

This Paper contains pieces of business/resolutions that the 2016 General Assembly at Southport was keen for synods to take forward. There are seven (7) of them. Please note that the main references are the General Assembly Book of Reports Southport Convention Centre 8 to 11 July 2016 and the Record of General Assembly, Southport 2016. These are on the URC website.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION AND ACTION BY SYNODS

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Appeal, reference & constitutional review

From Mission Council's Report.

(Fuller information is given in Paper I of Synod Together, October 2016)

Resolution 3

General Assembly adopts the following amendments to the Structure of the URC:

5. Appeal, Reference and Constitutional Review

5.1. Any decision of a Church Meeting within an area of ecumenical experiment may be taken by way of appeal to the area meeting. A decision of any other Church Meeting may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which the local church concerned is represented. Any decision of an ecumenical area meeting having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof may be taken by way of appeal to the synod on which local churches in the area are represented.

Any decision of a synod may be taken by way of appeal to the General Assembly.

5.2. A Church Meeting may itself refer any dispute or difference arising within the local church for resolution by the synod. An ecumenical area meeting may refer any dispute or difference arising within the area for resolution by the synod. A synod may refer any dispute or difference arising within the province or nation under its oversight for resolution by the General Assembly.

5.3. The synod may declare any decision of a Church Meeting within the province or nation under its oversight, or any decision of an ecumenical area meeting within that province or nation having implications for the United Reformed Church or any part thereof, which is (or has been reached by a procedure) incompatible with the Basis of Union, the Structure of the URC, the constitution of the ecumenical area (where applicable) or any rule or resolution of Assembly binding on the local church or the ecumenical area to be a nullity. The General Assembly may declare any decision of a Synod to be a nullity on analogous grounds.

The review of any decision with a view to declaring it a nullity shall be known as constitutional review.

5.4. Appeals, references and constitutional review under this paragraph shall be subject to conditions and processes laid down by the Assembly in Rules of Procedure. A wider council determining an appeal or reference may either substitute its own decision for that of the more local council, or remit the issue to the more local council for reconsideration. No procedure governed by this paragraph shall be used to review decisions reached under the ministerial disciplinary process or the incapacity procedure.

5.5. The decision of the General Assembly on any matter which has come before it on appeal, reference or constitutional review shall be final and binding.

After discussion, the resolution was passed unanimously.

The General Secretary moved that the matter be referred to synods in accordance with paragraph 3.1 of Structure with responses to General Secretary by 31 March 2017, which was agreed unanimously.

iChurch

From Communication Committee's Report on Page 63.

5.4 The committee fully supports iChurch, the out-of-the-box United Reformed Church website solution developed by the Windermere Centre. iChurch is built on the Wordpress blogging software and provides an easy-to-use, cost-effective, supported and flexible web solution. We commend its use to local churches, affiliated church groups and the synods. For more information please see the report from the Windermere Centre on pages 75-77 and/or contact Rebecca Gudgeon at the Windermere Centre at rebecca.wincen@gmail.com.

From The Windermere Centre's Report on Page 76.

6.10 iChurch is the out-of-the-box URC church website solution built on Wordpress blogging software. It ships with a template populated with dummy content, instructions and annual hosting. Designed to be maintained by people with no specialist knowledge of Wordpress or coding, different packages are available, from instructions-only, through training to full maintenance by the centre. We are looking at securing funding to appoint a full time administrator.

Resolution 12

General Assembly commends iChurch, as its preferred website supplier, to local churches, affiliated groups and the synods.

Assembly agreed this unanimously.

Authorised Elders

From Faith and Order Committee's Report

Resolution 14

General Assembly agrees that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (The Manual, Section F) be amended to read: The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows:

- a) the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);**
- b) if such a minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the Basis of Union: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;**
- c) authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal.**

Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs.

In response to questions raised in the debate, the convenor agreed to converse with the ministries committee on the question of the authorisation of church related community workers.

The resolution was passed recognising disagreement.

One person registered her dissent.

Resolution 15

General Assembly agrees that synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared.

Assembly passed this resolution recognising disagreement. One person registered her dissent.

Resolution 16

General Assembly agrees that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before embarking on their ministry.

Assembly passed this resolution recognising disagreement. One person registered her dissent.

Resolution 17

General Assembly agrees that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose authority to serve has been withdrawn be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again.

Assembly passed this resolution recognising disagreement. One person registered her dissent.

Resolution 18

General Assembly agrees that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.

Assembly passed this resolution recognising disagreement. One person registered her dissent.

Resolution 19

General Assembly agrees that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry.

Assembly passed this resolution recognising disagreement. One person registered her dissent.

Stipendiary minister numbers and deployment

From Ministries Committee's Report

Resolution 28

General Assembly notes the projections for numbers of stipendiary ministers likely to be available and stipendiary posts likely to be fundable through the Ministry and Mission Fund until 2025, and urges synods to use the principles outlined in 'Challenge to the Church' in deploying the stipendiary posts allocated to them, alongside non-stipendiary ministers, elders, local church leaders and other lay ministries.

This was agreed by consensus.

