

General Assembly 2023 Resolutions which have implications for local churches and/or Synods

The Assembly met from Friday 30th June to Monday 3rd July through a hybrid arrangement of an in-person meeting at the Hayes Conference Centre, Swanwick, Derbyshire and by video conferencing.

Could the following resolutions please be discussed at one of your forthcoming Elders meetings as they all have implications for local churches (and some for Synod). If you wish to see more information then please click on this link which takes you to the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/general-assembly-papers/>

Many thanks, David Coaker, Eastern Synod Clerk

Paper Z1 The Synod Moderators Report

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Z1-GA2023-Moderators-Report.pdf>

Main points

- To consider how it feels to be part of the United Reformed Church in its sixth decade
- To help us think about looking ahead as well as looking back
- To be more comfortable with who and what we are, and think less about what we are not
- Providing the necessary space time and resources for pioneer work
- To enable people to see we already have all we need to be the people of God, recognising God's provision.

Questions for discussion in local churches

1. What does 'being comfortable in our own skin' mean in our local context?
2. What can we let go of to keep us lean, lithe, and fleet of foot as activists and agents in God's economy?
3. What does it take for us to realise we already have all we need to be the people of God?
4. How can we carve out the space and time to consider new initiatives?

Church Life Review Paper N1

Theos Booklet for elders' discussion:

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/N1-Church-Life-Review-Report-edit.pdf>

Church Life Review Structures Paper N2

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/N2a-Church-Life-Review-Structures-edit.pdf>

Church Life Review – local churches flourishing through good governance. Paper N4.

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/N4-Local-churches-flourishing-through-good-governance-edit-1.pdf>

Main Points:

The Church Life Review Group:

- Commend the resources developed and commissioned by the Church Life Review Group to the church (Theological reflections, Theos, flourishing churches etc).
- Invite General Assembly to affirm some of the key messages we have discerned from the wider church (purpose of wider church structures, values, principles etc).
- Recommend that General Assembly:

commissions work on effective resource-sharing across the church;

establishes work to create centres of expertise within the church, avoiding duplication, and making expertise more widely available to Synods and local churches;

creates a working group on new models of lay work in local churches and groups of churches; authorises effective, proportionate project management of this work for the benefit of the wider Church.

RESOLUTION 51

The proposers wish to move this in a slightly amended form: General Assembly empowers the Business Committee, in consultation with the Nominations Committee, to set up a working group to examine:

- a) What models of employed lay work can be effective within local churches.
- b) What infrastructure is necessary to be provided by the wider church to support employed lay ministry work in local churches. [We want to change “ministry” to “work” both to broaden it out and to avoid confusion between local ministries and accredited ones.]

Then what was para (c) we want to put as a **NEW resolution 51A** in this form:

General Assembly asks the Mission and Discipleship Departments to look at how mission, evangelism and ministry which would lead to the emergence of new United Reformed Church communities of discipleship and worship might be encouraged and resourced.

Dr Nathan Mladin, of Theos, outlined the process and some of the most striking results of the review, and responded to a number of questions.

For reflection

- How do you experience joy as you gather for worship and in service of your community?
- To what extent is the mission engagement carried out by individuals from your congregation actually the work of the church (that is, carried out in the church’s name)?
- Are the workers commissioned in worship for this work?
- Can those outside your church recognise the work of the church offered among them?

These are lengthy papers and so it is not appropriate to share all of the text here. Please refer to the papers on the links given.

Communications Strategy Paper C1

Main Points:

A communications strategy for The United Reformed Church.

Resolution 14

General Assembly adopts the Communications Strategy, and instructs the Communications Committee and Communications Team to:

- undertake a research project to build a communications profile of each local church and Synod
- to produce a series of easy-to-use, time saving toolkits to help churches to communicate more effectively
- to create a network of Communications Advocates in each Synod who can be an informal link between the Communications Team, resources available, and local churches and the Synods
- share the new Design and Digital Visual Identity Guide.

Resolution 16

General Assembly urges all churches without a website, or with a website that has been inactive for more than six months, to use iChurch to engage digitally with all those who are interested in attending worship or activities taking place in church buildings.

Resolution 17

General Assembly strongly encourages the United Reformed Church at all levels and in all teams to use the revised Design and Digital Visual Identity to ensure quality and consistency across the work of the denomination.

Resolution 18

General Assembly urges everyone connected to the Church to read Reform, the magazine of the URC, either in print or digitally.

Finance Committee – Paper G5 – Stipendiary Ministry Target Numbers

The Facilitation Group moved Resolution 24a:

General Assembly encourages synods not currently supporting the M&M Fund from synod resources to do so, as they are able, and those already giving such support to consider increasing that amount. **Agreed**

Legacies of Slavery – proposals for repairing justice Paper I3

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/I3-Legacies-of-Slavery-Repairing-Justice-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

General Assembly is asked to make anti-racism training mandatory for specific groups within the Church; to endorse a proposed schedule of anti-racism training to be delivered from early 2024; and to endorse the task group's proposals for repairing justice at local, regional and global levels.

Resolution 32

General Assembly resolves that anti-racism training should become mandatory for specific groups and individuals who occupy positions of leadership and influence within the URC. (This list is published in the Paper).

Resolution 33

General Assembly asks the Legacies of Slavery Task Group to work with the Ministries and Education and Learning Departments to explore how and when anti-racism training can be rolled out more widely in the URC, particularly to include those roles defined as URC Office holders (such as Church Secretaries, Treasurers).

Poverty and inequality in the UK Paper I2

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/I2-GA2023-Mission-Report-on-poverty-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

In 2012, General Assembly received a substantial report entitled 'The social impact of poverty and inequality in the UK – a challenge to the Church, and adopted a resolution setting out various ways in which the Church would respond to that challenge and work to end inequality in our society.

