many ministers, the later years of ministry are exercised in enlarged pastorates, increased administrative complexity, and reduced local capacity. A normal retirement age gives ministers permission to prepare intentionally for transition and protects against the pressure to continue simply because need remains great.
- 4.4 The current financial position illustrates this clearly. At present the denomination can sustain approximately 290 stipendiary ministers through Mission and Ministry receipts, while currently supporting 272 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs. Alongside this, four students are completing training and thirteen Certificate of Eligibility ministers remain to be settled. Future sustainability depends heavily upon predictable retirement patterns.

4.5 Projected retirements demonstrate why this clarity matters:

Year	Number of retirements	Stipendiary Students Leaving RCLs	Number of Certificate of Eligibility ministers
2026	15	4	6
2027	10	5	
2028	16	3	6
2029	16	5	
2030	7	-	6
2031	15	-	
2032	15	-	6
2033	10	-	
2034	6	-	6
2035	3	-	

4.6 Mission and Ministry income remains uncertain and has increasingly required Synod subsidy. That pattern is not sustainable indefinitely.

4.7 A defined retirement age therefore remains essential because it gives the denomination one necessary point of predictability within otherwise uncertain financial conditions.

4.8 Removing the normal retirement age would not remove financial pressure; it would increase planning uncertainty at a time when predictability is especially needed.

5. Ecumenical and practical considerations

5.1 Our ecumenical partners offer useful comparison.

5.2 Among the URC's ecumenical partners, most maintain a retirement age or equivalent mechanism to ensure orderly transition and ministerial fitness.

5.3 Only the Baptist Union of Great Britain has no fixed age, but it relies on a demanding capability process to remove ministers deemed unfit to serve both at local and at denomination level.

5.4 Most other denominations maintain annual appraisal or development review systems to ensure ongoing competence. Currently, the URC currently such a mechanism, and therefore the retention of the normal retirement age remains a proportionate safeguard.

5.5 Different denominations that set a normal retirement age at 70 (rather than 65 or 68) generally do so for a mix of theological, practical, demographic, and legal reasons:

- *Changing life expectancy and health patterns* — Some denominations introduced or revised their retirement ages in response to longer life expectancy and better health among older clergy. The age of 70 is seen by some as reflecting this increased capacity while still providing a clear endpoint for stipendiary service.
- *Balancing vocational calling and organisational need* — Theological traditions that emphasise lifelong vocation tend to allow ministers to serve later in life, seeing ministry as a calling that continues as long as health and capacity permit. By fixing the retirement age at 70, denominations try to balance the individual's continuing call with the institution's need for orderly succession.
- *Legal and employment considerations* — Under UK equality law, a fixed retirement age must be objectively justified. Many organisations consider 70 the latest justifiable limit, balancing the individual's right to continue serving with the organisation's duty to manage succession responsibly.
- *Oversight and appraisal mechanisms* — Churches that have raised or removed the retirement age usually operate robust annual appraisal systems. Such systems ensure that those continuing in ministry are assessed regularly for fitness, effectiveness and wellbeing. Raising the retirement age to 70 can defer pension liabilities for two years and ease financial strain in the short term.

6. Insights from the 2026 survey

- 6.1 In January 2026, all ministers aged 55 — and more than 257 were invited — took part in a confidential survey; 122 ministers responded.
- 6.2 The survey explored both statistical and reflective responses concerning retirement, including the benefits and challenges of maintaining a normal retirement age, the relationship between retirement and ministerial sustainability, and wider questions of retirement, vocation and ministry later in life.
- 6.3 The findings suggest that the strongest support across the Church is not for 68 as an unquestioned fixed age, but for the value of maintaining a **clear, transparent and pastorally intelligible retirement framework**, within which 68 continues to function effectively as the normal retirement point. Overall, the evidence is weighted in favour of retaining retirement at 68, provided that the Church continues to allow carefully discerned extension beyond that age where vocation, health, effectiveness and pastoral need justify it.
- 6.4 Respondents repeatedly valued the clarity that a defined retirement age brings for ministers, congregations, Synods and the denomination, particularly because it **allows realistic planning for deployment, succession, housing, pastoral reorganisation and financial forecasting**. In a context of limited stipendiary posts and financial uncertainty, many saw this predictability as essential for the Church's wider sustainability.
- 6.5 Many respondents note that a retirement age of 68 gives ministers **permission to retire without guilt**. Because ordained or commissioned ministry is experienced as lifelong vocation, many ministers reported that without a clear expectation they might feel obliged to continue simply because congregations remain dependent upon them or because ministerial shortages create moral pressure to stay. The

retirement age was therefore widely understood not merely as administrative policy but as a pastoral safeguard, giving ministers freedom to conclude stipendiary service with dignity and without feeling they have failed in their calling.

- 6.6 A third significant point concerned **wellbeing and resilience**. Many respondents observed that by the later sixties, ministers are often carrying substantial fatigue after years of enlarged pastorates, multiple congregations, increasing safeguarding responsibilities and growing institutional complexity. A normal retirement age was therefore seen as a protective boundary which helps ministers and churches recognise limits before ill-health, exhaustion or diminished resilience require more difficult intervention.
- 6.7 The consultation highlighted the importance of **intergenerational renewal** within the Church. Respondents recognise that defined retirement points create space for new ministers, fresh deployment patterns and emerging leadership. Retirement is therefore seen not simply as ending one ministry, but as contributing to the Church's ongoing renewal.
- 6.8 At the same time, the consultation identifies **important cautions**. A significant minority argue that 68 may already be too late for some ministers, especially where health, energy or cumulative workload mean that effectiveness declines earlier. Others note that pension arrangements can create practical inequity, particularly if ministers experience financial disadvantage in retiring before 68. There is also concern that a fixed age can appear blunt where ministerial capacity varies widely: some ministers remain highly effective beyond 68, while others may struggle significantly before reaching it.
- 6.9 This leads to the clearest area of tension in the findings: respondents consistently argue that chronological age alone cannot determine ministerial fitness. Many therefore favour retaining 68 as the normal retirement age, while ensuring that extension beyond that point remains possible through clear discernment, review and pastoral oversight. This flexibility is particularly important in a denomination where some ministers continue to offer high-quality ministry beyond retirement age and where local pastoral need may justify limited continuation.
- 6.10 At the same time, respondents consistently stressed that chronological age alone cannot determine ministerial fitness. Some ministers remain highly effective beyond 68, while others may struggle earlier. For that reason, there was strong support for retaining 68 as the normal retirement age while preserving a clear extension process where health, effectiveness, vocation and pastoral need justify continuation.
- 6.11 Finally, the consultation made clear that retirement is not the end of vocation. Ministers described later life as a continuing season of service through mentoring, occasional worship leadership, accompaniment, voluntary ministry and spiritual support. The overall conclusion is therefore that 68 remains a helpful and humane normative threshold because it provides clarity, fairness and pastoral permission, while allowing continued ministry beyond that age where carefully discerned.
 - *Oversight and Appraisal Mechanisms* — Churches that have raised or removed the retirement age usually operate robust annual appraisal systems. Such systems ensure that those continuing in ministry are assessed regularly

for fitness, effectiveness and wellbeing. Raising the retirement age to 70 can defer pension liabilities for two years and ease financial strain in the short term.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The present retirement policy remains fit for purpose.
- 7.2 It protects ministers, supports congregations, strengthens fairness, and enables responsible stewardship.
- 7.3 The extension process already provides the flexibility required where continuation is genuinely justified.
- 7.4 For these reasons Ministries Committee recommends that the United Reformed Church:
- retain 68 as the normal retirement age for stipendiary ministers;
 - continue the existing extension procedure;
 - review wider ministerial wellbeing and deployment support alongside retirement policy.

Appendix 1. Questions considered by Ministries Committee

People are healthier for longer. Why should 68 remain when many ministers are fully capable at 70 or beyond?

The policy does not assume that all ministers cease to be capable at 68. Rather, it recognises that the Church requires a clear normative point for transition while allowing flexibility where continued ministry is genuinely appropriate. That flexibility already exists through the extension procedure. The issue is therefore not whether some ministers remain highly effective beyond 68, many do, but whether the denomination benefits from retaining a shared and predictable retirement framework. The evidence suggests it does.

Surely ministerial shortages mean we should allow ministers to stay indefinitely?

Ministerial shortage is a real concern, but retirement policy cannot solve a recruitment challenge. Removing retirement age risks masking deeper structural pressures rather than addressing them. It may also unintentionally delay opportunities for those entering ministry now. The extension process already allows continued service where there is genuine pastoral need.

Is this age discrimination?

A retirement age is lawful where it is objectively justified by legitimate aims and where the means adopted are proportionate. The present policy satisfies that test because it serves intergenerational fairness, deployment planning, financial stewardship, dignity, and wellbeing, while also permitting individual extension beyond 68.

Why not move to 70 like some other churches?

Some churches that operate at 70 do so within systems of annual appraisal or formal ministerial review. The URC does not currently have a universal appraisal structure capable of replacing the clarity provided by a normal retirement age. Moreover, the

extension process already allows ministry beyond 68 where justified, making a universal increase unnecessary.

Could this force ministers out when they still feel called?

The Church distinguishes between lifelong vocation and stipendiary office-holding ministry. Retirement ends one form of responsibility; it does not end vocation. Ministers continue to exercise important ministry in retirement, and those whose stipendiary continuation is pastorally justified may seek extension.

Would removing retirement age save money by delaying pension costs?

In practice, financial benefit is uncertain. Ministers remaining in stipendiary service continue to require stipend, housing, pension contribution where applicable, and deployment support. More importantly, uncertainty in retirement timing weakens workforce planning at a time when Ministry and Mission forecasting already carries significant risk.

Why should age matter more than capability?

The policy does not claim age alone determines capability. Rather, age provides a fair, transparent and universally understood point at which continued stipendiary service becomes a matter for active discernment rather than automatic continuation. Capability remains relevant through the extension process.

Paper C7

Process for the Ill-Health Retirement of Office Holders (from the buy out of the Ministers' Pension Fund)

Ministries Committee
Pensions Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Janet Tollington jet40@cam.ac.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 23 General Assembly adopts the process for the Ill-Health Early Retirement of Office Holders (from the buy-out of the Ministers' Pension Fund – expected in summer 2026)

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Following the pension fund buy-out, responsibility for pension eligibility decisions for ill-health early retirement transfers to the external insurer (JUST) for those with accrued rights in the former Ministers' Pension Fund. This ensures that, following buy-out, ministers continue to be treated in accordance with the current arrangements insofar as possible. Pre-2023 office holders (with pension fund benefits) will need to apply to the insurer for ill-health pension; the Church then assesses any additional support required. Post-2023 office holders (no pension fund entitlement): the Church determines both eligibility and financial provision directly.
Main points	See above
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Pension Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	Unknown
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. A Theological Introduction

- 1.1 Ill-health early retirement is received within the United Reformed Church not simply as an administrative conclusion but as a moment of pastoral and theological significance. Ministry in the Church is rooted in God's call and affirmed by the community of faith; it is therefore deeper than capacity, productivity, or role. When illness limits the ability of an office holder to exercise active service, the Church recognises that vocation itself is not withdrawn, but reshaped. Scripture reminds us that the Body of Christ honours all its members, especially in times of weakness, dependency, or change (1 Corinthians 12). Ill-health early retirement is thus understood as an act of faithful discernment in which the Church seeks the wellbeing of the office holder alongside the needs of the wider community, acknowledging human finitude while affirming enduring belonging. In releasing an office holder from the responsibilities of active service, the Church bears witness to grace rather than achievement, recognising that the identity of an office holder rests not in function but in baptism, calling, and lifelong participation in Christ's ministry. The community therefore commits itself to continued pastoral care, respect, and inclusion, trusting that ministry may continue to be expressed through presence, wisdom, prayer, and witness in new and life-giving ways.
- 1.2 Early retirement on grounds of ill health is not a diminishment of vocation but a recognition that ministry may be lived differently in changing circumstances.

2. Some guiding principles**2.1 Some explanations and terminology**

In this document, "Office Holder" means a Minister of the Word and Sacraments or a Church Related Community Worker serving under the terms of the URC Plan for Partnership. This paper deals with the situation that will exist when the buy-out of the Ministers' Pension Fund has been completed (expected in summer 2026). After this, present and future pensions that would previously have been paid from the Ministers' Pension Fund will be provided instead by the Insurer (JUST). The process for applying and for granting ill-health early retirement will have to change to reflect this new situation.

2.2 Eligibility

The United Reformed Church approaches all cases of possible ill-health early retirement with its pastoral and theological commitments. The Church will act with compassion and pastoral sensitivity, respect medical confidentiality, maintain clarity regarding roles and decision-making authority, and ensure appropriate transparency with the Office Holder concerned. Every effort will be made to avoid unnecessary delay, recognising that ill health affects vocation, identity, wellbeing, livelihood, and status. For Office Holders who were members of the Ministers' Pension Fund, application for ill-health early retirement will in future have to be made to the Insurer of the Ministers' Pension Fund and it will decide on eligibility. This procedure is explained in Appendix 1. For Officer Holders who entered

service after February 2023 and who do not have any benefits due from the Ministers' Pension Fund, application for ill-health early retirement will be made to the Church. This procedure is explained in Appendix 2.

2.3 Entitlements

When an Office Holder is granted Ill-Health Early Retirement, the Church will make the following provision:

2.3.1 If the Office Holder is assessed as being unable to undertake any paid employment, the Church will guarantee that income from the Church (including any pension payable by the Insurer of the Ministers' Pension Fund) will be at least 50% of stipend up to the normal retirement age (currently 68).

2.3.2 If the Office Holder is assessed as being able to undertake some paid employment, the Church will guarantee that income from the Church (including any pension payable by the Insurer of the Ministers' Pension Fund) will be at least 25% of stipend up to the normal retirement age (currently 68).

2.3.3 In both cases, this income may be a pension from the Insurer or a benefit paid through the Church payroll or a combination of both. This excludes any income from alternative employment.

2.3.4 The Church will make employer contributions to the URC defined contribution pension scheme in proportion to any benefits paid through the Church payroll.

2.4 These processes for ill-health early retirement, and the entitlements related to them, shall be reviewed every five years, or sooner if required by changes in pension arrangements, legislation, or denominational policy.

Appendix 1

Process for the ill-health early retirement of Office Holders who were members of the Ministers' Pension Fund and who are now entitled to a pension from the insurer of that fund (JUST)

1. Process and scope

- 1.1 The purpose of this process is to ensure that Office Holders are treated with dignity, fairness, and appropriate pastoral care at a time of vulnerability, while also providing clarity regarding decision-making responsibilities. It recognises that discernment about ministry and determinations concerning pension entitlement are distinct matters and must be approached through separate, though related, processes. The procedure therefore seeks to ensure clear understanding of the respective responsibilities of the United Reformed Church, the Insurer, and the Office Holder, while offering the Office Holder appropriate support and guidance through what is often a complex and emotionally demanding period.
- 1.2 Ill-health early retirement is both a pastoral and procedural matter requiring careful coordination between the Applicant, the Synod, and the Ministries Office. It necessarily involves theological discernment regarding vocation alongside formal administrative and pension processes.
- 1.3 Following the buy-out of the Ministers' Pension Fund, the responsibility for the payment of all current and future pensions to the members of that fund has been transferred to the insurer of that fund (currently JUST). Future decisions regarding the eligibility for an ill-health early retirement pension from the insurer will be made exclusively by the insurer under the rules of the insured scheme.
- 1.4 The United Reformed Church no longer exercises discretion over these pension benefits or medical eligibility determinations.
- 1.5 The Church nevertheless retains responsibility for matters relating to ministerial status, pastoral oversight, and the formal recognition of retirement within the life and order of the Church.
- 1.6 Accordingly, two distinct but interconnected processes operate alongside one another:
 - a) ecclesial discernment concerning fitness to continue in active ministry; and
 - b) decisions concerning the eligibility for an early retirement pension and, if eligible, the amount(s) that will be paid up to normal retirement age – these decisions will be in two parts:
 1. the insurer's assessment concerning entitlement to receipt of an early retirement pension on the grounds of ill health; and
 2. the Church's assessment concerning the overall ill health retirement benefits that will be paid up to normal retirement age.
- 1.7 These processes may inform one another but remain separate in authority and outcome.

2. Initiating the process

- 2.1 Consideration of ill-health early retirement will normally arise following an extended period of sick leave, typically after approximately six months' absence from ministry, although individual circumstances may require flexibility.
- 2.2 Ill-health early retirement should ordinarily be explored only after appropriate pastoral support, reasonable adjustments, and alternative deployment possibilities have been carefully considered.
- 2.3 The Synod Moderator, in consultation with the Ministries Office, will undertake discernment regarding the Office Holder's capacity to continue in active ministry. This discernment may include, with the Office Holder's consent, occupational health or medical advice, pastoral conversations concerning capacity and sustainability, consideration of adjusted patterns of ministry or deployment, and, in some cases, a period of inactive status.
- 2.4 Any determination made by the Church at this stage relates solely to fitness to exercise ministry and does not constitute a judgement regarding pension eligibility.
- 2.5 Where it becomes clear that continued ministry is no longer realistic, the Moderator, in consultation with the Ministries Office and the Maintenance of the Ministry (MoM) Sub-Committee or its successor body, may recommend progression toward early retirement on the grounds of ill health.

3. Pension Assessment Process

- 3.1 Once ill-health early retirement is being considered, the Office Holder shall apply for ill-health pension benefits through the Insurer, currently JUST, in accordance with the rules of the insured scheme. **This is the responsibility of the Office Holder / Applicant.**
- 3.2 The decision regarding medical eligibility and pension entitlement from the Insurer rests entirely with the Insurer. The United Reformed Church does not determine eligibility and cannot guarantee the outcome of any application.
- 3.3 The Church's role during this stage is supportive and facilitative. The Ministries Office will, where required, provide guidance and assistance to the Office Holder in navigating the application process and associated documentation.

4. Outcomes

- 4.1 Where the insurer approves ill-health early retirement pension benefits, the United Reformed Church will initiate its own denominational processes regarding ill-health early retirement.
- 4.2 The Office Holder shall, at the earliest reasonable opportunity, notify the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries), acting on behalf of the MoM Sub-Committee or its successor body, of the level of ill-health early retirement pension awarded by the insurer. This will enable the Church to determine whether any additional benefits are payable by the Church and, if so, to initiate those payments.
- 4.3 In calculating any payments due to an applicant, the Church shall have regard to the guiding principles set out above, ensuring that provision is fair, consistent, and aligned with the agreed framework for ill-health early retirement.

- 4.4 The value of any benefits payable by the Church will be reviewed whenever the URC stipend is increased. The Office Holder shall notify the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) of any changes to the value of the pension being received from the Insurer.
- 4.5 The Office Holder's continued entitlement to benefits and the value of those benefits shall be reviewed by the Church at intervals of five years up to normal retirement age, or more frequently if required, to ensure that they remain appropriate to the minister's circumstances.
- 4.6 When an ill-health early retirement pension is not granted by the insurer the Church, through the MoM Sub-Committee or its successor body, shall review the Office Holder's circumstances pastorally and determine an appropriate way forward. In all such cases, particular care shall be taken to ensure ongoing pastoral accompaniment, recognising the distress and uncertainty that such outcomes may bring.

Appendix 2

Process for the ill-health retirement of office holders who entered service after February 2023 and who, therefore, had no entitlement to benefits from the Ministers' Pension Fund

1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 This process sets out the procedures to be followed when an Office Holder, who entered service after February 2023, seeks early retirement on the grounds of ill health. These people were not members of the Ministers' Pension Fund and, therefore, have no entitlement to benefits from that Fund. They will have a pension pot in the URC defined contribution pension scheme, but the primary purpose of that fund is to provide an income after normal retirement age.
- 1.2 The purpose of this process is to ensure that office holders are treated with dignity, fairness, and appropriate pastoral care at a time of vulnerability, while providing clarity regarding decision-making responsibilities within the life and order of the Church.
- 1.3 This process recognises that discernment concerning an office holder's capacity to continue in active ministry is an ecclesial matter, held within the councils of the Church, and that financial provision in such circumstances is a responsibility to be exercised with care, consistency, and theological integrity.
- 1.4 Ill-health early retirement is therefore understood as both a pastoral and procedural matter, requiring careful coordination between the office holder, the synod, and the Ministries Office.
- 1.5 The Church affirms that vocation continues even where the exercise of ministry becomes limited or no longer possible. Discernment in situations of ill health

therefore attends both to the well-being of the office holder and to the integrity of the Church's ministry.

- 1.6 Decisions concerning early retirement on the grounds of ill health are made within the conciliar life of the Church and relate to fitness to continue in active ministry. Such decisions are distinct from, but connected to, decisions concerning the provision of appropriate financial support.

2. Initiating the process

- 2.1 Consideration of ill-health early retirement will normally arise following a sustained period of sick leave, typically after approximately six months' absence from ministry, although individual circumstances may require flexibility.
- 2.2 Ill-health early retirement should ordinarily be explored only after appropriate pastoral support, reasonable adjustments, and alternative patterns of ministry or deployment have been carefully considered.
- 2.3 The synod moderator, in consultation with the Ministries Office, will undertake discernment regarding the office holder's capacity to continue in active ministry. This may include, with the office holder's consent, medical or occupational health advice; pastoral conversations concerning capacity and sustainability; consideration of adjusted or restricted ministry; and, in some cases, a period of inactive status.
- 2.4 When it becomes clear that continued ministry is no longer realistic, the moderator, in consultation with the Ministries Office and the MoM Sub-Committee or its successor body, may recommend progression towards early retirement on the grounds of ill health.

3. Pension assessment process

- 3.1 Where early retirement on the grounds of ill health is approved, the United Reformed Church shall determine the appropriate level of financial provision, acting through the MoM Sub-Committee or its successor body, and having regard to the Guiding Principles set out above.
- 3.2 In determining such provision, the Church shall have regard to the Office Holder's capacity for work, the nature and extent of ill health, and the principles of fairness, consistency, and responsible stewardship.
- 3.3 When the Office Holder is assessed as being unable to undertake any paid employment, the Church shall pay a benefit through the URC payroll equivalent to 50% of stipend.
- 3.4 When the Office Holder is assessed as being able to undertake some other paid employment, the Church shall pay a benefit through the URC payroll equivalent to 25% of stipend.
- 3.5 In addition, the Church shall make employer contributions to the defined contribution pension scheme based on the benefit being paid.
- 3.6 These benefits will be payable up to the normal retirement age (currently 68).

4. Review of provision

- 4.1 The Church's financial provision shall be reviewed annually and adjusted whenever there is an increase in the URC stipend by the MoM sub-committee or its successor.
- 4.2 The Office Holder's continued entitlement to ill-health early retirement, and the value of the benefits payable, shall be reviewed at intervals of five years, or more frequently where circumstances require, to ensure that the benefits remain fair, appropriate, and sustainable.
- 4.3 Such reviews shall take account of any change in the Office Holder's health, capacity for work, and personal circumstances.

5. When ill-health retirement is not immediately appropriate

- 5.1 When early retirement on the grounds of ill health is not approved, the Church shall continue to review the office holder's circumstances pastorally.
- 5.2 In all cases, particular care shall be taken to ensure ongoing pastoral accompaniment, recognising the distress and uncertainty that may arise in such situations.

Paper C8

The Competencies and Expected Standards of Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of the 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 24 General Assembly adopts the framework of Competencies and Expected Standards of Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments as set out in this paper.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper is a tidying up of two former policies: Expectations of Ministry (General Assembly 2016) and the Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (General Assembly 2020). It establishes a clear grounded framework for understanding competencies and expected standards within the covenantal life of the United Reformed Church. It affirms that ministry is exercised within relationships of mutual trust, accountability and shared responsibility, and therefore requires both clarity about the nature of ministry and fairness in how it is recognised, formed and sustained.
Main points	Competencies describe the broad capacities required for faithful ministry — encompassing knowledge, skills, judgement and dispositions — while expected standards define the level at which these must be demonstrated in practice. Together, they provide a developmental and accountable framework for discerning readiness for ministry, supporting formation, and sustaining effective service over time. Grounded in the Basis of Union and the promises made at ordination, the framework integrates the Marks of Ministry (what a minister is), the Gifts and Graces (how ministry is lived out), and the Expected Standards (what is demonstrated in

	practice). This ensures a coherent approach to recognising and nurturing faithful, effective and responsible ministry across diverse contexts. The paper also sets out clear expectations for professional behaviour, including personal integrity, safeguarding, collaborative working, accountability within the councils of the Church, and the maintenance of healthy relationships and boundaries. It recognises that ministers may serve in a variety of settings, including externally regulated roles, and affirms that these standards apply appropriately within each context.
Previous relevant documents	Expectations of Ministry (General Assembly 2016) Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (General Assembly 2020).
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper places competencies and expected standards within the covenantal life of the Church because ministry in the United Reformed Church is exercised within relationships of mutual trust, accountability and shared responsibility between the minister, the councils of the Church and the wider people of God. Discernment therefore requires both clarity about the nature of ministry and fairness in the way ministry is recognised, formed and sustained.
- 1.2 Competencies describe the broad capacities required for faithful ministry within that covenant: the knowledge, skills, judgement, behaviours and dispositions through which ministry is exercised responsibly in the service of Christ and the Church. They identify key areas of formation, including theological reflection, pastoral sensitivity, communication, leadership, collaboration, self-awareness and the capacity to work within the conciliar life and polity of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.3 Competencies alone, however, are insufficient, because they do not indicate the level at which such qualities must be demonstrated, nor whether they are exercised with sufficient consistency and maturity to sustain the trust which covenantal ministry requires.
- 1.4 Expected standards therefore give practical expression to competencies by describing the threshold at which they must be evidenced in lived ministry. They make clear what the Church is seeking when discerning readiness for candidating, training, ordination and continuing in active ministry.
- 1.5 Together they provide a developmental framework which honours vocation while ensuring that those entrusted with ministry exercise that trust with integrity, pastoral wisdom and due responsibility.

- 1.6 Whilst this policy is framed primarily with Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in pastoral charge in mind, it recognises that those serving in other forms of ministry, including Non-Stipendiary Ministers and those in Assembly-appointed roles, exercise their vocation in different contexts. Accordingly, not all of the expected standards will apply in the same way. Nevertheless, the standards remain of equal importance and are to be interpreted appropriately in relation to the nature and scope of each minister's authorised role.

2. Basis of Union

The foundation for the conduct of Ministers is in the Basis of Union, summarised in Schedule E paragraph 2,

'Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry.'

The promises in Schedule C are:

- a) '...confess anew your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- b) '...believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people?
- c) '...believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world? Do you believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people? And will you faithfully proclaim this Gospel?
- d) '...believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ?
- e) '...zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, so far as you know your own heart, the chief motives which lead you to enter this ministry?
- f) '...to live a holy life and to maintain the truth of the Gospel whatever trouble or persecution may arise';
- g) '...to fulfil the duties of your charge faithfully, to lead the church in worship, to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take your part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world; and
- h) ...as a Minister of the United Reformed Church 'to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'.

3. **Within the United Reformed Church, ordination already presumes the Marks of Ministry (Mission Council 2019).** The Marks of Ministry describe the fundamental character and identity of the minister whom the Church ordains and recognises. They articulate the theological shape of ministry — what a minister is within the life of the Church. The Gifts and Graces (Competencies) describe the habits of character and practical abilities through which that ministry is lived out. They express how a minister grows, develops and exercises their calling in practice over time. The Expected Standards describe the accountable pattern of ministry as it is exercised in the Church's life. They indicate what a minister demonstrates in practice, providing a shared framework for recognising faithful, effective and responsible ministry.

A Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church is a person:

Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (Expected Standards):
A Faithful Disciple	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; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship so that they might model and encourage such life-long patterns in others with integrity; open to learning discipleship from other	• Their own experience of life and faith; • The Gospel and their own account of it; • The importance of prayer, scripture and worship for sustaining ministry; • The need for openness to learning and continuing development; • The significance of intergenerational discipleship	Living a Holy Life by: • Articulating growth in faith and practice; • Reflecting on learning and responding to challenge; • Relating in good, flourishing relationships to those both within and beyond the Church community; • Faithful participation in pastoral supervision and continuing professional development.

Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (Expected Standards):
A person of integrity and resilience	Self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for ministers); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; ready to deal with situations of conflict; balancing ministry's joys and pains with the fostering of right relationships with family and friends.	• What it means to live a Christian life of integrity, humility and selflessness; • The importance of resilience, perseverance and a healthy lifestyle; • Maintaining strict confidentiality of all matters shared with them in confidence unless given permission to do so, is a danger to the discloser or others or if the discloser is likely to become involved in a criminal offence; • The appropriate use of power and responsibility in ministry; • The demands of accountability within the URC.	• Reflective practice and self-awareness; • Maintaining appropriate boundaries and confidentiality; • Engagement with safeguarding, safer sacred space training and anti-racism training and other mandatory training as rolled out; • Healthy time management and sustainable patterns of ministry; • Willingness to seek support and manage conflict constructively

A contextual theologian	Delighting in scripture, rooted in the Reformed tradition, able to communicate their own faith and its implications within and beyond congregations; encouraging others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.	• The Bible and the Reformed tradition, including its expression in the URC; • The significance of context and culture in shaping faith; • The importance of being a theologian for particular times and places; • The value of reflective practice;	• Theological reflection on ministry experience; • Interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith within their particular context; • Analysis, discernment and critical evaluation; • Engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in theological conversation
Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry)	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):
A worship leader and preacher	Able to craft and lead worship that shows appreciation for the sacraments and the resources of many traditions and styles yet unafraid to create and advocate new forms as appropriate; passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word in preaching; ready and able to foster skills, techniques and experience in others so that they might lead worship and preach well.	• Patterns of worship and their theological roots • The demands of shaping worship in contemporary culture • The importance of clear and faithful communication.	• Quality in leading worship and the sacraments • Preaching and spoken ministry; • written communication • Reflective engagement with feedback • Deepening faith and worship for others • Offering ministerial service at major Christian festivals, including Christmas and Easter, unless in exceptional circumstances and by agreement from the Synod Moderator.

A pastor	Sharing with others, especially Elders, in sustaining care; making time to walk in love alongside people; 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.	• Pastoral sensibility and ministry as accompaniment • Patterns of human relationship, community and society • The human psyche • The importance of self-care alongside care for others.	• Listening and pastoral presence; understanding and interpreting people and situations • Relating well to Elders, members and others • Recognising need and making appropriate referrals • Reflective self-care.
Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):
A leader and collaborator	Identifying, developing, and enabling leadership in others, particularly Elders; capable of working in, and leading, teams through collaborative and shared leadership; aware of their own leadership style and open to learning with and from others, when necessary acknowledging their own mistakes and seeking restoration; committed and equipped to building up others in faith and witness so that the gifts and callings of all might flourish; demonstrating love for God's people.	• Their own leadership style and particular gifts • Group dynamics and how communities function • Shared and collaborative models of leadership.	• Enabling and developing the gifts of others • Community and team building; • Collaborative leadership and decision-making • Administration and management; • Sustaining constructive relationships with Elders and colleagues.

A missionary and evangelist	Passionate about and active in sharing the love of God for the world; alive to the significance of contexts and cultures in shaping mission and creative in discovering missional opportunities; empowering and equipping God's people in mission to share the Gospel and live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.	- contemporary contexts and cultures - The demands of evangelism today - How societies are formed and challenged - The importance of journeying with people as well as proclaiming.	- Inspiring and enabling others in mission and evangelism - Effective communication and public engagement - Engagement with change - Sustaining ministry under pressure - Nurturing resilience in others.
Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):
A public figure	Reliable and effective in representing the Church in ecumenical, community and wider settings; committed to and equipped in speaking truth to power and challenging injustice and marginalisation wherever they may be found.	- Social and political contexts; - Power and its effects - Life at the centre and margins of society.	- Ecumenical and (where appropriate) interfaith engagement; - Engagement with public bodies; - Participation in the wider life of society.
A communicator or	A communicator: who uses written, spoken and other modes with clarity and grace to share faith and build up relationships and communities; helping others to find their voice.	- Interpersonal, oral and written communication; - The use of different media and technologies.	- Preaching and public speaking - Use of text, image and sound - Appropriate use of information technology - Timely and effective correspondence including emails.

A participant in the Council of the Church	Responsive to God's call as gift and blessing to be lived out within the discipline and accountability of the denomination which trains, ordains and inducts them and the pastorates and ministries within which they serve.	- the Basis of Union - nature of oversight and accountability.	Participates faithfully in the councils of the Church, recognising that ordination includes that promise - Prioritises attendance at Synod meetings as an expression of this promise, except in exceptional and agreed circumstances by the Synod Moderator - Contributes constructively to the discernment and decision-making of the Church in its councils, where appropriate - Complies with mandatory training requirements - Serves within agreed Terms of Settlement - Engages in ongoing ministerial development through EM2 and EM3 - Engages appropriately with formal processes, including disciplinary processes where required.
Who is:	Who lives (marks of ministry):	Who knows and understands (gifts and graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):
A reformer	Wise in the dynamics and challenges of change; bold yet humble in helping individuals and congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.	Understands the ethos and history of the United Reformed Church	- Acting as an agent of change; - Supporting congregations through this transition.

