

# **Background Papers for the 2018 Motions**

**Motion 1 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Please see Document **AGM 14/18**, the report on the three-day meetings.

**Motion 2 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The considerable contribution of Rev Dr Ann Peart will be presented to the Annual Meetings, rather than in a background paper, in line with normal practice.

**Motion 3 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The considerable contribution of Alan Ruston will be presented to the Annual Meetings, rather than in a background paper, in line with normal practice.

**Motion 4 FROM THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Small Congregational Status

In June 2017 Bangor Unitarians contacted the Executive Committee regarding voting and representation rights at the Annual Meeting of the General Assembly. As a “Small Congregation” they have no right to vote but can send observers. They asked if the rule could be change to allow them representation. They highlighted the lack of fairness in being denied voting representation when many congregations with a smaller number of members seem to retain their Full Congregation status and have full voting rights. They have been regularly paying an annual Quota since they joined the General Assembly and remain strong in their commitment to Unitarian values.

The Executive Committee considered the request and was, in principle, in agreement. They recognised that there is no mechanism to remove “Full” status even if quota membership is below the 12 required for admission as a new congregation to the “Full” status and that to do so would be a retrograde step. The Executive Committee has therefore presented proposals for Constitutional changes which would have the effect of removing the “Small Congregation” status and reducing the number of members required for “Full” recognition to eight. Transitional arrangements have been proposed to admit the two existing “Small Congregations” – Banbury and Bangor – to “Full” membership.

## Motion 5 FROM THE FOY SOCIETY

Unitarians have long been in the vanguard of campaigns to promote equality in society in areas such as gender, race, LGBT. Hardly surprising, then, that the Penal Affairs Panel meeting at last year's GA meetings and the Foy Society Conference in May, on the subject of *Inequality in Society* were both well attended. The PAP meeting was addressed by Professor Kate Pickett. She introduced us to the wide range of research evidence from around the world which supports the contention that economic and social inequality in any society is bad for **everyone**. Professor Pickett was joined by her colleague, Professor Richard Wilkinson, at Foy Conference where there was more time for them to go into much greater depth on the extensive data and analysis which has been undertaken on this subject.

Profs Pickett and Wilkinson are co-founders of *The Equality Trust*. This is a registered charity that works to improve the quality of life in the UK by reducing economic and social inequality. As a registered charity it is completely independent of political parties. It seeks to achieve its aims by:

- campaigning for changes and policies that can reduce inequality.
- informing the public and politicians about the damage caused by inequality, supported by the best and latest data and research available.
- co-operating with organisations and groups from across our society including businesses, trade unions, charities and others to prioritise inequality reduction.

Recent revelations about high salaries and bonuses paid to the likes of university vice-chancellors and company executives have reinforced the Trust's finding that the UK has a very high level of income inequality compared to other developed countries. There is a wealth of data on the Trust's website - [www.equalitytrust.org.uk](http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk) – which demonstrates how this conclusion was arrived at and the damaging consequences of it.

Becoming an Affiliated organisation would give the GA direct access to research teams, publications, affiliates-only briefings and networking events and a listing on the Trust's website linked to our own website.

How much will it cost? Here's a surprise for you – this motion has been fully and accurately costed! Affiliates are requested to contribute £100 per annum.

Foy believes that the work of the Trust aligns closely with Unitarian social concern and is worthy of our support. Affiliation would identify us clearly with the drive to reduce inequality and build a better, fairer society.

**Motion 6 FROM FULWOOD OLD CHAPEL, SHEFFIELD**

The objective of this motion is to allow the General Assembly to ask the Executive Committee (EC) to re-examine the conditions of membership. We assume that the EC will ask the Constitutional Review group to do this on their behalf. The motion is not intended to promote any particular idea for change. We very much hope that during the debate, delegates will feel free to express their own ideas about how this could work.

Membership of the General Assembly is determined by the Constitution. The Constitution says:

*There shall be three classes of Full membership:*

1. *Congregations, Regional Associations approved by the Assembly, and Societies approved by the Assembly, acting through their appointed representatives, viz: one Lay Delegate from each Congregation having less than thirty members, and two Lay Delegates from each Congregation having thirty or more members, who have reached the age of eighteen years, and one delegate from each Society or Regional Association.*
2. *Any Minister, Lay Pastor or Lay Leader, provided that they are on the appropriate Roll of the General Assembly*
3. *All Honorary Officers and members of the Executive Committee.*

*Associate Members: All persons who have subscribed such a sum as shall be determined from time to time by the General Assembly Executive Committee to the funds of the Assembly in the financial year preceding its Annual Meeting shall be Associate Members and shall have the right to be summoned to its meetings and to speak but not to vote thereat.*

*Honorary Members: Any person elected at an Annual Meeting of the Assembly to be an Honorary Member shall be entitled to the same privileges as a Full Member.*

For some time now, the idea of votes for Associate Members has been talked about, but there has been no progress toward change.

As the number of congregations continues to decrease and the number of Unitarian and Unitarian-minded people not part of an established congregation increases, it is not only sensible, but highly desirable to find new ways of encouraging new Unitarian voices and to devise some mechanism to involve these people in the activities and the decision making of the General Assembly.

