

Process for Reconfiguring Pastorates and Scopings

Paper H3 General Assembly 2024

1. Call and vocation

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God - believers or not.
- 1.2 However, within the whole people of God "the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church" (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).
- 1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments "...may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office" (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers "... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period." (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22).
- 1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union*, is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed and ensure good order.
- 1.5 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which,

through its Councils, offers concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.

- 1.6 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.
- 1.7 For the sake of clarity in this document the term minister shall apply to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. Ministers Move On

- 2.1 Ministers, of course may end a Call by seeking a new call at any time for a number of reasons:
 - a) a minister might accept a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded;
 - b) a minister might retire;
 - c) a minister might resign seeking some other form of work outwith the Church;
 - d) a post might be time limited;
 - e) a minister might wish to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post.
 - f) a minister may need to leave because the pastorate can no longer be sustained as a 100% ministry.
- 2.2 It is this last category, 2.1.f, that this policy addresses.
- 2.3 This policy does not deal with the breakdown of relationships which is addressed through H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023.

3. Deployment across the URC

- 3.1 Stipendiary ministers of the URC are available to serve the whole denomination and are paid a stipend from central denominational funds.
- 3.2 Ministers of Word and Sacraments are a precious resource to the church – most often deployed to help to lead local churches, through working with the Elders in a team to enable the church in its life and witness.
- 3.3 The URC, through its General Assembly and the Ministries Department, seek to ensure a fair share of ministers across all 13 synods using a calculation based on the number of members (60% of the weighting) and the number of churches in each Synod (40% of the weighting). A target figure for deployment is therefore produced for each Synod.
- 3.4 Many synods are faced with working out how to achieve their target: to reduce ‘overscoping’, to find ministers for vacancies, and to ensure a fair spread of leadership through the churches in the synod.

- 3.5 The review of pastorates and scoping is not new. Model Terms of Settlement produced by the Ministries Office state: *The Pastorate and minister are willing to re-negotiate these terms of settlement during the course of a ministry at the request of the Synod through the Synod Pastoral Committee.*

In particular, it is recognised that, following appropriate consultation, an alteration to the scoping of the pastorate may be necessary during the course of the ministry. Any suggested changes from the pastorate or the minister will be subject to the agreement of the Synod through the local Synod Pastoral Committee. (Movement of Ministers Mission Council 2006 last updated 2020)

- 3.6 There will continue to be a need for full-time stipendiary ministers in the URC. Yet the URC cannot longer promise any of our ministers that they will be able to stay where they are while the church changes around them. Ministers need to be flexible and prepared to change the shape of their pastorates and even to move across the denomination as God calls them to new challenges.
- 3.7 It is important to remember leadership in churches is not just provided by stipendiary Ministers of Word and Sacraments. There are also: a team of Elders in every church, Synod Local Leaders, employed lay workers, Church Related Community Workers, and a range of non-stipendiary ministers.

4. Reconfiguration of scoping when a 100% ministry is not sustainable

- 4.1 On occasions pastorates, or projects, and ministers find themselves in a position where there needs to be a reconfiguration of scoping. Normally this would happen where one or more Church Meetings in a multi church pastorate makes the decision to close.
- 4.2 The effect of closure may be that a 100% scoping cannot be maintained in the long term and, unless the pastorate can be reconfigured to a 100% scoping, the Call to the minister has in effect ceased. The options open to the minister in that situation are to either take a reduced scoping, and, therefore, a reduced stipend, or to come back onto the Moderators' List to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
- 4.3 If the Call to a minister is affected where more than one church closes, the Synod Ministries Committee (or equivalent) will explore whether the closure does make 100% scoping for the pastorate unviable, and if so whether it is possible to reconfigure the pastorate. If the Synod Ministries Committee can reconfigure the pastorate possibly with the addition of another church(es) then the Synod will put in provision for
- a) the churches to be introduced to one another to form a new pastorate with all that that entails and
 - b) the minister to be introduced to the church(es) and the Call to be tested in the usual way.

- 4.4 If the Synod Ministries Committee is unable to reconfigure the pastorate, then the effect of the withdrawal of Call from one part of the pastorate or role is to withdraw the Call from the entire pastorate or role, or for the minister to accept a reduction in stipend. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision of the Synod Ministries Committee using the normal appeals process.
- 4.5 Because stipendiary ministry is a valuable resource, whilst recognising some ministers have geographical constraints, our theology of Call means that it is not possible to create roles for specific ministers. Any role is open to any minister and a Call to a role is always tested in the normal way.
- 4.6 Ministers, as office holders not employees, are not eligible for redundancy processes. Since they are called to serve the whole church, the Moderators will assist in helping the minister to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
- 4.7 In such cases, Pastoral measures will be put in place for those who come onto the Moderators List in line with Paper H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023 <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/H5-2023-Withdrawal-of-Call-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>

