

## Ministers and Church Membership

A number of queries about this have recently been raised, and have been raised over the years. The purpose of this note is to remind those in Synods, RCLs, and Church House about this.

The General Assembly has a longstanding policy, first agreed in 1976, and affirmed and amplified in 1985:

### *Resolution of General Assembly, 4 May 1976:*

The Assembly agrees that it shall be normal for ministers in charges to have their names placed on the roll of the church they serve and that ministers of the United Reformed Church who are retired or serving otherwise than as ministers of local churches, shall normally be members of a local church of the United Reformed Church or, because of residence or for other good reason, of some other recognised Christian fellowship.

### *Resolution of General Assembly, 1985:*

Assembly, taking note of the fact that ministers inducted to URC pastorates are on the one hand under the oversight not of the local church but of the District Council and that on the other hand they are in full fellowship the local church(es) to which they minister, affirms that the names of such ministers should be recorded on the roll of members of the church(es) to which they minister.

Where the pastorate includes more than one local church each with its own roll, the name of the minister(s) shall appear on one such roll to be reckoned for statistical purposes, and on the other rolls the name shall appear with the note - "The Revd A.N. is a member in full fellowship of this church but for statistical purposes only his/her membership is reckoned at the "x" United Reformed Church in this pastorate.

### *Further questions:*

1. The question is raised about a large multi-church church pastorate with more than one minister. Unless other arrangements have been made, each minister is a member of each local church, and a trustee of each local church charity.

2. The question is raised about whether the normal ceremony of reception into membership is needed for ministers in pastoral charge. It is not essential, because in issuing a call that includes being a member. Whether a minister opts for a ceremony or not is a local decision, the legalities don't change, and any ceremony is in effect optional "window dressing". For those not in pastoral charge the normal procedures apply as for any other member.

3. The recent decision of the General Assembly to facilitate a more flexible approach for those not able to be members in the normal way is intended to help those affected by the final part of the 1976 resolution among others.

4. The question is also raised about voting in Elders and Church Meetings. As a member, the minister has a deliberative vote like any other member, and in the event of a tie, the chair of the meeting also has a casting vote if needed. There is a convention at the General Assembly that those on the platform do not normally participate in visible votes. I would commend this to Synods, Elders Meetings, and Church Meetings. There is a further question of how a casting vote should be cast. There is a convention of how the Speaker of the House of Commons uses their casting vote, which I would commend to all who chair meetings, in this order of possibility:

a) The casting vote should not decide the question - in other words, to give the opportunity for further debate on an issue.

b) The casting vote should be against the motion, since any decision must be approved by the majority.

c) The casting vote should continue the status quo.

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