4. Standards of professional behaviour

A Minister of the Word and Sacraments is called to model, in public and in private, the Christ-like character that befits this office. Accordingly, it is expected that ministers will consistently treat all people with respect and dignity, recognising in each person the image of God, and conducting themselves in a manner that strengthens the Church's witness. The following standards articulate, in practical terms, the professional behaviours that the United Reformed Church has a right to expect of those who serve in ordained ministry.

Whilst ministers remain accountable to the discipline and oversight of the Church, it is recognised that those serving in contexts such as chaplaincy or other externally regulated roles are also accountable to the professional and institutional standards governing that setting. Accordingly, a failure to meet those external standards may properly be considered within the Church as a failure to meet the expected standards of ministry, since such ministry is exercised on behalf of the Church within that wider professional context.

1. *Personal integrity and health*

Ministers are expected:

- **To live a Christian life of prayer and integrity**, sustaining a faithful rhythm of worship, scripture and spiritual discipline appropriate to the responsibilities of ministry.
- **To attend to personal wellbeing and sustainability**, maintaining a healthy pattern of life that balances availability and accessibility to the demands of ministry with time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest, and ongoing spiritual growth.
- **To maintain strict confidentiality** in relation to all matters shared in confidence, except where disclosure is required by law or necessary to safeguard others; for example, where a child or adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse, harm or neglect, or where there is a safety concern affecting the wider congregation, consistent with the URC Confidentiality Policy.
- **To safeguard children and adults at risk**, by undertaking and refreshing mandatory URC Safeguarding Training (Advanced), and by maintaining a working knowledge of the URC's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance in accordance with the guidelines, including the relevant code of conduct for working with children and adults at risk.
- **To maintain appropriate boundaries**, by undertaking mandatory URC Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training, and by promoting safe and healthy relationships in all contexts of ministry.
- **To exercise care and sensitivity in seeking counsel**, including appropriate professional discretion, and the protection of third-party identities unless permission has been granted for disclosure.
- **To be diligent and reliable in administrative responsibilities**, including attending meetings, responding to correspondence in a timely manner, and keeping appropriate records efficiently and effectively, with due regard to the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR requirements.

- **To observe the URC Gift Policy** for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and to account carefully for expenses and for any funds held on behalf of others.
- **Not to undertake ministerial duties** while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, nor when medically advised not to do so.
- **To refrain from any misuse of privilege or power** for personal advantage or gain whether financial, emotional, sexual or material in accordance with the URC's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance.
- **Not to act in any way that undermines the spiritual health of another**, recognising the particular trust placed in ministers and the potential impact of ministerial conduct on the life and wellbeing of individuals and congregations.

2. *Relationships with ministerial colleagues*

All ministers are expected:

- **To protect colleagues from discrimination and prejudice**, and to act in ways that uphold the equal dignity of all, regardless of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation
- **To respect theological diversity** where differing views are held in good faith and are consistent with the faith and order of the United Reformed Church as expressed in the Basis of Union and are seen as a gift to the Church and contributes to its discernment, witness, and unity in Christ
- **To exercise discernment** before accepting responsibility within a pastorate served by another minister, and, where appropriate, to support the direction of church life shaped through that pastorate's authorised leadership
- **To respect the ministry of predecessors and successors**, and to deal honourably with their work and record
- **To consider carefully the location of retirement housing**, seeking, where possible, to avoid residing in the immediate area of a former pastorate, in order to protect the integrity of boundaries and the freedom of successor ministry.

Ministers in pastoral charge are additionally expected:

- **To support the ministry of other ministers**, and not to interfere with the conduct of ministry or the direction of church life in other pastorates
- **To sever professional ties with a previous pastorate**, referring all requests and enquiries relating to that pastorate to the interim moderator or the new minister
- **To welcome retired colleagues and ministers serving the wider church**, as members and worshippers within the pastorate, encouraging a culture of generosity and mutual respect.

3. *Relationships with elders, members and others*

All Ministers are expected:

- **To regard all people with equal love and concern**, reflecting the breadth of Christ's welcome and the Church's commitment to justice and inclusion.
- **To uphold the values of faithfulness, trust and respect** in all relationships, recognising that healthy relationships are foundational to credible ministry.

- **To share leadership and pastoral care** with elders and others who are called to these purposes, working collaboratively and valuing the contribution of the whole Church in decision-making.
- **Not to seek to influence inappropriately** a pastorate in the calling of a new minister, guarding the integrity of the Church's processes of discernment.
- **To seek advice and specialist support when needed**, including from ministerial colleagues or other professionals, where an issue exceeds one's competence or requires specialist knowledge.
- **To consult the Church Safeguarding Coordinator**, or where none is appointed or available, the Synod Safeguarding Officer, whenever a safeguarding concern, allegation or incident arises.
- **To consult appropriately before taking on additional commitments**, including with colleagues, elders and others, so that workload remains sustainable and ministry responsibilities are exercised with integrity.
- **To observe proper relational boundaries**, including the requirement not to enter into a sexual relationship with anyone in their pastoral care without first speaking with their Synod Moderator.
- **Not to meet alone with a child or young person under the age of 18**, and where a child or young person seeks to discuss a personal matter, to follow the Good Practice 6 Guidance on lone working.

4. *Relationship with the Councils of the Church*

Ministers are expected:

- **To participate actively in the Councils of the Church**, recognising conciliar life as intrinsic to the URC's identity and discipline.
- **To accept the oversight of Synod**, and the pastoral care of Synod Moderators, as part of accountable ministry within the denomination.
- **To submit to disciplinary procedures** when initiated by the Councils of the Church, and to inform, as soon as possible, the Synod Clerk and Synod Moderator—or, where appropriate, the Secretary for Ministries—if involved in civil or criminal legal proceedings.
- **To undertake mandatory training**, including Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training, Safeguarding training at the Advanced level, Anti-racism training, and any other mandatory training deemed necessary.
- **To engage in pastoral supervision at least six times per year**, as a normal expectation of reflective, sustainable and accountable ministry.
- **To serve in accordance with the agreed Terms of Settlement**, and to work within the responsibilities and boundaries they establish.
- **To be familiar with, and responsive to, the guidelines for ongoing ministerial training** issued by the Ministries Committee, recognising that continuing formation is a normal and expected element of ordained ministry.

Paper C9

URC Reasonable Adjustments Policy for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, and those in training

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 URC Reasonable Adjustments Policy for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, and those in training.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This policy establishes a clear, consistently grounded framework for the provision of reasonable adjustments for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, and those in training. It reflects the United Reformed Church's commitment to justice, compassion and mutual care, recognising that ministry flourishes when all are enabled to serve according to their gifting and capacity.
Main points	In compliance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Church's understanding of vocation, this policy affirms a shared legal and pastoral duty to remove barriers arising from disability or health conditions, with adjustments based on appropriate professional evidence. It makes clear that reasonable adjustments do not lower expectations or change the essential nature of ministry, but enable it to be exercised faithfully, safely and sustainably. Guided by principles of dignity, partnership, flexibility and stewardship, decisions are made collaboratively and on a

	case-by-case basis, balancing the wellbeing of the minister with the Church's mission and resources. The policy sets out a clear process for requesting, agreeing and reviewing adjustments, supported by occupational health advice, and affirms that seeking such support is a sign of responsible and healthy ministry.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators Legal Advisor

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church affirms the calling of every minister as a gift entrusted to the whole Church. Ministry is lived in the round: spiritually, physically, emotionally, practically, intellectually and relationally. It is a vocation that touches every corner of a minister's life and is sustained not only by the minister's personal faith and resilience but by the support and care of the wider Church.
- 1.2 This policy arises from our conviction that the Body of Christ flourishes when all its members are enabled to contribute according to their gifting and capacity. In the same way that congregations tailor their ministries to context, so too must the Church ensure that ministers with disabilities, long-term conditions or temporary limitations may continue to serve faithfully and safely.
- 1.3 The policy reflects the United Reformed Church's theological commitment to justice, compassion, and mutual care. The law provides the framework; the Gospel provides the heart.

2. Purpose and Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to both Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (hereafter "ministers") as well as those in training as student ministers.
- 2.2 Its purpose is to provide a consistent and transparent framework for identifying, discerning, and implementing reasonable adjustments where barriers – physical, procedural, attitudinal, or practical – impede a minister's ability to exercise their ministry.
- 2.3 Reasonable adjustments relate to disability which is supported by professional evidence. While the Church listens carefully to a minister's own account of their experience, reasonable adjustments under this policy are ordinarily grounded in a professionally identified condition or need (for example, through medical or

occupational health advice), so that discernment may be informed, proportionate and consistent.

- 2.4 The Church recognises that disability and ill-health are not understood solely through a medical lens. Many barriers arise from systems, environments, expectations and patterns of ministry rather than from an individual condition alone. At the same time, the Church must sometimes consider medical or occupational health evidence in order to discern what adjustments are reasonable, safe and sustainable within the exercise of ministry.
- 2.5 The policy seeks to ensure that adjustments are approached thoughtfully and consistently rather than informally or reactively.
- 2.6 Reasonable adjustments are not about lowering expectations or creating alternative categories of ministry. Rather, they enable ministers to exercise their calling in ways that are life-giving, realistic and sustainable.
- 2.7 Reasonable adjustments may be temporary, permanent or subject to review according to the circumstances of ministry and wellbeing.
- 2.8 The scope includes adjustments relating to:
 - ministry environment
 - patterns of ministry
 - expectations of role
 - deployment arrangements
 - pastoral and practical support

3. The Legal Framework: Equality Act 2010

- 3.1 The Equality Act 2010 imposes a positive duty on “employers”¹ to make reasonable adjustments where a disabled person is placed at a substantial disadvantage by:
 - a provision, criterion or practice (PCP);
 - a physical feature of the premises; or
 - the absence of an auxiliary aid.
 - 3.2 This duty applies to office holders as well as employees, and has been interpreted broadly within religious organisations.
 - 3.3 The URC therefore holds both a legal and moral responsibility to consider and implement adjustments where appropriate.
- ### **4. What “Reasonable” Means in Law**
- 4.1 The Act does not define “reasonable” numerically. Tribunals apply a contextual balancing exercise guided by the Equality and Human Rights Commission Code of Practice.
 - 4.2 Factors influencing reasonableness include:
 - effectiveness in removing the disadvantage;
 - practicality of implementation;

¹ Ministers are not employed but enjoy the status of office holders.

- cost relative to organisational resources;
- disruption caused;
- availability of external funding (Access to Work etc.);
- impact on colleagues or service users;
- health and safety considerations;
- whether essential requirements of the role remain achievable.

4.3 The Church will, where appropriate, explore external sources of support such as the Government's Access to Work scheme or other grants and funding streams which may assist in meeting the cost of reasonable adjustments. Such support may include specialist equipment, communication support, travel assistance, workplace adaptations, or other practical aids which enable a minister to exercise ministry more effectively. The availability of external funding does not remove the Church's own responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, but forms part of the wider discernment regarding what adjustments are reasonable, proportionate and sustainable within a conciliar Church.

4.4 Student ministers are not eligible for Access to Work but may apply for Disabled Students' Allowance.

4.5 No single factor is decisive: reasonableness emerges from the balanced consideration of all relevant circumstances.

5. What the Duty does not Require

5.1 The URC is not required to:

- create a fundamentally new role;
- remove essential elements of ministry;
- lower essential standards;
- implement adjustments that are unworkable or disproportionately costly;
- provide indefinite or open-ended arrangements with no realistic prospect of ministry.

5.2 However, the URC must demonstrate that it has:

- considered options carefully;
- consulted with the minister;
- sought appropriate professional advice;
- explored creative alternatives;
- documented its reasoning.

6. Core Principles of the policy

6.1 **Equality and Inclusion.** Ministers have the right to participate fully in ministry without discrimination where reasonable adjustments can remove disadvantage.

6.2 **Dignity and Respect.** Conversations concerning health or disability may involve vulnerability. All discussions will be conducted with pastoral sensitivity, confidentiality, and respect for the minister's lived experience.

6.3 **Dialogue and Partnership.** Adjustments are discerned collaboratively between the minister, Synod (normally through the Moderator), local church representatives, and the Ministries Office. Solutions are discerned together rather than imposed.

- 6.4 **Flexibility and Creativity.** Ministry takes many forms. Adjustments may involve imaginative reshaping of practice while remaining faithful to the nature of ministerial office.
- 6.5 **Stewardship.** Decisions must balance the:
- wellbeing of the minister;
 - sustainability of the pastorate;
 - responsible use of denominational resources;
 - mission of the Church.
- 6.6 **Legal and Pastoral Responsibility.** The URC is committed to fulfilling its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010. However, our motivation goes beyond compliance. As a Christian community, our pastoral responsibility compels us to seek the wellbeing of all.
- 6.7 **Case-by-Case Approach:** Each situation will be considered individually, balancing the needs of the individual with the mission and resources of the Church.
- 6.8 **Confidentiality:** Sensitive information will be shared only where necessary and with the minister's informed consent.
7. **What counts as a Reasonable Adjustment?**
- 7.1 Reasonable adjustments vary according to need and context. What is modest in one pastorate may be significant in another. Adjustments may include but are not limited to:
- Physical environment changes:** A manse or church building may need minor or major adaptation to ensure accessibility e.g. ramps, widened doorways, accessible bathrooms, improved lighting or hearing loops. In some cases, adaptive technology such as screen readers, digital dictation tools or ergonomic office furniture may be required.
- Flexible working patterns:** Health conditions or temporary impairments may necessitate adjusted working hours or schedules. Flexibility may include spreading out demanding tasks, incorporating rest periods, remote attendance at some meetings, or adjusting the rhythm of the minister's week. Flexibility is not permission to withdraw, but an enabler of continued service. See the Plan for Partnership guidance.
- Role or duty adjustments:** Ministry is multifaceted, and some aspects may be more physically or mentally demanding than others. Adjustments may involve shifting responsibilities within a ministry team, temporarily relieving a minister of certain duties (such as extensive travel or late-night meetings), or re-negotiating the scope of ministry within a given context. Such adjustments honour both the minister and the congregation by ensuring that expectations are realistic and sustainable.
- Support for communication or mobility:** A minister may need interpreters, mobility aids, drivers, assistive technology or modified liturgical resources.

Health-related support: A minister may require time for medical appointments, treatments or therapies. After significant illness, a phased return to ministry may be the healthiest route for all. Occupational health assessments provide professional insight into what is needed for safe and sustained ministry.

The guiding question is: What enables this minister to serve safely, faithfully and sustainably?

8. Temporary Reasonable Adjustments

8.1 Such adjustments may arise in response to changes in health, personal circumstances, or particular phases of ministry, and are intended to provide appropriate support for a defined period.

8.2 Temporary reasonable adjustments should be kept under review to be determined according to the Occupational Health advice, with clear points for reflection and discernment, so that they remain proportionate, effective, and appropriate to the minister's context.

8.3 Temporary adjustments do not diminish the value or integrity of ministry, but rather enable it to be exercised faithfully and sustainably within changing circumstances.

9. Distinguishing Adjustments from Capacity Issues

9.1 The key legal question concerns whether a minister can perform the essential functions of ministry with reasonable support.

9.2 Adjustments remain reasonable where they enable core ministerial responsibilities to be undertaken, potentially through reconfiguration, support, or delegation.

9.3 An adjustment may become unreasonable where it would:

- fundamentally alter the nature of ministry;
- remove essential duties such as worship leadership or pastoral oversight;
- permanently transfer core responsibilities to others;
- create a materially different role;
- undermine safeguarding, wellbeing, or mission.

9.4 Where essential functions cannot be fulfilled despite reasonable adjustments and fair trial periods, the matter may move from adjustment considerations to capability discernment.

10. Process for Requesting Adjustments

10.1 **Initiating a Conversation.** A minister may request adjustments at any time by approaching their Synod Moderator. Synods also hold a pastoral responsibility to initiate supportive conversations where concerns arise.

10.2 The responsibility for considering reasonable adjustments does not rest solely with the minister. Where a Synod Moderator, the Ministries Office, or another relevant council of the Church knows, or could reasonably be expected to know, that a minister may be experiencing a disability or health condition which places them at a substantial disadvantage in ministry, the Church holds a responsibility to initiate appropriate and supportive conversation regarding possible

adjustments. Such conversations should be approached sensitively and collaboratively, recognising that ministers may not always identify themselves as disabled, may be reluctant to request support, or may not yet recognise the extent to which adjustments may assist them in sustaining ministry wisely and sustainably.

10.3 **Assessment.** Once a request is made, the Synod Moderator will:

- gather the information needed to understand the situation;
- consult with the Ministries Office;
- seek appropriate medical or occupational health advice where necessary;
- consult with the Elders/church as appropriate.

10.4 **Agreement and Implementation.** Agreed adjustments will be recorded in writing and placed on the minister's file under Health, so that all parties – including the Synod, minister and Elders' Meeting/local church – are clear about:

- agreed actions;
- responsibilities;
- funding arrangements;
- communication expectations;
- review dates.

10.5 **Review.** Adjustments will normally be reviewed:

- after 3 months;
- after 6 months;
- periodically thereafter as required.

They will be reviewed regularly by the Synod Moderator and the Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee (joint Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee and Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee). Adjustments are dynamic and may change as circumstances evolve.

11. **Guidance and Awareness for Synod Moderators**

11.1 Synod Moderators hold a significant pastoral, legal and conciliar responsibility in relation to reasonable adjustments. The Church therefore recognises the importance of appropriate guidance, support and awareness training for those exercising oversight within this policy.

11.2 This includes developing awareness of:

- the Equality Act 2010 and the duty to consider reasonable adjustments;
- visible and non-visible disabilities;
- the difference between illness, disability, capacity and conduct;
- the impact of ministry patterns and church culture on wellbeing;
- the appropriate use of occupational health advice.

11.3 The purpose of such guidance is not to turn Synod Moderators into medical professionals or human resources specialists, but to enable wise, compassionate and legally informed pastoral oversight within the conciliar life of the Church.

11.4 The Ministries Office will seek to provide guidance and support to Synod Moderators in the implementation of this policy so that practice across the Church is as consistent, fair and pastorally grounded as possible.

12. **Responsibility for Funding Reasonable Adjustments**

- 12.1 The United Reformed Church is a conciliar Church in which ministry is shared, discerned and sustained collectively. Responsibility for reasonable adjustments therefore does not rest solely with the individual minister, the local church, or the Synod, but is held corporately across the councils of the Church according to their respective responsibilities, resources and capacities.
- 12.2 In considering the funding of reasonable adjustments, the Church seeks to act both lawfully and pastorally, recognising that the cost of enabling ministry should not fall unfairly upon an individual minister. Equally, the implementation of adjustments must take account of proportionality, stewardship and the realistic resources available within the wider Church.
- 12.3 Where reasonable adjustments relate primarily to the local context of ministry, for example minor adaptations to church premises, practical support within the pastorate, local equipment, or adjustments to working arrangements, responsibility will ordinarily rest with the pastorate or local church, supported where appropriate by the Synod.
- 12.4 Where adjustments relate to wider deployment, significant property adaptations, denominational processes, specialist equipment, occupational health recommendations, or matters extending beyond the capacity of the local church, funding responsibility may be shared between the Synod and the wider denomination through the Ministries Office or other appropriate Assembly structures such as the Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee.
- 12.5 In determining how costs are to be apportioned, consideration will be given to:
- the nature and purpose of the adjustment;
 - the extent to which the adjustment arises from the minister's deployment;
 - the financial capacity of the local church and Synod;
 - the availability of grants, external funding, or Access to Work support;
 - the anticipated duration of the adjustment;
 - the benefit to the minister's ability to exercise ministry safely and sustainably.
- 12.6 Agreed funding arrangements should be clearly recorded as part of the adjustment plan, including:
- the agreed contribution of each council or body;
 - any time limitations or review points;
 - responsibility for ongoing maintenance or replacement costs;
 - arrangements for review should circumstances change.
- 12.7 Where agreement cannot be reached regarding funding responsibility, the matter should be referred to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) for further discernment and resolution in consultation with the relevant councils of the Church.

13. Support for Local Pastorates

- 13.1 Local pastorates often carry a deep desire to support their minister but may feel uncertain about what is realistic or appropriate. Synods will support pastorates in understanding and implementing adjustments and may assist through:
- guidance and mediation;
 - pulpit supply;
 - additional pastoral support where necessary.

Clear communication helps prevent misunderstanding or resentment.

14. Relationship to Good Standing

- 14.1 Requesting reasonable adjustments does not imply diminished competence or commitment.
- 14.2 Seeking support is understood as an expression of responsible and healthy ministry.

15. Dispute Resolution

- 15.1 Concerns should first be raised with the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).
- 15.2 Where informal resolution is not possible, the complaints procedure (Section Q) may be invoked.

16. Monitoring and Review of Policy

- 16.1 This policy will be reviewed by the Ministries Committee every three years, or sooner if legislation changes, in consultation with the Synod Moderators and EDIB Committee.

Paper C10

URC Sickness and Ill Health Policy (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 17 General Assembly adopts the revised <i>URC Sickness and Ill Health Policy</i> for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This policy sets out how the United Reformed Church responds to sickness absence among Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, holding together pastoral care, accountability and the good order of the Church. It recognises that illness is part of the reality within which vocation is lived and seeks to respond with compassion, clarity and responsibility. Last revised in 2016, it needs to be updated in light of changes in legislation. Changes include 1. notification of sickness from day one; 2. compliance with Occupational Health Assessments 3. guidance on contact during sickness.
Main points	The policy is a timely reminder of the clear expectations for notification, communication and record-keeping, ensuring that appropriate support for both the minister and the congregation is put in place from the outset. It affirms that ministers must follow medical advice, with the aim of enabling a safe, sustainable and faithful return to ministry wherever possible. A structured framework is provided for pastoral care, review and decision-making during periods of absence. This includes regular contact through the Synod Moderator, formal review points, and the appropriate use of medical and occupational health advice to inform discernment about fitness to return, reasonable adjustments, or longer-term outcomes such as phased return or ill-health retirement.

	The policy also clarifies financial provision, including the continuation of stipend during periods of sickness and the process for determining support beyond six months, ensuring transparency and fairness. Throughout, the emphasis is on restoration, wellbeing and shared responsibility within the conciliar life of the Church. Where return to ministry is not possible, appropriate pathways are provided to ensure that decisions are made with care, dignity and proper oversight.
Previous relevant documents	URC Sickness and Ill Health Policy 2016
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church recognises that ministry is exercised by those called and set apart to serve the whole people of God, yet ministers remain human, finite, and at times vulnerable to illness in body, mind, or spirit. Periods of sickness are therefore not interruptions to vocation, but part of the reality within which vocation is lived.
- 1.2 This policy exists to ensure that, when illness arises, the Church responds faithfully, pastorally, and responsibly:
 - caring for the wellbeing and dignity of the minister;
 - sustaining the life and worship of the Church;
 - and exercising proper accountability within our conciliar life.
- 1.3 The Church seeks to hold together compassion and clarity: offering support without ambiguity and ensuring that appropriate processes are followed for the good of all.

2. Responsibilities within the life of the denomination

- 2.1 Responsibility for carrying out these procedures is divided between
 - the minister
 - their Synod Moderator (who may delegate some aspects of the Synod role);
 - and the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee (MoM), or its successor, acting on behalf of the Church.
- 2.2 In some situations, input will be sought from others, for example in relation to potential ill-health retirement. Where ministers are not deployed within a Synod their ministry support will fulfil the role ascribed to the Synod Moderator. A copy of the full procedures is available to ministers in the Minister's Handbook and upon request.

3. Sickness Absence Policy – Principles

- 3.1 The policy aims to ensure that during the course of an illness there is:
- pastoral and practical support
 - respect for privacy and dignity
 - appropriate use of professional and medical advice
 - clarity regarding financial provision and responsibilities.
- 3.2 Ministers are expected to take seriously medical advice. Where a doctor advises that a minister is not fit for work, the minister should refrain from undertaking all ministerial duties. Where a phased return is recommended, this will be discerned collaboratively with the Synod Moderator and the local pastorate.
- 3.3 The aim is always restoration: enabling the minister, where possible, to return to ministry in a way that is sustainable, healthy, and faithful.

4. Notification of sickness

- 4.1 A minister must inform their Synod Office and the Ministries Office on the first day of sickness absence. This is an essential part of ministerial accountability and ensures that appropriate pastoral support and record-keeping can begin promptly.
- 4.2 Where sickness continues beyond seven days, appropriate medical certification (“fit notes”) must be provided and kept up to date.
- 4.3 The Synod, in consultation with the pastorate or post, will ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for the continuation of worship, sacramental life, and pastoral care during the minister’s absence.

5. Pastoral care during Sickness Absence

- Ministers should notify their Synod Office, pastorate/post and the MoM Office if they are unable to work for more than three days due to sickness and ensure that they are kept up-to-date if the absence becomes prolonged.
- 5.1 Pastoral care will be provided through the Synod Moderator who may delegate some aspects of this care appropriately.
- 5.2 Contact will be maintained in a way that reflects both the needs of the minister and the responsibilities of the Church. Such contact is not supervisory alone but an expression of the Church’s care, concern, and prayer.
- 5.3 Where absence is prolonged (beyond four weeks), the Church also bears responsibility for the wellbeing of the congregations served, ensuring that they are supported in an appropriate and supported manner.

6. Continuation of Stipend

- 6.1 The stipend will be paid during periods of sickness in such sums as shall be determined from time to time by the MoM sub-committee, or its successor, and will take into account the regulations and benefit schemes of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

- 6.2 Under the terms of the current Plan for Partnership (para 6.1.2), ministers who are unable to work because of sickness or accident shall be paid full stipend (less any Employment Support Allowance or Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit received) for a period of six months. Any sickness arising in the twelve months prior to the first day of a new period of sickness will be taken into account in the calculation of those six months.
- 6.3 At the appropriate time after the beginning of any sickness absence, the MoM sub-committee, or its successor, shall determine, in consultation with the Synod Moderator and having taken independent occupational health advice, what further help, if any, should be given when the entitlement to full stipend comes to an end. The level of any payments to be made after six months will be notified by the end of the fifth month of absence, in the first instance, and may be reviewed later with regard to circumstances.
- 6.4 The Church will communicate clearly and in good time regarding any changes to stipend provision, recognising that financial clarity is an important aspect of pastoral care.

7. Medical and Occupational Health Advice

- 7.1 Where illness is prolonged or raises questions about a minister's capacity to exercise ministry, the Church may seek medical or occupational health advice.
- 7.2 An Occupational Health assessment should be understood not as a procedural requirement imposed upon a minister, but as a gift offered for their support. It enables the Church to listen more carefully and respond more wisely, by drawing on independent professional insight into the realities of a minister's health and the practical implications for their ministry.
- 7.3 Such assessments do not replace the Church's discernment, which remains pastoral and conciliar in nature, but they strengthen it—ensuring that decisions are informed, proportionate, and attentive to both the wellbeing of the minister and the faithful exercise of their calling.
- 7.4 Ministers are required to engage fully and constructively with such processes, including attending assessments and responding in a timely manner.
- 7.5 When an occupational health assessment is undertaken, ministers are required to give consent for the report to be released to the Church. Without such consent, the Church is significantly limited in its ability to offer appropriate support, make informed decisions, or discern a way forward.
- 7.6 Occupational health advice may inform decisions regarding:
- fitness to return to ministry;
 - appropriate and reasonable adjustments;
 - phased return;
 - or, where necessary, longer-term outcomes such as ill health retirement.

8. Disability and reasonable adjustments

- 8.1 Where illness results in disability, the Church will seek to respond in accordance with its theological commitments and the spirit of the Equality Act 2010.

8.2 The Synod will adhere to the Reasonable Adjustments Policy.

9. Review and ongoing discernment

9.1 Where absence extends beyond a short period, structured reviews will be undertaken by the Synod Moderator in consultation with the Ministries Office.

9.2 These reviews are part of the Church's shared discernment, seeking to understand the minister's situation, support recovery, and consider appropriate next steps.

9.3 This process may include:

- pastoral conversations;
- formal review reports;
- medical or occupational health assessments.

10. Extended Periods of Absence

10.1 For some individuals, incapacity through physical or mental illness may be judged to be permanent. In such cases ministers ordained or commissioned before 2023 will be encouraged to apply for ill health pensions benefits from the insurer. For those ordained or commissioned after 2023 will be encouraged to apply for ill health retirement through the MoM sub-committee or its successor.

10.2 At the point at which payments of stipend cease, some ministers will still feel unable to resume their full duties even though their illness is not considered permanent. Where such a situation is anticipated, their Moderator may make reference to the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for stipend support.

11. Grievance

11.1 Where a minister has a grievance about the way in which the sickness absence procedures are implemented, they are encouraged to make every effort to resolve this informally with those involved. Where an informal approach does not resolve the grievance, the URC Complaints Procedure (Section Q) provides a means of seeking a fair and impartial resolution of the grievance.

Appendix 1

Sickness Absence Procedures

The pattern of timescales and requirements set out in the following sections may be applied flexibly where considered appropriate. The MoM convener will consider all individual cases and may make adjustments as judged appropriate.

1. Notification of absence

1.1 Ministers should notify their Synod Office and the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer) if they are unable to work on the first day of sickness. This enables the proper records to be maintained.

1.2 The first seven days of sickness may be self-certified (by letter, email or telephone) but after that all continuing sickness must be covered by a doctor's statement of fitness for work ('Fit note'). Copies of these notifications should be sent to the Synod Moderator and the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer).

1.3 Both the Payroll Officer and Synod offices should also be informed when the

minister returns to work after a period of certificated absence.

2. Record-keeping

- 2.1 The Ministries Office will maintain a full record of sickness absence, decisions about the continuation of stipend, including copies of correspondence and notes of any telephone calls. They will initiate the Moderator Reviews, doctor's reports and Occupational Health assessments as required and retain copies of the completed reports.
- 2.2 The Synod will maintain a chronological record of all their contacts with the minister and complete the necessary forms/reports needed by the MoM sub-committee or its successor in a timely manner so that decisions about the levels of stipend payable are based upon full information about the individual's situation.

3. Fit Notes

- 3.1 The "Statement of Fitness for Work" was introduced to replace the old sick note in 2010. Doctors use the note to offer advice about the individual's fitness for work.
- 3.2 The two main options are that the individual is "not fit for work" or "may be fit for work" taking into account the doctor's advice.
- 3.3 In the latter case, the Fit note may contain advisory information from the GP, such as suggestions for a phased return, workplace adaptations or temporary adjustment to duties. The information given on the form is advisory and is not binding.
- 3.4 Where a note is received indicating that the minister may be fit for work, the Synod Moderator should take the initiative in contacting the individual to discuss how these recommendations can be put into effect. More details are given in 'Return to Work', below.

4. Actions During Absence from Work

- 4.1 While all doctors' Fit notes should be sent to the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer), communication with the minister will normally be through the Synod Moderator or their deputy.
- 4.2 It is important to maintain good communication with a minister who is absent due to sickness for more than four weeks. Regular pastoral contact by the Synod Moderator or a representative can demonstrate care and ensure that the Moderator has up to date knowledge of the minister's condition. This may also enable the Church to provide appropriate support. With some ministers, perhaps in the event of mental illness, there will be a need for extra sensitivity; in such cases the Moderator may agree with the minister that a family member or friend be the Synod's prime point of contact.
- 4.3 In any event, in order that the MoM sub-committee can carry out its duties, Moderators are expected to complete formal review discussions with the minister as described below.

5. Initial Moderator Review

- 5.1 Our practice is based upon evidence from research showing that people are more likely to get back to work as their illness recedes when they and their employers

talk during periods of sickness and make plans for returning to work. Good practice is to begin to discuss and set a framework for actions towards a return to working when someone has been absent from work for a period of time, probably between 4–6 weeks, and review this in the light of the actual course of the illness.

- 5.2 Where a minister's sickness absence is expected to continue beyond four weeks, the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer) will ask the Moderator to arrange a visit to the minister and complete a Ministerial Sickness Review Form. The completed form should be sent to the MoM Office who will forward this to the MoM convener. The minister will be sent a copy of this and any subsequent reports by the MoM Office if requested.

6. Subsequent Moderator Reviews

- 6.1 In the light of the initial review, and the nature of the minister's illness, the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer) will determine a pattern for further reviews. The normal timing of follow-up reviews will be to request one at 10 weeks, and if necessary, further reports to be completed by 5, 8 and 11 months. While best practice would be for these to be conducted during a visit, it is acceptable to conduct the reviews over the telephone by mutual agreement.

7. Occupational Health Assessment

- 7.1 In addition to the medical adviser's report, the Church's appointed Occupational Health organisation will be asked to review the position if the sickness absence continues for more than three months and where it seems possible that absence may extend to six or more months.
- 7.2 It is important that this report is completed and returned to the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer) in good time to allow the MoM sub-committee to consider whether, and at what level, any stipend payments should be made beyond six months. This decision has to be made by the end of the fifth month of absence. An additional important benefit of this assessment is that it incorporates an opportunity for the minister to have a confidential general discussion of health issues and receive advice on lifestyle/ health management.
- 7.3 The process is initiated by the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer), who will inform the Moderator and the minister of the need for Occupational Health assessment. The minister will be sent a link to the information sheet and the consultation referral form. The referral form will indicate the specific questions on which advice is sought. The minister is asked to complete Section D and send it on to the Moderator for their completion of Section E and return to the MoM Office. The form will then be sent to the OH company who will conduct their consultation with the minister either by telephone or face-to-face.
- 7.4 When the OH company has undertaken the consultation and sent its report to the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer), the contents will be shared with the Moderator and the MoM sub-committee. The report, which is advisory only, will focus upon the work-related aspects of the minister's health, their fitness to work and the practical steps that might facilitate a return to work. Medical information remains confidential to the OH organisation.
- 7.5 A further OH report may be sought at a later date if the MoM sub-committee considers it necessary in deciding whether further stipend payments should be

made.

