

Assembly Business Digest

A round up of the decisions made at the 2023 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, which took place at The Hayes Conference Centre from June 30-July 3.

The 2023 General Assembly of the United Reformed Church, began with worship led by the Revd Lindsey Sanderson, Chaplain to the Moderator 2022-2023. Lindsey was also confirmed as the next Moderator of the National Synod of Scotland.

Methodist Church, where she had just recently been elected President-designate.

“Spaces of grace” was the theme underpinning worship throughout Assembly,

We need grace in communal life, said the Revd Fiona Bennett, the Moderator of the General Assembly. It is through God’s grace we become able to laugh, cry, to wonder, and through that grace we also have hope for the world and God’s community of disciples.

In Assembly, she said, let us open our hearts, minds and hands to the ocean of God’s grace.

Following the decision of the 2022 Assembly to create the role of Chief Operating Officer, the Moderator welcomed and commissioned Victoria James to the position.

Ecumenical welcome

The Revd Canon Helen Cameron, currently Moderator of the Free Churches Group and one of the presidents of Churches Together in England, brought ecumenical greetings, in particular from the conference of the

Synod Moderator’s Report

The Synod Moderators’ report, ‘Life after 50’, looks back on the URC’s 50th anniversary. The report is available at [t O2 \(\)4 \(e\)2 \(or10 \(tb\)\)7169 \(e20 210 \(t2\]TJ -0.012](#)

Community Project Awards



This year marks the 25th year of the URC's community project awards. The awards are given at each General Assembly to celebrate innovative and transformative work that United Reformed Churches do in their communities.

Since 1998, 66 projects have won awards with prizes totalling £125,000. The scheme was founded by the Revd David Lawrence when Editor of *Reform*, and for the past 14 years has been sponsored by Congregational.

Three projects won awards at this year's Assembly:

- Causeway Community Garden, at St Johns United Reformed Church, Warrington, Cheshire, a garden that offers space for the community to enjoy and to support mental health;
- Darwen Asylum Refugee Enterprise, at Central United Reformed Church, Darwen, Lancashire, a drop-in service for the local refugee and asylum seeker community;
- Wooler Warm Welcome, at Wooler United Reformed Church, Northumberland, a warm, safe and comfortable place for people to meet informally.

Greetings from ecumenical and international guests

Partners from Taiwan and Korea were welcomed as well as Najla Kassab, President of the World Council of Reformed Churches, who spoke at the URC Ministers' Gathering last year, and Gordon Cowans, former Moderator of the United Church Jamaica and the Cayman Islands, and the current Chair of its Reparations Task Group.

Philip Brooks, Deputy General Secretary (Mission) also welcomed ecumenical and international guests, and invited the Dr Anna Krauss, General Secretary of the Council of Lutheran Churches in Great Britain, and the new President of Churches Together in England, representing the Fourth Presidency Group, to address the Assembly.

"We are committed to journeying together ecumenically. I'm thankful for all churches to stay with us and to work together with us on these issues. I don't want to forget about the empty chair."

Legacies of Slavery, proposals for repairing justice

General Assembly agreed to give anti-racism training to Church office holders, including all ministers in the URC. This follows from the confession and apology that Assembly passed in 2022 concerning transatlantic slavery and its continuing legacies.

Karen Campbell, Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries, asked Assembly to

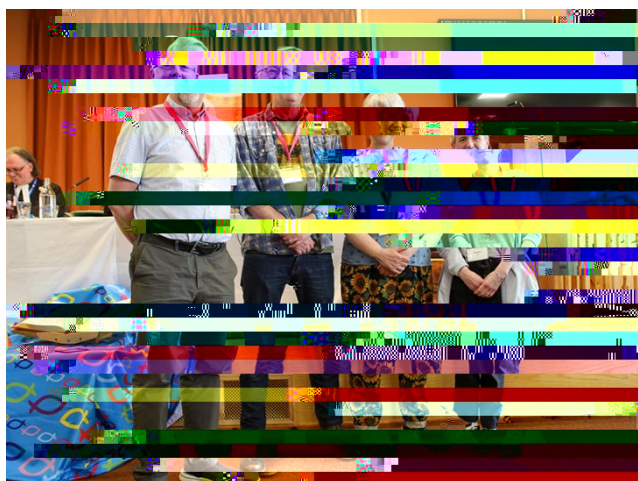
think of the Church's commitment to anti-racism as a journey. The URC needs to get its own house in order, she said, if it is to speak with credibility into the wider world.

