

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016 RESOLUTION 7 ON MARRIAGE OF SAME-SEX COUPLES (for information)

The General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, on 9th July 2016 at Southport during business session five passed **Resolution 7**, printed on pages 32-33 of the 2016 Assembly Reports, on the matter of same-sex marriage. The relevant parts of the resolution are as follows:

-
- a) In keeping with the 2007 commitment on Human Sexuality, General Assembly does not consider it appropriate to express a single view on behalf of the whole United Reformed Church on the matter of the marriage of same-sex couples.
 - b) General Assembly declares that the Church Meeting of each Local Church of the United Reformed Church in England and Wales is the relevant governing authority for the purpose of giving consent for the trustees of its building to seek the registration of that building for religious marriage ceremonies of same-sex couples, in accordance with the provisions of Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.
 - c) In the case of Local Ecumenical Partnerships and Union Churches, where the constitution makes no provision for a Church or Congregational Meeting (including a Special or Extraordinary General Meeting) the relevant governing authority of the United Reformed Church under Section 26A(1) of the Marriage Act 1949 as amended by the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 is the council which represents the widest gathering of members of that Church or Partnership. In case of doubt the council to act in this matter shall be jointly determined, in light of the LEP constitution and any sharing agreement, by the Moderator and Clerk of the synod on which that Church is represented.
 - d) Noting that Mission Council has already recognised, on behalf of General Assembly, 'that if a future Assembly were to allow for ministers and members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law, the Synod of Scotland would be the appropriate council of the URC to approach the Registrar General for Scotland', the General Assembly confirms that it now lies within the competence of the National Synod of Scotland to nominate under Section 9(1A) of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 as amended by the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 members of the United Reformed Church who have indicated their willingness in writing to the synod to be approved celebrants for the marriages of same-sex couples in Scotland.)
 - e) The General Assembly recalls that the trusts on which Local Church buildings are commonly held empower the Church Meeting to direct in what ways such a building is or is not to be used for public worship and ancillary purposes.
 - f) The General Assembly authorises the General Secretary, the Clerk, or any Deputy General Secretary to sign and furnish a copy of this resolution (or a relevant extract) in the name of the Assembly, whenever such a copy may be required by law.

.....

The Moderator called for tellers, and there voted for the resolution, 240, and there voted against the resolution, 21. This represented a percentage in favour of 91.92%, in excess of the two-thirds required. There were four abstentions.
Seven people had their dissent recorded.

During business session seven on Sunday 9 July 2016, the General Secretary made a statement, being a postscript to the debate on marriage of same-sex couples the previous day:

1. Advice on the legal processes for churches in England and Wales wishing to register their buildings will be on the URC website within about a week.
2. Anyone in Scotland requiring advice on the legal requirements in that jurisdiction should contact the office of the Synod of Scotland.
3. Legislation was under preparation in the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, and it might be appropriate for Mission Council to deal with any URC response to that legislation.
4. There are rare but not unknown occurrences of a minister being asked to conduct a wedding in unregistered premises, such as a hospital ward, and it might be appropriate for Mission Council to deal with any URC response to such situations.
5. Ministers should not constrain the decision of a Church Meeting on whether or not to apply for registration of their buildings. Church Meetings cannot compel a minister to conduct the marriage of a same-sex couple against their conscience, but could arrange for another minister to conduct such a service, in a very similar fashion to our baptismal policy.

No one objected to the General Secretary's suggestions.

Revd Derrick Dzandu-Hedidor
Synod Clerk September 2016