8. Application for Ill-health Pension

9.1 Please see the URC Ill Health Early Retirement policy and process.

9. Return to Work

9.1 On return to work, the date of return should be advised to the Ministries and Synod offices.

9.2 Where there has been an extended period of absence a phased return to work may be appropriate. When a Fit note suggests a pattern of increasing duties, the Moderator should initiate a discussion about phased return to work. Such discussions might also arise in the course of regular contact between the minister and Moderator. Any such planned return to work must be agreed between the Moderator, the pastorate/post and the minister in a written plan of increasing involvement towards full duties. The plan would normally last up to two months, and not generally beyond three months.

9.3 The aim of phased return to work is to build up the workload in stages, beginning with those that seem easiest to undertake or by limiting working hours/location to those that best suit the minister's condition – and not necessarily beginning with the aspects perceived to be of most importance to the church(es). The approach will differ for different people and illnesses; there are no hard and fast rules.

9.4 Some examples of such patterns of return to work are: to begin with only Sunday services with the attaching preparation being undertaken; starting by working only mornings or afternoons with no evening meetings or pastoral visiting; in a multi-church pastorate, return might be limited to specific church(es) for the first few weeks.

9.5 Once a planned pattern of return to work has been agreed, the Ministries Office (via the Payroll Officer) should be informed of the date of phased return to work. At this point, where stipend has been reduced, the Maintenance of the Ministry (MoM) sub-committee will normally agree to restore payments to the full level.

9.6 If in practice a return to work does not continue as planned, this should also be notified to the Synod Moderator and MoM Office. In any event, the Moderator should report to the MoM Office on progress at the end of the planned phased period of return to work, and monthly if the period extends beyond four weeks.

9.7 Where, at the end of the planned phased return to work, the minister has not yet returned to full duties, but is expected to recover sufficiently to do so in future, the MoM sub-committee will decide whether it is appropriate to reduce the stipend payable to reflect the level of work being undertaken. If it is considered unlikely that in the foreseeable future the minister's health will recover sufficiently to allow a return to full duties, the process of formally reducing the minister's full-time service should commence immediately.

Paper C11

Revised Terms of Reference for the Accreditations sub-committee of the Ministries Committee

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 18 General Assembly adopts the revised Terms of Reference for the Accreditations sub-committee of the Ministries Committee.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Extraordinary General Assembly Resolution 39a asked for revised Terms of Reference for the Accreditations sub-committee to accommodate the proposed application and review model, and to bring updated Terms of Reference to General Assembly in July 2026.
Main points	The revised Terms of Reference includes the accreditation, monitoring and review of new Christian Communities.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A5 Terms of Reference for Ministries Committee
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Terms of Reference

1. Membership

Convenor
Convenor of Ministries Committee
Convenor of the Assessment Board
Synod Moderator
CRCW post-holder
Pioneer practitioner
Three members

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Working in collaboration with the Secretary to the Church Life Fund Committee when relating to Church Life Fund new communities.

The Committee may co-opt practitioners, as required, to assist in the accreditation, monitoring and review of new Christian communities.

Functions of the Committee

- 1.1 the approval, monitoring and review of Church Related Community Work projects;
 - 1.2 the monitoring of Special Category Ministry projects;
 - 1.3 the approval, monitoring and review of the 13 new pioneering posts;
 - 1.4 the consideration and management of Certificates of Eligibility;
 - 1.5 the consideration and management of Certificates for Limited Service;
 - 1.6 the maintenance of the Roll of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, and Church Related Community Workers;
 - 1.7 maintenance of the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers;
 - 1.8 maintenance of the Roll of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers;
 - 1.9 maintenance of the Roll of Elders;
 - 1.10 to assess new Christian communities applications made to the Church Life Fund in accordance with the processes and criteria agreed by General Assembly (November 2025);
 - 1.11 to advise the Church Life Fund Committee on which applications meet the agreed criteria and whether they should be supported for funding;
 - 1.12 to accredit, monitor and review funded new Christian communities in line with the agreed processes, and to advise the Church Life Fund Committee on the continuation, modification or cessation of funding;
 - 1.13 any such other matters as may, from time to time, be allocated by the Ministries Committee.
2. Meets four or five times per year (at least one in-person meeting)
 3. Reports to Ministries Committee four times a year.
 4. Reports on all matters relating to accreditation, monitoring and reviewing new Christian communities applications made to the Church Life Fund. Reporting to take place before each meeting of Church Life Fund Committee, through coordination between the Secretaries and Convenors.

Paper CD1

Ministry and Mission Review Task Group Update

Resources and Ministries Committees

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Director of Strategy and Programmes 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 work of the Resolution 46 (Ministry and Mission Fund) Task Group
Main points	The Resolution 46 Task Group has been established to design and undertake a structured consultation across the United Reformed Church on the sustainability, purpose, and operation of the Ministry and Mission Fund (MMF). Initial work has focused on clarifying the historical, theological, and operational dimensions of the Fund, and identifying key tensions relating to financial sustainability, covenantal understanding, and ministerial deployment. The Task Group is developing a consultative process to engage synods, local churches, and other stakeholders, supported by further research into finance, deployment, and attitudes toward the fund and covenant. Findings will be synthesised into options and recommendations for General Assembly 2027.
Previous relevant documents	Paper A10, Extraordinary General Assembly 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Resources Committee; Ministries Committee; Moderators' Meeting; Synod Treasurers. <i>Extensive consultation with local churches, synods, and others is planned</i>

Summary of impact

Financial	The intention of this paper is to update Assembly on the work of the task group, rather than address the Ministry and Mission Fund itself.
External (eg ecumenical)	As part of the process, there is an effort to learn from ecumenical partners

1. Background

- 1.1. This paper is brought before Assembly by the Resolution 46 (Ministry and Mission Fund) Task Group, convened on behalf of Resources and Ministries Committees.
- 1.2. Resolution 46, enacted at the Extraordinary General Assembly in November 2025, states that:

General Assembly instructs Resources and Ministries Committees to arrange a consultation with synod officers, synod trust company trustees, and other relevant decision-makers, to address underlying theological and other strategic and covenantal questions related to finance and governance, particularly in relation the sustainability of the Ministry and Mission Fund and the ministry provision made possible by that fund.
- 1.3. The Ministry and Mission Fund is experiencing a growing misalignment between its financial sustainability, covenantal intent, and practical operation. Income is declining faster than expenditure, creating a widening structural gap. At the same time, the perception that there is a connection between contributions and the provision of ministry is under pressure, affecting how the fund is understood, and requiring clarification. This raises a more fundamental question about whether contributions are, or should be, understood as linked to the provision of ministry, or whether the fund is better framed in other terms. In practice, this results in increasing pressure on synods, giving rise to difficult decision about whether a stipendiary minister should be deployed to every church or focussed where they might make the most impact, and a related risk that a covenantal model of shared responsibility is interpreted in more transactional terms. The central question is therefore not simply financial, but whether the current configuration of the fund remains aligned with its original purpose, and what this implies for the future shape of ministry in the Church.
- 1.4. At this stage, the task group's role is not to propose immediate solutions, but to ensure that the Church is able to engage these questions well, by structuring a process through which a shared understanding can be developed, and out of which collectively owned conclusions may emerge.

2. Task group details

The task group members are:

Mr Myles Dunnett (Convenor), Director of Strategy and Programmes
Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Deputy General Secretary for Ministries
Mr John Samson, Chief Finance Officer
Ms Muna Levan-Harris, Legal and Trust Officer, Thames North Synod
Mr Alan Yates, URC Treasurer
Revd Dr Michael Hopkins, Moderator, Wessex Synod, and Convenor, Resources Committee
Revd Jamie Kissack, Moderator, Yorkshire Synod
Ms Jane Humphreys, Member, Resources Committee
Mr Steve Powell, Treasurer, West Midlands Synod
Ms Denise Harman, Premises and Finance Officer, Mersey Synod
Ms Elizabeth Hall, Convenor, North Western Synod Ministries Committee (and nominated Convenor of Ministries Committee beginning July 2026)
Ms Ornella Mbula, Strategy and Programmes Administrator, providing administrative support

- 2.1. The task group will undertake a structured and theologically grounded review of the assumptions and frameworks that shape current approaches to finance and governance within the United Reformed Church, with particular reference to the Ministry and Mission Fund and the ministry provision it sustains.
- 2.2. The task group is seeking to understand whether the current operation of the Ministry and Mission Fund remains aligned with its covenantal purpose, what this implies for the future shape of ministry in the United Reformed Church, and the best option to address the current challenges.
- 2.3. A full copy of the task group's terms of reference is included as Appendix One.

3. Scriptural basis

- 3.1. There are several scriptural backgrounds to the group's work. One of them is drawn from Luke 13:18-21:
¹⁸Then Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? ¹⁹It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches." Again he asked, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? ²¹It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."
- 3.2. Jesus offers two images of the Kingdom: a mustard seed that becomes a tree big enough for birds to nest in, and a small measure of yeast worked into a vast quantity of flour, which leavens the whole. Both begin with modest, almost unremarkable acts, yet the emphasis is on faithfulness of action rather than scale of input. What begins humbly becomes sheltering and nourishing.
- 3.3. The Church's life has never depended solely on what is immediately visible, but on repeated covenantal faithfulness. These images resonate with the Church's conciliar life: a shared work, undertaken patiently and collectively, through which something greater may emerge over time.
- 3.4. The group believes that its task is to discern, and to enable others to discern, what faithful sowing and careful mixing might look like now, and to do so trusting that a renewed covenant can, with God's grace, become more than we presently see.

4. Understanding the Ministry and Mission Fund

- 4.1. There are many different understandings and perceptions of the Ministry and Mission Fund. The Ministry and Mission Fund can be understood across four interrelated layers, and their relation to its current operation.
- 4.2. Historical
 Firstly, it is worth considering the history of the fund and its inheritance from the URC's predecessor traditions. The Ministry and Mission Fund can trace its roots back to the Presbyterian Church of England's Sustentation Fund, formed in 1869. The purpose was to pool resources, so wealthier congregations supported poorer ones. At that time, Congregational churches paid ministers locally, often unevenly, and with stigma attached to central support. When the URC formed in 1972, it adopted the Presbyterian model, centralising payroll and contributions by

1977. In the 1990s, separate funding streams were merged into a single Ministry and Mission Fund for clarity.

4.3. Normative

This layer relates to what the Ministry and Mission Fund is intended to do. The fund's purpose is most clearly and explicitly laid out in the Plan for Partnership, a document which was first approved by Assembly in 1980 and has been routinely updated ever since. The Plan is based on the URC's ethos as expressed in the Basis of Union. The fundamental principle of the fund is a covenantal theology of mutuality, expressed financially. It asserts that resources are shared because the Church is one body, that ministry is discerned and distributed collectively, and that giving is an act of participation in common mission, not a transactional exchange.

4.4. Reality

There is a need to understand the reality of the fund, and whether its current operation fulfils its intended purpose. There are several ways to assess the reality of the fund's operations.

4.4.1. Financially, the current Ministry and Mission Fund model is under significant pressure: the fund's income does not cover the intended costs. Annual income is falling by 3%, while the call on the fund is only falling by 1% per annum; this 2% gap equates to around £330,000 per annum. The current situation is likely to worsen over the coming years. Changes in contributions from local churches, largely due to church closures and membership decline, has put pressure on synods to fill the gap. Synods have been generous in filling this gap, but there will soon come a point where synods cannot cover the shortfall.

4.4.2. In covenantal terms, there is a range of perceptions, including that local church contributions are, or should be, directly linked to the provision of ministry. This is leading to frustration and changed understandings around the purpose of the fund. There is lack of clarity around the nature of, and parties to, the covenant.

4.4.3. Deployment is another way to understand the empirical reality of the fund. Synod moderators find it increasingly hard to prioritise deployment of ministers. The result of this is that it is hard to focus ministry where it might have the most impact. Ministers are also spread ever thinner, having a personal impact on them, as well as impacts on their congregations.

4.4.4. There are no simple answers to the problem with the fund. Taking immediate short-term action would only delay the need to address the underlying strategic questions.

4.5. Strategic

There is finally the strategic layer, which relates to key questions and tensions emerging from the interaction between the fund's purpose and its current operation. These include the degree of alignment between contribution and ministry received, variation in synod assessment approaches, limited transparency around the cost of ministry, and increasing difficulty in deploying ministry where it will have the greatest impact. A further complicating factor is that

many of these questions cannot yet be answered with confidence, due to limited visibility of how the fund operates in practice across the Church. This lack of shared, accessible data constrains both understanding and decision-making.

5. Approach to the work

- 5.1. In line with experience from the Church Life Review process, the task group is pursuing a consultative methodology, aiming to get the right people into the right spaces to consider the issue in a structured, safe, strategic way. This methodology is a living out of the Church's conciliar polity. This process needs to reach widely across the councils of the Church, including engagement with a diversity of local contexts. Only after this process is complete will it be possible to synthesise outputs and begin to shape a recommendation to Assembly in July 2027.
- 5.2. The task group has also noted that the lack of understanding around the purpose and operation of the fund is partly due to the absence of data. There is much that is unknown about the fund. The task group believes that the reality of the fund's operation needs to be brought into the light, so that discernment and eventual decision making is done with reference to high-quality evidence. This will include quantitative (finance, deployment, trends), qualitative (perceptions, theology, attitudes), and comparative (ecumenical) learning. There will therefore be a phase of groundwork, laying out findings, before other questions can be meaningfully explored.

6. Methodology and initial work plans – four areas

6.1. Research

The first piece of ongoing work is research, exploring areas including:

- Synod formulae
- The relationship between church level contribution and receipt of ministry
- The relationship between synod contribution and deployment
- Ecumenical learning
- Structural options

6.2. Local church consultation

The second piece of work will be wide engagement with local churches, split into two phases:

- 6.2.1. Firstly, a groundwork communications phase, building on ecumenical learning about the importance of setting the scene before engaging in funding conversations. Themes will include the theology of money, stewardship, discipleship, ministry and mission, and the cost of ministry.

- 6.2.2. Secondly, through questionnaires, webinars, and Synod Meetings in Autumn 2026, there will be an exploration of attitudes to the fund, churches' perception of their financial positions, the quality of historic communications around the Ministry and Mission Fund, and local expenses, potentially alongside other questions.

6.3. Denominational consultation

The third piece of work will be a denominational-level consultative event (25-26 January 2027), drawing together a wide and representative cohort including representatives of General Assembly, its offices, and committees, ministers,

synod officers, synod trust company directors, and representatives of local churches. Synods have been invited to send nine representatives each, including a balance of synod officers/staff and local church members.

6.4. Final questions

The fourth planned piece of work relates to essential final questions which need to be posed after the local church and denominational consultative processes, exploring financial matters, which will only be possible after initial exploratory work has been completed. Following this, the Task Group will meet to review all the evidence they have gathered and prepare a recommendation for General Assembly 2027.

Appendix One – Task Group Terms of Reference

1. Background

General Assembly, at its meeting in November 2025, agreed Resolution 46, which instructs the Resources and Ministries Committees to arrange a consultation with synod officers, synod trust company trustees, and other relevant decision-makers, to address underlying theological, strategic, and covenantal questions related to finance and governance, particularly in relation to the sustainability of the Ministry and Mission Fund (MMF) and the ministry provision made possible by that fund.

In response, the Resources and Ministries Committees have established a Task Group to undertake focused work on these matters and to bring forward and update to General Assembly 2026 and recommendations to General Assembly 2027.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Task Group is to undertake a structured and theologically grounded review of the assumptions and frameworks that shape current approaches to finance and governance within the United Reformed Church, with particular reference to the Ministry and Mission Fund and the ministry provision it sustains. The work will integrate theological, covenantal, missional, and strategic perspectives, ensuring that financial and governance models are examined in light of the Church's ecclesiology, conciliar life, and long-term sustainability.

3. Core Deliverables

The task group will:

1. Exploration and Articulation

Explore, analyse, and clearly articulate the theological, covenantal, and strategic assumptions that underpin present approaches to finance and governance within the United Reformed Church, with particular reference to:

- a) the Ministry and Mission Fund, and
- b) the ministry provision it currently enables and sustains.

2. Consultation Process

Design and implement a structured, transparent, and representative consultative process across the Church, engaging relevant councils, committees, office-holders, local church members, and other stakeholders in order to test assumptions, gather insight, and identify emerging priorities and concerns.

3. Recommendations to General Assembly

Produce a set of evidence-based and theologically coherent recommendations arising from this work for General Assembly 2027, for consideration and decision within an agreed timeframe.

4. Scope of Work

The Task Group shall:

- a. Facilitate consultation with synod officers, synod trust company trustees, local church members, and other relevant decision-makers, ensuring that a range of perspectives is heard.
- b. Examine the theological and covenantal foundations of shared financial responsibility within the URC, including mutuality, trust, accountability, and vocation.
- c. Consider the relationship between governance structures and financial sustainability, including how current arrangements support or constrain the Church's capacity to sustain ministry.

- d. Reflect on the sustainability of the Ministry and Mission Fund in light of current and projected financial pressures, demographic trends, and patterns of ministry.
- e. Identify key strategic questions and options for the future, noting areas of consensus, tension, and risk.
- f. Develop clear recommendations for consideration by the Resources and Ministries Committees, including whether changes to policy, practice, or governance structures should be proposed.

5. Membership

The Task Group shall be convened on behalf of the Resources and Ministries Committees and shall include:

The Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

The Convenor of Resources Committee

URC Treasurer

Chief Finance Officer

Synod Moderator and member of Ministries Committee

Synod Treasurer

Director of Strategy and Programmes

Broader Trust perspective

Synod Finance Officer

2 x other representatives with wider ministry perspective

Such other members as the committees deem necessary to ensure appropriate expertise and balance.

The Task Group shall be Chaired by the Director of Strategy and Programmes, to ensure every member can contribute without reservation, and to incorporate learning from the Church Life Review process and consultations.

6. Reporting and Accountability

The Task Group shall report to the Resources and Ministries Committees. Its final output shall be a report, including recommendations, to enable the committees to bring a resolution to General Assembly 2027.

7. Timescale

The Task Group shall commence its work as soon as practicable following appointment.

8. Administrative Support

Administrative support shall be provided by the Strategy and Programmes Administrator, including the coordination of meetings and circulation of papers. Consultation administration will be supported by the Strategy and Programmes Administrator.

Paper CH1

URC Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee

Pastoral and Reference Welfare Committee and the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee of the Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Mary Thomas dso-s@urcwessex.org.uk Elizabeth Welch elizabeth@skerratt-welch.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 26 General Assembly creates a single Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee, bringing together the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) and the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM), and adopts its Terms of Reference.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This paper proposes the creation of a single Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee, bringing together the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) and the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM). It recognises that, over time, the responsibilities of these two bodies (pastoral care, wellbeing, conditions of service, and oversight of ministry) have increasingly overlapped and caused duplication of work.
Main points	The proposal arises not from concern about the quality of existing work, but from a desire to strengthen coherence, simplify governance, and ensure that care and accountability in ministry are held together more effectively. The new committee will bring together pastoral support, casework, stipend and conditions of service, ill-health processes, and oversight of welfare funds, including the Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund. By unifying these responsibilities, the new committee will provide clearer lines of

	accountability, more timely decision-making, and a more consistent and compassionate response to ministers' needs. The committee will retain a strong pastoral focus while operating within a clear procedural framework, ensuring that sensitive cases are handled with wisdom, discretion and fairness.
Previous relevant documents	Terms of Reference of PRWC (Paper A6 GA 2024) Terms of Reference for the MoM sub-committee (Paper A2 GA 2025)
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee

1. Background

- 1.1 The United Reformed Church has long sought to hold together the care of its ministers with the ordered life of its ministry. This has been expressed, in recent years, through the work of two committees.
- 1.2 The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) has carried significant responsibility for responding to complex and often sensitive situations in the lives of ministers. Frequently engaging at points of difficulty or crisis, it has exercised a ministry of care, discernment and judgement, often when other routes have been exhausted. In doing so, it has also sought to offer guidance to Synod Moderators and others, particularly in navigating challenging pastoral circumstances.
- 1.3 Alongside this, the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM) has provided oversight of the structures, expectations and conditions within which ministry is exercised, including ill health. Its work has been rooted in the Church's responsibility to order its ministry well: to ensure clarity, accountability, and the faithful exercise of office within our conciliar life.
- 1.4 These two committees have developed with distinct purposes. Yet over time, their work has increasingly converged.

2. Reasons for Change

- 2.1 This proposal arises not from dissatisfaction with the work of either committee, but from a recognition that the Church's structures must evolve in order to serve its ministry more faithfully and coherently.
- 2.2 The recent restructuring of committees and sub-committees has invited us to reflect on how our governance can be simplified and strengthened. In that context, the continued existence of two separate bodies addressing closely

related aspects of ministers' lives and work has become increasingly difficult to justify.

- 2.3 In practice, all the matters considered by PRWC relate directly to ministers. Questions of wellbeing, crisis response, and exceptional circumstance cannot be separated from the wider framework of ministry within which those situations arise. Yet PRWC has, until now, sat outside the Ministries structure. This has led to a misalignment between responsibility and location which is no longer sustainable or helpful.
 - 2.4 Moreover, there has been a growing overlap between the care of PRWC, MoM and Synods. This has, at times, created uncertainty about where responsibility lies. Decisions have risked being duplicated or delayed, and those seeking guidance have not always been clear which body holds authority in a given situation. The fact that several individuals have served on both committees is itself a sign that, in practice, the distinction between them has already begun to erode.
 - 2.5 The work undertaken by PRWC in producing guidance for Synod Moderators was both valuable and revealing. While intended to bring clarity, it also exposed the extent to which existing processes were open to differing interpretations. This, in turn, prompted a deeper question: whether clarity would be better served not by additional guidance layered onto complexity, but by a more integrated structure.
 - 2.6 There is also a theological and organisational coherence to be recognised. Ministry in the United Reformed Church is not fragmented. It is one ministry, held within the councils of the Church, and sustained through patterns of accountability, care, and discernment. It follows, therefore, that the structures which support that ministry should also be held together.
 - 2.7 PRWC has often functioned as a “committee of last resort”, stepping in when other processes have reached their limits. While this has been necessary, it has also meant that its work has sometimes been disconnected from the ongoing life of Ministries, requiring frequent recourse to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries). This separation is neither efficient nor pastorally helpful. Bringing this work into a single committee enables a more joined-up, relational and timely approach.
 - 2.8 PRWC also has oversight of the Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund. It is anticipated that this will be incorporated into the new committee in a fourth strand of its work.
 - 2.9 Finally, the creation of the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) role provides a clear and appropriate locus for all matters relating to ministers. It is therefore both logical and faithful that this work should now sit wholly within the Ministries sphere.
3. **The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee**
 - 3.1 PRWC exists to consider cases which are referred to it, normally by Synod Moderators, and to have oversight of the welfare funds of the General Assembly.

- 3.2 As such, the committee seeks to offer support and assistance after other sources have been explored, often at times of difficulty, but when no other relevant assistance has been found to be available.
- 3.3 The committee has key responsibilities across several interlinked and interdependent operational areas. These areas are:
- Synod Moderators' Meeting
 - MoM Sub-committee
 - Resources Committee
- 3.4 Because of the nature of its work, the particulars of any support are always kept confidential.

4. The Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-committee

- 4.1 MoM exists to advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to, the stipend to the Finance Committee, using the agreed formula and the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Finance Committee;
- 4.2 It recommends amendments to ministerial conditions of service in the Plan for Partnership in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from the Offices of General Assembly;
- 4.3 It resolves questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception;
- 4.4 It offers pastoral support to both the minister and the church, and makes decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health;
- 4.5 It receives a report on pension matters and ill-health retirements at each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.

5. Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund

- 5.1 The Fund exists to ensure that it operates as a provision of last resort, available only in cases of genuine and exceptional hardship. The Fund is not intended to guarantee a universal minimum pension for all ministers. Accordingly, applicants must first have explored and, where eligible, claimed all statutory benefits and other sources of income before recourse is made to the Fund.
- 5.2 In assessing applications, the Committee shall take account of the overall financial circumstances of the household, rather than considering the minister's income in isolation. The purpose of the Fund is to address a sustained shortfall in income over a period of at least one year; it is not designed to meet short-term or one-off financial needs, such as unexpected repairs or replacement of household items, for which other provisions – such as Synod welfare funds – may be more appropriate.
- 5.3 All awards made from the Fund shall be discretionary, determined on a case-by-case basis, and subject to annual review. No award shall be regarded as a lifetime entitlement, and eligibility to apply does not confer a right to receive support. The Committee shall ensure that clear financial parameters are applied,

including an income threshold above which applications will not be considered eligible.

- 5.4 In exercising its responsibilities, the Committee shall apply the thresholds agreed by General Assembly (initially agreed – Paper A8 Resolution 5 in July 2024), namely that eligibility is limited to those whose income falls below 50% of the current in-service stipend together with the full standard state pension, and that awards are subject to an annual cap of 15% of the current in-service stipend. Initial assessment of applications shall be undertaken by the retired minister's Synod of residence, which is responsible for discerning eligibility and forwarding supported applications to the Fund.

6. The Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee

- 6.1 In light of these considerations, it is proposed that the work currently undertaken by PRWC and MoM be brought together within a new Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee.
- 6.2 This Committee will hold together what has too often been experienced separately: the pastoral care of ministers and the procedural frameworks within which ministry is exercised. It recognises that questions of wellbeing, conduct, capacity and conditions of service are not discrete categories, but interwoven realities in the life of ministry.
- 6.3 The intention is not to diminish the pastoral nature of this work, but to strengthen it. Care that is disconnected from structure risks inconsistency; structure without care risks becoming impersonal. The Church is called to hold both together.
- 6.4 At the same time, the proposal recognises the need for proper safeguards. The bringing together of responsibilities for conditions of service and individual cases raises the potential for conflicts of interest. This must be addressed through careful composition and clear process. The inclusion of independent members, two lay and one ordained, will be essential in ensuring transparency, accountability and trust.
- 6.5 Equally, it is important to affirm that this work will continue to require wisdom, sensitivity and discretion. Many of the situations considered will remain complex and deeply personal. The formation of a single committee must not lead to a loss of attentiveness to the pastoral realities involved.

7. Proposal

- 7.1 The Church is always called to order its life in ways that enable it to be faithful to its calling. Structures are not ends in themselves; they are means by which we seek to serve God's purposes with clarity, integrity and compassion.
- 7.2 Therefore, in order to provide a more coherent, accountable and pastorally integrated approach to the care and oversight of ministers, it is proposed that the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee and the Maintenance of the Ministry Committee be amalgamated into a single committee, to be known as the Ministries Support Wellbeing Committee.

- 7.3 In this way, the Church seeks to bring together care and accountability, wisdom and clarity, so that those called to ministry may be supported faithfully, and the life of the Church may be ordered well.

APPENDIX 1

Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee

Revised Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 The wellbeing of ministers has been high on the Church's agenda for many years. 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.
- 1.3 Whilst recognising that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are office holders, the Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee exists to advise the denomination on best practice concerning the welfare of ministers, ill health of ministers and ministerial conditions of service, including stipend increase. It shall consider special cases referred to it not covered by normal practice and after other sources have been explored so that, where appropriate, a minister can continue in service of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.4 It has oversight of the welfare funds of the General Assembly.
- 1.5 The Committee has key responsibilities across several interdependent operational areas, namely:
 - Synod Moderators' meeting
 - Resources Committee
 - Assembly Executive
 - The Officers of General Assembly

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 Ill health

The Committee will

- make decisions about the stipends of ministers who have been unable to work for some time through ill health;
- receive a report on pension matters and ill health retirements made to each meeting by the Pensions Convenor to keep members up to date.

2.2 Conditions of Service

The Committee will

- advise on, and recommend the annual revisions to, the stipend to the Resources 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;

- advise on, and recommend, the annual revisions to associated allowances for ministers to Resources Committee;
- recommend amendments to ministerial conditions of service, the Plan for Partnership, in the light of experience, legislation and recommendations from the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries);
- resolve questions where the circumstances do not exactly fit the Plan for Partnership, or where it may be appropriate to make an exception;

2.3 **Special Cases**

The Committee will:

- consider the cases and need for support of United Reformed Church ministers which are referred to it because of some perceived pastoral need by Synod Moderators, Assembly Executive or the Officers of Assembly, having explored all other avenues;
- 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 including a course of retraining, or therapy, or counselling;
- authorise the payroll to provide stipend or part-stipend, and may authorise the Chief Finance Officer to pay other necessary expenses 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. This does not apply to ministers who have been removed from the Roll under a disciplinary. See Paper H2 Assembly Executive November 2025. The Chief Finance Officer will accept this authority for payment;
- respond to any questions posed to it by the Payroll Manager regarding applications for welfare grants;
- in consultation with the Resources Committee, determine the level of welfare grants to be paid from Assembly funds.

2.4 **Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund**

The Committee will:

- consider exceptional cases of hardship after all other all statutory benefits and other sources of income have been exhausted, and
- taking into account overall household income:
- make 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.
- grant awards on a discretionary and case-by-case basis: eligibility to apply for an award does not equate to entitlement to receive one;
- review awards annually: they will not be 'lifetime' payments.

2.4.1 **Eligibility**

- The Fund must be equally applicable and accessible across the whole URC;
- 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;
- There needs to be an income threshold for eligibility (i.e. income above the threshold disqualifies an application to the Fund). GA agreed that this should be the sum of 50% of the current in-service stipend and the full standard state pension;

- There should be an annual cap on the maximum payable under the scheme in each case. GA agreed that this should be 15% of the current in-service stipend.

3. Confidentiality

It is evident that the work of the committee will be confidential, fair and pastoral. Nevertheless, it will need to keep a record of its meetings. Due to the need for confidentiality, the committee should use the URC's SharePoint site for all meeting papers. The committee's conclusions should be recorded there and on the minister's file, 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.

4. Membership

Convenor

Three members (two lay and one ordained)

Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator

Pensions Committee Convenor

Payroll Manager

Minutes Secretary: PA to the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

5. 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.

6. Conducting business

- The Committee meets four times per year and reports to Ministries Committee. 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, bearing in mind the need for confidentiality.

Paper D1

Update from Resources Committee

Resources Committee

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins, Convenor michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk Victoria James, Chief Operating Officer victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 27 General Assembly notes the work of the Resources Committee. Resolution 28 General Assembly notes the Annual Report and audited accounts for 2025.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide an overview of the Resources Committee work relating to matters not already before General Assembly for decision. To draw General Assembly's attention to the availability of the audited accounts for 2025 and accompanying Trustee's report.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	G2 Resources Committee Update July 2025 G1 Budget Paper November 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	N/A

Summary of Impact

Financial	N/A
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 The Resources Committee formally began its work after General Assembly in 2024 and after its first year of work conducted a review of its Terms of Reference but also how it conducts its business. For this review processes each member of Resources Committee met with the Convenor and Secretary and discussed their experiences of the committee and any suggested improvements for how it functions. This was a helpful process, which yielded positive feedback but also

constructive points about areas of development which the Secretary has been implementing with the support of the wider Administration and Resources team.

- 1.2 Between General Assembly 2025 and General Assembly 2026, the Committee will have met five times.

2. Decisions & Main Areas of Focus

2.1 Staffing Restructure

- 2.1.1 The Resources Committee Update for General Assembly 2025 explained that the then General Secretariat had announced that there was to be a full review of the staff team (except for Retired Ministers Housing Society (RMHS)) which is not funded through the Ministry & Mission (M&M) budget). On 6 May 2025, the Resources Committee reviewed the proposed structures and associated roles in the context of a detailed outline of the strategy and rationale for the proposed changes.
- 2.1.2 At the time of General Assembly 2025, the consultations were ongoing and therefore no details could be provided at that time. The consultations concluded shortly after General Assembly 2025 with the new structure coming into place from 1 September 2025. It remains the case that the team is continuing to settle into that new structure and the operational developments to underpin the structure continue.
- 2.1.3 Within paper G1 Budget paper for Assembly Executive in November 2025, it was noted that the process resulted in nine people being made redundant, seven people being appointed to new roles and five people moving to part time hours. Each person moving into a new role had the benefit of a trial period to make sure the new role was right for them. One person has decided within their trial period that the role was not right for them and as such the number of redundancies rests at 10. Resources Committee and the Senior Leadership team thank these individuals for their work during their time with the United Reformed Church and their contribution to our shared life.
- 2.1.4 The restructure aimed to streamline operations, clarify roles, increase collaboration and ensure efficiency and accountability such that decision making in the Councils of the church becomes impact focussed and data driven. As such, teams within the Offices of General Assembly relate to the structures and areas of work covered by the Councils of the Church, which fall into three main areas. Firstly, those things which are necessary to be a well-run, compliant organisation, which is the remit of the Resources Committee. Secondly, those things which are essential to be a church organisation, which is the remit of the Ministries Committee. Finally, there are those things which help us live out our faith as the URC, which will be the remit of the new committee approved by General Assembly which will combine the current Mission and Discipleship committees.
- 2.1.5 Consequently, we have three main Departments, each led by a member of the Senior Leadership Team (formerly the General Secretariat):
- Administration & Resources, led by the Chief Operating Officer
 - Ministries, led by the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)
 - Faith in Action, led by the Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action).

