



SYNOD DEPLOYMENT GUIDE

For the local churches

February 2023

1 Purpose

1.1 This Guide is intended to help local churches considering their future leadership in the context of ministerial deployment. It describes a process for when a Minister or Local Church Leader leaves a pastorate which is summarised in the flowchart at Appendix 1.

1.2 The Guide seeks to take forward the thinking in the Synod Deployment Policy adopted by Synod Together in March 2022 which is attached as Appendix 2. Some additional Notes for Area Pastoral Committees are attached as Appendix 3.

1.3 Every local church in the Synod is different. Every church seeks to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, the Ruler and Head of the Church. Please use and adapt this Guide to help discern what God is saying in your context. You may find it helpful to consult with the relevant partners in your setting, including other denominations if you are in a United Church. We acknowledge that one size does not fit all and this Guide does not attempt to address every situation.

2 Overview of the Process

2.1 When a Minister leaves, the Synod Area or United Area will normally appoint a Visionary Companion to walk alongside the Elders and other local leaders as they discern their future. The new role of Visionary Companion – or VC for short – is described further in Section 3 below.

2.2 As the church considers future options for leadership, it should consider the variety of models noted in the Synod Deployment Policy. The VC may have a particular role in sharing examples of leadership models not previously used in that congregation. These might include Local Church Leaders, Church-Related Community Workers (CRCWs), Non-Stipendiary Ministers, ecumenical models and URC Stipendiary Ministers who also work outside specific congregations in a thematic wider role.

2.3 In LEPs, the discernment process must always involve partner denominations and take account of the local Constitution.

2.4 The local discernment process may in some cases lead to a wish to explore the possibility of a URC Stipendiary Minister being part of the leadership for the next phase of the life of a congregation or group of churches. If this is the conclusion and the Area supports this view, the Area will appoint an Interim Moderator to work with the church(es).

2.5 The church(es) will need to have completed the following before any position is advertised through the Moderators' Meeting to the relatively small number of Stipendiary Ministers considering a move at any one time. The church(es) must have:

- Completed any LMMR process they have been asked to undertake
- Displayed an active and working response to their Mission Statement
- Completed both the Pastoral Summary and the full Profile
- Completed the latest URC Annual Return
- Provided to the Synod Office examined annual accounts for the past year
- Demonstrated a commitment to the wider URC
- Demonstrated sustainable finances for supporting M&M and ministerial expenses
- Prepared a manse in good condition which can be easily vacated
- Agreed with their Area Pastoral Committee a scoping percentage.

2.6 Given the responsibility of the Synod not to exceed its fair share of the limited number of Stipendiary Ministers, there will be times when there are more potential vacant pastorates in the Synod than can be publicised simultaneously. The Synod Moderator, with the Area Pastoral Committees, will look strategically where the current need is and decide when and in what order to present vacancies to the Moderators' Meeting.

2.7 In deciding on priorities, the Moderator will consider factors such as:

- The church(es)' strategic position in the community
- Ecumenical links
- Whether the church(es) have given good support to Ministers in the past
- The number and geographical distribution of URC Ministers in the Synod Area
- Length of time since local leadership last included a URC Minister.

2.8 If a pastorate is placed on the Moderators' Meeting list and does not attract any candidate over a period of 18 months, the Moderator will visit the pastorate to discuss taking it off the list for a while and the church(es) be invited to reconsider what God is saying to them.

3 Visionary Companions

3.1 Traditionally when a church became "vacant" an Interim Moderator was appointed on the assumption that the church would as soon as possible seek another minister. The United Reformed Church is a very different church community today. With many more churches than ministers, a different sort of discernment process is required in a local church.

3.2 We are learning that the reduction in numbers of stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacrament (MWS) is a God-given opportunity to pray and think afresh about how best to use the resources the Church has been given, leaving behind the idea that a church without a MWS is somehow lacking, and using lay and ordained ministries with renewed creativity and vision.

