

United Reformed Church Southern Synod
Policy on Authorised Elders for Lay Presidency at the Sacraments (DRAFT July 2018)

SUMMARY

Following the introduction of “Authorised Elder” status for Lay Presidency at the sacraments at General Assembly 2016, Southern Synod amends its policy of how lay presidents are to be authorised as follows.

This summary guidance is to aid understanding of the full detail of the policy.

1. Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments normally preside at the Sacraments. Retired and visiting ministers are not obliged to “stand in” as presidents, especially at short notice. [See Authorised Elders Policy (“AEP”) Introduction]
2. If the previously arranged president becomes unavailable at short notice, the church may choose someone suitable to cover, or to postpone celebration of the Sacraments. [AEP 1]
3. Normally those lay people allowed to preside at the Sacraments (“Authorised Elders”) will be Elders of the United Reformed Church (Serving or Non-Serving) and/or accredited lay preachers. The Synod interprets the latter to mean Assembly Accredited or Synod Recognised Lay Preachers who are members of the United Reformed Church (whether or not they have been ordained as Elders.) [AEP 2, Basis of Union 25]
4. Churches will no longer have lay people authorised “just in case” the previously arranged president is not available. Those appointed as Authorised Elders will be expected to preside. [AEP 2.2a]
5. In order to authorise lay presidency, a church must establish that there is “pastoral necessity.” During a time of ministerial vacancy or sabbatical or long-term sick leave, Synod/United Area Pastoral Committee will normally recognise that this pastoral necessity exists. [AEP 2.2a]
6. Where a Minister is serving a church but on a limited scoping that might affect their availability to preside, a case for “pastoral necessity” might exist – all cases will be considered on their merits. The onus is on the local church to explain why they believe they need a Lay President. [AEP 2.2a]
7. When a case of pastoral necessity has been recognised by the Synod Ministries Committee, usually not more than three Authorised Elders may be appointed for a church. [AEP 2.2a]
8. Appointment follows approved training to a common standard. Authorisation after initial training is for 1 year in the first instance and for up to three years thereafter. There are situations (such as a Minister being called) which might remove the pastoral necessity within the three-year period. [AEP 2.2c]
9. An Authorised Elder may be appointed for more than one church, but in each case, there must be an established pastoral necessity for someone other than a Minister of Word and Sacraments to preside. [AEP 2.2d]
10. Appointment as an Authorised Elder may be extended to second and subsequent periods of three years, providing the pastoral necessity still exists, and providing the Authorised Elder undergoes appropriate and approved refresher training. [AEP 2.2d]
11. An Authorised Elder may preside at Home Communion in both private and residential homes.