



Southern Synod



PROPOSED WAY FORWARD FOR SOUTHERN SYNOD DEPLOYMENT

Background: there has been a continuing reduction in the number of Stipendiary Ministers available to our denomination, due to retirements and low number of ordinands. It is recognised that the present and foreseeable deployment arrangements are unsustainable. This is a much wider issue than simply the leading of Sunday worship. The URC's General Assembly has been aware of this issue for many years and has made it clear that whilst not every congregation can have a minister of word and sacrament directly providing their day-to-day leadership, each would benefit from having an identified leader. The foundation documents of the Church still expect the Synod to ensure that every congregation has access to a minister on occasions when such support is necessary.

Aim: This paper seeks to encourage a new way of thinking to make best use of the human resources across Southern Synod in terms of deployed Ministers, (Stipendiary or Non-Stipendiary) CRCW's, SCM's, Local Church Leaders, Elders, Youth Workers, paid Administrators and the wider congregation. *Note: we recognise the ministry of the whole people of God and this vital truth underpins these proposals.*

Key to the success of this process will be ensuring

- a. Recognition that not all congregations want / need / can have a Stipendiary Minister, and that the URC recognises other forms of spiritual leadership (as noted under Aim above) as the leadership team.
- b. Best use is made of the gifts and calling of each deployed Minister (by far our most expensive human resource and too often the sole focus of the denomination's deployment thinking).
- c. Teams are created within each church / pastorate context. Teams could be made up of a variety of ministries working together.
- d. Church / pastorates are linked as may be appropriate, and Synod Areas are the facilitators to ensure this is done effectively.
- e. Information Technology contributes helpfully towards solutions.

Ministers: (whether deployed or other) will be used most beneficially if they are able to focus on where their skillset would be most effective. This can only enhance the motivation of ministers in their ministry, and the most advantageous use being made of their time and talents in relational ministry.

Churches: will be most effective if they can focus on their core mission priorities as a local church, and have a minister who shares that passion. The LMMR process and its Living Document (or ecumenical equivalent) is designed to help this happen.

Facilitation

To help provide creative ways to enable the process to be managed effectively and well by each Synod Areas and the United Area, Synod will form a facilitation team to work in partnership with them, as requested.

Step one: Sharing the vision

It is vital that from the outset churches (and ministers) understand what we are seeking to do and the fundamental benefits for them and the building of God's Kingdom. They need to understand that this is not a paper exercise but rather a fundamental reform of how the role of all forms of ministry are determined and how churches ¹ can be linked into pastorates.

A process helping all to understand the range of human resources available and the benefits for churches and ministers will be offered.

Step two: Clarifying priorities, incorporating two elements

Ministers: using the Marks of Ministry, (and the LMMR or equivalent process), recognising that each of us has different God given talents, Ministers will be asked to identify the 3 which they see as most significant / important in their ministry. In addition, what aspect of their current ministry do they feel is a poor use of their time, or shouldn't be part of their ministry? (saps their energy and motivation). Incorporating the concept of Team into everyone's thinking will free Ministers up to focus more particularly on what they are most gifted for. Recognising where they stand from a theological perspective will also be a factor.

Churches: using the Synod's 9 Mission Criteria, which are the top 3 in terms of the focus they believe God is calling them to have? Furthermore, what would be the top 2 or 3 priorities which they need / want a minister to focus on. Particularly at the point of vacancy churches are encouraged to review whether their minister could be a Local Lay Leader, a Non Stipendiary Minister or a Stipendiary Minister. Churches also need to recognise the benefit of a dedicated Local Leader versus the divided attention of a shared Stipendiary Minister. Churches too should recognise where they stand from a theological perspective, which might include a breadth of perspectives.

Interim Moderators: can help the vacant churches to consider which type of leadership they require.

Step three: Determining Ministry for each Church and Minister

There are several ways this can be approached, but what is essential is that we accept that no one model will be right / appropriate for every church, every minister or every Synod Area. Each area should have the freedom to develop bespoke models to ensure best use is made of the Ministers in their Area. Care should be taken to ensure that any proposals are consistent with the Basis of Union and the Manual.

We must acknowledge that there are many gifted people within our churches who are well able to provide pastoral care, preaching, and other ministry roles. Utilising the growing list of Lay Preachers will be a specific group to draw from.

We must also acknowledge that some ministers will only feel comfortable fulfilling a traditional type of ministry within a local pastorate. These ideas allow for a lot of flexibility.

As this is worked out, there need to be 4 underlying core principles kept in mind:

- Never lose sight of the need to make best use of the gifts and calling of every minister.
- It is not automatic that every church needs an allocation of a Stipendiary Minister.

¹ It should be remembered that in ecumenical situations there may be a different understanding of the local church as an entity.

- Create “*multi-disciplinary*” Teams to ensure all aspects of local church life are covered.
- Be innovative and imaginative in how and where ministry is provided.

