



The United Reformed Church

86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT, United Kingdom
General Secretary: The Revd John Proctor

8th July 2015

To Synod Clerks

Dear Friends,

Matter referred to Synods for consideration

This letter comes on behalf of the Revd Michael Hopkins, Clerk to the General Assembly, as well as on my behalf. Any responses should be sent to me.

We have already written to you about three sets of matters that were referred to Synods by the URC's Mission Council in May, because they would involve changes to the Structure of the Church. This letter concerns a fourth matter, referred for the consideration of Synods by General Assembly, which met on 27th June in Birmingham. Assembly was advised that this resolution would involve a significant change in the practice of the URC, and Assembly decided that if the Church were to adopt it, we should do so by the procedure that we use for constitutional changes.

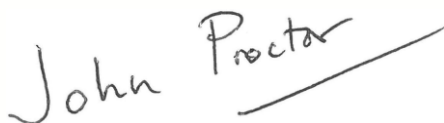
The procedure is set out in Section 3(1) of the Structure. A matter is considered at a central council of the Church, referred to Synods, and then considered again at a central council, where a formal and final decision may be taken. So this is now the middle stage of a three-stage process.

Unless your synod passes a resolution that the resolution "be not proceeded with", and you notify the General Secretary by 31st March 2016, your synod will have been deemed to agree by default. That means that if you agree with the measure, you do not need to reply. If you disagree with it, it is important that you do reply.

The wording of the resolution is set out on the next page. It concerns the marriage of same-sex couples and was Resolution 4A at the recent Assembly meeting. You will notice that the resolution has six paragraphs: nonetheless Assembly addressed it as a whole, and Synods should do the same. It is not possible to amend the resolution at this stage – only to accept or reject it.

Should you have any questions about the procedure and its formalities, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With thanks for your help in guiding the life of our Church,
Yours sincerely,


John Proctor

The marriage of same-sex couples

This resolution was approved by General Assembly meeting in Birmingham in June 2015:

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.

*The date for responses from Synods to the General Secretary is **31 March 2016**.*

*Michael Hopkins, Clerk to the General Assembly
John Proctor, General Secretary
July 2015*