Poverty and Inequality in the URC

Paper I2 was introduced by a series of audio recordings of people talking about their experiences of poverty in recent months, produced by the Changing Realities project. Simeon Mitchell reiterated how Jesus came to give news to the poor and how the resolution sought to do just that.

Resolution 31 called on General Assembly to challenge poverty and the structures that cause marginalisation by recognising that poverty is a result of political choices and systemic injustices, and calling on political leaders to make commitments towards the eradication of structural poverty in the UK; It asked the Mission and Ministries committees to reflect on the ways in which the Church might be able to demonstrate its commitment to people living in poverty through the allocating of resources for ministry and mission, and to bring any such proposals to a future General Assembly.

yoURChurch



General Assembly made the online meeting yoURChurch a congregation of the URC. yoURChurch began meeting during the first lockdown in 2020, and has continued ever since.

Assembly heard feedback from worshippers about how yoURChurch meets needs other

churches don't. 'It is literally a godsend,' said one. The Revd Martin Henninger, a guest from the Church of the Palatinate in Germany, said that yoURChurch had maintained links between Palatinate and URC during the pandemic.

New Assembly hymn

On its final day, Assembly sang a hymn written specially by the Revd Dominic Grant in response to the discussions of the last four days: <https://bit.ly/GA23-hymn>

Moderator -Elect 2023 -2024 acceptance speech



"Have we not seen assembly charting a clear course to uphold the dignity and integrity of humankind in all its multi-faceted, colour-filled, relational wonder?"

So began the acceptance speech by the Revd Timothy Meadows, Moderator-Elect for the office of the United Reformed Church General Assembly Moderator 2024-2025. "The United Reformed Church continues to embrace a diverse creation. Calling the church to be and practise the ways of grace."

"I am honoured and already feel the weight of this new adventure. I accept your call to be Moderator of General Assembly 2024 – 2025. I look forward to the chance to meet and listen to you. Let's all keep travelling together, lift God's people up and recognise the Christ among us."

Recognition of Children's, Youth and Family Ministry

Presented by the Revd Paul Robinson and Dr Sam Richards, Paper B1 set out the broad context and landscape of the church's children's and youth work ministry.

The paper was remaindered and returned in session ten where Paul thanked all for their contributions to the discussion phase of the presentation of the paper and further talks. In light of those discussions, Paul presented an amended version of the resolution which now reads:

However, he believed that synods are “vital

Mr Faber asked for the Faith and Order Committee to be given additional responsibility for worship, adding sincere thanks for the current Worship Reference Group, which would now be dissolved. The Revd Neil Thorogood emphasised that we understand ourselves best in worship, and strongly supported drawing these areas of expertise together. Both resolutions were passed unanimously.

A merged resolution created the Resources Committee that will bring together responsibility for the work relating to Church House Management, Communications, Finance and Human Resources, which are currently looked after by separate committees. The new resolution also added optional time for the Nominations Committee to bring nominations for the new committee. The Assembly agreed this “in principle” proposal.

Affirming the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming people

Following a consultation with its facilitation group, General Assembly:

- affirmed the human dignity of transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming (GNC) people and asserts their right, within and beyond the URC, to live without threat of violence and hatred;
- committed to furthering the ch (k)4 (r)7 ing baioluytap, Gmoa(i)6 (ng))7edh

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which sought to find a way in which the ambition for growth could be captured without transferring risk or making promises where there was no money.

Address to the Throne

The Revd Clare Downing, immediate past Moderator of the General Assembly, presented the Address to the Throne.

Moderator's reflection

As she prepared to hand over to her successor, outgoing Moderator of the General Assembly the Revd Fiona Bennett shared some reflections on her year in the role.

Ms Bennett said she had discovered in a new way a great community of disciples. She had also encountered a wide range of mixed feelings, from acceptance and belonging within the URC to tiredness and a sense of deflation; compounded by the uncertainty facing our planet and institutions. But she felt that she could trust the people she met right across the denomination – not because they were perfect “but because we are whole”.

Fiona offered thanks to many individuals who have supported her during the year. And she recalled a conversation with Karen Campbell when she said that if her successor as Moderator was a Black woman, she would be beyond happy. “That my sister Tessa has been willing to take up this call and bring her wisdom and courage and grace to this role to serve us all... well, my cup overflows.”

Northern Synod

The Revd Kim Plumpton was officially greeted as the incoming Moderator of the Northern Synod.

Induction of Revd Dr Tessa Henry - Robinson

The Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson has been inducted as the new Moderator of General Assembly. Her induction was part of a joyous closing act of worship led by Karen Campbell, one of the Chaplains to the Moderator.

The Revd Stephen Ansa-Addo(oder)7 (at)12 (or)eT9