

Session Six

The Moderator, the Revd Fiona Bennett, took the chair.

16 Further Ministries Committee Papers

The Moderator invited the Revd Dr Sarah Hall to ask the question of which she had given notice:

While acknowledging with thanks the generosity of various terms of provision of housing for retired ministers, is the Committee aware of the depth of concern and ill feeling about the new rent policy adopted by RMHS, which is believed by many to be unjust? Please could the committee assure General Assembly that these concerns have been heard and will be considered?

The Moderator invited the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary of Ministries, to respond. Ms Furley-Smith said:

Thank you for your question. I should at this point declare I am a director of RMHS.

To give some background:

The Society's rent setting policy and procedure was previously reviewed in 2019. Without changing the structure of, or methodology used in, setting rents, the review was a light touch one to simplify what was considered at the time a complex and unworkable approach.

That review, amongst other changes, reflected that the annual rent increase should be tied to a measure such as CPI(H) or RPI; and added two new bands - up to £300,000 and over £300,000 to the rent matrix.

The review did not consider the levels of rent within the rent matrix or compare them to other rents across the housing sector or other methods of rent setting.

Since then, the Covid pandemic happened and several environmental events around the world saw an increase in cost of living, driven by higher fuel and material costs. These have impacted the cost of building and maintenance as well as rent, mortgages and house prices.

Until 2023, house prices increased significantly, and remained relatively high despite high borrowing challenges faced by many. House prices have an impact on setting the Society's rents as the capital employed is directly related to the monthly rent charged and does not match expenditure.

In January 2023 the Board raised the National Ceiling for purchases to £750,000. With only having two bands the residents living in properties purchased at £305,000 and £650,000 were paying the same rent.

The new policy seeks to establish a rent setting mechanism that closely resembles the Society's operations, which is a shared ownership methodology by using multipliers against the level of capital employed by the Society in each property. The capital employed is limited to the price of purchase and does not include other on-costs. This mechanism creates better clarity and applies fairness in the way the Society charges rents.

The new model is intended to simplify the rent setting

However, what the policy does not do is recognise that being fair does not mean treating people the same. Ministers do not start from the same position where some may have other income, ie a secular pension or previous employment. There is a danger that the policy will create a postcode lottery for where ministers will be able to afford to retire.

It is acknowledged that the best way of letting residents know of this change is not through a newsletter. I also recognise that communication between the RMHS and the residents is poor.

At the last RHMS AGM we heard very clearly the negative impact the new rent policy is having on some residents. I therefore want to assure General Assembly that we did hear what was being said. The Ministries Committee RMHS sub Committee is having a joint meeting with the full Board in September and both the rent review impact and the tenant satisfaction survey will be on the agenda.

In response to a question asked earlier in the day regarding paragraph 23 of Paper G2 *Linking Stipendiary Ministry Costs to M&M Receipts* Ms Furley-Smith assured General Assembly that the Ministries Committee would take the conversation forward.

The Moderator then invited Assembly to return to Paper H3: *Process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings* and invited the Revd Mary Thomas, Convenor of the Ministries Committee, and the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary of Ministries, to continue to lead the discussion.

Ms Furley-Smith assured Assembly that the Ministries Committee would consider, and bring further proposals, to Assembly Executive addressing part-time posts in this process. Ms Furley-Smith explained the Ministries Committee had changed the wording of section 9 of the policy to read:

9. Stipend Support

9.1. Where the minister is actively engaging in the Call process, their stipend should continue for six months whilst looking for a new Call.

9.2 This support may be continued up to a maximum of 14(f)-3(g)1h3(3(i)22(1st lo

Resolution 29

General Assembly agrees the additions to the URC Policy on Withdrawal of Call.

Agreed

The Moderator invited the Revd Mary Thomas, Convenor of the Ministries Committee, the Revd Adrian Bulley, Deputy General Secretary (Discipleship), and the Revd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries, to introduce Paper H10 *Process for the Nomination and Appointment of Synod Moderators and other General Assembly roles reserved for Ministers of Word and Sacraments*.

Ms Thomas indicated that in Annexe 2, 4.3 four members should read three members, and in 3.2 two people should read three people.

In response to a wide-ranging discussion the Ministries Committee agreed to incorporate neurodiversity, inclusion and disability along with anti-racism and unconscious bias training into the compulsory training required of panel members. further consult to alleviate concerns raised about the reduced number of panel members having a negative impact on diversity and inclusion. the Synod Executive - not the Support Group - to initiate the review.

In response to comments suggesting that ageism in the church was the greater issue not age discrimination in the appointment of Synod Moderators, Dr Bradbury responded that whilst ageism is an issue the particular concern of these resolutions is to ensure that the church does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of age.

Resolution 30

General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of Synod Moderators as contained in annexe two of paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025.

Agreed

Resolution 31

General Assembly adopts the process for the appointment of other General Assembly roles reserved for ministers of Word and Sacraments as contained in annexe three of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024, effective for processes commenced after 1 January 2025.

Agreed

Resolution 32

General Assembly requires that the notes for nominating groups for other Assembly-appointed posts as contained in annex four of Paper H10 of General Assembly 2024 be noted and disseminated as appropriate.

Agreed

Resolution 33

General Assembly resolves that:

- i. fixed terms be removed from all current Assembly-appointed minister posts, from the close of General Assembly 2024;
- ii. all future such appointments be untermmed;

General Assembly denounces all acts of antisemitism in the UK, expresses deep concern over its unacceptable rise in our communities, and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Jewish neighbours.

