



*The North Western Synod*  
of the **United Reformed Church**

# **J6 Standing Orders:**

of The North Western Synod





# Standing Orders

## of the North Western Synod

### 1. The Agenda of the Synod Meeting

- 1.1. At its meetings the North Western Synod shall consider reports and draft motions prepared by its committees, motions submitted by Area Pastoral Committees, and motions and amendments of which due notice has been given submitted by local churches and individual members of the Synod.
- 1.2. For the good ordering of the Synod's time, the Moderator, in consultation with the Synod Clerk, shall group the draft motions into three Groups which shall determine the manner in which the Synod shall consider them:
- 1.3. **A** – en bloc, **B** – majority voting, and **C** – consensus.
- 1.4. All matters covered by paragraphs three (1) and (2) of the Structure of the United Reformed Church shall be placed in **group B**. In the case of any other matter the Moderator may rule at any time that a motion be taken from **group B** and placed in **group C**. At the same time the grouping of draft motions is published any matters already known to be urgent under Standing Order 2.3 shall also be published, with reasons given.
- 1.5. The motions in **group A** shall be taken en bloc, following Standing Order 2.
- 1.6. The motions in **group B** shall be determined by majority vote, following Standing Order 3.
- 1.7. The motions in **group C** shall be considered by consensus decision making process, following Standing Order 4.
- 1.8. Standing Orders 5 to 15 shall apply at all times, regardless of the mode of decision-making in use.
- 1.9. The Synod Executive shall prepare before each meeting of the Synod an order of business.
- 1.10. Motions arising from a report which have been duly seconded and submitted by individual members of Synod under Standing Order 3.2 shall be taken at a point in the business determined by the Moderator on the advice of the Synod Clerk.
- 1.11. If notice has been given of two or more motions on the same subject, or two or more amendments to the same motion, these shall be taken in the order decided by the Moderator on the advice of the Synod Clerk.
- 1.12. The Synod Clerk may, during the meeting of the Synod, propose that the order of business be changed.

## 2. En bloc Business

- 2.1. The proposal from the Moderator of items of business to be taken en bloc should be notified to Synod members in advance of their meeting.
- 2.2. Notice in writing to the effect that one or more of the motions included in **group A** should be considered separately may be given to the Synod Clerk prior to the commencement of the meeting. If such notice, which must be signed by at least six members of the Synod, is duly received, then the motion(s) in question shall be removed from **group A**. It shall be for the Moderator, in consultation with the Synod Clerk, to determine in which of **groups B and C** any such separated motions should be placed.
- 2.3. When the single motion to approve en bloc business is before the Synod, the vote shall be taken immediately, the motion being determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Synod present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards.

## 3. Majority Voting

- 3.1. A report presented to the Synod by a committee under Standing Order 1.1, shall be received for debate, unless notice has been duly given under Standing Order 5.4 of a motion to refer back to that committee the whole or part of the report and its attached motion(s). Such a motion for reference back shall be debated and voted upon before the relevant report is itself debated. To carry such a motion two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. When a report has been received for debate, and before any motions consequent upon it are proposed, any member may speak to a matter arising from the report which is not the subject of a motion.
- 3.2. During the meeting of the Synod and on the report of a committee, notice (including the names of proposer and seconder) shall be given to the Clerk of any new motions which arise from the material of the report, and of any amendments which affect the substance of motions already presented. During the course of the debate a new motion or amendment may be stated orally without supporting speech in order to ascertain whether a member is willing to second it.
- 3.3. No motion or amendment shall be spoken to by its proposer, debated, or put to the Synod unless it is known that there is a seconder. The only exception to this are motions presented on behalf of a committee, of which printed notice has been given.

