



The
**United
Reformed
Church**
Yorkshire

Yorkshire Synod Policy of Lay Presidency at the sacraments





Yorkshire Synod Policy on Lay Presidency at the sacraments of Holy Communion & Baptism

The following policy is based on discussions held at General Assemblies in 1991, 1995 and 2016. Extracts from the records of two of those Assemblies are given in the appendices. Consequent to decisions made by those Assemblies, Yorkshire Synod passed this resolution in March 2017:

'Synod agrees that following the General Assembly decision in 2016, those nominated by local churches to preside at the sacraments will, after suitable training, be authorized for an initial period of five years, after which they will be encouraged to undertake a refresher course, which will also be offered to those already authorized.'

1. Churches must understand that:
 - a. they should first approach Ministers of Word and Sacraments 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. Authorization will be given after undertaking relevant training which will be provided by the Synod, to include recognition of the historical and theological background of the three strands which

make up our denomination, as well as practical training for the administration of the sacraments’

3. The Synod Pastoral Committee will maintain a record of all those named individuals who regularly lead worship and who may need to preside in the case of pastoral necessity. Applications for new authorizations should be submitted to the Pastoral Committee, who will liaise with the relative Synod Pastoral Elder (who may in case of need authorize an Authorized Person from another church to preside at the sacraments at a church other than their own, if so requested by the inviting church).

4. Dates of Pastoral Committee meetings should be available to churches and additional requests for authorization for one-off occasions will be considered by the Pastoral Committee at their regular meetings. The Convener of the Pastoral Committee may authorize individuals in the case of emergency.

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 2016. The 1991 report of course refers 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 and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office. The ordination and induction of ministers shall be in accordance with schedules C and D. 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. Their service may be stipendiary or non-stipendiary, and in the latter case their service is given within the area of a synod and in a context it has approved.

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 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; (c) make provision through synods, 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 synod 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. '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. The provisions do not prevent the congregation assembled for baptismal or communion service from themselves appointing, as a church meeting, a suitable person to preside at the celebration of the Sacrament in a case of emergency, for example if the expected president is taken ill or held up in travel. The provisions do not require such an action rather than a postponement of the baptismal or communion service if that seems preferable.'

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 2016 report

14. General Assembly agrees that the existing guidance on Presidency at the Sacraments (The Manual, Section F) be amended to read:

“The pattern of presidency at the sacraments if the minister in pastoral charge is not available should be as follows –

a) the Church Meeting may invite another Minister of Word and Sacraments (including a retired minister who has expressed willingness to do so);

b) if such a minister is not available, the Church Meeting may invite an elder (or accredited lay preacher) authorised by the synod, in accordance with the provisions of §25 of the Basis of Union: elders of the local church and accredited lay preachers regularly conducting worship there should be considered first;

c) authorisation for such presidency by the synod, normally of members from within the congregation concerned, should be for an initial period of three to five years (according to synod judgement), including a probationary year on first appointment, with the possibility of renewal. Before renewal there should be consultation by the synod with the congregation, and a review of its needs.”

15. General Assembly agrees that synods are recommended to provide regular support and guidance for each church without an authorised elder within its membership; and also for authorised elders, for example by holding an annual meeting where experiences can be shared.

16. General Assembly agrees that the ministries committee be invited to develop a specific code of conduct for authorised elders and lay preachers; and that those concerned agree to be bound by it before embarking on their ministry.

17. General Assembly agrees that a list of those authorised elders and lay preachers whose authority to serve has been withdrawn be maintained by the General Secretariat, to avoid the possibility of any individual exercising this ministry unhelpfully in one place and then moving elsewhere without the previous difficulty being addressed to try again.

18. General Assembly agrees that the education and learning committee be invited to prepare an Assembly syllabus for the preparation of authorised elders and lay preachers, drawing on existing synod resources.

19. General Assembly agrees that further attention be given by the ministries and education and learning committees to the possibility of expanding the concept of non-stipendiary ministry to include once more the original pattern of team non-stipendiary ministry.

Amended March 2019