

 <p>The United Reformed Church</p>	<p>Thames North Synod 19 October 2019 Letter from the General Secretary</p>	<p>Paper G1</p>
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20 May 2019

To Synod Clerks

Dear Friends,

General Assembly and Mission Council

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

A number of changes to the URC's arrangements for General Assembly were agreed at our Assembly in July 2018. Some of these involved changes to the constitutional Structure of the URC, and were therefore referred to Synods. The Synods' responses were then considered at Mission Council last week, where these changes were formally confirmed as decisions of the Church.

A number of other changes that are practical rather than constitutional, to Assembly or to Mission Council, have been agreed by a single decision, some of these at Assembly in 2018 and others at Mission Council last week.

Among all the various changes mentioned above, several that will particularly affect or interest your Synods are listed on the next page, for information and clarity.

There are two further proposed changes about which I need to consult your Synods. You will find these proposed changes on the last page of this communication, and I ask for your response to the consultation to reach me by 31 December 2019. Should you have any questions about the procedure, please do not hesitate to contact me.

With thanks for all that you do to support the life of our Church,
Yours sincerely,



[The first section of changes originates from General Assembly 2018;
see pages 53-70 of the Book of Reports — here is the link to the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/images/General-Assemblies/Assembly2018/BookofReports2018w.pdf>

Synod Clerk]

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Agreed changes to General Assembly and Mission Council

The following changes have now been formally agreed.

1. Assembly will be annual, from 2020 onwards. The next dates are:
 - 10-13 July 2020, at Aston University
 - 9-12 July 2021, at The Hayes, Swanwick
 - 8-11 July 2022, at The Hayes, Swanwick
2. Each Synod will have the same number of representatives to Assembly, and for the moment this figure will be 16.
3. A Synod may include its Moderator in its overall representation, if it wishes to. There will not be additional places designated for Synod Moderators.
4. Among a Synod's 16, no more than two thirds (no more than 10) are to be elders or lay, and no more than 10 are to be ministers (of word and sacraments or CRCWs).
5. A Synod must still include at least two people aged 25 or under in its representation.
6. Incoming Moderators of General Assembly will take office at the end of Assembly. Clare Downing and Peter Pay will therefore take office at the end of the 2020 Assembly. They will chair, between them, the 2021 and 2022 Assemblies, and hand over at the end of the 2022 Assembly.
7. Mission Council will meet for one 48-hour meeting each year, roughly midway between General Assemblies. Details of timing are not yet clear, nor is the moment at which this new pattern will replace the current custom of meeting twice a year.
 - In 2019-2020 there will be two meetings, as follows:
 - 15-17 November 2019, at The Hayes, Swanwick
 - 17-19 March 2020, at High Leigh, Hoddesdon
 - The following date is also provisionally planned:
 - 20-22 November 2020, at The Hayes, Swanwick
8. Each Synod may appoint four representatives to Mission Council. From Assembly 2020 onwards, these four people are to be chosen from among those who attended the most recent General Assembly.

Michael Hopkins, Clerk to General Assembly
John Proctor, General Secretary, May 2019

Proposed changes to General Assembly and Mission Council

The following changes were approved at Mission Council this month. These are now referred to Synods for consideration because they would involve changes to the Structure of our Church. Responses from Synods are requested by 31 December 2019 and these will be considered by General Assembly in 2020.

In relation to each of the proposals, unless your Synod passes a resolution that the matter “be not proceeded with”, and you notify the General Secretary by the date indicated, your Synod will be deemed to accept the proposal by default. This means that if you disagree with a measure, it is particularly important that you reply by the due date.

Proposal 1

There shall be one Moderator of General Assembly, serving for one year. This Moderator may be a minister (of word and sacraments or CRCW) or an elder. Each Synod may nominate one minister and one elder each year, but only one Moderator will be elected.

The reasons for this proposal are listed in the May 2019 Mission Council reports, Paper N1, section 1.5, pages 72-74. This paper is available on the URC website.

file:///C:/Users/Synod%20Clerk/Documents/aURC/Synod/2019/3%20Exec%20%208th%20June/Mission%20Council%20papers/N1_Assembly_TG_.pdf

[the relevant section of Paper N1, reads:

1.5.9 Option H – one Moderator serving for one year. The task group recommend this option for these reasons:

- a) it is most appropriate for an annual Assembly to have a Moderator serving until the close of the next Assembly
- b) it allows elders to serve alone, thus avoiding any possibility of the perception that they cannot serve without the accompaniment of a Minister
- c) it is likely to secure the widest and most inclusive pool of nominees
- d) when there are two Moderators, they look on each other as close working partners and may develop a very strong collegiality. If this yoking were unavailable because the Moderator were working solo, it is at least possible in that situation that the Moderator would develop a closer working relationship with the General Secretary, and perhaps also with the Clerk, than is necessary currently. It is therefore possible that electing one Moderator would give the Church an even closer co-ordination between the ongoing service of Church House and the representative work of the Moderator than our present system promotes.

1.5.10 In order to make this system as helpful as possible, the task group propose that:

- i) each synod be permitted to nominate one minister and one elder each year, to allow elders the greatest chance of getting onto the ballot paper at General Assembly
- ii) that every year the ballot be open to both elders and ministers for election. To restrict a particular year to either candidate may result in the Church telling a very good candidate,

potentially in the absence of other candidates, that they are not able to stand this year, which seems to the task group to be an attempt to restrict the Holy Spirit

- iii) that a “college” of former Moderators be developed, so that the gifts of former Moderators can be utilised to fulfil needs identified in paragraph 1.4.5 above in a more systematic way. Such a college may wish to meet together occasionally in order that the wisdom of former Moderators is not lost.

Synod Clerk]

We expect that the next call for Synods to nominate a new Moderator of General Assembly will be in the months leading up to the 2021 Assembly. If the above proposal is agreed, the person elected at the 2021 Assembly would come into office at the end of the 2022 Assembly, preside at the 2023 Assembly and hand over at the end of the 2023 Assembly. From then on, the Moderator would serve for one year only.

Proposal 2

The name of Mission Council shall be changed to Assembly Executive.

The main reasons for this proposal are listed in the May 2019 Mission Council reports, Paper N1, sections 2.12 and 2.13, pages 75-76. This paper is available on the URC website.

file:///C:/Users/Synod%20Clerk/Documents/aURC/Synod/2019/3%20Exec%20%208th%20June/Mission%20Council%20papers/N1_Assembly_TG_.pdf

*The date for responses from Synods to the General Secretary is **31 December 2019**.*

*Michael Hopkins, Clerk to the General Assembly
John Proctor, General Secretary, May 2019*