

Adapted from the paper presented to Assembly 2006.

1 Introduction

This policy document brings together advice and guidelines from several sources into one place. It replaces Guidelines for Declaring and filling a vacancy and Interim Moderators in the United Reformed Church. It includes an overview of the process from the time a minister is about to move on to the end of an induction period when a new minister has been called. This policy document does not deal directly with Church Related Community Workers.

2 Preparing to call a minister

In what follows 'Elders' stands for the equivalent group in an ecumenical or 'special category ministry' situation. A Pastorate can consist of one or several congregations.

a The minister informs the Elders and Church meeting(s) of receipt of a Call to another post, retirement or other reason for leaving. Normally three months notice of a move is given, though in Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) and in the case of retirement it will be known earlier. Care should be taken as to the timing of the announcement and the way it is done, particularly in a group pastorate. Assembly has agreed that a statement of the circumstances be prepared by the minister for sharing with the pastorate or post to enable reflection by the pastorate and Pastoral Committee.

b Pastoral Committee may appoint a Pastoral Adviser to exercise ministry while any process of re-scoping is under way. When a vacancy is declared an Interim Moderator is appointed (or exceptionally more than one to churches in a joint pastorate). The role and duties of Interim Moderator(s) should be clearly defined (see below). If more than one Interim Moderator is appointed, because there are several congregations in the pastorate, it is important for one of them to play a 'co-ordinating' role.

c The Interim Moderator will chair any meetings about the vacancy and will be the point of contact with Pastoral Committee and the Synod Moderator.

d Pastoral Committee and the Synod Moderator will arrange one or more meetings with the Elders, or other appropriate pastorate group, to discuss the process of scoping and explain the procedures surrounding the movement of ministers.

e A representative 'pastorate call group' may be identified by the pastorate to help them through the process. Often this group is composed only of Elders (some or all), however, others may be invited to take part since it is best practice to ensure that there are women and men present and a mix of ages. Representation of each of the congregations in a group pastorate is a requirement. The call group will be less effective if comprising more than, say, twelve. Composition of the call group needs to be agreed by the relevant Church Meeting.

f The pastorate prepares a Pastorate Profile and a summary profile on the advice of the Synod Moderator. The pastorate prepares, and Pastoral Committee agrees, draft 'Terms of Settlement', to be finally negotiated with a prospective minister. Area Pastoral Committee needs to confirm the suitability of the manse.

g When a pastorate profile is completed, scoping agreed and Terms of Settlement approved in draft form, the Area Pastoral Committee will declare the pastorate free to seek a minister and the Synod Moderator will begin to seek a candidate through the Synod Moderators' meeting.

3 Seeking and issuing a call

The best current practice for the movement of ministers follows the process given here. The basic framework will be adapted for single church pastorates, group pastorates, team ministries, ecumenical or 'special category ministry' situations. The process should be regarded as confidential to those involved until a Call is issued.

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a When the vacant post has been declared and the Pastorate Profile and summary have been prepared, the Synod Moderator gives information about the vacant post to the Synod Moderators' meeting using the Summary Pastorate Profile. The vacant post is advertised through the monthly mailing to all ministers before any consideration of an introduction. Ministers may examine summary Pastorate Profiles on-line. If one or more candidates can be identified, or if any ministers have asked for it, they are shown the full Pastorate Profile and asked about letting their name go forward. Ministers seeking a move may be shown more than one profile, from which they may choose only one to pursue.

b If a minister agrees, their name with their Personal Profile is given to the pastorate. If more than one wish to be introduced their Personal Profiles are given to the pastorate which has to choose one with whom to proceed.

c An invitation may then be given to the minister to meet the Interim Moderator and Elders. These meetings/interviews should be confidential and carefully handled. Colleagues in a ministry team and ecumenical representatives may be met at this point and the manse should be seen.

Note: Agreement should be reached at this point with any candidate on the procedures for decision making in relation to a Call. The vote to send a call is eventually taken by those members present in Church Meeting. The size of majority that will be required in the voting must be agreed in advance. In the case of a joint or group pastorate, there are various options to consider:

Where possible there should be a joint church meeting so that the whole pastorate shares in prayer and discussion. The vote is then taken as a single vote of the pastorate, with distinctive ballot papers for the different congregations. If separate church meetings are held, it is good for them to take place concurrently, in which case the decision of each meeting should be held in confidence until all have met and made their decision.

d If the minister and pastorate call group both agree, he/she should be invited for a weekend, to include meeting with appropriate individuals and groups, leading of services, social gatherings, etc. Consideration should be given as to whether joint services in a group pastorate might be more appropriate than leading worship several times in different locations.

e The Church meeting(s) with the Interim Moderator chairing will take place as soon after the weekend visit as possible. The Elders' Meeting is free but not obliged to make a recommendation to the Church Meetings(s). The outcome of the Church Meeting discussion and vote is communicated to the candidate as soon as possible by telephone and confirmed in writing; a report on the attendance and the voting figures should also be offered. If the candidate is willing to accept the Call, the is provisional until Area Pastoral Committee concurrence is given; a provisional acceptance should therefore be communicated to the Area Pastoral Committee as soon as possible, with a request for concurrence.

Additional note:

The following procedure for voting as one joint church meeting in a group pastorate was agreed in General Assembly 2001 and ratified in General Assembly 2002.

1(1) (b) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the Area Pastoral Committee, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share resources and ordained ministry, they may, on the recommendation of the elders and the decision of the synod, form an association known as a group of churches with a structured relationship and a constitution governing the way in which they relate to one another as to the sharing of both resources and the ordained ministry. Each church within the group shall retain its own identity, and its church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the constitution shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1) (vii)) may be taken

by a single group church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the group shall be eligible to attend and vote.