2.1.6 Alongside these Departments are roles outside of the Senior Leadership Team which report directly to the General Secretary which include Head of Governance Services, Head of Legal Services and the Director of Strategy & Programmes.

2.1.7 Within Administration & Resources, we have formed a People and Benefits team which cover all areas in relation to the technical functions which enable people to fulfil their roles and receive their stipend or salary. This encompasses receipt of ongoing benefits and ensuring all legislative matters such as right to work checks for lay and ordained people are fulfilled.

2.1.8 The database and website functionality also sits within Administration and Resources to enable us to have a coordinated approach to data collection and analysis to support future strategic decisions and assess the impact of projects across the work of the Offices of General Assembly.

2.1.9 Three roles within the Administration & Resources Department are joint roles with the Methodist Church. The Building & Facilities Manager and Support Officer both work across the two office sites, which are geographically very close together. The Records and Archives Manager is also a joint role managing the records for both the Methodists and the URC.

2.1.10 The safeguarding team are part of the Ministries Department.

2.1.11 The Faith in Action Department support the United Reformed Church's outreach in several different areas. The Communications team are now part of the Faith in Action Department so that they are embedded in the life and work of this team, such that the depth and breadth of the life of the URC can be communicated.

2.1.12 Within the Faith in Action department there are several sub teams such that:

- Children, Youth & Intergenerational Discipleship and Evangelism and Ecumenism work alongside each other with shared support.
- Public Issues and Global and Intercultural Church would work alongside each other with shared support.
- World Justice and interfaith relations including Commitment for Life.

2.1.13 For more detail, the current organisational charts are provided in Appendix 1.

2.2 Finance Matters

2.2.1 The finances of the church has continued to be a significant area of focus for Resources Committee since General Assembly 2025 and has included:

- Preparing the 2026 budget ready for approval by the URC Trust and Assembly Executive. As there was going to be another deficit budget, this process was both a strategic and financial exercise. There were also operational complexities as a consequence of the staff restructure which moved some areas of spending into different teams. This required careful work to ensure the comparative figures were accurate.
- Monitoring of the quarterly management accounts.
- Preparation of the 2025 annual report and accounts for approval by the URC Trust and adoption by General Assembly. This process included meeting with

the auditors at the start of the process as well as receiving their feedback at the end of the process which will inform future work and decision making. The audit has been a smooth process for 2025.

2.2.2 After the committee adopted a new Budget Policy in 2024 for 2025, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) and the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) have been working to embed this policy with staff and Committees. This embedding work continues but the policy is being followed well thus far by Committee Secretaries, and the outworking is that Resources Committee have been notified of some unbudgeted spends approved by committees (£10-20k) or agreed by budget holders (under £10k). In cases where it is higher spend (over £20k) agreement has been sought from Resources Committee on the recommendation of the relevant committee. This has resulted in the following decisions thus far under the policy:

- Repairs to the heating system in the Offices of General Assembly - £22,800
- JPIT Intern - £6,100
- Continued legal work on the disciplinary process review - £25,000

2.2.3 So far in 2026, there has therefore been approval of essential unbudgeted spend of £53,900.

2.2.4 The COO and CFO are aware that there is a need for further work with committees and those supporting committees to ensure a full understanding of the policy and its implications.

2.2.5 The Committee have reviewed the remit of the Church Building Fund grant and updated the process which has been communicated to synods as they seek to support local churches.

2.3 Church House (Tavistock Place) and Central Properties

2.3.1 Resources Committee have been involved in conveyancing transactions for several central properties for Moderators and General Assembly Appointed Ministers:

- The manse which was used by the previous Deputy General Secretary (Mission) is being marketed for sale for £530k as it will not be used in future as a manse.
- A new manse has been purchased for the North Western Synod Moderator at a cost of £675k. The property is currently undergoing a renovation with an estimated total cost of £120k. The purchase price reflected the need for modernisation.
- A purchase had been agreed on a new manse for the South Western Synod Moderator, after which the current manse will be sold. However, the first sale fell through and a second has now been found at a purchase price of £750k.
- The former South Western Moderator's manse which was not fit for purpose and proved difficult to sell, finally sold in the summer of 2025 for £535k.

2.3.2 The Committee, in collaboration with the URC Trust have established a clear delegation of authority for the maintenance of central properties and the purchase and sale thereof. This sets out which level decisions rest with the employed staff team, what needs to be decided by Resources Committee and what Resources Committee needs to refer to the URC Trust.

2.3.3 During some of the sale processes it has become apparent that, while the Law Society recommendation of a deposit equivalent to 10% of the agreed purchase remains, it is becoming increasingly common for 5% to be accepted. While 10% is to be achieved where possible, the Committee, along with the URC Trust have agreed that 5% can be accepted if it means securing a sale. In the event of breach, the full 10% is enforceable.

2.3.4 The Church House building remains in a good state of repair. However, at the start of January 2026 emergency work was required to the heating/air-conditioning system at an unbudgeted cost of £22,800.

2.3.5 Resources Committee are also undertaking a review of the facilities contracts to ensure that they are both fit for purpose and best value for money.

2.4 People & Benefits

2.4.1 The staff restructure created a new People and Benefits team which brings together, HR, payroll and pensions. Maxine Parker started in January as the new Head of People and Benefits. Maxine is working closely with the COO to move forward culturally and operationally following the restructure.

2.4.2 The current focus is a full review of policy and procedure, and most particularly to ensure compliance with the Employment Rights Act 2025. This work is scheduled through 2026. Details of policy work relating to this are provided in section 4.

2.4.3 The Pensions Committee is a subcommittee of Resources Committee, the Resources Committee has received regular updates about the move to Buy Out by an insurer of the closed pension scheme. Two members of Resources Committee are also members of the Joint Working Group working with the Pension Trust towards buy in and ultimately buy out of the Scheme. Since the Ministers' Pension Scheme moved to 'buy in' with Just, it is no longer necessary for us to hold the Pension Deficit Fund. The fund was made up of generous contributions from Synods for which we express our grateful thanks. The balance of the funds held have now been returned to the synods in proportion to their original contributions.

2.5 Policies

2.5.1 Resources Committee have dealt with the following routine policy reviews over the year:

- Anti-bribery
- Bring Your Own Device (IT)
- CCTV Policy
- Salary Review Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Health & Safety and Welfare Handbook
- Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure
- Expenses Policy (Lay staff)

2.5.2 The Employment Right Act 2025 has necessitated updates to various policies: -

- Probation Policy & Procedure

- Induction Policy and Procedure
- Paternity Policy
- Sickness Absence Policy
- Neonatal leave and Paternity Bereavement Leave

2.5.3 Other policies have been introduced to cover operations and represent proactive steps to prevent future difficulties and to mitigate risks:

- Complaints Policy – this relates solely to complaints made by members of the wider denomination about lay staff members or contractors engaged in relation to the work undertaken in and from the Offices of General Assembly. It does not apply to ministers, RMHS, local church or synod contexts.
- Subject Access Request Policy & Procedure
- Generative AI Guidance

3. Annual Report and Annual Accounts

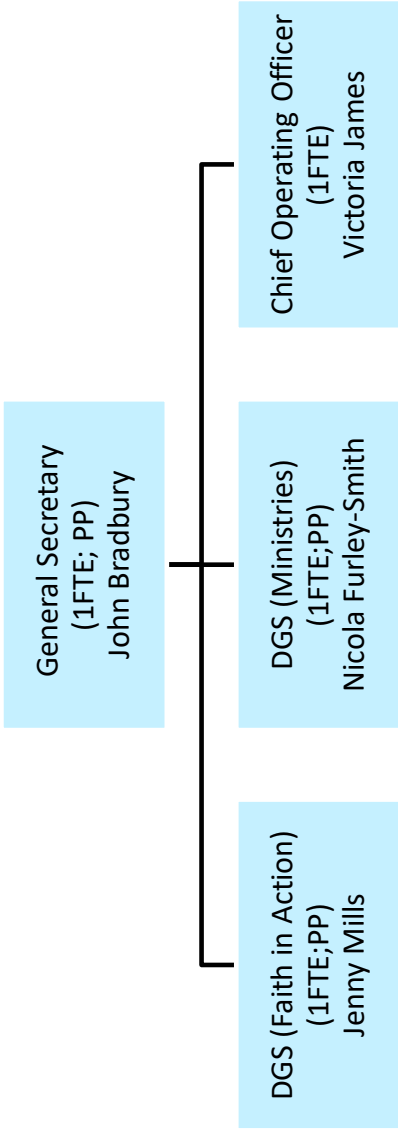
- 3.1 Both the Resources Committee and the URC Trust have considered the findings of the audited accounts for year-end 31st December 2025 and approved them.
- 3.2 Members of the General Assembly are invited to review the audited accounts, in preparation for passing this resolution, which are on the URC website and can be found on this page www.urc.org.uk/general-assembly-papers.
- 3.3 If for any reason the accounts are not available online before the General Assembly meets, the Treasurer will seek to withdraw the paper from consideration by members of the General Assembly.

4. Future Work

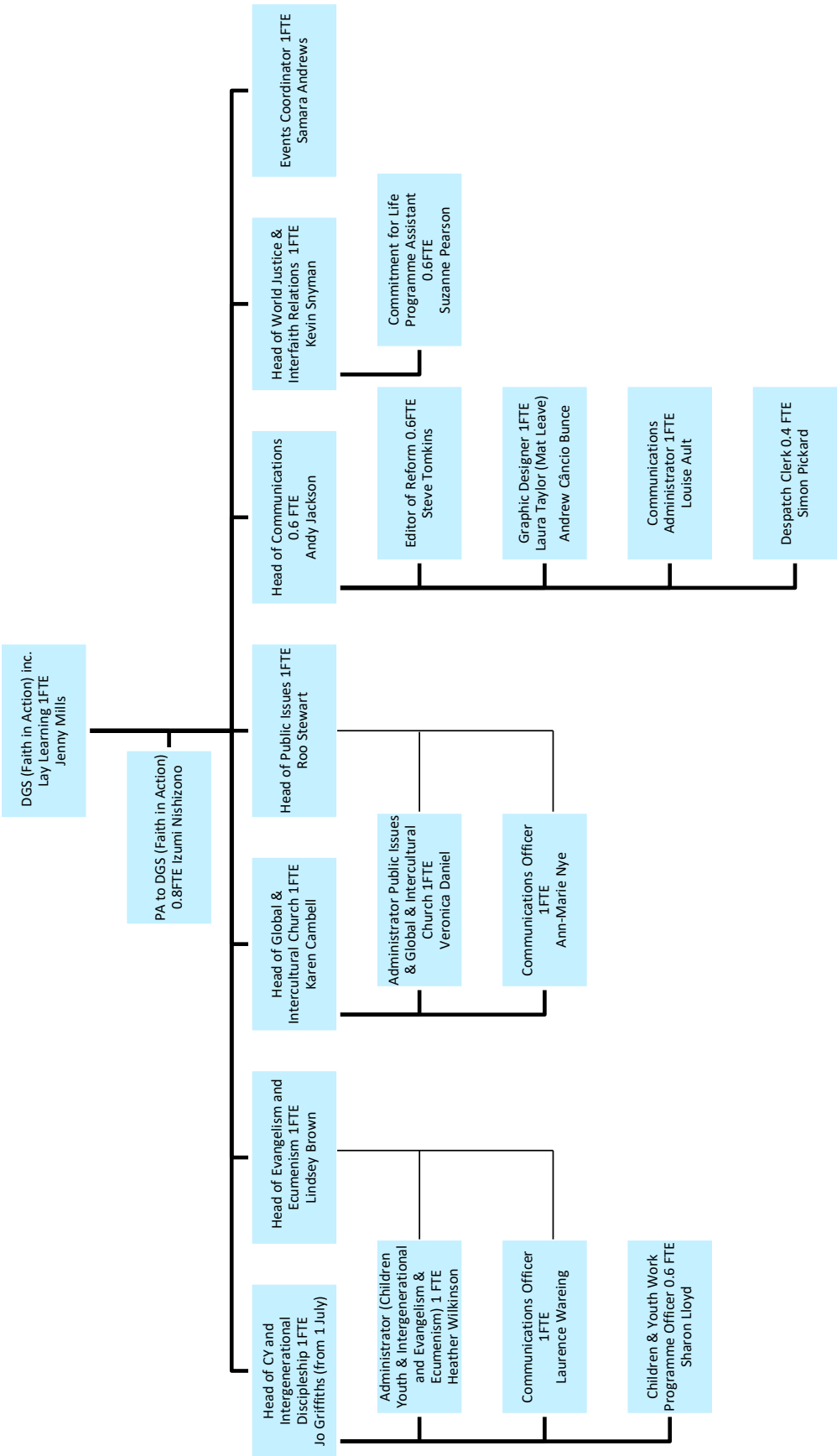
- 4.1 For the remainder of 2026 into 2027, the Resources Committee have a number of key areas of focus:
- Continuing the implementation of the Church Life Review Resolutions passed at the Extraordinary General Assembly in November 2025.
 - Working jointly with Ministries on the review of the M&M process.
 - Developing the database to meet the evolving needs.
 - Working with Faith in Action Committee on a strategy for the URC Bookshop and the *Reformed* Magazine (the name of which was changed from *Reform* in April 2026 to avoid confusion with the political party).

Appendix 1 New Organisation Charts May 2026

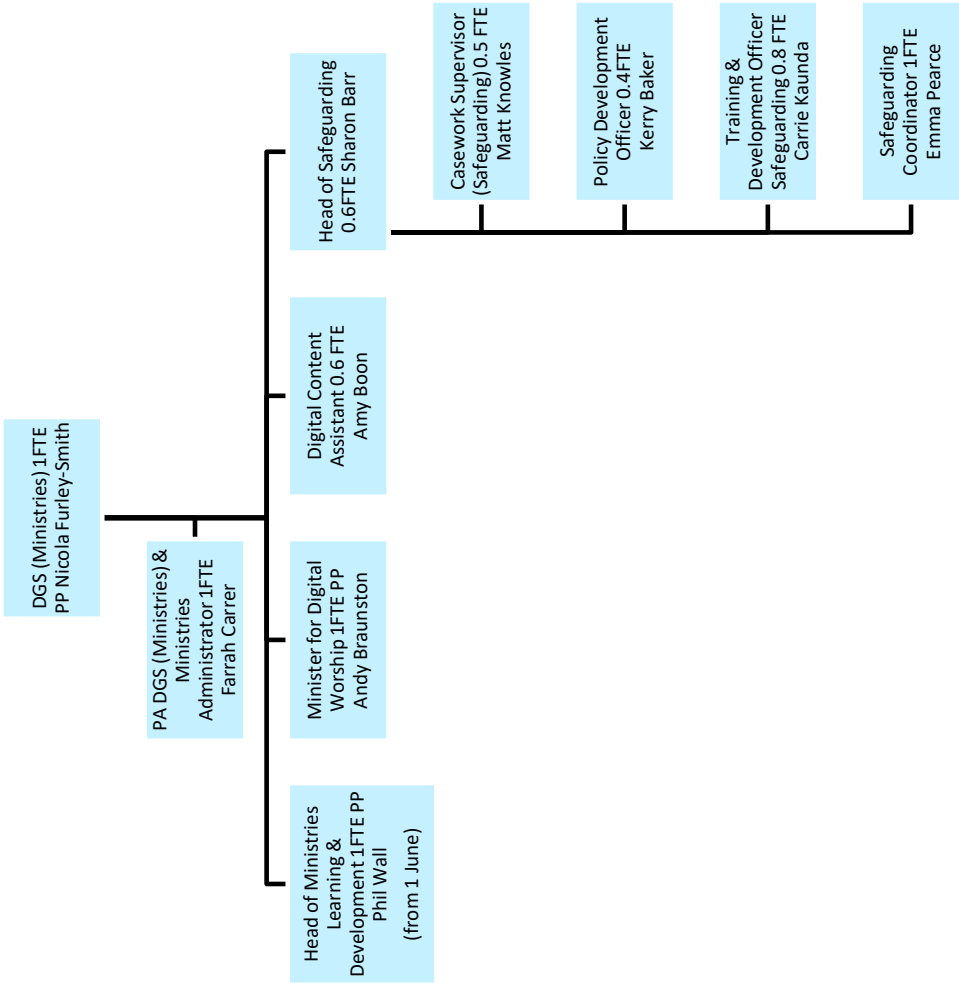
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)



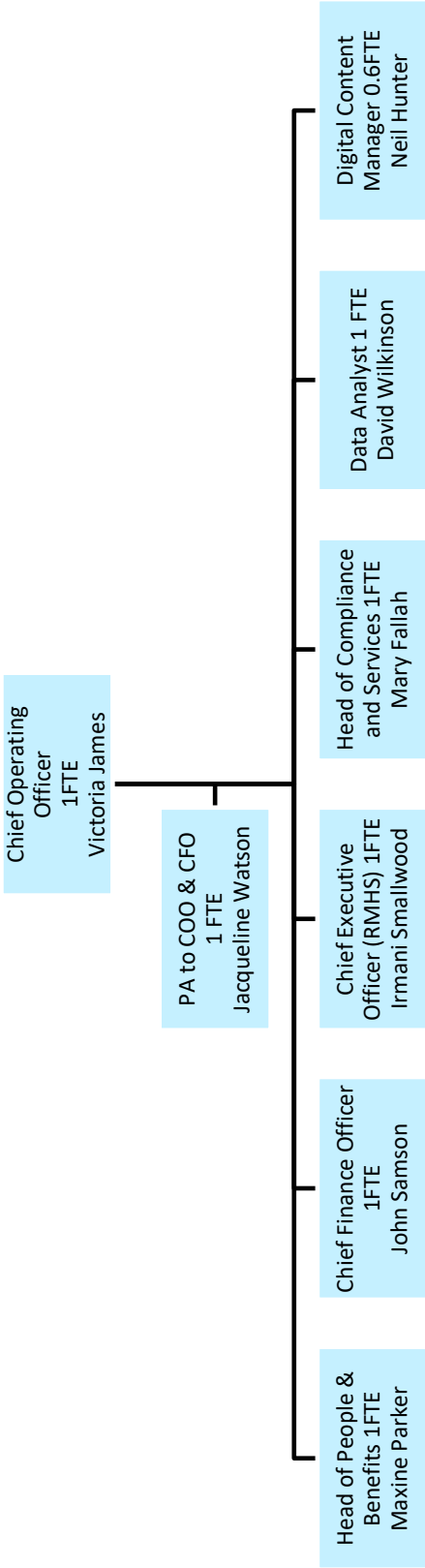
Faith in Action – New Combined Team



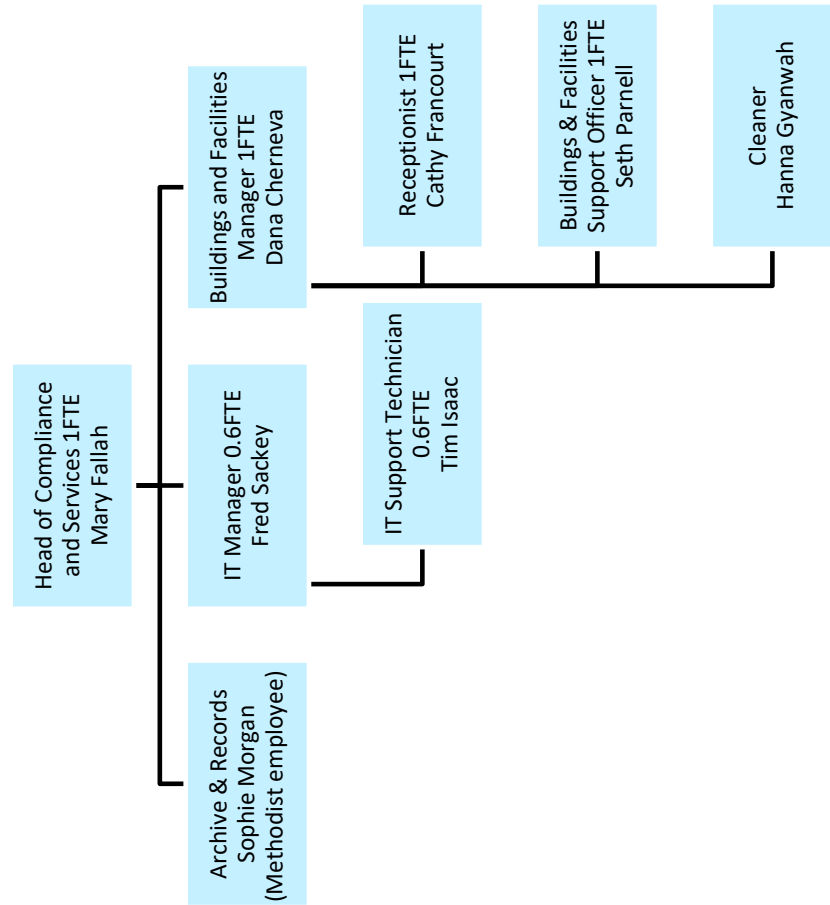
Ministries



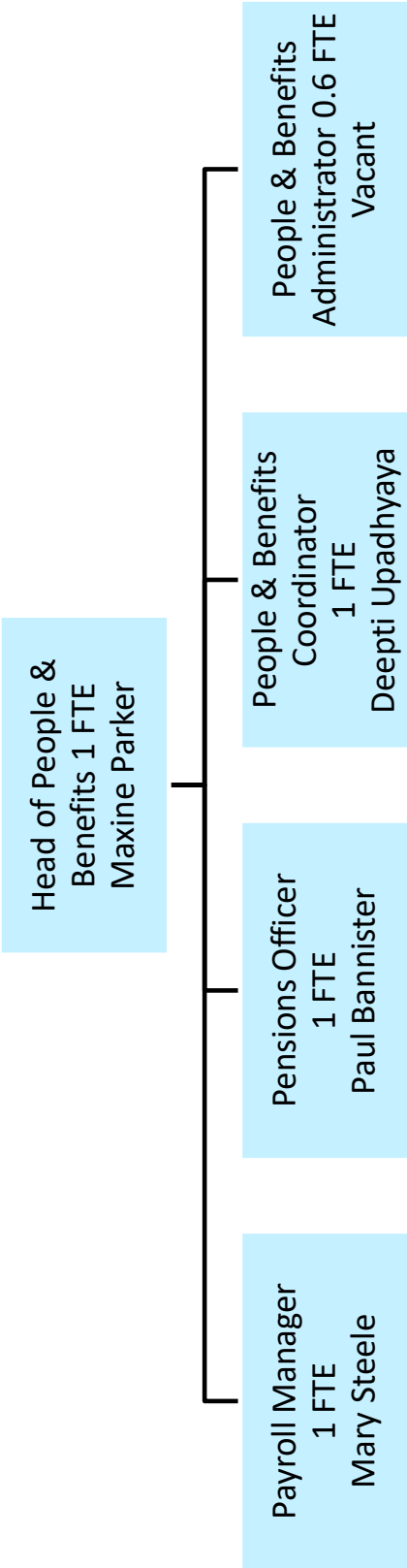
Admin & Resources



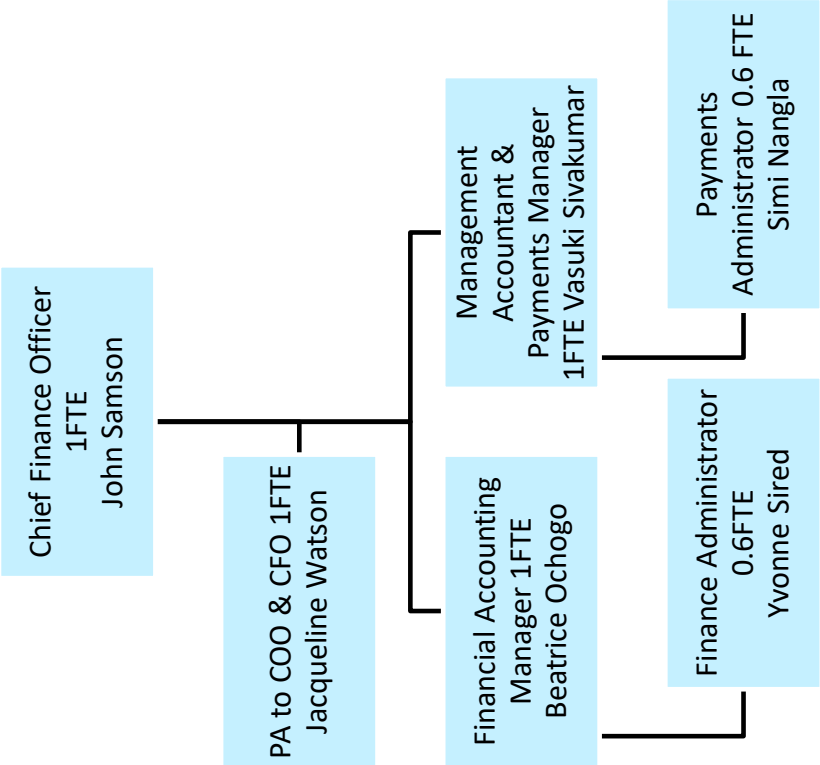
Compliance & Services



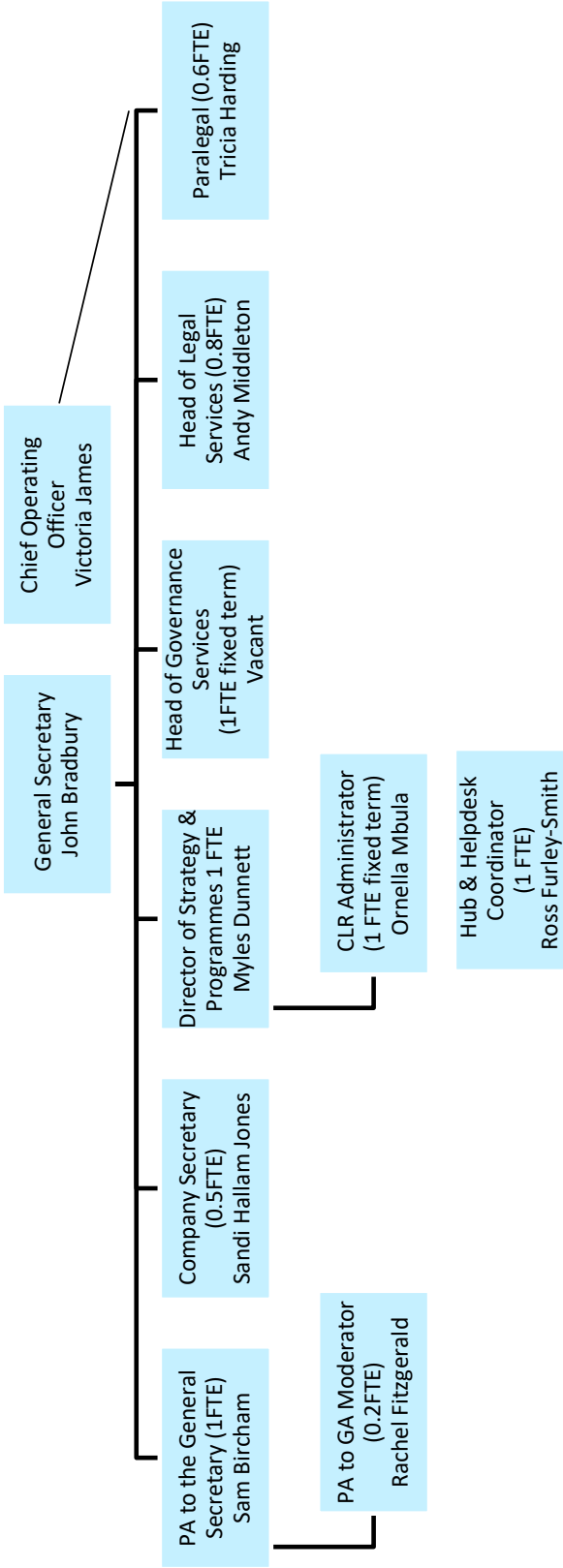
People & Benefits



Finance



Areas linked to the SLT



Paper D2

Future of the Investment Committee

Resources Committee

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins michael.hopkins@urc.org.uk Victoria James victoria.james@urc.org.uk
Action required	Note
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 29 General Assembly determines that following the buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme, a different style of committee is required and that the URC Investment Committee (URCIC) will cease to exist. Resolution 30 General Assembly determines that a new Investment Committee will be created as a sub-committee of Resources Committee, reporting to the URC Trust. Resolution 31 General Assembly approves the Terms of Reference for this new subcommittee.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To create a differently configured Investment Committee following buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme which meets the changed investment requirements.
Main points	The buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme changes the context of the current Investment Committee. As such a new approach is required from the buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme. The proposal contained in this paper has been drawn up in consultation with URC Trust.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Trust

Summary of Impact

Financial	There is no cost to the associated resolutions but having appropriate investment expertise is vital to ensure appropriate management of the financial assets.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	N/A

1. Background

- 1.1 The URC Investment Committee (URCIC) has played a vital and significant role in ensuring the performance of investments on behalf of the URC Trust but also the

- substantial portfolio which underpinned the Ministers' Pension Fund.
- 1.2 Once the Ministers' Pension fund moves to buyout, the basis of and level of need changes, which directly impacts URCIC, which currently relates to the Ministers' Pension Trust board and the URC Trust board. Following buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme, investment support will relate to the investments of the URC Trust only.
- 2. Proposed Way Forward**
- 2.1 The Resources Committee has a clear remit on how it supports the URC Trust in exercising their oversight of the finances which the URC Trust manages on behalf of the Church. The investments held by the URC Trust play an important part in the budgeting and financial planning necessary to meet the needs of the Church. As such, there does need to be a specialist group to continue to work to ensure the effective management of the investment portfolio.
- 2.2 The size of the portfolio as compared to that currently in the remit of URCIC is much smaller as a consequence of the pension buyout. This therefore changes the nature and operation of any future investment committee.
- 2.3 To ensure an effective relationship between operational finance matters, the working of the Resources Committee and the oversight of the URC Trust, it is proposed that a new investment committee is established which is a subcommittee of Resources Committee, with reporting obligations to the URC Trust.
- 2.4 There would be crossover of membership with members of Resources Committee and the URC Trust, with staff members with financial and overall budget responsibility in attendance.
- 2.5 The proposed terms of reference are provided in Appendix 1 for the approval of General Assembly.

Appendix 1

Investment Committee Terms of Reference

Committee	Investment Committee
Convenor	Appointed by General Assembly
Secretary	TBC from within the staff team
Ex Officio Members	Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer Investment Specialist Director of URC Trust Chair of URC Trust Chief Finance Officer
URC Trust Appointed Members	Three further members with investment knowledge and experience
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)	Chief Operating Officer Other members of the Finance or People and Benefits teams.
Minute Secretary	TBC from within the staff team

Meeting Frequency	Minimum twice per annum but up to four times per annum.
Connected Boards and Committees	Investment Committee is a sub-committee of the Resources Committee but reports to the URC Trust also.
Quoracy	Four members, to always include the Treasurer or Deputy Treasurer.
Accountability & Reporting Duties	General Assembly as part of Resources Committee and URC Trust reporting on financial matters in terms of the budget and annual accounts. The Committee will provide an update report to each meeting of the URC Trust. Responsibility for the implementation of policies and decisions of the Investment Committee rests with the CFO.
Terms of Reference Review	At least every four years, in consultation with the Trust. In addition, a full review in consultation with the Trust and the operational team will take place 18 months after its first meeting to ensure its effectiveness.

Responsibilities

The Investment Committee (the Committee) supports the Resources Committee in its financial responsibilities by ensuring the relevant investments are effectively managed. Given the Resources Committee acts under the authority of the URC Trust, then so too does this Committee.

The Investment Committee will ensure that:

- an appropriate investment strategy is in place to meet with financial needs of the URC, based on the recommendations and requirements of Resources Committee and the URC Trust
- appropriate investment policies are in place meeting the requirements of the Trust and that they are, as far as possible, in keeping with the ethical standards set by General Assembly
- performance of the investments is monitored throughout the year and recommendations are made to Resources Committee and the URC Trust based on said performance.

The Investment Committee will be the main point of contact with the current investment managers and the committee will:

- meet the managers as necessary in order to meet the Committees responsibilities
- tender for new investment managers if the need arises

- monitor the performance of the investment managers, raising any issues with the URC Trust and Resources Committee.

The Investment Committee may be able to support synods in relation to their investments, but the Committee cannot give Regulated Financial Advice.

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 CFO and noted at the next meeting with updates on progress as needed.

