

# Assembly Business Digest



The 2025 meeting of the United Reformed Church (URC) General Assembly met at The Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick from 4-17 July.

## DAY ONE



### Opening worship

The meeting began with Communion led by the Revd Tim Meadows General Moderator 2025-2025, and with worship led by the Revd Andrew Mann-Ray and Andrea Heron, his chaplains, who said: “Because we are promised resurrection, we are called to go through the world of suffering. Love is the path that will lead us through crucifixion to resurrection.”

### Ecumenical guests

The Revd Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) reminded Assembly that “there is a world outside the United Reformed Church” and that it is represented by ecumenical guests. The Revd Géza Kacsó, a pastor of the multi-cultural Reformed community of Bányú in western Ukraine, said: “We hope for a better future, and we thank you for all your support, financial and through prayer.”

### Mock resolution

The Revd Sarah Moore, Cler, and Assistant Clerk, the Revd Dr Alex Clare-Young, introduced a mock debate around the colour balance of sweets in supermarket brands of Fruit Pastilles. The debate was “fruitful” and gave Assembly much to “chew on”.

### Synod Moderator’s Report

The 2025 Synod Moderators’ Report, presented

by the Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Moderator of East Midlands Synod, focused on the theme of grace and draws upon both scripture and lived experiences from churches across the denomination. The report calls the URC to be “full of grace”, not just in word but in witness.

### Safeguarding Training Framework

General Assembly adopted the updated Safeguarding Training Framework for use across the Church and instructed the Denominational Safeguarding Team and Synods to oversee the implementation of the framework. It also asked the Business Committee to look at future updates because it was a technical document across three nations.

### Criteria for the 13 new pioneering posts

The General Assembly agreed the “criteria” for 13 new pioneering posts, designed to “intentionally grow new Christian communities”. Mary Thomas, Convenor, said that though pioneer ministry is “ever-evolving and never static”, the criteria would guide how to establish the new ministries.

### URC Retirement Policy

General Assembly considered a report from the Ministries Committee on the possibility of removing the normal retirement age of 68. The review of the Church’s retirement policy is not complete, and the committee wanted a steer from the meeting. The committee will bring proposals to the Assembly Executive meeting in February 2026.

## DAY TWO



Day Two started with a Bible Study by Dr Francesca Nuzzolese, Professor of Pastoral Care at the Waldensian Theological School in Rome. who led a Bible

study on the words of Jesus in Matthew: ‘Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.’

Dr Nuzzolese invited members of Assembly to receive those words as spoken to them here and now. What the world needs most is our presence filled with the Spirit. When we receive rest, we are not alone but yoked with Christ. Rest is part of ministry. She said she wanted to remind us as gently as Jesus does: yield to the invitation to go often to Jesus.

### **Children’s and Youth Work Committee Final Report**

The Revd Samantha Sheehan, Convenor, reflected on seven years of strategic work and introduced a renewed vision for the future. Rooted in the call to “fan into flame the gift of God” (2 Tim 1:6), the committee highlighted the importance of nurturing thriving, inclusive, intergenerational churches where children and young people are central to God’s mission.

### **Education and Learning presentation**

Pippa Hodgson, Convenor, said “Looking at the Education & Learning General Assembly reports since 2005, it is quite remarkable how education and learning has changed.” “Collaboration between and across Synods, Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) and those at Church House, not only for the three Education For Ministry (EM) levels, but also in developing a range of programmes to meet the needs of all has been a notable success. “It is right that the education and learning of the whole people of God is integrated across the work of the Church.”

### **Update on a Ministry of Children’s and Youth Work**



Revd Samantha Sheehan presented the final paper exploring what would be needed to introduce a formal Children’s, Youth and Families ministry. The report and resolution acknowledged and commended the training offered through colleges and asked the new committees to look at how training can be accessed by more people.

### **Place for Hope mediation team launch**



The United Reformed Church’s mediation team, trained by Place for Hope, was launched at General Assembly. Carolyn Merry, Director of Place for Hope, spoke to Assembly about the need to be agents of transformation in our world. Martha Hunt, leader of Living Reconciliation Programme, spoke of her excitement at reaching this point and said that the objective was to embed a culture of peacemaking in the URC. They had worked to create a programme that works for who the URC is, she said.

### **General Secretary’s address**



In his address to the 2025 General Assembly, the Revd Dr John Bradbury, delivered a historically anchored reflection on the future of the United Reformed Church.



Marking five years in office, and anticipating the extraordinary General Assembly on the Church Life Review in November, John reminded the meeting about the Council of Nicaea and its theological legacy. He issued a plea: it is time, once again, to believe deeply and radically in the living God made known in Jesus Christ. Noting that some young people find “transformative, engaging, inclusive” worship outside the URC, John warned that the denomination must rekindle its own spiritual vibrancy or risk irrelevance. He was clear about the limitations of institutional strategy. The Church Life Review, he said, won’t renew the URC by itself. It may lift burdens, free up resources, and enable lay ministry, but it cannot rekindle the flame of faith.

