

Yorkshire Synod

Elders in Local Leadership Policy

Background

This policy brings some clarity to the situation where churches receive leadership from individuals who are not Ministers of Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Work Ministers, and where Synod recognition for such ministry is requested.

The policy begins from the starting point that such leadership ought to be recognized and honoured by the Synod whilst at the same time also honouring our traditional models of ordination and commissioning to which we remain committed.

The policy also roots any such local leadership firmly within the ministry of Eldership of the United Reformed Church and should not be seen in any way as establishing a different order of ministry.

In terms of status within Synod we do not need to make a distinction between those who are ordained as Ministers of Word and Sacraments or commissioned as Church Related Community Work Ministers, and those who are not. We are a denomination in which all are called to work together in the working out of the mission and ministry of the church, and none who are obedient to the call of Christ are greater or lesser than another.

In terms of function within the life of the church there are very few distinctions between those who are ordained or commissioned and those who are not. The main distinction is between whether or not Synod approval is required for individuals to preside at the sacraments.

There is, however, an important distinction in terms of calling. Those who are Ministers of Word and Sacraments, or are Church Related Community Work Ministers

- undergo a lengthy period of discernment of their call which can last several years and which involves the church at every level.
- undergo a significant period of ministerial formation. This is as well as, and distinct from, formal theological education.
- receive whole-church recognition of their calling in a service of ordination or commissioning, in which they make vows of obedience.
- as a result of the above, are under a very clearly defined discipline in relation to the denomination as a whole.

Those who are not ordained or commissioned will bring many gifts to the role and may bring insights and expertise that are unique to the individual. However, the Synod has a duty to be clear about the distinction of calling a) for clarity within the denomination and b) because we need to be clear with our ecumenical partners, for whom distinctions of function may be more important.

This need for clarity is particularly important in relation to the introduction of Non-Stipendiary Model 4, which is locally identified but has all the above distinctive elements of call.

If the Synod is to recognize a leadership role, then there needs to be a clear commitment on both sides to honour all ministries, and at the same time not to blur the distinctions between them.

The Policy

This policy envisages two possible starting points for the process of Synod recognition of local leadership within our local churches.

The first starting point is when the Synod is blessed to have within its fellowship Elders who feel a calling to serve the wider church and are happy to engage in conversation with the Synod about where their ministry could be most productively used.

In this case, the [Synod Pastoral Committee] will introduce the Elder to a church through a process that will test out the match between the needs and expectations of the church on the one hand, and the gifts and graces of the individual on the other. Whist this would not require the level or formality of the introduction of a Minister of Word and Sacraments, it will be robust and thorough. This process will be overseen by the [Synod Pastoral Committee] who will appoint an ‘Interim Moderator’ for the duration of the introduction process.

The second starting point is where a local church has already recognized a person as offering them a leadership role through a local arrangement. This could be someone from their membership, or someone from wider afield.

The Synod recognizes the right of local churches to appoint leadership in this way but would assume, as part of the covenant relationship between local church and Synod, that the development of such a leadership role will have been in discussion with the Synod Moderator and relevant Synod officers and committees.

In this second case, if the church and leader arrive at the point where they feel Synod recognition would be appropriate, then the [Synod Pastoral Committee] will arrange for a visit to talk to the church and to the local leader, to learn about the nature of the ministry being exercised, and to satisfy themselves of the appropriateness of the arrangement.

Through the normal process of discernment of God’s call within the local church, if not already so then the individual concerned will need to become an Elder of the United Reformed Church.

[When the Synod Pastoral Committee has satisfied itself of the appropriateness of the local leadership being offered through either of these two routes, then the application for Synod recognition will be passed over to the Synod Ministries Committee]

An agreement is drawn up by the [Synod Ministries Committee] in consultation with the church and office holder. This is to include:

- an acceptance of the Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church
- a commitment by the local leader to work within the conciliar structures of the URC.
- a commitment by the local leader and church not to blur the distinctions between local leadership and the ordained or commissioned ministry of the Untied Reformed Church.
- a commitment to work constructively with a mentor appointed by the [Synod Ministries Committee], in consultation with the local leader, who will normally be an ordained Minister of Word and Sacraments or CRCW Minister.
- where the leader is to preside at the sacraments, to seek permission from the Synod Pastoral Committee.

- the local leader is subject to a periodic review – initially after 6 months, 1 year, and then ever 3 years. These reviews will be arranged by the [Synod Ministries Committee]

This agreement will be signed by local church, Synod and post holder, and amended as appropriate at each review.

When this is in place the Synod will arrange a service of recognition to take place in consultation with the local church and local leader. The preferred term for this role is 'Elder in Local Leadership'.