Expertise from outside its membership can be utilised for projects and task groups from beyond its membership instructed to develop specific pieces of work. The Committee has the power to seek external professional advice if it deems it 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 G1

Report to General Assembly 2026

Nominations Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Victoria Blunt victoria.blunt@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 32 General Assembly adopts the recommendations for ‘good practice’ for Synods in selecting representatives to attend General Assembly, as set out in section 2.4 of the report, and commends these to Synods. Resolution 33 General Assembly instructs the Nominations Committee to work with the Business Committee and those responsible for communications in the Offices of General Assembly to produce and distribute the relevant resources to support these recommendations, including promotional media and application templates, in preparation for General Assembly 2027. Resolution 34 General Assembly resolves that there be two co-opted ordinary members of the Church Life Fund Committee in order to ensure that there is diversity on the committee. Resolution 35 General Assembly gives thanks for all who have served on General Assembly committees and as representatives of the Church. Where terms of service have ended, or resignations have been received, General Assembly discharges these volunteers with thanks for their service. Resolution 36 General Assembly appoints members of committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 7 of this Report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary Reports to Assembly. Resolution 37 General Assembly thanks John Bradbury for his service thus far and appoints him to serve as General Secretary for a further term of 5 years from General Assembly 2027 to General Assembly 2032.

	Resolution 38 General Assembly reappoints the Revd Jamie Kissack to serve as Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod until 30th September 2032.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report on the work of the Nominations Committee since General Assembly 2025, specifically regarding Resolution 7 and the standardisation of safer recruitment across all committees and representative roles.
Main points	Progress on Resolution 7 (2025) regarding Synod representation at General Assembly. Implementation of safer recruitment and person specifications for core and specialist committees. Development of data collection for protected characteristics to ensure church-wide diversity. Appointment of the re-formed Assembly Appointments Panel and Church Life Fund Committee.
Previous relevant documents	General Assembly 2025, Resolution 7
Consultation has taken place with...	EDIB sub-committee, Synod Clerks, the URC Legal Advisor, and the Director of Strategy and Programmes.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	Recruitment of members to ecumenical bodies.

Report to General Assembly 2026

1. Committee Work and Safer Recruitment

- 1.1 A primary focus since General Assembly 2025 has been supporting Core and Specialist committees with nominating members through formal safer recruitment processes. These processes are becoming embedded, resulting in a wider diversity of names, including individuals who have not previously served at the Assembly level.
- 1.2 The Nominations Committee would like to thank the committees for their support with supporting the safer recruitment processes. As we have transitioned into this new way of working, there have been occasions when the Nominations Committee have received requests for appointments to be made outside of the standard processes. We have worked with committees on these, and where appropriate, have shared justifications for these with Assembly Executive.

However, as the processes are now embedded, the Nominations Committee has decided that all future Assembly level appointments must be advertised and recruited in line with the safer recruitment processes set out. This includes advertising roles, even if someone is prepared to serve a second term. This was

communicated to all Assembly committee convenors and staff of the Offices of General Assembly by letter in March 2026.

1.3 For appointments outside of these committees — such as URC representatives on external bodies or groups like the Congregational Hall Memorial Trust — the committee has produced person specifications and job descriptions to support transparent advertising.

1.4 We are currently developing methods to collect information on protected characteristics for existing committees and candidates. This will allow us to support committees more effectively in reflecting the diversity of the URC. This work will continue into the coming year.

2. Response to Resolution 7 (2025): Synod Representation

2.1 General Assembly 2025 Resolution 7 instructed the Nominations Committee to bring recommendations for best practice in appointing Synod representatives to ensure diversity. The Nominations Committee has consulted with the Equalities, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) sub-committee, Synod Clerks and the URC Legal Advisor.

2.2 While the original resolution used the term ‘safer recruitment’, consultations concluded that this phrasing did not represent what was needed for selecting representatives to attend General Assembly. Instead, the Nominations Committee decided that the intent behind this term was that the focus should be on inclusive advertising of the opportunity and enabling the pool of attendees to be broadened.

2.3 As part of the discussions surrounding the work on this resolution, consideration was given to what ‘the diversity of the URC’ means. Through consultation, the Nominations Committee felt that the following should be considered:

- Lay and ordained members, including those who are not Elders.
- Age
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Gender identity and gender reassignment
- Marriage/Civil Partnership status
- Race
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Class
- Disability
- Neurodiversity
- Theological diversity and diversity of thought
- Inclusion of all congregations, such as Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs)

2.4 Following consultation, the Nominations Committee proposes the following recommendations for ‘good practice’ for Synods in selecting representatives to attend General Assembly.

- An ‘advert’ for attending General Assembly is circulated via Synod Newsletters.
- There are centrally produced social media adverts, website adverts and information about attending General Assembly as a synod representatives

which are made available to Synods to use as they so wish. This includes short videos about General Assembly (such as 'Is it for me?') which make it clear that General Assembly is for a wide range of people across the URC.

- Social media adverts and the videos are shared on the central URC social media platforms, as well as being available for Synods to use.
- The communication highlight that there is no financial cost to attending General Assembly. Synods, and the Offices of General Assembly, should have mechanisms in place to purchase travel tickets for attendees prior to Assembly, not rely on attendees being able to purchase them themselves and be reimbursed afterwards.
- An online form (e.g. Google Forms) is available for people to express an interest in attending General Assembly. An example of this is shared with Synods, although Synods are free to produce their own. For those who do not use the internet, there is also the possibility of contacting Synod Office.
- For any candidate, a verbal reference should be given from their minister or church secretary for lay members, and from the Synod Moderator for ministers.

2.5 Throughout the consultation, a number of points were raised about how arrangements for General Assembly could be made more inclusive and thus help to broaden the appeal of attending to a more diverse pool of people. These suggestions lay outside the remit of the Nominations Committee, but were shared with the Business Committee.

2.6 This section of the paper relates to Resolutions 32 and 33.

3. Assembly Appointments Panel

3.1 Following 2025 resolutions, the committee has advertised for and conducted safer recruitment checks for the re-formed Assembly Appointments Panel. The names for these are in Section 7.

4. Church Life Fund Committee

4.1 The Nominations Committee has also worked alongside Synods and Myles Dunnett, Director of Strategy and Programmes, to propose names for the Church Life Fund Committee. Recommended names for this committee are in Section 7.

4.2 In accordance with the terms of reference set by General Assembly 2026, this committee is made up of 13 Synod representatives (one from each Synod), two representatives of the URC Trust, one Youth Representative and one Convenor.

4.3 The representatives of the URC Trust have been selected by the URC Trust.

4.4 The convenor role was advertised.

4.5 For the Synod representatives, each Synod was asked to provide two names of suitable candidates. All candidates undertook a safer recruitment interview. One candidate from each Synod was then selected in order to try to reflect the diversity of the URC.

4.6 At the time of writing this paper, no names have been suggested for the Youth Representative. We will therefore run another recruitment round for this.

4.7 Out of 26 names put forward by Synods, only one individual was from a Global Majority Heritage background. This is not sufficient representation for a committee with 13 Synod Representatives and at least 17 members in total. The Nominations Committee is committed to ensure diversity in our General Assembly-mandated work and therefore propose to co-opt two additional ordinary members, to improve the quality of our governance decision making. This represents a living out of the Church's commitment to equality, diversity, inclusion, belonging, and anti-racism through deliberate action. In light of this, the Nominations Committee asked all synods to suggest a name for Nominations Committee to approach. At the time of writing, two names have been received and approaches to these individuals are being made before safer recruitment processes begin.

4.8 Resolution 34 is the proposal to co-opt two additional ordinary members of Global Majority Heritage background to ensure that there is diversity on the committee.

5. Thanks to all who serve on Assembly Committees

5.1 The Church remains fortunate to have numerous dedicated members who generously contribute their time and talents to serve on its committees, panels, and working groups, as well as by representing the Church on outside bodies. The Nominations Committee wishes to express its sincere appreciation for all who offer their service in these roles.

6. Those to be appointed or re-appointed

6.1 The committee brings to General Assembly for appointment 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.

6.2 Those agreeing to be appointed for the first time or for a further term:

Committee/group	Name	Role	Years	
Pensions Committee Convenor	The Revd Janet Tollington	Convenor	2026 - 2030	Extension of term of service due to buy-in, buy-out
URC Trust Member	Ms Alanna Hurman	Member	2026-2030	
Safeguarding Committee	Roger Jones	Convenor	To continue until post is filled	To continue whilst new convenor is appointed
Safeguarding Committee	Rev Alecia Johnstone	Member	2026-2029	
Complaints and Discipline Advisory Group	Mrs Fiona Smith	Consultant to Ministers in Section O	2026-2030	Continuation in post
Assembly Appointments Panel	The Revd Janet Tollington	Member	2026 - 2031	
Assembly Appointments Panel	The Revd Gilbert Esambe	Member	2026 - 2031	
Assembly Appointments Panel	The Revd Alex Jacob	Member	2026 - 2031	

Assembly Appointments Panel	Mr Tony Brett	Member	2026 - 2031	
Assembly Appointments Panel	The Revd Carole Marsden	Member	2026 - 2031	
Assembly Appointments Panel	Dr Ewen Harley	Member	2026 - 2031	
Assembly Appointments Panel	Ms Muna Levan-Harris	Member	2026 - 2031	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Philip Brooks	Convenor	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr David Coaker	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Marcelle Plaatjies	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Reuben Watt	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr John Denison	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Gordon Woods	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Jessica Ashcroft-Townsley	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Jacky Embrey	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Joan Grindrod-Helmn	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Simon Walkling	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Steven Smillie	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Keith Berry	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Ms Helen McCormack	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd Alison Micklem	Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	The Revd James Breslin	URC Trust Representative Member	2026 - 2029	
Church Life Fund Committee	Mr Alan Yates	URC Trust Representative Member	2026 - 2029	
Resources Committee	Mr Steve Powell	Finance Representative	2026-2030	
Ministers Pension Fund	The Revd Janet Tollington	Ex officio trustee, as Convenor of the URC Pensions Committee	2026-2027	Extension of term due to buy-in/buy-out

Ministers Pension Fund	Mr Richard Nunn	Ex officio trustee, as Convenor of the URC Investment Committee	2026-2027	Extension of term due to buy-in/buy-out
Ministers Pension Fund	The Revd Caroline Vodden	Member Nominated Trustee	2026-2027	Extension of term due to buy-in/buy-out
Ministries Committee	The Revd Jan Adamson	Member	2026-2030	
Ministries Committee	Ms Gill Bates	Member	2026-2030	Serving a second term
Westminster College Board of Governors	Mr Derek Graham	Governor	2026-2032	
Westminster College Board of Governors	The Revd Catherine Lewis-Smith	Governor	2026-2032	

7. Membership of committees, panels and working groups, and representatives to other bodies

- 7.1 In the interests of clarity and brevity, this report includes only the changes to the membership of committees, panels, and working groups. A full list of current membership will be published in the Record of Assembly and is available on request from the Nominations Committee at nominations@urc.org.uk.

8. Review of the General Secretary

- 8.1 A review panel convened by the Moderator of General Assembly, Mrs Catriona Wheeler, met to consider the term of the Revd John Bradbury. The panel considered 360-degree feedback, John's own reflections, and held extensive conversations with John.
- 8.2 The panel noted that John feels a strong sense of call to serve a further term as General Secretary. The feedback from the review was positive and consequently, the Review Panel recommends that John Bradbury's term as General Secretary be renewed.
- 8.3 Arising out of the feedback and discussion, the following recommendations and comments are made in relation to John's responsibilities:
- **Provide theological and pastoral leadership**
The URC needs to create space and opportunities for John to provide accessible theological insights for the denomination and the wider world.
 - **Provide pastoral and operational oversight to the URC**
The panel noted the very positive ongoing relationship with the Moderators and commends John for this work.
 - **Serving both General Assembly and Mission Council**
While there are no specific recommendations, the panel noted that disciplinary processes take a large element of John's time. It is hoped the new disciplinary process will reduce this workload.
 - **Provide leadership to and management of the general secretariat**

The panel recommends that John be supplied with a 'second pair of hands' — an executive role to deal strategically with the day-to-day management of meetings, papers, and agendas. This would free John to lead strategically with a wide appreciation of the big picture.

- **Oversee the co-ordination of the work of the Offices of General Assembly**

While this now rests with the Chief Operating Officer, the panel suggests that this change needs further embedding at the Offices of General Assembly. The proposed creation of a Head of Governance is welcomed.

- **Foster and maintain links with the wider Church**

John should be given full support to explore these links, noting fruitful conversations with the Methodists and his fulfilling work as Executive President of the Communion of Protestant Churches.

- **Ensure positive external relations**

Support should be given to John as he thinks through the theological and ecclesial response to the rise of the populist right, nationalism, and Christian nationalism during his sabbatical.

- **Other matters**

The panel recommends that the Business Committee consider coaching or a support group for the General Secretary. It is further recommended that John has an annual appraisal, that consideration be given to whether termed appointments at Church House fit the URC's sense of call, and that the General Secretary's line manager be any Officer of Assembly rather than a Moderator. Finally, significant thought should be given to succession planning.

- 8.4 In light of the review, Nominations Committee recommends to General Assembly that John Bradbury is appointed to serve as General Secretary for a further term of five years. This is set out in Resolution 37.

9. Review of the Moderator of Yorkshire Synod

- 9.1 A review group met to review the term of the Revd Jamie Kissack as Moderator of Yorkshire Synod. The group warmly commends Jamie's reappointment for a further five-year term. He is widely valued as a wise, pastoral and strategic Moderator whose ministry is marked by theological depth, attentiveness to people and congregations, and a gift for fostering relationships in which others can flourish. His leadership has helped to strengthen mission, support ecumenical engagement, and guide the Synod's life with calmness, care and creative purpose. While noting the importance of continuing to develop clear communication and sustainable patterns of responsibility, the group is confident that Jamie is the right person to continue in this role and strongly recommends the extension of his call.

- 9.2 In the light of this, Nominations Committee bring Resolution 38 The renewed term is dated to Jamie's anticipated retirement date, shortly beyond a standard five-year term.

10. Notification of the reappointment of the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith to serve a second term as Deputy General Secretary (Ministries).

- 10.1 The role of Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) is a role appointed by an appointments group, comprised of those on the Assembly Appointments Panel, rather than a nominating group; therefore, the group has the devolved authority to make the appointment without a General Assembly resolution. We are pleased to

report that the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith has been appointed to serve as Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) for a further term.

A full five-year term would take Nicola beyond her anticipated retirement date of 31st January 2029, although Nicola has indicated that she will apply to serve for a few months beyond her normal retirement date so her retirement co-indices with that of her husband. She will apply through the accreditations sub-committee in the normal way to secure this.

- 10.2 The reappointment panel reported that, in a demanding period of transition and change, Nicola has brought order, stability and thoughtful leadership to the broad area of Ministries, helping to ensure that the Church has a sound basis in policy and process to support the flourishing of its various ministries. Her work is clearly valued by colleagues, particularly Synod Moderators, who appreciate her support and wisdom in complex ministerial situations.

The panel was impressed by her passion, commitment, experience and specialist knowledge, and commends both the resilience with which she has responded to a challenging and evolving role and her desire to leave a positive legacy for the wider Church and give thanks for the significant contribution Nicola has made during her first term.

Paper H1

General Report

Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PWRC)

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Elizabeth Welch, Convenor PRWC elizabeth@skerratt-welch.org.uk The Revd Jenny Mills jenny.mills@urc.org.uk
Action required	For information only
Draft resolution(s)	None

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To report the work of the committee and its oversight of welfare funds
Main points	The work of the Committee is necessarily confidential, but the report draws attention to matters of general concern and the potential future of the Committee.
Previous relevant documents	Report to General Assembly 2023
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators, Deputy General Secretary (Ministries), Maintenance of the Ministries Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	None but possible transfer to oversight by Ministries (if creation of new Ministers Support and Wellbeing Committee goes ahead)
External (eg ecumenical)	None.

Introduction The pastoral reference and welfare committee (PRWC) considers the cases of ministers who are referred to it, usually by Synods, often at times of difficulty. It also deals with welfare and emergency matters including the use of welfare funds. Because of the confidential nature of its work the report is in general terms only.

Committee members:

Convenor: The Revd Dr Elizabeth Welch [2027]**

Secretary: Deputy General Secretary (Faith in Action)

Deputy Treasurer

Synod Moderator – Geoffrey Clarke

Nominated Members:

The Revd Ruth Dillon [2028]

Mrs Hilary Miles [2026]**

Mrs Bridget Akinyombo [2028]

Vacancy

In attendance:

The Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

The committee has continued to meet via Zoom and this has enabled the committee to make decisions in a timely fashion. Urgent requests are occasionally dealt with via email.

We have considered 5 cases this past year.

Schedule of Welfare grants - 2020 - 2025

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Widow/er Gifts	9,450	11,750	9,000	6,675	12,650	12,650
Education grants	1542	1175	2089	-	-	2,672
Medical grants	-	441	-	-	-	1,304
Special grants	3,839	14,100	11,062	8,273	6,836	1,767
Ministerial Counselling	11,622	10,921	10,793	8,003	7,479	14,429
Christmas gifts	39,500	38,875	40,625	44,550	43,950	44,250
Re-imbursed	(2,750)	(2,875)	(3,105)	(3,000)	(2,850)	(2850)
TOTAL	63,202	74,387	70,464	64,501	68,065	74222

Other points to note:

- In the past year there have been discussions around ensuring the appropriate form for the Retired Minister's Benevolent Fund is both easy to complete and contains the necessary information.
- The welfare letter was sent out to all Ministers, explaining support that is available.
- Discussions with the Synod Moderators led to the development of guidelines for when to approach the PRWC. This led to more questions and to the conversation about combining MoM and PRWC Committees as much of the work overlaps.
- The biggest expenses are the Christmas gifts and Widow/er's gifts.
- The funding of the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service is met from the Ministries budget.
- There was a discussion about Private Medical treatment and the tax implications of this sort of support from synods or the PRWC.
- The Committee met with the Head of Compliance around the Risk Register. All Committees need to have completed such a Register related to their work.

We give thanks to all members of the Committee who serve, and have served, in the past three years. Much of the work is hard and not without tough decisions. Thank you to Izumi Nishizono who oversees the administration of the Committee, Mary Steele who makes the payments and offers her experience and wisdom to our work, and Elizabeth Welch who convenes and leads the Committee with grace, commitment and compassion.

If the decision to combine the PRWC and MoM Committees is agreed at this General Assembly, this will be the final report from PRWC.

Paper I1

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 2025
Previous relevant documents	T1 Safeguarding Annual Report from General Assembly 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

Background

The Safeguarding Committee meets quarterly, with one of these meetings held as a full-day, in-person session at the Office of the General Assembly in London. This schedule aligns with the workflow of both the Assembly Executive and the General Assembly.

The committee comprises 17 members representing a range of roles within the URC, alongside external representatives. There is currently one vacancy for an individual with lived experience. If you feel you may be suited to this role and would like to be considered, please contact the committee convenor or secretary.

Revd. Roger Jones has now completed his term as committee convenor, and the process to appoint his successor is underway. Further information is available on the URC website.

Highlights

The Church House Safeguarding Team has remained unchanged since General Assembly 2025. The following staff members continue in their roles:

- Sharon Barr – Head of Safeguarding (Part-time)
- Carrie Kaunda – Training and Development Officer (Part-time)
- Kerry Baker – Policy Development Officer (Part-time)
- Matt Knowles – Casework Supervisor (Part-time)
- Emma Pearce – Administration Coordinator (Full-time, supporting both the Safeguarding and Ministries teams)

The team is available to support safeguarding work across the denomination and collaborates closely with Synod Safeguarding Officers. Please feel free to contact any member of the team for assistance.

Safeguarding Team Residential

Last year's annual safeguarding residential brought together the General Assembly Safeguarding Team and Synod Safeguarding Officers. As SSOs are often the sole safeguarding professionals within their synods, the opportunity to gather, learn, and network is essential. Coming together helps reduce the isolation that can accompany their roles, providing space to share both challenges and successes, hear one another's experiences, and build confidence as a wider safeguarding community.

The programme included a range of speakers who led sessions on Cultural Sensitivities in the Church, Trauma-Informed Practice, and Deliverance Ministry within the Church of England.

Safeguarding Symposium

In 2025, the Safeguarding Team organised and facilitated a safeguarding symposium. During the event, we presented the training matrix approved by General Assembly earlier in the year and updated attendees on key changes to safeguarding policy and guidance over the previous 12 months. Our keynote speaker was from Restored UK, a Christian domestic abuse charity.

The symposium was attended by approximately 170 participants, and the feedback received was overwhelmingly positive. A selection of comments included:

"I just felt that I had to drop you a line to say how good this afternoon's session was. Part 1 was packed with useful information and Part 2 (Domestic Abuse) was brilliantly delivered, thought-provoking and very relevant. Thanks for arranging it and to the people who took part."

"I have very much enjoyed the URC Safeguarding Symposium! It was very well organised and presented, and the programme included just the right amount of useful information from the safeguarding staff. The talk from Restore UK on domestic abuse was insightful and thought-provoking."

Given the strong engagement and positive response, we plan to continue hosting the symposium on a biannual basis.

Training

Since General Assembly 2025, the wider Safeguarding Team has continued to raise awareness of the changes to the training matrix. It was recognised that the most significant impact would be the increased demand for Advanced training. To support

synods, Carrie has delivered numerous Advanced courses for ministers, alongside the bespoke training sessions available to individuals across the denomination. These have been very well received, with 535 participants attending the online courses—an increase in uptake compared with the previous year.

The Foundation eLearning course also continues to see strong engagement, with 1,220 completions recorded over the past year.

Synods remain committed to delivering the Combined, Intermediate, and Advanced safeguarding training in person. The Church of Scotland provides equivalent training for churches within the Synod of Scotland, while the Synod of Wales offers adapted courses that align with the training framework required by Social Care Wales.

Policy

The URC's Good Practice documentation underwent a full review in 2023. Further amendments are scheduled for 2026. This work has been slightly delayed from the original 2025 timeline due to anticipated legislative changes. Mandated reporting, as recommended by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), is expected to be introduced through the Crime and Policing Bill, and the Good Practice document will need to be updated accordingly once the legislation is finalised.

Kerry has also completed and published updates to the following documents:

- Self-Declaration for Elders
- Interim Guidance on the Update Service

In addition, she continues to lead work on the Synod Safeguarding Reviews and the development of the Safeguarding Committee's Strategic Plan, as outlined further below.

Risk Areas

Recording and reporting

The URC's Safeguarding and Ministries team rely on accurate, up-to-date information about training completion in order to support compliance across the denomination. To achieve this, the URC's database must reach a point where it can generate reliable reports that clearly identify who has completed the required safeguarding training and where gaps remain. This would enable the Safeguarding and Ministries teams to provide timely support to synods, local churches, and office holders, ensuring that training expectations are met and that individuals in key roles remain compliant with denominational policy.

Without this capability, the denomination faces increased operational and safeguarding risk. Incomplete or inaccurate data makes it difficult to identify individuals who may be serving without the appropriate level of training, potentially leaving churches and synods unaware of gaps in compliance. This not only undermines the URC's ability to demonstrate due diligence but also increases the likelihood of inconsistent safeguarding practice and heightened vulnerability in the event of an incident or external scrutiny. Strengthening the database's reporting functions is therefore essential to maintaining robust safeguarding standards across the URC and this is a dialogue that we are keeping open between various teams at the Offices of General Assembly.

Areas of development

Synod Safeguarding Reviews

Over the past year, the team has piloted two Synod Safeguarding Reviews, with the wider rollout outlined in a separate paper. This has been a substantial piece of work, and the committee is particularly grateful to the staff who conducted the reviews and to the two synods that volunteered to participate in the pilot.

File Review

As outlined in the Annual Safeguarding Report (Paper T1) presented to General Assembly 2025, the Safeguarding Committee recommended commissioning an external review of ministers', CRCWs', and local leaders' files. The purpose of this review is to identify any outstanding safeguarding concerns that may not have been fully addressed, enabling the denomination to resolve any issues and ensure confidence that all known concerns have been managed appropriately and consistently.

Over the past year, a dedicated working group has developed a detailed Scope of Work, engaged with potential providers, and completed a full selection process. An organisation has now been appointed to undertake the review, which is expected to commence in summer 2026, with a final report anticipated for presentation at General Assembly 2027.

This review forms an important part of the URC's ongoing commitment to best practice, consistency, and transparency in safeguarding. Further communication will be shared across the denomination, including with those whose files will be included in the review.

Strategic Plan of the Safeguarding Committee

Following extensive discussion and reflection on the previous strategic plan—both within the Safeguarding Committee and the Synod Safeguarding Practice Group—it was agreed that a single Safeguarding Strategic Plan covering all councils of the Church was no longer the most effective approach. Instead, it was determined that a more focused plan should be developed specifically for the work of the Safeguarding Committee and the Safeguarding Team within the Offices of the General Assembly.

A working group was convened to draft this revised plan. After initial development, the draft was shared with synod personnel for consultation, and further revisions were made to ensure clarity of purpose. The final version makes explicit that it is not a strategic plan for synods or local churches; however, synod safeguarding groups may choose to use it as a framework or reference point when developing their own safeguarding plans.

A copy of the agreed plan can be found at <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Safeguarding-Committee-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Working Guide for SSOs – Risk Management assurance

We are proud of the work completed on the Good Practice document and its accompanying resources. Feedback has highlighted that the guidance is clear, well-structured, and effective in outlining lines of accountability, required processes, and the resources to be used across the denomination.

It has also become evident that there are variations in how Synod Safeguarding Officers record, report, and escalate safeguarding cases. To support greater consistency and strengthen risk management, it has been proposed that a dedicated Good Practice guide and resources for SSOs would be beneficial. This will be developed in collaboration with SSOs over the coming year, with the aim of providing a unified framework that enhances safeguarding practice across the denomination.

ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2026

This report is created from data captured from the Annual Church Safeguarding Returns for 2025, but does not include analysis from Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs). Further in-depth analysis will be reported to the September 2026 Safeguarding Committee for analysis.

INTRODUCTION

87.7% of churches completed safeguarding annual returns

2.4.% of churches have no safeguarding coordinator

Comments: The number of churches completing their annual return has remained consistent with last year. Encouragingly, the proportion of churches without a safeguarding coordinator has decreased from 4.5%, representing a positive step toward strengthened safeguarding practice. Synod Safeguarding Officers continue to engage proactively with churches that have not submitted returns or do not currently have a safeguarding coordinator in place, offering support and encouragement to help them meet their responsibilities.



SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS



Number of concerns related to children: 52, the main categories of abuse are sexual abuse and then emotional abuse/physical/neglect

Number of concerns related to adults: 157, the main two categories of abuse are emotional abuse and physical neglect

(These figures are likely to be higher when final data is collected by SSO's and do not include high numbers of low-level concerns supported by SSO's)

Comments: The number of safeguarding concerns reported and supported by safeguarding personnel has remained consistent with last year's figures.

Safeguarding training continues to be reviewed, updated, and developed to ensure that all safeguarding personnel across the denomination are equipped with both core safeguarding knowledge and an understanding of emerging and topical issues. This ongoing development supports the denomination's commitment to maintaining high standards of safeguarding practice.

PASTORAL CARE & SUPPORT

Comments: Local churches and synods continue to arrange appropriate pastoral care and support for individuals and groups who require it, drawing on Place for Hope services where additional specialist support is needed.



MANAGING RISK



60 known people who pose a risk to children or adults are attending URC churches

Comments: Individuals subject to safeguarding agreements within local churches continue to be supported by Church Safeguarding Coordinators and Synod Safeguarding Officers. This collaborative approach ensures that appropriate oversight and monitoring remain in place.

The guidance documents relating to the management of individuals who may pose a risk have undergone revision during this period and template resources are now available. These updated resources aim to provide greater clarity and consistency in how such situations are managed, strengthening the denomination's ability to maintain safe environments for all.

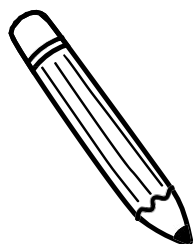
SAFER RECRUITMENT

Comments: With the continued cultural shift in safeguarding, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of safer recruitment, and this is being reflected in practice across the denomination. As a result, the number of DBS/PVG checks completed has risen, with 2,299 processed in 2025 as part of the Safer Recruitment and Safer Election of Elders procedures.

Of the 2,299 DBS/PVG checks completed, 1% resulted in a blemished certificate requiring a risk assessment to determine the individual's suitability for the role. These assessments were undertaken by the Synod Safeguarding Officer in collaboration with the applicant, local church, ensuring that decisions were made carefully, consistently, and in line with safeguarding best practice.



ADDITIONAL COMMENTS



The Safeguarding Committee extends its sincere thanks to all local churches and Church Safeguarding Coordinators for taking the time to complete the Annual Return. This information is vital in supporting the work of Synod Safeguarding Officers and the General Assembly Safeguarding Team, enabling us to maintain Strong safeguarding practice across the denomination. If you have any feedback on the Annual Safeguarding Return, please contact safeguarding@urc.org.uk.

Paper 12

Synod Safeguarding Reviews

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	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 39 General Assembly instructs the denominational Safeguarding Team and Synods to implement a programme of regular reviews of Synods' safeguarding practice. Resolution 40 Assembly adopts an addition to the Rules of Procedure which will read under Synod responsibilities: 10.3.4 — To participate in a triennial safeguarding review conducted by the General Assembly Safeguarding Team.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) found that good quality auditing only happened in a small number of faith organisations and recommended further consideration be given to the need for internal auditing, inspection and oversight. The URC were core participants of the IICSA. The Makin Review (2024) also stated that “Safeguarding best practice is achieved by there being a ‘golden thread’ of safeguarding throughout the organisation with ‘safeguarding [made] everybody’s business’ from the bottom to the top of an organisation. A robust and systematic quality assurance process, that includes independent scrutiny, audits and learning reviews, would also be in place, to provide challenge and support to those responsible for safeguarding practice. A culture of transparency complementing a cycle of continuous learning to inform improvements to reduce gaps and improve practice are integral to these systems, as demonstrated in national statutory guidance that is applicable to other institutions and organisations” (emphasis added). Consequently, the URC Safeguarding Committee has been

	considering ways to strengthen quality assurance in relation to safeguarding. A 'Safeguarding Practice Development Framework' has been developed (see 7 below) which sets out some key principles for our approach and different activities that can all contribute to the goal of improving safeguarding culture and practice. One important element of the Practice Development Framework is the introduction of Synod Safeguarding Reviews. This paper explains what this would involve and seeks approval by General Assembly for a regular programme of Synod Safeguarding Reviews to be undertaken.
Main points	• The rationale for Synod Safeguarding Reviews • An outline of what a Safeguarding Review involves • A summary of experiences from two 'pilot' reviews • Proposals for the future roll-out of the reviews across all Synods
Previous relevant documents	Paper T1 Safeguarding Committee Annual Report 2025
Consultation has taken place with...	Safeguarding Committee Members Synod Safeguarding Officers Synod Moderators East Midlands Synod South-Western Synod Audit working group The proposal to undertake Synod Safeguarding Reviews is also part of the draft Safeguarding Strategic Plan for 2026-2029 which was circulated to Synod Moderators, Synod Clerks, and Synod Safeguarding Officers for consultation.

Summary of impact

Financial	There will be costs for travel incurred by staff visiting Synods to undertake Safeguarding Reviews and some additional ad hoc hours for the Policy Development Officer (Safeguarding) around the time of each Review. These costs will be covered within the General Assembly safeguarding budget.
External (eg ecumenical)	

URC Synod Safeguarding Reviews

1. Introduction

The United Reformed Church recognises that it is everyone's responsibility to safeguard others and needs to have appropriate measures in place for quality assurance, to identify areas for improvement and to share examples of good safeguarding practice across the denomination.

2. Safeguarding Practice Development Framework

The diagram in Annex 1 below shows the planned practice development framework for

safeguarding. It summarises the aims of our quality assurance process and the principles underpinning how this will work out in practice. The activities listed are not exhaustive, and may change over time as the process develops, but are intended to illustrate different elements of practice improvement. It is not envisaged that all of these activities would be taking place at the same time and some of them (eg external review) are proposals for future development.

3. The need for Synod Safeguarding Reviews

Synods have a critical role in providing advice, support and training for local churches but the URC does not currently have any systematic way of evaluating the work being undertaken.

The introduction of the Casework Supervisor role has provided greater consistency (for those Synods which make use of the role) in terms of how active cases are managed. It is not within the remit of that role, however, to look at wider aspects of practice such as policies, communication between synods and churches, safeguarding culture, or the resources provided by synods for safeguarding personnel and activities.

There are regular quarterly meetings of Synod Safeguarding Officers (SSOs) which focus on providing mutual support and learning from each other. These meetings can cover a wide range of topics but are not intended to provide a systematic overview of practice across different synods.

In light of the recommendations from IICSA on strengthening quality assurance within organisations, the URC needs a way to evaluate how synods are fulfilling their vital contribution to creating a safer URC.