Agreed

Resolution 42

General Assembly denounces all acts of Islamophobia in the UK, expresses deep concern over its unacceptable rise in our communities, and wishes to extend a hand of solidarity to our highly valued Muslim neighbours.

Agreed

Resolution 43

Given the unacceptable rise in religious hate crime, General Assembly encourages every local church and Synod to reach out in friendship and welcome to their local faith communities using interfaith dialogue and/or other resources available to them for this purpose.

Agreed

Resolution 44

In order to encourage learning and deeper awareness, without taking a view itself on these terms, General Assembly instructs Mission Committee in collaboration with the Education and Learning Committee and Youth Assembly, to consider how best to resource the URC with a better understanding of the theologies and history that help to shape and feed the crisis in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory as these relate to:

- i. Christian Zionism and Supersessionism**
- ii. The Balfour Declaration**
- iii. Antisemitism and Islamophobia**
- iv. Peace, Violence, Security, and related, relevant topics so that Synods, local**

and engagement with people experiencing poverty and marginalisation, and report to the extraordinary General Assembly in November 2025.

Agreed

19 Matters dealt with En Bloc

The General Secretary moved the en bloc matters.

Paper A3 Terms of Reference for Children's and Youth Work Committee, A4 Worship, Faith & Order Terms of Reference, A5 Terms of Reference for Ministries Committee, A6 Revised Terms of Reference for the Pastoral, Reference and Welfare Committee, A7 Terms of Reference for the Education and Learning Committee, A10 New Nominations Committee and Safer Recruitment, H2 Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee – Change of name to the Accreditations sub-committee, H6 Basis of Union paragraphs 19-24: Ministry in the United Reformed Church, H8 Amending the Basis of Union Paragraph 24, P1 Local United Reformed Church Constitutions, J1 Report to General Assembly 2024, J2 Supplementary Report to General Assembly 2024, T1 Safeguarding Annual Report, and X1 Northstowe Church Network (LEP) becoming a local United Reformed Church,

Resolution 1

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for Children's and Youth Work Committee as contained in Paper A3 General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 59

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Worship, Faith, and Order Committee as contained in Paper A4 of General Assembly 2024

Resolution 2

General Assembly adopts the Terms of Reference for the Ministries Committee as contained in Paper A5 of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 3

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee as contained in Paper K1 of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 4

General Assembly adopts the revised terms of reference for the Education and Learning Committee as contained in Paper D2 of General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 10

General Assembly offers profound thanks to Helen Lidgett and Margaret Marshall for their work as Convenor and Secretary of the Nominations Committee as they step down from these roles at this General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 11

General Assembly appoints Victoria Paulding to serve as the Convenor of the new Nominations Committee from General Assembly 2024 to General Assembly 2028.

Resolution 12

General Assembly appoints the representatives reflecting the diversity of the Church to

Resolution 19

General Assembly agrees to the change of name of the Accreditations (CRCW & SCM) sub-committee to the Accreditations sub-committee.

Resolution 26

General Assembly adopts the changes to Schedule A of The Manual with regards to Ministry in the United Reformed Church (paragraphs 19-24). (changes in blue)

Ministry in the United Reformed Church

19. The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it. This service is given by worship, prayer, proclamation of the Gospel, and Christian witness; by mutual and outgoing care and responsibility; and by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life, according to the gifts and opportunities given to each one. The preparation and strengthening of its members for such ministry and discipleship shall always be a major concern of the United Reformed Church.

20. For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church. The United Reformed Church recognises that Christ gives himself to his Church through Word and Sacrament and through the total caring oversight by which his people grow in faith and love, the exercise of which oversight is the special concern of elders and Ministers. Those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills: the United Reformed Church having solemnly acknowledged their vocation and accepted their commitment shall appoint them **as committed disciples to their particular ministry and give them authority to exercise it within the church, setting them apart with prayer that they shall be given all needful gifts and graces for its fulfilment, which solemn setting part shall in the case of Ministers and elders be termed ordination and in the case of Church Related Community Workers be termed commissioning. In the United Reformed Church all ministries within the life of the Church shall be open to both men and women. Appropriate affirmations of faith shall be made by those entering upon all ministries within the life of the Church.**

21. Some are called to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. The ordination and induction of Ministers shall be in accordance with Schedules C and D. They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world.

Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case the service is given within an area of a Synod, and in the context it has approved.

22 Some are called to the ministry of Church Related Community Work. After approval, preparation and training, they may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed church, event, commission to the office of Church Related Community Worker, and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with schedules D&F. Church Related Community Workers are commissioned to care for, to challenge, and to pray for the community, to discern

Mr John Skipworth moved that Resolution 21 be referred back to the Committee for further work under Standing Order 12.2.

With thanks for the mission and ministry of local churches General Assembly remembered:
Falstone with Kielder, Northumberland
Warkworth, Northumberland

Trinity United, Cheetham, Manchester

Christ Church, Castleford, West Yorkshire
Cornerstone Church, Great Horton, Bradford, West Yorkshire
Stainland and Holywell Green, Halifax
Castle Square, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire
Ermine, Lincoln
Great Doddington, Northamptonshire
Independent Chapel (URC), Earl Shilton, Leicester