As a conciliar Church, we must be particularly careful not to impose one standard model but rather to encourage the local churches as they seek to discern (with the support of their Synod Area) the pattern of team ministry which is appropriate to the talents and needs of their local situation. The possible options churches might consider would include the following:

Possible Options (*With Ephesians 4: 11 – 13 in mind*)

Example a: Local Church Leader: a church could be led by a Local Church Leader. This leader does not have to have come from that church but could be called from a different church. Several churches in our Synod are thriving using this model. Leaders can also be trained whilst in post ensuring the local church has a leader and they are trained within the local context.

Example b: Team of ministers: a team could consist of several ministers working as a team to cover a group of churches. The Eastbourne Group would be an example of this in practice, operating as an ecumenical partnership. A team consisting of a mixture of different types of ministry (e.g. Stipendiary or Non Stipendiary Minister, Local Church Leader, CRCW, Administrator etc.) A hypothetical example might be St. Margaret’s, St. Andrew’s and Newtown community centre which might have one stipendiary Minister, one Local Church Leader and a Youth Worker. Elders of each church have their own roles within the team; Lay Preachers cover pulpit supply with the minister, LCL, and Youth Worker; one leadership meeting a month with either Elders or Officers from each Church / community centre. The extent to which churches offer administrative support to their minister should also be considered.

Example c: Area wide ministry: If the churches in a Synod Area or the United Area discern that a minister has a real passion for a certain aspect of Church life, e.g. Mission, Evangelism, Green issues, strategic planning, trained counselling, church planting etc., then a minister, called to a specific pastorate they could be appointed by the Pastoral Committee (or Synod) to fulfil such ministry across the whole or part of the Synod Area, or even the whole Synod. Churches within the Area would then use them to help and develop that aspect of their local church life.

Example d: One pastorate ministry: a minister could continue in a typical pastoral context, however working with their church or pastorate to build a Team covering a variety of aspects of local church life. This would free them to focus on what is core to their ministry, (remember Acts 6: 3 – 4). By utilising technology, live services could take place in each congregation but if desired, for the sermon, the minister could preach in one building but then be relayed to the others.

There are 3 possible models for this;

1. To keep pastorates as they are.
2. To re-group Churches based on shared focus and theology. These new “groupings” would be agreed by Synod Area following recommendation by their Pastoral Committees.
3. To create one “Church” with multiple congregations. This newly formed “church” would then create a Team to ensure all aspects of church life were covered.

NOTE: these are not designed to be a fixed or limited list of options but rather a flavour from which Synod Areas could potentially develop other creative and imaginative ideas as they prayerfully think “outside the box”.

Step four: Building the teams

Each Synod Area and the United Area would facilitate a process for the Churches (or pastorates) to explore the role each minister would fulfil, whilst helping Churches to prayerfully discern what other people / skills would be needed to create an effective Team. Churches would be encouraged to think imaginatively about how this could be done across the pastorate rather than simply within their individual congregation. Furthermore, crossing Area boundaries should not be discounted if this would increase the effectiveness of ministry. As earlier noted, Synod will form a facilitation team to work in partnership with Synod Areas and the United Area, as requested.

Some phasing of this process will obviously be required. All churches should be aware of what is proposed, and we anticipate that some will be keen to take part from the outset. Others may wish to pause until they can see more clearly how they should contribute. Synod Areas will need to agree with their local churches how this process of phasing should best take place. Many elements of the LMMR or similar ecumenical process will be useful in that work, and where it takes place it is obvious that the LMMR process itself should not create duplication.

The option of “buying in” expertise / ministry (e.g. Youth Worker, Admin support, Financial skills) to cover gaps in the Teams should be included in discussions, if the resources for this are available locally. However, in some cases Synod resources might be available. (e.g. Strategic Mission fund). Periodic reviews would be the responsibility of Synod Area Pastoral Committees.

Some Available Resources

Everyone would recognise that live worship led by a committed Christian is preferable to watching a recording. Local churches should be aware that there are now more than twice as many accredited lay preachers and active retired ministers in the Synod as deployed ministers of Word and Sacrament. Contact details for Lay Preachers have already been provided to local churches to allow this wider resource to be accessed. Synod Handbook, which includes relevant lists, is available from the Synod office. We strongly welcome the national URC initiative to provide well planned pre-recorded services which allow the flexibility for local churches to use, for example, just the sermon or more, but we do not suggest that this resource replaces the need to address the deployment issues which are much wider than the leading of Sunday worship.

Resources can be found at: [Devotions.urb.org.uk](https://devotions.urb.org.uk)

Local churches which have looked at these resources and feel they need further guidance regarding how to use them are welcome to contact Andy Twilley (Training Officer) or Mark Rigby (IT consultant)

The new national resource addresses the need for support for leading Sunday worship. Separately Synod will be considering what additional digital support might be needed for the wider aspects of church life such as Bible study, contemplative worship etc.

NOTE: this document may well require further amendment in the light of experience.

*Moderator and Deployment Sub Committee
January 2022*