

# Paper K1

## Gendered language in the Basis of Union

### URC Youth Assembly

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 46</b> <b>General Assembly instructs the Worship, 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.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	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.
<b>Main points</b>	The motion asks the Worship, 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.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Paper E2: Affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender nonconforming people, GA 2023.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	URC Youth Assembly

#### Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	None
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	

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.