

Grouping, Amalgamation and Dissolution of Local Churches

It is the hope that all congregations in Southern Synod are thriving and vibrant. Sadly, on occasions, it is recognised that the life and mission of a congregation has come to an end. On very rare and exceptional occasions, it may be necessary for the Synod to act on behalf of a local church if it is unable or unwilling to pass the necessary resolutions, required by the Basis of Union and URC Acts of Parliament, to dissolve as a congregation and ask the Synod Trust to sell the church building. Synod Officers and Staff have been seeking advice from the Clerk to General Assembly concerning this process and the advice given has highlighted the need to clarify certain matters concerning this function of Synod.

Dissolution of Local Churches

The Clerk has helpfully outlined a three-option process if a congregation is no longer able to function as a congregation of the URC.

If a congregation is no longer able to function as a United Reformed Church congregation:

- Option 1. they seek to unite with another local URC;
- Option 2. the Church Meeting of the local church seeks to resolve to close as a member of the URC.
- Option 3. If it is not possible for a local congregation to call a Church Meeting to pass appropriate resolutions to close, it is possible for the Synod to take action, in accordance with the functions of Synod as set out in the Structure of the United Reformed Church (Section B of the Manual), to dissolve the local congregation (as an association of people).

If Option 3 becomes necessary, again, the Clerk offers a two-fold process.

1. Closure of the congregation. The power to close a church (as a body of people) belongs to the Synod, under function 2(4)(A) (iii) of the Structure (section B of the Manual): *“to decide upon all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of Local Churches;”*
2. Once that has been done District Council needs to be called and the District Council needs a resolution to dispose of the building and instructs the Synod and Trust to dispose of it.

However, the Clerk has emphasised that Synod needs to be very clear if it has delegated the power to close from a full meeting of Synod to, for example, a Synod executive.

Synod Council is minded that it would be wise to delegate this function of Synod Together to Synod Council, as members of Synod Council will already be aware of the reasons for this action to be exercised. Synod Together is therefore asked to consider Resolution A to enable this process:

Resolution A:

Synod Together, under the Functions of Synod 2 (4) (A) (iii) concerning “all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of Local Churches” delegates the task of the dissolution of a local church to Synod Council., subject to the local church being given the opportunity to make representation to Synod Council.

Grouping and Amalgamation of Churches

In practice, the grouping and amalgamation of Churches has become the task of Synod/United Areas, under the guidance of the appropriate Pastoral Committee. To complement the resolution considering the dissolution of local churches, Synod Council requests Synod Together to vote on Resolution B:

Resolution B:

Synod Together, under the Functions of Synod 2 (4) (A) (iii) concerning “all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of Local Churches” delegates the task of the grouping and amalgamation of Churches to the appropriate Synod/United Area.

District Council

The Structures of the United Reformed Church (2.(3)) provide provision for a meeting of District Council.

The District Council is responsible for exercising the following functions:

- i. those matters which are the responsibility of the District Council under the United Reformed Church Acts of 1972, 1981 and 2000 (including the Schedules to those Acts);
- ii. such other matters as may be delegated to it by the General Assembly.

In reality, this enables Synod, through a meeting of District Council, to ask Synod Trust to dispose of church properties where it is not possible for a local congregation to pass a suitable enabling resolution, either because of inability to call such a meeting or an unwillingness to do so.

The Structures of United Reformed Church 2.(3) state that the District Council shall consist of:

- a) The Moderator of the synod for the time being;
- b) A president appointed by the synod, who shall perform the functions defined as applicable to the chairman in the United Reformed Church Acts 1972, 1981 and 2000;
- c) A secretary appointed by the synod;
- d) Such number of representatives of Local Churches within the District as the synod shall direct;
- e) Up to six co-opted ministers or members of Local Churches, normally elders, as the synod shall direct.

The District Council shall meet at least once a year, unless the secretary notifies the members in writing that there is no business for the council to transact.

In order to ensure good governance, Synod Council asks Synod Together to clarify the membership of Southern Synod District Council. Synod Council has been advised that it would be appropriate and wise to ensure that the membership of District Council is distinct from the membership of Synod Council or Synod Trust, whilst recognising the need for members of District Council to be aware of the background leading to the Council having to take action. Therefore, Synod Council asks Synod Together to consider Resolution C:

Resolution C:

The District Council of Southern Synod shall consist of:

The Moderator of Southern Synod

The Synod Clerk (Secretary to District Council)

The Convenor of Synod Council (Convenor of District Council)

Convenors of Synod Area Pastoral Committees (Kent and East Sussex SA, Surrey & Sussex SA, South London SA East and West) and Executive Area Leader (CSUA).

Rev'd Russell Furley-Smith
Convenor, Synod Council
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