

Guidelines on the Safer recruitment of those who lead worship in our churches

Paper H11 General Assembly 2024

1. Introduction

- 1.1** 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.
- 1.2** Lay preachers (non-ordained) share with ministers of word and sacraments in the leadership of worship in local churches. In their role of leading worship there may be times when a lay preacher is called upon to exercise a pastoral role when a minister of word and sacraments is not available, and they need to adopt similar standards of integrity in their lives and relationships. Hence the need for all lay preachers and worship leaders to be safely recruited.
- 1.3** All Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, Synod Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Lay Preachers are required by the United Reformed Church to be safely recruited.
- 1.4** However, there are lay preachers and leaders of worship from other denominations and/or organisations, and from none, who are invited to preach, some on a regular basis, others on an ad hoc basis.
- 1.5** This paper sets out the expectations for local churches for the various categories of lay preachers when inviting preachers to occupy their pulpit.
- 1.6** This paper also acknowledges that it is the function of the Elders Meeting to arrange for pulpit supply.

2. Safer Recruitment of Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers (from July 2021)

- 2.1** Lay preachers are an integral part of the church. Along with the other recognised ministries in the United Reformed Church, Lay preaching affirms that ministry is the work of the whole people of God.

“The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service equipped by him for it..... For the equipment of his people for this total ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts, and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church.”

Schedule A paragraph 19 and 20 (page 6) of The Basis of Union
https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf

- 2.2** Among the offices so recognised by the United Reformed Church is that of a lay preacher.
“The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen, the United Reformed Church shall (a) take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained ministers of the Word and sacraments are readily available to every local church; (b) provide for the training of suitable men and women, members of the United Reformed Church, to be accredited by synods as lay preachers.”
Schedule A paragraph 25 (page 6) of The Basis of Union
https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf
- 2.3** The provisions of paragraph 25 are intended to establish the principle that worship should be led by representative persons recognised by the wider church as well as by the local church to do and to bear his will all the days of their life.
- 2.4** Schedule B (page 4) of the Manual Details the functions of the elders’ meeting which can be found at https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/B-The_Manual_-_Section_B-2019.pdf
- 2.5** Lay preachers, in addition to their promises as members of a United Reformed Church, at their commissioning service reaffirm their faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and undertake to exercise their ministry in accordance with the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church.
- 2.6** Those thinking of becoming an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher should, where possible:
- a) attend an Enquirer’s Event organised by the Ministries Office and normally held in February and October each year via Zoom;
 - b) be a church member for at least one year;
 - c) be given copies of the leaflet ‘Become a Worship Leader, even a Lay Preacher’
<https://urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/become-a-worship-leader-lay-preacher/>;
 - d) have a conversation with the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner;
 - e) have a conversation with their minister/interim moderator;
 - f) agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting.
- 2.7** The applicant should contact the Ministries Office for a registration form plus copies of
- a) The Marks of Ministry of an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher
 - b) URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Preachers
 - c) A course outline
- 2.8** The Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner should ensure the Ministries Office receives:
- a) the application form

- b) a Church meeting minute that the church meeting approves of the candidate going forward;
 - c) two references – one being the minister of the church or the interim moderator where there is no minister;
- 2.9 Should these not give cause for concern then the Ministries Office would organise the appropriate criminal record checks. For applicants in England and Wales this will involve a DBS check and for applicants in Scotland this will require a Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure; if there is a blemish this is followed up by the Secretary for Ministries and the URC Designated Safeguarding as per the usual process;
- 2.10 Any concerns during training come back to the Ministries Office where the concerns would be dealt with.
- 2.11 An Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 2.12 All Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.
- 2.13 An Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher is accredited by the United Reformed Church
 - a) to preach at any church which invites them;
 - b) to preside at the Sacraments at any church in the Synod which has sought permission from the relevant Synod Committee;
 - c) training is recognised at a level comparable to training received by those with an equivalent ministry by our ecumenical partners;
 - d) if an AALP moves Synod, their training and accreditation means their Assembly Accreditation will be recognised.
- 3. **A Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher** (this role ceased to be trained and recruited from March 2021 when Mission Council adopted the new policies)
 - 3.1 The names of all Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preachers should be kept on a list by the Synod Lay Preaching Advocate (or equivalent).
 - 3.2 A Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher will be required to have a current DBS (every 5 years).
 - 3.3 A Synod is asked to ensure that a Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preacher shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church and the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers.

- 3.4 **A Locally (Synod) Recognised Lay Preacher** appointed before March 2021, is commissioned by the Synod
- to preach at any church within their local area which invites them (normally the area served by the old district Council;
 - is not authorised per se to preside at the sacraments;
 - their local recognition may not be recognised ecumenically;
 - their recognition is not transferable to another Synod.
- 3.5 **A Locally (Synod) Recognised Lay Preacher** shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 3.6 All Locally Recognised (Synod) Lay Preachers are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.

