

Ordinations and Inductions of Elders during the Covid-19 restrictions

This process mirrors the process used for the Ordinations and Induction of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Commissioning of Church Related Community Workers during the on-going covid-19 restrictions.

The rubric in our book of Worship Resources should always take place during Sunday worship in recognition of the fact that elders are called by God to the leadership and service of God's people. In the Reformed tradition, this is not a sacrament (like baptism or communion), but public recognition in an act of worship of a particular office in the church. In a time of pandemic, public worship can be enabled by zoom or similar live platform.

The following should be taken into consideration when planning a service of ordination and induction:

- a) The making of promises, the ordination prayer and the declaration of ordination are essential. These give the occasion its lifelong character, and permanent intent;
- b) whilst the laying on of hands is our normal practice at ordination, it is not constitutionally binding in our polity and ecclesiology. Its absence would not invalidate an ordination;
- c) whilst communion normally follows ordination and induction, where there is a sense that this cannot be realised by Zoom or other such platform, there is no obligation for this to happen. Its absence would not invalidate ordination;
- d) ordination is an action of the gathered church – in the URC of the gathered conciliar church. In order to recognise fully this sense of gathered community of the whole people of God, there should be some physical gathering alongside the virtual gathering where possible. Those who should meet physically would normally represent the Synod as well as the local. This may simply be your Synod representative. Where restrictions do not allow this the service should be conducted by Zoom or other similar platform;
- e) The service should be broadcast live via Zoom (or some other virtual platform) to allow others to be amongst the gathered church, although at a distance.

Therefore, the following process for ordination during the Covid-19 restrictions should be adopted

1. Where possible a physically-gathered service should be held. Where restrictions do not allow this the service should be conducted by Zoom or other similar platform;
2. If a physical service is possible social distancing should be observed at all times, and adherence to current government guidelines;
3. The service should be broadcast live via Zoom or a similar platform for as many as are able to be present, recognising the wider online gathered community of the people of God;
4. As the short preface to Schedule C in the Basis of Union indicates, the Statement of Nature, Faith and Order should be read, and there should be a statement about the circumstances of the call.
5. The ordination promises, ordination prayer and declaration of ordination should be said;

6. If social distancing deters or prevents the laying on of hands, the intent and meaning of this symbol could be expressed by the stretching out of hands towards the elder to be ordained and inducted.

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