Our existing congregations are clustered around large urban centres where enough people can physically meet regularly to share worship. There are many people who are not able because of distance or working patterns to become active members of congregations and yet they are still Unitarian and wish to play a part in promoting and supporting the Unitarian ethos. Today's Unitarian Facebook Communities have more members than any existing congregation and it is inevitable that many new forms of sharing Unitarian beliefs and practice will develop in the coming years.

*Rev John Harley gives his views about the future generation of Unitarians*

*"In my twelve years in the role of GA Youth Coordinator I became aware that a growing number of young people attending our youth events were not attached to a congregation or fellowship. They appeared to express and explore their Unitarian values at organised Youth Programme events, mainly at the Nightingale Centre, and at peer organised events,*

*many of which took place at Flagg Barn. They shared their Unitarian values and aspirations through social media channels and at events of their own choosing such as festivals; they made sense of their lives and built a sense of community through small credo groups and a spontaneous and creative style of worship often in a circle. Many young people want to deepen their Unitarian faith and witness without 'going to church' or belonging to a congregation.*

*However, as many of us know, our Unitarian young people have much to say about how our religious Movement can engage and must engage with society and with the important issues of today's world such as campaigning for justice, peace and equality and forming a clear vision for the future. I feel that our present voting rules deny many young people the opportunity to take part in our Unitarian democratic processes or to have their voices heard at all.*

*I hope many of us are curious about how we can enable more young people to be represented at our Annual Meetings and how they can have their views heard and vote on motions without perhaps being physically present at our sessions. I applaud the EC's substantial accommodation discounts for people under 30 to attend our Annual Meetings – this has encouraged more young adults to attend. But isn't it a bit ironic that they still can't vote unless they are delegates."*

This motion calls for suitable changes that will allow non-congregational Unitarians more inclusion, participation and representation. It isn't just about finding ways to enable young people and young adults to get involved in our governance and our democratic mechanisms – it is about having a complete rethink in how we enable Unitarians of all ages to have a real say in the direction of our Movement by considering new channels and social media approaches.

A number of our key activists and movers and shakers do not attend our Annual Meetings for a wide array of reasons – from working or family life patterns, to cost, to maybe, dare we say it, our beloved conference failing to come across as appealing enough! How do we hear the views of all those Unitarians who don't attend and all those who are not even members of our churches and chapels?

It is time to be creative and open to new ways, so that more people can contribute to the Unitarian cause.

## Motion 7 FROM THE UNITARIAN WOMEN'S GROUP

'Empty Pockets: Women and austerity'

As Unitarians, we are committed to the service of all humanity and respect for all. Since they have been in place in recent years, the effects of the government's austerity measures have fallen predominantly on women. With this in mind, the Unitarian Women's Group is asking for the backing of the General Assembly to lobby and work for change in this area. Support for women affected can come happen at local and governmental level, and Unitarians can make a real difference.

Unitarians have a long and proud history of supporting equality and, in 2006, the General Assembly passed a motion about equality for all. Women are bearing a bigger share of the burden of the austerity measures than men, and this is unfair. We are asking that Unitarians support women at a local and national level.

The Women's Budget Group (WBG) is an organisation that scrutinises government policy from a gender perspective. In their gender impact assessment of the Spring 2017 budget, the WBG concluded that 'Women and those on low incomes continue to shoulder by far the greatest burden of tax and benefit changes and cuts to public spending since 2010, with black and Asian women facing a triple disadvantage.' In June 2017, Dr Mary-Anne Stephenson, Co-Director of WBG said "Rethinking austerity is long overdue. Women, and BME women in particular, have borne the brunt of seven years of cuts to public services and social security. These cuts have had a devastating impact on individuals and communities across the country, have increased inequality, and have undermined the social infrastructure on which the economy depends."

Analysis carried out by WBG found has that:

- Women are hit harder than men across all income groups, with Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) women particularly hard hit. Asian women in poorest third of households will be £2,247 worse off by 2020 (in contrast to 2010) – almost twice the loss faced by white men in the poorest third of households.
- White men in the richest third of households, by contrast, lose only £410. Black and Asian lone mothers stand to lose £3,996 and £4,214, respectively, from the changes.

We suggest that:

- Actions can be taken at a national level, to include lobbying parliament to highlight the inequality and joining with other organisations where appropriate to lobby for an end to these austerity measures.
- Actions can be taken at a congregational level, to include getting involved in initiatives that support women affected by austerity. For example, congregations could host an event informing people of the facts of the inequality and raising money for their local food bank or Women's Centre.
- Actions can be taken on a personal level, to include writing to local MPs, outlining the facts, and asking them to work towards a more equal bearing of the load – or, even better, an end to the current austerity measures. Volunteering at a Women's Centre or Citizen's advice is another way of offering help and support to women negatively affected by the current austerity measures.

We hope all Unitarians will join us in taking action.

For more information related to this project, visit us at :  
[www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensgroup](http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/womensgroup)

**Motion 8 FROM TWELVE FULL MEMBERS & THE PEACE FELLOWSHIP**

This background paper has not yet been received and will need to be circulated separately to meetings attenders in the March mailing.

When available, we will put it up on the 2018 Unitarian Meetings website.