5. Rescoping pastorates during the course of a ministry

- 5.1 Synods through their appropriate committee are responsible for the scoping and grouping of churches. The Manual Section B 2.(4)(iii) states the functions of the Synod include: *To decide upon all matters regarding the grouping, amalgamation or dissolution of Local Churches.*
- 5.2 In some cases, in churches where numbers are no longer practicable, Synod Ministries Committees (or the body responsible for deployment), in determining viable pastorates, may need to reshape the pastorate. In these cases, the Synod will need to share information accurately, directly and at the same time with all the affected churches and ministers, setting out the proposals but inviting further discussion in the (no less than) 9 months before any changes are due.
- 5.3 Where one or more ministers are serving congregations which are reconfigured into a larger group pastorate it is possible the new pastorate might be over deployed. In these cases, to address the issue of deployment, the Synod Ministries Committee will need to determine with transparency and clarity, scoping arrangements for the newly created pastorate. As expectations and patterns of ministry will inevitably be changed, a new Call process will be required to address this.
- 5.4 The process for reconfiguring during the course of a ministry will be as follows:
- a) There shall be a consultation period involving the Synod Ministries Committee, the minister(s) and the churches which leads to the proposal where consideration should be given to the issues which may be low membership, finance, state of buildings and a possible way forward should be considered. A church's/pastorate's Local Mission and Ministry Review (LMMR) will be useful here. The period of consultation shall be for no less than 3 months.

- b) Feedback from the consultation will be considered by the Synod Ministries Committee in formulating the proposal for reconfiguration.
 - c) The Synod Moderator or their deputy, on behalf of the Synod Ministries Committee, contacts all churches and minister(s) affected by the rescoping stating
 - i) the proposal;
 - ii) the new configuration of churches and ministers;
 - iii) the new scopings.
 - d) The Synod Moderator or their deputy visits the minister(s) individually out of pastoral concern to hear their views. This should be in person;
 - e) The Synod Moderator or their deputy along with representatives of the Synod Ministries Committee meet in a joint meeting with the elders/members of the churches affected. This should be in person;
 - f) It may be desirable to introduce the minister to the church(es) for three months prior to any final decision about scoping so that minister and church(es) beginning to build trust in one another's ministries;
 - g) The Synod Ministries Committee will consider the feedback from those meetings which may include other configurations not considered previously. If the Ministries Committee decides to change the proposal, it must repeat stages a-c;
 - h) In their negotiations to form a new pastorate the Synod Ministries Committee in consultation with the churches will decide whether this is a dissolution of the old pastorate or an expansion to form a new pastorate. The decision will affect whether the minister(s) will be required to receive a Call from all churches or only the additional church(es).
 - i) The Synod Moderator meets again with the ministers individually to ascertain whether to accept the reconfiguration and or/ rescoping or not. If the ministers decide to proceed, the ministers go through the Call process with all the churches in the new pastorate
OR
The ministers go through the Call process with the additional church(es) only.
 - j) If the minister decides not to proceed with the rescoping, they will submit their profile to the Synod Moderator for the Moderators' List to receive a new Call. Once a new Call has been received, they will have in effect resigned from their present pastorate.
6. It is hoped that the preparation work of matching churches/pastorates and minister will result in a Call. Where this is not possible and a Call has not been issued by the new pastorate as a whole or by the additional church(es) as in (h) above, the Synod Moderator will assist in helping the minister to seek a Call to a new pastorate.
7. Pastoral measures will be put in place for those who come onto the Moderators List in line with Paper H5 Withdrawal of Call GA 2023 <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/H5-2023-Withdrawal-of-Call-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>

8. Manse provision & Expenses when a Call is withdrawn

- 8.1 Manses are provided rent free for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.
- 8.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.
- 8.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project, or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.
- 8.4 If the whole Call is withdrawn the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the Minister (and/or family) and the Synod or Pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal eg. car and other allowances.
- 8.5 A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months. Any extension to this would be a matter of the Synod or Pastorate depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
- 8.6 Whilst the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the Synod or Pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.
- 8.7 When the scoping has been reduced the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 8.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.
- 8.9 Where scoping is reduced a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping although in some cases the Synod or Pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.

9. Stipend Support

- 9.1 Where the minister is actively engaging in the Call process, their stipend should continue for six months whilst looking for a new Call.
- 9.2 This support may be continued up to a further six months where the minister continues to actively engage with the process.
- 9.3 After 12 months, and where there is a concern for welfare, the Synod Moderator shall make an application to the GA Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for further stipend support.

10. Appeal

- 10.1 Ministers wishing to appeal against the decision taken must write to the Moderator of their Synod submitting their reasons for the appeal within 7 working days of receiving the decision.
- 10.2 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure.