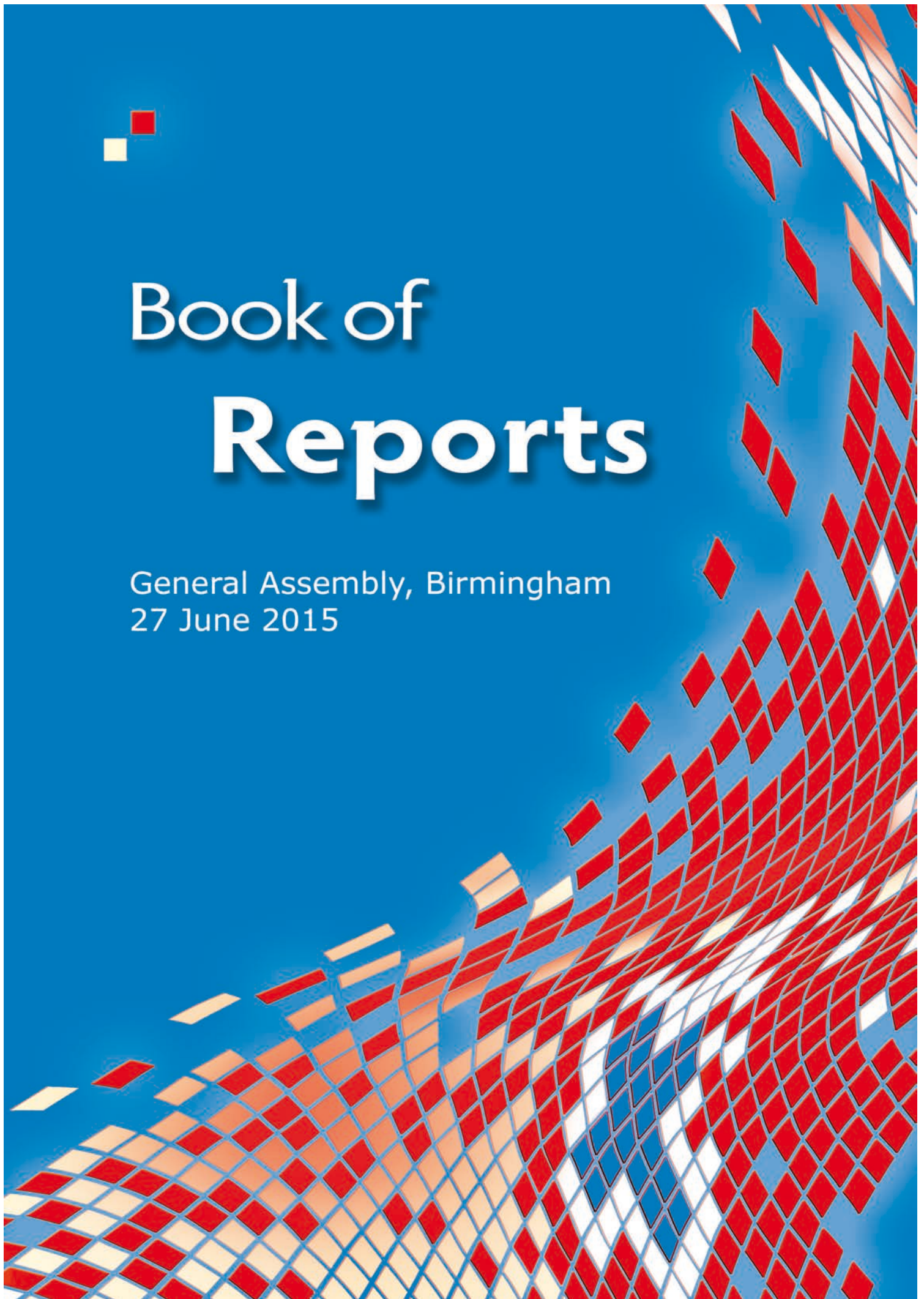




Book of Reports

General Assembly, Birmingham
27 June 2015





www.urc.org.uk

Set and published by the United Reformed Church's graphics office, Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT on behalf of General Assembly.

The United Reformed Church General Assembly

Meeting at Birmingham, 27th June 2015

From 11:00am until 4:30pm

| Saturday 27 June 2015 | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Session 1 11:00am – 1:15pm | <p>Constitution of Assembly</p> <p>Worship</p> <p>Arrangements for the meeting: report from the officers of Assembly, with Resolutions 1, 2 and 3</p> <p>The marriage of same-sex couples: report from the human sexuality task group, with Resolutions 4 and 5</p> | |
| 1:15pm – 2:15pm | Lunch | |
| Session 2 2:15pm – 4:30pm | <p>The marriage of same-sex couples: report from the human sexuality task group, with Resolutions 4 and 5 (<i>continued</i>)</p> <p>Record of the meeting: Resolution 6, from the officers of Assembly</p> <p>Closing Worship</p> <p>Close of meeting and farewells: The General Assembly adjourns to meet in Southport from 8 to 11 July 2016, or at such time and place as shall be determined.</p> | |

Paper 1

Officers of Assembly

Arrangements for the meeting
of General Assembly

United Church 2015
Church 2015
Reformed Church 2015
Church 2015

Paper 1



Officers of Assembly

Arrangements for this meeting of General Assembly

Basic Information

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Contact name and email address | James Breslin breslin@newcastleurc.freeseve.co.uk |
| Action required | Four resolutions for decision, and two items to note. |
| Draft resolution(s) | The officers of Assembly bring four resolutions to the Assembly printed in full in the following paper. Resolutions one, two and three (on page 7) and resolution six (on page 8). |

Summary of Content

| | |
|---|--|
| Subject and aim(s) | To put the necessary procedures in place for the smooth running of this meeting of General Assembly. |
| Main points | Resolution 1: Confirming the recall of Assembly. Resolution 2: Tidying up the roll of Assembly. Resolution 3: Appointing a convener of tellers. Paragraphs 2 and 3: The names of some people who are available to help Assembly if required. Resolution 6: Arranging for a <i>Record of Assembly</i> to be produced. |
| Previous relevant documents | Paper N1 and minutes from the Mission Council meeting of May 2015, where the recall of Assembly was agreed. |
| Consultation has taken place with... | Assembly Arrangements Committee; Mission Council. |

Summary of Impact

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Financial | There will be a production and printing cost for the <i>Record of Assembly</i> , which is part of the cost of holding an Assembly. The other resolutions involve no new expenditure. |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | None. |



Arrangements for this meeting of General Assembly

1. The officers of Assembly bring forward the following procedural Resolutions 1–3, which will be moved by the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee at the very start of business. The Moderators propose to invite Assembly to vote on them without debate.

Resolution 1

General Assembly concurs in the decision of the Mission Council to call this special meeting.

Resolution 2

General Assembly notes that the holders of several offices and roles, which are members of General Assembly *ex officio*, have changed since General Assembly met in July 2014. General Assembly confirms the consequent changes to the Roll:

**General Secretary – the Revd John Proctor
 Deputy General Secretary (Administration and Resources) – Mrs Jane Baird
 Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship) – the Revd Richard Church
 Deputy General Secretary (Mission) – Ms Francis Brienen
 Clerk – the Revd Michael Hopkins
 Moderator of the North Western Synod - vacant
 Moderator of the Mersey Synod – the Revd Jacky Embrey
 Convener of the Assembly Arrangements Committee – the Revd James Breslin
 Convener of the Equalities Committee – the Revd Helen Mee
 Convener of the Ministries Committee – the Revd Gethin Rhys
 Convener of the Nominations Committee – Mrs Irene Wren
 Convener of the United Reformed Church Trust – the Revd Richard Gray**

Resolution 3

General Assembly appoints Dr James Merrilees as convener of tellers for this meeting.

2. When General Assembly met in Cardiff in July 2014, it appointed a number of members to act as a facilitation group, and of that group the following are ready to act again if required. The group therefore remains in place, should Assembly wish to call upon it:

| | | |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| David Bedford | Claudette Binns | Samuel Cyuma |
| Alison Dalton | John Humphreys | Anne Lewitt |
| Lis Mullen | Kristin Ofstad | Simon Peters |

3. The Assembly Officers have appointed the following to act as pastoral listeners, and they will be present in Birmingham in that role, to help members of Assembly as required:

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Steven Faber | Richard Gray | Jenny Mills | Melanie Smith |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|



4. The Record of Assembly

One final resolution is brought by the officers of Assembly. It will be formally moved by the Clerk at the end of the day's business and immediately voted upon without discussion.

Resolution 6

General Assembly authorises the Officers of Assembly to check the accuracy of the minutes, and to arrange for their publication in a supplementary *Record of Assembly*, also containing the Roll of Assembly and any other material also accidentally omitted from the *Record* of the Assembly meeting in July 2014.

Paper 2

Human Sexuality Task Group

The Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

United Church 2015
Church 2015
Reformed Church 2015
Church 2015



Paper 2

Human Sexuality Task Group

The Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

Basic Information

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Contact name and email address | Elizabeth Caswell ecaswell@btinternet.com |
| Action required | Decision. |
| Draft resolution(s) | The human sexuality task group brings two resolutions printed in full in the following paper. Resolution four (on page 12/13) and resolution five (on page 16). |

Summary of Content

| | |
|---|---|
| Subject and aim(s) | The URC and the marriage of same-sex couples. |
| Main points | <p>Report on the Church-wide consultation on this subject, which concluded in March 2015.</p> <p>Resolution 4, Part A expressly takes no single view on behalf of the URC as a whole about the marriage of same-sex couples.</p> <p>Parts B to F of resolution 4 set out possible arrangements for taking local decisions about the registration of buildings (England and Wales), and for nominating celebrants (Scotland).</p> <p>Resolution 5 refers Resolution 4 (if passed) to the synods of the Church, using the procedure in Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.</p> |
| Previous relevant documents | <i>The Record of Assembly 2014.</i> The minutes of the meeting of Mission Council in May 2015. |
| Consultation has taken place with... | Most of the congregations and all the synods of the URC. Mission Council. |

Summary of Impact

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Financial | There is no direct cost associated with these decisions. |
| External (e.g. ecumenical) | A number of other denominations are either actively considering this issue or have already done so. |

The Marriage of Same-Sex Couples

1. The human sexuality task group brings the following report to Assembly, in the light of discussions at the May 2015 meeting of Mission Council.
 - A. The consultation of synods and local churches**
 2. In 2014 General Assembly agreed to consult our synods and local churches about the marriage of same-sex couples. We asked them: 'Would you wish General Assembly to allow same-sex marriage, in those local URC churches that wish to offer and host these services?' This question addresses specifically the situation of churches in England and Wales. Scots law does not require the registration of buildings for religious weddings.
 3. All thirteen synods replied by the end of March, as requested, as did a majority of the churches (858 out of 1472). The consultation is complete, and the May meeting of Mission Council considered its results. Mission Council worked on proposals to bring to General Assembly, in the light of this new information, received within the context of many earlier discussions, including those at Cardiff in July 2014. General Assembly now gathers to reflect on the consultation, and to consider Mission Council's proposals for taking the matter forward.
 4. Of the congregations who replied, 63% voted in favour of the resolution, 34% voted against, and 3% of the fellowships were evenly divided.
 5. Of the members who voted in local churches (roughly eighteen thousand people), about 62% voted in favour and 38% against.
 6. All the synod meetings were in favour. Of their 1100 members, 80% voted yes, and 20% no.
 7. The FURY advisory board and East Midlands Youth were both unanimously in favour, and the majority of a group of Westminster College students were in favour.
 8. In reporting on the consultation, the human sexuality task group warmly thanks those who led and hosted our two training events for facilitators (Elizabeth Gray-King, Michael Jagessar, Neil Thorogood, members of St Paul's, Bayswater and staff of North Western Synod); the Council for World Mission funded this training with a capacity development grant; and dozens of synod facilitators helped very many of our churches to discuss this matter. We are grateful too to staff in Church House who prepared the material and handled the replies, and to Graham Campling, who undertook the numerical analysis with clarity, speed and care.
 9. There is, however, more to consultation than numbers, and many replies included thoughtful comment. We need to mention one emphatic objection to a couple of words in the *One plus One* booklet – the words '(particularly) African' on page 6. The task group believes it was right to mention that the subject of same-sex relations raises different sorts of responses in different nations and cultures, but apologises for linking this issue to a particular group of countries, in a way that is unfairly specific.
 10. Most churches were glad to have been consulted; some would have preferred this to precede any Assembly discussion. Many churches that voted yes were clear that they do not expect to hold same-sex marriages in their buildings, but they do believe

that local churches should make their own decisions in this matter. The URC's speed of action on this subject was criticised from both directions: 'Get on with it!' and 'Move more slowly.' Some of our members are very hurt at the thought that the URC might countenance same-sex marriage at all; others are pained that their churches cannot offer same-sex marriage services at the moment. There were also churches that spoke of growth through careful listening to one another, even amid respectful disagreement.

11. There are various fears abroad – that the legal protection in the Act of Parliament might one day be withdrawn from churches that do not wish to register their buildings; or that the URC may split; or, in some places, that local unity will be strained.
12. The largest number of comments concerned the institution of marriage. Many churches that voted 'yes' added the rider that they, or a number of their members, did not think a union between people of the same gender could be marriage. Whatever civil law says, they believe that marriage is the union of a man and a woman. They wish to be welcoming and affirming but cannot understand why civil partnership is not enough.
13. Authority in the Church was a concern. If this measure goes through, will the Basis of Union have to be revised on the grounds that we will not be acting under the authority of the word of God or seeking the peace and unity of the Church? Several comments touched on whether or not this subject is an issue of doctrine. Some returns suggested that a General Assembly resolution should not be required; we should 'give churches more freedom within a federal congregational structure. Such a move might allow us to stay together with integrity and some measure of authentic unity.'
14. At least two synod meetings heard proposals along those lines: rather than talking of Assembly authorisation, the URC should simply recognise that local churches are the places for taking decisions on the registration of local buildings. A well-drafted proposal of this kind, which also took careful account of the necessary legal framework, emerged in Wessex Synod.

B. A different proposal

15. The Task Group was grateful to take up the outline and much of the wording of that Wessex proposal, and commended it to Mission Council. Mission Council agreed that such an approach could help the Church to live with integrity within its own diversity of opinion, and therefore commended the following resolution to General Assembly. Mission Council's discernment process on this matter was conducted using our consensus decision-making procedures, and resulted in the resolution being passed recognising disagreement on the part of a small number of members.

Resolution 4:

- 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 Same-Sex Marriage.**
- 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 of same-sex marriage 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.
16. The human sexuality task group reported to Mission Council its view that this six-part resolution is as comprehensive as it can presently be, is coherent (so should not be treated piecemeal) and is compliant with the law. The group’s thinking behind the various parts was as follows.
17. Part A of the resolution invites Assembly, by declining to express a single view on behalf of the whole Church, to sustain the spirit of the 2007 Commitment, which honours the Christian integrity and intention of members who take a variety of views about same-sex relations (even though understandably the 2007 Commitment did not consider marriage). The 2007 Commitment is printed in these Assembly papers, to recall the pattern and policy by which members of the United Reformed Church relate to one another over this issue.

18. Part B of the resolution applies to local URC congregations in England and Wales. It 'declares' that we take certain decisions locally. Our common life as a Christian family involves many sorts of decisions, which we rightly take in several different settings. Some are taken by the elders of a local church; others in a Church Meeting; others again by a synod, or by General Assembly. Our present practice is that a local Church Meeting directs its trustees to register a building for marriage services. This part of the resolution sustains that custom in the context of the 2013 Act, which requires a separate registration for the marriage of same-sex couples. In this clause an expression like 'General Assembly authorises' would have suggested a view held not only locally but in the wider Church too. By contrast, the word 'declares' reminds us that certain matters are usually determined locally, and do not require the Church as a whole to take a particular view of the substantial issue.
19. Part C of the resolution is really a postscript to Part B. It concerns those local ecumenical partnerships (LEPs) or Union Churches whose constitution does not provide for a Church or Congregational Meeting, and who are therefore not helped by Part B. It offers a way by which such churches in England or Wales may take decisions about the registration of their buildings for the marriage of same-sex couples, in ways that the URC would support. (N.B. This clause can only address the requirement for the consent of the appropriate URC governing authority; these local churches will generally require additional consent from the governing authorities of other denominations to which they belong.)
20. Part D of the resolution refers to Scotland, where marriage law does not require the registration of buildings in the ways that apply in England and Wales. Scots law, by contrast, focusses upon the nomination of celebrants – the people who may conduct marriage services. This part of the resolution therefore carries forward a decision taken by Mission Council in November 2014, recognising that should Assembly 'allow for ministers and members of the United Reformed Church to solemnise same-sex marriages under Scots Law' then the National Synod of Scotland would speak for our Church in nominating celebrants.
21. Part E of the resolution recalls that the trustees of a church building will usually expect the Church Meeting to direct how that building will be used for Christian worship. These decisions are not usually taken by the trustees independently.
22. Part F of the resolution is necessary because registrars may well require formal evidence of the Assembly's decisions, and the persons indicated will be able to supply this authoritatively.
23. There are a few gaps in the resolution, which it does not appear possible to address quickly:
 - 23.1 The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are not referred to. No legislation that would allow the marriage of same-sex couples is yet proposed in these places, and it is better to defer any URC response until there is legislation to consider.
 - 23.2 The resolution does not offer any proposals about armed forces chapels in England and Wales.
 - 23.3 Nor does the resolution make any proposals about the marriage of people detained, e.g. prisoners, the housebound, and the terminally ill, in England and Wales.

24. Mission Council commended Resolution 4 to General Assembly, and invited the task group to present it. Should Assembly support Resolution 4, it will be asked to consider Resolution 5, for which the background is as follows.

C. Is this a matter of doctrine?

25. Mission Council took time to discuss one particular concern about Resolution 4. It had been suggested at Cardiff that the marriage of same-sex couples would ‘modify ... doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church’. If that were the case, then any Assembly resolution which would make this possible under our auspices would fall within the terms of Paragraph 2(6)(A)(xi) of the Structure of the URC, and could not be enacted by one Assembly decision alone. An initial Assembly resolution would need to be referred to the Church under the process for ‘Constitutional Amendments’ outlined in Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, and, subject to the Church’s response, brought back to Assembly for final ratification. Only after that final ratification would it come into effect. Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure is printed in these Assembly papers as Appendix C.
26. After the concern above had been raised, the General Secretary sought help from the faith and order committee and from the law and polity advisory group. Both groups gave considered and careful advice, which was posted on the Church’s website in November and December.
27. The key passages from the faith and order committee’s response are as follows:
- 27.1. ‘... in the doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, since her coming into being in 1972, there is no reference to marriage. The nearest the United Reformed Church comes to a position is in the service books ... but ... service books are not regarded as holding the doctrine of the church ...’
- 27.2. ‘... marriage is an evolving human institution that flows from the church’s doctrine of humanity, but ... marriage is only one way of living in community ... it is not a doctrine as such, but derived from our doctrine. Therefore although permitting same-sex marriage is a significant change to the church’s practice of ministry it is not a change to the United Reformed Church’s doctrine.’
28. The majority view of the law and polity advisory group was that the matter is not constitutional. While doctrinal statements in the URC’s predecessor churches do make affirmations about marriage, the statements that have formulated the doctrine of the URC(UK) or of the URC since 1972 have not done so. While marriage services are an important part of the Church’s practice, affirmations on marriage have not been a part of its common doctrinal commitment and witness.

D. A case for referral

29. If General Assembly accepts these two pieces of advice, and if it approves Resolution 4, it may reckon that the matter does not involve an amendment to the Church’s constitution, and that it need not use the referral procedure of Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure. Mission Council, however, believed that Assembly should refer the matter to the synods. The reasoning behind this was as follows. (a) There is a strand of opinion in our Church that disagrees with the advice set out above, seeing doctrine as a broader and deeper-seated aspect of church life than is fully set out by the post-1972 statements mentioned above. (b) An Assembly discussion on whether or not this matter needs to be referred could therefore be complex and lengthy, requiring

carefully nuanced historical and theological judgments. (c) Yet avoiding or curtailing such a discussion might open the Church to subsequent challenge, that we had taken a constitutional decision without following due process.

30. Further, the trustees of a local church building are expected to 'permit the premises to be used for' purposes that include 'The public worship of God according to the principles and usages for the time being of the United Reformed Church ...' (Schedule 2 to the URC Acts 1972 and 1981, and Schedule 1 to the URC Act 2000). It could be argued that marriage services for same-sex couples would change the 'usages ... of the United Reformed Church', and that this would be a constitutional change. Use of the referral procedure would protect the Church, and perhaps trustees too, from possible challenge on this ground.

31. Since Mission Council met, the Church's legal adviser has written about the issue of referral. He makes two points that are not directly addressed above.

31.1 The advice of the faith and order committee is that the marriage of same-sex couples would be a notable change in the Church's practice. Even if it is not thought doctrinal, it might still be reckoned to come under Paragraph 2(6)(A)(xi) of the Structure, which refers to 'any other form or expression of the polity...of the United Reformed Church'. If that view were taken, then it would require referral under Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure.

31.2 Further, the Assembly should take into account the unity and peace of the Church when making a decision, particularly when a controversial matter is being considered. In this connection, even on matters which are not of a constitutional nature, Paragraph 4 of the Structure of the Church requires that there shall be the fullest attempt to discover the mind of other councils of the Church before a body such as the Assembly makes its final decision. The process prescribed for constitutional amendments can be used as a way of achieving this.

32. After careful discussion, a majority of Mission Council believed that referral would be the better way forward, and agreed, by 43 votes to 15, to commend the following resolution to Assembly:

Resolution 5

General Assembly refers Resolution 4 to the synods, using the procedure in Paragraph 3(1) of the Structure, with responses to the General Secretary by 31 March 2016.

33. 33.1 If Assembly were to agree Resolution 4 and decide not to refer it, Assembly would be taking the view that the matter is not constitutional. To take that view, Assembly would need to be confident that the doctrine and usages of the URC as a whole are not being altered, and that discernment on this particular issue is properly assigned to local churches.

33.2 If, on the other hand, Assembly were to accept Mission Council's advice, and refer the resolution under Paragraph 3(1) procedure, this need not imply that the matter is definitely constitutional. But it would save Assembly discussing whether it is or not, and would protect any decision against challenge on constitutional grounds.

33.3 If a matter is referred and more than a third of the synods – five or more – vote 'that the proposal be not proceeded with', then it falls. Otherwise it would be brought back to General Assembly 2016, where a two-thirds majority would be able to confirm it as the Church's decision.

E. Looking beyond Assembly

34. Should Resolution 4 be passed for implementation by General Assembly (either without referral, or after referral) a number of further matters will require prompt and careful handling:
- 34.1 Local churches may want guidance on how to register their buildings. The law and polity advisory group will draft a flow-chart of steps to be taken and some model documentation to use.
- 34.2 Liturgical material will be needed, to ensure that any same-sex marriage services (a) reflect our Reformed traditions appropriately and (b) are legally secure. Again the law and polity advisory group will advise, particularly on the second point.
- 34.3 If any local church is either acutely disquieted as a body about the Assembly decision, or deeply divided within itself, it may wish to call upon the advice and support of the wider church. Because synods exercise care for local churches, they will be the first point of contact.
35. Conversely, should General Assembly not progress this matter along the lines set out in Resolution 4, there are likely to be some members and congregations – not the same group as mentioned above – who will be deeply disappointed, and who may want particular attention and support from the wider church. Again synods will expect to lead on this.

The task of Assembly

36. This paper has set out the business the Assembly will be asked to address in Birmingham. The issues are sensitive; they intertwine with our personal stories; and they relate to deeply held but differing convictions. So the Assembly has a demanding task. It will also have limited time. The meeting will be held within a framework of worship and prayer as the Assembly seeks God's will. The Officers ask all of the members of Assembly to pray, beforehand and on the day, that our discussions will express and embody the fruits of the Spirit, and that the fellowship of our Church may deepen and grow through the business we do together.

Appendix A

The 2007 Commitment on Human Sexuality

As the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church,

7.1 we recognise that –

- many of the issues and views surrounding human sexuality can seem to be intractable and irreconcilable;
- despite lengthy debates, much study and many reports, opinions have not changed sufficiently for us to be of one mind;
- this is a deeply emotive and potentially divisive issue;
- human sexuality and the language we use about it raises many complex questions, not least in the area of biblical interpretation.

7.2 while it is not possible to do full justice to the variety of views represented within the church, we recognise that the range includes –

7.2.1 some people who feel that the debate on human sexuality has become a wrong focus and has received too much attention, believing that:

- faithful living and worship should take priority over controversy about human sexuality;
- participation in God's mission and Christ's ministry in the world demands all the energy of God's people;
- this is not a matter over which policy decisions imposing a universal rule are necessary or appropriate;
- the church's existing assessment procedures are appropriate for discerning the call of God;
- responses to pastoral situations involving people in same-sex relationships are best determined within the local church;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views can create painful tensions, though it may also offer opportunity for growth and development.