4. The approach to synod safeguarding reviews

A small working group was formed — comprising a local Church Safeguarding Coordinator, SSOs and members of the Offices of the General Assembly (OoGA) safeguarding team — to look at ways of taking this work forward. The group felt that any assessment of synods' safeguarding work needed to fit with the following criteria:

- not be overly burdensome for either synods or the OoGA safeguarding team
- provide an opportunity for synods to reflect on their own practice
- identify constructive learning for each synod and also for the wider denomination

The approach that has been developed and tested in two synods so far is based on the structure of the *Good Practice 6* safeguarding guidance and sets out key goals in each of the six key areas of the guidance (see Annex 2 below).

Before starting the review, the synod and Head of Safeguarding for the URC will sign an information sharing agreement in recognition of the sensitive nature of some of the data being shared.

The key elements of the process are:

- The completion of a self-assessment tool by the synod prior to the review. This is based on the key goals linked to each of the sections of Good Practice 6.
- Review of a range of documents including policies, minutes of Trustee and safeguarding committee/reference group meetings
- Review of safeguarding information provided on the synod website
- Online questionnaires (anonymous) to obtain feedback from Church Safeguarding

Coordinators (CSCs) and Ministers

- Visit by two members of the OoGA safeguarding team to the synod and discussion based on all of the above
- Dip sampling of a small random selection of cases

A full report is then provided to the synod highlighting both positive aspects of practice and suggestions for improvement. A summary report can also be provided for sharing more widely within the synod.

The OoGA team members will also keep a record of any examples of good practice to share with other synods and also areas where further guidance or training may need to be developed.

5. Piloting the Synod Safeguarding Reviews

Two 'test-runs' have taken place so far: East Midlands Synod kindly volunteered to be the first synod to take part in the process, and their trial review took place in November 2025. A second pilot review took place in South-Western Synod in March 2026.

Some key learning points from these two pilot reviews include:

- The self-assessment tool takes time to complete but both synods found it useful
- The completion rate of the online questionnaires for CSCs and Ministers has been good and has provided some useful feedback for the synods
- There will be differences between synods in terms of which staff are involved in the reviews given their different structures and staffing levels
- Synods need several months' notice of a review to have adequate time to complete the self-assessment and collate the relevant documentation
- The purpose of the review needs to be clearly explained (that it is a review of wider synod practice and not an external appraisal of the SSO).

The approach combines structured self-reflection by the synod with the benefit of external review by the OoGA safeguarding team. The aim has been to engage in constructive discussion, taking account of the specific context, resources, challenges and opportunities in each Synod. This also seems to fit well with the conciliar structure of the URC, rather than pursuing a rigid 'inspection' type approach.

6. Proposed roll-out of Synod Safeguarding Reviews

It is important that all Synods take part in this process in order to achieve adequate accountability and to maximise the opportunities for learning and practice development across the denomination.

We propose to that each synod would complete a review once every three years. This timescale would avoid placing too much burden on synods whilst ensuring that there is a regular opportunity for reflection and review.

We would continue with the approach that has worked well in the pilot Reviews so far.

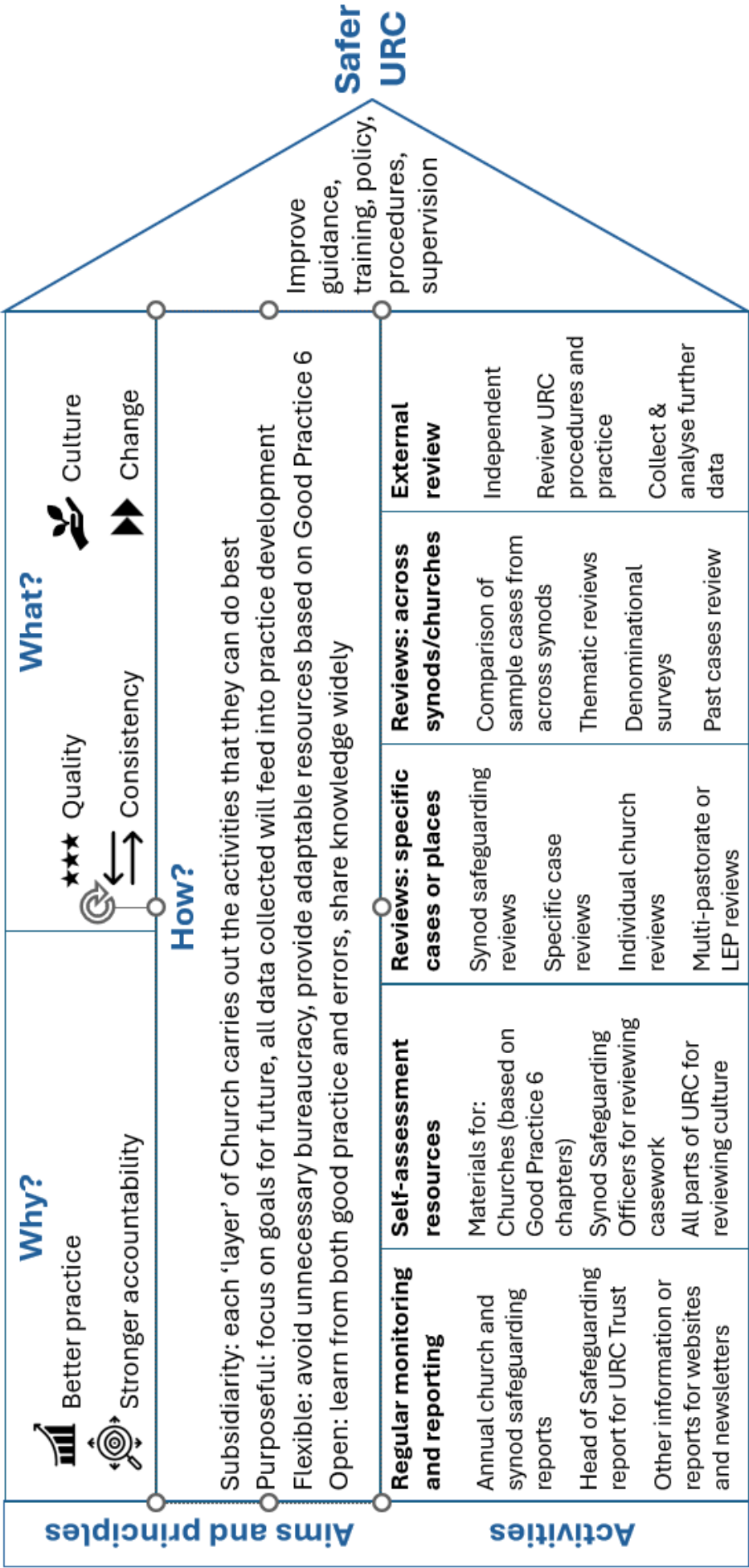
We would work with the National Synod of Scotland to agree an amended process for a review in Scotland. The Synod has a service agreement with the Church of Scotland Safeguarding Service who provide training for churches and are responsible for responding to concerns and allegations arising within URC congregations. The review process would be adapted to reflect this specific context.

As per the new safeguarding strategic plan, we would look at lessons learned after one year of the new roll-out and for the Safeguarding Committee to consider whether any changes to the process or resources required are needed.

7. Future plans

We plan to look at options for a review of the OOGA safeguarding team and/or an independent external review of safeguarding across the denomination, but this would likely take place once the first full cycle of synod reviews has been completed.

Annex 1: Safeguarding Practice Development Framework



Annex 2: Structure of Synod Safeguarding Reviews

The reviews are structured around the chapters of *Good Practice 6* guidance.

1. Our URC commitments, values and responsibilities

Goal: The Synod actively demonstrates its commitment to implementing the URC's safeguarding policy statement and provides clear leadership on safeguarding for local churches.

Key themes:

- Leadership
- Strategic oversight
- Operational responsibilities
- Communication

2. Safer culture

Goal: The synod is continually developing a safer culture in its own work/activities and helps local churches strengthen their safeguarding cultures.

Key themes:

- Safer recruitment and training
- Policies and procedures
- Data privacy, security and information sharing
- Reviewing and learning lessons

3. Safer activities

Goal: Safe working practices are evident across all areas of the Synod's work and the Synod helps equip local churches to embed safer working in their activities.

Key themes:

- Safe use and hiring of buildings
- Risk assessments for activities
- Best practice in safer working for events and activities

4. Recognising and responding to concerns

Goal: The Synod responds promptly and appropriately to concerns, working effectively in partnership with local churches, statutory services, and other relevant organisations. The Synod helps equip local churches to recognise and respond to concerns appropriately.

Key themes:

- Awareness of abuse and how to report it
- Appropriate and timely responses to concerns
- Contact with statutory services, other agencies and denominations
- Support and pastoral care

5. Managing allegations and risks

Goal: Allegations against church workers are managed effectively and fairly with appropriate support provided to all involved. The Synod supports local churches to balance being open to all with ensuring suitable boundaries are in place to protect people attending church activities from those who intend to cause harm.

Key themes:

- Referrals, investigative and disciplinary procedures
- Behavioural risk assessments
- Safeguarding agreements and multi-agency working
- Equipping local church leaders and support groups to manage risk

6. Supporting victims and survivors

Goal: The Synod prioritises the needs of victims and survivors; ensures they receive appropriate, personalised care; and helps equip local churches to provide support.

Key themes:

- Raising awareness
- Responding to disclosures
- Provision of support
- Listening to the voices of victim-survivors

Paper J1

Worship, Faith & Order Report

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	None
Draft resolution(s)	n/a

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Report the work of the Worship, Faith and Order (WFO) Committee
Main points	This paper outlines the areas of work the Committee has undertaken since it last reported to General Assembly and identifies ongoing and future work
Previous relevant documents	None
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

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.

The Worship, Faith and Order Committee has met on six occasions, including two residential meetings, since last reporting to General Assembly in 2024.

1. Children and Youth ministry

The Committee was fully involved in the discussion about a Children and Youth ministry. The decision at Assembly Executive, and subsequently at the Children and Youth Work Committee, paused this conversation. However, WFO feel it is important to acknowledge the clarity achieved on questions of polity. This will be useful should conversations about new ministries resume in the future.

2. Church membership and belonging

Noting that the language and practice of membership feels alien to many, the Committee has discussed this matter on several occasions. We are now consulting with other denominations to see if there are common issues and possible solutions. In the meantime, the Committee is looking at historical precedents to ensure that what was theologically meaningful is not lost as a result of cultural change. The work is ongoing.

3. Assisted Dying

Aware that legal changes were on the horizon, the Committee revisited the General Assembly resolution of 2007. Initially there was some concern about how to respond pastorally and theologically in a situation where assisted dying might be a legal possibility when the URC has adopted a resolution clearly opposing it. Perhaps unexpectedly, and despite the momentum for change that appeared to be gathering pace, the Scottish Parliament voted against a change to the law while, at the Westminster Parliament, the debate ran out of time.

Alongside this, the Committee had a helpful session at its residential meeting in February 2025 in which two stakeholders guided our thinking around developments in theology seeking to hear marginalized voices. These include disabled voices, voice of the ethnically minoritized and the global majority. These were not prominent in 2007, while it has also been pointed out that the 2007 documents had no distinctive women's voice.

All these would now offer important insights to us. While the Committee believes that the material produced in 2007 was, for its time, balanced, these subsequent developments need to be made more readily available to the churches. As a result, the Committee will bring a resolution to the Assembly to reissue the paper on Reformed theological approaches to the question and note that further work will be commissioned bringing to the fore a greater breadth of voices on the issue.

4. Christian Nationalism

The Committee has been made aware of the rise in popularity of Christian imagery and language associated with extreme political views. While this has been a clear phenomenon for some time in the USA, it has begun to play a part in European countries and recently in the UK. The Committee in discussion with ecumenical pastors, JPIT and others will provide material to help inform our churches in due course. The work is ongoing.

5. Co-opting members

It has become clear that URC representatives to certain ecumenical bodies (such as the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the World Council of Churches) have no natural place in our revised structures in which to report to the denomination. WFO believes they should be co-opted to serve on the Committee in order that there be a place where the work of those

ecumenical bodies can be received and, when necessary, a response offered. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

6. A Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church

Following a query to the Committee regarding the responses found in Version II of the Statement, and hearing of experiences, especially in ecumenical services, where Version II has been considered to be too long to be fit for purpose, the Committee agreed to produce a third alternative version of the Statement which is shorter than Version II, stays close to the content of Version I, but includes congregational responses. This is intended to be a further option alongside, rather than a replacement for, Version I and Version II. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

7. Creationtide

Global ecumenical partners have been encouraged to adopt a Feast of Creation and to consider a Creationtide Season during which churches will focus on the mystery of creation. The Feast of Creation will be included in the Revised Common Lectionary from 2026. Given that the URC does not follow a particular calendar, but that many Ministers and Lay Preachers use the Revised Common Lectionary, the Committee will ask General Assembly to encourage churches to observe the Feast and Season and to provide resources to help churches to celebrate it. This is subject to a General Assembly resolution.

8. URC Spirituality

This group reports on activity to WFO, both formally and informally through conversations between its officers and committee officers. Discussion have included the provision of a page for URC Spirituality on the denomination's website. A question has been raised about the appropriate committee to oversee URC Spirituality and this is awaiting clarification.

9. Minister for Digital Worship

As member *ex officio* and as joint secretary to the Committee, the Minister for Digital Worship has attended the Committee meetings and makes a full contribution to the Committee's work. He reports, as necessary, on his work. Recently he has worked on slight amendments to the Marriage Rites and these have been included in the on-line Worship Book.

10. Expansive language

A sub-group looking at expansive language in worship surveyed the orders of service for baptism, initiation, ordination and commissioning. With due recognition of ecumenical discussion and commitment, especially regarding baptism, the language of each service had been revised as far as is possible.

11. On speaking about the Faith, Life and Practice of Jewish People

For various reasons, the Committee's attention has been drawn to the need for guidelines about how difficult biblical passages should be discussed. Specialist research and great sensitivity is required. The work is ongoing, though the aim is to bring a URC statement on relationships with the Jewish people, on which full consultation has taken place, to General Assembly as soon as possible.

12. Non Stipendiary Ministry (NSM) (Local)

Though a matter for Ministries, this matter was brought to the Committee by the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) so that the Faith and Order aspects could be discussed. The Committee noted that, in terms of order, NSM (Local) ministers are ordained ministers of the Word and Sacraments, and we only have one order of this ministry. This means that their ministry is to be recognised throughout the Church. Their role is more narrowly focused, but the paper and resolutions approved by Mission Council in 2018 noted that Synods are free to determine the nature and scope of an NSM (Local) ministry. The Committee observed that Synods can use their oversight and discretion in redeployment if an NSM (Local) needs to be redeployed.

13. Miscellaneous

On occasion WFO is approached by convenors and secretaries of other committees to offer advice on particular pieces of work. Over the last two years this has included comment on AI, Diaconal Ministry, Marks of Mission, how we discern the guidance of the Spirit in our meetings.

As per our remit, and as can be seen from the report, members of the Committee are pleased to receive comments and feedback from members of Assembly.

Paper J2

Celebration of Creationtide

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 41 General Assembly encourages United Reformed Churches to observe the Feast of Creation in Christ on the first Sunday in September from 2026. Resolution 42 General Assembly instructs the Worship, Faith and Order Committee to provide and curate worship resources to help the churches to celebrate the Feast of Creation, including resources produced as a result of the global ecumenical process.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To encourage churches to observe the Feast of Creation.
Main points	There is growing ecumenical support for the formal acknowledgement of the Feast of Creation on or around 1 September each year. There is theological merit in celebrating the Feast but it is also appropriate to do so as we face the climate emergency. Having no formal liturgical calendar, the United Reformed Church might be encouraged to observe the feast while Worship, Faith and Order might curate the supply of liturgical and theological material.
Previous relevant documents	n/a
Consultation has taken place with...	Chaplain of Eco Congregation Scotland

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	The movement to establish the Feast is supported by WCC, WCRC as well as the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council and the Anglican Communion.

In 1989, the Orthodox Churches invited all Christians to pray together on 1 September – or the following Sunday – to mark the ‘Feast of Creation’ or ‘Creation Day’. The aim was to praise God as Creator and to wonder at the mystery of the Creation. As an act of the Trinitarian God, creation was to be heralded as the foundation for God’s act of salvation in Jesus Christ which is interpreted not just in individualistic terms but also as God’s work to bring the work of creation to its fruition. Subsequently the Feast of Creation has expanded into a Season of Creation (1 September to 4 October).

Following an ecumenical seminar held in Assisi in March 2024, supported by the World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches, several church communions worldwide have agreed to introduce the Feast of Creation into their liturgical calendars. Though on the surface this changed very little, it in fact transformed it from a ‘world day of prayer’ into being a ‘formal liturgical feast’. This development enables more intentional celebration of this great mystery of the Christian faith. The Revised Common Lectionary agreed to include the feast from 2026.

The Feast of Creation ecumenical committee outlined the following opportunities that will be provided in marking the Feast of Creation:

- (I) a liturgical opportunity to fill a gap of the liturgical year, which is meant to ponder “the whole mystery of Christ” but still neglects the role of Christ in the creation of heaven and earth;
- (II) a pastoral opportunity to support and accompany the faithful in confronting the “signs of the times” of the ecological crisis, nurturing action to care for our imperilled creation in solidarity with the communities most vulnerable to this injustice;
- (III) an evangelisation opportunity with young people, both by speaking to their strong sensitivity to creation issues and their calls for intergenerational justice, and by preaching about the compatibility between science and faith in a Creator;
- (IV) a catechetical opportunity to ponder the sacredness of Creation and proclaim God as Creator, uplifting a notion that should receive as much attention as that of God as Redeemer;
- (V) a theological opportunity to rediscover the great mystery of Creation, a Christological and Trinitarian doctrine that is a cornerstone of our faith;
- (VI) an ecumenical opportunity for visible unity with the many churches instituting the Feast.

An emphasis on God as creator and the world as created has its own merit but it seems particularly apposite as we seek to respond to the climate emergency.

The United Reformed Church does not have an official liturgical calendar, though many ministers and lay preachers follow the Revised Common Lectionary. The Worship, Faith and Order Committee asks General Assembly to commend and encourage celebration of the Feast of Creation to the churches and, in consultation with others, to provide liturgical and theological resources for the marking of the Season of Creation.

Paper J3

Providing a 3rd Version of the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 43 General Assembly agrees to adopt Version III of the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide a shorter, responsorial version of A Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC (SNFO) which is closer to the original text.
Main points	The Committee was asked if the responsorial version II of the SNFO could be shortened as many of the responses do not appear in the original text (version I). The Committee felt there was merit in offering a third version using expansive language and which was also closer to the original text. Any of the three versions could be used by local churches at services of induction, commissioning, and ordination. If accepted, as this would be a change to the Basis, the resolution would need to be referred to the Synods.
Previous relevant documents	Versions I and II of the SNFO
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

A question from a retired URC minister led to discussion about the responses in version II of A Statement concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC (SNFO). While the Committee agreed that the responses were appropriate, members acknowledged that they made additional statements, not found in the original text (version I).

The Committee noted that there are occasions, often ecumenical, when version II is considered to be too long to be fit for purpose, and an alternative, version III, might be provided for the church which stayed close to the original text, introduced responses and employed expansive language. The Committee offers the following for consideration by General Assembly to adopt this as a third version alongside the two existing versions.

The Committee felt it important, in a statement such as this, to keep to the traditional language describing the Trinity at the start, declaring that our faith is that of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, but to balance this with a prayer using expansive language at the end and to remove gendered references to the First and Third Persons of the Trinity throughout.

In the second stanza the Committee felt it would be good to return to the original language, closer to the Basis of Union, “in the common life of God’s people” when referring to the life of faith to which we are called.

In the third stanza we have put back in the clause about the Bible noting that it is discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit which, we felt, was stronger than the phrase “alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit” in Version II.

We followed Version II in combining three stanzas in the original about the ability to change and make new declarations of faith adding in the original’s phrase about the mind of Christ.

We reworked the clause about personal freedom to avoid the word “fellowship” which some feel is gendered. This then follows into the next stanza where we follow the previous versions in noting it is for the church to decide when such freedom causes injury to our common life. Again we’ve avoided the use of “fellowship.”

In the stanza about church and state we have more closely followed version I with the addition of the word “religious” before belief. Non-religious beliefs and ideologies would be included in the “conscience” article.

The final stanza in Version III uses “declare” rather than “affirm”, thinking in terms of confessing faith in the world. We have avoided “fellowship” (in Version I) and “fellow Christians” (in Version II).

The beautiful final phrase in Version II is reworked into a short prayer to finish the Statement grounding it firmly into the worshipping life of the church.

A comparison of all three versions follows. If General Assembly were to pass the resolution and the Synods confirm it, then any of the three versions could be used by local churches at services of induction, commissioning, and ordination.

Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (Basis of Union, Schedule D)

Version I	Version II	Proposed Version III
The United Reformed Church confesses the faith of the Church catholic in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The United Reformed Church acknowledges that the life of faith to which it is called is a gift of the Holy Spirit continually received in Word and Sacrament and in the common life of God's people. The United Reformed Church acknowledges the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people. The United Reformed Church accepts with thanksgiving the witness borne to the catholic faith by the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and recognises as its own particular heritage the formulations and declarations of faith which have been valued by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and members of Churches of Christ as stating the Gospel and seeking to	With the whole Christian Church the United Reformed Church believes in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The living God, the only God, ever to be praised. The life of faith to which we are called is the Spirit's gift continually received through the Word, the Sacraments and our Christian life together. We acknowledge the gift and answer the call, giving thanks for the means of grace. The highest authority for what we believe and do is God's Word in the Bible alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit. We respond to this Word, whose servants we are with all God's people through the years. We accept with thanksgiving to God the witness to the catholic faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. We acknowledge the declarations made in our own tradition by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ in which they stated the faith and sought to make its implications clear. Faith alive and active: gift of an eternal source, renewed for every	With the whole Christian Church, the United Reformed Church believes in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The life of faith to which we are called is the Holy Spirit's gift, continually received through the Word, the Sacraments and in the common life of God's people. The supreme authority for the faith and conduct of God's people is the Word of God, in the Bible, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We accept with thanksgiving to God the witness to the catholic faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. We acknowledge the declarations made in our own tradition by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ in which they stated the faith and sought to make its implications clear.

The United Reformed Church testifies to its faith, and orders its life, according to the Basis of Union, believing it to embody the essential notes of the Church catholic and reformed. The United Reformed Church nevertheless reserves its right and declares its readiness at any time to alter, add to, modify or supersede this Basis so that its life may accord more nearly with the mind of Christ. The United Reformed Church, under the authority of Holy Scripture and in corporate responsibility to Jesus Christ its ever living head, acknowledges its duty to be open at all times to the leading of the Holy Spirit and therefore affirms its right to make such new declarations of its faith and for such purposes as may from time to time be required by obedience to the same Spirit. The United Reformed Church, believing that it is through the freedom of the Spirit that Jesus Christ holds his people in the fellowship of the one Body, upholds the rights of

We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union in which we give expression to our faith in forms which we believe contain the essential elements of the Church's life, both catholic and reformed; but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ. Our crucified and risen Lord, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.	Held together in the Body of Christ through the freedom of the Spirit, we rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit's gifts and uphold the rights of personal conviction.

We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union in which we give expression to our faith in forms which we believe contain the essential elements of the Church's life, both catholic and reformed; but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith as we continue to seek the mind of Christ in obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit.	Held together by Jesus Christ through the freedom of the Spirit, we uphold the rights of personal conviction.

It shall be for the church, in safeguarding the substance of the faith and maintaining the unity of the fellowship, to determine when these rights are asserted to the injury of its unity and peace.

The United Reformed Church declares that the Lord Jesus Christ, the only ruler and head of the Church, has therein appointed a government distinct from civil government and in things spiritual not subordinate thereto, and that civil authorities, being always subject to the rule of God, ought to respect the rights of conscience and of religious belief and to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind.

The United Reformed Church declares its intention, in fellowship with all the churches, to pray and work for such visible unity of the whole Church as Christ wills and in the way he wills, in order that people and nations may be led more and more to glorify the

For the sake of faith and fellowship it shall be for the church to decide where differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace. **We commit ourselves to speak the truth in love and grow together in the peace of Christ.**

We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head. Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind, and to respect the rights of conscience and belief. **While we ourselves are servants in the world as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.**

We affirm our intention to go on praying and working, with all our fellow Christians, for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses so that people and nations may be led to love and serve God and praise him more and more for ever. **Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal glory. Amen.**

It shall be for the church, in safeguarding faith and unity, **to decide when differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace.**

We believe that Christ gives the Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In the things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, **but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head.** Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind, **and to respect the rights of conscience and religious belief.**

We declare our intention to go on praying and working, with all other Christians, for the visible unity of the Church as Christ wills and in the way he wills, **so that people and nations may be led more and more to glorify God.**

And so, Eternal God, Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is: **to you be glory, forever and ever, Amen.**

Paper J4

Assisted Dying

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, Convenor rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk
Action required	Acceptance of Resolution
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 44 General Assembly commends to the churches A Theological Resource on Assisted Dying for prayerful thought and discussion.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide material enabling informed debate about Assisted Dying.
Main points	
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 51 General Assembly 2007 and accompanying material
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	None

The United Reformed Church's General Assembly last discussed Assisted Dying in 2007 and at that time resolved that medical intervention which deliberately sought the death of the patient could not be supported. This remains the URC's position.

Earlier in 2026, legislation was introduced to legalise Assisted Dying in the United Kingdom, though the Bill before the Westminster Parliament ran out of time as it was debated in the House of Lords and the Scottish Parliament, perhaps unexpectedly, voted against its Assisted Dying Bill.

Legislation has been passed on the Isle of Man and on Jersey but currently awaits Royal Assent. If the media are to be believed, the majority are now in favour of legislation enabling Assisted Dying and it is almost certain that legislation will be reintroduced in the near future seeking to change the law.

The prominence of the topic in public discourse and the political agenda, and the likelihood that it might prove the subject of debate between church members as well as between the church and society, lead the Worship, Faith and Order Committee to

believe that our churches need resources to enable thoughtful, prayerful and theological discussion to take place.

The Committee believes that the material supplied in 2007 was honest and balanced, but some of it belonged to the immediate context. It can be accessed here:
<https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/general-assembly-archive/>

However, developments since 2007 have brought to the fore the need to hear marginalised voices and their concerns, particularly those from the disabled community, those involved in end-of-life care and voices from the Global Majority

Our proposal is that the following pieces should be attractively reproduced and uploaded to a relevant part of the website and therefore be more readily available to the churches

1. The 2007 Resolution;
2. *A Reformed View* (written by Professor Neil Messer, a United Reformed Church minister currently serving as Professor of Theological Bioethics at Baylor University, Texas);
3. The conclusions offered by the then Church and Society Committee which produced the material.

In so doing, the Committee hopes that the material will help inform members of the URC about the issues involved, to respond to questions in an appropriate and pastoral way and, in a spirit of prayer as well as enquiry, help formulate their own response to this complex and emotive matter.

The discussion is ongoing in the Committee and we are currently seeking to commission further work which, it is hoped, can be brought to the Church in the near future. This will include voices from the disabled community, end of life care, the Global Majority. We aim to hear and take seriously the concerns of those who feel most vulnerable as a result of this debate.

The Committee would also welcome any feedback from members and churches and will respond should any further questions be raised or any further information or reflection be requested.

Appendix: Material to be commended to the churches

A Theological Resource on Assisted Dying

The United Reformed Church's General Assembly discussed Assisted Dying in 2007 following the defeat of Lord Joffe's 'Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill' in 2006. At that time, Assembly affirmed the Report 'Assisted Dying', prepared by the Church and Society Committee, encapsulating its support in the following statements (Resolution 51):

- (i) As Christians we regard all human life as being God given, and therefore precious; we believe that death is not the end and we have faith that there is a more perfect life to follow.
- (ii) We recognise that there is a time to die and that there are circumstances in which it will be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life.
- (iii) We recognise that some palliative treatment for the terminally ill makes the patient more comfortable and pain free but can also hasten death. We believe this to be acceptable, as long as the intention of the treatment is pain relief and comfort of the patient.
- (iv) We could not support legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. We would therefore oppose any change in the law to permit voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide.
- (v) We believe that a Living Will or Advance Directive which has been prepared by a patient of sound mind, can be helpful for carers and relatives; however, we do not believe such a document should be used to facilitate a person's death.
- (vi) We believe that additional resources are needed to provide more uniformly available and more high-quality palliative care.
- (vii) We recognise the valuable contribution made by carers. We express our prayerful support for those who work in, and promote hospices, and others who care, befriend and provide support for the dying.

The General Assembly, in 2007, resolved that medical intervention which deliberately sought the death of the patient could not be supported. That remains the URC's position.

The current situation

Since 2007, there have been a number of changes to the broader legal and social position on assisted dying, including a much-publicised campaign endorsed by the broadcaster Esther Rantzen which seems to have emphasised 'freedom to choose'. For a time, the momentum appeared to be in favour of changing the law to legalise Assisted Dying under certain circumstances. The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill passed through the House of Commons, while the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill seemed to gain support in the Scottish Parliament. The Welsh Senedd does not have the power to introduce such a Bill, but it does have the power to stop Assisted Dying being available on the NHS.

Consequently, in January 2026 the Senedd voted to approve Assisted Dying in Wales subject to the result of the vote in Westminster. Assisted Dying has been legalised in the Isle of Man and on Jersey, though both Bills (at the time of writing) await Royal Assent. As a result, there are already URC congregations in jurisdictions where Assisted Dying is legal, or likely to become law, by the end of 2026, and at one point it seemed likely that this would be the case for many more (if not all) our churches. However, the Scottish Parliament voted against its Assisted Dying Bill on 17 March 2026 while the Bill

before the Westminster Parliament ran out of time as it was debated in the House of Lords.

If the media are to be believed, the majority are now in favour of legislation which enables Assisted Dying and it is almost certain that legislation will be reintroduced in the near future. The following material is offered for prayerful consideration in order to help churches and their members to take an informed view.

The Worship Faith and Order Committee believes that the material supplied to the General Assembly in 2007 was honest and balanced, but some of it belonged to the immediate context. It can all be accessed on the United Reformed Church website in the General Assembly Archive.ⁱ

However, we believe that the following in particular would help present the issues involved to members of the URC. Equally, it should help them respond to questions in an appropriate and pastoral way and, in a spirit of prayer as well as enquiry, help formulate their own response to this complex and emotive matter.

**1. *A Reformed View*, by Neil Messer (2007; rev. 2026)
(Neil is a United Reformed Church minister and ethicist, currently serving as Professor of Theological Bioethics at Baylor University, Texas.)**

Four areas of debate about assisted dying need some critical attention from a Christian perspective that regards ‘the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, [as] the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God’s people’.ⁱⁱ The first is human autonomy; the second, suffering, compassion and the love of neighbour; the third, the distinction (if any) between acts and omissions, together with the related idea of ‘double effect’; and finally, the likely consequences of assisted dying legislation and concerns about a ‘slippery slope’.ⁱⁱⁱ

1.1 Human autonomy

1.1.1 The principle that human autonomy must be respected is widely held in healthcare ethics. It has philosophical roots in the work of two very different thinkers, Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill. Kant particularly might support a more nuanced version of the principle than the versions frequently used in healthcare ethics.^{iv} Be that as it may, when respect for autonomy is considered in contemporary debates – including those about assisted dying – it typically means something like this: If I am an adult whose capacity for free and informed decision-making is not significantly impaired by illness, incapacity, coercion, etc., I should be free to do what I choose with my own life, to the extent that my exercise of my freedom does not hinder anyone else’s exercise of theirs. This is often taken to include the freedom to end my own life when and how I choose, and the right to receive medical help in doing so. This has been one of the most influential arguments for assisted dying in many countries.

1.1.2 Such a view of autonomy is open to question from several perspectives. For example, some feminist ethicists have long been concerned about the individualism expressed in this view, which they argue privileges male experience.^v From a Reformed Christian standpoint, the basic assumption that my life is my own, to do as I like with, seems highly problematic. A key biblical theme is that God is the creator, owner and giver of human life, and no human can claim

absolute ownership of their – or anyone else’s – life. This seems to be part of what underpins some commands in the Torah, particularly those about taking life. And in a key New Testament text, Paul tells his readers: ‘you are not your own ... you were bought with a price’ (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In other words, we have been (in Paul’s metaphor) ‘purchased’ by Christ’s saving death, so that our lives might be transformed and renewed to become all God means them to be. Paul argues that this sets limits on the things we ought to do with our own, or others’, bodies. Of course, this text is addressed to a very different context from present debates about assisted dying: Paul is admonishing the church in Corinth about matters of sexual behaviour. But it also implies a more general theological claim that *is* transferable to these debates: in Christian perspective, flourishing as human creatures in relation to God and one another is not well described as individual self-possession and self-rule.

- 1.1.3 In short, if Christians are to think about assisted dying, respect for autonomy will prove an unsatisfactory starting point. A more promising start can be made by considering how God’s gift of life should be respected and protected in these agonisingly difficult circumstances – or as Karl Barth formulated it in his ethics of creation, what it means in these circumstances to obey the divine command ‘You shall not kill’.^{vi} Barth himself thought that in extreme situations (including some cases of abortion and war, for example), protecting some human lives might require the taking of others. This *might* therefore be ‘permitted or commanded’ by God. But he did not seem to think this could ever be true of euthanasia. Christians who wish to make a case for medically assisted dying in these terms would need to show that Barth was wrong: that euthanasia and/or assisted suicide could in some circumstances be ways of obeying God’s command to respect and protect human life.