1(1)(c) Where two or more local churches together, and in consultation with the Area Pastoral Committee, decide that their mission will be more effective if they share ordained ministry (but not other resources), they may, on the recommendation of the Area Pastoral Committee and the decision of synod, form an association known as a joint pastorate, with a structured relationship with respect to the provision of ordained ministry only and a statement of intent governing the way in which they relate to one another in relation to the sharing of ordained ministry. Each church within the joint pastorate shall retain its own identity, and its church meeting and elders' meeting shall continue to exercise all their functions in relation to that church, save that, so long as the statement of intent shall so declare, decisions relating to the calling of a minister (see paragraph 2(1)(vii)) may be taken by a single joint pastorate church meeting at which all the members of each of the constituent churches in the joint pastorate shall be eligible to attend and vote.

f At this point the minister is required to seek a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure, the result of which will be made known to the Synod Moderator by the Ministries Committee.

g The Interim Moderator(s) works with the pastorate, Area Pastoral Committee officers, newly called minister and Synod Moderator to co-ordinate the preparation of the (Ordination and) Induction service, which is held under the auspices of the Area Pastoral Committee or Synod. The Interim Moderator may also work with the incoming minister on an induction process.

4 Interim Moderators

Introduction

a The ministry of Interim Moderators has been recognised from the foundation of the United Reformed Church. Their purpose is to provide a continuing mutual link between the wider church (usually the Area Pastoral Committee) and local pastorate during a time of ministerial transition.

b The Manual records the duty of an Area Pastoral Committee "to appoint, in consultation with the local church and the Moderator of the Synod, from among its members an Interim Moderator during a pastoral vacancy". Such person has in the past normally been a minister but sometimes an elder may be appointed, especially where Pastoral Committee have appointed a Pastoral Link to care for the congregation during the vacancy. The Interim Moderator needs to be objective and sensitive to the church's tradition, theological stance and ways of operating. The agreement of the pastorate in the appointment is advisable. Training should be offered by Pastoral Committee to potential Interim Moderators. A serving Interim Moderator may be invited to the Pastoral Committee to report on the state of the pastorate during the time of ministerial transition.

c Best practice is for clearly defined terms of service to be agreed by all parties at the beginning. An appointment for a year at a time is preferable. All parties should understand the time available to be used, the costs (Interim Moderators' expenses are paid by the receiving local church) and the tasks which can and cannot be undertaken by the Interim Moderator, depending on whether there is also a Pastoral Adviser.

d The responsibilities of Interim Moderators normally include:

- i) chairing Elders' Meetings, Church Meetings or special groups where the calling of a minister is discussed;
- ii) chairing all meetings with prospective ministers;
- iii) providing a mutual link between the Area Pastoral Committee and the local church;
- iv) providing a mutual link between the Synod Moderator and the local church;
- v) providing a mutual link between the prospective minister and the local church;

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- vi) aiding the drafting and negotiating of Terms of Settlement, including housing provision;
- vii) overseeing and co-ordinating the planning of the Induction Service in consultation with the Area Pastoral Committee, Synod Moderator and future minister;
- viii) advising on what is appropriate at each stage.

e The transition time is not just a waiting time; the church can develop. The Interim Moderator and a Pastoral Link can help the church grow in awareness and confidence in the process, and be prepared to address difficult issues. If this growth and development does not occur the church will be restricted in its vision for the future.

5 Additional notes:

Ordinands, married couples, advertised posts, fixed term appointments, health issues. For further information beyond that given here contact the Synod Moderator.

i) **Ordinands** prepare their Personal Profiles in time for interviews with the Synod Moderators normally in September of their final year of training. The October Synod Moderators' meeting then seeks to offer each ordinand a suitable pastorate to consider. Before proceeding to ordination and induction the Synod Moderator should have sight of a Leaving Certificate issued by the training establishment, and a recent CRB check.

ii) **Married Couples** – the settlement of couples is complicated and therefore requires sensitive and careful handling. Two Call processes will be interlinked, and the Interim Moderators will need to liaise closely. Particular care will need to be taken over confidentiality, whilst issues such as housing, etc will be different from normal.

iii) **Advertising posts** – The Synod Moderators' meeting produces each month a list of pastorates seeking a minister, which is circulated to all ministers through the payroll system and available on-line. In the case of a post being advertised through Reform, then usually that post is not considered by the Synod Moderators, unless the advertisement specifically directs enquirers to their Synod Moderator.

iv) **Fixed term appointments** – most Calls to ministers to serve pastorates are open ended. But some posts are for a fixed period, for example the special category ministry posts, which are five years in the first instance but may be extended after review. Ecumenical posts are also often fixed term and this will be clear from the job description.

v) **Health and Disability issues** – the pastorate should be made fully aware of all relevant matters in cases where there may be health and disability issues.

Appendix: URC Declaration of equal opportunities policy

1 The Church will behave as an 'equal opportunity employer organisation' and not discriminate between ministers on grounds of race, gender or disability.

2 The Church affirms in its Basis of Union that 'all ministries shall be open to both men and women' and at Assembly in 1987 adopted a Declaration on Racism.

3 The Church works to combat racism and sexism and is committed to positive action rather than containing the issues.

4 The Church is aware of possible barriers, for example to women and to black and minority ethnic people within the structures of the Church in ministry and other posts; this has to do with expectations, position, role and status.

5 The Church will therefore establish appropriate methods of monitoring the appointment, call and position of women and black people in the ministry and of considering appropriate action where necessary. (Revision of Employment Practice Report, Appendix E, Note C)