7.2.2 some other people who feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it concerns the Word of God, and for them is a passionately held matter of holiness, purity and obedience to God's commands in scripture, believing that:

- God's creation plan is for the complementarity of man and woman, and that sexual relations apart from that are therefore disordered;
- scripture and the traditions of the church teach that the only legitimate pattern for sexual relations is between a man and woman within the commitment of marriage;
- all scriptural references to same-sex activity are explicit in their condemnation;
- same-sex activity is an affront to Christian morality and offensive to many people of other faiths and of none;
- people in sexually active same-sex relationships should not be accepted for ministry;
- the acceptance of same-sex (civil) partnerships on the part of society and the state is a matter to be resisted;

- the character and teaching of Jesus requires that both grace and truth must be embodied in dealing with this issue and with the people concerned;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates painful tensions.

7.2.3 some others again who feel that this debate is a necessary focus because it is a passionately held matter of God's unbounded grace, justice, the work of the Spirit and faithfulness to God's revelation in Christ and in scripture, believing that:

- God's will is for newness of life for all people in Christ, regardless of any human distinctions, including sexual orientation;
- it is God's creative intent that there are people whose innate sexual orientation and its fulfilment are directed towards others of the same sex;
- some people are called by God into committed, loving, same-sex relationships, including their sexual consummation, and that such relationships can be judged by the fruits of the Spirit that result;
- whilst most scriptural references to same-sex activity seem negative, they are not relevant to the contemporary understanding of same-sex relationships; emphasis needs to be given to the scriptural themes of grace, love and faithfulness;
- where vocations to ministry of those in committed same-sex relationships are discerned through the processes of the church to be the work of the Holy Spirit, such vocations should be upheld;
- this is an issue of justice, and the church should celebrate changes made to address unjust structures in society as, in part, the work of the Spirit;
- the church should welcome the creation of civil partnerships and support such unions pastorally;
- working and sharing fellowship with people of very different views and practice creates painful tensions.

7.3 recognising this very wide range of views, we –

- acknowledge this diversity;
- accept that these views are all held with integrity and often with passion;
- acknowledge that those who are sisters and brothers in Christ are so through God's calling rather than personal choosing;
- believe that Christ calls us to strive to live together;
- realise that this can only be done by reliance on the grace of God to enable mutual respect, love and continuing exploration together;
- agree to continue to explore these differences in the light of our understanding of Scripture and under the Holy Spirit's guidance for our individual and shared life in today's world.

7.4 in love and submission to Christ who holds us together, we therefore commit ourselves to stay together, to work and pray together, to treat one another with respect, and to seek God's gifts of unity, harmony, wisdom and deeper understanding.

**The text above is taken from the *Book of Reports 2007* pp232-233
©The United Reformed Church 2007**

Appendix B

Standing Orders of General Assembly

1. The Agenda of the Assembly

1.1 At its meetings the Assembly shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees which include the Mission Council or by synods, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by individual members of the Assembly.

1.2 For the good ordering of General Assembly's time, the Moderators for that Assembly, in consultation with the General Secretary and the Clerk, shall group the draft motions into three groups which shall determine the manner in which the Assembly shall consider them: A – en bloc, B – majority voting, and C – consensus. All matters covered by paragraphs 3(1) & (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church shall be placed in Group B. In the case of any other matter the Moderator may rule at any time that a motion be taken from Group B and placed in Group C. At the same time the grouping of draft motions is published any matters already known to be urgent under Standing Order 2.3 shall also be published, with reasons given.

1.3 The motions in Group A shall be taken en bloc. Notice in writing to the effect that one or more of the motions included in Group A should be considered separately may be given to the General Secretary by the close of business on the first day of the meeting of the Assembly. If such notice, which must be signed by at least six members of the Assembly, is duly received, then the motion(s) in question shall be removed from Group A. It shall be for the Moderators, in consultation with the General Secretary and the Clerk, to determine in which of Groups B and C any such separated motions should be placed. When the single motion to approve Group A is before the Assembly, the vote shall be taken immediately, the motion being determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards.

1.4 The motions in Group B shall be determined by majority vote, and Standing Order 2 shall not apply.

1.5 The motions in Group C shall be considered by means of the consensus decision making process set out in Standing Order 2.

1.6 The Assembly arrangements committee shall prepare before each meeting of the Assembly a draft order of business, and submit it to the Assembly as early as convenient in the programme.

1.7 Motions arising from a report which have been duly seconded and submitted by individual members of Assembly under Standing Order 4.2 shall be taken at a point in the business determined by the Moderator on the advice of the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee.

1.8 If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Clerk.

1.9 The convener of the Assembly arrangements committee may, during the meeting of the Assembly, propose that the order of business be changed.

2. Consensus decision making

2.1 Those motions in Group C shall be determined by a process of decision making by consensus. For these purposes the following Standing Order 2 will apply and the Standing Orders 4, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5 will not apply.

2.2 The process of consensus:

2.2.1 Consensus means a decision of the council reached unanimously, or where a small minority of members of the council is willing to accept a proposal that is not their first preference.

2.2.2 Passed, recognising disagreement means a decision of the council where, after careful consideration of the options, a small number is unable to accept the majority opinion but agree to stand aside so that the matter may be resolved.

2.2.3 At each stage of the process the Moderator will clarify the nature of the session, that is whether it is for information, discussion or decision making.

2.3 The information session:

This session aims to inform the Assembly on the issue to be considered. At the start of this session, if s/he judges that the matter before the Assembly is urgent, requiring decision during the current meeting of the Assembly, the Moderator shall inform the Assembly that this is the case and advise that if following the Consensus procedures there is continuing disagreement it may be necessary to move to a majority decision under Standing Order 2.5.9.6. A range of options may be presented by different people who shall speak in favour of their option. Those presenting issues, reports or proposals may speak for no more than five minutes unless the Assembly agrees to an extension of time. Members of Assembly are then free to ask questions on the issue or seek for clarification or further information.

2.4 The discussion session:

This is the opportunity for discussion of various viewpoints and vigorous debate on different opinions. Speakers may speak for no more than three minutes.

2.4.1 The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole council, time for thinking during a break etc. The Moderator may invite Assembly to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage.

