

Policy on Lay Presidency at the Sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism

The following policy is based on discussions held at *General Assemblies* in 1991 and 1995. Extracts from the records of those *Assemblies* are given in the appendices.

1. Churches must understand that
 - a. they should first approach Ministers of Word and Sacrament with whom they have a pastoral relationship to preside at their services which include the sacraments. (A church in vacancy with a lay Interim Moderator who regularly leads worship should invite that Interim Moderator to preside.)
 - b. Lay Presidents must be people in a pastoral relationship with the church, who have a good understanding of what they are doing and a spiritual awareness of the importance of the role.
2. No-one would be authorized without having undertaken relevant training which will be provided by the Synod.
3. The Synod should annually - through its Ministries Committee - invite all churches to list named individuals who regularly lead worship and who may need to preside in the case of pastoral necessity. The list of those authorised to be reported to Synod annually.
4. Dates of Ministries Committee meetings should be available to churches and additional requests for authorisation for one-off occasions will be considered by the Ministries Committee at their regular meetings. The Convener should be enabled to authorize individuals in the case of emergency.

Val Morrison - September 2009

Appendices

The appendices give the full texts of the Assembly reports on the last two occasions when lay presidency was discussed - 1991 (an interim report) and 1995 (following consultation with churches). (These reports of course refer to District Councils - we should note that the responsibilities of District Councils in this matter have been transferred to Synods)

Appendix 1

a) The Basis of Union

21. Some are called to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be ministers of local churches or missionaries overseas, or to some special or approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the Church in its mission to the world. Others serve as non-stipendiary minister, continuing in other occupations and earning their livelihood within them.

25. 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 as 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 of the United Reformed Church, to be accredited by District Councils as lay preachers; (c) make provision through District Councils in full consultation with the local churches concerned, for the recognition of certain members of the United Reformed Church, normally deaconesses, elders or accredited lay preachers, who may be invited by local churches to preside at baptismal and communion services where pastoral necessity so requires. The pastoral needs of each situation shall be reviewed periodically by the District Council in Consultation with the local church. Apart from ordained ministers of the United Reformed Church and of other Churches, only such recognised persons may be invited.

Appendix 2

b) From the 1991 report

There are three views one hears expressed.

(i) The position held by the greater part of the Church universal is that ordination places the care of the sacraments firmly in the hands of the minister, who is therefore the proper person to preside and administer them. It is a most ancient view. It recognises that it is the responsibility of the wider church, not the local one, to supervise both ministry and sacraments. Those who hold this view, nevertheless, have to be pragmatic and so provision has to be made for lay people to preside where ordained people are not available.

4.2. (ii) Another view frequently heard is that the preaching of the word and the conduct of the sacraments are so closely related to those recognised as lay preachers should also have authority to preside at the sacraments.

4.3. (iii) A third view has been growing of late. There are a number of places with collegiate ministries and others where there is a need for local lay leaders and these could well be authorised. It is felt that it is more important to have someone presiding who is recognised as a leader in the local church than someone who is not of the family.

7.3. Lay Presidents should

- Be people of good character and standing
- know what they are doing.
- In the case of baptism be competent to undertake the necessary pastoral work with the candidate or the parents,
- be fully aware of the policy of the United Reformed Church on baptism and be able to discuss it.
- In order to preside at the Lord's Supper should have a sound understanding of what is happening and believe in it to command respect.
- be able to talk with anyone about membership of the body of Christ.
- have a spiritual awareness of the importance of the role and a good grasp of its responsibilities.

7.4. Order and Variety

..... Districts have to be prepared for new styles of ministry. There are churches developing a collegiate style of ministry, resembling somewhat that which the Churches of Christ brought to the URC.

There are groups with a pool of authorised persons and other groups where it may be desirable for each church to have one or two elders who can preside. There are churches with a minister which may want a presiding elder to help during a sabbatical or holidays. One or two presiding elders will be valuable during an interregnum. Some churches may like one or two to preside at communion services in rest homes for the elderly and for sick and housebound people. But in all our dealing we must all endeavour to keep away from the city of legality while not falling into the morass of disorder.

In Proportion

Presidency is something that matters, of importance to us. Yet, when seen in the light of history or over against the great issues facing the Church and the world, it is seen in its true stature, a minor domestic issue, which it would be wrong to spend too much time and energy upon. Nor is presiding something any Christian can feel worthy to do, taking the place of him who went straight from there to Gethsemane and then Golgotha.

Appendix 3

c) From the 1995 report (following consultation with churches)

5.1.5 We suggest the following pattern of presidency -

- (a) a Minister of Word and Sacraments should preside when available;
- (b) in situations of pastoral necessity where no minister is available, the district council should make provision for lay presidency; Moderating Elders and Lay Preachers should be considered first;
- (c) authorisation for lay presidency should not cover a period longer than a year without consultation and review of the needs of the congregations concerned.

We believe that such a process will remain true to the spirit of the Basis of Union. It will enable us to be ourselves, and it will be sensitive to our ecumenical context.

This policy was adopted by the Yorkshire Synod at its meeting on 10th October 2009