

Synod Council Report

1. Synod Strategy. A Southern Synod strategy for supporting local churches was established in 2010 with the adoption of the Synod Mission Criteria by Synod Together. The Synod Structures report in 2010 boldly declared that we strive always to be ‘Christ’s people ... transformed by the Gospel ... making a difference.’ The Synod’s mission is to encourage and enable local churches in God’s mission. By God’s grace, we want to encourage growth in depth and breadth. Whilst the strategy has been reviewed from time to time by Synod Council, it has largely remained the same. However, the climate in which the Southern Synod finds itself in 2018 as the people of God has changed considerably from 2010. Synod Council has therefore been considering how best to support local churches with limited resources available. As a result, it offers the paper on a Synod strategy to give aims and objectives for the Synod over the next five years with an emphasis on making new disciples. It further recognises that for many churches, as well as the Synod, if something is taken on, something must be laid down. We are a small church with a big heart. After all, the 7th mark of a healthy church is to do a few things and do them well.

Resolution: Southern Synod adopts the Paper A1 as its strategy over the next five years.

2. Lay presidency and Authorised Elders Guidelines. General Assembly 2016 agreed to the appointment of at least 2 Authorised Elders in each church. The Southern Synod Sacraments Course has proved to be so popular that we now find ourselves with ‘too many’ people authorised to preside at communion. What was originally introduced into the Basis of Union as almost an emergency provision for when a minister is not available, has become almost a routine occurrence. The point of this resolution is to introduce a standard practice across the URC. Synod Council has been working on regularising its practice of Lay Presidency within Southern Synod where Synod/United Areas were doing different things, the result of which is Paper A2. The main changes are:

- a) Locally Recognized Lay Preachers are authorised to preside at any church within the Synod which invites them to do so providing they have completed the Sacraments Course successfully.
- b) Authorisation is for 3 years.
- c) Two new categories of ministry have been introduced: Local Church Leaders and Authorised Elders.

Resolution: Southern Synod adopts Paper A2 on Lay Presidency and Authorised Eldership Guidelines.

3. The category of Authorised Elders takes churches back to the standard practice of some years ago where each church was required to provide the names of two elders who would be nominated to preside at the sacraments in cases of pastoral necessity. As previous stated above this is to introduce standard practice across the denomination. The summary provided sets out what is required. Authorisation is for 3 years.

Resolution: Southern Synod adopts Paper A3 on Southern Synod Policy on Authorised Elders.

4. Local Church Leaders Policy. We are indebted to those Elders who have responded to call to offer themselves as Local Church Leaders. At present we have 15 LCLs working largely with pastoral oversight of a local congregation with one to be commissioned and two in training. The policy was last amended in 2013 but has not kept up with the requirements of ministry in 2018. There are four major changes:

- a) There will only be one model of LCL: oversight of a local congregation;
- b) Candidates and students committee will be responsible for oversight of the candidating process;
- c) LCLs will be required to do the mandatory training undertaken by Ministers of Word and Sacraments;
- d) LCLs will have Volunteer Agreements with a clear job description to be agreed by the LCL, local pastorate and Synod.

Resolution: Southern Synod adopts the Local Church Leaders Policy with the changes as laid out in Paper A4.

5. Active ministers. General Assembly agreed that there is now a definition of an active minister: A Minister of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker is considered active if they are on the URC roll of Ministers and at least one of the following applies.

- a) They are: in a pastorate or post for which they are receiving a stipend (either full or part) from the United Reformed Church (e.g. deployed post, SCM post, Assembly appointment);
- b) in non-stipendiary service in a recognised ministry post (e.g. model 1, 2 or 3)
- c) exercising a ministry with another organisation (e.g. chaplaincy, educational establishment, ecumenical body) for which they receive a stipend, salary or serve in a voluntary capacity;
- d) providing recognised voluntary service on behalf of the Church (e.g. Interim Moderator, serving on a synod or area committee, representing the URC on an external body);
- e) not in a formal position but whose expertise and experience means that, enjoying the confidence of synod officers, they are asked to undertake pieces of work from time to time;
- f) frequently leading worship in a church other than where they are a member (this criterion does not apply in the case of Church Related Community Workers).

Where there is uncertainty as to whether or not a Minister of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker falls within any of the six descriptions given above the judgment shall be made by the Minister's synod, which may delegate the responsibility to one of its committees. Any appeal against the decision of a synod in this respect should be directed to the Secretary for Ministries. Any active minister would need to do mandatory training.

6. Isolated Members. Membership in the United Reformed Church is an important concept. It represents a degree of commitment in exchange for the right to share in decisions of the church. However, there are people who have been received as members of a local church, and who retain a commitment to the URC, but now live too far distant from a local church to worship there regularly. Following Resolution 25 at General Assembly, we shall need to identify one or two churches who could act as 'host' churches for isolated members. Isolated Membership offers a non-geographical substitute for the local church, with all the limitations of a substitute. People would be admitted to it by transfer from a local church, and admitted to a local church by transfer from Isolated Membership. Isolated Membership would not be open to everyone. It would exist primarily to serve five 'constituencies' of people who have joined the URC in the regular way through the decision of a Church Meeting, who wish to continue to 'belong' and to maintain their commitment; but who are unable, for reasons of distance or mobility, to put down regular roots in an existing local church. The likely constituencies would be:

1. students and young adults, resident away from home for part of the year, or in a transitory lifestyle in the early years of a career;
2. members of the armed forces and their households who receive the ministry of URC chaplains;
3. members of the URC, including retired ministers and non-serving elders, who have moved away from any locality where regular attendance at a local United Reformed Church is practical;
4. URC members worshipping in a church of another denomination, which had earlier been a local ecumenical partnership in which the URC was involved but is no longer;
5. URC members whose local church has closed, and who are not able to worship in another local church, but who wish to retain their membership of the URC.

Synod Council has asked Synod Area Pastoral Committees to nominate a local church from amongst their number who may act as a host church. Numbers of isolated members would not be counted against M&M.

7. People for Mission. Southern Synod deployment number falls from 45 to 37 full-time stipendiary equivalents by 2022, we shall need to be looking at 'supplementing' our ministries. Synod Council has been exploring some strategic posts around the Synod including a SCM post, 2 CRCW posts and lay ministry in New Malden and Kingston (from the Presbyterian Church of Korea). At present the SCM and one CRCW posts have been granted and work is well underway to bring over the lay missionary from the PCK.

8. Rayalaseema. The money is still lodged with the State Bank of India. Because of the India Government Currency Regulations, the money cannot be returned to us and sits in the SBI. Therefore, following a conversation with CWM, Synod Council proposes that we gift the money to CWM to be used for projects in the Church of South India (CSI). CWM will advise where the money has been used.

Resolution: Southern Synod proposes that the money currently lodged with the State Bank of India, approximately 1500 Crore, is gifted to CWM to be used for mission projects in the Church of South India.

9. Mission Grants. Synod Council has been looking at its policy for giving Mission grants and loans. The Treasurer will explain more in his report.

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