3.3 The heart of the deployment strategy is to encourage churches to think imaginatively about being church, embracing four core principles:

- a. Every member ministry
- b. Effectively using ordained Ministers (Stipendiary or Non-Stipendiary), CRCWs, Special Category Ministers (SCMs), and Local Church Leaders (LCLs)
- c. Creating teams
- d. Creative thinking.

3.4 The local church is called to pray, think creatively and be open to new possibilities to make it relevant for today. Possible questions to address could include:

- What vision is God giving us?
- What resources will best enable this to happen?
- What roles should be created and who will fulfil them?
- How could we connect with other churches, whether URC or ecumenically?
- What benefit could be derived from the gifts of Ministers in the Synod working in non-congregational roles across the wider Church.

3.5 Such creative and potentially radical thinking will not just happen and in many places a Visionary Companion (VC) can help the Elders and other leaders ensure innovative ways forward are explored. A VC can be a Minister or an Elder appointed by the Pastoral Committee.

3.6 A VC's responsibility will be to:

- Help churches understand this new way of thinking
- Excite churches regarding the opportunities this represents
- Facilitate the journey as a church prayerfully seeks the way forward
- Ensure there is creative and innovative thinking, and lots of prayer.

3.7 In addition to the VC's contribution, the church can seek help from the Synod staff, eg Children & Youth Development Officer, Training Officer, Mission Development Officer and Ecumenical Officer and may also find support, ideas and insights from local Ministers or the Area Pastoral Committee.

3.8 It is envisaged that a VC's work would normally be completed within one year.

4 Interim Moderators

4.1 If the church, having explored other options first, decide they are being called to seek stipendiary ministry and the Moderator and Pastoral Committee agree, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to work alongside the Elders.

4.2 The Interim Moderator would be appointed for an agreed period, perhaps two years, after which time the Area Pastoral Committee would assess the next step for the church moving forward.

4.3 The Interim Moderator role would, as previously, assist with the necessary processes for seeking a minister including:

- Guide the church / pastorate in preparing their Pastorate Profile and Summary
- Chair vacancy committee meetings considering potential candidates
- Liaise with candidates
- Liaise with Synod Moderator and wider Church
- Chair meetings between the pastorate and candidate
- Chair Elders and Church Meetings which discuss and vote on issuing a call
- Communicate result of voting to candidate

- Ensure induction arrangements are made.

5 Hearing God's Voice

5.1 While the processes are important, the way they are approached is even more so. Especially if people are anxious or deep convictions clash, keeping fixed on seeking what God is saying to the church is a challenge.

5.2 It is very important that churches never lose sight of the four core aspects of being church, namely worship, pastoral care, mission and evangelism, all of which were clearly core to first century church life, as well as key to the church throughout history.

5.3 Yet it is equally vital to discern God's "shape" for being church now, and the vision and direction God wants it to take which is relevant and dynamic. Care will be needed to help the church envision its mission by reference to the opportunities and needs of the community it is in, rather than being constrained by a focus on the established patterns of what it has been doing.

5.4 The whole journey is best guided by prayerful reflection, and whilst there will of course be conversations we must be careful to ensure that at all times this is a process of discerning God's will and calling. There needs to be an opportunity for everyone to share their personal vision / dreams for the church (Acts 2).

5.5 In that context it is important to:

- understand the church's local context and the community within which God has placed us. That includes keeping aware of the potential for working with other local churches and Christian communities in relationships and resources;
- explore the relevance of what is being considered as well as the 'fit' with what the church is called to be;
- ensure we keep "in step with the Spirit".

5.6 The discernment process, assisted by the VC, is about much more than just the gifts sought in a single leader, whether a minister or not. Fresh teaching about spiritual gifts may encourage congregations to explore and discover the specific gifts people have. Linked to this is God's call on each of our lives and our specific God-given purpose within the family of the Church. There should also be an understanding of how God is often able to use past experiences in our lives as a source of ministry and blessing to others, even when those experiences have been challenging and painful: nothing is wasted.