4. **Safer Recruitment of A Locally Recognised Worship Leader** (from March 2021)

- 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.
- 4.2 Those thinking of becoming an a Locally Recognised Worship Leader should, where possible:
- a) attend an Enquirer's Event organised by the Ministries Office and normally held in February and October each year via Zoom;
 - b) be a church member for at least one year;
 - c) be given copies of the leaflet 'Become a Worship Leader, even a Lay Preacher' <https://urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/become-a-worship-leader-lay-preacher/>;
 - d) have a conversation with the Synod Lay Preaching Advocate (or equivalent);
 - e) have a conversation with their minister/interim moderator;
 - f) agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting.
- 4.3 The applicant should contact the Training and Development Officer (or equivalent) for a registration form plus copies of
- d) The Marks of Ministry of a Locally Recognised Worship Leader
 - e) URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Preachers
 - f) A course outline
- 4.4 The Synod Lay Preaching Advocate should ensure the Training & Development Officer (or equivalent) receives:

- d) The application form
 - e) A Church meeting minute that the church meeting approves of the candidate going forward;
 - f) Two references – one being the minister of the church or the interim moderator where there is no minister;
- 4.5 Should these not give cause for concern then the Synod Office would organise the appropriate criminal record checks. For applicants in England and Wales this will involve a DBS check and for applicants in Scotland this will require a Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure; if there is a blemish this is followed up by the Secretary for Ministries and the URC Designated Safeguarding as per the usual process.
- 4.6 Any concerns during training should be directed to the Synod Moderator where the concerns would be dealt with.
- 4.7 A Locally Recognised Worship Leader shall exercise their ministry in accordance with the Marks of Ministry for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and Locally Recognised Worship Leaders, the Standards for Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church, the Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and the Disciplinary Policy of Office Holders.
- 4.8 All Locally Recognised Worship Leaders are required to do mandatory safeguarding training to foundation level.
- 4.9 A Locally Recognised Worship Leader is commissioned by the Synod
- a) to preach in their own church or pastorate¹;
 - b) to preside only if they are an Elder and have been recognised by the appropriate Synod Committee as an Authorised Elder;

5. Regular Preachers/Speakers/Worship Leaders from other Denominations or organisations who are in a preaching/speaking/worship leading role

- 5.1 Some churches may wish to invite preachers from other denominations/organisation to preach on a more regular basis. For the purposes of clarity regular shall mean 4 times or more per year.
- 5.2 In an LEP, a Methodist local preacher is subject to safer recruitment. Therefore, if the preacher comes from the Circuit plan, please liaise with the relevant Methodist contact to ensure the safer recruitment requirements are met.
- 5.3 If the preacher is from outside of a circuit and from another denomination/organisation, even if known to members of the congregation, the local church through their nominated person (normally the Pulpit Supply Secretary) shall be responsible for ensuring the preacher:
- a) is in good standing with their lead denomination by contacting the relevant authority ie. the local minister or regional office where they hold their

¹ In an LEP, a pastorate is a local group of churches and should not be read as eligible to preach across the Circuit.

membership. This should be done preferably by email so that there is a record of their status (see Appendix 1);

- b) has a current criminal record check. In England and Wales this will require a DBS. In Scotland this will require a Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure. The lead denomination shall be asked to provide details of the certificate number and the level of DBS check.

- 5.4 Any concerns should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the lead denomination/organisation as any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination/organisation.

6 Regular preachers/speakers/worship leaders not in that role within their own denomination or organisation

- 6.1 Some churches may wish to invite those to lead worship on a regular basis who are a member in another denominations or work for another organisation who does not perform that role in their own denomination. For the purposes of clarity regular shall mean 4 times or more per year.
- 6.2 Even if known to members of the congregation, the local church through their nominated person (normally the Pulpit Supply Secretary) shall be responsible for ensuring the preacher is suitable for the role by undertaking safer recruitment processes including:
- a) Seeking a reference to ensure they are in good standing with their denomination or organisation by contacting the relevant authority ie. the local minister or regional office where they hold their membership. This should be done preferably by email so that there is a record of their status (see Appendix 1)'
 - b) A criminal record check to be completed by the local church verifier before they preach. In England and Wales this will require a DBS. In Scotland this will require a Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure.
- 6.3 Once safer recruitment has been carried out for the preacher, they will then be required to undertake mandated training and support;
- 6.4 Any concerns related to that preacher should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the Synod Safeguarding Officer and the lead denomination or organisation any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination/organisation. They should not be invited to preach until the matter has been completed.

7 Ad-hoc (1-3 times a year) preachers/speakers/worship leaders from another denomination or organisation

- 7.1 Some churches may wish to invite speakers or preachers from another denomination or organisation to speak/preach on a one-off basis.

- 7.2 An elder shall be designated to accompany the preacher/speak/worship leader whilst they lead worship.
- 7.3 Any concerns should be directed to the Church Safeguarding Co-ordinator to be passed onto the lead denomination or organisation as any disciplinary would fall under the jurisdiction of the lead denomination/organisation.

8 Preachers/speakers/ worship leaders who no longer attend any church or who are no from an organisation

- 8.1 On occasions local churches have been known to invite someone to preach who is not in membership with any denomination but once was. Given that any lay preacher or worship leader represents the wider church to the local, the local church should think seriously about whether it is appropriate to invite someone who is not in fellowship with others to occupy the pulpit.
- 8.2 Should a local church wish to do this, they must seek advice from their Synod

Appendix 1

Example letter of good standing which can be completed by telephone call (but full details must be recorded of date, time and person contacted).

Dear XX

XXX URC has invited AA to lead worship *on Sunday XX 202X or regularly with them (delete as appropriate)*. AA has given me your name as the lead contact person in their church/organisation and has shared that they are in the role of xxx within your church/organisation.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that AA is in good standing with your church/organisation by which we mean:

- They have undergone a safer recruitment process (delete if the person is not in a role)
- They are not under any disciplinary investigation
- They are not subject to any restrictions in the role they undertake
- To the best of your knowledge is suitable to lead worship and be seen in a Position of Trust within our church.

Please could you also supply the date, certificate number and level of their current criminal record check. In England and Wales this will be a DBS. In Scotland this will require a Level 1 (Basic) Disclosure. If there is any content on the DBS check would there be any transferable risks that we need to consider.

Thank you.

With best wishes,

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