1.2 Suffering, compassion and love of neighbour

- 1.2.1 Perhaps the most influential argument in the assisted dying debate is based on compassion: some patients, particularly some who are chronically or terminally ill, experience terrible pain and suffering and long for death to release them. Surely the compassionate thing to do is to help such patients to a quick, painless and dignified end.
- 1.2.2 The Christian imperative to love our neighbours as ourselves might seem to reinforce this argument. Those who have not experienced such suffering in their own lives or those of loved ones should be cautious in what they say about this: it would be easy to speak glibly or even callously. That said, this line of argument contains at least one buried assumption that is problematic from a Reformed Christian perspective. Namely: that our over-riding obligation to our suffering neighbours is to end their suffering by any means necessary, including ending their lives if that is what it takes. Now, it goes without saying that the relief of suffering is a hugely important expression of Christian love.

The long Christian history of healthcare provision – including of course the Christian origins of the modern hospice movement – bears witness to that. But this does not necessarily mean that eliminating suffering is the *only* or *over-riding* requirement of Christian love, or that caring for our suffering neighbours can be *reduced* to ending their suffering. The assumption that it can seems to owe more to Enlightenment thinkers such as the avowedly secular Jeremy Bentham, whose

utilitarian ethical theory effectively reduces the human good to pleasure and the absence of pain.^{vii}

1.2.3 The biblical roots of Christian tradition suggest a more nuanced understanding of both suffering and love. For example, Paul pleaded with God to be relieved of the ‘thorn in his flesh’, but received the answer ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor 12:1-10). This hints at an understanding of suffering both richer and more complex than the utilitarian view summarised above. Certainly, in Paul’s story, his suffering is a real and terrible evil; but at the same time, mysteriously, it has become an occasion by which he has experienced God’s grace in a powerful way.

1.2.4 In no way should Paul’s story lead us to make light of pain or to mouth platitudes like ‘suffering is good for the soul’. But Paul also witnesses to the mysterious ways in which God may be encountered in the midst of suffering. His testimony suggests it is over-simple to conclude that love of our suffering neighbours requires us to end their suffering by any means necessary, including ending their lives. To be sure, pain and suffering are real and sometimes terrible evils, and Jesus teaches that being a neighbour means showing compassion to those who need our care (Luke 10:25-37).

For those caring for dying patients, this will include using all the resources of good palliative care – up to and including palliative sedation^{viii} – to relieve pain and suffering according to patients’ needs and wishes. But showing love and compassion to suffering neighbours may also mean offering forms of human relationship and community which help them *endure* pain or indignity. Some Christian thinkers would suggest that this is one of the most important contributions Christian churches can make to debates about euthanasia and assisted suicide: to be the kinds of communities that can help suffering human beings find the resources to endure their suffering.

Stories can be told of remarkable ways in which this does happen in Christian care for suffering and dying people (again, the Christian roots of the hospice movement are noteworthy), but churches don’t always manage to live up to this calling. If Christian practice falls short, Christian words and arguments – on *either* side of the assisted dying debate – are likely to ring hollow.

1.3 Acts, omissions and ‘double effect’

1.3.1 A third line of argument for assisted dying is that, in effect, we already practice forms of euthanasia, so we might as well be honest and do it more efficiently and effectively. Doctors withhold or withdraw life-prolonging treatments when patients refuse them (or when they are judged not to be in the best interests of patients who lack decision-making capacity). This is accepted as good medical practice by most opponents of assisted dying. Yet assisted dying supporters argue that this is inconsistent. If the result is the same – the patient’s death – why permit doctors to bring it about by omission, but forbid actions that would achieve it, such as giving a lethal injection?

Indeed, advocates argue, the actions might achieve quicker and easier deaths than the omissions. A related issue is the principle of ‘double effect’, which states that an action with a good intention may be permissible even if it also results in a foreseen but *unintended* evil consequence. A much-discussed example in end-of-

life care is that doctors could be justified in giving a pain-relieving drug even if that drug had the foreseeable side-effect of shortening the patient's life. This may be more of a theoretical than a real example, because palliative care clinicians emphasise that pain-relieving drugs do *not* shorten life when properly used. But however common or rare such scenarios actually are, some supporters of assisted dying criticise the double-effect principle on similar grounds to their critique of the acts/omissions distinction. They argue that both distinctions – acts vs. omissions and intended vs. foreseen consequences – are false, because the outcomes are the same either way. Therefore, they say, if we accept some kinds of action or inaction that hasten patients' deaths, we should also accept direct intentional killing.^{ix}

- 1.3.2 These issues are more philosophical than theological. However, many who deny the significance of the acts/omissions distinction and the validity of the 'double effect' principle assume a view of ethics in which the only relevant factor in assessing the morality of an act is its consequences. A strong case can be made that Christians are committed to a richer view of moral action. For example, we may have good reasons to distinguish between *aiming to relieve pain* (knowing that this might also hasten death) and *aiming to kill*.

Part of the difference between these kinds of action might lie in the effects they would have on those who performed them, and on the communities and societies that sanctioned them. It is not only the end results of actions that matter, but also the kinds of people and communities we become. A doctor who became accustomed to intentionally ending terminally ill patients' lives might gradually become a different kind of person than if they simply aimed to relieve their patients' pain. Similarly, a society that became accustomed to the intentional killing of its terminally ill members might gradually develop an altered moral character as a result.^x

1.4 Consequences, slippery slopes, and the common good

- 1.4.1 Another important strand of public debate concerns the possible consequences, beneficial and harmful, of proposed legislation. Opponents of assisted dying sometimes argue that even if it could be morally justified in individual cases, the effect of legislating for it would be to put the lives of many innocent and vulnerable people at risk.^{xi} A related claim is that even if legislation contained built-in safeguards, permitting assisted dying would set society on a 'slippery slope' that could eventually lead to widespread euthanasia, loss of respect for human life, and loss of protection for the vulnerable.

One Christian framework for addressing these questions, familiar from Catholic social teaching but also increasingly used by Protestants, is the 'common good'.^{xii} This refers to the social conditions which enable all members of a society or community to flourish as fully as possible. So, quite apart from the question whether assisted dying could ever be morally justified in individual cases, Christians can also ask whether assisted dying *legislation* would serve the common good. If it turns out that such legislation tends to put significant numbers of vulnerable people at risk or create slippery slopes, the answer will most likely be 'No'. To answer this question – whether or not assisted dying legislation would serve the common good – will require not only a theologically-informed understanding of human flourishing, but also careful analysis of the evidence from those jurisdictions around the world that have already adopted such legislation.

3 Some tentative conclusions (2007; rev. 2026)

- 3.1 Assisted Dying is a complex subject; advances in technology and medicine pose new challenges. We believe there is a time to die, and we recognise that there are circumstances in which it will be wrong to continue to provide treatment designed to prolong life. However, we do not believe it is right to empower, or to give doctors responsibility for providing, medical intervention which deliberately seeks to assist a patient to die. We recognise that these are often matters of fine judgment, but we do not support changes to legislation to allow assisted dying or euthanasia.
- 3.2 There is clearly considerable interest in the subject within the Church. Many people have views born out of personal experience of seeing suffering in body, mind or spirit – or all three. Most have experienced the death of a loved one and that has helped form their view on death and the way of dying. Sensitivity rather than dogmatic pronouncement is therefore required.
- 3.3 We recognise that the issues raised have implications for the Church and the pastoral care of the chronically sick and the terminally ill. There is a need to offer prayerful support, for sufferers and carers. We recognise pain can be in body, mind and spirit, and that care must be taken to address all three.
- 3.4 We recognise and respect the fact that those of other faiths, or no faith, may have a different view of life, death and suffering.
- 3.5 Whilst acknowledging the dilemma and anxiety which sometimes surrounds terminal illness, we believe the vulnerable might be at risk from possible abuse of legislation that would empower medical staff to intervene in ways which deliberately seek to assist a patient to die. However, we do support the right that terminally ill patients already have, to decline treatment that might prolong life.

ⁱ <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/book-of-reports-2007.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ United Reformed Church, The Basis of Union, Schedule D.

ⁱⁱⁱ In the following discussion, I shall not always differentiate between euthanasia (in which doctors or others perform interventions such as lethal injections to hasten patients' deaths) and assisted suicide (in which they provide patients with the means, such as lethal drugs, to end their own lives). Most of the ethical arguments I shall examine are first and foremost arguments for euthanasia. If they justify it, they will also *a fortiori* justify assisted suicide.

^{iv} Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

^v Susan Frank Parsons, *Feminism and Christian Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 53-6, 137-41; see also Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

^{vi} Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, part 4.

^{vii} See further Gerald P. McKenny, *To Relieve the Human Condition: Medicine, Biotechnology, and the Body*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997.

^{viii} Caroline Barry et al., 'Palliative Sedation at the End of Life: Practical and Ethical Considerations', *Clinical Medicine* 25 (2025), e100338.

^{ix} A classic statement of these critiques is Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, ch. 7.

^x Acts, omissions and double effect are helpfully discussed by Nigel Biggar, *Aiming to Kill: the Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004.

^{xi} E.g. Biggar, *Aiming to Kill*.

^{xii} See Nicholas Sagovsky and Peter McGrail (eds.), *Together for the Common Good: Towards a National Conversation*, London: SCM Press, 2015.

Paper J5

Granting the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee Permission to Coopt Members

Worship, Faith, & Order Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Robert Pope, rpp20@westminster.cam.ac.uk	Convenor
Action required	Decision	
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 45 General Assembly grants the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee permission to coopt members who currently represent the United Reformed Church in ecumenical or international bodies, or who can bring specialisms for particular piece of work.	

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To grant the WFO Committee the power to coopt
Main points	Resolution 56 of General Assembly 2023 noted the Worship Faith and Order Committee comprised the Convenor, the Secretary for Ecumenical Relationships (now the Head of Ecumenical Relations and Evangelism), the Minister for Digital Worship and five members. The Committee feel that, from time to time, it would be useful to coopt other members – ecumenical colleagues, those who represent the URC on ecumenical bodies, and those who may have particular expertise for projects that the Committee takes on.
Previous relevant documents	Resolution 56 General Assembly 2024
Consultation has taken place with...	None

Summary of impact

Financial	Slight for the annual residential meeting. Other meetings are held virtually.

External (eg ecumenical)	The General Secretary is exploring with the Methodist Church, initially, about a number of areas where our respective Worship, Faith, and Order Committees might work together.

The United Reformed Church sends representatives to ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches, the World Communion of Reformed Churches and the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe but there is no natural place in our revised structures for them to report on the work of those bodies or for reports from those bodies to be received and, where necessary, for a response to be written. WFO would seem to be the most natural place for that to happen.

As currently written, the remit and membership of WFO does not enable the coopting of members to the Committee when specific pieces of work might require particular expertise.

This request is not open-ended. It applies only to those URC representatives to ecumenical and international bodies who have no formal means of reporting back to the denomination or to those asked, for a discrete period, to assist WFO with particular pieces of work. No maximum number is specified, because of the unpredictability of the numbers of those who represent the Church on international or ecumenical bodies but it will only ever be small.

WFO asks General Assembly to agree to amend the membership of the Committee as follows:

The Worship, Faith and Order Committee comprises:

A Convenor

The Head of Ecumenical Relations and Evangelism

The Minister for Digital Worship

Five members

Coopted members to include:

- Representatives of the United Reformed Church on ecumenical bodies for the duration of their period of service
- Ecumenical colleagues whose remit is ecumenical or doctrinal
- Those with necessary expertise who would assist the Committee in particular areas of work

Paper K1

Gendered language in the Basis of Union

URC Youth Assembly

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Kacie Hodgson urcyamoderator@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 46 General Assembly instructs the Faith and Order Committee to review the use of gendered language in the Basis of Union and its schedules, in consultation with other committees and sub-committees, including Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), as well as Youth Executive.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	URC Youth Assembly would like the gendered language in the Basis of Union and its schedules to be reviewed with the aim of exploring potentially more inclusive language.
Main points	The motion asks the Faith and Order Committee to review gendered language in the Basis of Union so that this foundational document and its schedules better reflects the Church's diversity, including women, non-binary and gender nonconforming people, without imposing any single theological viewpoint. No formal changes are being proposed now; we would only like to know whether there is more inclusive language that reflects the Church today.
Previous relevant documents	Paper E2: Affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming people, GA 2023.
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth Assembly

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	

The Basis of Union and its Schedules are foundational documents for the United Reformed Church, setting out the Church's understanding of its own identity, mission and purpose. It has been noted that some of the language used in the Basis of Union documents is heavily gendered. Some examples include those highlighted in blue:

- We believe that God, in his infinite love for **men**, gave his eternal Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (point 17, page 3).
- We believe in the one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church, in heaven and on earth, wherein by the same Spirit, the whole company of believers is made one Body of Christ, to worship God and serve him and all **men** in his kingdom of righteousness and love (point 17, page 4).
- In the United Reformed Church all ministries within the life of the Church shall be open to both **men and women** (point 20, page 5).

At the time of the URC's founding, it was common practice to use the phrase "men" to encompass all of humankind. It was also considered to be a huge step for a Christian denomination to state that women are able to be ministers across the URC; the language was used to emphasise this. However, as ideas about gender in society and theology have developed and broadened in outlook, many now view gender not as a binary (i.e. one is either a man or a woman) but as a spectrum. URC Youth Assembly feels that the language in this foundational document has room to grow and change to be more inclusive of a broad range of perspectives.

We recognise the importance of acknowledging the right of women to minister in the URC. However, the General Assembly has also affirmed the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Does this language have the potential to also acknowledge the existence of ministers who identify as non-binary and gender nonconforming, who are already working in the URC? The language must also be reflective of the diverse range of theologies held across the URC. We don't know whether such language that can bring together these three key points exists.

The resolution specifically requests consultation with a range of communities, including the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB) sub-committee and URC Youth Executive, to ensure a wide range of theologies and voices is heard throughout the review.

The outcomes of the review could mean a change in wording, which would be voted on in future General Assembly meetings. Or no suitable alternative language is found. URC Youth Assembly feels that it is important to recognise that there is room for improvement. If no such appropriate language exists at the moment, then at least we have taken the first steps and begun a discussion.

Paper K2

Place of URC Youth

URC Youth Assembly

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Kacie Hodgson urcyamoderator@urc.org.uk Alexander Clements urcyamodelect@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 47 General Assembly instructs business committee to establish a task group to explore the identity, purpose and future development of URC Youth. Resolution 48 General Assembly instructs the task group to report to Youth Assembly on the progress of its work in 2027, and bring final recommendations to Youth Assembly 2028, which if adopted would form the basis of recommendations to be brought to General Assembly 2028. Resolution 49 General Assembly accepts the remit, membership and timescale of the task group.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To enact a task group to explore the identity and future development of United Reformed Youth
Main points	The report outlines the suggested remit and scope of the task group
Previous relevant documents	Youth Strategy document – currently being developed by Children and Youth Development (CYDO+) team and Youth Executive URC Youth Exec and Youth Assembly Moderators' Review, 2025 by John Steel – URC website
Consultation has taken place with...	Youth Executive, Faith in Action

Summary of impact

Financial	Potentiality to use money from Bill Snelson Fund
External (eg ecumenical)	

Introduction

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” – Book of Jeremiah 29:11

In recent years, the United Reformed Church has undertaken a significant period of reflection, review, and structural change. Through the Church Life Review and the outcomes of the Extraordinary Meeting of General Assembly, the denomination has begun to reassess how it is organised and how it responds to the realities of contemporary church life.

Within this context, it has become clear that URC Youth must also examine its identity, purpose, and place within the life of the Church. While changes have been made to the Youth Executive, Youth Assembly recognises that structural revision alone does not address the deeper questions now emerging.

Many existing frameworks supporting URC Youth were developed for a different context and may no longer adequately reflect the experiences and needs of young people today. There is therefore a need, not simply for adjustment, but for a more fundamental exploration of what URC Youth is, what it is for, and how it should develop for the future.

In response, Youth Assembly has instructed General Assembly to establish a task group to explore the identity, purpose, and future development of URC Youth. The intention is to bring findings and a proposed resolution to Youth Assembly 2027 and, subject to approval, to General Assembly 2027.

It is our hope that the task group will work in partnership with the CYDO+ team, which is developing a five-year strategy for URC Youth. A document is being produced with a statement of what URC Youth currently is, but work is being paused until a decision is made at General Assembly, in order to integrate pieces of work together.

This report sets out the proposed scope, remit, and structure of the proposed task group.

Facts about URC Youth, Youth Assembly and Youth Executive

We have compiled a few statistics on the current numbers of previous Youth Assemblies and URC Youth across the denomination.

Average number of participants at Youth Assembly over the past six years: 93 people

Youth Assembly 2026 participants (including denominational reps): 96

All aged <26 worshipping at main service: 8,166 – This is a great number, but Youth Assembly barely reaches this number in-person. It is unknown how many of this number are reached with Youth Assembly mailings like the round-up newsletter.

Total Average Congregation: in person children <18: 3,407 – Youth Assembly only targets young people of 14-years-old upwards. How can we make the connection to the youth below that age and URC Children?

All aged <26 associated with the life of the Church: 25,437 – We have a lot of young people who don't attend on a Sunday but are still involved in the life of the Church. How do we connect with them?

Total Average Congregation: digital <18: 231 – Although a small number, there are still a lot of people that we may not be reaching currently but who might be easier to reach with them being based digitally.

Current challenges facing URC Youth

In undertaking this work, it is necessary to recognise the challenges currently shaping URC Youth. These are interconnected and reflect wider changes within both the Church and society. It is important to note that there is significant variation in experience across the denomination. As such, the experience of young people within the URC differs widely depending on local context, with inconsistency in opportunity, engagement and support, sometimes leading to an uneven sense of belonging.

There is also a disconnect between local, synod, and national expressions of URC Youth. While Youth Assembly and Youth Executive provide important structures for representation, these are not always clearly connected to local experience and can be perceived as distant or inaccessible – a common issue across the wider URC.

The limitations of existing structures are increasingly evident. The current model has provided continuity but may not fully reflect how young people engage with community, faith, and leadership. Participation is often centred on events rather than sustained, relational engagement.

The question of URC membership for young people remains unresolved. Many young people are geographically mobile, frequently moving areas and synods due to family life and education. This can make membership difficult to engage with due to no longer being permanently fixed to one location.

This has raised broader questions about how belonging and commitment are recognised within the Church. There are also ongoing concerns regarding voice and representation. While structures exist for participation, there is a need to ensure that the voices of young people are consistently heard, valued, and acted upon within wider decision-making processes, including those of General Assembly.

Finally, the wider social and cultural context must be acknowledged. Changing patterns of community, communication, and engagement continue to shape how young people relate to faith and church life.

These challenges underline the need for a more coherent, connected, and contextually relevant approach to URC Youth, and provide the basis for the proposed work of the task group.

Current happenings of URC Youth Assembly

Youth Assembly is changing along with the wider URC, with a recent change of venue, based on the reduced numbers attending, being a driving force for this.

Youth Executive is also changing with its most recent re-structure, which was officially put into action at Youth Assembly 2026. Youth Executive has now been split into three working groups: a Youth Assembly Planning Group, the Synod Representatives

Network, and the Officers of Youth Assembly. This allows for those wanting to be involved in the planning of Youth Assembly without having to be a Synod Youth Representative. This has meant that more young people have been able to be involved with the national processes and also allows those who only want to represent their synod to do so. This has raised the number of people in Youth Executive, with many of the new faces only a part of it due to this restructuring.

The paper related to this re-structure can be found in the URC Youth Executive and Youth Assembly Moderator's Review 2025 on the URC Website.

Identity and purpose

Questions of structure must be grounded in a clear understanding of identity and purpose. The task group will therefore begin by exploring what URC Youth is and what it is called to be within the life of the Church.

Key areas of exploration include:

- **Issues Facing Young People:** To explore how the Church responds to issues of belonging, participation, and membership among young people.
- **Purpose in a Post-Church Life Review Context:** To clarify the role of URC Youth within the changing structures of the Church, including its contribution, voice, and relationship to the wider denomination.
- **Structural Evolution:** To assess whether the current "Youth Assembly/Youth Executive" model remains the most effective framework, and to consider alternative approaches – such as community-based or "Youth Church" models – that may better support participation, discipleship, and leadership.

This work will establish a clearer and more coherent foundation to inform future development.

Remit of the Task Group

The task group will operate within a defined remit, enabling both reflection and practical recommendation.

It will:

- **explore identity:** considering what it means to be a young person within the URC today;
- **review current ways of working:** examining the operation of Youth Assembly and Youth Executive, identifying both strengths and limitations;
- **consider future development:** proposing potential developments, including structural changes, naming, and any necessary constitutional updates.

The task group will be expected to produce clear, actionable recommendations.

Membership of the Task Group

The task group should reflect a breadth of experience across the Church with at most 12 members of the task group – At least half of the group should be under 26s.

Suggested membership includes:

- Youth representatives, including current and former Youth Assembly Moderators, Youth Executive representatives, and members of Youth Assembly
- Synod representatives, including Children's and Youth Development Officers

- A representative from the Business Committee, Faith In Action, and other committees if relevant
- The Head of Children, Youth and Intergenerational Discipleship
- Power to co-opt people where needed

This ensures a balance of lived experience, governance insight, and institutional knowledge.

Safer Recruitment Suggestions

Synod/Youth representatives to apply through nominations committee to follow the correct safer recruitment process.

There has been thought of bringing in someone external, like Eido Research. This is something that might be considered by the task group if formed.

Desired Outcomes and Timescale

The purpose of this work is to move from reflection to clear and agreed action. The proposed timeline is:

- Enactment of task group and planning of work – till end of 2026
- Research and Consultation (end of 2026 – 2027)
 - Engagement across synods with young people, CYDO+s, Youth Executive
- Consultation with Youth Assembly and General Assembly 2027
- Reporting findings and decision to Youth Assembly 2028 and submission to General Assembly 2028
 - Subject to approval, submission for final consideration and enactment

Summary

The task group is expected to deliver:

- a clear articulation of the identity and purpose of URC Youth
- recommendations for future structure and development
- proposals addressing membership and participation
- guidance on how URC Youth relates to the wider life of the Church

This process will enable URC Youth to move forward with greater clarity and coherence within the United Reformed Church. “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” – Book of Jeremiah 29:11

Paper K3

Involvement with the Welcome Directory

URC Youth Assembly

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Maya Withall, National Synod of Scotland maya.withall@gmail.com Jay Tynan, North Western Synod
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 50 General Assembly encourages local churches to work with the Welcome Directory, in line with guidance in the URC's safeguarding Good Practice document, to help prison leavers with joining faith communities. Resolution 51 General Assembly strongly encourages local churches who feel able to join the Welcome Directory and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into how churches can be supported in their involvement.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Encouraging local URC's to sign up to the Welcome Directory and work in line with the URC's safeguarding policy to welcome prison leavers.
Main points	Encouraging local URC's who feel able to get involved with the Welcome Directory.
Previous relevant documents	N/A
Consultation has taken place with...	URC Youth Executive URC Youth Assembly 2025 Faith in Action Committee John Bradbury – URC General Secretary URC Head of Safeguarding URC Safeguarding Committee

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (eg ecumenical)	

Introduction

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself” Luke 10:27.

From URC Youth Assembly 2025:

This motion was brought to Youth Assembly in 2025 and was discussed at length. A number of concerns were raised and have been considered in the construction of this resolution.

“Encouraging the URC to be involved in the Welcome Directory: Youth Assembly encourages local churches to work with the Welcome Directory to help prison leavers with rejoining faith communities. Youth Assembly also asks the Mission Committee, with the help of URC Youth, to bring a resolution to General Assembly to support this.”

Proposer: Jay Tynan – GA & AE Representative; North Western Synod

Seconded: Maya Withall – URC Youth Assembly Moderator Elect; National Synod of Scotland.

This was passed by consensus at Youth Assembly 2025.

What is the Welcome Directory?

The Welcome Directory is a multi-faith organisation which maintains a directory of registered faith communities, across England and Wales, who have declared their commitment to welcoming prison leavers and provide them with appropriate support. This directory is used by prison chaplains, probation workers and prison leavers themselves so they can identify communities upon their release from prison who are openly welcoming. The directory is in every prison across England and Wales.

It is estimated that each year 8,000 people who practice a form of faith on the ‘inside’ once released from prison do not go on to join faith communities. While this can be for a range of reasons, one reason is that many faith communities are nervous about encouraging prison leavers to join them and feel ill equipped to provide the appropriate support.

By getting involved in the Welcome Directory these faith communities will not be working alone to welcome prison leavers, rather they would work with the Welcome Directory to enable these people to continue to practice their faith. The URC have robust safeguarding processes in place to welcome those that could pose a risk and are being released from prison to join its churches in a safe way, therefore any person attending a URC via the Welcome Directory would be supported through our safeguarding processes and policies.

What type of prison leavers are involved in the welcome directory?

Individuals will be leaving prison following various lengths of sentences and for a vast array of convictions. Each person who is released from prison and would like to attend a URC would be supported to do so safely by the Synod Safeguarding Officer who will liaise with the individual, the local church and other professionals to ensure the risk is appropriately assessed and managed.

Safeguarding

For a community to register for the Welcome Directory there are four requirements:

1. **Safeguarding policy** – promotes an active safeguarding culture within a local faith community. This policy must be happening in practice, as well as on paper with a named lead and an active culture of safeguarding. Each local URC is required to have a safeguarding policy with a named safeguarding officer. The URC also has the Good Practice safeguarding document which covers supporting those that the Welcome Directory support.
2. **Permission** – permission from a senior faith leader (or multiple faith leaders). The Elders' [meeting] would need to support the church registering with the Welcome Directory.
3. **A point of contact, a 'champion'** – someone with a passion for the project and is happy to be a main point of contact for prison leavers wishing to connect with the faith community. This could be the church safeguarding coordinator or another individual appointed by the Elders meeting.
4. **Prior experience** – it is recommended that the congregation wishing to get involved has prior experience. This can be through working or volunteering in a prison or helping out in their community. For congregations without prior experience the Welcome Directory runs free online courses, every quarter allowing interested individuals to get experience. A three-session Prison Awareness Course is available, [this as insertion] involving experienced prison and community chaplains to learn about life in prison, life after release and how we can welcome prison leavers. Any person wanting to attend the church via the Welcome Directory would be supported by the SSO who is experienced. However, the point of contact champion should attend the Welcome Directory training.

Types of leavers

- Low to medium risk – do not need to disclose that they have been to prison unless the church requires them to disclose it
- High risk (violent crimes) – a person of high risk would not attend the church without the church leader and members of the community being aware.

The URC already has in place robust safeguarding procedures for high-risk offenders, which are managed by synod safeguarding offers in partnership with local churches.

Scottish Equivalent

Sadly, the Welcome Directory only operates in England and Wales and as such Scottish URC's will be unable to get involved with the Welcome Directory's work. There is nothing the URC can do as the Welcome Directory is an external agency and they do not have the resources to extend their work into Scotland. However, General Assembly still encourages churches in the National Synod of Scotland to get involved with work of this kind in whatever capacity this may be.

URC Involvement

Four URC congregations are already signed up to be part of the Welcome Directory:

- Abbey United Reformed Church, Romsey
- Christ Church United Reformed Church, Rayleigh
- Northgate United Reformed Church, Darlington
- St Columba's URC

URC's experiences with the Welcome Directory

Christ Church URC on the Welcome Directory:

“When our Church Meeting discussed it, one of the elderly Stalwarts (who is sadly now deceased) said ‘if we call ourselves Christians, why are we even discussing this!’ And of course, Jesus came to free prisoners, so it is a Christian mandate to help prisoners, and the Welcome Directory provides a way to do that while still meeting safeguarding concerns.”

Abbey URC on the Welcome Directory:

“Abbey URC Romsey decided to get involved in this outreach possibility following a visit from a Chaplain of Winchester Prison who led a Sunday morning service here. After his talk/ sermon he asked whether the congregation had any questions to ask him, and one asked how the church could be involved in helping ex-offenders, to which he replied, “Consider including your church in the Welcome Directory”. Elders’ and Church Meeting discussions followed over the next few months, and a subsequent Church Meeting voted to be listed. We have yet to be approached by an ex-offender, but Welcome Directory resources have prepared us well to do so as and when the opportunity arises.”

Case Study

Note: this example is provided by the Welcome Director and URC safeguarding procedures would need to be followed.

About my faith/belief community

We are a Christian faith community, based in three different locations. Our congregation ranges from students and young adults to families and older people across our locations. Our church provides free meals to disadvantaged households, a youth club and helps unemployed young people find work. We’ve been working across two prisons, giving donations, running bible studies classes and visiting people. The main prison we’re connected to is a remand prison. We registered with The Welcome Directory in 2023.

How we’ve supported prison leavers

We didn’t have many prison leavers coming to our faith community initially, but through our work in prisons they got to know us and recently more have been coming. Prison leavers are encouraged to be involved in volunteering with the church, such as helping with maintenance and decorating work as well as serving at the café. Some have found freelance work through us or have used their existing skills to help the church. We also offer practical help like applying for benefits and housing.

The difference our work has made

For some prison leavers, being involved in a faith community is part of something bigger. There are people who’ve struggled with addiction for years and being part of a faith community has helped them to be released from that, alongside support groups like AA and NA. For others, participating in a faith community is reintegrating back into society. Being seen as a part of society, rather than someone on the outskirts.

I believe that a good welcome is...

Knowing that we’re there for them. Some people may never ask for help and we need to say “this is what we can do, would you like that?” Realising that some people are being released, it might be the first time in years where they’ve had to think about what time they are going to get up and what they are going to do that day.

The most important thing I've learnt is...

We're all in the same boat. In secular society, prison leavers are in one group and the rest of society is in another, because "you've committed a crime and I haven't". In Christianity we're all fallible and we all need a saviour. That puts us on a level playing field.

I've also learnt that working with prison leavers requires patience and persistence. I love the phrase 'high support, high challenge'. There's a time to sit back and let someone settle in and there's a time to encourage them to take on a new challenge, if there is an opportunity for change or involvement or an opportunity to get someone into work.

Disclaimer: This case study represents the individual's views, and not the views of their organisation.

Paper P1

Name of Wessex Synod

Wessex Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins moderator@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 52 General Assembly changes the name of the Wessex Synod to the Wessex and Islands Synod, with effect from 1 January 2027.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	A change of name of the Wessex Synod to Wessex and Islands Synod.
Main points	This proposal asks the General Assembly to change the name of the Wessex Synod to the Wessex and Islands Synod. The change is intended to be modest and descriptive only: it would not alter boundaries, structures, finance, or legal arrangements, but would adopt a name that more clearly reflects the full geography and communities already within the Synod's life, including its island contexts. The proposal is rooted in the Christian understanding that naming matters, because names express recognition, belonging, and relationship. The new name would therefore make explicit something already true in practice: that mainland and island communities together share in the one common life of the Synod.
Previous relevant documents	n/a
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

Summary of impact

Financial	n/a
External (eg ecumenical)	The proposed change will align better with our ecumenical partners, notably the Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church.

1. The proposal

- 1.1 The names and boundaries of synods are determined by the General Assembly. The Wessex Synod therefore asks the General Assembly to approve a change of name from Wessex Synod to Wessex and Islands Synod.
- 1.2 This proposed change is intentionally modest. It would:
 - make no alteration to Synod boundaries;
 - require no constitutional, financial, or organisational restructuring;
 - leave existing legal entities, charitable registrations, trust arrangements, website domains, and other operational structures unchanged unless and until any later changes were judged helpful.
- 1.3 The proposal seeks only to adopt a name that more clearly reflects the geography and communities already within the Synod's life and care. The Synod includes not only mainland areas of southern England commonly associated with Wessex, but also island contexts, including the Channel Islands, the Isle of Wight, Portsea Island, and Hayling Island, together with churches and communities shaped by coastal and island realities.
- 1.4 The proposed new name is intended to be descriptive, inclusive, and transparent. It does not imply any change in status between different parts of the Synod, nor any new constitutional distinction within it. It simply makes explicit in the Synod's public identity something that is already true in practice: that its common life embraces both mainland and island contexts.
- 1.5 The proposal arose from reflection on whether the Synod's present name fully represents the breadth of the area it serves. The conclusion reached was that Wessex and Islands is a simple and intelligible way of naming the Synod more fully, while remaining continuous with its present identity.

2. The rationale

- 2.1 In Christian tradition, names matter. They are not merely administrative labels, but expressions of recognition, relationship, and truthfulness. To name something well is to pay proper attention to what it is.
- 2.2 This proposal therefore arises from a simple ecclesial question: how should the Synod describe itself in a way that most faithfully reflects the communities that belong within it? The issue is not one of structure, but of self-understanding and recognition.
- 2.3 The present name, Wessex Synod, works well for much of the Synod's mainland geography and heritage. This proposal does not diminish that inheritance. It asks only whether the name can now speak more clearly about the whole Synod, rather than the greater part of it.
- 2.4 When some parts of a church's life are named explicitly and others remain implicit, there is a risk that the unnamed can seem secondary, even where no such distinction is intended. The purpose of this proposal is not to suggest any past neglect, but to make visible a fuller picture of the Synod as it already is.