Over the decade since, there have been many significant changes in the nature and extent of inequality in Britain. Poverty has become deeper and more entrenched. The impact of austerity policies on public services and changes to the benefits system have reduced the support available to people on low incomes.

The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated financial inequalities and resulted in many poorer households building up debts. The cost of living crisis of the last 18 months means that many more people are affected by and aware of these issues. Levels of destitution, child poverty and poverty experienced by those in work, are all on the rise. We have witnessed the rapid growth in provision of food banks and now "warm spaces", by churches and others, as the welfare system does not provide a sufficient social safety net. This report therefore seeks to provide an update to the 2012 report and offer an opportunity for General Assembly to reflect on these central gospel concerns in our current context and discuss the ways that the Church should respond.

Resolution 31 (amended and accepted)

In response to the gospel call to challenge poverty and structures that cause marginalisation, General Assembly:

- a) expresses its deep concern at the rising levels of poverty in the UK over the last 15 years, recognising that in a wealthy economy such as the UK, poverty is not inevitable but a result of political choices and systemic injustices
- b) calls upon political leaders to make a commitment to work towards the eradication of structural poverty in the UK, challenges the stigmatisation and discrimination shown towards those in poverty in the UK, and encourages churches and church members to raise these issues with candidates in the lead-up to the next General Election
- c) asks the Mission and Ministries Committees and the Synods to reflect on how the Church could better demonstrate its commitment to people experiencing poverty and marginalisation in allocating resources for ministry and mission, and bring proposals, if appropriate, to a future General Assembly.

Illegal Migration Bill Paper X3

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/X3-NW-synod-Illegal-Migration-Bill-Resolution-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

Challenge to government policy on migration

Resolution 73 (revised and accepted)

A. General Assembly invites churches and members of the URC to write to their MPs and prospective Parliamentary candidates expressing their opposition to the Illegal Migration Bill (2023) and urging them to support the development of safe and legal routes for those seeking asylum

B. General Assembly expresses deep concerns about the Illegal Migration Bill on the grounds that it potentially breaches the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1953) and undermines the UK's long - standing commitment to the protection of human dignity.

C. General Assembly affirms its support for the aim of the Convention in maintaining an internationally recognised legal standard of human dignity that reflects the nature of God, revealed in the Bible, and urges the UK government to uphold it.

Safeguarding Committee: Whistleblowing Policy Paper T2 Resolution 70

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/T2-GA-2023-Whistleblowing-Policy-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

This policy aims to encourage whistleblowers to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously, investigated as appropriate and their confidentiality respected. It aims to provide whistleblowers with guidance as to how to raise their concerns. This policy aims to reassure whistleblowers that they can raise concerns without fears of reprisals, even if their concern turns out to be mistaken

General Assembly adopted the Whistleblowing Policy outlined in paper T2 of General Assembly 2023 and commends it to church meetings, Elders' meetings and Synods for consideration, implementation and dissemination.

Business Committee: Mediation and Reconciliation Resource Paper A5 Resolution 10

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/A5-Mediation-and-Reconciliation-service-Copy-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

It has become obvious recently that across the Church there are an increasing number of conflicts that arise. In the context of a more litigious society, and in the light of the trauma of the pandemic, the Church is dealing with an ever-increasing number of complaints rooted in conflicts. These are affecting local churches, Synods and the General Assembly.

General Assembly Instructs the Business Committee to consult widely and bring costed proposals for a URC-wide Mediation and Reconciliation Service to Assembly Executive 2024.

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/E2-Equalities-Resolution-Support-of-Trans-people-Copy-edit.pdf>

Main Points:

In the light of increasing hostility toward trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people there is a need to affirm their right to dignity and respect in the life of the church and in wider society. To this end, there is a responsibility for the church to learn more about their lived realities, to offer care and to speak Paper E2 United Reformed Church – General Assembly, July 2023 out against the threats of hatred and violence experienced by transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

Amended Resolution 21

General Assembly:

a) affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred;

b) commits to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination and requests the Equalities Committee to facilitate this;

c) recognises the church's failure to challenge the assumptions and patterns of behaviour which lead to transphobia* and acknowledges that church sometimes perpetuates these patterns;

d) supports the right of all to receive affirming non-directive support and healthcare, and to express their sexuality, gender and identity without coercion or the fear thereof. *In this instance we define transphobia according to the Crown Prosecution Service definition as "any incident / criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender." The General Secretary agreed to ensure that the Equalities Committee would undertake to do work on de-transitioning. Assembly agreed that the asterisk and footnote be deleted.

At the Moderator's suggestion, Assembly agreed to address and decide upon each clause as a separate resolution:

Resolution 21a

General Assembly affirms the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred. **Agreed**

Resolution 21b

General Assembly commits to furthering the church's understanding of, and pastoral care for transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people in the church, both locally and across the denomination and requests the Equalities Committee to facilitate this. **Agreed**

Resolution 21c

General Assembly recognises the church's failure to challenge the assumptions and patterns of behaviour which lead to transphobia and acknowledges that church sometimes perpetuates these patterns; **Agreed**, with dissent registered by the Revd Geoff Felton.

Resolution 21d

General Assembly supports the right of all to receive affirming non-directive support and healthcare, and to express their sexuality, gender and identity without coercion or the fear thereof. **Agreed**, with dissent registered by the Revd Geoff Felton.

Recognition of children's, youth and family ministry Paper B1

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/B1-GA2023-Report-CYWC-Final-edit.pdf>

Main Points: Recognition of the importance of ministry among children, young people and families, and consideration of how to acknowledge, encourage and equip those who undertake this within the URC.

Resolution 11

General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

Resolution 12

General Assembly acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.