2.4.2 The Moderator shall ensure that those who have different backgrounds or who disagree or who are unsure are given space to contribute to the debate, as well as those who are enthusiastic.

2.4.3 The Assembly may meet around tables so that small group discussion can happen quickly and easily.

2.4.4 As the discussion session proceeds possible ways forward for the Church are developed until a specific proposal is reached.

2.5 The decision session:

Only those Assembly members present may contribute to this session, they may speak for no more than three minutes.

2.5.1 Discussion continues with speakers outlining the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal. At all times, speakers are encouraged to suggest a way forward for the Assembly, rather than merely speaking with passion for a pre-determined view.

2.5.2 Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. It is important to hear from those indicating disquiet or disapproval as well as those who are enthusiastic.

2.5.3 The proposal shall be displayed throughout the discussion in such a way that all can see the text and any progressively agreed changes to it.

2.5.4 If there is a major new insight expressed, the Moderator may determine that it is appropriate to move back into a discussion session.

2.5.5 After summing up where the Assembly seems to be heading, the Moderator checks whether the Assembly is nearing consensus using one or more questions such as the following:

2.5.5.1 What is your response to this proposal? (inviting a show of indicator cards)

- 2.5.5.2 Do you believe we have consensus in support of this proposal?
- 2.5.5.3 Do you believe we have consensus not to support this proposal?
- 2.5.6 If there is strong but not unanimous support:
 - 2.5.6.1 Who supports the proposal?
 - 2.5.6.2 Who does not support the proposal as your first option, but is prepared to accept it? Are you prepared to have the issue declared resolved by consensus?
 - 2.5.6.3 Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?
- 2.5.7 Where some members of Assembly indicate an unwillingness to accept a proposal there shall be further discussion and then the Moderator shall seek to ascertain that they accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome.
- 2.5.8 The Moderator shall ask:
 - 2.5.8.1 Are you prepared to have the issue declared passed, recognising disagreement? If so they may choose to record their dissent.
 - 2.5.8.2 Who is not prepared to accept the proposal?
- 2.5.9 Continuing disagreement
Assembly may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including:
 - 2.5.9.1 adjourning the discussion to another time or place perhaps with more work before reconsideration;
 - 2.5.9.2 asking the Moderator to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Assembly;
 - 2.5.9.3 referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;
 - 2.5.9.4 deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;
 - 2.5.9.5 declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;
 - 2.5.9.6 if the issue has previously been notified as urgent, moving to majority decision;
 - 2.5.9.7 in the event of urgency not previously notified, moving to majority decision; in that event, the Moderator shall give her/his reasons, and test the mind of Assembly in forming her/his judgement.
- 2.6 The Moderator
- 2.6.1 The role of the Moderator is very important.
The Moderator:
 - 2.6.1.1 assists the Assembly to discern the will of God as far as possible
 - 2.6.1.2 is alert to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as members contribute
 - 2.6.1.3 pauses for prayer or buzz group reflection as appropriate
 - 2.6.1.4 encourages trust and integrity in contributions
 - 2.6.1.5 ensures care and support for those whose honesty or minority voice makes them vulnerable
 - 2.6.1.6 invites members to respond to speeches showing indicator cards, and reflects the mood of the meeting as it becomes apparent
 - 2.6.1.7 suggests or encourages creative modifications of a proposal, picking up insights expressed
 - 2.6.1.8 summarises discussion from time to time to assist in focusing the discussion.
- 2.7 The Assembly and Moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group.
This will be appointed at the beginning of each Assembly by the Assembly. It will:
 - 2.7.1 enable group work, collate responses from groups and report back to the council
 - 2.7.2 help and support the Moderator
 - 2.7.3 be responsible providing the wording of the text under discussion.

- 2.8 Coloured cards
- 2.8.1 Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they are helpful.
- 2.8.2 Each member receives two cards:
- 2.8.2.1 Orange – held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal.
- 2.8.2.2 Blue – held at the end of a speech, so that the Moderator can see, indicates coolness about what has been heard or disapproval of a proposal.
- 2.8.3 Cards held crossed indicate to the Moderator it is time to move on to the next subject.
- 2.8.4 Cards should be shown only at the invitation of the Moderator and held so that the Moderator can see them. They indicate response to what has just been said. They help the Moderator to gauge the strength of feeling for various ideas, and to invite speeches from those who are unsure or cool towards the proposal.

2.9 Changes of order

Changes of order may be raised by any member of Assembly at any time during the meeting and must refer to the proceedings of the council. The Moderator asks the member to state their change of order. The Moderator rules on it immediately, or asks for a decision by the Assembly via a simple majority vote.

Changes of order include:

- 2.9.1 Out of order – the speaker is digressing from the matter being discussed.
- 2.9.2 Closed session – that the matter in hand is sensitive and should be conducted in private. This is voted on immediately without discussion. It can be raised more than once during a discussion. If it is agreed, all those who are not members of the council must leave. Members must treat the subsequent discussion in the strictest confidence and must not divulge its content or process to non-members.
- 2.9.3 Adjournment of the discussion – this is voted on immediately without further discussion. It can be proposed more than once in a discussion. It cannot be brought by a person who has already spoken. When the discussion is resumed the person whose speech was interrupted has the right to speak first.
- 2.9.4 Personal explanation – a member feeling that some material part of their former speech has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may ask to make a personal explanation.
- 2.9.5 Objection – a member may raise an objection if the remarks of a speaker are deemed offensive or derogatory. On such an objection being raised the Moderator shall immediately rule as to whether the remarks are offensive or derogatory and if the ruling is in favour of the objection may require the speaker to withdraw the remark. Should the speaker refuse to do so the Moderator may require the speaker immediately to terminate their speech.

3. Presentation of business

3.1 All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the General Secretary by a date to be determined, so that they may be printed and circulated to members in time for consideration before the date of the Assembly meeting.

3.2 A synod may deliver to the General Secretary not less than twelve weeks before the commencement of the meeting of the Assembly notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Assembly. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Assembly.

3.3 A Local Church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its synod for consideration and, if the synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the synod to comply with Standing Order 3.2 above.

3.4 A member of the Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Assembly agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the General Secretary to be an infringement of the rights of a synod through which the matter could properly have been raised, the General Secretary shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Assembly arrangements committee which shall advise the Assembly as to the procedure to be followed.