That task belongs to local congregations, ministers, Elders and worship itself. “We must deepen our confidence in the reality of the living God,” he said. “We must become more confident evangelists... and significantly improve the quality of our worship.”

In closing, John issued a challenge not just to treat church renewal as a bureaucratic exercise, but as a spiritual vocation. The address ended an appeal: “May God’s Spirit be with us as, together, we discern how we build one another up in faith, discipleship and worship such that we might respond faithfully to the call of God to be God’s Church.”

**Download and read the address in full:**

<https://bit.ly/GenSecGA2025>

### Community Project Awards



Seven church projects offering outstanding service to their communities were recognised

at General Assembly in association with Congregational. Three projects won the 2025 Community Project Awards: Dove Dementia Cafe, Diss URC in Norfolk, Food with Friends, Rivertown URC in Shotton, North Wales, and Food for Thought, Union Church Margate in Kent.

Four projects were Highly Commended: Forget-Me-Not Café, St Andrews Roundhay URC in Leeds, Stepping Out for the Community, Longton URC, Stoke on Trent, Vine Gardening Club, Vine URC in Ilford, Essex, Soupermums, Wilsden Trinity Church near Bradford.

**Watch video about each project:**

[www.urb.org.uk/awards](http://www.urb.org.uk/awards)

### Emergency Statement

At the start of session five, an emergency resolution from the West Midlands Synod against Israeli military actions in Gaza was adopted. “This is about ethics, not ethnicity,” the Revd Steve Faber emphasised. “We must not allow people to believe that all Jewish people are responsible for these actions. The condemnation is directed at the Israeli government and its military, not the nation or Jewish people.”



### General Assembly Moderator 2026-2027

The Revd Dr John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, announced that the Revd Neil Thorogood had been elected as General Assembly Moderator for 2026-2027, and will chair the 2027 General Assembly. Neil is a minister of two URCs in the South Western Synod, a former Principal of Westminster College, Cambridge, and the son of the late the Revd Bernard Thorogood, who was General Secretary of the URC from 1980-1992.

## Ecumenical pilgrimage to the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission), [introduced a film recording](#) the recent visit of an ecumenical delegation to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The visit was made to demonstrate solidarity with partners in the region and included representatives from the Methodist Church in Britain, the URC, the Church of Scotland, the United Methodist Church in the US, and the World Methodist Council.

## Assessing education needs in the URC

Assembly endorsed the findings and themes from the Education and Learning (E&L) Consultation in April and instructed the working group and others to enact its outcomes. Assembly further instructed the Business Committee, the new Faith in Action Committee, and the Ministries Committee to report back to next year's General Assembly with an update on progress.

## DAY THREE

Day three opened with a Bible Study by Dr Francesca Nuzzolese. She invited members of Assembly to recreate holy silence they experienced yesterday: centre themselves, meet Jesus and reconnect with holy rest.

## Church Life Review – progress and local church perspective

Phase Two of the CLR, was tasked by General Assembly in 2023 to focus on four workstreams. These consist of financial resource sharing (finance), provision of shared support services (services), employment of lay workers (lay workers), and new URC communities of worship and discipleship (new communities). The report did not present any final proposals or resolutions but set the stage for the Extraordinary General Assembly in November 2025.

The presentation showed the need for change within the wider challenges facing many Christian denominations across Europe, including declining membership, increased regulatory demands, and the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.



Key proposals discussed include a central resources portal, shared

administrative services (like payroll, HR, and IT), and the idea of employing lay workers more strategically, either at the local or Synod level. The overall hope is of a flourishing URC that is less burdened and better enabled, with renewed energy for mission, evangelism, and discipleship.

## General Assembly Moderator's address

"I am much more optimistic about the URC than when I began," said the Revd Tim Meadows in his address as Moderator of General Assembly. Tim visited every Synod during his year as Moderator as well as ministers' retreats, CRCW retreats and Youth Assembly.

Tim said that in his travels during the year he found many churches had little relationship to General Assembly. "Does the General Assembly speak to or for the churches? Are we, who take part in General Assembly, going back and talking to our churches about General Assembly decisions?"

Tim ended by saying that in his dealing with other Churches in the UK and overseas, he found the URC is admired.

## En bloc resolutions

The following resolutions were passed: A1: Terms of Reference for the Faith in Action Committee; A2: Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee; A3: Changes to the Committee Structure; A5: Terms of Reference and composition and name of the General Secretariat; D1: Discipleship Development Fund; E1: Equalities report on ongoing work; G2: Update from Resources Committee; H1: Basis of Union Paragraphs 19-24: Ministry in the United Reformed Church; H3: Ministries general report; H5: Sabbaticals; H6: Renaming of Models of Non-Stipendiary Ministry; J1: Report to General Assembly 2025; N1: Church Life Review progress update; T1: Safeguarding Committee annual report; and X1: Love's Farm Church.

