

Paper P3

The URC's treatment of ministers arrested for theologically motivated peaceful civil disobedience

Thames North Synod

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 62</p> <p>This Synod wishes to express its concern about the disciplinary action which would potentially be taken against ministers in the URC should they be arrested for following their conscience and joining many others in protests against legislation which some see as unfair and authoritarian.</p> <p>The Synod recognises that such action by ministers is in line with both the dissenting tradition of the URC and our Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC: “We rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit’s gifts, and uphold the rights of personal conviction” and “We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In the things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to state but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, as only Ruler and Head”.</p> <p>Recognising that some ministers may feel called to peaceful protest given the current political climate worldwide, this Synod asks the URC to urgently review its disciplinary procedures in cases of ‘theologically motivated peaceful civil disobedience’.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	The Government has increased the amount of legislation restricting protests and organisations. As a consequence, any minister who felt called to theologically-motivated peaceful civil disobedience would risk arrest on the criminal charge of ‘showing support for a proscribed organisation’.
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	<p>The aim of this resolution is for the URC to urgently review its disciplinary procedures in such cases.</p>
<p>Main points</p>	<p>This resolution is not about any violent actions of protesters. Such individuals can be prosecuted under appropriate, longstanding, UK law. This resolution is about the clash of our URC Church principles, as set out in our Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC document, with the possible legislative actions under consideration by the Government.</p> <p>This resolution concerns the process that the URC would automatically follow should a minister take a protest action which is now defined as criminal under recent additions to UK laws. It calls for these URC procedures to be reviewed because they were designed for serious criminal acts including abuse and safeguarding concerns relating to a minister – a different kind of criminal accusation entirely.</p> <p>The resolution asks the URC to review its Disciplinary process because ministers may well be drawn to feel they should follow their conscience and participate in actions of ‘theologically-motivated civil disobedience’ on current topics including climate change, migration and immigration, and Israel-Palestine issues; such actions may result in arrest on a criminal charge, following from the Governments changes to legislation in terms of peaceful protest.</p> <p>To give some wider background, Amnesty International issued an ‘Urgent Action’ in December 2025 about the arrests of peaceful protestors, coupled with a letter to the Public Prosecutors: see https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur45/0540/2025/en/</p> <p>In April 2026, the URC joined with many other faiths in a letter urging the Govt not to legislate against ‘cumulative disruption’: https://urc.org.uk/britains-faith-communities-dont-silence-peaceful-protest/ and the letter itself at https://www.quaker.org.uk/documents/faith-and-belief-leaders-letter-crime-policing-bill-april-2026.</p> <p>Nevertheless, it passed into law, and could well lead to further arrests in coming months.</p> <p>The church should consider whether the Assembly Standing Panel for Discipline process as currently applied is the most suitable for these cases, or whether the action could be more of a process of discernment, and handled as a pastoral issue (as in some other denominations). It should</p>

	also review the strict confidentiality it currently imposes.
Previous relevant documents	Section O of the URC Manual (Feb 2024 edition) parts 1 to 4 details the expectations of ministers, and the procedures to be followed. Para 3 'Allegations' states that 'a report ... of a criminal .. arrest ... is to be treated as though it were an allegation of misconduct'.
Consultation has taken place with...	Individual clergy from six other denominations, who confirm they do not treat this as a disciplinary matter, but a pastoral one.

Summary of impact

Financial	None
External (eg ecumenical)	To give the URC parity with most other denominations when dealing with statutory legal accusations against their ministers in relation to peaceful protest; To restore the reputation of the URC as a church whose governance is 'distinct from the governance of the state'.