5.7 In such ways a discernment process about future leadership can also help underline that God has a role for everyone. This principle is at the heart of the New Testament. It is imperative that everyone understands that they have a role to play and helping them discover this will be important to ensure no one feels excluded or unimportant. Every gift is useful for the building of the church.

6 Moving on Together

6.1 We thank God for the gift of people willing to sacrifice other possibilities to serve the United Reformed Church as Ministers of Word and Sacraments. As you play your part in

discerning how best they are deployed alongside all other Christian disciples in continuing Christ's ministry on earth, do not be afraid. Use the resources the Synod and your Area can provide; and keep praying.

APPENDIX 1: Flowchart of Process

[See attached]

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) CRCWs, SCMs, 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. Churches / 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 can be linked into pastorates. [It should be remembered that in ecumenical situations there may be a different understanding of the local church as an entity.] 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.
- 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 (eg 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. (eg 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.

Adopted by Synod Together: March 2022

APPENDIX 3: Additional Notes for Area Pastoral Committees

Deploying Visionary Companions

Synod Area Pastoral Committees (PCs) will appoint Visionary Companions (VCs) for each church when a Minister or LCL is leaving. They could be Ministers or Elders but not everybody will be able to carry out this role, even if they are experienced past Interim Moderators.

If there is a leadership team in the church already in post, a conversation will take place to see who might be the best person to do this – for it must also be kept in mind that VCs need to be comfortable leading exploratory thinking well beyond the existing status quo, and it is quite possible that no-one at present in a leadership role will be best equipped to do that.

In some instances, an outgoing Minister might be a suitable VC. Where existing pastorates involve more than one church, care is needed to avoid appearing to pre-empt what pattern of leadership might be best for the next phase of each of those individual churches' lives.

[The Synod has decided to make available to help with the provision of suitable VCs, so if nobody from within the Area is available that resource could be approached. Depending on priorities elsewhere in the Synod, this help may not be immediately available.]

At regular Area PC meetings the VC would report back on progress and issues, enabling the Pastoral Committee to provide guidance, support and assistance as appropriate.

Person Spec for VC

The following skills are key to the successful fulfilment of this role:

- Innovative thinker
- Strategic planner
- Good listener
- A possibility thinker
- Able to challenge without imposing a view nor undermining insights presented in discussions
- Understands the Synod Deployment Policy and believes in it
- Understands the core primary aim of ensuring most effective vision for each church enabling it to thrive, NOT to simply merge / combine churches
- Sufficient time availability and a willingness to go on the journey with the church, up to a year in duration

Support for Visionary Companions

Because the Visionary Companion is a new role, PCs will need to think carefully about what support can be offered to someone appointed to this role.

Part of that support is to ensure they are properly briefed. VCs should have copies of the Synod Deployment Policy (Appendix 2) plus the statements relating to *The Structure of the United Reformed Church* sections 1.1a, 1.1b, 1.1c and 2.1.vii and the Synod Mission Criteria.

A balance will be needed between allowing them, once appointed, to run things in their own way, and helping them to gain the benefit of ideas generated by other VCs. It is suggested that PCs should consider getting all newly appointed VCs together to discuss their own ideas about the best ways forward.

Items for an agenda for such a meeting might well include the possibility of developing together a simple list of questions for those being consulted to consider, perhaps in advance, so that meetings flow more easily and so that those attending have the chance to pray and prepare themselves for what will be a process of discernment.

Another matter to be considered carefully is the timing of consulting neighbouring URC churches who are invited to consider similar questions. Whilst it would be quite possible for all local churches falling under one VC's responsibilities to be invited to meet together at the launch of the journey, they might then rather easily get the impression that the PC is set on merging them! Rather the idea is to encourage churches which are located in the same broad area to see whether they contain folk who might be able to help in (all or part of) that area to offer the leadership and pastoral roles that are needed for each local church. If the discussions were then to lead, naturally, to some closer relationships or even merging churches then that is not forbidden, but the sensitivities of local churches *must* be respected if this process is not to be stymied almost at the outset.