## The Revd Nicola Furley-Smith



Following Paper A5 in En bloc, the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith was welcomed by members of the General Secretariat into her expanded role of Deputy General Secretary for Ministries.

### Loves Farm Church

Loves Farm Church was welcomed as a new local URC congregation with a resounding applause. [Watch a short film about Love Farm Church](#)

### Jubilee and New Ministers

The 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Ordination of Ministers were celebrated. Then the General Assembly greeted Ministers who had been admitted to the Roll of Ministers since the last Assembly, many of whom were at the meeting.

### A Missional Lens for the URC

Following a passionate debate, Assembly accepted the committee's proposal to withdraw both the main resolution (32) and the supplementary resolution relating to evangelism (32A).

### Addressing the excess costs in ministries

The suite of resolutions was introduced by General Secretary the Revd Dr John P Bradbury. They focussed on the future of the URC's three Resource Centres for Learning (RCLs) (at Westminster College, Cambridge, Northern College in Manchester, and the Scottish College).

The current proposals arise from the commission by February's Assembly Executive of a learning review and audit for the URC. The current financing is no longer sustainable, and equally, numbers of students at RCLs are no longer sustainable, and the pressure on the budget is too great. Change is needed soon.

Between 2011 and 2024, total costs rose by about 5% in total (not per annum). RCL costs rose by about 60%, and student costs fell by about 15%. The total RCL and student-related costs were £1.18m: £750,000 for RCLs and £430,000 to support students.

The Assembly discussed the resolutions as a whole, before discussing each resolution individually.

**Resolutions 14-19, including the ceasing of at least one RCL from September 2026 for the Education of Ministers (EM), were carried with very few amendments.**

## DAY FOUR

Day Four opened with another Bible study led by Dr Francesca Nuzzolese. She ventured into mystic territory. Her text was the words of Paul in Galatians: "It is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me." She commended daily spiritual practice: "It tells our brain that it's worth it."

### Church Life Review Q&A

After being told of an omission, Steve Faber reminded Assembly of the Theos Report which had commended the CRCW ministry, and that all forms of ministry are loved and valued in the URC.

For churches and members wanting to prepare for November's General Assembly, Steve pointed to the [News Update email](#), the URC's monthly national e-newsletter and [Reform magazine](#) as communications channels to help keep local churches and Assembly members prepare for November's Assembly. There is also a [dedicated page on the URC's website](#).

### Moderator-Elect

The Revd Neil Thorogood, who has been elected Moderator-Elect 2025-2026, to serve as General Assembly Moderator 2026-2027, was invited to address the Assembly.





He described the role as an “awesome honour and daunting responsibility” and said it carried for him “a host of meanings” (Neil’s late father was a General Secretary of the United Reformed Church). Neil thanked those who are supporting him into the role, including his family, and also his congregations of Trinity-Henleaze and Thornbury in Bristol “who have joined me in this adventure and to live into the consequences together”.

### **Address to the throne**

The Revd Tim Meadows, General Assembly Moderator 2024-2025, delivered the Address to the Throne to Assembly, after which Assembly voted to approve the Address. It was then signed by the Moderator and Clerk and sent to the King.

[Read the Address to the Throne](#)

[Learn more about the history behind the Address to the Throne.](#)

### **New Convenor of the Business Committee**

The Revd Mark Robinson introduced and welcomed Irish Sirmons as the new Convenor of Business Committee.

### **Closing worship, including the induction of Catriona Wheeler, General Assembly Moderator, 2025-2026**

The induction of Catriona Wheeler, a lay member of the URC, as General Assembly Moderator 2025-2026, took place during a service led by the new Moderator’s Chaplain, the Revd Jane Wade. The Revd Geoffrey Clarke, Moderator of the East Midlands Synod, gave the charge during the Induction of Catriona.



As part of the service, the Assembly read the [Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC](#).

Inducting Catriona, the outgoing Moderator, the Revd Tim Meadows, declared: “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and representing the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church I declare Catriona to be inducted as Moderator of General Assembly. May you continue to walk in the way of Christ, following in his footsteps.”

Catriona signed the Bible of the General Assembly and was welcomed by the Assembly with warm applause.



**General Assembly reporting team: Andy Jackson, Ann-Marie Nye, Steve Tomkins and Laurence Wareing. Videos: Ann-Marie Nye. Photos Kevin Snyman. Assembly Business Digest: Andy Jackson and Steve Tomkins.**

**For a full write up of the business of the General Assembly, visit the URC website, [www.urc.org.uk](http://www.urc.org.uk), and read the next issue of *Reform magazine*, the magazine of the URC: [www.reformsubs.co.uk](http://www.reformsubs.co.uk)**