3.5 Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Mission Council or a committee of the General Assembly or a synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.

3.6 It shall not be in order, whether in en bloc business, majority voting, or consensus decision-making, to move a motion or amendment which:

3.6.1 contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or

3.6.2 involves the Church in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or

3.6.3 pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or

3.6.4 amends or reverses a decision reached by the Assembly at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or

3.6.5 is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under 3d.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 3.6.1, 3.6.2, 3.6.3, and 3.6.5) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary (in the case of 3.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

4. Motions and amendments

4.1 A report presented to the Assembly by a committee or synod, under Standing Order 1.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 3.4 of a motion to refer back to that committee or synod the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.

4.2 During the meeting of the Assembly and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. The Moderator shall decide whether such motion or amendment requires to be circulated in writing to members before it is discussed by the Assembly. During the course of the debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.

4.3 No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Assembly unless it is known that there is a seconder, the exception to this being motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given.

4.4 A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserves the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.

4.5 An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion under Standing Order 4.10.

4.6 If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.

4.7 An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Assembly be rejected.

4.8 The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly, alter the motion or amendment proposed.

4.9 A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Assembly. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.

4.10 Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. After any amendments duly moved under Standing Orders 4.5, 4.6 and 4.7 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Assembly. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting. Once a sole motion remains, votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way and in accordance with Standing Order 7.

5. Timing of speeches and of other business

5.1 Save by prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Assembly committees which are to be open to question, comment or discussion shall not exceed five minutes.

5.2 Save by the prior agreement of the officers of the Assembly, speeches made in support of the motions from any Assembly committee, including the Mission Council, or from any synod shall not in aggregate exceed 45 minutes, nor shall speeches in support of any particular committee or synod motion exceed 12 minutes, (e.g. a committee with three motions may not exceed 36 minutes). The proposers of any other motion of which due notice has been given shall be allowed an aggregate of 10 minutes, unless a longer period be recommended by the officers of the Assembly or determined by the Moderator. Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than three minutes.

5.3 When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Assembly.

5.4 Secretaries of committees and full-time executive secretaries who are not members of Assembly may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the

request of the convener concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator.

5.5 In each debate, whether on a motion or on an amendment, no one shall address the Assembly more than once, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.

5.6 The foregoing Standing Order (5.5) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Assembly or from a speech made in the debate upon it.

6. Closure of debate

6.1 A member of Assembly may deliver to the General Secretary not less than 21 days before the date of the meeting of the Assembly a notice in writing of a motion that the General Assembly, for the better consideration of a specified resolution and its related documents, goes into a committee of the whole Assembly. Provided that the Moderator, Clerk and General Secretary together decide that this rule may appropriately be applied in the case of the said resolution, the motion shall be presented immediately following the opening speeches in support of the primary motion. For such a motion to be carried, two thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. Committee procedure enables members to speak more than once and exploratory votes to be taken on particular points or suggested changes. The number and length of speeches shall be at the discretion of the Moderator. After discussion in committee and decision on any proposed changes the Clerk shall draw the attention of the Assembly to any changes to the original text which have been agreed. The Moderator shall then declare the committee stage to be ended, and the Assembly shall proceed to hear a closing speech from the mover of the motion under discussion and proceed to a vote on the motion, subject to any further motion under Standing Order 6. The decision of the Moderator with the Clerk and the General Secretary on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

6.2 In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration be not put. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Assembly. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately end and the Assembly shall proceed to the next business.

6.3 In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question be now put. This is sometimes described as 'the closure motion'. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

6.4 During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be deferred to the next Assembly. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Assembly needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the

proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the General Secretary may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other councils and/or by one or more committees of the Assembly. The General Secretary shall provide for the deferred motion to be represented at the next Meeting of the General Assembly.

6.5 The motions described in Standing Orders 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 above are exceptions to Standing Order 4.3, in that they may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote. Precedence as between motions under 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4 is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Assembly no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.

7. Voting

7.1 Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.

7.2 Other motions before the Assembly, not subject to the consensus process, shall be determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Assembly present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards, except:

7.2.1 if the Assembly decides before the vote that a paper ballot be the method of voting or

7.2.2 if the show of cards indicates a very close vote, and the Moderator decides, or a member of Assembly proposes and the Assembly agrees, that a paper ballot shall be the method of voting.

7.3 To provide for voting in the case of a paper ballot, and to assist in taking a count of votes when the Moderator decides this is necessary, the nominations committee shall appoint tellers for each Assembly.

7.4 Any electronic voting system approved by the Assembly arrangements committee shall be deemed to meet the requirements of these Standing Orders.

8. Questions

8.1 A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the General Secretary, ask the Moderator or the convener of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Assembly to which no reference is made in any report before the Assembly.

8.2 A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Assembly a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.

8.3 Questions asked under Standing Orders 8.1 and 8.2 shall be put and answered without discussion.

9. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

9.1 A member shall have the right to rise and call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Assembly shall cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Assembly.

9.2 A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may rise and request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.

9.3 The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Assembly shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.

9.4 The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

10. Admission of public and press

10.1 Members of the public and representatives of the press shall be admitted to the Assembly unless the Assembly otherwise decides, and they shall occupy such places as are assigned to them.

11. Circulation of documents

11.1 Only documents authorised by the General Secretary in consultation with the convener of the Assembly arrangements committee may be distributed within the building in which the Assembly is meeting.

12. Use of Electronic devices and communications during the course of debate

12.1 Although many meetings take place in wi-fi enabled rooms, and many attending will have access to systems of electronic communication and to social media sites during business sessions, their primary responsibility is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications and editorial committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business. All electronic devices must be silent when a meeting is in session.

12.2 Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

13. Record of the Assembly

13.1 A record of attendance at the meetings of the Assembly shall be kept in such a manner as the Assembly arrangements committee may determine.

13.2 The draft minutes of each day's proceedings shall be made available in an appropriate form normally on the following day. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of a subsequent session. Concerning the minutes of the closing day of the Assembly the Clerk shall submit a motion approving their insertion in the full minutes of the Assembly after review and any necessary correction by the officers of the Assembly. Before such a motion is voted upon, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.

13.3 A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the General Secretary as the official record of the Assembly's proceedings.

13.4 As soon as possible after the Assembly meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be published as a *Record of Assembly* and a copy sent to every member of the Assembly, each synod and Local Church.

