

Guidelines on Elders in Local Leadership

Paper H7 General Assembly 2024

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1** In 2008 in its “Challenge to the Church” (Assembly Resolution 23 and accompanying report) the General Assembly expressed its “belief that each congregation and mission group has a need of its own local leader to work in partnership with the elders’ meeting to challenge, enable and equip the saints and be a focus of Christian presence in the local community” but left it to Synods to “make arrangements for the recruitment, training, calling and support of local church leaders”.
- 1.2** The Assembly saw the need for the recognition of an individual who “would have a pastoral and teaching role, would be the first point of contact in the event of pastoral need, would provide continuity of worship and nurture, and would be the focus of the Christian presence in the wider community”. (Assembly Reports 2008, p.226, para.7.1). The present need suggests this ministry may also provide leadership in mission.
- 1.3** Prior to Resolution 23, some Synods had a number of people in church posts that would now be considered Local Church Leader posts or Elders in Local Leadership. For the purpose of this paper, the designation of Elders in Local Leadership (ELL) shall be used.
- 1.4** In some cases, it is possible that appointments were made to local leadership relatively informally and limited formal provision was made as to role description, terms of agreements, training or review. Ministries Committee is seeking to regularise the approach to these issues and to achieve parity/consistency and accountability for local leadership to form a Synod accredited ministry, namely Elders in Local Leadership
- 1.5** With the reduction in stipendiary ministry numbers, some Synods are looking to establishing ministry teams across available ministries whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs, Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Locally Recognised Lay Preachers or Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers. A ministry of Elders in Local Leadership would enhance this team and give recognition to and accountability for ministry which is already happening but sometime in a rather ad hoc way. This paper has been written with the assistance of the Synod Moderators.

2. Marks of Ministry of Elders in Local Leadership

- 2.1** God delights in each person’s unique gift and calling to any form of ministry.
- 2.2** Elders ‘share with Ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders’ meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care’ (The Manual, Schedule A 23). They are ‘associated with ministers

in all the councils of the Church'. Elders promise at their ordination to 'accept the office of elder of the United Reformed Church' and promise 'to perform its duties faithfully'.

2.3 All ELLs must embody these Marks of Ministry of an Elder:

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; to be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given and open to journeying as a disciple with others.
- **A person of integrity and prayer:** self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for elders); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; upholding values of faithfulness, trust and respect.
- **A person who cares for others:** sharing with others including the minister in offering and sustaining pastoral care; regarding all persons with equal love and concern; rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support; wise in knowing their limits and boundaries when more specialised help is needed; reliably dealing with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality.
- **A person of accountability:** committed to serving as an Elder within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support for elders; observing proper boundaries in relationships; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; understands their role as a Trustee (where appropriate) in administering the assets of the church; ready to collaborate with others for the mission of God.

3. Discerning the call and appointment of an ELL to a local church

- 3.1 The concept of 'call' is fundamental to our understanding of discipleship. The Bible says much about the variety of tasks to which people may be called, perhaps most notably in Paul's use of the image of the body (eg.1 Corinthians 12). The 'call' is primarily the call of God but may be heard and interpreted in various ways.
- 3.2 Each ELL position is unique, and the role is not transferrable outside the local church to which they have been appointed.
- 3.3 All ELLs must be Elders in the United Reformed Church and the Marks of Ministry for Elders, the Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour for Elders (General Assembly Reports 2010, Appendix 3c) and the Disciplinary Policy for Office Holders applies to all ELLs.

4. Safer Election of Elders in Local Leadership

- 4.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church. Synods will use the process for the safer Election of Elders in Local Leadership.
- 4.2 As with any ministry within the URC, call is a discernment process. Call is always a gradual process of coming to know who God is calling you to be. Therefore, the candidate must first speak with their Synod Moderator about their sense of call and the vocation to which they feel called.
- 4.3 If the Synod Moderator discerns a sense of call it is at this point that exploration will be given to the role they will play in the life of their local church. The Synod Moderator shall

determine whether the local church is in agreement to the appointment of an ELL. If so, the Synod Moderator shall forward their details to the Synod Candidates and Students Committee or equivalent.

4.4 The Synod Candidates and Students Committee Convener (or equivalent) shall supply an application form to the candidate setting out details of the candidate's:

- Journey of faith;
- Character/Spiritual Maturity;
- Prior local church experience, including positions of responsibility held, with brief summary of dates and nature of duties, and experience of the wider councils of the church (e.g. attendance at Synod meetings, General Assembly, membership of national or Synod committees);
- Previous theological studies (if any) (e.g. theology degree, TLS Foundation Course, accredited lay preacher training in the United Reformed Church or another denomination);
- Participation in "Stepwise" or similar courses exploring discipleship;
- Previous practical training (e.g. elders' training courses – give detail of subject-matter covered);
- Experience of reflective practice;
- Life experience/training gained in the workplace;
- Other information the candidate considers relevant to assessment of his or her training needs.

4.5 Upon receipt of the completed application form, the Candidates and Students Committee Convener (or equivalent):

- a) takes up references (one from minister/interim moderator and one other);
- b) organises an assessed service where the call is to a preaching ministry (normally 2 people) and a written report of the service;
- c) organises a Synod interview and a written report. The candidate is able to bring a 'supporter' who will not be part of the formal interview but may be invited to speak at the end of the interview.

5. Training

5.1 If the candidate is successful, training shall be through either the route for:

- a) Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers
- b) Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers
- c) URC Church Leadership Programme
- d) An equivalent Synod Course as agreed by the Training Development Officer or equivalent.
- e) Funding for training will be through the 'normal' route for funding
 - i) From the individual and/or
 - ii) The Synod and/or
 - iii) Education & Learning

5.2 Applicants

- a) attend the in person You're Welcome: An Ethos and History of the URC course held at Westminster College, Cambridge;
- b) will undergo safeguarding training and other mandatory training appropriate to their role as well as any further training which the denomination shall determine from time to time;
- c) will receive an annual grant of £300 shall be available [equivalent to Lay Preachers] for further training;

5.3 Upon completion of training the Synod Moderator or their representative shall:

- a) meet with the elders of the local church to finalise the role description and Terms of Settlement;
- b) organise a Service of Commissioning for the ELL.

6. Oversight.

- 6.1 All ELLs shall be subject to the supervision of an experienced Minister of the Word and Sacraments who will be appointed as a pastoral advisor. When making the appointment of any ELL it is the responsibility of the Synod to ensure that adequate provision is made to ensure that such oversight is carried out.
- 6.2 ELLs may be appointed to one church as part of a team ministry where there is a multiple church setting alongside Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

7. Appointments:

- 7.1 The initial appointment shall be for three years, with a review at year 2.5 with the possibility of renewal.