- 3.4. A seconder may second without speaking and, by declaring the intention of doing so, reserve the right of speaking until a later period in the debate.
- 3.5. An amendment shall be either to omit words or to insert words or to do both, but no amendment shall be in order which has the effect of introducing an irrelevant proposal or of negating the motion. The Moderator may rule that a proposed amendment should be treated as an alternative motion under Standing Order 3.10.
- 3.6. If an amendment is carried, the motion as amended shall take the place of the original motion and shall become the substantive motion upon which any further amendment may be moved. If an amendment is rejected, a further amendment with a different outcome may be moved.
- 3.7. An amendment which has been moved and seconded shall be disposed of before any further amendment may be moved, but notice may be given of intention to move a further amendment should the one before the Synod be rejected.
- 3.8. The mover may, with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Synod, alter the motion or amendment proposed.
- 3.9. A motion or amendment may be withdrawn by the proposer with the concurrence of the seconder and the consent of the Synod. Any such consent shall be signified without discussion. It shall not be in order for any member to speak upon it after the proposer has asked permission to withdraw unless such permission shall have been refused.
- 3.10. Alternative (but not directly negative) motions may be moved and seconded in competition with a motion before the Assembly. It shall be for the Moderator, on the advice of the Clerk, to rule when motions shall be considered as alternatives under the Standing Order.
  - 3.10.1. When such draft alternative motions have been received by the Synod Clerk, the Moderator may ask the a Synod Officer to convene a meeting (physical or electronic) of the proposers, to ascertain if it may be possible to agree on a single draft motion to put before the Synod, or to clarify the areas of disagreement.
  - 3.10.2. If the Synod has alternative motions before it, each proposer shall be given the opportunity to present their motion in an order decided by the Moderator.

- 3.10.3. After any amendments duly moved under Standing Orders 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 have been dealt with and debate on the alternative motions has ended, the movers shall reply to the debate in reverse order to that in which they spoke initially. The first vote shall be a vote in favour of each of the motions, put in the order in which they were proposed, the result not being announced for one until it is announced for all. If any of them obtains a majority of those voting, it becomes the sole motion before the Synod. If none of them does so, the motion having the fewest votes is discarded. Should the lowest two be equal, the Moderator gives a casting vote. The voting process is repeated until one motion achieves a majority of those voting.
- 3.10.4. Once a sole motion remains, further discussion is permissible and votes for and against that motion shall be taken in the normal way and in accordance with Standing Order 7.
- 3.11. In the course of the business any member may move that the question under consideration be not put. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Synod. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried, the business shall immediately end and the Synod shall proceed to the next business.
- 3.12. In the course of any discussion, any member may move that the question be now put. This is sometimes described as “the closure motion”. If the Moderator senses that there is a wish or need to close a debate, the Moderator may ask whether any member wishes so to move; the Moderator may not simply declare a debate closed. Provided that it appears to the Moderator that the motion is a fair use of this rule, the vote shall be taken upon it immediately it has been seconded. When an amendment is under discussion, this motion shall apply only to that amendment. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. The mover of the original motion or amendment, as the case may be, retains the right of reply before the vote is taken on the motion or amendment.

- 3.13. During the course of a debate on a motion any member may move that decision on this motion be deferred to the next Synod. This rule does not apply to debates on amendments since the Synod needs to decide the final form of a motion before it can responsibly vote on deferral. The motion then takes precedence over other business. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded and the proposer of the motion under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule or that deferral would have the effect of annulling the motion. To carry this motion, two-thirds of the votes cast must be given in its favour. At the discretion of the Moderator, the Synod Clerk may be instructed by a further motion, duly seconded, to refer the matter for consideration by other committees of the Synod. The Synod Clerk shall provide for the deferred motion to be presented again at the next Meeting of the Synod.
- 3.14. The motions described in Standing Orders 3.11, 3.12 and 3.13 above are exceptions to Standing Order 3.3, in that they may be moved and spoken to without the proposer having first obtained and announced the consent of a seconder. They must, however, be seconded before being put to the vote. Precedence as between motions under 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13 is determined by the fact that after one of them is before the Synod no other motion can be moved until that one has been dealt with.
- 3.15. Motions before the Synod under Standing Order 3 shall be determined by a majority of the votes of members of the Synod present and voting as indicated by a show of voting cards, except:
- 3.15.1. if the Synod decides before the vote that a paper ballot be the method of voting, or
  - 3.15.2. if the show of cards indicates a very close vote, and the Moderator decides, or a member of Synod proposes and the Synod agrees, that a paper ballot shall be the method of voting.

## 4. Consensus Decision Making

- 4.1. Those motions in group C shall be determined using this Standing Order.

### **The Information Session**

- 4.2. The first stage of the consensus decision making procedure is the information session.

At the start of this session, if the Moderator judges that the matter before the Synod is urgent, requiring decision during the current meeting of the Synod, the Moderator shall inform the Synod that this is the case and advise that if following the consensus procedures results in continuing disagreement it may be necessary to move to a majority decision under Standing Order 4.4.4.