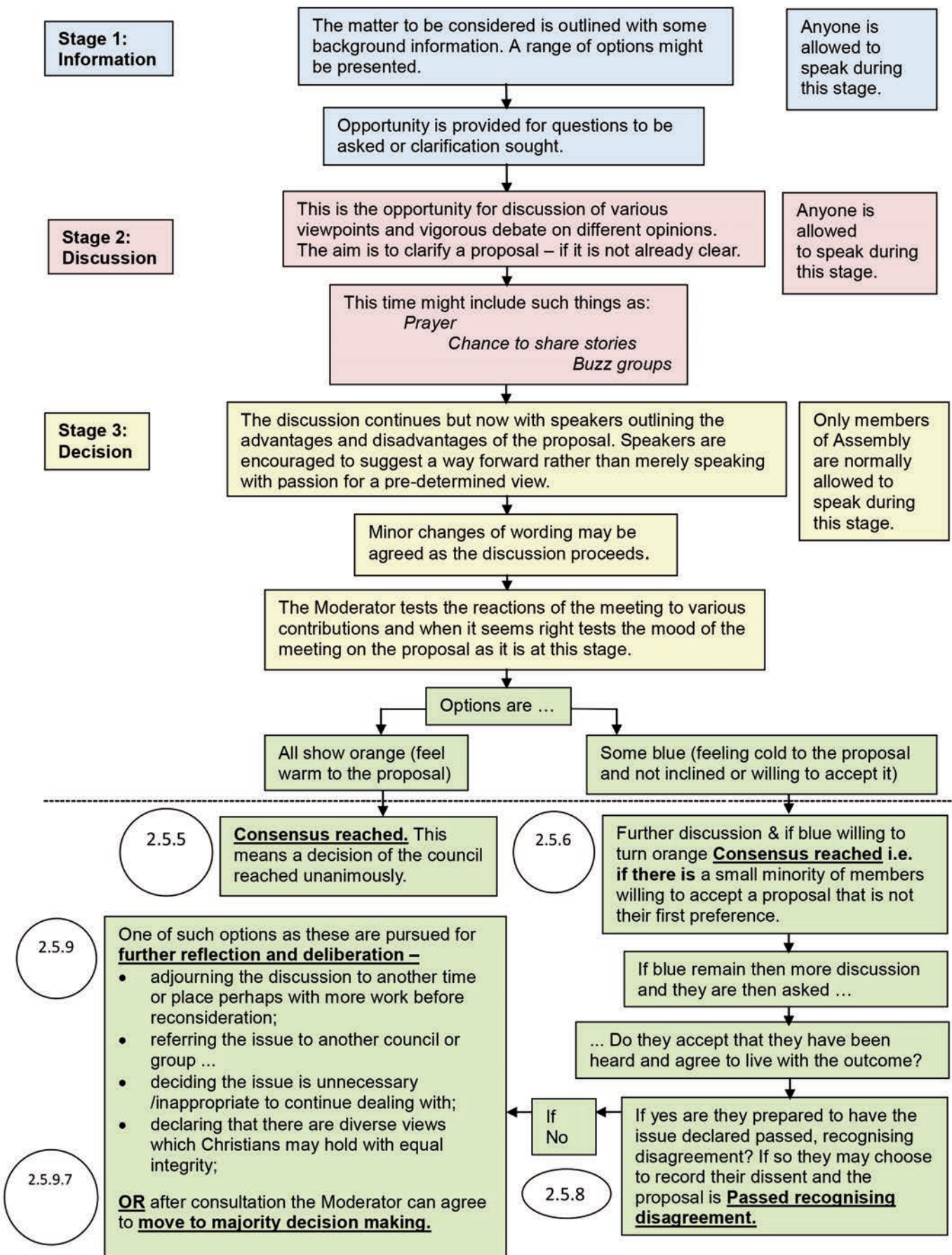
14. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

14.1 In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Assembly present and voting shall so decide.

14.2 Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Mission Council). The Clerk of the Assembly may, from time-to-time, suggest amendments.

*Content as amended by resolution of the Mission Council on 4 November 2014.
Formatting as agreed by the Mission Council on 11 May 2015.
Editor of document: The Clerk of the General Assembly*

Flow Chart to guide the use of Standing Order 2 – Consensus Decision Making





Appendix C

Paragraph 3.(1) of the Structure of the URC:

Constitutional Amendments

3.(1) No exercise of the function of constitutional amendment contained in 2(6)(A)(xi) shall have effect unless the following procedure has been followed:

- (a) The proposal for the amendment shall be made in accordance with the Standing Orders of the General Assembly.
- (b) Either the General Assembly or, in years when the General Assembly does not meet, the Mission Council, shall vote on a motion to approve the proposal which shall require a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass.
- (c) If such motion to approve the proposal is passed the General Assembly or the Mission Council, as the case may be, shall refer the proposal to synods and may, if it deems appropriate, in exceptional cases also to Local Churches.
- (d) If the proposal has been agreed by the General Assembly it shall set a final date for responses to be made, which shall normally be at an appropriate time before a meeting of the Mission Council not less than nine months after the meeting of the General Assembly at which the proposal was agreed.
- (e) If the proposal has been agreed by the Mission Council it shall set a final date for responses to be made which shall normally be at an appropriate date before the next ordinary meeting of the General Assembly.
- (f) If by such date notice has been received by the General Secretary from more than one third of synods (or, if it has been so referred, more than one third of Local Churches) that a motion 'that the proposal be not proceeded with' has been passed by a majority of members present and voting at a duly convened meeting of such body, then the Assembly or the Mission Council, as the case may be, in its concern for the unity of the church shall not proceed to ratify the proposal.
- (g) If by such date such notice has not been received, a motion to agree the proposed amendment shall come before the General Assembly at its next meeting or before the Mission Council at a meeting specified by the General Assembly. If such a motion is before the General Assembly it shall require a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass. If the motion is before the Mission Council it shall require a simple majority of the members present and voting to pass. In its concern for mutual understanding within the life of the church, before voting on such a motion the General Assembly or Mission Council shall invite a representative of any synod from which the General Secretary has duly received notification under 3(1)(e) to present the main reasons for its objection.
- (h) If such a motion is passed by such a majority the amendment shall have effect.
- (i) For the purposes of this paragraph 3(1), only synods and Local Churches in existence on the date set for responses to be made shall be counted in the calculations.