Resolution 29

- a) Assembly reaffirms its aim of funding at least 26 stipendiary CRCWs across the URC with a minimum of two CRCWs per synod. While the total number of CRCW stipends paid remains below 26, synods may have three stipendiary CRCWs in their synod for a limited period without it affecting their overall deployment numbers or number of stipends allocated for the ministry of Word and Sacraments. Each CRCW post shall require approval by the church related community work programme subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.
- b) Up to 8% of the available stipendiary posts for ministers of Word and Sacraments shall be allocated as special category ministry posts, each post to be approved by the accreditation subcommittee on the basis of an application by the relevant synod.
- c) All remaining stipendiary posts for both ministries shall be allocated to synods on the current basis until more work has been done on deployment at Mission Council.
- d) Each synod shall remain responsible for making its own allocation of stipendiary posts across the synod.

After further discussion, in which particular concern was expressed about rural churches and geographically isolated churches, the revised resolution was agreed by consensus.

Environmental Policy for the United Reformed Church

From Mission Committee's Report

(Fuller information is given in Paper G of Synod Together, October 2016)

Resolution 31

General Assembly adopts the Environmental Policy, and encourages all committees, synods and local churches to do their best to implement it.

The resolution was agreed by consensus.

Resolution 32

General Assembly resolves to appoint a task group until 31 July 2022 in the first instance, of four persons, to be appointed by the nominations committee and funded from the mission committee budget, to monitor the United Reformed Church's progress toward meeting its commitment to reduce its carbon footprint, reporting to the mission committee.

The task group's specific remit shall be to:

- a) compile, produce or commission resources for worship and teaching related to themes contained in the Environmental Policy;**
- b) consider the budgetary implications of implementing the Environmental Policy;**
- c) commission a suitable individual or body to calculate the Church's carbon footprint, enabling a benchmark to be set against which future reductions in this footprint may be made; and**
- d) liaise with the United Reformed Church investment committee, and to assist the relevant bodies within the United Reformed Church regarding decisions relating to the investment of Church funds in fossil fuels.**

After discussion, the resolution was passed recognising disagreement.

Youth representation in URC councils

Unfinished business from 2014 General Assembly

(Fuller information is given in Paper I of Synod Together, October 2016)

Resolution 42

General Assembly resolves to amend the Structure of the United Reformed Church as described:

a) Membership of Synods:

Current wording:

2(4)(i) Two young people, being members of the United Reformed Church, nominated by the Synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent;

Proposed wording:

2(4)(i) Two young people, *actively involved and engaged with the United Reformed Church at local, synod or assembly level, who have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of the Synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent;*

b) Membership of General Assembly

Current wording:

2(6)(b) Among the representatives of Synods shall be included at least two from each Synod aged 26 or under, at the date of appointment. Should a Synod prove unable to make such an appointment it may appoint from another Synod but these persons must be 26 or under at the date of appointment;

2(6)(k) Such number of representatives of the Fellowship of United Reformed Youth, being members of the United Reformed Church, as the Assembly shall from time to time determine (at present three);

Proposed wording:

2(6)(b) Among the representatives of Synods shall be included at least two from each Synod aged 25 or under, at the date of appointment. *These representatives need not be members of the United Reformed Church, but must be actively involved and engaged with the United Reformed Church at local, synod or assembly level, and have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of the Synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent;* should a Synod prove unable to make such an appointment it may appoint from another Synod but these persons must be 25 or under at the date of appointment;

2(6)(k) Such number of representatives of *United Reformed Church Youth, associated with a young people's group in a local church or United Reformed Youth groups at Synod or Assembly level, who have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of URC Youth,* as the Assembly shall from time to time determine (at present three);

This resolution was passed unanimously, meeting the requirement for a two-thirds majority.

The General Secretary proposed that in accordance with paragraph 3.1 of the Structure, resolution 42 be referred to synods, with responses to reach him by 31 March 2017. This was agreed.

Resolution 43

General Assembly resolves to amend the membership of Mission Council agreed in Resolution 19F of General Assembly 2014, such that the United Reformed Church Youth representatives on Mission Council shall be people who are actively involved and engaged with the church at local, synod or assembly level, and have the confidence of their local church or the confidence of either United Reformed Church Youth or their synod's youth forum, committee or equivalent.

This was passed unanimously.

The European Union Referendum From Mission Committee's Report

Resolution 50

On the 23 June a referendum took place within the United Kingdom regarding the question of European Union membership. The majority of those who participated within this referendum voted for the UK to leave this union. In the light of the UK's 2016 European Union membership vote, General Assembly:

- Recalls that the Gospel mandates us to respect all people, love our neighbour and offer hospitality to strangers. In light of the decision to leave the EU, and the hurt and anxiety that many people across our nations feel, it believes that the Church's responsibility now is to be a voice of love, hope, inclusion and compassion;
- Affirms the value of being a diverse and multicultural society and calls on local churches to continue to build bridges of understanding and trust with all parts of their communities;
- Celebrates the URC's Reformed European heritage and identity, and commits to ongoing ecumenical relationships with partner churches across Europe;
- Celebrates the contributions that nationals of other European countries make to the UK and commits to stand in solidarity with them at a time of uncertainty;
- Calls on local churches and members of the URC to challenge incidences of racism and hate crime and report them through the appropriate channels;
- Expresses concern and sadness about the deep inequalities within British society and calls upon URC members to lobby their elected representatives calling for a fairer society;
- Calls on all those in the URC to pray for wisdom and honesty for those involved in negotiating the terms of the UK's exit from the EU and for those who currently feel marginalised by the decision;
- Recognises that the URC is a Church in three nations and so calls upon the Synod of Scotland to engage in and contribute to the public processes and ecumenical responses specific to Scotland which may emerge;
- Encourages members of the URC to continue to engage with the ongoing political and social debate on this topic and to challenge misinformation.

The resolution was agreed by consensus.