**During the information session, members of Synod may ask questions only to seek clarification or further information.**

### **The Discussion Session**

- 4.3. Once the Moderator decides that the information session has ended, the Synod moves into the discussion session, in which the substance of the matter may be discussed.
  - 4.3.1. The methods used may include prayer, buzz groups, group discussions, speeches to the whole Synod, time for thinking during a break, etc. The Moderator may invite Synod to indicate opinions by the use of coloured cards at this stage, and shall ensure that the full ranges of voices are given opportunity to contribute.
  - 4.3.2. Minor changes of wording may be agreed as the discussion proceeds. If a proposed change is, in the opinion of the Moderator upon the advice of the Clerk, a major change, then a proposer and seconder are required.

### **The Decision Session**

- 4.4. When the Moderator senses that the Assembly may be ready to reach a decision, the Moderator shall state that Synod is moving into the decision session, and shall check whether the Synod is nearing consensus. If during the decision session substantially new material or proposals emerge, the Moderator may rule that the Synod shall return to the discussion session.
  - 4.4.1. If there is unanimous support for, or rejection of, the proposal it is declared passed or rejected by consensus.

- 4.4.2. If there is strong, but not unanimous, support, the Moderator shall ask if those who do not support the proposal as their first option are nonetheless prepared to accept the proposal. If so, the issue is declared resolved by consensus.
- 4.4.3. Where some members of Synod indicate an unwillingness to accept a proposal there shall be further discussion and then the Moderator shall seek to ascertain that they accept that they have been heard and agree to live with the outcome, by asking if they are prepared to have the issue declared passed, recognising disagreement. Subject to Standing Order 9.3, a member may ask to have their dissent recorded in the minutes.
- 4.4.4. If there is continuing disagreement, the Synod may, at the discretion of the Moderator, look for further possibilities including but not limited to:
  - 4.4.4.1. adjourning the discussion to another time or place, perhaps with more work before reconsideration;
  - 4.4.4.2. asking a named person to continue to work on the issue with relevant people until the next Synod;
  - 4.4.4.3. referring the issue to another council or group to deal with;
  - 4.4.4.4. deciding the issue is unnecessary/inappropriate to continue dealing with;
  - 4.4.4.5. declaring that there are diverse views which Christians may hold with equal integrity;
  - 4.4.4.6. if the issue has previously been notified as urgent, moving to majority decision;
  - 4.4.4.7. in the event of urgency not previously notified, moving to majority decision; in that event, the Moderator shall give reasons, and test the mind of Synod in forming that judgement.
- 4.5. The Synod and Moderator may be assisted by a facilitation group, which shall be appointed at the beginning of each Synod by the Synod.
- 4.6. Coloured cards are not essential in consensus decision making but they can be helpful. Orange cards, held at the request of the Moderator, indicate warmth towards a point of view or approval of a proposal. Blue cards, held at the request of the Moderator, indicate coolness about what has been heard or the need for greater clarity or disapproval of a proposal.

## 5. Presentation of Business

- 5.1. All reports of committees, together with the draft motions arising therefrom, shall be delivered to the Synod Clerk by a date to be determined, so that they may be printed and circulated to members in time for consideration at least 7 days before the date of the Synod meeting.
- 5.2. A local church may deliver to the Synod Clerk not less than 14 days before the commencement of the meeting of the Synod notice in writing of a motion for consideration at the Synod. This notice shall include the names of those appointed to propose and second the motion at the Synod.
- 5.3. A local church wishing to put forward a motion for consideration by the General Assembly shall submit the motion to its synod for consideration and, if the synod so decides, transmission to the Assembly, at such time as will enable the synod to comply with Standing Order 3.2 above.
- 5.4. A member of the Synod may deliver to the Synod Clerk not less than 7 days before the date of the meeting of the Synod a notice in writing of a motion (which notice must include the name of a seconder) to be included in the Synod agenda. If the subject matter of such a notice of motion appears to the Synod Clerk to be an infringement of the rights of a local church through which the matter could properly have been raised, the Clerk shall inform the member accordingly and bring the matter before the Synod Executive which shall advise the Synod as to the procedure to be followed.
- 5.5. Proposals for amendments to the Basis and Structure of the URC, which may be made by the Mission Council or a committee of the General Assembly or a synod, shall be in the hands of the General Secretary not later than 12 weeks before the opening of the Assembly. The General Secretary, in addition to the normal advice to members of the Assembly, shall, as quickly as possible, inform all Synod Clerks of the proposed amendment.
- 5.6. It shall not be in order, whether in en bloc business, majority voting, or consensus decision-making, to move a motion or amendment which:
  - 5.6.1. contravenes any part of the Basis of Union, or
  - 5.6.2. involves the Synod in expenditure without prior consideration by the appropriate committee, or
  - 5.6.3. pre-empts discussion of a matter to be considered later in the agenda, or
  - 5.6.4. amends or reverses a decision reached by the Synod at its preceding two meetings unless the Moderator, Clerk and Synod Officers

together decide that changed circumstances or new evidence justify earlier reconsideration of the matter, or

5.6.5. is not related to the report of a committee and has not been the subject of 21 days' notice under Standing Order 5.4, or

5.6.6. simply reaffirms existing work.

