

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

Notes of the Annual Meeting of the General Assembly held from 12 – 14 April 2025 at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole Hotel

The ninety-sixth Annual Meeting of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches was held from 12-14 April 2025 at the Birmingham Hilton Metropole Hotel. Geoff Levermore, President of the General Assembly, was in the chair for the business sessions, assisted by Elizabeth Slade, Chief Officer of the General Assembly.

Saturday 12 April

The first plenary session commenced with an opening welcome from Rev Kate Brady-McKenna and the lighting of the Chalice.

The Standing Orders for the Conduct of Business, as set out in document AGM 5/25 were adopted. The Steering Committee members – Marion Baker, Angela Maher and Mike Tracey – were confirmed.

The Chair, and Gavin Howell (our Youth Coordinator and Safeguarding Officer), discussed our expectations for being together over the Meetings, set the scene and gave information about how to deal with any safeguarding concerns.

Motion 19 on the Golden Rule, was passed. A minute's silence was held for the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza.

The Chief Officer gave a report on the current status and context of the General Assembly, encouraging members to tend to the living culture of our faith in a way that allows change to happen in the way our faith is expressed.

David Warhurst and Ann Peart gave a report from the Electoral Panel on the process of the Executive Committee election. It was pleasing to see that there had been enough candidates standing to require a contested election for the first time in several elections. The turnout could still be improved, and this would be considered. The Panel would be giving a detailed report on the Election to the new Executive Committee.

For the Keynote Address, Alison Webster, a progressive practical theologian who is currently General Secretary of Modern Church, and also Mission Theologian in Residence for Citizens UK, gave an enlightening talk on "Neon Gods and Organic Resistance", followed by questions from the attenders.

Sunday 13 April

The second plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Sian Murray, and a welcome from the President.

The Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2023/2024 were introduced by Elizabeth Slade, who presented and recapped the Annual Report, and key priorities for the year.

The Honorary Treasurer, John Bates, gave an update on the GA's finances. The GA Quota would be increasing from £35 per capita (where it had been for at least ten years) to £40, and would then rise with inflation in future. The Ministerial students Fund had a year of funding left, and we would be looking to raise £300K for funding for the next four years. The Investment Advisor and Auditor arrangements would be considered.

Motion 10 to receive and adopt the Annual Report And accounts of the General Assembly Executive Committee was passed.

Motion 11 to allow the EC to appoint Auditors and set their remuneration, was passed.

Motion 12 to appoint John Bates as Honorary Treasurer 2025-2026 was passed.

Two emergency motions had been put. Angela Maher explained the process on behalf of the Steering Committee. A vote was held on which to consider, and the emergency motion on the US political situation was selected. A vote on whether to debate this emergency motion was then held, and passed, so the motion was debated. This motion was then passed.

A presentation was given by Karl Newton on behalf of the National Churches Trust.

The third plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Rev Ant Howe and Rev Stepan Mairovsky (of the Hungarian Unitarians).

The Nightingale Centre report was presented by Richard Crompton, and Cathie Masztalerz. It had been another successful year.

Motion 8, to name Marion Baker as an Honorary Member of the General Assembly, was passed.

The Ministerial Fellowship Report, on the work of the Fellowship, was given by Rev Daniel Costley.

The Housing Survey was sent and was being considered. This was a result of Housing having been identified as a major stumbling block for new Ministers and Ministers relocating to other churches.

The report of the Stipend Review Committee and the Housing Survey were presented by Jenny Jacobs, who thanked all those who had contributed feedback. The report was adopted.

Helen Mason, Director of Unitarian College, gave a presentation on Lay Leadership Training. There was then a celebration of new members of the Lay Leaders Register, led by Rev Jo James, and Certificates were presented to: Garry Hammond, Rosie Whiting and Vince McCully.

The Anniversary Service, preached by Rev Maud Robinson, took place in the evening.

Monday 14 April

The fourth plenary session commenced with opening reflections led by Peter Flower.

A session of updates from Staff took place. Gavin Howell reported on Safeguarding. Nick Butler-Watts reported on the Innovation Challenge Fund. Lizzie Kingston-Harrison reported on congregational connections.

Helen Mason, Director of Unitarian College, gave a presentation on the work of the College during the year, and their future plans.

Motions 1-6, for the GA to move to a Charitable Incorporated Association, were discussed. A motion to refer back did not receive the necessary 2/3 majority (For: 62, Against:45, = 57.9%). The original motions then passed (For: 78, Against: 27, Abstentions: 15).

Motion 7, allowing the EC to co-opt back up to quoracy, was passed (For: 100, Against: 3, Abstentions: 5).

The fifth and closing plenary session commenced.

Motion 9, to name Jeffrey Teagle as an Honorary Member of the General Assembly, was passed.

Motions 13 (to thank John Bates as Honorary Treasurer for 2024-2025, and district and local officers; 14 (giving greetings overseas); 15 (Thanking Rev Maud Robinson and all those involved in the Anniversary Service); and 16 thanking the Volunteers and GA Staff) were passed. Staff Member Andrew Mason was thanked for his 25 years of service.

Motion 18 to thank Prof Geoff Levermore for his services as President during the year was passed. Motion 18 to appoint Prof Geoff Levermore as President of the General Assembly for the year 2025-2026, was proposed by Rev Jo James on behalf of the Executive Committee, and passed. The installation of the new President took place, and the new President addressed the Meetings. A ceremony took place to commemorate the handover to the new Executive Committee members

A closing act of worship took place, led by Revs Celia & John Midgley, and the President declared the Meetings closed.

Resolutions

Once passed, Motions become Resolutions. The text of all of the Resolutions passed was circulated after the Meetings, published in the following Annual Report, and made available on the GA website.