- 2.5 The proposed name expresses a theology of belonging. It signals that island communities are not peripheral to the Synod's identity, but integral to it, and that geographical separation does not lessen ecclesial fellowship, mutual responsibility, or shared vocation.
- 2.6 This is consonant with the New Testament image of the Church as the Body of Christ, in which different members, contexts, and gifts belong together in mutual dependence. A Synod name that explicitly joins Wessex and Islands offers a modest but tangible expression of that conviction.
- 2.7 The proposed name also assists clarity in public, ecumenical, and civic contexts. It gives a more transparent account of the Synod's scope and may therefore support clearer understanding in partnership and communication.
- 2.8 The proposal is therefore a small change, but not a trivial one. It neither alters structures nor creates new ones. Rather, it invites the General Assembly to authorise a name that more faithfully reflects the Synod's geography, relationships, and common life.
- 2.9 The Wessex Synod accordingly asks the General Assembly to approve the change of name to Wessex and Islands Synod as an act of recognition: a way of naming the Synod that honours the full breadth of the body entrusted to its care.

Paper P2

Keeping Trans people safe

Wessex Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Michael Hopkins moderator@urcwessex.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 53 General Assembly notes that following the statement agreed at General Assembly 2023, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in the UK find that they are living in an increasingly hostile environment, which means that it is even more important that the church welcomes them, and has appropriate safeguarding measures in place. Resolution 54 General Assembly notes that St Columba's URC Oxford has therefore agreed that it is important to affirm its commitment to the 2023 resolution, and to publicise this on their church website. Resolution 55 General Assembly invites other local churches to make similar affirmations, and to indicate their support to the Offices of the General Assembly as part of the Annual Return for publication on the URC website within the “Find a church” tool.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To invite the General Assembly to support clear voluntary signposting by local churches of their commitment to the 2023 Assembly statement on transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people, as a matter of welcome, safeguarding, and clarity.
Main points	This proposal is a practical safeguarding and welcome measure. It does not seek to reopen debate or persuade any local church to adopt a particular view, but invites those churches which wish to do so to make clear their support for the 2023 General Assembly statement on transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people. By enabling churches to indicate this through the Annual Return for publication in the “Find a church” tool, the proposal would provide clearer signposting for those seeking a church and

	help reduce the risk of vulnerable people inadvertently entering spaces they may experience as unsafe.
Previous relevant documents	Resolutions 21a-21d of General Assembly 2023, and the associated report of the Equalities Committee.
Consultation has taken place with...	n/a

Summary of impact

Financial	n/a
External (eg ecumenical)	Greater clarity which reduces risks of misunderstanding and associated harm.

1. The Wessex Synod, following a proposal from the Church Meeting of St Columba's URC in Oxford, asks the General Assembly to consider these resolutions in the light of the statement agreed by General Assembly in 2023 concerning transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people. The impetus for this proposal is not to reopen the debates which led to the 2023 statement, nor to persuade any local church or minister to adopt a view different from that which they already hold, nor to create any new policy beyond that already expressed by General Assembly. It is simply to address a practical question of keeping people safe, of welcome and of clarity.
2. In recent years, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in the United Kingdom are living in a social climate which many experience as increasingly hostile. For some, especially younger people, that hostility is not abstract. Unsupportive settings can become places of profound distress and, in some cases, serious risk to wellbeing and safety. Concern has been expressed that, where churches give no clear indication of their commitment to the 2023 Assembly statement, people may inadvertently enter spaces which feel unsafe or exposing. Even where no harm is intended, uncertainty itself can be harmful.
3. Research consistently shows that transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people are at significantly increased risk of suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and suicide attempts, and that unsupportive environments can intensify that risk. In the UK, Stonewall has reported that 46% of trans people had thought about taking their own life in the previous year¹, and that more than two in five trans young people had attempted to take their own life at some point.²
4. This proposal therefore arises from a safeguarding concern. It is about helping vulnerable people know, in advance, where they will be received with care, dignity, and clarity. It is also about enabling congregations that do support the 2023 Assembly statement to say so plainly and publicly, so that those seeking a church are not left to guess.
5. St Columba's URC, Oxford, has already concluded that it is important to affirm publicly its commitment to the 2023 resolution and to make that commitment

¹ <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/lgbt-britain-health-2018>

² <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/school-report-2017>

visible on its church website. The church believes that such signposting is a simple but significant act of welcome and pastoral responsibility. It does not settle every question, nor does it remove the need for appropriate local safeguarding practice, but it does help people identify safer spaces and approach churches with greater confidence.

6. The Synod brings this matter to General Assembly not because there is unanimity on every aspect of these questions, nor in order to persuade anyone to change their mind, but because it believes that clear public affirmation can serve the Church's pastoral and safeguarding responsibilities. The proposal does not ask Assembly to create an onerous new process. Rather, it invites churches which are willing to do so to make similar affirmations, and to indicate that support through the Annual Return, so that this information may be made available through the denomination's existing "Find a church" tool.
7. This would be a proportionate and practical step. It would not require every local church to make the same declaration, nor would it encourage any local church to make a particular decision. It would, however, allow those churches which do wish to signal their welcome and commitment to safeguarding to do so in a way that is visible and accessible. In this way, the Church would help people avoid unsafe uncertainty, while giving concrete expression to the commitment already affirmed by General Assembly in 2023.

Paper P4

Recognition of Mission Projects in Thames North Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Revd George Watt moderator@urcthamesnorth.org.uk Ms Nneoma Chima synodclerk@urcthamesnorth.org.uk
Action required	General Assembly asked to recognise four Mission Projects in Thames North Synod
Draft resolution	General Assembly recognises the following as Mission Projects in Thames North Synod: Resolution 56 Seedbeds (395 High Street North, Manor Park, London E12 6PG) Resolution 57 The Lumen Centre (88 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RS) Resolution 58 The Hyde (Varley Parade, Colindale London, NW9 6RR) Resolution 59 Island House (Roserton St, Isle of Dogs, London E14 3PG)

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	General Assembly recognition of Mission Projects in Thames North Synod.
Main points	In recent and previous years, there have been a number of congregations which have closed. In some instances, community work has continued in the buildings, but this does not fully fulfil the charitable objects of the Synod: <i>‘The objects and activities of the Thames North Synod are to advance the Christian religion in accordance with the doctrines, principles and usages of the United Reformed Church, particularly in the Thames North area.’</i> Moreover, we are concerned when Christian witness is withdrawn particularly in areas of deprivation and need. In recent years, the Synod has been asking if we discern if there is scope for a future mission in these ‘redundant’ buildings

	before selling the property. These are four churches where we believe that there is a mission to be explored and developed. Seedbeds at Manor Park Since Shalom Church closed in 2010, the premises have been leased to The Renewal Programme providing vital services and support to the local community, which is diverse and has high levels of deprivation. Since 2023, Dave Mann (a Baptist Local Pastor) has been working there for the Synod to grow a new Christian Community. He is working closely with The Renewal Programme to ensure community engagement is maintained. The Lumen Centre After the closure of the congregation known as Regent Square @ Lumen in July 2020, it was agreed that we should retain the building as a resource for the Synod and explore its role within the local community. The present and previous centre managers have also had the remit of developing worship there. Although there is still some uncertainty about the priorities, a Christian witness and sense of community remain at the heart of Lumen. The Hyde Following the closure of The Hyde in April 2024, there have been explorations to church plant in the existing building. Under the oversight of Mill Hill East Church (URC/Baptist). The Revd Isabella Senior (a Baptist Minister) has been commissioned to take on this work for the Synod. There is a thriving Chinese Church in London congregation meeting there and it is hoped to complement their witness and explore opportunities of shared mission. Island House After the closure of St Paul's Cubitt Town, the building, Island House, was retained as an important facility for the community which is diverse and with significant levels of deprivation. We are seeking to establish a worshipping community there and will be looking to appoint a pioneer worker to oversee the work. The Synod will be establishing a Mission Projects Group to have general oversight of these projects and management groups to support the day-to-day running of the individual projects.
Previous relevant documents	World Church and Mission resolutions on Mission Projects agreed at General Assembly 1992 (Appendix II, Page 20 Record of General Assembly) Law and Polity Advisory Group advice September 2020
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	To be met by Synod resources.
External (eg ecumenical)	The Synod believes that these projects seek to bring about community transformation as well as ensuring a Christian witness continues where there may be little or none, but always seeking to work with other churches and denominations.

Paper P5

Clarifying the term “pastoral necessity” for lay presidency at the Sacraments

West Midlands Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Steve Faber moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
Action required	Instruction to relevant committees to provide guidance on the meaning of the term “pastoral necessity.”
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 60 In light of increasingly complex pastorates and the decrease in the number of available Ministers of Word and Sacraments, General Assembly instructs the Ministries and the Worship, Faith and Order Committees to review the question of what it means for there to be ‘pastoral necessity’ for Lay Presidency at the Sacraments and provide guidance accordingly.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To provide clear guidance to Assembly, Synods and local churches as to the meaning of the term “pastoral necessity” to allow for lay presidency at the Sacraments, in line with the Basis of Union §25.
Main points	With ministers serving multiple churches in a pastorate, it is increasingly hard to find ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments (MWS) to preside with the regularity required by many churches. Synods are increasingly being asked to approve Authorised Elders to preside when a MWS is not available
Previous relevant documents	The URC Manual Section J, GA2016 Book of Reports pp90-107 and Record resolutions 14-19 on Authorised Elders
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	There is already provision Lay Presidency in the Basis of Union, and question of ecumenical sensitivity were covered in

	the 2016 report. At this stage, no change in policy is proposed, but clarity on the existing position is sought.

Lay Presidency at the Sacraments

General Assembly last reviewed its position on Lay Presidency at the Sacraments when it made provision for Authorised Elders in 2016.

Resolution 14 of the 2016 Assembly affirms that the normal pattern should be that a Minister of Word and Sacraments (MWS) should preside at Holy Communion and Baptism whenever available, but where there is no Minister available then an Elder may be authorised by the Synod to preside, after appropriate preparation. Preference should be given to “Elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship” (GA 2016 Resolution 14b). Resolution 14 updated Section F of the URC Manual accordingly.

In the last 10 years, the number of churches forming a pastorate served by an MWS has increased dramatically. It is now increasingly common for ministers to serve in a grouping of at least four churches, so is likely to lead worship at any one of those churches in their pastoral charge once a month or less often.

The most typical pattern for the celebration of Holy Communion in United Reformed Church congregations is monthly. Typically, therefore, a MWS will be asked to lead Communion at one of the churches to which they have been inducted every single week (which would be the normal pattern in former Churches of Christ congregations anyway), but when holidays, study leave and illness are factored in, inevitably there will be some Sundays when “their own” minister will not be available to lead Communion (let alone Baptism, although those occasions can often be planned around the availability of a MWS.)

Members of our Synod meeting considering this resolution also noted that there is a particular pressure point at the major Christian festivals, especially around Easter, when it is not possible for Ministers to preside at multiple churches in their charge on Maundy Thursday and/or Easter Sunday, for instance.

Similarly, with an ageing demographic, there is some anecdotal reporting of a higher number of requests for home Communion for those who find it difficult to attend Sunday worship. Where a pastorate covers multiple churches in a much larger geographical area, some Ministers are finding it increasingly difficult to meet perceived spiritual needs for isolated members.

Churches can, of course, seek retired MWS to preside, although whilst the number of retired ministers is growing, fewer feel that this is a service they wish to continue to offer, many having hung up their clerical vestments many years earlier.

Representations have also been made that even if a Minister can lead worship in each of “their” churches monthly, there may be missional reasons why including Holy Communion is less appropriate, including those occasions where a large number of visitors from the community may be present who have not been prepared for what we are doing when we break bread and drink wine.

Even at the formation of the United Reformed Church, we accepted that presidency by MWS would not always be possible — and we had considerably more ordained ministers available then, most with charge of only one or two congregations. Unquestionably it is getting harder to secure a minister's presence with a fixed regularity (the First Sunday of a month, for instance).

As a Synod, we have sought to make it clear that in many places the fixed regularity of the Sacraments may not be sustainable. Flexibility should be considered seriously by a local church. "We've always done it this way", is not a theological basis for Lay Presidency.

For the avoidance of doubt, this paper is not proposing a change to the Basis of Union. It is still the **normal** pattern for a minister to preside at the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism. The onus remains with the Elders' Meeting, "to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered" as one of their functions (The Structure of the United Reformed Church, 2,(2)(ii). Further, the Basis of Union §25 starts by saying that, "The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God." To act consistently with this foundational belief, there are appropriate standards to be maintained. The emphasis on, "the whole people of God," also means we must take seriously the ecumenical implications of our presidency at the Sacraments.

Amongst our typical partners in LEPs, whilst the Baptist Church would be far more concerned with the acceptability of the President to the local congregation, the Methodist Church would tend to be more concerned with good order and the President being agreeable to the wider Connexion. The Church of England would take a stricter view — Presidency is a task for a priest. We should also recognise that the ecumenical scene is broader than our traditional LEP partners, and a great many other denominations and church networks would lean towards the Baptist/Congregational view of the local church deciding.

Certainly, in our LEPs we must be respectful of the convictions and discipline of our partners, but it would be appropriate to bring in wider questions of ecumenism. The language used around Lay Presidency has always been "in cases of pastoral necessity" a Synod (and previously the District Council) could authorise lay people to preside (see also the footnote to §25 of the Basis of Union, which makes it clear that worship "should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as the local church.") "Lay" here includes Elders, who are ordained, but Assembly has previously made it clear that Elders do not share the same kind of ordained ministry as Ministers of Word and Sacraments. Similarly, CRCWs, as a commissioned, rather than an ordained ministry, are not automatically designated as those who may or should preside at the Sacraments.

The General Assembly has, from time-to-time attempted to explore what "pastoral necessity" means. Most significantly, the Faith and Order committee's reports, to Mission Council in 2015 and 2016 which led to the creation of Authorised Elders, wrestled with what the term means and how it was being interpreted. Their conclusion, essentially, was that it depends largely on the church tradition, as those formerly Presbyterian tended to emphasise the pastoral need in providing for the Sacraments to be celebrated, whereas those formerly of the Congregational tradition would see the necessity as having the President (ordained or lay) as someone in an established

pastoral relationship with the congregation. The Churches of Christ tradition of weekly Communion celebrations provided for Elders to preside routinely at the table.

In implementing denominational policy, the Synod Pastoral Committees (by whatever name) act on behalf of the Synod in appointing Authorised Elders at the request of local churches.

Time and again they are asked to decide whether there is a case being made of “pastoral necessity” for Lay Presidency, with almost no guidance as to how to decide whether such a case exists, often on the basis of partial information which requires follow-up and clarification, leading to frustration and resentment from local churches. It is increasingly difficult to make consistent decisions, when a little more information might tip the balance one way or the other.

The West Midlands Synod feels that having a clearer, definitive, statement on what constitutes “pastoral necessity” in our current ministry context is now needed. We are aware that the 2016 Assembly’s view was that a Synod is the appropriate Council to decide on the appointment of Authorised Elders, but we wish to see a consistent standard so that people moving from one Synod to another will find a common approach being followed.

Paper P6

Emphasising Evangelism in the life of the United Reformed Church

Mersey Synod

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Revd Geoff Felton, Moderator of Mersey Synod moderator@urcmerseysynod.org.uk
Action required	For decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 61 General Assembly: Affirms that evangelism is integral to the life and mission of the United Reformed Church, arising from confidence in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ and present through the Holy Spirit. Encourages GA and its committees, Synods, local churches, ministers, elders and lay leaders to prioritise evangelism understood as both invitation to encounter God within worshipping communities and to discover God in everyday life. Recognises the central role of worship in evangelism and calls the Church to sustained attention to the quality, depth, and expectancy of worship. Commends the outcomes of the Church Life Review (CLR) as providing structural and resource support that enables evangelistic renewal, while acknowledging that renewal itself depends upon spiritual attentiveness and faithfulness.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	1. This paper invites the General Assembly to affirm a renewed emphasis on evangelism within the life of the United Reformed Church. 2. Mersey Synod Meeting of 14th March 2026 passed the resolution for this paper on Evangelism to be submitted to General Assembly. 3. Evangelism is understood not primarily as programme or strategy, but as faithful witness arising from confidence in the reality of the living God, encountered within the worshipping life of the Church and made known through the Holy Spirit. 4. The paper connects evangelism with renewed confidence in worship, ecclesial identity, and the

	Church's confession of itself as one, holy, catholic and apostolic.
Main points	Context¹ 1. The United Reformed Church emerged in a period of significant cultural and theological change. In responding to shifting worldviews, many theological approaches sought to reinterpret Christian faith in ways that reduced or removed claims about God's active presence within creation. 2. These approaches were often undertaken with integrity and a desire to make faith intelligible in the modern world, creating space for questioning and critical engagement. 3. Experience has shown, however, that such approaches are insufficient to sustain Christian faith and witness in a world marked by starvation, conflict, injustice, environmental crisis, and widespread mental ill-health. 4. In this context, a God who is distant, abstract, or removed from human suffering lacks credibility. The God revealed in Jesus Christ — crucified and risen — and present through the Holy Spirit is the God who is encountered in the midst of the world and proclaimed by the Church.
Previous relevant documents	Theos Report, John Bradbury Address to GA 2025, Church Life Review
Consultation has taken place with...	Lindsey Brown, John Bradbury, Mersey Synod Meeting March 2026

Summary of impact

Financial	There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper.
External (eg ecumenical)	The proposal is consistent with the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitments and understanding of the Church's incompleteness.

1. Evangelism and confidence in God

- 1.1 Evangelism arises from confidence that God is alive, active, and present among God's people.
- 1.2 It is not primarily a response to institutional decline, but an expression of faithfulness to the gospel and participation in God's mission, indeed evangelism is a matter of discipleship not desperation.
- 1.3 Evidence from across a wide range of Christian traditions indicates renewed engagement with faith, particularly among younger people, often rooted in experiences of encountering the living God within worship and community.

¹ Some of this section comes from Revd Dr John Bradbury General Assembly Address 2025

- 1.4 Evangelism is therefore best understood as invitation to encounter, offered with integrity where there is confidence that the Church is a place where God is known and experienced.

2. The Church as the Body of Christ²

- 2.1 In confessing belief in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, the Church affirms that it is the Body of Christ and the People of God.
- 2.2 Through the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, prayer, worship, and shared life, Christ is made present in and through the Church.
- 2.3 Within the United Reformed Church there can at times be a hesitancy to speak confidently about the Church in these terms, shaped by ecumenical commitment and a strong emphasis on personal faith.
- 2.4 While these commitments are valued, such hesitancy can unintentionally weaken evangelistic confidence if the Church itself is not understood as a place of genuine encounter with the living God.

3. Worship and Evangelism

- 4.1 Worship lies at the heart of evangelism. The purpose of evangelism is to encourage all people to worship with their whole lives. Worship also fuels evangelism.
- 4.2 Testimony from across the Church highlights the importance of worship that is engaging, inclusive, challenging, and spiritually nourishing, and in which there is an expectation that God will meet God's people.
- 4.3 Where worship lacks depth, vitality, or expectancy, evangelism is diminished. Where worship is confident, prayerful, and attentive to the Spirit, evangelism becomes a shared and natural expression of church life.
- 4.4 A renewed emphasis on evangelism therefore requires sustained attention to the quality and theological confidence of worship across all contexts of the United Reformed Church.

5. The Outcomes of the Church Life Review (CLR)

- 5.1 The outcomes of the CLR cannot in themselves bring about spiritual renewal or evangelistic confidence. No programme or set of resolutions can achieve this.
- 5.2 They do seek, however, to create conditions in which renewal may be pursued more fully, by addressing structural pressures, resourcing local churches, and enabling new forms of ministry and communities of worship and discipleship.
- 5.3 The review should be understood as providing practical support for renewal, rather than as a substitute for it.

6. Mersey Synod Action

- 6.1 Mersey Synod initiated and implemented Talking Faith in order to build confidence among church members to enter into conversation about something they might keep private to themselves. Talking Faith was not just an evangelistic program it was an idea to encourage the church to think in faith terms about all areas of life and to articulate those thoughts beyond the individual, thereby building confidence in speaking naturally of life's issues through the lens of faith.

² Some of this comes from Revd Dr John Bradbury General Assembly address 2025

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 There are emerging signs of hope within the life of the Church, including new people exploring faith, modest growth in some contexts, and a shifting mood from resignation towards attentiveness.
- 7.2 These developments invite the Church to renewed confidence, expectation, and readiness to join in with God's work.
- 7.3 A renewed emphasis on evangelism calls the United Reformed Church to deepen its confidence in the living God, to invest in worship as a place of encounter, and to understand itself as the Body of Christ in its communities.
- 7.4 As a result of the resolution, we would encourage synods, local churches and the Faith in Action Committee to review and commit to plan for and engage with culturally and contextually appropriate evangelism strategies.

8. Implications

Financial implications:

- 8.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper. Any resourcing implications are addressed through the outcomes of the CLR.

Equality, diversity and inclusion implications:

- 8.2 The emphasis on evangelism as invitation to encounter affirms the inclusion of all people within the life and worship of the Church.

Environmental implications:

- 8.3 None directly arising from this paper.

Ecumenical implications:

- 8.4 The proposal is consistent with the United Reformed Church's ecumenical commitments and understanding of the Church's incompleteness.

Resolutions

Resolution 1

General Assembly welcomes the report of the Ministerial Disciplinary Working Group and affirms the direction of travel towards a 'Fitness to Practice' process.

Resolution 2

The General Assembly:

- A. determines that the Luther King Theological College become the primary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One (EM1).
- B. determines that the Scottish College becomes the complementary Resource Centre for Learning for the United Reformed Church, and provider of Education for Ministry Phase One.
- C. invites Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College to seek the closest possible collaboration in the delivery of Education for Ministry phase one and in other areas of work.
- D. determines to cease using Westminster College, Cambridge, for Education for Ministry One.
- E. instructs the Business Committee, in collaboration with the Ministries Committee, Resources Committee and Faith in Action Committee, to agree with Luther King Theological College and the Scottish College new Memoranda of Understanding and Service Level Agreements to effect the outcomes sought in A-D, and to ensure the appropriate financial agreements are in place to enable their successful delivery.
- F. instructs the Resources Committee to work with the three existing RCLs to provide appropriate financial support through a transitional period through to the full implementation of A-D.
- G. instructs the Business Committee and Resources Committee to work with Westminster College Governors as they discern the future for the College and to enable the General Assembly to support this through appropriate governance and transitional financial arrangements when appropriately developed proposals have been made.

Resolution 3

General Assembly receives the observations of the Working Group and instructs the Ministries Committee to review these recommendations and return to the General Assembly or Assembly Executive with any appropriate proposals.

Resolution 4

General Assembly welcomes the proposed consultative meeting between District Chairs and Synod Moderators, and in the light of that directs the Business Committee in consultation with the Liaison Group to report to the 2027 General Assembly with proposals concerning the vision and shape of future possible collaboration.

Resolution 5

Assembly approves and adopts the Terms of Reference of the Church Life Fund Committee, as set out in Appendix Five, and directs Business Committee to review and appoint co-opted members to the Church Life Fund Committee where appropriate.

Resolution 6

General Assembly commends this paper and encourages next steps to be taken in developing this work within the Faith in Action Team and beyond, as appropriate.

Resolution 7

General Assembly warmly commends the journey towards a joint Christian-Muslim declaration, encouraging the Faith in Action Committee through the Inter Faith Enabling Group to deepen these ongoing inter faith efforts, tasking them to report back to General Assembly in 2027 on progress and action.

Resolution 8

General Assembly commends the prayerful study of the *Kairos II* document across the URC and tasks the Faith in Action Committee to keep under review ways in which deep solidarity might be expressed to our partners in the region.

Resolution 9

General Assembly instructs the Business Committee to establish a task group to address issues surrounding antisemitism within the life of the United Reformed Church, in consultation with the Inter Faith Enabling Group, the Worship, Faith and Order Committee, The Faith in Action Committee and the Ministries Committee, and to bring terms of reference, membership, and budget to Assembly Executive in February 2027 for approval.

Resolution 10

General Assembly:

- a. Welcomes a continuing presence at, and partnership with, Greenbelt Festival for three more years, recognising the positive impact of the URC presence at Greenbelt on festivalgoers and URC volunteers.
- b. Instructs the Faith in Action and Resources Committees to facilitate this engagement through an appropriate allocation of funds and staff time in keeping with 2026 costs, adjusted for inflation.
- c. Instructs the Faith in Action Committee to measure and report on the impact of this engagement annually, using qualitative and quantitative data.

Resolution 11

General Assembly adopts the terms of reference for the Net Zero Task Group as set out in paper B6.

Resolution 12

General Assembly adopts the specific three-strand Repairing Justice proposals offered by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group

Resolution 13

General Assembly adopts the allocation of monies from the Legacies of Slavery Fund in the following proportions:

- Up to 30% to be apportioned to the regional strand
- A minimum of 60% to be apportioned to the Global strand – including, but not limited to, the development of New Free Villages in Jamaica.

Resolution 14

General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to continue its work establishing partnerships both in the UK and globally to be resourced by the URC Legacies of Slavery Fund.

Resolution 15

General Assembly delegates the authority to determine specific funding allocations for each project to the Faith in Action Committee, to be advised by the Legacies of Slavery Task Group, bringing updates to General Assembly via the usual reporting processes.

Resolution 16

General Assembly instructs the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Senior Leadership Team, the Legal Advisor, The United Reformed Church Trust and other relevant bodies as necessary to ensure that appropriate governance and safeguarding structures are in place to honour the URC's fiduciary responsibilities.

Resolution 17

General Assembly adopts the revised *URC Sickness and Ill Health Policy* for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

Resolution 18

General Assembly adopts the revised Terms of Reference for the Accreditations sub-committee of the Ministries Committee.

Resolution 19

Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee to conduct a review of learning and formation across all accredited ministries in the United Reformed Church in accordance with the outline in paper C3.

Resolution 20

General Assembly adopts the revised *Active Ministers Policy – Fitness to Practise* and directs its implementation.

Resolution 21

General Assembly adopts the Inactive Ministers Policy and directs its implementation.

Resolution 22

General Assembly affirms that:

- a. the normal retirement age of 68 for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers remains an appropriate and proportionate policy within the present life of the United Reformed Church;
- b. the existing Procedure for Extension to Stipendiary Ministerial Service beyond the normal retirement age remains the proper and sufficient mechanism for discerning continued stipendiary ministry beyond 68;
- c. requests Ministries Committee:
 - i. to keep under review the pastoral and practical support offered to ministers approaching retirement, including matters relating to wellbeing, deployment and transition into later forms of ministry;
 - ii. to further consider the relationship between the normal retirement age and fixed-term appointments with a report to Assembly Executive 2027.

Resolution 23

General Assembly adopts the process for the Ill-Health Early Retirement of Office Holders (from the buy-out of the Ministers' Pension Fund – expected in summer 2026)

Resolution 24

General Assembly adopts the framework of Competencies and Expected Standards of Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments as set out in this paper.

Resolution 25

General Assembly adopts the URC Reasonable Adjustments Policy for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, Church Related Community Workers, and those in training.

Resolution 26

General Assembly creates a single Ministries Support and Wellbeing Committee, bringing together the work of the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee (PRWC) and the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee (MoM), and adopts its Terms of Reference.

Resolution 27

General Assembly notes the work of the Resources Committee.

Resolution 28

General Assembly notes the Annual Report and audited accounts for 2025.

Resolution 29

General Assembly determines that following the buyout of the Ministers' Pension Scheme, a different style of committee is required and that the URC Investment Committee (URCIC) will cease to exist.

Resolution 30

General Assembly determines that a new Investment Committee will be created as a sub-committee of Resources Committee, reporting to the URC Trust.

Resolution 31

General Assembly approves the Terms of Reference for this new subcommittee.

Resolution 32

General Assembly adopts the recommendations for 'good practice' for Synods in selecting representatives to attend General Assembly, as set out in section 2.4 of the report, and commends these to Synods.

Resolution 33

General Assembly instructs the Nominations Committee to work with the Business Committee and those responsible for communications in the Offices of General Assembly to produce and distribute the relevant resources to support these recommendations, including promotional media and application templates, in preparation for General Assembly 2027.

Resolution 34

General Assembly resolves that there be two co-opted ordinary members of the Church Life Fund Committee in order to ensure that there is diversity on the committee.

Resolution 35

General Assembly gives thanks for all who have served on General Assembly committees and as representatives of the Church. Where terms of service have ended, or resignations have been received, General Assembly discharges these volunteers with thanks for their service.

Resolution 36

General Assembly appoints members of committees and representatives of the Church as set out in paragraph 7 of this Report, subject to the adoptions and corrections contained in supplementary Reports to Assembly.

Resolution 37

General Assembly thanks John Bradbury for his service thus far and appoints him to serve as General Secretary for a further term of 5 years from General Assembly 2027 to General Assembly 2032.

Resolution 38

General Assembly reappoints the Revd Jamie Kissack to serve as Moderator of the Yorkshire Synod until 30th September 2032.

Resolution 39

General Assembly instructs the denominational Safeguarding Team and Synods to implement a programme of regular reviews of Synods' safeguarding practice.

Resolution 40

Assembly adopts an addition to the Rules of Procedure which will read under Synod responsibilities: 10.3.4 — To participate in a triennial safeguarding review conducted by the General Assembly Safeguarding Team.

Resolution 41

General Assembly encourages United Reformed Churches to observe the Feast of Creation in Christ on the first Sunday in September from 2026.

Resolution 42

General Assembly instructs the Worship, Faith and Order Committee to provide and curate worship resources to help the churches to celebrate the Feast of Creation, including resources produced as a result of the global ecumenical process.

Resolution 43

General Assembly agrees to adopt Version III of the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith, and Order of the URC.

Resolution 44

General Assembly commends to the churches *A Theological Resource on Assisted Dying* for prayerful thought and discussion.

Resolution 45

General Assembly grants the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee permission to coopt members who currently represent the United Reformed Church in ecumenical or international bodies, or who can bring specialisms for particular piece of work.

Resolution 46

General Assembly instructs the Faith and Order Committee to review the use of gendered language in the Basis of Union and its schedules, in consultation with other committees and sub-committees, including Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (EDIB), as well as Youth Executive.

Resolution 47

General Assembly instructs business committee to establish a task group to explore the identity, purpose and future development of URC Youth.

Resolution 48

General Assembly instructs the task group to report to Youth Assembly on the progress of its work in 2027, and bring final recommendations to Youth Assembly 2028, which if adopted would form the basis of recommendations to be brought to General Assembly 2028.

Resolution 49

General Assembly accepts the remit, membership and timescale of the task group.

Resolution 50

General Assembly encourages local churches to work with the Welcome Directory, in line with guidance in the URC's safeguarding Good Practice document, to help prison leavers with joining faith communities.

Resolution 51

General Assembly strongly encourages local churches who feel able to join the Welcome Directory and for local churches, Synods and General Assembly to look into how churches can be supported in their involvement.

Resolution 52

General Assembly changes the name of the Wessex Synod to the Wessex and Islands Synod, with effect from 1 January 2027.

Resolution 53

General Assembly notes that following the statement agreed at General Assembly 2023, transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming people in the UK find that they are living in an increasingly hostile environment, which means that it is even more important that the church welcomes them, and has appropriate safeguarding measures in place.

Resolution 54

General Assembly notes that St Columba's URC Oxford has therefore agreed that it is important to affirm its commitment to the 2023 resolution, and to publicise this on their church website.

Resolution 55

General Assembly invites other local churches to make similar affirmations, and to indicate their support to the Offices of the General Assembly as part of the Annual Return for publication on the URC website within the "Find a church" tool.

General Assembly recognises the following as Mission Projects in Thames North Synod:

Resolution 56

Seedbeds

(395 High Street North, Manor Park, London E12 6PG)

Resolution 57

The Lumen Centre

(88 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RS)

Resolution 58

The Hyde

(Varley Parade, Colindale London, NW9 6RR)

Resolution 59

Island House

(Roserton St, Isle of Dogs, London E14 3PG)

Resolution 60

In light of increasingly complex pastorates and the decrease in the number of available Ministers of Word and Sacraments, General Assembly instructs the Ministries and the Worship, Faith and Order Committees to review the question of what it means for there to

be 'pastoral necessity' for Lay Presidency at the Sacraments and provide guidance accordingly.

Resolution 61

General Assembly:

- a. Affirms that evangelism is integral to the life and mission of the United Reformed Church, arising from confidence in the living God revealed in Jesus Christ and present through the Holy Spirit.
- b. Encourages GA and its committees, Synods, local churches, ministers, elders and lay leaders to prioritise evangelism understood as both invitation to encounter God within worshipping communities and to discover God in everyday life.
- c. Recognises the central role of worship in evangelism and calls the Church to sustained attention to the quality, depth, and expectancy of worship.
- d. Commends the outcomes of the Church Life Review (CLR) as providing structural and resource support that enables evangelistic renewal, while acknowledging that renewal itself depends upon spiritual attentiveness and faithfulness.



The
United
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Church