The decision of the Moderator (in the case of 5.6.1, 5.6.2, 5.6.3, 5.6.5, and 5.6.6) and of the Moderator with the Clerk and the Synod Officers (in the case of 5.6.4) on the application of this Standing Order shall be final.

## 6. Timing of speeches and of other business

- 6.1. Time allowed for speeches made in the presentation of reports concerning past work of Synod committees which are to be open to question, comment, or discussion shall be determined by the Moderator in consultation with the Synod Executive.
- 6.2. The Synod may meet in parallel sessions to consider the past work of Synod committees for questions and comments. Any draft motions arising therefrom must be dealt with in a plenary session of the Synod.
- 6.3. Time allowed for speeches made in support of the motions from any Synod committee, including the Synod Executive, shall be determined by the Moderator in consultation with the Synod Executive.
- 6.4. The proposers of any other motion of which due notice has been given shall be allowed an aggregate of ten minutes, unless a longer period be recommended by the Synod Clerk or determined by the Moderator.
- 6.5. Each subsequent speaker in any debate shall be allowed five minutes unless the Moderator shall determine otherwise; it shall, in particular, be open to the Moderator to determine that all speeches in a debate or from a particular point in a debate shall be of not more than a different specified number of minutes.
- 6.6. When a speech is made on behalf of a committee, it shall be so stated. Otherwise a speaker shall begin by giving name and accreditation to the Synod.
- 6.7. Members of staff who are not members of Synod may speak on the report of a committee for which they have responsibility at the request of the Convenor concerned. They may speak on other reports with the consent of the Moderator.

- 6.8. In each debate under Standing Order 3, whether on a motion or on an amendment, and in each decision session in debates under Standing Order 4, no one shall address the Synod more than once without the permission of the Moderator, except that at the close of each debate the proposer of the motion or the amendment, as the case may be, shall have the right to reply, but must strictly confine the reply to answering previous speakers and must not introduce new matters. Such reply shall close the debate on the motion or the amendment.
- 6.9. The foregoing Standing Order (6.7) shall not prevent the asking or answering of a question which arises from the matter before the Synod or from a speech made in the debate upon it.
- 6.10. An invited speaker, whether speaking to a draft motion or not, may address the Synod for such period of time as may be agreed by the Synod Clerk.

## 7. Voting

- 7.1. Voting on any motion whose effect is to alter, add to, modify or supersede the Basis, the Structure and any other form or expression of the polity and doctrinal formulations of the United Reformed Church, is governed by paragraph 3(1) and (2) of the Structure.
- 7.2. To provide for voting in the case of a paper ballot, and to assist in taking a count of votes when the Moderator decides this is necessary, the Area Secretaries shall normally act as tellers.
- 7.3. Any electronic voting system approved by the Assembly arrangements committee shall be deemed to meet the requirements of these Standing Orders.

## 8. Questions

- 8.1. A member may, if two days' notice in writing has been given to the Synod Clerk, ask the Moderator or the Convenor of any committee any question on any matter relating to the business of the Synod to which no reference is made in any report before the Synod.
- 8.2. A member may, when given opportunity by the Moderator, ask the presenter of any report before the Synod a question seeking additional information or explanation relating to matters contained within the report.
- 8.3. Questions asked under Standing Orders 8.1 and 8.2 shall be put and answered without discussion.

## 9. Points of order, personal explanations, dissent

- 9.1. A member shall have the right to rise and call attention to a point of order, and immediately on this being done any other member addressing the Synod shall cease speaking until the Moderator has determined the question of order. The decision on any point of order rests entirely with the Moderator. Any member calling to order unnecessarily is liable to censure of the Synod.
- 9.2. A member feeling that some material part of a former speech by such member at the same meeting has been misunderstood or is being grossly misinterpreted by a later speaker may rise and request the Moderator's permission to make a personal explanation. If the Moderator so permits, a member so rising shall be entitled to be heard forthwith.
- 9.3. The right to record in the minutes a dissent from any decision of the Synod shall only be granted to a member by the Moderator if the reason stated, either verbally at the time or later in writing, appears to the Moderator to fall within the provisions of paragraph 10 of the Basis of Union.
- 9.4. The decision of the Moderator on a point of order, or on the admissibility of a personal explanation, or on the right to have a dissent recorded, shall not be open to discussion.

## 10. Admission of public and press

- 10.1. Members of the public and representatives of the press shall be admitted to the Synod unless the Synod otherwise decides, and they shall occupy such places as are assigned to them.

## 11. Advocacy and Promotion

- 11.1. Prior approval of the Synod Clerk is required to distribute information at Synod. Ways to share information include; items shared verbally during news sharing, information stands, & leaflets to be included in Synod Bags.

## 12. Closed session

- 12.1. A closed session is one in which the business is highly sensitive. Only members of Synod, the Legal Adviser, and any technical or venue staff required to enable Synod to meet safely may be present. Neither content nor process may be divulged to non-members, save specific information authorised by the Moderator in consultation with the Clerk and (if necessary) the Legal Adviser. No social media in any form may be used during a closed session, nor to report upon such closed session. Any live

streaming must be switched off. Minutes will be taken, but these will be held in retentis by the Clerk, and shall not be made available to non-members.

- 12.2. A closed session may be called for at any time in any decision-making mode, and voted upon by the Synod, requiring a simple majority. This motion takes precedence over every motion before the Synod. As soon as the member has given reasons for proposing it and it has been seconded, and the proposer of the motion or amendment under consideration has been allowed opportunity to comment on the reasons put forward, the vote upon it shall be taken, unless it appears to the Moderator that an unfair use is being made of this rule. Should the motion be carried the business shall immediately pause while non-members leave the room.
- 12.3. If a matter is known to be highly sensitive in advance, then the Synod Officers, consulting a Legal Adviser if necessary, may announce in advance that a certain piece of business will be conducted in a closed session giving their reasons.
- 12.4. Where possible a closed session will begin after a break, in which event everyone must leave the hall. Once the hall is empty, only those entitled to be present shall be admitted. Members of Synod may leave the hall during a closed session, but if they do so they may not be re-admitted.

### 13. Use of electronic devices and communications during debate

- 13.1. Although many meetings take place in wi-fi enabled rooms, and many attending will have access to systems of electronic communication and to social media sites during business sessions, their primary responsibility is to attend to the business and participate in the decision making. Those present must refrain both from posting on social media sites during business sessions and from commenting upon partially completed business. It is the responsibility of the communications committee's staff to make official announcements. This restriction is only in place when in session; those attending are free to join in the online debates during breaks and after the close of business in respect of business that the Synod has completed. All electronic devices must be silent when a meeting is in session.
- 13.2. Everything written and shared on social media sites at any time is the sole responsibility of the author, and is subject to the same defamation laws as any other form of written communication.

## 14. Record of the Synod

- 14.1. A record of attendance at the meetings of the Synod shall be kept in such a manner as the Synod Executive may determine.
- 14.2. The draft minutes of each Synod Meeting shall be made available as soon as is practicable, but before the next meeting of Synod. They shall, after any necessary correction, be approved at the opening of the subsequent Synod Meeting. Before the close of Synod, any member may ask to have read out the written minute on any particular item.
- 14.3. A signed copy of the minutes shall be preserved in the custody of the Clerk as the official record of the Synod's proceedings.
- 14.4. As soon as possible after the Synod meeting ends, the substance of the minutes together with any other relevant papers shall be sent to every member of the Synod. A summary may also be included in the Synod News email.

## 15. Suspension and amendment of Standing Orders

- 15.1. In any case of urgency or upon proposal of a motion of which due notice has been given, any one or more of the Standing Orders may be suspended at any meeting, provided that three-fourths of the members of the Synod present and voting shall so decide.
- 15.2. A Synod meeting cannot amend the standing orders of the United Reformed Church. Motions to amend the Standing Orders shall be referred to the Clerk of the Assembly for report before being voted on by the Assembly (or, in case of urgency, by the Mission Council). The Clerk of the Assembly may from time to time suggest amendments.

*The Standing Orders of a Synod Meeting are essentially the Standing Orders agreed for the General Assembly, by the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church.*

*This document is an edited form of the Assembly Standing Orders, (which can be found on the [URC website](#)) amended simply to change the terminology used, for example substituting The Assembly for The Synod, and amending timings, for example those which refer to multiple days of the Assembly, a notice period which is far in excess of what a Synod could reasonably require, and the rules relating to the timing of business and speeches.*

Based on the document edited by The Clerk of the General Assembly on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2019.